PRAYERS
[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PETITION

Standing Order 14 and Chief State Solicitor

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition on behalf of the Chief State Solicitor.

I shall now ask that the Clerk be permitted to read the petition and that the promoters be allowed to proceed.

Petition read.

Question put and agreed to, That the petition be granted.

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)
[Sixth 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 Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by apologizing for my loss of voice, since the Parliament Chamber has been so cold for the last few days, it is affecting my vocal cords. However, I cannot, even in this stage, as we would say in Trinidad and Tobago, “irregardless” of the circumstances, [Laughter] I will not deprive myself of the opportunity to participate in this very interesting debate.

Mr. Speaker, I have been in and around the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago for many years. In fact, this would be my 18th budget debate contribution.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Is this your last as well?

Mr. Valley: No.
Mr. Manning: I assure you not.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Even if it is my last, Mr. Speaker, I will leave with a smile on my face—[Desk thumping]—having had the pleasure and the privilege of being part of the PNM team, supporting the Minister of Finance in presenting a budget to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; a budget of which we can all be proud. [Desk thumping]

I have taken part in budget debates under a number of administrations: PNM administration before, the NAR administration, the UNC administration and PNM administration, again, under different circumstances and I could say without fear of contradiction that this is the best budget ever presented to the people of Trinidad and Tobago by any Minister of Finance. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we understand that good news sometimes is very difficult to assimilate by persons who see good news as inimical to their narrow interest and, therefore, some of the criticisms are based on misunderstandings and some are based on disappointment. But this is not new, Mr. Speaker, even more significant issues than a national budget have been subjected to the same thing.

As you may recall, Mr. Speaker, with slavery at its barbaric worst, when emancipation was at the door, there were people, even some slaves, who were saying: What are we going to do with freedom? [Laughter] What are the slaves going to do when you free them? They are going to be idle. Where are the workers going to come from? There was a defence of slavery on the grounds that slaves would not know what to do with freedom.

Even as we approached independence, there were people in this Trinidad and Tobago, who one would have thought would have known better, but they were so steeped in their colonial drippings that they saw independence as inimical to the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and spoke out and stood up against independence. Independence: can we govern ourselves? What will we do when the Queen goes home? [Interruption] They were there. Today in Trinidad and Tobago, a Minister of Finance finds himself in a situation to present a budget in a time of plenty and to hand to taxpayers; in fact, put differently, to not take from taxpayers $1.7 billion in taxes, which otherwise would have been taken. There are people, even in the Parliament, who are saying: What are they going to do with all that money that they now have in their hands. [Desk thumping] So we know that; we are accustomed to that.
Mr. Speaker, there is a dichotomy all the time. If this Government was not strong; rooted in PNM's philosophy with a sense of purpose, we would be confused, because on one hand, out of one mouth corner of our friends we are hearing: “You have done nothing for the small man; you have done nothing for the middle class”. On the other hand we are hearing: “You have given them so much money, what are they going to do with that money; they are going to engage in consumerism”. What is the truth? The truth is that the PNM is in the middle, understanding both sides of the issue, and doing what is right. What we have done is not take taxes from people when taxes were not required. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, you and I, we are not old men—[Laughter] because as Sparrow said: “Age is a number.” But I think I am going to expose our age a little. Do you remember, Mr. Speaker, when dog licences were a major source of revenue in this country? [Laughter] We had a dog called Pepper and when the police passed to check on dog licence I used to hold Pepper under my arm and go below the house—[Laughter]—because policemen used to come to your yard to inspect to see if your dog had a licence. Mr. Speaker, that was a revenue-raising measure! Mr. Speaker, at some point in time the country reached a point where dog licence was no longer required to raise taxes. [Laughter]

Now, when the Minister of Finance finds himself in a situation where oil prices are running at $60 per barrel; budgeting for revenues at $45 per barrel and seeing what our revenue projections are; saying to the people of this country: We will not take from you $1.7 billion in taxes; that is a Government that cares and understands what the people want. [Desk thumping] Taxes are people's money and if you do not need to take taxes you leave the people with their money!

We believe that with proper guidance—and I am asking the Minister of Finance to spend some money to provide some guidance by way of the public media to let those who do not know, know that we expect them to take care of the money they get now. Do not waste it! Because if it changes around, you would hear from the same people: What the Government did for me? What did the country do for me? You have to do for yourself! It is your money: invest, save, spend wisely, the Government has done its part!

Mr. Speaker, what does $1.7 billion mean? Let us go back to last year’s budget? It means that when we did the reduction in tax the last time around in the budget, we removed taxation from persons earning—we gave a $25,000 personal income deduction. When the personal allowance was $25,000; 123,000 people paid no tax and at $60,000 with respect to the personal allowance, 300,000 taxpayers will pay no tax. Therefore, 177,000 additional persons will now pay no
taxes as a result of the increase in the personal allowance of $60,000. This means that, on average, the taxpayer, who otherwise would have been paying tax in that bracket, will now have in their pay packets approximately $900 per month; some a bit more, some a bit less, but the average is that amount, which is money in their hand, which otherwise would have gone into the Treasury for Government’s use.

10.15 a.m.

There are those who would say that there is nothing in the budget for the small man and nothing for the middle class. I make no comment on the Smart Card. The Prime Minister will tell you that in May 2002, I went to Brazil and I saw that system at work and I came back and said that we could do that here in Trinidad and Tobago. Instead of going a circuitous route, technology allows us to give government support directly to those persons we want to target, by way of the card and I am happy today to see that that will be done as early as possible, by January or March thereabouts. [Desk thumping]

So, if the Government wants—as the Government does want—to give support to people for the food bill, that Smart Card will take that money to their hands. It is up to them to buy food with it. We know our people. Some will buy cigarettes; some will buy rum; some will find all kinds of ruse, but the Government would have done its part; would have given them assistance to buy food. The systems are going to be in place to ensure that abuse is virtually minimal because it is impossible not to have some element of abuse because our people are human beings. At the end of the day, the Government recognizes its role and that is what we have done. So, this talk about nothing for the small man, let us forget about that because that is not really on.

Mr. Speaker, again there is a dichotomy—confusion. There is one chorus saying that all of this will lead to overheating of the economy; the measures in the budget; all the things we want to do is heating up the economy. Yes, it is wise to caution, but not to be intimidated and diverted by that. Next, we will be hearing that implementation is the issue and Government will not implement. It cannot be both. If we do not implement, there will be no overheating. If we implement and there is overheating, then we have implemented. Somewhere between those two is the happy medium. We will implement and we are ensuring, with proper management of the monetary systems that we will minimize inflation as we build that capacity.

I want to say something to my friends on the other side. We have put structures in place to facilitate implementation. Those special purpose state companies that seem to have attracted attention for the purpose of implementing;
that same implementation that they are concerned about; those management companies are specifically organized to facilitate that implementation.

Our friends on the other side used NLCB to procure medical equipment that we cannot find up to now. Remember the famous Oma Mobile? NLCB procured that. They used TIDCO to pave roads; they used MTS to build schools; they used NIPDEC to build the airport building and put between NIPDEC and the contractor, Birk Hillman. Where are Birk and Hillman today? They are in front the court because of the systems that they used. They come here to try to confuse the public and spread “ol’ talk” that the PNM is facilitating corruption with these state companies.

What did the PNM do? Before we formed one of these additional companies, we put this to the Parliament and the country. It is called Reform of the Public Sector Procurement Regime. This states exactly how those companies will function. This is the bible of public sector procurement. We did this first and this will be the guide against which those boards will spend government money. There will be no NLCB procuring things for the Prime Minister’s wife; no Birk Hillman between the company and the contractor; no TIDCO paving roads. Companies will be above board, transparent and accountable to the Parliament and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is PNM’s policy. [Desk thumping]

My friend on the other side asked if this is money. He said my 18th budget speech is my last. If it is my last, there are two things that I would leave happy about. One is that I was there when we dismantled the Negative List. It was a sense of great pride and satisfaction to me. Remember those days! If you wanted a motor car, you booked three years in advance and bribed the car seller. I was there when we dismantled that and I am now happy again that I am part of a Cabinet supporting the Minister of Finance in a PNM Government that offers free tertiary education. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, when we embarked on this course to end up at this position; when we first mentioned the creation of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the normal reaction that came from the other side was to bad-mouth it. In fact, one leader of part of the national community presented UTT in racial terms and said it is the PNM’s attempt to give university space to unqualified black people. That was their view of UTT.

Last night, with pride, I heard how the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education described the stature of UTT and where we are headed even today—what the PNM is about. This is no fly-by-night “vaps” like Dollar for Dollar.
Dollar for Dollar was policy by "vaps" that came into birth in my constituency. The former Prime Minister was in Victoria Gardens in my constituency talking to a lot of Victoria Gardens residents. While he was speaking, Minister Gillette passed him a note saying that the people around had a lot of children abroad and what would sell to them was a policy that would give them half the money they pay to support their children. Right then an announcement came—Dollar for Dollar—you put one dollar, I put one dollar, and that was the birth of the Dollar for Dollar programme, but by the time it was operationalized, it became for locals only. It did not work out the way they thought it would. And they compare Dollar for Dollar with a PNM programme that says that you do not have to have the first dollar. The policy is that you will not be denied education because of an inability to pay. They cannot see a difference in that.

The tax cuts today are not as a result of the current oil price spike, you know. It was a policy which we stated to this House. Before we won the election, we said that it would be the PNM's position to reduce taxes from wherever it was to 25 per cent. We have kept our word and we have kept it manfully. We predicted what we would do and we have done that in steps. We are now in a country where the taxation regime is at 25 per cent, equating personal income tax and corporation tax. That was PNM stated policy even before the current oil and gas hike.

It was the same thing with our policy towards free tertiary education. We said that it is training of the national population that would make us move from this level to the next level. When BHP Billiton announced their oil find, the oil companies were concerned about what this little country would do with the bonanza to come. We met with them and said: "We will train our people." Because what we need is participation. Once the economy is strong and there is participation, then all those who participate will benefit and, for the unfortunate few who cannot participate directly, the onus is on the Government to share with them, not just the crumbs, but a decent living and that is welfare. That is the way a modern society is organized. That is the PNM's vision. [Desk thumping]

Therefore, when we talk about skills—last night the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education told this House that since we embarked on this course, 80,000 citizens had accessed training in this country. We know that we are on course because that access to training tells us something. Whatever they were trained in, at whatever level, to take whatever job, each trained person is prepared to participate in the economy and that is where the wealth of this country would be distributed—by participation.
Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to say thanks, on record, in this House. We are not good in this country about saying thanks. We are good at bad-mouthing people, pulling down people and seeing the worst. I want to put this on record, so that those who do not would know, and those who care to would give thanks.

I take you, Mr. Speaker, to the PNM Cabinet of 1992. We came into government in 1991, after eight years of economic decline initiated by an oil price collapse a little earlier and that decline supported by dubious policies of the neophyte government of the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) in that intervening period. The NAR’s approach was to use the World Bank-type dogma to deal with that decline. I will come back to that. However, when we got into office, meeting a situation where Trinidad and Tobago was an IMF client owing US $350 million on which the previous government had taken a moratorium, meaning that they did not pay back any and left it to be paid by the other government.

We had an option, like all governments have options, to do what would have been done by that government had they won the election. They would have continued along the World Bank/IMF road. We in the PNM Cabinet, again with our faith in the PNM philosophy and our faith in this country, took a different road. Our road was that we were not going to reschedule the debt. We were going to repay the debt. We said to the country: Tighten your belt! Let us repay the debt and move on from this place.

In 1992, with a contracting GDP, losing government revenue, Patrick Manning, as Prime Minister of a Cabinet with only two experienced members, the cautious John Eckstein and the tight-fisted Wendell Mottley, said to us: We will do that. What did we do? We revised the SPT, that petroleum tax, and that revision, in a time of reducing revenues, cost us $150 million in lost revenues—revenues foregone for a purpose. The people who convinced us to go that route were the Prime Minister Patrick Manning, Kenneth Julien and the brilliant John Andrews. They were the three people who were guiding that process and the Cabinet took that route. [Desk thumping]

As a result of that option—remember I told you we could have rescheduled the debt or followed the advice of the World Bank and go the road the NAR was going, but we chose to ask our people to tighten their belts. Unlike what they would have you believe, bad times do not last, if you know what you are doing. Some of them even said that we were pandering to the oil companies and that we were crazy to give tax breaks in a time of reduced revenues, but what did that do? It stimulated exploration for the first time in seven years in Trinidad and Tobago.
It was out of that exploration exercise that came the gas finds that caused us to have enough gas that caused us to think about LNG.

10.30 a.m.

If, today, as a result of having gone that road, we find ourselves with this budget and this bonanza as a result of our gas arrangements, largely, this country owes a debt of gratitude to those who drove that decision in 1992: Patrick Manning, Prof. Kenneth Julien and John Andrews. I want that to be on the record. [Desk thumping] Because the gas was always there. We are drilling Oligocene and Miocene in the horizons. The gas has been there for 15 to 30 million years. The difference between the gas coming from where it was 15 million years ago and coming to the market today was that a PNM Government said: “Let us go drill, find it and monetize it.”

When we made the decision on a gas price of $2.50 per msc, today it costs $14. The plants were predicated on $2.50. There were those who were saying that we were wasting our resources and that we should not sell gas. Gas is the most valuable of the petroleum chain right now because the market is good. [Desk thumping] If we had listened to them we would have missed this period. The gas would have still been underground, we would not have gone for it and when we got it, we would not have gone LNG.

Today, they talk as though it is a crime to have LNG, the Trinidad model. The LNG that we are looking at today—to give us the money we are talking about, which allows us to give the kinds of tax break to the corporate and personal sector, to support those who are unable to carry on without government's help— came out of that singular decision; to take ourselves out of a situation, not by World Bank and International Monetary Fund dogma, but by taking our boot strings and pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps and saying, rather than apologize for having the energy sector, we will use what God gave us to have the life that God wants us to have. That is the PNM's policy. [Desk thumping]

Every country in the world has something to depend on. Thank God we have petroleum, oil and gas to depend on. We make no apologies; it is how we use it. This PNM Government is using it in a way that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the widest cross section, will benefit and that is what governs the policies in this budget.

We dodged a bullet, because had we not come into government in 1992, to do what I have said, my friend from St. Augustine might have been part of the next government that would have carried on with the philosophy of the previous government. Today, in Trinidad and Tobago, as he speaks as leader of the UNC,
he is talking the same kind of failed garbage. My friend from Arouca South had to be rough on him. The reason she was rough on him is because she understood the threat that he posed to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. He spoke a lot about democracy and philosophy. Everything he does is wedded to these World Bank/IMF things, forgetting that these are high-paid public servants who experiment with the world. That is what they do. When one policy fails, they move on to the other policy. The PNM, in our 50 years, believes in what the country can do; IMF or no IMF, World Bank or no World Bank. He is a World Bank junkie.

I brought this book. He likes to quote. I want to quote something for him so that he will not come back here again and try to tell us that once he puts the World Bank imprimatur on it, it is to be swallowed and once he says IMF, it is to be swallowed. This book is called the Best Democracy Money Can Buy. It is written by a guy who was part of the Chicago Boys Club that created the Milton Friedman's philosophy of the free market, which is today the lifeblood of the WTO, which he thinks is the best thing that happened since sliced bread. Permit me to quote liberally from this book, for the benefit that my friend would know not to come back in this House and try to give any stamp of approval to any policy by quoting World Bank. I would quote the section on page 146:

“Dr. Bankenstein's Monsters: The World Bank, the IMF and the Aliens Who Ate Ecuador

'Strategy for Ecuador….Ecuador's government was ordered to raise the price of cooking gas by 80 per cent by November 1, 2000. Also, the government had to eliminate twenty-six thousand jobs and cut real wages for the remaining workers by 50 percent in four steps and on a timetable specified by the IMF. By July 2000, Ecuador had to transfer ownership of its biggest water system to foreign operators, then grant British Petroleum rights to build and own an oil pipeline over the Andes.

That was for starters. In all, the IMF's 167 detailed loan conditions looked less like an ‘Assistance Plan’ and more like a blueprint for financial coup d'état.

The IMF would counter that it had no choice. After all, Ecuador was flat busted, thanks to the implosion of the nation's commercial banks. But how did Ecuador, once an OPEC member with resources to spare, end up in such a pickle?

For that, we have to turn back to 1983, when the IMF forced the nation's government to take over the soured private debts Ecuador's elite owed to foreign
banks. For this bailout of U.S. and local financiers, Ecuador's government borrowed $1.5 billion from the IMF.

For Ecuador to pay back this loan, the IMF dictated price hikes in electricity and other necessities. And when that didn't drain off enough cash, yet another ‘Assistance Plan’ required the state to eliminate 120,000 workers.

Furthermore, while trying to pay down the mountain of IMF obligations, Ecuador foolishly ‘liberalized’ its tiny financial market, cutting local banks loose from government controls and letting private debt and interest rates explode. Who pushed Ecuador into this nutty romp with free market banking?"

It was the IMF.

“How the IMF Cured AIDS.

The IMF and its sidekick, the World Bank, have lent a sticky helping hand to scores of nations. Take Tanzania. Today, in that African state, 1.3 million people are getting ready to die of AIDS. The IMF and World Bank have come to the rescue with a brilliant neoliberal solution: require Tanzania to charge for what were previously free hospital appointments. Since the Bank imposed this requirement, the number of patients treated in Dar es Salaam's three big hospitals has dropped by 53 per cent. The Bank’s cure is working!

The IMF World Bank helpers also ordered Tanzania to charge fees for school attendance, then expressed surprise that school enrollment dropped from 80 per cent to 66 per cent.

Altogether the Bank and IMF had 157 helpful suggestions for Tanzania. In April 2000, Tanzania government secretly agreed to adopt them all. It was sign or starve.

The IMF and World Bank have effectively controlled Tanzania's economy since 1985. According to World Bank watcher Nancy Alexander of Citizens' Network on Essential Services (Maryland), in just fifteen years Tanzania's GDP dropped from $309 to $210 per capita, literacy fell and the rate of abject poverty jumped to 51 per cent of the population. Yet, the World Bank did not understand why it failed to win the hearts and minds of Tanzanians… In June 2000, the Bank reported…‘One legacy of socialism is that most people continue to believe the State has a fundamental role in promoting development and providing social services’.”

I want to tell the IMF and my friend from St. Augustine that the PNM believes, unlike the World Bank, that the State has a fundamental role in promoting development and in providing social services. That is PNM’s policy. [Desk
All those who believe that by changing the guard on the other side would put us in a better position, they must understand when the Member gets up and talks about philosophy and quotes the World Bank liberally, this is what he is talking about. That is his dogma. He is a World Bank junkie believing that whatever they say is right and whatever we do is wrong.

When we build houses for the people, using the people's money in a time of plenty, he gets up in this Parliament and says that we are threatening to bankrupt the country, because according to the World Bank, to do that is socialism; in a situation when the average person cannot find a place to live. He comes here and throws out the name World Bank and that he wants to know the philosophy of the budget. That is our philosophy, that the State has a fundamental role in development and social services provision. His philosophy is the opposite because he is a colonial who thinks that anything from Washington or London has to be better than what we do here. Understand why my friend was so angry with him and called him—not to insult him, but to speak fact. As a former colleague of mine in the University of the West Indies, maybe I can tell him that too but I would not, I would lend him the book: *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy—The Truth about Corporate Cons, Globalization and High-finance Fraudsters*.

**Mr. Imbert:** That is a good description of him.

**Hon. Dr K. Rowley:** [Interruption] There are more recent books. He is looking for more recent books to hold on to the same old philosophy that killed—I may go further and point out to him that there is a section that talks about—more recent books. He is not going to give up.

**Mr. Imbert:** He is a dinosaur.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** In the period of the so-called socialism, 1960 to 1980, what they called the dark ages—I quote:

“increasing national government control and new welfare schemes,…”

They pooh-poohed that. You can label it however you want to. What were the facts?

“Per capita income grew 73 per cent in Latin America and 34 per cent in Africa.”

These are facts; that cannot change now. In that period, in Latin America, per capita grew by 73 per cent and Africa by 34 per cent. By comparison, since his bosses, the Milton Friedman group have their philosophy at work, these are the facts. Latin America’s growth had come virtually to zero and the implosion of
Argentina was the highlight of that. In Africa, incomes a decline by 26 per cent. The philosophy that he is pooh-poohing saw growth of 34 per cent over that period and Latin America 73 per cent. The new philosophy that he holds to his bosom saw stagnation in Latin America and a 26 per cent decline in Africa. If you count the corpses—I quote:

“From 1950 to 1980, socialist and welfare statist policies added more than a decade of life expectancy to virtually every nation on the planet.”

Today in 15 African nations, life expectancy has dropped considerably and illiteracy has risen. Of course, the IMF and the World Bank say that is bad luck; not bad policies, but bad luck. That is not to say that we are pursuing socialist, welfarist policies. We are pragmatists in control of our canoe, paddling our own canoe and not jumping to the drums of those in Washington who believe that we are minions and puppets to be pulling our strings. That is why his assent to the UNC leadership holds no fear for us, because we know he is galloping on a horse, looking backwards.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke about the PNM and 1992, and how we handled the situation of our oil and gas exploration. They like to talk about performance. The country was not aware of any bacchanal in the PNM when we were planning that strategy. What the country was aware of was that there was a serious government in office, doing government business in a proper and decent manner. When we lost the election in 1994 and they came into office, they had to carry on what they met there. How did they do it? The next thing we knew was that guerrilla warfare broke out in the Cabinet and the newspapers were reporting that the Chairman of the NGC was arriving in the Cabinet room to fight and curse with the Minister of Energy over the LNG negotiations. Do you remember that? That is not my saying. Go back to the newspapers. When they were doing that, the oil companies were looking on at Government and Cabinet. A Prime Minister allowing a chairman to come into the Cabinet to confront a Minister of Energy?

10.45 a.m.

And what did they do? Suddenly, there was a shortage of gas at Point Lisas. In that crisis, the Government had to negotiate with their testicles in a vice, and there is where they agreed to give away the gas to 2017. There is where it came from. It took the PNM back in office now—with the authority and strength of a government founded in the people of Trinidad and Tobago and a political party of great experience—to go to those oil companies and say that cannot work. [Desk thumping] That is how we have been able to talk to the oil companies and say...
exactly what is fair and what is reasonable. Of course, at the end of the day, it came to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We will get certain assets that they have given away. Mr. Speaker, where would you be in 2017?

Mr. Speaker, this was not by accident. When they were in government there was a talk: “I will be here in 2015.” [Laughter] So they made an agreement for 2017, knowing fully full that even if God had smiled on them that they would leave in 2015. Thank God that they left before, so we had a chance to renegotiate what they negotiated.

My friend, the Member for St. Augustine, asked—I am not sure but I think he asked or somebody over there—whether these state companies would be complying with this $5 million limit where they are required to get approval from the Ministry of Finance. That was something they put in place. The Minister of Finance had to put that in place because of what was going on in that Government. So any expenditure over $5 million had to come before him. He had to see it personally. He could not trust them out there.

Petrotrin bought one tanker of oil at a cost of US $20 million. In that system, the Minister of Finance, himself, cannot be approving $5 million here and $5 million there, but a public servant was required to approve it. What that system did was to take away the authority from persons in the state sector who were managing the country’s affairs and it was put into the hands of some nameless, faceless public servant. The PNM has done away with that and has replaced it with this. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, this budget is so good that those who responded to it were forced to go off and invent responses. The response that I want to comment on is from my friend, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, who is not sure if he is a fish or fowl and who is not sure whether he is Patriots or Progressives and who went on to discuss “Saga Boy” and “Tan Tan”. [Laughter] That was his contribution to the budget debate because the budget was virtually without fault.

Mr. Speaker, we have some work to do with this budget and the work we have to do is to talk to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I hope that the relevant ministries and their staff will do it. Parents, talk to your children. Tell them that this country is a land of opportunity; tell them nothing that is worth having can be had without effort; and tell them that what comes to them, the decision is what they do with it. [Desk thumping] The Government has no role behind closed doors.
Hon. Member: Murders! Kidnappings!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: What goes on in the home is for the homeowner and his family. The Government’s role is on the outside to set the stage and the framework to create opportunity; and this budget creates opportunity more than any other budget in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] That brings me to the point of crime.

I have not been saying very much about this crime issue because everybody else in the country was talking about it, and I think there was not much that I could have said that was going to be different.

The Leader of the Opposition made his entire presentation on the issue of crime, and very little of what he said on the issue of crime one could take issue with, except he went overboard. We all live here. In this little grouping that we call parliamentarians, two Members have suffered the trauma of having members of their family fall to the criminal element. It is silly to think that we on this side have some—

Mr. Singh: Immunity.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—immunity from the criminals and that we believe that we are not responsible for security of the State. The fact is that as a country, we are going through what other countries have gone through. In many instances, prosperity and high crime seems to have gone together. It happened in many countries and, presently, it is happening here. The Government has to accept responsibility for security of the State [Desk thumping] and the Government does that.

Mr. Speaker, how does the Government deliver on that? The agency which permits the Government to deliver on that acceptance of responsibility is the Police Service. Mr. Speaker, we cannot have it both ways. We accept responsibility, but the bulwark between the law-abiding citizens and the criminals is the police service. It is just politics and “ol’ talk” to want to hold the Minister of National Security personally responsible. When somebody gets killed, my colleague says that it is Martin Joseph who is responsible. That is stupid. What you have to hold the Government responsible for is having in Trinidad and Tobago an effective Police Service that can deal with the crime manifestation. [Desk thumping] The Government must be held accountable for that.

When the Prime Minister’s driver was arrested he called the station to find out if his driver was still there and whether he was incarcerated, and there were hours of debate here about that phone call by the Prime Minister, who was just
enquiring about his driver’s well being. This was viewed as interference in the police’s business. What they did not say is what they forgot. Apparently, they wanted the Prime Minister and me to go and hold criminals and arrest them and charge them.

I received a letter from one of my constituents who, like me, is traumatized by crime. The letter said to me: “You are my MP, do something about crime,” I looked at that letter once, twice and 10 times and I thought about what I am supposed to do. I came to the conclusion that what I am supposed to do is to ensure that the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago make all the resources required available to the police service to respond to the criminal element. [Desk thumping] This is what I have to do. [Desk thumping]

It is the police business to monitor criminals; to apprehend criminals; and to charge criminals; it is the courts business to ensure that they are tried and disposed with in one way or the other. So the Government’s role is to ensure that there is an efficient and effective Police Service. It is also the Government’s role to make sure that the avenues are there for swift justice. Once the Government is doing that—like New York, Los Angeles and Hong Kong—we would eventually get the better of that persistent criminal element. [Desk thumping] If you believe what I have said then we are toying with the Police Service.

Mr. Speaker, what is happening in this country is that the upsurge in criminal activities has caught this country flatfooted; it has caught us with a police service that was not prepared to deal with the current manifestation of crime. The kidnapping issues out of New York, Washington, London and Florida, where did they come from?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West 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. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank Members for the extension. If you agree that it is an effective police service that is going to respond to crime then what we all know in this country is that there are serious problems in our Police Service. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot know that there are serious problems with the Police Service—the Government has certain roles and the Police Service has a direct role—and pretend that we do not have problems in the Police Service.
I heard my friend, the Member for Couva South, saying that we should bring in Scotland Yard to conduct a commission of enquiry into the Police Service. It may very well be that an enquiry into the Police Service is required, because we need to know what is going on in there. Why the failure to rise to the occasion is so intransigent? It does not stop there. We already have knowledge because we knew what to do.

In fact, the history would show—we understood what had to be done with the Police Service—that the head of a Government which they were a part of brought those measures to this Parliament to treat with the Police Service, but in playing politics they decided, in the face of a crime wave, they would see the country go to hell in a hand basket, and they would not use that vote to make that contribution to deal with the Police Service. [Desk thumping] I am not saying for one minute that the Police Service Reform Bills will fix the Police Service, but if it allows the managers of the Police Service to manage a little better and to be able to cope with the criminals, then Members of Parliament would have done their part, but they refused to do their part.

Mr. Speaker, they take pleasure in reporting on the number of murders; the number of kidnappings and the number of rapes. They take pleasure in that because they believe that would give them the opportunity to get back into office. That is what they believe. It is not that their mothers, sons, daughters and neighbours are at risk, but we all are at risk. If the Commissioner of Police has the opportunity to manage better that would be something that would contribute to having an efficient, effective police service. What they can do they will not do.

Mr. Singh: I want to thank the hon. Minister for giving way.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Injury time.

Mr. Singh: Do you think that it is appropriate, at the stage of evolution of this society, for police reporting functions to be vested in the hands of the political directorate, meaning the Prime Minister, and, therefore, create room for political authoritarianism?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I want my injury time, please. Had I known he was going to ask that question I was not going to give way, but he is my colleague, so I gave way to him. Last week, in the United States of America—the same America that they are running to every five minutes—every time anybody gets killed they would tell you that they are going away; they are going to leave. They go on platforms and encourage people to leave rather than encourage them to stand up and face the issue in the country. Their approach is to
encourage persons to leave the country and then tell you how many businessmen have left by calling names.

In the United States of America where they run to, last week, the head of a political party was appointed the Chief Justice. Today, he is appointing another Supreme Court judge.

In the United States of America, the elected Mayor of New York—the one that they wanted us to pay $12 million—could fire the Commissioner of Police offhand. [Desk thumping] The Member then got up here and asked me if I believe the Prime Minister should—they want to hold the Prime Minister responsible for every rape and every kidnapping, but they are afraid to have him hold the Commissioner of Police accountable for his job.

So in a crime wave in this country, you could see the Minister of National Security on television; you could see me on television; but the one person you never see on the television talking about crime in this country is the Commissioner of Police. It is his job to fight crime as put there by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [ Interruption] Do you understand? Mr. Speaker, are Americans better at handling that situation? It is the same mentality—do not give us independence, we cannot handle it; do not give us the Caribbean Court of Justice because in London we get pure justice.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Partap: We would accept that.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: You have no choice, but you would accept it from the Englishman? That is what I am saying, you are an old colonial. He would accept that from the Englishman but not from us. We belong to this country and that is why we support the CCJ; we support this budget; we support the PNM and we support Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] We are a sovereign nation and we would support it as long as we believe in it, and you would be in the Privy Council until they kick you out, as they surely will one day.

Mr. Partap: Like what you are doing now.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So Couva South said a commission of enquiry. I think there is sufficient that is wrong with the Police Service that we know, and there is more that we do not know; that it would serve some useful purpose if we find out the full nature of the problem as we try to solve it, and therefore, I would have no difficulty in supporting that call from the Member for Couva South, because we need to know the details.
I was talking to a senior police officer the other night and he told me, if the police are going on a raid in some instances, they have to be careful that some Police do not know about it. In that situation, I am afraid. Many, many years ago, not recently, this is not recent you know. Many, many years ago I was in the Oval, I was a Member of Parliament, one year in Parliament, I think it was. I was sitting in the cycle track and a "fella" was standing in front of me, blocking me, and I asked him to move please. He spent the rest of the day terrorizing me. He told me when we leave there he would change his address because he would be living in my rear end and he would plant something on me. I had to get the Mayor of Arima to escort me to my car, so that that policeman could not carry out his threat. That was about 20 years ago; nothing has changed.

I sat here in this Parliament in front of you, Mr. Speaker, in a Privilege Committee, and watched a police officer lie on record. It is in the Parliament record here now. We all know that at the management level all is not well, because once you cross a certain level in the system the question has to do with promotion and dog fight. I think we need to understand more about that problem because the police are our shield against the criminal element. We need to find out what is going on there; we need to fix it, and only then will we be able to confront the modern criminal element in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the Government's responsibility. The question is: Can we count on our friends on the other side for any help? The answer is no, because they are seeking to profit by it. But crime or no crime the people of this country with their eyes wide open will differentiate between good governance and vaulting ambition and battle. [Desk thumping]

In this House, I am making this point, and I want to show you. The Member for Couva North had the gall to get up here and say, in making his crime contribution, that when the UNC was in Government, they had crime under control. He actually said that, you know. He forgot that the UNC had brought crime under control when they were in office. Mr. Speaker, it was inside his house they killed two people. Inside the house of the Prime Minister they killed two people. What was worse, it involved elements of the security services. Then you have the gall to come hear and say, you had control of crime under the UNC.

**Mr. Partap:** What is the point?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** The point?

**Mr. Partap:** Yes.
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: To control crime, bring it under the Prime Minister's bed. [Laughter] That is the point. Apparently, a grave injustice was done in this House by those who believe that they are immune. I was in this House, listen to what the Member for Couva North said, it may have escaped our notice; it did not escape my notice. He said:

"The office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) is a very important institution... Unless the population has the confidence that this office will be fair, fearless and strong, the very foundation of our democracy will be undermined."

Then he proceeded to launch an attack on the DPP. He accused the DPP of abuse of office and all manner of evil, in his budget contribution; not dealing with the budget; he dealt with the DPP. All of that in defence of a named person who was charged by the DPP, a certain Dr. Naraynsingh, who was charged for killing his wife, and has become some cause celebre for the Opposition Leader and his friends.

I want to quote for all of us in this House and the national community who heard the contribution of the Member for Couva North. I want to quote for the country what the Standing Orders of the Parliament says:

"36(10) The conduct of the Governor, Members of the Senate or the House of Representatives, or of judges or other persons engaged in the administration of justice shall not be raised except upon a substantive motion..."

and if not—

"shall be out of order."

So, while the parliamentary Standing Orders expressly forbid the Opposition Leader from coming here and attacking the DPP, except on a substantive motion, he came in a budget debate and launched the most violent attack on the DPP, in defence of a man who was charged for killing his wife, and of course saying that the DPP is guilty of abuse of office because he referred the magistrate's ruling to a judge to be reviewed. That is proof of bias; and Dr. Naraynsingh is the best thing in the world, and if we knew he is an upstanding citizen; how many persons he helped, and so on and so on.

Immediately after that, there was a ruling from another court in a matter of Krishna Persad versus Moraven Holdings Limited, where a magistrate ruled that certain charges should be dropped against Dr. Persad. That was a private motion
brought by Mr. Nicholas. He was not happy with the magistrate's ruling, so he went to the High Court. The court ruled that the magistrate's finding was unacceptable and the Magistrate overstepped his bounds; he made finding of fact, which he should not have done, and all he was required to do was see a prima facie case and the High Court referred the matter back to the Magistrates’ Court so that Dr. Persad can face a review of his situation; that happened in a private matter.

But when the DPP does the same thing with Dr. Naraynsingh, the Opposition Leader comes in the Parliament, puts up a defence for Dr. Naraynsingh; how brilliant he is; how much people he helped; how much tears he dried, and attacked the DPP virulently. Then, wants to tell us that he is a champion of the reduction of crime in this country. Whom do you believe? How do you accept that? In one breath you want to destroy the institution of the DPP; attack the DPP; violate Standing Orders in the Parliament in defence of. But then, the court on the other hand rules that a magistrate can be reviewed by the High Court.

They are not serious. They are not serious about this country. Left to themselves alone, they would take this country down a road that we would never want to be. Thank God they are where they are and we are where we are in this country. [Desk thumping] They do not stand alone, you know.

Mr. Speaker, I want to show you what the Government has to face in this country. You would have seen in the newspapers a couple days ago, big headline, because there are those who are happy to announce bad news. I do not know what they have with me; they love my name; they want to see me, I do not know what, but I am so happy I am not taking on any one of them, you understand. Because I have done my part and I must be the happiest person in Trinidad and Tobago; but they love my name. But I order a long, long, long name so, that hard to pronounce, and when I get that I would ignore them. [Laughter] Big article in the newspapers: Rowley loses to Sharma in the court. What is the story? For you, Mr. Speaker, and the benefit of the public who might have been misled, what has happened is that the Member for Fyzabad wrote to the Ministry asking for the names of all persons who got NHA houses and he wants it by racial origin.

That letter came to the Ministry on May 20; we passed the letter to the Solicitor General in June; on July 05, the Permanent Secretary wrote to the Member for Fyzabad telling him, and I want to put it on record what he said:
“Your request for information under the Freedom of Information Act, 1999, May 17 refers: I wish to inform you that the Ministry of Housing does not have information on racial origin in its database.

Attached is a copy of the application form which shows the type of information that is collected from recipients.

With respect to the request for information on the local districts, towns and villages of applicants, I hereby enclose same as per your request.”

That is July 05. On July 07, the Member for Fyzabad went to the court and told the court that he wrote the Minister of Housing and got no reply and therefore, next thing we know, the court ruled that information that does not exist must be provided." And of course go on to rule that—

**Mr. Partap:** Acted illegal.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Me, I acted illegally and the cost to be paid, I want to make it clear; I have no cost to pay. None, not one cent. It is the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago who have to pay for this folly.

You get a letter on July 05 saying that the application form does not ask anybody for their racial background. Two days later, you go to the court and tell the court you never received any reply and the court rules in that way. Taxpayers will pay. Because, you see, we cannot have it both ways.

Then we have an editorial in the *Newsday* which is hellbent on placing the housing policies in a certain light. This is the second editorial in about a three week period. An editorial in the *Newsday* accusing me of either having or hiding information, and in so doing, the Member for Fyzabad had some case; that is the editorial in the newspaper. What is the truth? The editorial says that for six months the Ministry stonewalled the Member, not true. He wrote this on May 20; we got legal advice during June; we wrote him on July 05. What he asked for is not available.

But something else too. It has been reported that my colleague from Fyzabad, to get that court decision, told the court that I said that the Ministry had information which said that 60 per cent of its applicants are Africans. Mr. Speaker, this is a transcript of the speech that I made, and I would quote it for you. Hear what I said:

"Everybody knows in this country that urban Trinidad and Tobago, the East-West Corridor is largely non-Indian. I can tell you, the database of the NHA
shows that 60 out of every 100 applicants, 60% of the 70,000 persons who have applied to the NHA come from the East-West Corridor, that is between Carenage and Sangre Grande."

That is what I said. Yet he goes to the court and tells the court that I said in a speech that 60 per cent of the applicants in the NHA database are Africans and on that basis the court had now ordered me to provide him with the information by race, and to pay his cost. You understand? I will tell you; I have never seen a case dealt with so quickly. Case filed September 17 or thereabout; finished long time. I had a case in the court for 17 years, a serious matter, but he goes to the court to ask for information by race; case done in a few days.

My friend from Siparia will tell you how she behaved in this House not too long ago, when it came to her attention that somewhere in the Ministry of Education or in the Teaching Service Commission there was a form to be filled out for application for teachers and somewhere on that form they had asked about race. My friend from Siparia is on Hansard here making mincemeat of that; saying that the State should not be doing that. Notwithstanding the fact that it was during her time that it happened, but she was making the point that collection of data by race is unacceptable.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: That is not on any Hansard record. Find that on Hansard record and bring it here. But he is lying; bring the records; bring it and read it.

11.15 a.m.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I am not taking them on. I was right here when the issue came up about an application form in the Ministry of Education that made reference to ethnicity or race and she had a lot to say, but her colleague is going to court and the court is demanding that I present information by race, which we do not have, and an editorial is demanding that I gather it and give it. It goes on to say that if we do not gather it then we are suffering from a dereliction of duty.

It says it here: “If they are not gathering that information then they are guilty of dereliction of duty.” That is the kind of scene the Government operates in. Instead of being responsible and serious and crying shame on a Member of Parliament, who will go to court and misrepresent the facts like that and incur hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers’ money in legal cost—and by the way, before I forget, I heard my friend from Fyzabad making a case here for money for MPs to spend in their constituency.
Mr. Speaker, I want to go on record as saying, I do not support that. I want no part of it, and as far as he is concerned, that is tantamount to putting "cat to watch butter." Currently we have an allowance to pay our light bills and our office maintenance. You must find out which constituency office T&TEC cuts lights every week. Find out which one! Find out who lives off the allowance from the Parliament, from the maintenance of their office. Then he comes here in big bright daylight and asks for money for constituency to spend.

**Hon. Members:** Who?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Could you imagine—as a MP, I have money in my constituency and everybody’s issue is an emergency. So, when somebody comes and you give that person some money and the other person wants some money, and you say “no, you cannot have it.” Is it not mayhem you are creating? And he knows that. What he wants is he want to get a bigger pool of money to play in.

I am totally against any constituency slush fund and what should happen is the Government service departments must be made to do their job. We know where they are and they must do their job. [Desk thumping] Public servants must do their jobs and they are all there in the various ministries prepared to do their jobs. Do not give Parliamentarians any money to disburse to their constituents; otherwise some of them would end up in jail! [Desk thumping]

**Hon. Member:** In jail. He has it right.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, the last item I want to touch on before I close, is an issue—and again for public information—looking at the front page of today's paper you would see a lady, "Tears of broken down home", and the story is inside there. This has to do with the housing programme where the Government agency, the LSA, has broken down a squatter’s home in San Fernando and the public is being made to understand that this is some harshness. In fact, in another newspaper and in the media as well, it is being put across that this is some racial action on the part of the state agency.

**Hon. Member:** Discrimination!

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Yes, discrimination. What does the file show? The law of this country, passed by them, with our support. Act 25 of 1998 says that after October 27, 2000, squatting of any kind is illegal and ought not to be tolerated. The State has put in place a Land Settlement Agency to enforce that law and to put an end to squatting. The law that they passed, this lady a few months ago, in
violation of the law, went and built that unit in Blitz Village. She was served a notice by the LSA and she was told on August 09, 2005—and in fact, before that, she was served a notice.

She went to her MP on July 28, 2005. Her MP, Diane Seukeran, who is from San Fernando West wrote to the LSA asking for some consideration for her. The LSA gave her some consideration; they gave her an extended period during which she would comply with the law. Instead of complying with the law, she does otherwise. She was written to again on August 09, 2005 and warned that she was breaking the law and action would be taken against her. She was written to again and told on September 28, 2005 that this is your last notice and it said to her:

"If you do not comply, the LSA will have no choice but to take necessary steps in accordance with Act 25."

She refused to comply.

"Please be advised that this is the final notice to remove your structure on or before October 05, 2005. With your failure to do so, the Agency would have no choice but to demolish your structure with immediate effect and with no further notice given to you."

The State's agency went beyond the call of duty to try to get this lady to comply with the law. She refused to comply with the law and when the state agency follows the law and demolishes her building—they, my friend from Nariva is over there bawling "discrimination". [Interruption] She is there telling the press, it is discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, I can show you [Crosstalk] that the LSA has not been picking and choosing. In fact, the LSA, you would have heard the Prime Minister say in the budget speech that as we make housing available across the board, we are also going to bring abatement to the squatting issue. That was in the budget speech. To do that, the LSA is prepared to enforce the law. When I took the oath of office as Minister, that oath required me to carry out my duty without fear or favour and without malice or ill will, and the law must take its course. [Desk thumping]

The LSA acts against persons who are in breach of the law, regardless of their race, colour, creed or class. But they like to put everything in the context of race and incite people. While they are bawling that they are against crime: they are against crime, they are encouraging lawlessness [Desk thumping] and putting the lawlessness in the worst possible construction, in a racial context, to make it look as if the Government is treating with some citizens differently.
Hon. Member: That is what they are doing.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: You will recall when the LSA broke down the houses in Union Park, remember that? Remember, that was a big issue for a few weeks. Mr. Speaker, how do you please them? We cannot please them. [Interruption]

Mr. Manning: I can answer that for you.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: All we can do is to be true to our oath and ensure that in everything that we do, the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago is paramount. Mr. Speaker, if there is any document, if there is any action on the part of any Government that demonstrates that the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago is paramount, it is the budget of 2005/2006 and I commend it to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (Caroni Central): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just like the Member for Diego Martin West I myself want to apologize for my voice, but as you know the month of Ramadan started two days ago and I am fasting and I do not know for how long I will be able to speak, but I could not allow this occasion to pass without making a contribution to this debate. [Interruption] Do you want me to sit?

Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Manning: This might be your last one.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, since most of the comments that I will make in this debate are related to the Ministry of Health. I want on this occasion to express our deepest sympathy and condolences to the Minister of Health on the recent loss of his nephew.

We know the pain and the trauma that he must have been through, he and members of his family. We on this side of the House had our own share of grief when one of our colleagues, the Member for Naparima also had his son kidnapped and brutally murdered.

Mr. Manning: Do not talk about that, please.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Why? He is expressing condolence.

Mr. Manning: Okay, well go ahead then.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, do you have a difficulty with me expressing condolences?

Mr. Manning: No, by all means. I hope you could take what I have to say.
Hon. Members: Go ahead.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, when someone lives his entire life and dies at an old age it still brings grief and pain to members of the family. But, when one is cut down in the prime of his life, especially in the way that these two young gentlemen have been murdered, then what kind of comfort and solace do you give the members of their family? I think the only thing we can say to them is that eventually God is in charge of everything.

Mr. Speaker, in expressing condolence to both of these gentlemen, we also want to express condolence to members of all the families of people who have been kidnapped and people who have been brutally murdered. We say the same thing to them, that eventually God is in charge of all our affairs.

Mr. Manning: I hope you understand what that means, because he hears all and he sees.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: He sees all and he hears all and eventually, there is justice. I find it a bit difficult to summon the energy to speak in this budget debate, because out there the population of Trinidad and Tobago has very little interest in what we are discussing here. [Interruption] Of necessity, the attention of the population is focused elsewhere and that is surviving the criminal elements on a day-to-day basis. [Interruption]

So, as I said the population is demonstrating very little concern for this budget debate. Normally a budget presentation generates a lot of excitement, a lot of attention, a lot of discussion. But on the day that this budget was presented, none of the newspapers had on their front page that a budget was being presented today. In fact in The Trinidad Guardian it was not on any of the pages 1—7. On page 8 there was a little two-paragraph item saying that the budget will be presented today at 2 o'clock by the Prime Minister. That is because, as I said, the population has little or no interest, because there are other more compelling concerns and pressing concerns to deal with.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of crime has been mentioned by many speakers in this debate so far, and I will not like to say much about this issue, except to say that if the theme of this budget is “Addressing Basic Needs”, then the most basic need, and that is the need for security and safety of the individual, has not been met. To the extent that this need has not been met, the basic need for security and safety, this budget is a failure.
Another area of frustration, and I want to address this to the hon. Prime Minister, is the contempt with which the Prime Minister has treated this Parliament in budget debates, particularly at the committee stage.

Mr. Speaker, last year during the committee stage, the Opposition raised and sought clarification and answers on about 100 different issues, items of expenditure and to date—

[Hon. Prime Minister rises]

Mr. Prime Minister, I wanted to address this to you, if you will give me one minute of your time?

Mr. Manning: I was not about to leave the Chamber, I would be right here.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Okay. I was saying that last year during the committee stage we raised about 100 different issues and to date not one of these issues have been answered. All the queries by the Opposition were met with by the Prime Minister: "We would provide the answer at a later date."

11:30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, today is one year later and we still have not received the responses. The Standing Orders of the House of Representatives provide for four days of debate in the budget, but seven days for the committee stage. The Standing Orders even allow for any day saved during the budget debate, to be added to the committee stage, so important is the committee stage during the debate.

During the debate itself, policy issues and policy measures are dealt with, but in the committee stage is where the House gets down to the nitty-gritty of the items of expenditure. If answers are not provided by the Government to queries from the Opposition, then the entire process, the entire exercise, is a farce and a mockery of the Parliament. [Desk thumping] I hope that this year, if answers cannot be provided immediately, that the House would be adjourned for a day or two, so that proper answers can be provided before we actually vote on the budget; otherwise, as I said, the issue of transparency would be just a farce and a mockery.

I now want to get down to some specific items of expenditure in the budget itself. There is an item of expenditure that is neatly tucked away under a subheading of households, in the Ministry of Health and one which can be easily overlooked, but one which has grave consequences for the health sector.
That item is the Voluntary Separation of Employment (VSEP) for health care workers, to the tune of $540 million; VSEP for health care facilities workers of $540 million.

Incidentally, this would mean that while the other ministries got substantial increases in their allocations in the 2006 budget, the Ministry of Health, of which the Prime Minister spoke so much in the budget, as being one of the priority areas for attention and development, in a budget of $34 billion, got an increase of $67 million, when you discount the $540 million allocated for the VSEP. But we will say more on that a little later.

Once again, our good friend, the Minister of VSEP, of Caroni (1975) Limited fame, has been given the responsibility to implement VSEP in the health sector; this time to the doctors, nurses and the other health care workers in the public sector. One would have thought that a major policy measure like this would have been announced by the Prime Minister in his budget.

Not too long ago, the Ministry of Health conducted a survey among the public service staff at the Sangre Grande and Mayaro Hospitals. An offer was made to the public officers to transfer to the Regional Health Authorities and they would receive, as an incentive, an additional three months salary, together with payment for all vacation leave and a few other small perks. The idea was to implement it in smaller institutions first and then the San Fernando and Port of Spain Hospitals and so and so. That survey indicated that over 80 per cent of the staff at the Sangre Grande Hospital was willing to accept that offer and, in fact, were eager to do so. Lo and behold, while the Ministry had begun to work on this, they received a directive from the Minister of Public Administration, Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith, to abandon the programme. Mr. Speaker, this would have been a much easier programme to administer and would have cost the Government, not $540 million, but hundreds of millions of dollars less.

Mr. Manning: What programme was that? I missed it.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: I will repeat it for you. Not too long ago, the Ministry conducted a survey at the Sangre Grande Hospital, making an offer to the public service staff that they would give them three months salary, be paid for all vacation leave and a few other small perks, as an incentive to go across to the Regional Health Authority.

Mr. Manning: Voluntary Separation of Employment?
Dr. H. Rafeeq: To be transferred to the RHA, not VSEP. Over 80 per cent of them accepted this offer and were eager to go across to the Regional Health Authority (RHA) with that package. While the Ministry was in the process of dealing with this, they received a directive from the Ministry of Public Administration and Information, that they should no longer pursue that, in fact, that they should abandon this programme. This would have been a much easier exercise to administer; a much cheaper exercise to administer. We understand the reason for this was that a deal had been struck between the Minister of Public Administration and the President of the Public Services Association for this VSEP package. I can only say that this would put the health sector in further chaos.

All of us know that the health sector cannot function without the services of all these personnel from the public service now being offered VSEP. This means that the employees would be given VSEP and rehired by the Regional Health Authorities. To date, I have spoken to quite a few health care workers in the public sector and none of them know anything about this VSEP package.

One would have thought that there would have been some kind of discussion with the major players involved. The workers will have to be rehired and I ask the Minister, I do not know if he would be responding in this debate, but at whatever time is appropriate, if he could give us the answers. How is this VSEP going to be done? How is it going to be offered? How is it going to be administered? There are, at present, existing workers within the Regional Health Authorities, at all levels: consultants, registrars, senior nurses and so on. What about the issue of seniority then? Who will be senior?

If you have a doctor or a nurse who has been employed by the RHA for, let us say, two years, and you have a new employee coming in to the RHA, but he or she is a doctor or nurse who has had about 20 years experience as a public servant, who will have seniority in that case? Would it be the doctor or nurse who has two years experience or will it be the doctor or nurse who has 20 years experience, but is now coming in by this method, as a new employee in the Regional Health Authority? How will you deal with issues like that? Whichever way it goes, whether you put the RHA doctor or the public service doctor as the senior person, there is going to be chaos if there is not some kind of prior discussion and, maybe, consensus.

I also want to find out whether the VSEP and subsequent rehiring will be used to weed out some of the employees that the Ministry perceives as troublemakers. Remember that all of them would be given VSEP; they would no longer be employees; they would have to apply for a job in the RHAs and they would be
coming in as new employees. I want to ask whether that would be used as a mechanism to screen doctors and other health care personnel and get rid of some of them that the Ministry perceives as troublemakers. All those who have been involved in union-type activities, this mechanism may be used to get rid of them. I am just asking these questions and I hope, at some point in time, we can get answers to them.

To the public health care workers involved in this, I say to them, “Be very careful about this VSEP offer and make sure that when the negotiations are concluded, you have all your commitments in writing, so you know exactly what your package would entail.” I will not say anything more on that now, because very little information is available at this point in time.

I want to deal now with the issue of the Scarborough Hospital. I would have thought that in the light of so many adverse comments and reports about this Scarborough Hospital, that either the Minister or Prime Minister would have taken this opportunity to make a comprehensive statement to inform the nation on the status of this project. Permit me to give a very brief history of this project so far.

After the designs for the hospital were completed, tenders were invited for the construction of the hospital. Tenders were received by this Government when it came into office. One of the contractors, Northern Construction, had put in a bid for $100 million. The contract was awarded to NH International for $125 million for the construction of the Scarborough Hospital. During the early days of the project, there were serious allegations of poor quality work and cost overruns.

The project became plagued with constant infighting between the contractor, NH International, the project manager, the National Insurance Property Development Company Limited (Nipdec) and Stantec. During the last budget debate, allegations were made and documentation provided that materials were being transferred from the hospital project site to a private development site in which the Minister of Housing admitted he had a beneficial interest.

While I am on this, may I just say that the Prime Minister had promised that he would lay the Landate Report on the Commission of Enquiry in the Parliament; so far he has not done so. [Desk thumping] We understand that the report recommended that certain persons were to be charged for activities arising out of the project. [Desk thumping] I am calling on the Prime Minister today to keep his promise and lay the report as quickly as possible, maybe today before this budget debate is finished. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker, continuing with the history of that project, earlier this year, the Prime Minister announced, at a post-Cabinet briefing, that Nipdec would be dismissed and would take no further part as project manager. I will just like to read a newspaper clipping from the *Trinidad Guardian* of January 21, 2005.

"Government has given the boot to Nipdec, a State-run agency and the Government-hired project manager on the controversial Scarborough Hospital Project. The hospital is 14 months behind schedule and $134.1 million over budget. Formal notice of Nipdec's termination, as project manager of the floundering hospital project, came at a post-Cabinet news conference yesterday from Prime Minister Patrick Manning who, in response from questions from journalists, said that the answer is, ‘Yes, they (Nipdec) have been fired.’

The Prime Minister declined to provide any information on Cabinet's decision to fire the State-appointed project manager saying only that the line Minister, John Rahael, would give a detailed statement on the matter. But Rahael who was also present at the post-Cabinet news briefing at White Hall, docked questions on Nipdec's removal.

Nipdec's termination comes almost six months after a US $185,000 diagnostic report by Turner International, which warned of the State's increased exposure to the continued acrimonious stand off between lead consultant, Stantec Consultant International and NH International, the main contractor on the Scarborough project.

The project has been engulfed in a sea of controversy almost from the start of March 2003 sod turning with infighting between the project partners, conflict of interest allegations, massive cost overruns, threats of litigation and, more recently, the refusal of the project manager to certify the structural integrity of the project. Stantec in a mounting pile of correspondence has accused NH International of shoddy and defective structural works."

Mr. Speaker, that was in January this year. The Prime Minister said that they had fired Nipdec.

"Somewhere along the line Turner International was hired to do some kind of evaluation of the project. The firm was hired without any advertisement; without any competitive bidding and, to date, no one knows who hired them; what were their terms of reference; how much they have been paid and how they were hired."
Mr. Speaker, a couple months ago, NH International indicated that it was pulling out of the project and, together with Nipdec, the terms of their disengagement were being worked out. To date, after the Prime Minister announced in January that they had been fired from the project, Nipdec is still the project manager of the Scarborough Hospital project. From what we know, Turner International is still on the project and work has been stopped; so you have two management firms and no contractors doing the job.

Mr. Speaker, there are too many unanswered questions, which I pose today and which, I hope, before this debate is finished, answers would be provided for; the public needs to know.

11.45 a.m.

The public whose moneys have been spent needs to know first of all who hired Turner International. What were the terms of reference and the terms and conditions of that contract? Why the services were not advertised for and why was competitive bidding not done to hire that firm?

Secondly, what are the exact terms and conditions of the contract with NH International for the construction of the Scarborough Hospital? In one of the parliamentary committees we tried to get a copy of the contract and we were given a runaround and to date, we have not been able to obtain a copy of that contract.

How much moneys have been expended so far, and what works have been done so far on the Scarborough Hospital?

Fourthly, what are the terms and conditions of the settlement with NH International for its disengagement from the project? And is this going to add to the cost overruns at the Scarborough Hospital?

Mr. Speaker, how will another contractor be hired to continue work on the project which has been stopped? How would another contractor be contracted to continue work on that hospital? Will it be by open tendering again and how soon will that be done?

Next, we would like to find out how soon will work commence on the project and when will the hospital be completed and ready for use by the people of Tobago.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we want to find out what is the projected final cost for the construction of the hospital? This is one of the biggest scandals to hit this
country. A hospital that was supposed to have cost $125 million would end up costing this country over $400 million. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, the strange thing about this is that it is an IDB-funded project, it is part of the Health Sector Reform Programme, and it is major partly funded by the Inter-American Development Bank and, to date, we have not heard a word from the Inter-American Bank concerning this project.

Since this is the people’s money that is involved, we call on the IDB to make a public statement on this fiasco that is taking place at the Scarborough Hospital. [Desk thumping] And you know, the people of Tobago are suffering, the old hospital they have is falling apart, and they need the services of this hospital.

In the budget debate of about three years ago, the Minister of Housing, the Member for Diego Martin West, mentioned that they were not only building a hospital to service the people of Tobago, they were building one which would be used as a teaching hospital with so many benefits for the people of Tobago. Mr. Speaker, at least give them the services of a new hospital even if it does not end up being a teaching hospital after all.

Mr. Speaker, the next project that I want to mention, the second scandal taking place has to do with the construction of the Oncology Centre, the Cancer Centre. Again, the Government has signed a contract with a Canadian company for the construction and commissioning of an Oncology Centre at Mount Hope and, to date, very little or nothing has been done.

Just for the record, I want to give a brief history of this contract. A firm was contracted through international tendering to conduct a feasibility study for that Oncology Centre and the study would have provided information on the site, that is where it would be located, the size of the centre, the staffing requirements, the equipment and training of personnel required to run that centre.

After presentation of the report, it was to be reviewed by the ministry’s staff, by our cancer specialist in Trinidad and Tobago and by specialists from the M B Anderson Cancer Centre in Houston, Texas free of charge. We went out of office and the report was received by this Government and when the report was received, the contract was given to the same company for constructing and equipping that centre. Mr. Speaker, the same company that did the feasibility study, we pointed out that there would be a conflict of interest situation here, which is happening today. The Government took no note and it went ahead and gave to contract to construct and commission the cancer centre to the same company that conducted the feasibility study.
Mr. Speaker, not only that, Government hired to head this project in Trinidad and Tobago at a cost of over $50,000 per month and allowances, a local doctor who never worked in a cancer centre, has no knowledge of cancer treatment, and has no experience in the field. That person is the director of the international oncology project.

Today, the project is stalled, nothing is happening and hundreds of people are dying, or have to pay through their noses for cancer treatment abroad. The Government is now realizing that it was a mistake to contract that firm that did the feasibility study because there is no objectivity in the project and it almost has to start all over again.

Mr. Speaker, to demonstrate the incompetence and attitude of those who are heading the project, recently—and I want to relate this incident—the team from the ministry was invited to the M B Anderson Cancer Centre—that is one of the best in the world—to view the operations of the centre in Houston. The people at M B Anderson made all the arrangements for accommodation, transport, and mobilized their staff to give a comprehensive look at the operations to our Trinidad team; they also made arrangements for them to visit a smaller satellite centre which would be similar in size to that of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have to tell you the amount of work that had to be done to mobilize all their resources for that visit of the Trinidadians which was to last one week. At the last minute, the head of the team here, the same director who works for over $50,000 per month wanted to cancel it and when told that the arrangement could not be rescheduled she said, well, to save face she would go for one day. Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker?

Here there is a golden opportunity to interact with one of the best people in the world as far as cancer treatment is concerned. They had mobilized their resources and put them at your disposal, they had nothing to gain from it, there were no strings attached and you want to cancel the project and at the last minute you said, to save face you will go for one day?

Mr. Speaker, today construction of that centre should have been completed and treatment of patients should have started. Today if one has cancer that needs radiation therapy—and most of them do—without the cobalt machines that we have at St. James, one has to find US $40,000—$50,000 to go abroad for treatment, beg someone to help, or die.

Mr. Speaker, today cancer is no longer considered a death sentence in most instances because with early detection and proper treatment, patients can live a
long and productive life. Unfortunately, with billions of dollars flowing through our country, poor patients in Trinidad and Tobago do not have that luxury. So today for the benefit of those who have cancer and need treatment abroad and cannot afford such treatment, and for the incompetence of the Government in particular, I am calling on the Minister and the Government to make appropriate arrangements with centres abroad to treat our locals at the cost to the Government, or at least at a subsidized cost. [Desk thumping]

This programme should be put in place as early as possible and last until we are able to construct, equip and staff our centre and treat our own nationals in Trinidad and Tobago. Our citizens must not be allowed to die unnecessarily because of the failure of the Government to do its job in an efficient manner. You see lives are not only being lost through criminal activities, lives are being lost because of incompetence of the Government.

The next programme the Prime Minister mentioned was that the Government has acquired two new Catheterization Laboratories (Cat labs) to perform a variety of heart tests on cardiac patients. I want to say that we on this side of the House will support any initiative of the Government to bring relief to our citizens suffering from any health condition. Somehow, the Government seems to be confused about its policies with regard to health.

First of all, every year, the Government keeps announcing new initiatives and even though none or most of them do not get off the ground, they keep announcing new ones. In this specific case, the Prime Minister not only projects that these cat labs will serve and provide health care to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, not only citizens of Caricom, but of the wider Caribbean.

Let me give you the reality: firstly, the Government has at its disposal in the public sector dozens of operating theatres, dozens of qualified surgeons, and a whole cadre of trained theatre nurses and anesthetists, all of whom are being paid by the State.

**Mr. Rahael:** Correct.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Yet, you were unable, Mr. Minister, to make any significant dent in the waiting list for surgery, unless you contracted the services of the private sector. I am saying they have all these resources and were unable to harness them to do ordinary surgeries. They had to go to the private sector. [Desk thumping] They want to introduce cardiac catheterizations and angioplasty in the public sector for which there are no or little qualified personnel.
Mr. Speaker, who are the doctors who are going to be doing the angiograms? Who are the doctors who will be doing the angioplasties? Who are the doctors who will be putting in the pacemakers? Where you have qualified and competent personnel in general surgery you cannot harness the resources.

**Mr. Rahael**: We are bringing in whoever we have to bring in.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq**: The expertise for these services resides in the private sector.

**Mr. Rahael**: And hold us to ransom.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq**: Would it not be better for some kind of arrangement to be made with the private sector to provide these services at some kind of negotiated cost to the Government? Or would it end up like general surgery where you have the Cat lab at Mount Hope and you have to pay for these surgeries outside where you are paying twice for the same service.

Mr. Speaker, the second issue has to do with the Government making lavish promises that raise the hope of poor patients with certain diseases but only to have their hopes dashed because of the Government’s inability to keep its promises.

**Mr. Rahael**: What promise is that?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq**: Last year the Government announced that in order to increase accessibility of renal dialysis services to the general population, they would be providing before January 01, 2005 two renal dialysis treatment centres; one in north and one in south Trinidad, each providing treatment for 200 persons.

**Mr. Rahael**: Correct.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq**: Has this been done?

**Mr. Rahael**: I will respond to you, I do not want to interrupt you.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq**: I do not want to know if there is a reason for that. This was a promise to the people of Trinidad and Tobago who are dying from renal failure.

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

**Dr. H. Rafeeq**: They said it will be supplemented by a renal transplant surgery programme to provide renal surgery at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex at Mount Hope.

Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister announced that initiative we applauded but we cautioned the Government when we spoke in that budget debate last year that they were making promises that they could not keep.
Mr. Speaker, that announcement had the effect of sending up the hopes of patients suffering from kidney failure that they would have access to treatment this year. Their hopes have been dashed and while some patients get a temporary reprieve from peritoneal dialysis, the expected two renal dialysis centres remain an illusive dream. Yet the Government announces that it would not only be treating Caricom citizens but from the wider Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, the third issue—and I am really tired of speaking of this in this Parliament. I have spoken of it ad nauseam in this Parliament and I hope it is the last time I will have to speak about it. It is the issue of tissue transplant. We did our part when we were in office; we brought legislation to Parliament which was passed in 1998 or 1999, after it was languishing for 20 years. And on every occasion I have had to speak here, I have been begging the Minister to implement this Act so lives can be saved. The Minister makes all kinds of excuses, conducts all kinds of press conferences and briefings and gives about four different start-up dates for the programme. The last date given was August 2005.

12.00 p.m.

I wonder if any Member of the Government really knows what it is to lose the life of a loved one from some condition that could have been cured. Sometimes I feel that life has no meaning for this Government, because you lose a few by murder, a few hundred by accident, kidney failure or by cancer and it is no big thing. Life has very little meaning for this Government. I want to repeat today that in Trinidad and Tobago, because of our high incidence of diabetes and hypertension, there is a high level of chronic renal failure, that is, kidney failure. Thousands of patients have been struggling with this disease and more patients become affected on an ongoing basis. There are several people who, because of the generosity of their family and because of having to mortgage or sell whatever property they have, they have benefited from renal transplants abroad. Some have been successful in Pakistan and other places and some have not, but some have succeeded and are living productive lives today. But many undergo the suffering and die because they cannot access treatment because they do not have the money to do so. Yet there is something that can be done by the Government to give back life to these people.

We do not take any comfort in this but we know that hundreds of people are dying from unnatural causes and their kidneys could have been used to assist those people who are in need of kidney transplant, but for reasons best known to itself, the Government refuses to implement the programme. As I said, the last startup date given by the Minister was August. I am pleading with him again to
start this programme. Give life to people who cannot afford it so that they can go ahead and lead productive lives as well. Again, after four years of not being able to implement that programme, the Prime Minister wants to give heart care, not only to Caricom, but the wider Caribbean. Start the programme at least for Trinidadians first.

Thirdly, the Prime Minister mentioned that the adult cardiac surgery programme is ongoing. I do not know how much money has been spent and how many persons have benefited and what is the criteria that is being used to select persons to benefit from this programme. What I do know is that there is serious favouritism and discrimination taking place in that programme. I want to draw your attention to two cases and I will give the names to the Minister if he so desires—I do not want to call their names in public. About eight months ago a gentlemen who was diagnosed as having heart disease, blocked arteries of the heart, was seen by a cardiologist; he was given a letter to go to the Ministry of Health because he would have required an angiogram, possibly angioplasty or cardiac surgery. He was poor and could not have afforded that treatment and so he took the letter to the Ministry of Health. After three months, he received no response from the Ministry of Health. Mr. Speaker, I am talking about someone who has heart disease, a fatal condition. He brought it to my attention and I called the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Health. The permanent secretary left a number for him to contact them. So far that gentlemen has called on 27 occasions and he has not been able to speak to anybody at the Ministry of Health. To date, nothing has been initiated; nothing has been done. It is eight months since that gentleman has been diagnosed as having a condition that needs to have angiogram, possibly angioplasty or cardiac surgery, and nothing had been done. That is the first case.

The second case, a gentlemen had myocardial infarction, that is a heart attack. Again, he was seen and treated by his cardiologist. They told him that he would need to have an angiogram and maybe bypass surgery. Again, he was a poor taxi driver; he could not have afforded these investigations or treatment and he was given a letter to go to the Ministry of Health to seek help. He took it personally to the Ministry of Health and it is three months to date and he has not even received an acknowledgment. This is a person who is the sole breadwinner of his family. He had a heart attack. After having his angiogram he could have benefited from cardiac surgery. He does not have the money to do it. To date, he has not even had the benefit of an acknowledgement from the Ministry of Health.
I have been reliably informed that there are persons who have had favourable responses after these letters have been sent. We have sometimes accused the Government of discrimination, but when there is discrimination as far as the provision of health services are concerned, that is the lowest that a Government can go and it is extremely sad. Yet we want to provide heart care services for Caricom citizens and citizens of the wider Caribbean.

I want to deal now, briefly, with the development programme. In the 2005 budget the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health stated that in 2005 a new wing at the General Hospital in San Fernando would be commissioned which would include an ICU and outfitted with a burns unit. We know that the new wing has been commissioned, but without the ICU and the burns unit. That remains a broken promise.

Mr. Rahael: The new wing has been opened.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Without the major facilities of a burns unit and an intensive care unit.

The other issue has to do with district health facilities. During the tenure of this Government over the last four years, not one district health facility has been built; not one district health facility has commenced construction; not one enhanced health facility has commenced construction.

Mr. Rahael: I thank the Member for giving way. Mr. Speaker, I just want to correct the hon. Member for Caroni Central. He talked a lot and I will have time to respond, but with respect to not one public health centre having started construction, I am just going to name one, Petit Valley, but there are others.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, that is the problem. The Minister does not understand the difference between a health centre and a district health facility, and when we have someone who is heading the ministry who does not understand these basic differences we are in serious trouble. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Rahael: Would the Member give way again? Mr. Speaker, I also wish to advise the Member for Caroni Central that the contract has been awarded for the St. James district health facility and construction has started, or is about to be started. [Desk thumping]

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, that is what I am saying. The Minister talked about the Petit Valley Health Centre. There is a difference between an outreach centre, a health centre, a district health facility and an enhanced health facility. They provide different levels of services.
Mr. Rahael: Do you think I do not know that?

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Obviously you do not know, otherwise you would not have got up and made a fool of yourself here.

A district health facility provides a 24-hour accident and emergency service; it provides specialist clinics; it provides X-ray facilities, including ultrasound; it provides laboratory facilities; it provides an observation area with beds for 24-hour observation, among other services. That is what a district health facility is. That is not a health centre. An enhanced health facility provides almost the same services but these are located close to the hospitals. So you had one to be constructed close to Port of Spain hospital, one close to the San Fernando hospital, one close to the Sangre Grande hospital and one close to Mount Hope. Those were the enhanced health facilities. The reason for those is to serve as a, sort of, clearing house for cases. Cases would go there and be attended to there, so you leave the real accident and emergency cases for the major hospitals, so you do not crowd the accident and emergency at the major hospitals. That was the reason for the construction of the district health facilities and the enhanced health facilities. I am saying that the—

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. [Mr. G. Singh]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank Members for extending my time.

I was saying that the Health Sector Reform Programme called for the construction of seven district health facilities and this Government has added one which is Diego Martin, so that is eight. When we were in office we concluded the construction of two district health facilities and constructed two, that is at Princes Town and Couva, and as I said, to date this Government has not even commenced the construction of one of these district health facilities. I now hear the Minister saying that one is about to start. We await that. But remember that in answer to a question by the Member for Chaguanas a few months ago, you stood up in this Parliament and said that the construction of the Chaguanas district health facility will commence in August 2005 and that he would be invited to the sod-turning ceremony. So far nothing has been done. That remains another broken promise.
Every year in the budget the Prime Minister talks about the Point Fortin hospital; it is going to start; it is going to be completed, and so on. Every budget he puts in a line about the Point Fortin hospital. Between 1991 and 1995, the PNM government had taken a decision to downgrade the Point Fortin hospital to a district health facility. When we came into office we thought that was madness and we had a fight with the Inter-American Development Bank, because we were tied up with a Health Sector Reform Programme, and we wanted to construct a hospital there instead of the district health facility. After doing the necessary studies, we agreed that Point Fortin should have a hospital. Then we went out of office, and to date nothing has been done with that Point Fortin hospital. They keep making promises every year and so far nothing has been done. But we are not surprised because the Prime Minister himself, during one of the last election campaigns, went to Couva and said that the people of Couva deserved not a district health facility but a hospital and “when we get into office we are going to build a new state-of-the-art hospital for the people in Couva”.

That is the same Government that allowed the Couva hospital to run down to the point that it was termed a health hazard by the public health inspectors and had to be abandoned. They could not even build a health centre for the people of Couva. Today the people of Couva have a brand new district health facility. Yes, it needs upgrading to a hospital, but we would not hold our breath because we know that promises are broken promises.

I want to move on to another issue. Within the last few years and, particularly, within the last year, the Minister of Health has been spending millions of dollars in full colour advertisements in the media trying to convince the population that all is well in the health sector. They buy an MRI machine; do some MRIs, and you put a full page advertisement saying that you are doing MRIs. You take taxpayers’ money; you pay private doctors and private institutions to do some surgery; you put out a big advertisement every day in the newspaper saying that you are doing that. You opened a neurology ward which was constructed by the previous government and equipped; you do some surgery there; you spend thousands of dollars putting advertisements saying: “We are doing surgery there.” [ Interruption] All these things are part of your job. That is what you are getting paid to do.

These advertisements serve no benefit to the population. In case you think so, let me read a letter to the editor from Monday of this week, in the Trinidad Guardian, October 03, 2005:

Mr. Rahael: The Guardian you are quoting from?
Dr. H. Rafeeq: You are now against the *Guardian* as well? I quote from the *Guardian*:

“Health ads far from reality—Open letter to the Minister of Health John Rahael:

In recent times I have been hearing you boasting about the improvements in healthcare and patting yourself and the Government on the back. The ads in the newspapers and on television really do look good, I must admit. Well, I’ve got news for you.”

12.15 p.m.

“A relative of mine had surgery done to remove kidney stones at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital. A fairly routine surgery I would think. Guess what? The X-rays he had to do before the surgery had to be done privately.

On the morning of the surgery his wife was asked to purchase some drugs privately which he would need after he came out of surgery; cost of the drugs: $600.

During his period of recovery a blood test was needed. Guess what? It had to be done privately as well. So in this public hospital, one has to keep going out to do things privately.”

[Crosstalk] I have better things to do with my time than write letters to the editor. I must read the concluding paragraph.

“Please, a better standard of healthcare for the citizens of this wealthy country. So while the ads do look good, it is very far from reality. I think the citizens would much prefer you use our tax dollars in the hospitals and health centres. If that ad money helps to buy medicine for one more patient, that’s an improvement.”

That is the point I wanted to make. The advertisements are meant to satisfy the Minister’s ego and to justify the employment of 10 persons in his communications unit. It is a waste of time. Compare all those advisements with the information that has been coming out of the commission of enquiry into the health sector; the state of the health sector that the Minister is trying to portray with his advertisements with the horror stories that are being told at the commission of enquiry. The members of the commission of enquiry have visited most of the major hospitals and institutions within the past few months. At each institution
they have been given a long list of woes and many horror stories. Who does the Minister expect us to believe when he spends millions of dollars trying to convince the population that all is well in the health sector as opposed to the real life experience as told to the members of the commission of enquiry?

Most of the submissions to the commission of enquiry in their visits have been made by health care workers. If the members of the commission of enquiry were to speak—and I think that they are about to do that in the coming month—with members of the population who interface with the health institutions, they will get the real picture. I wonder who is advising you about these advertisements. I wonder if you know that it is still common practice to go to the hospital, accident and emergency on a morning and leave the following morning if your patient has to go to the ward.

It is still common practice in many of the health centres for patients to come very early in the morning and leave late in the evening and sometimes without medication. It is still common practice for patients to go to the ward struggling for basic attention and not be able to get it. It is still common practice in some health centres for people to come very early in the morning and be told that they could not be seen because the doctor already had his quota of patients.

It is still common practice as in this article for patients to be given prescriptions to buy medicines while they are in public institutions to take to the hospital to be administered there. It is still common practice for patients to go to the hospitals and clinics and spend a day; be seen by the doctor and not get their prescriptions filled and they cannot afford to buy the medication. When these patients go to clinic they spend an entire day; they have wasted their time and their condition is no better.

If the Minister is convinced the health sector is so good and that he has done so well, he should read the results of the McAL poll that came out three weeks ago. In that poll 76 per cent of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of service at the nation’s hospitals. The reasons were the long waiting hours; lack of medication; insufficient doctors, nurses and pharmacists and unsanitary conditions.

There is a startling revelation that 62 per cent of the respondents felt uncomfortable having their babies delivered at public health institutions. Mr. Minister in case you think that you have done so well, 80 per cent of the respondents feel that your performance is fair to very poor. You are able to fool 20 per cent with your ads and I am sure that those do not go to the public
institutions. When your predecessor was in office I warned him that public relations will not work. I want to warn you of the same thing. Do the job and that would be your public relations.

I want to say a couple words on the pharmacists’ issue. Recently, there was an impasse with the pharmacists and poor people suffer because they cannot buy their medication. We have no problem with the Government bringing health professionals from abroad but certain conditions have to be met. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: I will like to hear what the Member has to say and I am sure you would too. Let us hear him.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: They must be registered by the Pharmacy Board and must be able to deliver the quality of care that we are accustomed to. Deal with the issues of the local pharmacists as well. Treat them well so that they would stay and provide the service that you are paying them for.

More importantly, when we were in office we drafted a piece of legislation that created a new category of staff called the pharmacy assistant. When this Government came into office they brought the legislation and we supported it. It was passed and is now law. The pharmacy assistant would be a category of staff that will assist the pharmacists in some of their less technical duties. They would be trained over a period of six months and then assist the pharmacists. That would relieve the pharmacists to do what they are paid to do; that is filling prescriptions and counselling the patients. The law was passed over two years ago and today, it has not been implemented. If that law was implemented we would not have seen the problems we have had recently, and maybe, we would not have had to import pharmacists to Trinidad and Tobago.

While I am on the issue of pharmacists let me say a word on the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP). I am on record in Parliament as saying that is a good programme. The Government holds that as one of its flagship projects. This year the Prime Minister in his Budget statement said that 150,000 persons benefited from this programme. Before they get carried away let me put this programme in its correct perspective. Out of the 150,000 persons, about 125,000 got their prescriptions from the hospitals or clinics.

Normally, these prescriptions would have been filled at the health centres or hospitals; now, they are being filled in the private pharmacies. There is a benefit in that they are served in a shorter time. The people who are benefiting from this are the 25,000 persons who go to private doctors; get their prescriptions and are now going to the pharmacies to get them filled. With 150,000 prescriptions, the
Government has spent $60 million. This means that each person benefited to the tune of $200 per year. There is at least a 50 per cent administration fee for that programme. That means about 60 or 70 cents a day for their medication.

Mr. Prime Minister, I address this to you. If you want to do something that you can boast about, there are drugs for the treatment of heart disease, kidney failure and cancer which are very expensive and out of the reach of most people; make them available under prescriptions from a specialist or whatever conditions you want to put, so that people who cannot afford can have access to them.

I want to say something about the National Health Insurance. In every budget the Prime Minister has mentioned the National Health Insurance but in this one he did not mention it. I want to give the Government an idea. The Government is contemplating providing a basic level of service to all members of the population; a service that they can access either in the private or public sector and at some cost or premium that employees and employers will have to pay. I am not in favour of that model and I will tell you why. At present, most of the people in this country seek services in the public health sector and get services free of charge. First of all, improve the service of the public health care institutions, that is the health centres and hospitals.

Secondly, have a national health insurance that will cater for services that are not offered at the nation’s hospitals. Have a health insurance that will cater for renal failure; heart surgery; cancer treatment and conditions that are not treated in the hospitals at this point in time. When a person has any one of those diseases that person will know that he or she is covered by insurance for all the basic conditions in the public health care sector. Provide insurance for people who cannot afford it; maybe, for the entire population. Insure people for those categories of service and let the other services be free as they are to all members of the public. If the Government introduces the system that it is contemplating and anybody is insured and has the choice to go to a private institution or public hospitals; most of them would go to the private institutions. Are you pushing health care in this country in the direction of the private sector? If that is your intention say so. Improve the conditions at the public health care institutions and insure the population for those diseases for which we do not have treatment in the public health care sector. You can think about it when the time comes.

During the past year, the health sector has been characterized by work stoppages one after another; poor service and a general dissatisfaction among the people who seek services in the sector. Last year the Ministry of Health was allocated $200 million and this year $67 million more, when you discount $540
million Voluntary Separation Employment Package (VSEP). Given the track record of this Government and the ministry, there is nothing in this budget that gives any hope that this year would be better for the population, as far as health services are concerned. On the contrary, with the coming on stream of VSEP for health care workers, it is more than likely that there would be more turmoil and things would get worse. Citizens have very little to look forward to as far as health care services are concerned.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch. We will resume at 1.30 p.m.

12.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

1.30 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am extremely pleased to join this debate on what, by all measures, has been an excellent budget. Of course, this great budget has created major difficulties for those, our friends, on the other side. They have the responsibility to respond to a budget that is well near perfect, and I really do not envy them.

I could remember as a little boy my grandmother would come to me and say: “Ken, I want you to write a letter.” I would sit with pen and paper and say: “Okay, mammy, what do you want to tell, whoever it is?” She would say: “I don't know, make a letter.” [Laughter] Mr. Deputy Speaker, they had to try to make a response and, as a result, we had all types of misquotes, of doublespeak and what have you.

Last night we heard from the Member for Oropouche who stated that—I think he was the third one—there was no philosophical underpinning of the budget. I think it started with the Member for St. Joseph who took rather long, I must say, some 15 minutes to claim that there was no nexus with the budget and Vision 2020; there was no philosophical underpinning. That was echoed by the Member for St. Augustine and, again, by the Member for Oropouche.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been making the point, I think for about two or three years, that whatever we do over the five-year period is grounded in the manifesto on which we fought the 2002 elections. It is this that guides our every
action. We have said, clearly, over that period we will be putting the infrastructure in place; putting the institutions in place and very early when we spoke about Vision 2020 we said, quite clearly, that the action plan for 2002-2007: Emphasis on the social sectors underlying philosophy, the core concept which permeates this manifesto is:

- social equity;
- human resource development;
- wellness and well-being;
- poverty eradication;
- affordable housing;
- personal security; and
- safety.

Last night, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Oropouche said that in 2004 we outlined our challenges, specific issues, and focused on the budget as outlined on page three:

- “Education;
- health;
- core principles;
- housing;
- social service delivery;
- strong and cohesive communities;
- unity in diversity;
- concept of social equity;
- safe streets homes;
- places of recreation, and
- work security.”

He said while we said this in 2004 we did not repeat it this year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on page 40—I do not know on what page it is on the smaller copies—of the Budget Statement it states clearly that our priorities for this
period include: “Increased emphasis on personal security,’ about which the Minister of Finance has already spoken with respect to crime;

“Building strong families;

Strengthening the education, training and innovation systems;

Investing in quality health care…

Providing affordable housing;

Offering effective social support to the poor and vulnerable.”

Those are social services, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so when they speak about philosophical underpinning, that is from where we have come, clearly, and that is going to guide our action over the period.

We said that we would also undertake strategic investments to ensure that the economy continues to grow, so that while we concentrate on putting these institutions in place and while we concentrate on ensuring that the social sectors are okay, we would continue to ensure appropriate macroeconomic variables are in place.

On page 35, again, in this volume, you will see that commitment to a responsible macroeconomic agenda; a commitment to prudent, monetary and fiscal policies; strong balance of payment; increased real GDP growth with the aim of full employment with quality sustainable jobs. That is the orientation of the budget.

Against that background, the Member for St. Augustine started off by telling us very early in his contribution—very confused—that we ought not to confuse positive financial indices in the country as evidence of sound economic management. Then he went on later to tell us that you have to measure economic policy by its results. He told us do not measure what is happening by the indices, but later he told us that that was exactly what one had to use. He said we have to measure macroeconomic policy by the results. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are getting exceedingly good results, as I would demonstrate in a while.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, later on he told us that the financial indices do not reflect sound economic management in Trinidad and Tobago. We are getting three different views from the same spokesperson. He told us first do not worry about them; you cannot take them on. Secondly, he told us: you have to take them on because the results are what matters. Thirdly, he told us that the indices do not reflect sound economic management in Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know what to believe.
Let us see what the facts show, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Economic fundamentals: Gross Domestic Product at real factor cost 2001, a growth rate of 4.3 per cent; 2002, a growth rate of 6.8 per cent; 2003, a growth rate of 13.2 per cent; 2004, a growth rate of 7 per cent. Continued economic growth: the manufacturing sector, 2002, 3.8 per cent; 2003, 4.2 per cent; 2004, 9.5 per cent; 2005, 8.6 per cent.

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, Economic Growth: when you look at another indicator, what is happening with Retail Price Index? In 2001, 5.5 per cent; 2002, 4.2 per cent; 2003, 3.8 per cent; 2004, 3.7 per cent and from all expectation, because of food prices, one expects some increase for 2005, and the Government has taken policy measures to deal with that. The Government has said, quite clearly, that we are going to reduce the custom duties on a number of food products, in other words, to allow for an increased supply which would have favourable effect on prices and, more importantly, that we are going to give target groups the Smart Card.

Mr. Speaker, someone spoke about productivity, I think it was the Member for St. Augustine. What is happening with productivity? In 2002, productivity index rose by 11.6 per cent; in 2003, it rose by a further 13.2 per cent; in 2004 it rose by 14.7 per cent. Does that suggest an economy where the economic fundamentals are unsound? If you look at the unemployment rate, in 2001 it was 10.8 per cent; 2002, 10.4 per cent. The rate at the end of 2004 was 8.3 per cent. When we look at first quarter of 2005 versus the first quarter of 2004—because unemployment is a seasonal thing—whereas it was 10.5 per cent in first quarter 2004, it was 9 per cent in first quarter 2005, indicating, clearly, that unemployment continues on a downward trend. [Desk thumping]

If you look at persons employed, I think the Member for Oropouche said last night that persons are shopping around, they are moving from one make-work programme, under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, to another but when you look at the Review of the Economy, that is not borne out by the facts. You will see gains in employment in the productive sectors of the economy.

The facts are that over the last year some 29,000 jobs have been created in the economy. Whereas in terms of persons employed, in December 2001, it was 514,100; in 2002, it went to 525,100; in 2003, it went to 534,100 and it is now 567,000. Mr. Speaker, it is increasing every year.
We looked at the fiscal accounts and they continue to be healthy, Mr. Speaker. Import cover, another important economic statistic, moved from 6.1 per cent in 2001 to 10.6 per cent, so it does not matter what one looks at, one sees the economic fundamentals are extremely strong. That is not only what we are saying.

I have just returned from the Trade Policy Review of the World Trade Organization, mid September. As a member of the World Trade Organization, we have to submit to a review of our trade policies once every six years. It was last done in 1988. I want to quote from some people who ought to know. I quote here from an Ambassador Glen. He was the discussant. His job was to review the documents and provide an opening statement with respect to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

He says:

“I am impressed by what you have been able to achieve economically. It is not a given success to exploit petroleum; almost on the contrary. History gives abundant examples and illustrations of how countries have failed in their endeavours under such circumstances.”

He is saying, yes, we know that you have petroleum, but countries have not been able to manage petroleum resources successfully and I am extremely impressed by what you have done.

My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, made the point that direct intervention by the Government in 1991/1992, the change in taxation of the energy sector, coupled with the formation of the energy subcommittee—their ability to make decisions quickly—has put us in this enviable position today. It is not a windfall as someone would want you to believe; it is direct action by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—a PNM government.

He goes on, speaking about fiscal policy. He says that fiscal policy has been very wise and prudent:

“I think I have seen the word responsible being used by some to describe the policy pursued, which I think is very appropriate.”

Mr. Speaker, you can imagine I am sitting there and there are countries from all over the world, and this gentlemen is saying this about the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Let me read it again:
“I think I have seen the word responsible being used by some to describe the policy pursued, which I think is very appropriate, but I believe it is more than. You have some years back introduced a policy geared at handling the capital inflow you receive over the years from the petroleum activity.”

The Petroleum Stabilization Fund: Yes, we were complimented on that and then he commented on the trade policy. It was not simply Ambassador Glen; it was Barbados paying compliments to Trinidad and Tobago’s economy.

“The Chairman of my delegation wishes to warmly congratulate Trinidad and Tobago on its sound economic performance in the face of continuing difficulties being experienced by small vulnerable economies around the world and specifically in the Caribbean.

Trinidad and Tobago’s success in achieving what is currently described as robust economic growth over the period 1999 to 2004 is concrete evidence of the government’s stated strategy of consolidating their reform liberalization and integration processes commenced in the last decade.”

Brazil and Canada and a number of them also commented; so for one to come in this House to talk in terms of fundamentals not suggesting a strong economy is very far from the truth.

Some of them wanted to make a point—I am not sure it was made by the Member for St. Joseph, but definitely by the Member for St. Augustine and the Member for Oropouche—about the fact that the legislation has not come to the House as yet, with respect to the Revenue Stabilization Fund, which I think is an extremely small point. That is why I say it is making a letter—looking for something to say.

The fact is that when they left, there was $1 billion in the Fund. At present, there is $5.6 billion and, with the appropriation here, it will be close to $7 billion. We have not touched a cent. We said clearly what it is for. We said that there will be legislation before the end of the year, but, as everyone knows, legislation takes time. To attempt to make a point out of that is being extremely piddley.

On state enterprises, the Member told us that we have more state enterprises now than we had in 1982; which, of course, is not true. In 1992, when we came in, there were 87 state companies and when we left there were 47 state companies. There is an attempt to make an issue of the fact that the Government created some state companies to deal with the implementation issues.
We hear them talking about 15 new state companies. Last night, the Member for Oropouche spoke about 17 new companies. Nothing is further from the truth. If they would only read the documents, in the *Review of the Economy*, page 38:

“At the end of July 2005, the State Enterprise Sector comprised forty-seven enterprises as opposed to thirty-nine enterprises at the end of the fiscal period in 2004.”

47 minus 39 is eight; definitely not 15 or 17.

If you go to the *Social and Economic Policy Framework*, you will see Mr. Speaker, the new companies which were formed. On page 27, there is the Education Facilities Company Limited; the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited; the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited; the Tourism Development Company Limited, which is a result of the split of TIDCO between eTecK and CDC; the Rural Development Company Limited; the Community Improvement Services Limited; the Trinidad and Tobago Film Company Limited; the Caribbean New Media Group Limited.

What is being said is that the Government is using 15 state companies as an implementation arm. We are using some that have been in existence. We are using UDeCott, which has been there already; PSAEL, which has been there already. So that there are some new state enterprises that have to be used. The Government is clear.

They talk about public sector reform and they do not see the connection. This is a part of the public sector reform of which we are speaking. We have come to a policy position that the Ministry must be concerned with policy and administration and that implementation is best done via the companies set up.

In my own case, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Mr. Speaker, there is the business development company, which was formerly the Small Business Development Company. We have refocused the company and renamed it and given it the mandate to grow business in Trinidad and Tobago. We have separated the tourist aspect from the trade and investment aspect in TIDCO and formed Evolving TecKnologies and Enterprises Development Limited (eTecK) and the Tourism Development Company.

One could only think and see that it is much easier and much more efficient to use a company such as eTecK to do what it is doing, rather than attempting to do it within a Ministry. That is all that is being done. We hear the argument that, rather than continue with privatization, we bring in new state companies. These
are not state companies that can really be privatized; they are extensions of ministries. The policy continues that to the extent that there are commercial state companies, which are non-strategic, they would be divested in an orderly manner.

At the same time, from time to time, there will be need to form companies for implementation purposes. Take the Film Company Limited, which is a result of the strategic approach by the Government, looking at diversification, looking at certain industrial sectors and seeing that we have a competitive advantage in this area and setting up a committee to see what are the bottlenecks and the constraints; what we need to do; how we can intensify the area so that we can achieve the competitive advantage we seek.

They have reported that we need a company comprised of some of the persons who were involved in the work of the committee developing the strategic plan to take this forward. The Government said they would set up a company. Then we come to the Parliament to have them tell us that we are going back to forming state companies. They go on to tell us very boldly about the state companies that are losing money—WASA and T&TEC—for which they are responsible.

In the case of T&TEC, one knows the story of the sleights of hand, a situation in which they were supposed to be getting power without any tendering; they were supposed to be getting power, a 25 megawatt plant—that was what was supposed to come—to supply the needs of four new projects, which were coming to Trinidad and Tobago, which eventually ended up being a 225-megawatt plant, and they were supposed to be selling the excess to The Grid, in a sweetheart deal called InnCogen.

The other one is the desalination plant, which the Member for Caroni East knows so much about, that now has WASA by its throat. When the Member for St. Augustine quotes the deficit at WASA, T&TEC and TIDCO, he has nerve, Mr. Speaker, because he knows what his friends did. He can claim that he worked at the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago at the time, but let us not forget that on the Saturday before the 1995 election, Mr. Dookeran was on their platform. He was always part of their group and when they got in, the pay-back was to put him at the Central Bank. Now that we have made a change at the Central Bank, he has gotten back home. So when he talks about that and I groan, I have every right to groan, because I am saying, What nerve!

There is another argument they have. They tell us about the non-energy deficit. The argument runs like this: If you take away the energy sector, there is a deficit. First of all, my colleague, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, dealt with that
in a particular way. Let me make another point. The policy position of the Government is that we are going to use some of the revenues from the energy sector to invest in the non-energy sector to build long-term sustainability in the economy. Now, you just have to work that out.

2.00 p.m.

If you work that out, you will see there must be a deficit in a non-energy sector. That is a policy position. You are stating a fact. When you tell me that there is a non-energy deficit, what else is new, or “ent”, as we say in Trinidad and Tobago. By definition, we are saying that we are using some of the excess revenues here, to build sustainability here. We must be spending more over here than we are getting, so there must be a deficit. We are investing. He is saying something with one side of his mouth and on the next side he is telling me that I have a non-energy deficit. Yes, I have a non-energy deficit because that is what I am doing now. I have to do that now, because I have to build sustainability because you are the same people who are telling me that oil and energy is going to run out. Therefore, when it runs out I must have something. That is what I am trying to do and that is why I am spending money on education. That is why I want to get 60 per cent of the cohort, as graduates with tertiary education.

The research shows that the rate of economic growth is positively related with your level of graduates at tertiary education. We have to put things in place to accept persons coming from abroad; returning residents. When they ask us where we are going to get persons for these companies, I say the world is our source. If we are talking about developed country status, then we have to know that we have to source mankind from wherever, even if it is on the moon. Guardian Life's new CEO is from Ilium or somewhere about the place. We are talking about world competition. That is the structure that we have to put in Trinidad and Tobago, as we engage the world. That is what we are doing and we will continue to do that.

Of course, he misquotes Dr. St. Cyr—where is he? That is when I really groaned. What did he say? He said that production is not connected. Dr. St. Cyr was making quite a different point. He quoted the gentleman out of context. He is attempting to indicate that Dr. St. Cyr said that there was no philosophy underlying the budget. Very early in his statement, Dr. St. Cyr made the point that the budget has clearly stated its philosophical position and that the top of our agenda is the restructuring and strengthening of the drivers of growth, so that we can develop a diversified, competitive economy, occupying a more profitable position in the global value chain. He said quite clearly that there was a philosophical position underlying the budget.
Dr. St. Cyr's point is that he and his group, the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of the West Indies, put out its work: Choices for Our Economy in this Age of Plenty, on April 18, 2005, where he is talking about another philosophical view, which, of course, one can argue. His point is that we have an offshore element and an onshore element and we need to do certain things on shore. We can debate that, but Dr. St. Cyr was at no point in time suggesting that the budget was without philosophical underpinning. It cannot be, because anybody reading the article would have seen that, that he misunderstood Dr. St. Cyr. For yet another time, we are seeing the Member for St. Augustine very stingy, as it were, with the truth. Of course, we have to wonder why. One can continue in that vein. I think the one point that he made in all of this is the old economic argument, ceteris paribus, we may run into trouble, meaning that unless we do certain things, increase capacity, then on implementation, we may have some difficulties. But the point was made by my colleague from Diego Martin West who outlined the road programme.

We know that, given what is happening, the port is a constraint and that we will have to lay emphasis on building capacity in the port. With respect to tertiary education, the Minister with responsibility for tertiary education came here and outlined the training programmes that are in place to build capacity with respect to labour. We are building capacity with respect to our road network. We are building capacity with respect to the port. We know that imports will increase. It is important, however, that we provide the environment in a hurry, with respect to 2020.

What are some of the salient features of the budget? Mention has already been made of a number of them. I have a quick comment on tertiary education. It has already been mentioned that the PNM's policy is that no student will be denied an education, based solely on the inability to pay. Building capacity is fundamental. Understand, the point made by the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, is that this would also be expanded into the private sector with certain clear policy guidelines. Again, when one talks about capacity constraints, we are bringing the private sector into the loop.

Perhaps, for me, what is extremely significant in the budget, running second to tertiary education, is the increase in disposable income. In one fell swoop, we have been able to give every worker in Trinidad and Tobago a salary increase, understand that. If the employers in Trinidad and Tobago were to provide a similar salary increase to their employees, that would have been inflationary. We have found a way of doing it; of giving back. That was the point made by my
colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West. The State taxes the citizens so as to run the State and if the money is not required then you better give it to the individual. Thatcher and Reagan have changed the old paradigm where government knows best. When you tell me about incentives for savings, that is the old paradigm. When we said that the tax system was the major tool of fiscal policy, that has now changed. We say that the individual will make rational decisions and we have to leave it up to him that the individual is responsible.

Yesterday's business magazine indicated that there are more persons here than your survey indicated. There are five persons. The common man said: “No spending here.”

**Dr. Rowley:** Twenty per cent more.

**Hon. K. Valley:** Twenty-five per cent more. Do you understand? The common man said: “Listen we are saving it.” This thing about incentives is a thing of the past. That is from the 1960s and you have to know that. The economic man is a rational man; he can make his own decisions. That is what we are doing. Let him make his decisions.

I have spoken about the special purpose companies and corrected the inaccuracy. There is no 15 or 17 new companies; approximately five new companies; in that area we will be using 13 or 14 companies to do the job. Some of the things that you might have missed are the reduction in URP to release workers who can then be trained by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education for the labour market. We are laying emphasis on training. The Minister of Finance spoke about 70 training programmes that are in existence at present.

Where does the Ministry of Trade and Industry fit into all of this? Mr. Speaker, our job at the Ministry of Trade and Industry is to assist in building that sustainability that we spoke about; to assist in providing this economy with long-term sustainability. There are three areas that we looked at. The first is the diversification of the economy which we hear so much about. We all know that we need to diversify our economy. What have we been doing? We need to build competitiveness. The Member tells us that we have been falling in the competitiveness index. If he really analyses the thing, if he looks at the macroeconomic analysis, he would see that we have been doing better. But, that survey is done here in Trinidad and Tobago by the people at IOB, sending out questionnaires to business people in Trinidad and Tobago, who, of course, at present, are all caught up with this crime thing and that is masking what is really happening.
When one looks at the hard data, one sees quite clearly that competitiveness in Trinidad and Tobago is in fact improving. He can, if he wishes, simply look at the index, which is, in effect, biased, but the Review of the Economy points out quite clearly that in terms of the real economy, we have been doing much better, in terms of competitiveness.

There are three basic areas with which we are concerned. We are concerned with diversification, building competitiveness and, of course, we are concerned with sustainable export growth.

In terms of diversification of the economy, I want to quickly talk about some of the things that we have been doing and what we expect to be doing over the next year. I mentioned in passing a while ago—and the Budget Statement of last year would have recorded on page 10—when we spoke about manufacturing, that the Government was targeting seven industrial groups. I can report that at present, we have completed work on some of them. Cabinet has accepted the final report for the film and yachting industries and steps are now being taken towards implementation. In the case of the film sector, the company is being formed and the board of directors has been appointed.

2.15 p.m.

With respect to the yachting industry, a Cabinet appointed steering committee has been established to coordinate implementation of the recommendations. Mr. Speaker, as you know, the yachting industry at Chaguaramas was another initiative of the last PNM government, and when we came in there was nothing there. [Desk thumping] Again, by direct governmental action, it grew. There were 1,400 vessels, and when they came into government it went down—if you see it on a chart, you would see how it declined. We are now taking steps to rebuild the yachting industry down there.

Mr. Speaker, you heard the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education when he said that we would be putting a campus of the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) at Chaguaramas for the marine. [Desk thumping] The strategic plans for the Merchant Marine, Printing and Packaging and the Food and Beverage Industries have already been presented to the Standing Committee on Business Development. That is the committee chaired by the hon. Prime Minister, with Ministers, other public sector officials and members of the private sector, where we sit and make quick decisions.

Mr. Speaker, that is what marks us apart from those on the other side—the speed of the decision-making in those areas. That is why when we are faced with
these built-in constraints of the public service, we know that we have to ensure implementation by using some state companies. They realized the same thing but the only thing is that they went about it rather badly, I must say.

The reports for the two remaining sectors: the fish and fish processing industry and the entertainment industry are being finalized and are to be presented to the standing committee in October. As a matter of fact, that meeting was supposed to be on the 4th, but it had to be postponed because of the budget debate.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. G. Singh]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. K. Valley:** I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues here in the House for extending my time. In terms of diversification, we are looking at those industrial sectors. Secondly, we have begun to lay emphasis on the services area. You know, in the old days, one never considered services in trade negotiation, but it has now become a big part of our service negotiations. First of all, let me say that it accounts for more than 50 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP).

We are in the final stages of our services policy which ought to be going to Cabinet shortly. If you understand what is happening in the world today—and you hear about Bangalore, where you stay in India and provide services to the United States of America. We are doing some of that here.

**Dr. Rowley:** In Tobago.

**Hon. K. Valley:** We are doing some of that here like Direct One in Chaguaramas, but understand the concept. There are now so many barriers that one cannot—if you want to go to one of these developed countries to work they would give you so much trouble, and developing countries are now finding a way to stay in their countries and take the jobs from the developed countries. I think that is just rather interesting. We ought to be doing more and more of that. Given that, we are laying emphasis on the services sector, knowing that we can stay here in a garage or some little old house—even in Caratal and so forth—and provide services to developed countries—
Mr. Singh: Thank you Minister for giving way. Is it that you are going to have an IT policy in that area? Could you tell us about the development of e-commerce that we have left in place when we demitted office?

Hon. K. Valley: I do not know what you left in place. I do not know that you left any e-commerce. Let me just tell you that with respect to e-commerce, e-government and e-fast forward, the Ministry of Public Administration and Information is taking care of that. More than that, the Wallerfield Industrial Park is another key area of our diversification thrust where we are concentrating on light industries in the ICT areas and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, in the new fiscal period, we would be doing a lot of work up there. The final designs have already been completed on the Flagship Complex which includes eTecK, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago offices, tenant buildings and conference centre. They have already received a certificate of environmental clearance and outlining planning approval. A baseline study of the ecosystem is completed. So they are doing the work up there preparing the Wallerfield Park for the university, as well as for the light industrial sector, including the whole area of parks, as well as light ICT industry.

In terms of our diversification thrust, we are designing a trade assistance programme using funding from the IDB. We are working with the manufacturers in Trinidad and Tobago and putting a trade assistance programme so as to allow for transition from sunset industries to new areas. The budget provision of some US $1.3 million has been allocated for this trade assistance programme under the IDB Trade Support Sector Loan. We are also funding some studies; a major one being competitiveness of the manufacturing and servicing sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Another key area in our diversification thrust is, of course, the integration of the economy. First of all, as a first step to CSME, but going further afield and really locating Trinidad and Tobago within the Latin American economy, we see this as being extremely important.

First of all, we see Trinidad and Tobago as part of Caricom, but then as a part of Latin America, or what I call the ACS area. Further afield, as part of the hemisphere is FTAA and, of course, the world economy that informs a number of initiatives to be pursued.

The restructuring of the EXIM Bank: We are saying that it makes no sense if we are having trade agreements with these countries and we do not have the financing to go with them. We know how risk averse banks are and, therefore, if
we are encouraging our manufacturers to go into these new markets, we must have a system to provide credit for their potential buyers. It makes no sense if we are going into these markets that we are unable to get to our markets. That informs the decision to get into Dominican Republic, where we had trade agreements with Cuba and Costa Rica. It had nothing to do with the FTAA initiative. We still consider that a very important initiative.

I want to make the point that contrary to what some would have you believe, it was a clear policy of the Government that we would buy services from BWIA. BWIA was not providing us with a gift. We were clear, that in the early stages, it would not in fact be profitable, and we had to buy services from BWIA.

An agreement was negotiated with BWIA for the period 2004 to 2005. We put some $26 million into BWIA to provide that service. Of course, that had to be suspended when BWIA found itself in difficulties. Hopefully, when BWIA is up and running, once more, we can restart that strategic initiative. The initiative really centres on positioning Piarco as a hub—an alternative hub—into and out of Central and South America and an alternative to Miami.

Mr. Speaker, if one really visualizes what that means in terms of dollars and cents, when it develops—it is not going to happen today or tomorrow, but remember that if we are talking about sustainability when oil and gas run out, we are really talking about 2020 for the earliest. So that in this time we have to use resources where we have to build these things, so that by that time it would be up and functioning. Yes, it is going to cost us to build, but just consider where we are going to be if we do not do it in 2020. We have to position Piarco as an alternative hub with maintenance and so forth. We are helping Trinidad and Tobago to be the centre of activity in this hemisphere. That is the vision for BWIA, and coupled with LIAT, in my view, they can play an extremely important part in all of that.

Mr. Speaker, in our attempt to attract investment in Trinidad and Tobago, we see a need to do some amendments to our Foreign Investment Act. We are finalizing our investment policy, and before the end of the year, I expect to be in the Parliament with a new investment Bill.

Now, again, in terms of the Latin American initiative, one of the things that we achieved when we had the Costa Rica Agreement is an opt-in for other Central American countries, and we want to be able to pursue that. Now that the FTAA seems to be on a cold backburner, we would use the period to pursue trade agreements with other Central American countries as well as South American countries. We have already started an initiative with Mercosur which ought to bear fruit shortly.
Now, in terms of the competitiveness, I want to point Members to the Social and Economic Policy Framework which outlines clearly what are the plans for the ensuing period with respect to the three major initiatives that I have outlined: diversification of the economy, building competitiveness; generating sustainable export-led growth, positioning Trinidad and Tobago as a manufacturing centre and a transportation hub. In terms of building competitiveness, the part we expect the venture capital to play and other strategies are outlined there.

With respect to some of the other areas, my colleague has already talked about procurement reform. Over at the Ministry of Finance, we deal with the reform agenda, and with respect to the financial sector reform, we talked about that in last year’s budget. I think the Member for St. Joseph wanted to know where we are with pensions and so forth. Given the agenda, the pension reform is now slotted for the period 2006. We are working on three major initiatives which were supposed to be done during this period: one is the establishment of a modern regulatory and supervisory framework.

I can report that an Interim Regulatory Council has been established as predecessor to the Single Regulatory Authority which I have spoken about in the White Paper on the financial sector reform.

As Members are aware, the Insurance Act has already been amended to transfer the responsibility of the insurance sector to the Central Bank. That was completed in July 2004.

The upgrade of the legislation that governs the credit unions to bring it under the Central Bank is now carded for 2006, the new fiscal period.

2.30 p.m.

Amendments to the Central Bank Act, the Financial Institution Act and the Co-operative Societies Act are currently underway. The takeover by-laws for the Securities and Exchange Commission were completed in April of this year.

With respect to the second objective for this year, the establishment of supportive institutions, electronic trading on the stock exchange commenced in March 2005. The Office of the Financial Service Ombudsman was launched on May 02, 2005. The Credit Rating Agency commenced operations since 2004, as well as the Automated Credit Bureau, July 2004. Amendments to legislation; the Financial Institutions Act would be brought to Parliament before December 2005. The Venture Capital legislation has already been passed and, of course, the procurement White Paper was laid in Parliament some time last week.
Mr. Speaker, we are really—as I said in opening—providing the infrastructure for Vision 2020. That is our mandate during this five-year period, and that is what we are working on; building capacity; all with a view to provide sustainability for the period when the oil and gas cannot provide us with the type of revenues that they are providing us with today. The Revenue Stabilization Fund: the legislation will be coming to the Parliament shortly; it is being drafted; not one cent has been touched; it is not an issue, therefore, so that my good friend from St. Augustine can rest assured.

Just a few other things quickly in closing, Mr. Speaker. Now that I have the Member back here, I just want to let him know that the Government did not collect any $115 billion over the last four years. Over the last four years, one would see the revenues were $80.3 billion, not $115 billion—way off.

Mr. Dookeran: You have to add this year.

Hon. K. Valley: Even if you add this year, you are not going to get $115 billion; and if you add this year though, you are not going to get four years; you are going to get five years. Also, you were not here last night, so let me just tell you that tertiary education is not included in the $60,000.

Mr. Speaker, that is it; I do not think I have left out anything. I hope I have covered the major areas mentioned by those on the other side, and therefore I end simply, by recommending the measures in this budget to the House and to the national community.

I thank you.

Mr. Ganga Singh (Caroni East): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this debate “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago, for the financial year September 30, 2006”. This is the fifth day of what—in the context of cricket—appears to be the final day of a test match with a predictable result.

This debate on the fifth day—and normally a budget debate in four days—and the Standing Orders have been suspended in order to accommodate an additional two days. What has transpired is that this debate has become almost a procedural right of passage for the budget, and it is devoid of reality; of the fear and insecurity that is outside the portals of this hallow Chamber; fear and insecurity that is gripping the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Couva North, dealt extensively in his response to the budget statement with the issue of crime; credibility and the incompetence of that administration.
There are several issues that have not been touched by Members and I think that we are close to winding up this debate. One would have thought that the issue of telecom liberalization would have been dealt with by the Minister of Planning and Development. One would have thought that the issue of British West Indies Airways (BWIA) would have been dealt with more extensively by the Minister of Industry and Enterprise, and there are other areas in which I intend to raise, which have not been touched and it is hoped that the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in his response will be able to deal with these matters.

It would be remiss of me if I do not deal with some of the matters raised by Members opposite. I first want to start with the matter raised by the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, the Chairman of the PNM political party, because he brought into the domain of the debate, the issue of party politics and sought to create some measure of distinction between the politics of the two different parties. He raised in that context the issue of succession, as I see it. For the record, I wanted to place on the record, that the attempts at succession amongst political parties in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall in 1973, I know the hon. Member for San Fernando East would have participated in that and he would have been very close to the action then, on the side of Karl Hudson-Phillips I understand. Dr. Eric Williams, the then father of the nation, indicated that he had planned to retire; he wanted to get out from the hurly-burly of the politics and he indicated that he wanted to retire; and putting forward their names were Karl Hudson-Phillips and Kamaluddin Mohammed. [Crosstalk]

I am looking at the historical context and I know that the hon. Member for San Fernando East is caught easily in the slips, but you have to look at that historical context. When Eric Williams realized that Karl Hudson-Phillips was getting tremendous popular support and Kamaluddin Mohammed was not getting the support—notwithstanding the support by Erica Williams for Kamal—big Ben and others went and got Dr. Eric Williams to return to the fold of the—you were there.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, yes. I am very glad that the hon. Member for Caroni East acknowledges that I was there. There is a divergence of view between himself and myself as to what really happened. What he is giving is just his version of events.

Mr. B. Panday: When shall I get yours? Your autobiography?
Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that the Prime Minister would add to the issue of political succession in this country because, you see, my version is not a version that I made up, it is there documented in several of the books. Selwyn Ryan—

Mr. Manning: It was not there.

Mr. G. Singh: Well you give me the benefit of your personal information. Kirk Meighoo in his book, *Half a Society*, although—[Interruption] It is documented in their text. If you are willing to give me your version, I am willing to listen to it. Mr. Speaker, the salient point; there was an attempt by the PNM formed in 1956 coming forward, attempting to bring about succession in 1973; succession that failed. Ultimately what emerged out of that and I am saying this to the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, because he seems to cast a distinction. What happened? Karl Hudson-Phillips with certain stalwarts in the party left and formed the ONR. Succession gone bad.

Mr. Speaker, you had a similar exercise in the late 1960s with the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), the opposition party at that time, when Dr. Rudranath Capildeo attempted to bring about some measure of succession by naming Stephen Maharaj as the opposition leader. When the then executive of the DLP attempted to name Stephen Maharaj as the political leader, Dr. Rudranath Capildeo fired summarily the executive of the party—succession gone bad, and then left to the formation of the liberal party and the workers and farmers party.

We are coming forward because it is important in the context of the parliamentary democracy we understand these things. In the period 1987 in the competition for power within the leadership of the PNM, political leader Manning succeeded against Dr. Aeneas Wills. Dr. Aeneas Wills found refuge quickly in the judiciary having security of tenure. We come forward. In the period 1996, I think it was, when Keith Rowley attempted to compete with Mr. Manning, Prime Minister Manning as he now is, the hon. Member for San Fernando East, we must be able to appreciate at that time what had transpired. There are sufficient PNM members whom I know and I ask them to detail for me what transpired in that campaign.

Mr. Manning: “We kiss and make up.”

Mr. G. Singh: Hold on, hold on. Let me read into the record what transpired from the brief indicated to me. Following which his three deputies suggested to Mr. Manning that he should validate his leadership at a convention, he refused to do so, causing his three deputies to resign: Keith Rowley, Augustus Ramrekersingh
and Wendell Mottley. Then, what transpired? Three mappapire snakes hanging by the Barataria Flyover—I saw them myself, with their heads cut off; three mappapire snakes hanging at the time, so you understand the savagery. [Laughter]

Hon. Member: Four snakes.

Mr. G. Singh: This is what transpired in both Arima and the Point Fortin constituencies; the Rowley team was debarred from having meetings. In one instance they were shut out of the Point Fortin venue, and in the other, the electricity supply was cut off. [Laughter] The political leader of the day controlled the institutional mechanism—the secretariat. When the delegate lists were secured from Balisier House they were significantly different from those that had been received from the constituencies themselves—the PNM constituencies.

As a result there was a lot of hue and cry and the PNM political party appointed Glenda Morean as the investigator. The Glenda Morean report speaks extensively of the padding, omissions and deletions of voting delegates by a current Minister and the cohorts.

By the end of the campaign, members of the Rowley team went to the convention with bodyguards; the situation was so tense. [Interrupt] That is true, everything you know I say is true. There were several altercations in the convention centre itself. When the results were announced, political leader Manning called for Rowley to join him on stage at the end of the proceedings, Rowley refused to respond, because the Manning supporters had launched an attack on Rowley and his supporters in the bar. It was at that time that Rowley bodyguards had to intervene and physically remove Rowley from the convention centre. [Laughter] This is all about political party evolution.

Linda Baboolal, the current President of the Senate, campaigned for Mr. Manning and went to all the eastern communities and branded Rowley as Rawan, the God of darkness and the underworld. [Laughter] [Crossstalk] I am telling you. Keith Rowley's campaign was the politics of inclusion; somewhere along the line it became the politics of exclusion.

Mr. Speaker, in the struggle for leadership of the PNM the casualty list was long. Vincent Lasse, strongest supporter and most tireless campaigner; he came across to the UNC.
Rupert Griffith who was ostracized and hounded out of the PNM, was vice chairman on the Rowley slate. Wendell Mottley went off to form his own party, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to get too much—the point I want to make is that we come into the Parliament arising out of party politics and when you come forward in the context that the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro was making, it seems to me that there seems to be a measure of trepidation on the part of the PNM that there exists in this party now smooth succession. [Laughter] From the political leader, Mr. Basdeo Panday and founder, to Mr. Winston Dookeran of St. Augustine.

Hon. Member: You believe that?

Mr. G. Singh: That is something that no political party has been able to do. It is clear to us that when you look at the maturity of the electorate, and we have one man one vote system; we do not have a delegate system and the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro was making the point about one man one vote— [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. G. Singh: No, he raised it in this House. You understand what transpired when our party elected Jack Warner, elected Wade Mark, elected Gerald Yetming and when the PNM saw Winston Dookeran, Basdeo Panday, Jack Warner and Gerald Yetming they realized they have the fantastic four to deal with, and it is a fearsome foursome—

Hon. Members: “Aye ah aye.”

Mr. G. Singh:—with which you have to deal in the coming elections. So therefore, I say these things—[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: I do not want Members opposite to distract the Member for Caroni East from his trend of thought; he is developing a point. Please, let us hear. [Laughter]

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, the party elections in the PNM demonstrated a culture of hate, and a culture of vindictiveness that find crystallization today in some of the contributions of the hon. Member. For example, when the Member for Arouca South behaved in the manner like a fish market vendor—

Hon. Members: Oh, oh.
Hon. Member: Oh yes.

Mr. G. Singh:—in her contribution to the debate here, it is part of that inheritance of savagery and that culture of vindictiveness and therefore, that is why the talk shows and all the talk programmes told the hon. Member for Arouca South to get off that kind of savage kind of attitude which seems to be within your DNA to behave like that.

Mr. Speaker, they indicated to her that there was “revulsion” for that approach. [ Interruption] There was repulsion for that kind of approach. So, you understand that culture of savagery is the value system as exhibited by the Member of Couva South in this election, in this debate.

Mr. Valley: Couva South, you are quite correct.

Mr. G. Singh: Arouca South I said. This PNM administration would like us to believe that with the tons of money emanating from the budget that there is a bed of roses for us in the country.

Hon. Member: We should have a wedding. [ Inaudible]

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, yes, the colour is red, but it is the blood of our citizens. Let me read into the records a collage of newspapers headlines—

Hon. Members: Oh lord.

Mr. G. Singh:—in the aftermath of this budget, September 30, 2005 “Budget day bloodshed”; Trinidad Guardian, Wednesday October 05, 2005 “Crime Capital”; Thursday, October 06, 2005—“Stay out of Town US Embassy warns of bombing threat in Port of Spain”; Newsday—“Human shield woman speaks from hospital bed: He grabbed me and let bullets hit me”; “Daylight shooting at Charlotte Street woman used as human shield”; “Bloody Tuesday”; “Panday hits crime, crime, crime”: “Bloodshed stops Tobago fest”: “Murders climb to 287 mom shot dead”: “Two charged for Koury’s murder” and “Granny shot in human shield drama”.

Mr. Speaker, what are they speaking about? It is clear that in the current scenario fear stalks the land and we on this side have argued, ad nauseam, about the link between the political directorate and criminal elements in this society; argued all the time against it. We indicated that once you have that link then there is no way that you are going to be able to have the political will or the political courage to deal with crime.
Dr. Basil Ince, writing in today’s newspaper in an article entitled “Crime and the Budget”—he is a former Minister, diplomat of repute, and he says on page 11 of the Daily Express:

“The entire society is seized with the issue of crime. It is the burning issue in the country today. No one is setting high falutin and referring to…‘the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property…’ or pointing out that a state has the preponderance of power within its borders to protect its people—

People are just damn afraid, afraid for their lives,…of their children, afraid for the lives of their loved ones.

But believe me there is a glimmer of hope. Not because any government actions taken in the recent past have yielded any success. Anaconda, the blimp, the creation of the Special Anti Crime Unit – the same khaki pants, the proliferation of crime continues unabated. For a problem to be tackled there must first be a recognition that it exists. In spite of the actions taken, there seemed to be an official reluctance to admit that there was a serious crime problem. At one point we heard that ‘we’ve turned the corner’ and at another time that the problem was ‘temporary’. Now officialdom has gone before the world and admitted it. When foreign ministers address the UN General Assembly they are speaking not only to the world but their message is also intended for the domestic constituency. Our Foreign Minister…”

That should be Knowlson Gift, MP.

“told the world that ‘it is becoming increasingly difficult to stem the tide of criminal activity within our society’ and the Prime Minister essentially confirmed it in his Budget speech. Crime is for real, the deeds too macabre to relate.

The consequences of runaway crime are real. Ordinary citizens, political and non-political, begin to press the panic button. They huddle together, talk behind closed barricades, begin to march, have silent vigils, collect signatures and petition the President as the Keith Noel 136 Committee did.

The political directorate seems incapable of ensuring their safety. Members of State boards look for grey areas in the law to avoid filing declarations with the Integrity Commission. No one wants to become the
latest kidnapped victim. Suddenly the governing party seems vulnerable. It could be swept out of power in a time of plenty. One minister admits, ‘if we don’t fix it (crime) we’ll lose the next election.”

Mr. Speaker, the article goes on; it is important to have an appreciation of what a man of the stature of Dr. Basil Ince said:

“Foreign businesses pick up the vibes. Perceptions of crime corruption, inefficient bureaucracy have caused the country’s business competitive ranking to fall from 59th last year to 65th this year. Dispatching missions abroad to explain the situation cuts little ice. Foreign missions on the ground right here in Trinidad and Tobago do that task.

People feel trapped and powerless…The confidence of the police is at rock-bottom. In a recent case a judge referred to some of them as ‘human rats.’”

I will come back to that, Mr. Speaker.

“…Things have certainly hit an all-time low when there is difficulty distinguishing between ‘police and tief.’

This is no excuse for the police’s sub-par performance but one might well ask, ‘what was being done all the time to enhance the working conditions under which they perform?’ Not much, it seems if one can judge from the full page ad appearing in the newspapers on the refurbishment of police stations throughout the country. This ad is testimony to the lengthy neglect of the police service.

The Prime Minister in his capacity as Minister of Finance has signalled his intent to bring in the FBI and Scotland Yard to assist the police. A vociferous argument against this is that after 43 years of independence, the country should have the ability to handle this situation. Agreed. The operative word is ‘should.’ However, nature, like water, abhors a vacuum. In the federal system of the United States, when a state proves itself incapable of doing something important, the federal government intervenes despite all the talk about states’ rights. At the international level, in spite of all the claims of sovereignty, the international community has pierced the veil of sovereignty.

This may well be the country’s last chance to save the country from total chaos.”
Mr. Speaker, sobering, very very sobering, this letter written by one of our senior diplomats, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, outlining the utter chaos in which we have found ourselves in this country. I am happy that the Member for Diego Martin West said it is the Government’s responsibility, because it is the Government’s responsibility in order to deal with the issue of crime and his speech had a kind of subtitle which read: “Don’t blame the Government, blame the police.”

That is totally unacceptable, because it is clear that once you have that kind and you accept responsibility, then you must accept the responsibility for the full mile. As Dr. Basil Ince was talking about what is clearly emerging in this society—social anarchy. We seem to have moved slowly, almost imperceptibly, and the population adjusted every step of the way, one kidnapping, two kidnappings, one murder, two murders, and then you have the escalation, escalation leading, is a kind of numbing, almost you begin to get at the level of immunity. The first bomb everybody shuddered. The second bombing and the third bombing, there seems to be that kind of movement in that direction and nothing, no intervention on the part of the Government seems to be able to stem this tide.

I go back to basics, when there is a link between the political directorate and the so-called community leaders who are really criminal elements; when you utilize those same community leaders as your enforcement machinery, savagery in an election campaign then you know: “so you are elected so you govern.” This drift that is taking place towards anarchy—

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you would find that the hon. Member for San Fernando East speaks about the Police Reform Bills all the time. As we drift toward anarchy, the panacea for him is the Police Reform Bills. We have said during the debate, that you cannot seek to protect the liberty of the citizenry by giving it up to a kind of political authoritarianism; we cannot do that.

I refer to the debate that took place on the Police Reform Bills. You cannot be using the Police Reform Bills as the panacea to cure this social anarchy prevailing, this quest for authoritarianism; this quest for naked power in the political directorate, to control the police is unacceptable. I now read a few paragraphs from my contribution on the debate in this House which took place at around 1.45a.m. of Thursday, July 01.

Mr. Valley: You are quoting from yourself?
Mr. G. Singh: I now read:

"...vesting the power to appoint members of the Police Management Authority and the Police Complaints Authority in the two leaders of political parties, and in the absence of their agreement, in the President, is an extreme swing of the pendulum away from the current Police Service Commission, and its independence and autonomy from political control to an exotic hybrid creature that would impose upon the people a police service subject to political control.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this legislation, if it is passed, is laying the basis for a police state. It is a hybrid without the necessary checks and balances. It is part American by virtue of the direct interference of politicians but it is British in its failure to provide for checks against politicians, and it is being located in the developing world where the Prime Minister is de facto king and everybody else around him is crapaud.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a creature against liberty; it goes against the dream of what is Trinidad and Tobago. There would always be this conflict between the liberty of man contemplated by the Constitution and the inherent desire that lies in the heart of those who are governing to dominate. One writer puts it this way, and I quote:

“Through the ages men of wisdom, philosophers and learned judges of the law have all warned against the potential evil that ever walks with power.”

So when the hon. Member for Diego Martin West spoke about—[Interuption]

Mr. Imbert: "You was not in no slate."

Mr. G. Singh: When I asked him whether in the evolution of the political democracy of this country, we should vest police power in the hands of politicians and, therefore, have the chance of naked political power marrying itself with police power and, therefore, emerging political authority, he said that in the American system recently President Bush appointed a Chief Justice and is appointing another justice. But in that American system, you have the checks and balances.

When Mr. Bush makes his nomination, there is public scrutiny; there is the power of veto as well. They have to get passage over a whole system. It is systemically different; constitutionally different; it is not applicable to our environment. If you want to have that, then you are speaking of systemic change
and if you want that kind of change, you are talking constitutional reform. I did not understand what the Member of Diego Martin West was talking about, in the context of the American system.

It is clear to us that there is need for radical reform of the security establishment in this country; radical reform is required. We have to change the model of policing in this country. We have to redefine the relationship between the police and the Government; between the police and the citizenry and the police and the law. We have in this country, notwithstanding 43 years of independence, a colonial constabulary. The only change is that we have removed their wearing short pants and given them long pants, but the training and the attitudinal approach to the citizenry and to the law is very colonial in content. We have to radically change the manner in which we do policing in this country.

When you seek to bring in the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), you are bringing in an American unit and a British unit. The British police system is based on a model of local policing together with consensus in the community, together with protection of the rights of the citizenry.

What do we have in Trinidad and Tobago? The British sent the Irish model here, where the role of the policeman is to maintain law and order; that is it; colonial in mentality; colonial in approach; 43 years of independence. How is it going to work, when you bring the FBI? The FBI emerged out of a different ideological battle within the American system, in the checks and balances. These groups can give technical assistance, but they will not be able to run this police service; the culture of the Trinidad and Tobago police will ensure that approach fails. We have to ensure that it does not. There is need for a radical rethink of the manner of policing in this country.

Mr. Speaker, we have to redefine the role and function of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the powers of the police. We have to look at the nature and fundamental relationship, where the police service is enmeshed; between the Government and the police service; the police and the community and the police and the law. We need to lift the veil on the police service. My colleague from Couva South has called for a commission of enquiry into the police service. It has been endorsed by the Member for Diego Martin West.

There have been several reports into the police service. There has been the La Tinta Report, which was indicative of a certain rogue element in the police service dealing with drugs; the Bernadette James enquiry, which was indicative of that as well. You had the Scott Drug Report, indicative of that kind of rogue element.
You had the O'Dowd Report and you had, most recently, the Ramdhanie Report. I agree with the Members for Couva South and Diego Martin West, there has not been a holistic managerial approach as to how to deal with the police service, in the context of Trinidad and Tobago in the 21st Century.

All those reports point to certain commonalities. It is clear to us that much is required to be done in this area. Certainly, we have to find a way to protect the rights of our citizens. If we move beyond the colonial constabulary, which we have, into the realm where the police and citizens are integrated into a wider integrated and united society, then we are talking about real change. We are not talking about cosmetic change. The changes made over the years were cosmetic in intent and focus. I will leave the area of police service reform and point to another area in which this culture of vindictiveness and maliciousness has entered the education sector.

When you have people who do good in this society, you must support them. People who give their life to doing good in this society, we must support them. Servol is an organization in this country in which it is acknowledged throughout that they do good for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to read some letters quickly into the record, because we cannot take what is good and turn it around and make it bad. The hon. Minister of Education is here. This letter is dated April 06 to Hon. Hazel Manning from Gerard Pantin, Chairman:

"Dear Mrs. Manning

Over the last month I have made every effort to make personal contact with you with no success. I did not ask for much of your time, in fact just a few minutes; all I received was a telephone call which unfortunately came at a time when I was in Antigua attending to the needs of the Early Childhood programme in that country. On my return, I have tried to contact you by telephone and by a number of visits to your office but to no avail; so I am constrained to write this letter which is a poor substitute for a personal meeting with you.

The purpose of my visit was twofold: I want to present you with the first copy of the revised curriculum for Early Childhood Education which has been three years in the making.

The second reason is to ask your urgent assistance in obtaining approval for the increase of salaries for our Adolescent Development Programme as outlined in my letter to the Honourable Prime Minister and which I was told he has passed on to you."
Honourable Minister, our instructors are under a lot of pressure with the increase of the cost of living combined with their substandard salaries.

I am fully aware that the problem is not a lack of money: it is common knowledge that the coffers of the Government are overflowing with money. Neither could the problem be the dedication of these men and women who are striving to stem the rising tide of crime and violence which has begun to filter down to the out of school youth.

I had hoped that when the Prime Minister put the matter in your hands we would have received some sign from you that swift action was being taken. Alas, this did not happen. I have tried to understand why this is so without success. On the few occasions where I have met you at meetings, I have been reassured by the friendliness of your attitude towards me. However I regret to say that has not been backed up by concrete action.

Honourable Minister, please help us in our hour of need. At least give us some assurance that our request is being favourably considered.

I look forward to hearing from you and will be happy to meet with you at any time or place.

Sincerely,

Gerard Pantin.

Chairman."

Mr. Speaker, I now move to a letter written by Gerard Pantin, once more, dated February 02, 2005. This is the letter that was referred to:

"Dear Mr. Manning.

Over the thirty-four years during which SERVOL has been in existence, we have had a cordial relationship with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and in more recent times I have come to regard you as a friend on whom we can depend in our hour of need. That is why I am appealing to you to help us as we face a critical moment in the history of our organization.

You are aware that for most of this time SERVOL was the only voice crying in the wilderness to save the young people of depressed areas from opting for a life of crime through our human development and vocational programmes."
We are very happy that your Government has been blessed in recent times with a buoyant economy which allows you to join with us in our efforts to save these at-risk young people.

However, there is one area where there is a significant discrepancy between the salaries paid by SERVOL to its instructors through a grant from the Ministry of Education and the salaries which the Ministry offers to its newly built centres, e.g. Science & Technology, Eastern Main Road...

It is clear from the above that the staff of the newly built Science and Technology Centre are receiving TWICE AS MUCH AS THEIR SERVOL COUNTERPARTS who have laboured in the vineyard of the Lord for more than thirty years.

Mr. Prime Minister, I realize that with your duties it is impossible for you to monitor all the details of financial budgets and I am sure that if you were aware of the anomaly you would have taken steps to remedy what is patently unjust. I do not ask for a total review of budget which would only be done at the expense of a great deal of paper work by your civil servants.

But put yourself in the shoes of those members of our staff who have laboured manfully for over 30 years when they receive no increase in their salaries.

Consequently I am proposing a simple solution to the injustice done to our staff, i.e. you double the salaries of all teachers and ancillary staff which will bring them on par with their colleagues in the Science and Technology Centre on the Eastern Main Road.

SERVOL is prepared to accept that this centre always be favoured by having access to materials and equipment that are being poured into the Science and Technology Centre that are far above what we can hope for…”

3.15 p.m.

“Mr. Prime Minister, you may recall that I sought an audience with you for a similar request in the nineties. You generously received me, listened to my plea and actually brought out confidential budget documents to show me how strapped you were for money that though you admired the work we were doing, there was no way you could accede to my request.
Mr. Prime Minister, the financial landscape has changed through the blessing of Almighty God...”

Not the PNM I might add.

“funds are available for you to stretch out your help to Grenada, Jamaica and other neighbouring territories which were hard hit by the recent hurricane.

You will note in my request for higher salaries I have not restricted myself to those who are directly concerned with the technical/vocational aspect of the SERVOL…”

A Press Release states:

“Servol meets with the Prime Minister and Minister of Education”

On Friday 2nd October 05…

The following points were reiterated:

1. The Ministry of Education had a national plan for universal Early Childhood Education…

2. It therefore intended to fully take over the governance of the schools which came under the World Bank project (38), 50 Pre schools which were formerly under the Ministry of Education but which were handed over to Servol in 1991 and for which Servol set up Boards of Education and trained teachers and eight other schools which were set up by the Ministry of Education/Servol project in 1987 leaving Servol with 85 schools to manage.”

This is what the Prime Minister said:

“The Prime Minister outlined the difficulties experienced in convincing other religious groups that no preference is being given to ‘Catholic Organizations like Servol’. Father Pantin stated very clearly that Servol was not a Catholic Organization, and that it did not come under the jurisdiction of the Catholic Church.

Servol is an independent NGO and is a people’s organization working with all religions and this is reflected in the composition of its staff, the constitutions of the Early Childhood Boards which clearly state that the Board must be representative of and reflect the religious, ethnic and social makeup of the community. Its programmes are opened to all people whatever their religious beliefs.”
So the Prime Minister is saying, based on the documentation that I have, that people who have laboured for over 40 years to help the poorest amongst us, that in this time of plenty he will not help because you are perceived as Catholic. What utter nonsense! The Constitution of this country—

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I thought that the Member for Caroni East, would have, in the interest of full disclosure, read into the record the culmination of the matter and that is; the Cabinet considered the salaries of the Early Childhood Care and Education teachers in the Servol system and agreed to upgrade those salaries way above what Servol had asked for and, in fact, to bring it in line with salaries paid to the rest of the teaching service.

Regrettably, the Member for Caroni East did not find it convenient to read that into the record also. [Desk thumping]

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, on the documentation I have, I do not know when Cabinet made that decision. It was not my intention to mislead this House. This documentation was passed to me yesterday and it indicated a position.

**Mr. Manning:** Not only that, Mr. Speaker, that decision to upgrade the salaries predated the meeting to which reference has been made by the Member for Caroni East.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, I will follow this matter. I have heard what the Prime Minister has said. You have seen the request to be upgraded to the salary with those of the Science and Technology Centre and I will follow the issue. If the Prime Minister is saying that the salaries are the same as those at the Science and Technology Institute Centre in Laventille, and it is in fact in effect, I have no problem with that. I came here to argue the case to help the people at Servol in a time of plenty, and if they have been assisted, I am grateful. But I intend to verify whether in fact it is so.

**Mr. B. Panday:** He is not saying it is in effect. He has not said that yet.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Prime Minister, is it in effect? Anyway, you will get your chance to respond.

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

*Motion made,* That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. B. Panday]

*Question put and agreed to.*
Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, having done my duty to God and country and the Catholic Church, it is time I do my duty to the realm of the telecommunication environment.

It is unbelievable that in a budget debate in 2005, there is not a word mentioned about the liberalization of the telecom sector. It is not done. The Spectrum was auctioned on June 23, what has happened since then?

Mr. Speaker, has the Government awarded mobile concessions and licences to the persons who won the Spectrum in the auction? No, it has not done that. What is emerging—from the documents before me is that the Government, through the Minister of Public Administration and Information, Dr. Lenny Saith—is a disagreement between the regulator and the Ministry and the casualty of that is Dr. Ralph Henry has been replaced as the chairman of the Telecommunication Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. So the Spectrum has been auctioned with no interconnection. [Interruption] By Khalid Hassanali? He might be more pliable for the Minister. I want the regulator to be independent of the Government. That is important.

Mr. Speaker, no mobile concessions and licences have been awarded. What about TSTT and interconnection? Has there been interconnection agreement between TSTT and the new mobile operators? If so, there has not been a word from the Government. Interconnection has two elements; writing the interconnection agreement and the physical interconnection. Nothing has happened. No interconnection has started with TSTT.

Mr. Speaker, is the Government having discussion with the operators? Yes it is. But TSTT is being obstructive of the interconnection and the Prime Minister, during the course of the budget debate spoke about the role of multinationals. I want to advise him that Cable & Wireless will obstruct and put obstacles in the path to liberalization of the telecommunications sector in this country. I know you know that, but I want you to use your office as a goodly pulpit to drive the process of liberalization so the obstacles that Cable & Wireless puts, you can get someone or form another company to deal with that bottleneck.

Mr. Speaker, what is required is that the Government needs to put pressure on TSTT as the 51 per cent shareholder. It needs to mandate the board, give a clear directive to the board of TSTT to comply with its instructions and give the people of Trinidad and Tobago a choice by Christmas.

If you understand the environment, Christmas time is when, if there are mobile operators coming in you get gifts of telephones and so on and, 60 per cent
of your sales is done at Christmas time worldwide. What is TSTT doing? There is no interconnection agreement and the Government is passive.

This is what Minister Saith had to say in the Business Guardian: “No interference, I am staying out of cell race”.

When the Government takes a passive approach like that, it works for the benefit of Cable & Wireless.

Mr. B. Panday: The status quo.

Mr. G. Singh: Yes, it works for the benefit of the status quo, so you are in fact supporting the status quo whilst business suffers, and the whole economy suffers and you do not liberalize the telecommunications sector. This is what is happening in this country.

Mr. Speaker, having established that there is need for action and clear direction in the telecommunications sector, I want to deal now with some of the fiscal measures as they relate to energy and tax reform in the 2005/2006 budget. My colleague, the Member for Couva South dealt extensively with it and I would add my two cents worth.

The contribution of the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister is unique in this area, for it lacks detail and it is the hope of hon. Members on this side that in his winding up, he would provide some more details so that the national community will better understand the implications of this new tax regime.

The hon. Minister of Finance made a great song and dance about the royalty issue and, clearly, there is need for clarification in that area. Historically, and you know the Prime Minister always talks about this 17-year contract and I want to deal with it.

In November 1995 when the UNC assumed office as the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, certain Ministers on their first day of office received a letter from the President of Atlantic LNG at the time, Mr. Gerard Preudhomme, seeking urgent approval for an omnibus agreement for Train 1 which he claimed was negotiated by the previous Government, which is you. The omnibus agreement which was attached to the letter was bereft of many details including the extension of Amoco’s exploration and production licences and the gas supply contract to LNG Train 1.

Mr. Speaker, these were glaring omissions which had to be addressed as a matter of urgency by the incoming UNC government. Further, the partners at Atlantic LNG had already abandoned the idea of siting the plant at the LABIDCO
estate. The UNC government had no choice but to completely restart the negotiations which were conducted during the period when the oil price was US $12.00 per barrel and the Henry Hub price of gas was US $1 per million btu.

Mr. Speaker, it is instructive to note that at this point in time, the comparable prices of US $60 per barrel of oil and US $6 per million btu for natural gas. Even then, the UNC Government had the foresight to renegotiate both the royalty and the price of natural gas sought through the National Gas Company by Amoco.

With respect to the issue of royalty, the hon. Minister of Finance mentioned—and this was an emotive issue clearly in his mind, he chose the correct word, but this is really an economic issue. As the hon. Minister of Finance mentioned in the budget under the new regime, SPT will be computed on gross crude oil income with no allowances except for the royalty allowance.

Further, it is our understanding on this side that in accordance with the existing gas supply contracts, the National Gas Company, the royalty cost is a pass-through cost to be absorbed by the NGC. The then UNC government took the position to renegotiate the royalty on all licences held by the then Amoco Company which is now British Petroleum (bp). The final negotiated position was that 10 per cent royalty tax would be applied to all licences as they expired.

Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that there were hundreds of licences held by Amoco, and they expire at different times; some in 2009, some in 2011, some in 2013 and some in 2017. Those were the expiry dates.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this royalty re-negotiation was spearheaded by the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the director of energy planning in the Ministry and the legal advisor to the Minister. The negotiations for Trains 1, 2 and 3 were undertaken at a time when the commodity prices for crude oil, natural gas, ammonia and methanol were at very depressed levels. The price of both ammonia and methanol at the time were below US $100 per metric ton. The UNC government took the position that in Trains 1, 2 and 3 negotiations we should exercise our leverage to do two things: One was to force Amoco to reduce the price of natural gas to the National Gas Company and, secondly to get a cheap tranche of gas to T&T in order to keep the cost of electricity down to a minimum for domestic consumers.

For Train 1, the reduction in gas supply price to the NGC realized a net saving to the NGC of approximately TT $240 million. For Trains 2 and 3, as a result of a reduction in the price of natural gas to the NGC, the net savings to the NGC was
appropriately TT $500 million. That is why we on this side are proud of the fact that the National Gas Company can realize in present-day circumstances, annual profits in the region of TT $2 billion. Maybe the hon. Minister of Finance would be so kind as to advise this honourable House as to what natural gas price reduction his Government was able to achieve during the negotiations for Train 4. The hon. Minister of Finance should know that you can either take your revenue at the well head through various tax regimes inclusive of royalty, or you can use NGC as a revenue collector in the form of distribution of income dividend to the Corporation Sole.

The UNC government also took the opportunity to negotiate a cheap tranche of gas of 100 million standard cubic feet per day at a price of US 65 cents per million btu. The hon. Minister of Finance needs to clarify to this honourable House how much of this vaunted royalty tax would be collected. Is it going to be cash straight into the Consolidated Fund, or is it going to be free gas, or a combination of both? Or is it that he does not know at this point in time?

Hon. Member: He knows.

Mr. G. Singh: Okay, well he will tell us.

The hon. Minister of Finance must advise this House as to what impact the implementation of this royalty tax will have on the revenue of the National Gas Company, if any. We on this side feel that there are too many questions being left unanswered and the national community needs to know. The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries may have let the cat out of the bag, because from his contribution one can discern that after all the “gallering” about royalty, all Mr. Manning got for his efforts was the paltry amount of 50 million standard cubic feet per day of free gas. You cannot compare this with the $750 million savings achieved by the UNC.

I now turn to some points made by the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. First, he boasts about oil production now standing at 146,529,000 barrels of oil per day. How much in your tenure did you contribute to that? He further boasts that gas production is now 3.2 billion standard cubic foot per day. How much during your tenure did you contribute to that? He also made a comment about the UNC engaging in a frolic about building groceries and rum shops next to gas stations. We know that the Minister is an expert on rum shops. After all, he passes by “Smokey and Bunty”. It is clear to us that all over the world—if we aspire to First World status—that petrol stations have Quick Shoppes, convenient shops—worldwide. The gas stations in Guyana are better
than the gas stations in Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Barbados, Antigua. So in a sense, you should be grateful that the UNC instituted those reform measures to bring that about.

I wanted to deal with BWIA but I would do so on another occasion. I want to deal with these special purpose companies. I have a lot to say about BWIA but I would have to do a Private Members’ Motion. They talk a lot about the fact that this eight to 15, depending upon who is talking about these special purpose companies—“RudeCott”, UDeCott, all kinds of “Cotts”; and that the issue about these special purpose companies—in the words of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central—are part of the whole public sector reform; that the Ministry is policy and administration and they are implementation. Are you going to still keep the public service to the same level now that you have an implementation arm, or are you going to go through, sleight of hand, provide for voluntary separation for public servants? What are you doing? If you are saying public sector reform, are you going to maintain the same level of personnel as you increase personnel on the other side? What is this, a bloated public service? Are you going to have another arm for implementation?

Hon. Member: Parallel.

Mr. G. Singh: A parallel and duplication of activity. In our time we had project implementation units. Have you eliminated all the project implementation units? What are you doing?

I want to raise, in the context of what is happening with these special purpose companies, the issue of tendering, because in an established company, Petrotrin, serious questions have been raised about the efficacy by an independent report. The independent report slams management of Petrotrin heads as “Not ethical”. I read: from the Guardian of Sunday, June 26, 2005:

“Tendering questions:

The Investigating Team’s report noted that Petrotrin’s tendering process is a dual one—bidders are invited to submit two proposals, one technical, the other financial. If they meet the technical requirements, only then are the financial bids opened. The company also has an approved list of registered contractors for use on jobs, and four, including CCISL, eventually tendered for the #4VDU project.”

The Vacuum Distillation Unit project.

Mr. Manning: What does that mean?
Mr. G. Singh: I have an idea what a vacuum does.

“The report stated that only two contractors—Damus Ltd. and Trinweld Ltd—passed the technical grade, and the former was selected by a team of senior planners and engineers from the Maintenance Department for the job as Damus Ltd. had the lower bid of $27.5m.

The report stated at a June 30, 2004 meeting, the ETC, chaired by Jones…”

a good friend of the Prime Minister;

“directed, however, that ‘a careful re-evaluation of the previous recommendations be carried out’, after a member said CCISL had presented a commercial bid of $22.5m.

The report noted that the selection team ‘continued to express their serious concerns about CCISL’s (Cudjoe Construction) ability to carry out the turnaround and the risks attached. ‘Notwithstanding this, the ETC did not accept the recommendation (of Damus Ltd.)

The report further stated ‘the entire review of the recommendations was compromised in that the review was being conducted with all of the bid prices available though one of the commercial bids was unopened’.

‘This experience would have sent a signal to the wider Corporation that processes could be compromised at will, precedents established conveniently and business conducted as usual.

This action could not be seen as being supportive of the core values which the Organisation should be aiming to inculcate and maintain. Given the difficulties faced today in the industry in upholding ethical conventions, such actions must be condemned in the strongest possible terms’…”

So what do you have? In an established organization like Petrotrin, of which a Member of the Opposition is a senior member, you had the compromising, based on an independent report, of the tendering process in order to favour a favoured contractor. As a result of that, the cost overrun moved from $24 million to $124 million. So if you were to extrapolate that—this is being done in an established company—what is going to happen with these special purpose companies? All hell would break loose. The political directorate, in a real sense, will determine everything.
I cannot take comfort in saying that you will adhere to the White Paper. It is clear to us in the current scenario that those special purpose companies should be brought under the ambit of some kind of parliamentary committee for review in order to establish that we are getting value for money, and some measure of auditing taking place.

The final point I wish to deal with is the issue of BWIA and its reorganization. This Government is seeking to recapitalize BWIA to the tune of US $250 million, which is TT $1.5 billion. In the budget speech the Prime Minister outlined a series of measures that would be taken. I quote from page 62 of the budget speech.

“After careful deliberations, we have chosen to pursue the option of creating a new National entity using as a basis, a restructured BWIA.”

Now that, I had some problems with: “a new national entity using as a basis a restructured BWIA.” I really do not understand it. I continue:

“There have been numerous efforts at ‘restructuring’ over the past 45 years…We believe strongly that we are now in a position to complete a seamless transition…”

I have another problem with that.

“from the existing BWIA to this new entity. But, this will involve a substantial investment of taxpayers’ dollars by the Government and some major departures from the status quo.”

In the BWIA report done by Arthur Lock Jack and the team established by the Government—this is the real thing.

Mr. Manning: Where did you get that from?

Mr. G. Singh: I got it in my envelope in my mailbox.

“Report of the task force on the future of BWIA”

This is what the Government asked them to do.

“The Task Force has interpreted its mandate in the following terms of reference:

1. The closure of BWIA with no replacement by a state-owned air transport company.

2. The closure of BWIA with the simultaneous or otherwise establishment of a new air transportation company which could be wholly-owned or partially state-owned.
3. The closure of BWIA and in its place a restructured BWIA (2005) Limited.”

Which one is it? Because when you say “pursue the option of creating a new national entity using as a basis a restructured BWIA”, it seems to me that you are creating a hybrid between two and three. So they have agreed to have a restructured BWIA and the restructured BWIA has certain conditions, in the words of the committee, to make sure it happened. They have six conditions for a restructured BWIA. At page 21 of the report, it says: “The Case for the restructuring BWIA”, and I quote:

“Restructuring BWIA is certainly the most difficult undertaking this Task Force evaluated. Despite several failed attempts, however, we believe that it is possible to complete a successful restructuring of BWIA. However, this success would be contingent on the timely fulfillment of a set of conditions which have never before been pursued in totality. Failure to secure any of these conditions would substantially jeopardize the likelihood of successful restructuring.

Condition One, Capital: Injection of $250 million, TT $1.5 billion.

After the injection of $250 million, the balance sheet would have US $180 million of shareholder equity. We believe that this level of equity is essential to support the balance sheet.

Condition 2: Category One status.

Condition 3: Charter policy.

Charters are competing unfairly with BWIA, particularly on the New York and Toronto routes. A restructured BWIA would require the implementation of a charter policy which acknowledges that scheduled airlines which have fixed costs and load factors which are seasonal should have protection from charters which operate without any overhead costs and engage in predatory pricing.”

3.45 p.m.

Charters are operating efficiently in this country and the poor man gets an opportunity to fly. What are you doing by preventing the poor people from getting the opportunity to fly? I do not understand that. Why are you seeking to provide a kind of unfair trade in this society?
Condition four is on corporate governance. A restructured BWIA has to be managed by a professional independent board of directors. The members of the board of directors should possess expertise in business, finance, accounting, aviation, law, human resource, management and so on. The chairman must be a leader who enjoys the respect and confidence of government, business and labour.

Mr. Lok Jack has been named and he enjoys that.

Condition five deals with management. A restructured BWIA must have professional management; productivity and on time performance. The management of BWIA will work within an incentive structure which rewards specific performance. That is a very good idea.

With regard to restoration of maintenance capability, a restructured BWIA must operate with a maintenance capability which is fully restored. When is that going to happen?

Condition seven deals with work rules and culture changes. Perhaps this is where the real problem is. You can find the money, but in order to bring about that culture change in the organization, that is where the real challenge would be for Mr. Lok Jack and his team. BWIA will need to form a strategic plan for implementation of its restructuring programme involving retrenchment; organizational and cultural transformation; change in work rules and new performance-based environment. Each of these elements would be essential to transform the attitude and behaviour of employees at BWIA.

Condition 8 in Chapter 11. The problem with BWIA is that of political interference. A restructuring of the airline will require a vesting Act to provide protection from its creditors as well as nullification or suspension of labour and management contracts and in securing assets.

The challenge for this Government would be how can it provide the capital to BWIA and not interfere in the operations whether it is through engagement and personnel. The history of BWIA over its 45 year period whether it was with Captain Hernandez or Louis Lee Sing has been PNM political interference in the operation of the airline.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, let me tell the Member that that has not been the recent history. I do not know what history he is talking about. Certainly, it has not been the recent history, since this Minister became the line Minister of BWIA.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear, but I am talking about the history of the PNM, Louis Lee Sing, Captain Hernandez and so on. If it be I take
the word of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central that he does not intend to further interfere in the affairs of BWIA and he has put a ring fence to BWIA since he became minister.

In the time provided, we have attempted to look at the presentation of the Budget Statement in the context of the arena of fear and trepidation that grip this country. If we want to embrace Vision 2020, they have said that they would lay the gas master plan; water master plan and the Vision 2020 documents. We look forward to those documents because they would aid us as we debate in the coming months of this session.

We hope that the Government has taken on board some of the recommendations that we have made and we look forward to the continued debate of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order.

Thank you.

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stanford Callender): Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to participate in this budget debate, 2005/2006 and, at the same time, to join my colleagues on this side to compliment the Minister of Finance, the Ministers in the Ministry of Finance; the Minister of Planning and Development and the numerous public servants who contributed to this process.

I have been in this Parliament for the past few years and I must confess that I was a bit disappointed with the opening salvo of the Member for Caroni East. I was beginning to grow accustomed to the Member for Caroni East as the man who comes to the House and drops some bombshells. Unfortunately, he had no bombshell to drop. He proceeded to entertain us for the first 15 to 20 minutes showing his ability as a comedian. I am disappointed.

On a more serious note, I also identify with the theme of the budget which is “Ensuring Our Future Prosperity and Addressing Basic Needs.” I agree with the Minister of Finance when he said that notwithstanding the immediate challenges, we on this side of the House approached the new financial year with a great sense of optimism in the future of Trinidad and Tobago. We do have challenges and some of them have been identified by the contributions of several Members of the House. We on this side cannot give up. I cannot give up because as a true Tobagonian, I see myself as a true progressive patriot of this blessed land called Trinidad and Tobago.
I also support the Minister of Finance when he said that this budget continues to strengthen the platform for achieving the goals of Vision 2020 by responding to those basic fundamental needs we desire and deserve to have fulfilled. This budget gives priority to the issues affecting the family, as well as our collective concerns for security and safety; a relevant education system; quality health care; adequate housing and poverty reduction.

It is important to emphasize, and maybe re-emphasize, that achieving Vision 2020 will require a great deal of introspection on the part of all of us in this country. As a people we must examine our values and attitudes; develop a greater ownership; environmental sensitivity; respect, discipline, tolerance and responsibility of a culture of performance and excellence. If we want to enjoy the highest quality of life, we must be also prepared to work harder and be more productive. [Desk thumping]

It is clear that the emphasis on the budget this year and the years that will continue in this administration is on delivery. In the case of Tobago, this Government has made it possible for that process and progress to take place. It is very evident when we see what is happening with the tourism development of Tobago; in education and the provision of additional institutions of learning; on a more reliable sea transportation system and a commitment by this Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, that the air bridge would be made more reliable. It is also evident by the development taking place at Crown Point International Airport and the infrastructural works development and three housing estates in Tobago East; Roxborough, Blenheim and Castara. It is evident by the acquisition of Adventure Estate in Tobago West for the expansion and development of communities like Plymouth and Black Rock. It is also evident by the bold decision to purchase Courland Estate for the furtherance of the development of Tobago. The purchase of Pigeon Point has been a landmark decision in the history of the people of Trinidad and Tobago; the planned development of the Cove Industrial Park and I can go on and on.

These achievements did not come about by chance or wishful thinking. It was as a result of meaningful dialogue and a relationship based on mutual respect; not confrontation, conflict or legalism, but by a serious commitment by honourable men and women towards one common goal, which is the development of Tobago and its people, as we move toward Vision 2020 together, as Trinidad and Tobago.

Unlike some of my friends in Tobago, and in particular those who oppose this administration—and I hasten to say that it is their right so to do—I take this opportunity to advise them to take a little more time to research the context of our
process and the progress we have made and the harmonious relationship that we have developed among the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Tobago House of Assembly and by extension the people of Tobago.

No reasonable Tobagonian and there are thousands of them, can seriously accuse this Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance or this Government of ignoring the cries and needs of the people of Tobago. We do not see this budget in the simplistic context of the arithmetic in which those opposite see it. We see this budget as it goes beyond the recommendation of the DRC; a budget that provides $500 million capital expenditure borrowing facility to Tobago; a facility that will activate in 2005/2006 funding opportunities; expanding further with the Infrastructure Development Fund working in collaboration with the Tobago Development Company and the Ministry of Planning and Development.

We see this budget as it offers Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly a chance to protect Tobago’s patrimony. It offers Tobago a chance to fulfill its dream as being clean, green, safe and serene. The comprehensive economic development plan for Tobago is funded in this budget, as well as the North East Tobago management plan.

Like the Prime Minister, I congratulate the Tobago-led task force by Dr. Anslem London and a number of public servants within Trinidad and Tobago who contributed to these fantastic plans. This budget speaks to the improvement of sea and air transportation; the restructuring of BWIA and the provision of fast ferry service between Trinidad and Tobago. One looks forward to a restructured BWIA and the role that it would play in the furtherance of the development of Tobago.

This budget provides improvement and security infrastructure on the island; the reconstruction of Roxborough and Old Grange Police Station. It provides an opportunity for the Business Development Company in Tobago and its plans towards the establishment of the Cove Industrial Park; disaster preparedness and management in the windward development plan; increased opportunities in tertiary studies; construction of the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) campus at Buccoo in Tobago and the upgrade of the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Tourism at Mount St. George.

When you listen to the budget and Ministers on this side, as they speak to the commitment of this Government to the development of Tobago, for me it was a bit embarrassing when I saw a copy of today's Tobago News, Friday October 07, 2005.
Mr. Speaker, There is an article in the Tobago News, dated Friday, October 07, 2005, headlined: “Jack: $34.1b creates Tobago as ‘bastard child’”

Mr. Speaker, that speaks to the Minority Leader in the Tobago House of Assembly. I want to take this opportunity to tell Minority Leader, Jack, to speak for himself. I am not a bastard child. [Laughter] I am certain that the Member for Tobago East is not one also.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Not me! No, no, I am not.

Hon. S. Callender: Mr. Speaker, I have a problem with how politics changes people. Some people feel they could stay in Tobago and talk foolishness and it would not be brought to the attention of the people of Trinidad and the world. The quote continues:

“MINORITY Leader Ashworth Jack has said the $34.1b presented by Prime Minister Patrick Manning last week had created Tobago as a ‘bastard child’ in the twin island Republic.

Speaking to reporters following the presentation Jack said the Government has continued to keep giving smaller and smaller allocations to Tobago, hence the island would always have to play catch up.

‘What the budget does for Tobago is it creates a bastard child. A very developed island and a very underdeveloped one,’ he asserted.”

Mr. Speaker, do you know this same Jack and his party spent 20 years, prior to 1991, developing Tobago?

“Jack said the allocation of $1.3 billion in the $34.1 billion was a ‘sore disappointment’. He added: ‘I don't see how the Prime Minister could have taken 210 seconds...’”

He took time to count by seconds, the Prime Minister's contribution.

‘‘out of a three-hour budget debate to deal with Tobago. When I look at the allocation for Tobago I see one of two things. Either there seems to be a lack of understanding about what is happening in Tobago, or there is total disregard.’

Jack said it appeared that the Government did not seem to have much confidence in the people who ran the Assembly and was intent on holding on to the reins and running it from Trinidad.”
Now, that was an old political trick in the days of the DAC, when they tried to convince people that the PNM did not have the capacity within Tobago to run Tobago. But we demonstrated a few years ago that we do have the capacity. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, that is enough of Jack because I have limited time to deal with other things.

I want to put in its correct context, this Government's intention and commitment to Tobago as articulated by the Minister of Planning and Development in her contribution. I am a married Tobagonian so there might be some biases. [Laughter]

“One area of concern to us as a Government is that of the development of Tobago in circumstances where Tobago, to a large extent, lagged behind Trinidad's development.”

We know that; we appreciated that.

“As a consequence of this, the Tobago House of Assembly in conjunction with several public servants moved to develop a comprehensive economic plan for Tobago… As a consequence of the acceptance of this report,...

Talking about the Tobago Development Plan.

“the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is moving steadily with the Tobago House of Assembly in ensuring that implementation is not a problem for Tobago. Our objective is to move not only Trinidad forward but also to ensure that Tobago catches up with Trinidad and Trinidad and Tobago move forward together so that development is holistic for both islands.

As a consequence of this, one of the issues that will be dealt with by the special purpose companies is specific to Tobago's development. Consequently, there would be special projects developed in Tobago utilizing the special purpose companies and the issue of the re-development of the windward part of Tobago which had some destruction. Because of the hurricane the windward part of Tobago would be dealt with specifically.

There is a move to ensure that the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly work together to ensure the comprehensive development of Tobago. I thought that it was important to make that point in circumstances where there has been concern as to the capacity in Tobago and the ability to implement what is necessary for Tobago's development.”
Mr. Speaker, we recognized the capacity of Tobago a long time ago and that is why some time last year, with the Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, there was some arrangement with the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) to provide a measure of funding to allow institutional strengthening to take place within the Tobago House of Assembly.

This has been the commitment from this Minister, and outside of that, we have heard in the Prime Minister’s presentation of the budget—notwithstanding the fact that the Minister of Works and Transport did not have the time to deal with the specific issues as it relates to the air and sea bridge—and it is documented that it is this Government's intention that, and I quote:

“You will be aware by now that in November 2005 there will be two leased fast ferries on the inter-island route, and I also wish to advise that in 2006, the Government proposes to purchase a fast ferry (if an appropriate one is available) to service the sea bridge between Trinidad and Tobago, when the CAT is taken out of service in April 2006.”

He further went on, because this is important, you see with the improvement to travel by sea, there is a need and the Government recognizes this need. I continue to quote:

“Refurbishment and construction works will be undertaken on the Passenger Terminal Building at Port of Spain at an estimated cost of $11 Mn,... The expansion of the Terminal Building at Scarborough is estimated to cost $1.5Mn with designs to be undertaken in fiscal 2006 and actual construction works will commence in fiscal 2007.”

In addition to all those initiatives, the Prime Minister did say that the resources available to Tobago for 2005 are in the vicinity of $2.3 billion. Against that backdrop coming from the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment for services provided in Tobago that are not under the direct responsibility of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), close to $70 million will be provided, $23.5 million to provide capital expenditure under T&TEC; Operational Maintenance, $20 million; under the National Social Development Programme, $1.5 million and under WASA, something in the vicinity of $46 million. Mr. Speaker, against all of that, this Minority Leader stays in Tobago and talks foolishness.

Mr. Speaker, I further emphasize, for the benefit of this House, notwithstanding all that I have said a while ago, and I make it absolutely clear that the present administration in the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) has never been shortchanged by this PNM administration. [Desk thumping] I will demonstrate that by information
and record. Between 2001 and 2002—I think that was a budget prepared by the UNC—I have said it before and I will say it again, because we Tobagonians speak honestly. I have grown to have a sort of appreciation for his calmness at times and for the thoughts of the then Minister of Finance, the Member for St. Joseph. When the PNM administration came on board and replaced the administration of Jack, Tobago was in debt of close to $200 million—that was left by Jack and his friends—and it took a Tobago-controlled PNM led by Orville London with that Minister of Finance in some type of meaningful discussion and understanding of selling ideas, and funds were provided to deal with some of the immediate problems. [Desk thumping] Tobago will be grateful to the Minister. I had the opportunity to say to him the first time that he is a good man that might have found himself among bad friends.

Mr. Speaker, in 2001/2002 Recurrent Expenditure: the parliamentary appropriation was $598,472,833 and at the end of the fiscal year it remained the same, so there were no problems. In 2002/2003, under the PNM it went up to $838,550,300; by the end of that financial year it remained the same, no problem. In 2003/2004 the initial parliamentary appropriation was $734,111,481 and by the end of the year the final appropriation was $824,111,461. In 2004/2005 it was $822,900, and by the end of that financial year it was the same. Under Development: in 2002/2003 the development provisions were $104,072, and after midterm review, final appropriation was $116,072,000. In 2003/2004 it was $166,450, by the end of the financial year there was a final appropriation of $180,264,514. In 2004/2005, the parliamentary appropriation was $200 million. At the end of the financial year, after final appropriation midterm review the provision was $405,750, but Jack continues to say that every year the allocation is getting smaller and smaller.

The Prime Minister dealt with the improvement in the tourism sector and I support him in his comments. I would like to compliment the Tobago House of Assembly and the Secretary of Tourism, in particular, for their bold initiative but, Mr. Speaker, this did not happen by chance, this came about just over three years ago when the Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, responded to a distress call from the Tobago tourism sector. He moved by setting up a Standing Committee on Tourism chaired by him and that committee is now chaired by the hon. Chief Secretary.

4.15 p.m.

That happened at a time when, under Jack, when the hotel occupancy rate in Tobago was 17 per cent and all the hoteliers in Tobago were on the brink of bankruptcy; when only one international airline, British Airways, was getting into
Tobago. Today, as a result of those initiatives, there are several airlines flying to Tobago. In addition to British Airways, there is Virgin Atlantic, Excel Airways, flying out of the United Kingdom, the latter twice a week. There is Travel Span and BWIA operating out of the United States of America; there is Condor, Martin Air and Louder Air flying from Europe.

With an increased capacity today, hotel occupancy is 70 per cent. The same can be said with the increase in cruise ship arrivals. Last year there were 45 cruise ships making calls in Tobago, estimated visitors 43,000. This year, it is expected that it will increase to 66 cruise ship calls, taking the visitor to 55,000.

Tobago has the distinction, based on the efforts of the Tobago House of Assembly and this administration to have won the award of the World Tourism Organization, which named Tobago the best eco-tourism destination, not once but twice, 2001 and 2004. The only little jealousy I have is that it was influenced by that famous rain forest in Tobago East and not in Tobago West.

Englishman's Bay in Tobago was declared by The Travel Channel as one of best beaches in the world and the sixth rated top beaches in the Caribbean [Desk thumping]

Notwithstanding the strides we have made in tourism, the World Travel Span report states by statistics that Tobago is doing very well, but while it speaks to the expansion and growth of the tourism sector, the point must be noted that, like in Trinidad and Tobago, where our main engine of growth is in the energy sector, tourism represents that to Tobago. It is therefore advisable that we seek not to place all our eggs in the tourism basket, as Tobagonians would say; but to seek some form of diversification of the Tobago economy. That is why the Cove Industrial Park has come about. It was an initiative that the Government supports.

With respect to the provision of housing, I have spoken about the three sites where infrastructure work is being done. In addition to those, notwithstanding the fact that we had an unexpected visitor to Tobago last year by the name of Hurricane Ivan, that has set back some of the development works. While that is taking place, infrastructure development will also begin on Adventure, which we have bought, and Courland Estate and we hope that construction of at least 210 units will begin in the very near future to bring additional housing benefits to the people of Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, on the subject of national security, as an MP coming from Tobago, it is important that I join the voices within the Government and general population to say a few words on crime and criminal activities that have been
stalking this land. Many things have been said, but one of the things that worried me during this debate and over the past few weeks, is the notion which some have that our decision to bring in Scotland Yard and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is of no value.

I do not think how many of us had the opportunity to see today’s Express. I have a copy, and on page 23, there is a picture showing Sir Ivan Blair, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service of London, addressing and lecturing to policemen in the United States of America on how it should be done because criminal and criminal activities are stalking the word. It is an international problem, so who is Trinidad and Tobago not to seek help from who we perceive to be the best in the world?

I join with my colleagues because we must understand that Tobago is part of this nation called Trinidad and Tobago and we are not immune and we cannot escape the incidence of crime and criminal activities that are stalking our land. We being the smaller twin island, we should be able to manage the situation.

I take the opportunity to call on all Tobagonians and to inform them that my colleague and I will be meeting to come up with suggestions and ideas, including all policy and decision makers, law enforcement agencies, NGOs, CBOs, families; the entire community of Tobago, to be the guardian of our safety and democracy, where we will expect nothing else but zero tolerance on crime and criminal activity.

We must stop them before the crime multiplies in Tobago. We must not allow the economic and social gains that we have made to be threatened by crime and violence. Towards this end, towards this new development paradigm we see for Tobago, which is that it must be clean, green, safe and serene.

I intend to meet very soon with the Minister of National Security to discuss some national security issues in Tobago and to find some possible ways to simplify a method whereby goods and services for basic expenditure could be appropriately administered from the Office of the Prime Minister Central Administrative Services in Tobago, to treat with the agencies of the police, the fire service, the prison and the army. There might be teething administrative problems and to deal with some basic goods and services issues. I intend to meet with the Minister of National Security very soon after my return to Trinidad.

I must not end my contribution without placing on record that I noted with interest that we are coming to the end of almost five days of parliamentary debate on the budget of the nation. I was almost totally embarrassed that a party in
opposition that is seeking to be the next Government of Trinidad and Tobago, did not have a single word to say or vision for Tobago. All I heard were some cynical statements made by the Member for Oropouche and the Member for Couva South, trying to put Tobago in the context of St. Patrick and Siparia. I want to make it absolutely clear that Tobago is not a part of Trinidad. Tobago is a half of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and this Government recognizes that. That is why special emphasis is being placed on Tobago. [Desk thumping] [Interruption] I did not mention the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre because she is not a part of the real UNC.

Mr. Speaker, to compound my horror, I listened to the Member for Caroni Central when he attempted to speak about the hospital in Tobago, making the comment that Tobagonians are suffering. What does he know about Tobagonians’ suffering? Tobagonians were suffering, but we dealt with that. We dealt with that when the Member for Tobago East and I came to represent the PNM in this Parliament and to get the UNC out of office. We dealt with that in the context of Tobago by removing Jack and his friends. So Tobago is on the road to progress.

I understand that is the contempt in which they seek to treat Tobago, but I put Tobago on notice that not the incoming leader nor the outgoing leader paid due respect to half of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I am encouraged and this Government is encouraged by the economic and social progress that Tobago has made. Where there has been success, we need to look to the future to reach a higher plateau of national, regional and international context. Our vision in Tobago has been inspired by the 2006 budget. This budget is important in translating a vision into a living, practical reality that requires a strong political commitment, which we have, a dedicated, concentrated action, which we promised; it requires that we combine our natural endowment with those new circumstances that we create to expand our human possibilities, so that there emerges an enriched endowment of human capital that will work to the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am extremely happy to be part of this Government. I am extremely happy to be a part of this administration that has placed Trinidad and Tobago on the path of developed country status by 2020. I am reminded that I am proud to be a part of a government that has no Jacks in it.

Like the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, I remind the House that this country is our country. That this is our Trinidad and Tobago and it gives me great pleasure as the Member of Parliament for Tobago West and part of the Government of
Trinidad and Tobago to support wholeheartedly the budget as presented by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

I commend it to the House.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (Siparia): [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, I was not waiting in anticipation. I knew that the hon. Minister of Education prefers to speak after me, so both Mr. and Mrs. Manning will have to stand and defend their budget. I have absolutely no problem speaking before her. [Crosstalk]

As we well know, the Minister walks with a prepared speech so it will be the same whether she speaks before me or after me. I have no difficulty with that.

Mr. Speaker, in three and a half years under the PNM, this country has been reduced from a country of hope to one of total hopelessness. We were watching the Members on the other side and I noted that the male Members are all dressed in black. They are always dressed in black. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker? Because of the number of persons who have died because of their incompetence and because of the crime. They are in a state of perpetual mourning. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please! We have just about one minute and a half to tea. Let the Member make her contribution.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year, I closed our side of the debate and this year I have the opportunity so to do. I would really like to congratulate the Members on this side for their sterling contributions. They were all able to speak and I congratulate them for the recommendations they have made and endorse their sentiments.

I trust that the Member for San Fernando East in his winding up will deal with some of the concerns that were raised and take on board some of the recommendations made.

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

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In last year's budget, in my contribution, I crunched the numbers in the Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure with respect to four items of expenditure within each Ministry and I had dubbed these four, taken together, as the “propaganda vote” in the budget for the various ministries. That “propaganda vote” comprises the vote for entertainment,
overseas travel, hosting and publicity. The vote for hosting is an entirely new vote that has been inserted in the budget by this Government. It was never there when the UNC was in government. It is an entirely new vote that has been created. The vote for publicity did not exist in the majority of ministries, under the UNC. These are new items of expenditure that have been included in the budget.

Based on what I saw happening in the budget and the fact that for last year, there was an allocation in the budget that amounted to a total of $159 million under that “propaganda vote”, as I have dubbed it, I wrote the Integrity Commission as follows:

“The Chairman & Commissioners of the Integrity Commission,

Dear Sirs,

As disclosed in the Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure 2005, government spent more than $27,171,761 in fiscal 2003, $69,585,168 in fiscal 2004 and has allocated more than $94,497,610 for fiscal 2005 making a total of $191,254,539 for promotions and publicity. The amount allocated for fiscal 2005 represents an increase of over 249% above the amount spent in 2003. It is to be noted that these numbers, as large as they are, do not include money being spent by State Enterprises and Statutory Authorities such as NLCB, WASA and such so that the expenditure by government for publicity is far greater than the numbers stated above.

No doubt, Commissioners would have seen and heard, as did other citizens, the consistent and persistent advertising by government in the print press and electronic media promoting individuals of the government thereby affording those individuals undue preferential treatment that is neither fair nor impartial. The frequent full page centre spreads containing images of certain government individuals carried in the print press comes immediately to mind.

Further, the Honourable Prime Minister admitted in Parliament on the 29th day of June 2004 that up to that date government had spent earlier this year $1.97m in promoting its position on the Police Reform Bills. No money was allocated to the Opposition party for the promotion of its position on the said Bills. This clearly afforded undue preferential treatment to the governing party that is neither fair nor impartial.

Yet further, government's expenditure pattern with respect to promotions and publicity has not been fair and impartial and has afforded undue preferential treatment to some. For example, in response to a question I
asked in parliament, the Honourable Minister of Education disclosed that a total of $1,847,492.40 had been expended by her Ministry on advertising for the two-year period January 2002 to January 2004 and disclosed a breakdown of amounts to each media house as follows:

- Trinidad Express: $943,133.96
- Trinidad Publishing: $413,392.87
- Newsday: $293,805.77
- T&T News Centre: $54,714.70
- CCN TV6: $20,987.50
- The Wire: $3,061.01
- All Media Products: $118,397.10

These numbers clearly demonstrate an inequitable expenditure pattern on the part of government. With respect to the print press, expenditure to the Trinidad Express was far more than the other newspapers, namely, about 221% more than the Newsday and 128% more than the Trinidad Publishing. There was no expenditure at all to some other media houses.

The situation of an inequitable distribution of expenditure by government is the same with respect to government advertising generally in the print press and the electronic media (including radio).

Furthermore, it is alleged that with respect to promotions and publicity government is affording undue preferential treatment to only a few of the many advertising agents/companies operating in Trinidad and Tobago so they are the only ones benefiting from the millions being spent by government.

In the code of conduct for persons in public life set out in the Integrity in Public Life Act 83 of 2000, section 24(1) provides that a person exercising public functions (such as government ministers and permanent secretaries) shall ensure that he performs his functions and administrates the public resources for which he is responsible in an effective and efficient manner and shall (a) be fair and impartial in exercising his public duty and (b) afford no undue preferential treatment to any group or individual.

As described above, government has been administering millions of dollars of the public resources for promotions and publicity in a manner
that has not been fair and impartial and has been affording undue preferential treatment to groups and individuals inside and outside of government in contravention of the aforesaid code of conduct set out in the Integrity in Public Life Act 83 of 2000.

Pursuant to section 32 of the Integrity in Public Life Act 83 of 2000, I hereby call upon the Commission to inquire into government's contravention of the Integrity in Public Life Act 2000 with respect to the millions of dollars of the public resources being spent for promotion and publicity.”

I sent this letter dated November 04, 2004 to the Integrity Commission based on the estimates set out in the Recurrent Expenditure for last year's budget. I received a reply from the Integrity Commission acknowledging receipt of this letter. To date, almost one year later, absolutely nothing has happened with respect to this. Of course, we will not leave it here.

In India a similar situation was taking place; India, as you know, has the largest democracy in the world. There, government ministers were utilizing full-page ads, putting their faces and pictures in the newspapers and there, public spirited citizens have filed what is called a public interest litigation, challenging and questioning the use of government's and therefore taxpayers' funds for promotion of government ministers.

The Integrity Commission has done nothing; it is the same with respect to five ministers of government who are under investigation by the Integrity Commission. Nothing has come out of that. The Integrity Commission is sitting on all these documents.

In last year's budget we raised the issue of the enquiry into contracts awarded by Petrotrin. That too has been with the Integrity Commission over a year and nothing has come out of this.

The Prime Minister, in this Parliament, appointed a commission of enquiry to look into the Landate matter, the Scarborough Hospital. Before I go further on that, I find it very surprising that the Member for Tobago West will stand and say that the people of Tobago are not suffering, when the Scarborough Hospital has gone into cost overruns. That hospital has stalled and still cannot be built because the people were "tiefing" gravel and stone off the site in Scarborough. That was the commission of enquiry set up to look at what was happening; implicating the Member for Diego Martin West as the person who was involved in the siphoning of materials raised in last year's budget. It is one year later. The Prime Minister
had promised a commission of enquiry and came to this Parliament on more than one occasion and promised to lay the report in the Parliament. Here we are in another budget debate being completed today and the Prime Minister has not kept his promise. Why? The Prime Minister admitted—

Fairly recently I brought a matter of urgent public importance. I asked for leave to raise that and asked the Prime Minister to keep his promise and lay the report, as he had promised the Parliament. The Motion was not allowed, but the Prime Minister rose of his own volition and he again promised: "I will lay the report. I have received the report." That is over one month ago. Why is the Prime Minister holding on to the report? Is the report sanitized in some way? Why is the report not being laid in Parliament when you have had it in your hands for so long? I find it a most strange occurrence. Not only was the promise made once in this House; the promise was made as recent as one month ago and that promise has not been kept.

All these investigations are going on and we cannot get results. The Integrity Commission still cannot give us the results for this. Last year that “propaganda vote” totalled those millions that I spoke about, this year when we look at the figures for that “propaganda vote”, we see that it has gone from $132 million to $229 million budgeted, $100 million more in one year. When I saw that someone said: "So Kamla you are talking about that, what about when you all were in government, what did you do? How much did you all spend?" First of all, there was no hosting vote; there was nothing of the sort. The publicity vote was $3.7 million; overseas travel, $6.4 million; entertainment, $1.4 million. This was for 2001, the last year that the UNC was in government. These are the actual numbers spent. The total for 2001, under the UNC, was $11.580 million. You will say that we have a lot of money now and that this is a $34 billion budget, so we can now allocate $229 million for this. When the UNC allocated and spent $11.580 million, the total budget was $16 billion. Today the budget is $34 billion, just over double. Even if you had to double it, it could not go from $11 million—In three and one-half years it has now reached to $229 million. What is interesting is, once against, inequity and undue preferential treatment is here.

Last year I pointed out to the Members that you can see who the rising stars are and who the ones who were getting next to nothing are. It is interesting that we look at these numbers and see what has been allocated.

If we take the Head for entertainment, which is Item 19, for the Ministry of Finance, $440,000; overseas travel, Ministry of Finance, $3.8 million. By far the largest of the expenditure goes to the spouse of the Minister of Finance, to the
Minister of Education. When we are looking—[Interruption] I do not care when you speak, Sir, you have your right to speak, as I have mine. You speak whenever it is best for you. Your Minister of Education got the largest slice of the budget. She came to this Parliament and sat for the entire day from 10 o'clock this morning and did not see it fit to speak for what will be done with that $5 million.

**Mr. Imbert:** That worrying “yuh eh”?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** It is not worrying me.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, it is worrying you.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** It will worry you more than me, and you will find out why. When we look at the publicity totals, we can look at the overseas total per Ministry. You are a very small fry in this so you should stay quiet. You will know how little you have got.

Office of the Prime Minister, overseas travel, $2 million; CAST, which is under the Office of the Prime Minister, $100,000; the Ministry of Finance, which is still the same Minister, $3.8 million. That gives the Minister of Finance, in his capacity as finance and his capacity as Prime Minister, a total of overseas travel of $5.9 million; the Ministry of Planning and Development, $900,000; the Ministry of National Security, $1.7 million; the Attorney General, $1.4 million; the Ministry of Legal Affairs, $655,000; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, $1.5 million; the Ministry of Education, $1.8 million; the Ministry of Health, $600,000; the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, $1.1 million.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Public Administration and Information, $750,000; the Ministry of Tourism, $650,000; the Ministry of Housing—I am sorry the Member for Diego Martin West is not here—he would see he is the least of the Apostles. His overseas travel vote is $250,000; the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, $1.2 million; the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, $3 million; the Ministry of Local Government, $340,000; the Ministry of Works and Transport, $600,000—

**Mr. Imbert:** That is not enough?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Of course, that is not enough for you. You should get a few millions. Talk to your leader. The Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, $400,000; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, $3 million; the Ministry of Trade and
Industry—I see Mr. Valley has taken care of himself—$4 million; the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, $250,000; and the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, $600,000—the high priestess of the PNM got $600,000. That brings a grand total in overseas travel to $31.293 million allocated for fiscal year 2005/2006.

Under “Publicity Vote”—this is where there were the largest increases—under the Office of the Prime Minister, $1 million; under “cars” which is under the Office of the Prime Minister, $10,000; the Ministry of Finance, under the Office of the Prime Minister; $1.9 million. So that is almost $3 million for publicity out of the Prime Minister’s two ministries. The Ministry of Planning and Development, $405,000; the Ministry of National Security, $3 million; the Attorney General’s Office, $1.1 million; the Ministry of Legal Affairs, $1.2 million; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, $625,000; and the Ministry of Education, $7 million for publicity. Every week in the newspapers this is what we get—[Newspapers in hand]—full-page advertisements—and the Minister cannot come here and account for the money that was spent last year. Look at these advertisements. These are just examples of two of them. You could pick up every newspaper—I think there is a full-page advertisement on today’s newspaper.

Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Speaker, about three or four years ago, when an IDB loan was signed by the then administration, there was a clause in that loan that talked about marketing the reform. Mr. Speaker, I would like to say here right now that the $7 million identified there came from that loan. I would really like the Member on the other side to pull out the document—they seem to have all the documents across there—and to identify just what they signed across there for the marketing of the reform of the education system. [Desk thumping] I would like to put that into that context. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, the Minister is talking about marketing of the reform of the education system, but I do not see any reform. I am seeing marketing of the Minister. This is marketing propaganda with the Minister. Mr. Speaker, with due respect, why in every full-page advertisement we have to see her face in it? But it is not that Minister alone, but all of them are guilty of the same thing.

Mr. Manning: I like the face.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar: This ministry got the most money to do it because of the Prime Minister. [Interruption] The Member for San Fernando East
just said that he likes the face. He just said it himself, so she gets the most money
to put her face on the newspaper and on the media. It is every one of the
Ministers. So when we add up the total figure for publicity allocated in this
budget it is $127,722,000. How much money did the UNC spend in 2001? Firstly,
my dear, that loan is not to market yourself and, secondly, the $127 million is not
about the IDB loan to market anything.

Mr. Speaker, look at what we have here. The Prime Minister presented a
budget and went live for three hours on television. I have no problem with that.
All the talk shows, commentaries and analyses were carried on the newspapers
over the week with respect to that budget statement.

Mr. Speaker, at lunch time I saw some guys with some cable and I asked them
what is going on. They told me they came to hook up their equipment during the
lunch break because they have to carry the Prime Minister’s reply live. I have no
problem with that.

Hon. Member: What is wrong with that?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I said nothing is wrong with that, but what is
wrong is that you take taxpayers’ money—your budget has been so unconvincing
and it has failed and it has flopped—to take out a whole page advertisement to
come and praise your budget. This is the publicity. You spent the whole week—
one hour, two hours or whatever hours—and tonight you are going live on the
television, and you have to take our dollars—the money that you did not pay us as
MPs during the year when we were 18/18—you are taking all that money, to
advertise your budget. Why? Because you have been so unconvincing, and the
budget has brought nothing to anyone, so you have to budget money to spend
again to advertise yourself. Mr. Speaker, that is the Publicity Vote.

When we look at that vote we also see “hosting”. Under “hosting”, once again,
we see featuring prominently, of course, $3 million to the Ministry of National
Security—those are the big ones.

Mr. Imbert: How much money I got?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Do you want to know how much money you got?
I do not even know what your ministry is. You have changed ministries so often;
you have been reshuffled so often. The Ministry of Works and Transport got
$250,000. You are the “small fry”, for sure. You should be reshuffled again.
Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry of Trade and Industry—Mr. Valley, once again, got $4 million. You were well taken care of. This is for hosting. Hosting is for eating, drinking and “spreeing”. Do you know what that vote is for? That is what it is for.

Hon. Member: How much money I got?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: You do not know how much money you gave yourself? Are you serious? You got a total of about $2.7 million. The Ministry of Education got $7.8 million. Is that a loan too? Mr. Speaker, they forget that even though it is a loan it is our money that has to pay it back. The money of Trinidad and Tobago has to pay back the loan and we have to pay interest on the loan. So even though it is a loan, they did not tell you to advertise it in that manner. Mr. Speaker, so these are the figures under this propaganda vote that have gone from $132 million to $229 million in just one budget year.

Mr. Speaker, when they came in, the amount being expended was $11 million and, today, the taxpayers of this country have to contribute to $229 million which was spent by that incompetent Government to promote themselves through propaganda. Whilst this vote is very well implemented, it has been spent. If we look at what was allocated as against that which was actually spent, we are going to see for entertainment, 110.68 per cent. That means you spent more than was allocated for entertainment.

For overseas travel, 113.42 per cent—you spent more in overseas travel than was allocated. Under “hosting” 67.6 per cent and “publicity”, 70.7 per cent. Mr. Speaker, listen to these percentages, please. When we come now to look at the implementation of the programmes in the ministries, we do not see 100 per cent; we do not see 60 per cent; and we do not see 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to quote from PricewaterhouseCoopers document. The Member from Arouca South was afraid to quote from this document. I am going to quote from it. They went through last year’s budget and in their memorandum on page 51 it says: Budget deliverables, delivered or not. They gave a total of 100 projects, taken from every ministry, and the implementation completed rate was 18 per cent. Out of all the grand promises made last year for all these programmes and projects, only 18 per cent of these projects were completed. But here it is for entertainment and overseas travel and so forth, over 100 per cent was spent—more than was given—but only 18 per cent of the programmes and projects were completed.
Mr. Speaker, if you look at these programmes, once again, these have been the grand promises that we have been hearing in the budget presentation. It explains why at the beginning of their document, PricewaterhouseCoopers said on page 3:

...somewhat unusually, but perhaps with the expectation that the expenditure side of the budget would be most critically analyzed, the honourable Minister dealt extensively with how his Government had spent the $27 billion.

That was last year’s money:

Whether these funds were properly accounted for and we got the expected value for such expenditure is yet to be determined, but our concern remains that despite spending programmes of $22 billion in 2004 and $27 billion in 2005, there has been no material improvement in a wide range of areas including basic living standards.

This is not the UNC; this is PricewaterhouseCoopers saying that, “there has been no material improvement in a wide range of areas including basic living standards.”

Mr. Speaker, so the $22 billion spent in 2004 and the $27 billion spent in 2005, after we calculated this for the year, this works out to an average of $62 million per day that was spent by that Government and, yet, all these projects have not been completed.

Now, let us look at agriculture. What happened is that I said $100 million a day, given the budgeting but, you know when we get these books we get the actual revised figures. So based on the revised figure that is how it is calculated. It is based on the allocated figures and that is how we worked it out. We now have the revised figure which gives you expenditure up to that date. When it comes on stream in four months’ time it would be far more than the revised figure when we get the actual figure. So we still have more to come.

With respect to agriculture, all these projects were not completed: upgrading agriculture infrastructure by constructing access bridges and roads; establishing water management and flood control systems; constructing fishing centres in Toco and San Fernando; distribution of state lands for agriculture in Caroni and other state lands; launching of national agriculture information databases; strengthen incentives programme; develop and enforce grades and standards; enhancing veterinary diagnostic lab facilities; expanding, strengthening sanitary and phytosanitary and food safety capabilities; promoting fish production and
establishing fisheries; monitoring and surveillance units; putting sustainable management techniques in place for a renewable marine and inland fisheries; and introducing the Sugar Industry Authority to implement a quality base payment system for sugarcane; not done, not completed. So 18 per cent of the 100 projects were completed.

With respect to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, completion of construction of a methanol plant by Methanol Holdings Limited; construction of an ethylene petrochemical complex with the minimum of four plants and a gas refinery complex of at least five plants.

Mr. Speaker, I read these because in the same way, last Wednesday when we were here, we listened to the plans presented by the hon. Minister of Finance, with respect to projects that the Government is going to undertake in fiscal year 2006—all the plans and promises. Some of them have been repeated, why? Because they were not completed; they were not done. So when we hear about all these plans, on the face of it, they sound good.

Mr. Speaker, we have been told very often that all that glitters is not gold. So when we hear all these promises, the actual gold would be when they are completed. The history and the track record has been that the budgets for 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 have failed. They have failed! What is a budget? When you come here with your plans and programmes—it means nothing! It is only on paper. The only time it benefits the people of Trinidad and Tobago and improves the quality of lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago is when the projects are completed. But you spent $27 billion and then $24 billion and the projects are not yet completed. Where did that money go?

5.30 p.m.

If you are saying out of your budget last year you spent $27 billion and here it is 100 projects; only 18 per cent completed, where did the money go? How was the money spent? We need to get some answers to that. I was reading energy; increase production of ammonia and urea as well as diversification into production of melamine; construction of aluminium smelter plant and construction of power plant to supply smelter and provide for normal increases in electricity demand; facilitate an integrated automotive wheel development and production centre; expansion of iron and steel facilities; introduce gasoline optimization programme, including producing environmentally friendly gasoline by constructing five plants and establish gas to this facility. All these grand plans were in the 2005 budget.
Health: continue expansion of the oncology centre—the Member for Caroni Central dealt with that at length. Upgrade Sangre Grande Hospital and construction of a health centre in Sangre Grande. Construction of Point Fortin Hospital; expansion of free medication on the free health care system, removing age restrictions; continue training of radiation oncologists, pathologists and nurses; none of these have been completed. Introducing two renal dialysis treatment centres, the Member spoke of that—not done. Expansion of eye surgery programmes including treating cataract and glaucoma, as well as heart surgery—not completed. Research and development of new tropical medicine at the University of Trinidad and Tobago lab—not done.

Housing: Facilitate the construction of 100,000 homes over ten years, that one is in progress. Re-vitalization of Port of Spain, San Fernando and Chaguanas under urban renewal programme, I have not seen any of that. Completion of infrastructure works on 107 lots, including Valencia, contracts for design layout and so on—not done. Regularizing of squatters at 12 sites with 2,150 lots of land to be regularized during the year—not done. As I say this, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Housing boasts of his housing plans, and so on.

There is on the statute books of Trinidad and Tobago, the Squatter Regularization Act passed by the UNC government. Under that Act, all persons who were living on State lands in designated areas, could apply for and be granted something called a certificate of comfort. After the certificate of comfort is granted, they would then be given a statutory lease, and the third step is that they would actually be given a deed for the land.

Thousands of persons applied, part of the work of that same Land Settlement Agency (LSA) the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about; it is their job to give out the certificates of comfort; it is their job to create the statutory leases; it is their job to give the people a deed for their land. Mr. Speaker, everybody in this country would like to own a piece of land. When you have a deed; you can use that for collateral; you can go to a bank, get money borrowed to send the children to get their education; to buy things for your home; to upgrade yourself and so on.

Hon. Member: Education is free now.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Well it is free here now, I do not know for how long. I remember when I was going to university it was free, but it stopped you know. [Crosstalk] So if you do not use this windfall—we must learn from the mistakes of the past—properly then that programme would stop again. In fact, others have spoken about the manner in which these moneys; this oil windfall that
is coming in; the large revenues coming in, that they are not being used to create any kind of sustainable development in the country. We are here spending money but we are not utilizing that money to create something that would go down the road.

When that oil and gas run out—. I cannot remember if it is one of the IMF's reports but there is a report that tells us that natural gas is not going to last forever. They gave us about 15 years in terms of what is the known reserves—natural gas. When that runs out, what is going to happen in this country? This money should be taken and utilized in a manner that will allow us to continue.

You set up a Revenue Stabilization Fund. Every year you come into this Parliament and you boast and you promise that you would bring legislation to control how the moneys would be drawn out of that fund; how the moneys are going to be utilized; what is the criteria. As it stands now, anytime these "fellas" decide they want more money for publicity, for hosting or for overseas travel, it means they could go into the revenue Stabilization Fund. There is no criteria; there is no legislation. Therefore, whilst you say you are putting aside—and let us give credit where credit is due. It was Gerald Yetming, the Member for St. Joseph who set up that Revenue Stabilization Fund under the UNC; that is where it started. [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Imbert:** There was no money there.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** "Doh lie."

**Mr. Imbert:** Is we who put money—

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Ask this gentleman, please—before I tell him something I should not tell him—to shut up.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister of Works and Transport, you have had your time and you are constantly harassing the Member. Please.

**Mr. Imbert:** I want to go home.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** The truth gets him a little irritated sometimes. I am saying the money is coming in; we must protect it. You know the saying: We have inherited this land from our parents; from our forefathers, but we do not own it; we hold it in trust for our children and our grandchildren; it is not ours to fritter away and waste away. The only way that we can protect that money and hold that money in trust is, we must have legislation to prevent these people from just going into that fund anytime they feel like it. Any rainy day they can just draw down from that fund. There must be legislation that would set out the criteria.
The reality is, you have to set up criteria through legislation that will tell you when you can draw down; how much you can draw down, and you cannot just go into that fund and pull out anytime you feel like it. Until that legislation comes, that fund is at risk under the hands of that Government. They are on a spending spree; it is very clear I just read for you $229 million on eating, drinking, spreeing and flying up and down. So, Mr. Speaker, that is vitally important.

We come again to national security. Construct 12 new police stations, continue refurbishing—none. Expansion, modernization of the fleet; I understand that they said we would be getting some in November, so they are probably preempting what is in here. Establish a police training academy—not done. Facilitate the application of a greater measure of technology in the conduct of police work; provide computers to all police stations; introduce an integrated information technology platform and communication systems—not done. Back in the budget again, expansion of forensic division facilities and capabilities—not done. Introducing modern machine readable passports—not done. Refurbishing maximum security prison to house 2,400 prisoners. Mr. Speaker, why are we increasing the size of the prison to take in 2,400 more people? Is it that we are expecting this crime to continue and continue and continue?

Hon. Member: "Bas" will go back.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Well I do not think "Bas" will go back, you know. What you have to worry about is your Mayor in San Fernando, facing two years in jail for ballot box tampering. [Desk thumping] When we told you that you lost the election, but you stole the general election; here is the proof. Your Mayor in San Fernando is in court on charges for ballot box tampering. [Crosstalk]

You know what I find interesting, Mr. Speaker? This is discrimination again. Inequity in the way they disburse moneys. When it is a Member of the Opposition facing charges in the court, they bring in big time lawyers; flying in from London, Timothy Castle and all these "fellas", I cannot remember some of their names; all these Queen's Counsel, the very Privy Council my friend from Diego Martin West damned here; but they bring all the Queen's Counsel here to prosecute those cases. But when it is the Mayor on ballot box tampering charge, you know you cannot tell who is the lawyer prosecuting. They send the most junior lawyer out of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) office to prosecute.

Again, it is so glaring; this is a matter where you need senior experienced persons to do the prosecution. [Crosstalk] But, that is the inequity. That is the inequity.
Hon. Member: What is the crime in ballot box tampering? What is the point?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: You do not consider crime to go—My colleague is asking what is the crime in ballot box tampering? He "ain't" see nothing wrong with that, you know. You know why? That is a gentleman who went before the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) and lied. He went before the EBC and lied. So he does not see anything wrong with ballot box tampering. [Crosstalk] Crime on the statute books—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are winding down the debate after five days, please, I am asking you, can we get two hours of silence? Please, continue.

Dr. Rowley: That matter is before the court.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The hon. Member for Diego Martin West should be the last one to talk about "matter before the court", when in this Parliament the precedent was set. We had the cases before the Magistrates' Court; before the Court of Appeal, and the Speaker allowed the debate to take place in this House. You should be the last one to talk about matter before the court.

Dr. Rowley: What nonsense you talking?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Here is a matter before the court, I can say it. The matter is on the front page of the Newsday, I did not make it up. The matter is on the front page: “Mayor Atherly, the PNM Mayor of San Fernando, ballot box tampering charge.”

Mr. Speaker, I am saying 18 per cent implementation and I was looking at the ministries. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Hon, Members, you know things are getting out of hand now and I am asking you—I have reached the stage where I am going to put Members out of the House, now. So I am giving you fair warning. Please continue.

Hon. Member: Speaker getting tired too.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Tempers are getting short on all sides. Mr. Speaker, including in the Chair, with due respect.

National Security, is very important. We are saying the implementation rate has been so poor and yet we are crying about crime; talking about crime and what could be done. I was reading the projects that were promised, but have not taken place. Enhancement of capabilities of the fire service; removing the National
Emergency Management Agency to a new office of disaster preparedness and management—has not happened.

Social Development: Reviewing legislation for Homes for Older Persons Act 2000; licensing, regulation and control regarding senior citizens homes has not happened.

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Mr. G. Singh]

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Establishment of the older persons care board—that has not happened either. These are some of the Ministries, but as I said, 18 per cent out of the 100 not completed.

I would turn to education. Education has been repeating in every budget the same promises. In the 2005 Budget, the programme was to construct 43 early childhood care and education centres, this is the pre-school. The PNM Government is boasting about from pre-school to post school and so on. For the past three years these promises have been made to build these early childhood centres. In budget 2002, the Prime Minister promised that they would build 30 early childhood care and education centres; not a single one was built. In budget 2003, the promise was to build 43, and in budget 2004, again to build 43. On page 30 of the 2003 budget statement presented on October 21, 2002 by the hon. Prime Minister said:

"We will increase the number of early childhood care and education centres in every district."

Not one was built. The Minister of Education contributed to that budget debate on October 29, 2002:

"Over the 2003 fiscal year…construction and outfitting of 43 early childhood care and education centres."

—would take place; not one has been done, Mr. Speaker. On September 05, 2003; in reply to a question in the House that I asked the Minister of Education, the Minister indicated that no childhood centres had been built in that year. The Prime Minister in his budget statement on October 2003 said:
"We have developed a plan to achieve universal pre-school education before the end of the decade. We shall build 200 Centres over the next four years."

The Minister of Education in supporting him, said in budget 2004 on October 13, 2003:

"This year Government plans to build 30 centres using revised designs."

So, there were 43 promised in the 2002 budget; 30 in the 2003 budget and we hear again, now fiscal year 2005, none of these have been built. When we looked at last year's budget they were going to build 43 pre-schools. In his budget statement this year, the hon. Prime Minister on page 27 says:

"Our goal is to achieve universal Early Childhood Care Education (ECCE) by 2010. This calls for the construction 600 Early Childhood Care Education Centres to cater for some 30,000 three (3) to four (4) year olds. Fifty (50) of these centres will be completed and established during this fiscal year."

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this is the fourth promise; this is the fourth budget; and every year the promise has been to build the Early Childhood Care and Education Centres. The Member for Arouca South was calling a whole host of schools recently when she spoke, saying that we did not build these schools. I just want to set the record straight with respect to those schools. Early Childhood Care and Education Centres were built by the UNC.

We are saying in three and a half years and this is the fourth budget. Early Childhood Care and Education Centres are being promised by the Member for San Fernando East and they have been promised by the Minister of Education; up to today not a single one has been built. I do not know what is the problem? Do you know what has happened also? The loan that was funding these Early Childhood Care and Education Centres; they did not comply with the loan; it was terminated before time. It came to an end, so they did not even have those moneys that were under the fourth basic education programme. Those moneys went, they have been budgeting moneys every year to build these childhood centres and not a single one was built.

Mr. Speaker, as at June 2000 the following new childhood centres were built by the UNC: APS Barrackpore APS, Aranguez SWAHA, Princes Town Centre, Charlieville Mennonite, Cumaca ECCE Centre, Embacadere Village Council, Esperance, Frederick
Settlement, Gran Couva, Las Lomas, La Romain, Morvant St. Dominic’s, Penal Presbyterian, Point Fortin St. Anthony’s, Princes Town Baptist, Rose Hill Moravian, Tableland SDMS, Tunapuna SDMS. These were 18 new ones as at June 2000.

The ones that were upgraded, Mr. Speaker, are as follow [Interuption] let me finish! What housing are you building in Siparia, you want to come here and quarrel about Diego Martin West. The Member for Diego Martin West needs to ask the Minister of Education why they have not yet built the two schools in Diego Martin that have been put into the budget under the new STEM schools. [Interuption] Why, three and a half years later? Do not come here to argue with me, your own Minister will not build your schools in your constituency.

Dr. Rowley: For you to indicate voter padding.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: You could never house pad in Siparia. With due respect, you cannot do it; do not even try. [Interuption] Well, you could hear what you like, Sir, but you cannot house pad in Siparia.

Mr. Speaker, we look at the other centres, upgraded and furnished: Arima Centre, Belmont Centre, Carnbee, Mount. Pleasant, Caroni, Chiniapo, Clarke Rochard, Cumana, La Brea, La Fillette, La Pastora, Layan, Mafeking, Morne Diablo, New Beginners, Piparo, Rancho Quemado, South Diego Martin, St. Barbs, Strange Village, Tabaquite, Valley Line, Williamsville, those are 22.

These 22 centres that I now read were centres that were refurbished and were equipped under the loan. This was at June 2000. The projection then for the year 2000, the others to be completed and were in progress were as follows: Bamboo Presbyterian, Brothers Road, Fyzabad, Mamoral, Moruga, Springvale Pentecostal, Cotton Tree Foundation which is completed now, Maracas Valley, Caratal, St. Joseph, Mount. St. George, Roxborough and Princes Town TML.

So, Mr. Speaker, just to put on the record the projections by the ECCE Unit for the year 2001: South West Development Agency, Pentecostal Lighthouse Tabernacle, The Church of God and Prophecy, Future Seekers, Christian Union Church, Trinidad and Tobago Federation of Women’s Institute, Council of Elders Spiritual Shouters Baptists, St. Charles Dharm Sabha, Universal African Improvement Association, Morvant/Laventille Improvement Organization, Enterprise Village Council, Black Water Village Council, South Caribbean Conference of Seventh

Mr. Speaker, these were the projections in the year 2001. These were there, I do not know what happened with the Minister, why a single one was not built? The hon. Minister came with a very interesting statement in this House. Sometime last year I had asked a question about how many childhood centres were built. In reply to that question, the Minister told this Parliament that whereas the UNC government had constructed and upgraded over 100 preschools in office, in effect, what she was saying was that we were too cheap, because we did it with a ceiling cost of $250,000. Those centres were built at a ceiling cost of $250,000, but the hon. Minister said, in effect, that money was not enough, for the preschools and she said further that they would do it at $400,000 for one.

Lo and behold, Mr. Speaker, the Minister thereafter announced that it will then cost $700,000 to build one pre-school. This was since last year, so, I do not know how much it is now, it must be $1,000,000 now to build one of those preschools. We were able to build all those pre-schools at a ceiling price of $250,000, the Minister initially responded in this Parliament saying that cannot build it, it would go to $400,000 and then $700,000 last year. So how much is it now three and a half years later when not a single one has been built?

Mr. Speaker, with respect to de-shifting, I look at the budget statement again, the hon. Prime Minister once more as he did last year promises that there will be a de-shifting programme to de-shift the schools. At page 27:

“At the secondary level, the major initiative is de-shifting and conversion of junior secondary schools to 5 and 7 years schools as well as the conversion of Senior Secondary Comprehensive Schools to 7 years schools. At present, two-thirds of our secondary school population attend 5 and 7 years schools”

Mr. Speaker, there are two points in here. At present two-thirds of our secondary school population attend five-and-seven year schools, do you know why? It is because under the UNC government in our thrust, education for all at the secondary level, the schools that were built by the UNC were all to be five-year schools or more, and that is where all these extra schools came, this is why so many of the student population now attend these five-and seven-year schools. But the rest of them are still in these junior secondary, still in the shift system. In three and a half years every budget promise to de-shift from the Minister of Finance and the hon. Minister of Education, and to date only three schools have been de-
shifted, one a year. How many do you have—forty two—how many do you have to de-shift?

**Sen. Manning:** Thank you for asking the question. Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that approximately six schools have been de-shifted and converted. They are twins and when we de-shift one, we convert the senior comprehensive schools; so that makes it about six schools de-shifted and converted and therefore the population now going to school has nothing to do with universal. It has to do with the fact that they are going from Form I to Form V in one location and that is what de-shifting means. Approximately 66 per cent of the population now goes to school from Forms I to V in one location. [Desk thumping]

**Mrs. K Persad-Bissessar:** I thank the Minister for responding, but, Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned. If it is six schools de-shifted in three and a half years, then you are going to take 20 years to complete the de-shifting process. Why is it taking so long to de-shift these schools? Each year hundreds of millions of dollars are going into the budget for the de-shifting process, that is just not good enough. The shift system has been the most evil system perpetrated on the children of this nation. That has been the most evil system that we have seen for children to go to school half day. That is why so many of our young ones when they come out of school really cannot work for a whole day. They have to go CEPEP and work for two hours in the morning; they cannot do a full day’s work. They go to URP and work for two hours in the morning, they cannot sustain for an entire day, that is the training they got from so very young.

At the secondary level I would also like to read into the record the secondary schools built by the UNC. Every time we come here somebody stands and says they built that school, everybody else built the school; let us put the record straight, Mr. Speaker: Cunupia High School, Waterloo High School, Matura High School, Valencia High School, Coryal High School, Manzanilla High School, Blanchisseussse High School, Brazil High School, Debe High School, Tableland High School, the famous or infamous Biche High School. Mason Hall High School, Tobago was in progress. Speyside High School was—when we demitted office, Mr. Speaker, [Interruption] the documents are there, those who want the truth will see the documents. Bishop Anstey East and Trinity East were built within our time.

Mr. Speaker, we built these new high schools and in addition we established other schools that the buildings were to go up and some of them had progressed but others had not. The Saraswati Girls’ Hindu College, Miracle Ministries Pentecostal
High School, the SWAHA College—my colleague spoke about SWAHA College and up to today they cannot build the school, Light and Life Pentecostal High in Sangre Grande, Vishnu Hindu Boys College, ASJA Boys College, Charlieville was in progress, had started to be completed; ASJA Girls’ College, Charlieville.

Mr. Speaker, there are two schools, the Shiva Boys’ Hindu College and the Parvati Girls’ Hindu College, for the life of me every year I ask the Minister why it is three and a half years later not a stone has been turned to construct these schools? Why are these children being left out of the education thrust? I asked the question here and I was given all kinds of answers as to why these schools would not go on board. Why is it up to today the Shiva Boys’ College and the Parvati Girls’ College cannot be built in Trinidad? The children are in the sheds in the old building that was there and they keep extending it each year, when the moneys were left, $50 million approved by the IDB for these two schools to be built. The bank sent the approval for these two schools to be built, why they cannot be built?

God is so good the children that we placed under the “Secondary Education For All”, those children that we placed in 2000, 2005 is the first year that those children wrote CXC and in the Shiva Boys’ College they scored 100 per cent CXC passes despite the fact that they would not build the school and they are still in the old building there.

Mr. Speaker, these are the records your Minister has the records for all the schools, you could ask her, you know.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: You do not have to ask me. That school is in my constituency so I know the numbers but talk to your Minister if you want other numbers. Mr. Speaker, those are the secondary schools.

With respect to primary schools, I will place on record the list of primary schools as well, because yesterday, the Member for Arouca South named schools that had clearly been constructed by the UNC. These schools are as follows: the Patna River Estate Government, which is a new school.

Dr. Rowley: The PNM built that.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Okay, take that, you want Patna, take Patna go with it. Let us continue: Guayaguayare RC, Reform Presbyterian, Valencia South Government, Bamboo Settlement Government in 1999, Beetham Government now Excel Composite—I was there with the Member for Diego Martin West when we opened that school—Diego Martin Boys RC, Carenage, St. Mary’s AC,


Hon. Members: This is madness. [Interruption]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, let them listen. The first list I read was the completed schools; these were the schools that construction was ongoing when we left office.

6.00 p.m.

All the designs were there. Under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), several schools were also on the list to be built. [Crosstalk] So when I read the hon. Minister of Education last year in Hansard saying that they built the Cunupia High School, I was very surprised. When we built that school, it was dubbed the "University of Central", because it was such a beautiful school; all the facilities were there. The Biche High School, the Shiva Boys' School and the Parvati Girls' School, the Minister told us they could not be built because of oil. Just over the road, from the site for those schools, is the Penal Junior Secondary School. This is the road. [Mrs. Persad-Bissessar demonstrates] Just over the road is the Penal Junior Secondary School that was built by the PNM. There is also the Penal convent; the Penal Anglican School; all three schools are right over the road, but these two schools cannot be built, because there is oil in the area.

I heard the Prime Minister promising to build an $850 million sport complex somewhere in Tarouba and there is endless oil there.

Hon. Members: Where? Where?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: This is what I read; it has been reported. [Crosstalk] [Interruption] Has the Environmental Management Authority given any clearance for that sports complex?

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, some years ago, an exploration well was drilled on the San Fernando Bypass, just outside the Twilight Drive-in Cinema; it was
called Marabella I, and it was a dry hole. There is no oil in that area, as of now. There has been no discovery. I would like to know the publication from which the hon. Member got her information.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I thank him. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Ramnath: Were you the geologist that built that well?

Mr. Speaker: No, please; there can be no intervention in the intervention.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly the issue, because on the sites for these two schools there is no oil. Those have been capped, so it is the same problem. You dig, you have a dry well and you do whatever. [Crosstalk] It is because of spite and malice that you would not build those schools. If the sites were not good, you did not start them; why have you in three and a half years not identified another site to start building those schools? If you say the soil is not good, why can you not find somewhere else in the area to build the schools for these children?

Mr. Partap: Spite!

Mr. Ramnath: There is nothing wrong with the site. I work there.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: If you were to take this budget presentation and look at the education promises, they are repeated year after year. Technical upgrades; since I was there the bank had approved that. We were there in 2001; three and a half years later not a single drop of technical upgrade done. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order, Member for Nariva.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The statement contained in one of the documents tells me that there are 36. One of these books put out by the Prime Minister; the
books that we got; the social sector or one of them, tells us how many boards there are. The majority of them are still not there. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: All Government secondary schools have them.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: No, that is not true. When we passed the law, it was for all Government schools, so the majority of schools do not have school boards.

Dr. Rowley: You are out of touch!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: That includes primary and secondary schools; do not mislead us. When you say all Government schools, that is not true. [Crosstalk] You still have not kept your promises. Look at the problems we are having in schools; the school boards were designed to assist. The promises are repeated; if you have a checklist, like when you write an exam, it is either you pass or fail. The Ministry of Education has failed, in every regard, with respect to keeping the promises made in the budget.

Let us look at food prices, because the Prime Minister gave us a list of items. I was very pleased to hear him talk about duty reduction, because people have been crying out about high food prices. He mentioned reduction of duty on salted meats, peas and beans. I felt, “Okay, here is the hon. Prime Minister showing some concerns for the cries out there for the high food prices,” but over the weekend I checked with the supermarket where I do my shopping. I asked, "How soon should we see these reductions on items?” The man told me, “Look, I do not know what you are speaking about; what reductions can these be, because all these specific items, the salted meats and so on, by Legal Notice of February 03, No. 14 of 2004, signed by the Prime Minister, January, are already exempt from duty." So when you go to the supermarket, no salt meat price "going down."

When it was announced in the budget, hon. Prime Minister, maybe somebody misled you. The legal notices come out each year, so when you say that you have taken the duty off these items, it is misleading, because they are already at that price without the duty. That reduction in duty is not going to help the prices for that. We have Legal Notice, No. 14 of 2004 and Legal Notice No. 19.

Mr. Manning: What else?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Salted meat.

Mr. Imbert: What about swine and bovine?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Same thing, swine and bovine; salted meats. There are a few others, but check the legal notice. I am giving you the specific
ones; those have already been for the past how many years; each year they have been exempted from duty. So when I go to buy in the supermarket, I am not going to see a price reduction for those items. [Crosstalk] Therefore, it would be misleading to say you have taken the duty off them.

The real problem with the food prices stems from inefficiencies on the port. The port has now introduced, if the hon. Prime Minister did not know, something called a congestion fee. This adds to the price of everything that comes to the port, which means food, because we import most of our food. If you wanted to help the food prices, you cannot take off a duty that is already exempt; you need to look at what is going on at your port. You have to pay this congestion fee of $819.

**Mr. Valley:** I am sorry, please, what number legal notice?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No. 14 of 2004; No. 19 of 2004. Legal Notice No. 14; I will give you copies of them if you like; the typing is a little unclear from the photocopy.

Mr. Speaker, you pay these prices on the port, therefore, food prices are higher. Something needs to be done very quickly with respect to what is happening at the port.

Just one final item before time runs out on us, the Family Court. Recently, the hon. Chief Justice was speaking glowingly about the pilot Family Court. We were happy it was set up, of course, we wanted the entire family court system, but we are happy that it even got off to the point of a pilot project. You would recall in the last year we were here that we brought an entire Family Court Bill, which lapsed. This Government did not see it fit to carry through with that, but came instead with a pilot project. With his talk about the glowing record of some 6,000 cases being dealt with by the Family Court, somebody is seriously misleading the Chief Justice, because they are putting the numbers in such a way to show them as being bumped up. [Interruption] [Cell phone rings] [Crosstalk] So if I have five children, I would file five custody applications, which is one and the same case. So if you are going for custody, you have five applications and they bump up the lists in that manner; that is what I have been told is happening there.

More importantly, somebody earlier mentioned putting somebody in charge of something that he did not know anything about. The manager of the Family Court is a person with a social services degree. It is true that you need the social services involved, but to manage the court, you have a person with absolutely no experience with respect to court work. All the staff hired in that court was hired
on contract and they are all leaving, because with the new rules in the High Court they are running off to the Supreme Court, so there is no one with institutional memory. This pilot project will never get off the ground.

I got these photographs which display:

“Police Notice, Parking reserved for Family Court only
By order of the Commissioner of Police”

This is outside the Family Court. This is a courthouse and the people operating inside are lawyers and magistrates. The law says that no parking signs put up by the police must stay more than three months; here outside the Family Court, all the magistrates and lawyers are in breach of the law itself. Those magistrates in the Family Court report to no one. In the normal system, you report; through the note takers there are risings and sittings; they report to no one; they go to work when they want. They have been given the best of everything and yet they cannot function in the manner they should.

I thank everyone for this time and for all of us participating in this debate. I trust the Prime Minister would look at what I said about that exemption in duty and let us try to get some schools built this year. I wish you the best of luck.

Dr. Rowley: Here, here, here; thanks for the motion.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Mr. Speaker, we have come to the end of five days of very intensive debate on the budget, Appropriation Bill for fiscal year 2006. I conclude this debate by thanking hon. Members on both sides of the House who contributed, in one way or the next, to the deliberations and wisdom that will emanate from this House, in respect of our fiscal measures and provisions for fiscal year 2006.

I assure hon. Members opposite, that I have taken very copious notes of all that has been said and nothing said has gone unnoticed. We have taken note of every issue they have raised. Even if I am unable to address them in my winding up, at this time, be assured that every issue is going to be examined on the basis of merit and we will treat with matters raised.

Mr. Speaker, inside and outside of this House, in some quarters, the sustainability of the fiscal measures have been drawn into question. Indeed, in one newspaper article, a lady in the street indicated that she proposes to save the moneys that will come to her, as a result of the tax concessions in the budget, to educate her teenaged daughter, because she does not believe that free tertiary
education in Trinidad and Tobago will be sustained. In a sense, she has basis for those fears, because in the 1970s and 1980s, there was free university education in Trinidad and Tobago but it was a government of which the hon. Member was an integral part and the hon. Member for Caroni East and, incidentally, the hon. Member for Siparia. [Interruption]

The Member for St. Joseph was an ambassador, at that time, and was also an integral part of the governance structure. In the face of difficult economic circumstances and an attitude on the part of the government of the day, that the poor people of this country, as a result of PNM governance, had become an integral part of what they described as a dependency syndrome, they proceeded unceremoniously to remove, not just free tertiary education from the measures of the then government, but proceeded unilaterally and, in some instances, unlawfully, to cut the salaries of public servants by 10 per cent and to remove the cost of living allowance.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it took a PNM Government seven years later to reintroduce free tertiary education in the way it had been introduced by the PNM in earlier times.

Having said that, let me indicate to this honourable House and to you, that it is with a measure of fondness that I recall the year 1992. In that year, the Government that I had the pleasure and honour to lead at that time took a decision to review the tax structure that governed operations in the petroleum sector.

Mr. Speaker, it came following the events in the Middle East of 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait and Kuwaiti oil was no longer available for export. The petroleum markets reacted nervously and the price skyrocketed, windfall profits began to accrue, the price at which oil from Trinidad and Tobago—and, incidentally, gas petroleum, because with the price of oil it attracts the price of the other.

The prices at which our domestic petroleum was supplied also escalated on international markets and the oil companies began to reap a windfall of revenues and profits as a consequence of no action that they had taken. No further increase in the cost of production had really reflected an export of the patrimony of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in circumstances in which revenues of that nature and the people of the host country have the first call on revenues of that nature.

Try as we may in this Parliament, we could not get the Minister of Finance of the day and the government of which he was a part to modify the income tax structure so the people of Trinidad and Tobago would get a fair share of the
revenues that now seemed to be accruing to the oil companies, not as a result of anything they had done; entirely without any additional effort and which represented nothing more than the exportation of the patrimony of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So we changed it and we had a more equitable system in place.

Mr. Speaker, there were two features of the tax structure of 1992 that are of significance to today’s deliberation. The first is that we attached to the tax structure, a provision that took into account instability in international petroleum markets, the possibility that oil prices could skyrocket as a result of nothing that the companies would have done, and they could be the beneficiaries of windfall profits without having to incur any further expenditure. In short, we sought to make provision for the situation that arose in 1990. That was the first feature.

The second feature of that tax structure was a work programme that went with it which committed the oil companies involved to an exploration programme, because as you know, Mr. Speaker, it is exploration. You have to conduct the exploration programme to make the discoveries which are then a basis of development drilling and work by the oil companies. So the exploration is critical.

In the absence of exploration, what happens is that your reserves to production ratio continue to go down and down and down. And incidentally—a much misunderstood statistic—reserve to production ratio goes down. So that in committing the oil companies to a work programme, what we sought to do was ensure that enough exploration work took place and on the basis of the success ratios existing at the time, there could be more discoveries of oil or gas, keeping our production levels up in both oil and gas as the case may be, and to ensure the sustainability of our revenues. What in fact we were doing was taking a step to protect the revenue position of Trinidad and Tobago; that was what we were doing.

In the normal course, countries would be wise or prudent to review their petroleum tax structure every three years or so and it would have followed a natural consequence had the PNM stayed in office beyond 1995, 1996 would have been the year for a further review of the tax structure.

Mr. Speaker, that did not take place because in 1995 the PNM lost the election and hon. Members opposite formed the Government of the day at that time with a set of priorities very different from those established by the PNM, and very different from the objective that we had set ourselves in terms of protecting our revenue base and, therefore, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the fiscal
measures that we would have put in place then and indeed are putting in place now. They did not do it in 1996, they did not do it in 1997, they did not do it in 1998, they did not do it in 1999, they did not do it in 2000, and neither did they do it in 2001. It took a PNM government 13 years later to come in and take the steps required to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago gets a fair share of the depletion of its most important—[Desk thumping]

They talk about the principle of retroactivity which we would deal with in a minute. Member for Caroni East, understand what we are saying. What I am saying is that once the year is passed, and the taxes are incurred and paid, you do not recoup it, so what the country would have lost in the 13-year interregnum is lost forever and the oil companies are then in a position to go internationally and boast about the profits they have made. What is worse is that Trinidad and Tobago is one of the most important profit centres of many of the oil companies. Why is that so? It is because of the Government that succeeded after 1995. So 13 years later, we found ourselves in very difficult negotiations.

Mr. Speaker, I think that you and this country ought to know that we concluded the negotiations to review the oil and gas price structure at 12.30 on the morning of September 28, the day on which the budget was presented and had we not concluded that, then we would not have been able to present to the national community the package of fiscal measures because the revenue base would not have been there. It was as close as that.

The negotiations were hard, and I want to take this opportunity, indeed as the Cabinet has done, to specially compliment our negotiating team headed by Prof. Ken Julien and also the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, Mrs. Allison Lewis. Particular commendation goes to the people from the Board of Inland Revenue, the very dedicated tax workers from the oil tax section of the Board of Inland Revenue who worked above and beyond the call of duty. Not only that, but who came up with very innovative approaches for Trinidad and Tobago to secure the country’s revenue base. [Desk thumping]

So impressed was the Cabinet that it took a decision that the public servants involved should be the subject of special commendation, and indeed, the Minister of Finance is going to hold at the appropriate time, a function at which they would be appropriately honoured. [Desk thumping] It is not every day that a Prime Minister can stand in a Parliament and talk like this about public servants. The public servants who worked on this matter are outstanding and can be compared to the best anywhere in the world. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker, the option of the negotiations was that we enhance the coffers of the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago in excess of $3 billion, which was what we were foregoing when hon. Members opposite failed to act by acts of omission. They did worse than that, but we would come to that in a moment. So today we have concluded the negotiation with one of the big companies, we are about to go to the next, and as has been the case in the past, not only did we take steps to get our fair share of the revenues, but we also associated with the arrangement and exploration programme that commits the oil company concerned to drilling one deep well per year for the next three years at a cost of some US $45 million per well.

Mr. Speaker, the geology of Trinidad and Tobago is very complex and all I would say is that bpTT now has a history and it understands the geology of this country much better than most companies, and we are confident that those exploration wells will not be dry holes. Let me put it differently. We are confident, especially as they are going to be testing—and not a theory which the technocrats call evaporative fractionation—that is to say that if you have a gas field, it is more than likely that below that field you have oil, that is the source from which the gas would have come. That is also being tested. That is why the wells are going to be deep wells, deeper than 21,000 feet, the deepest wells ever drilled in Trinidad and Tobago, and a test of which I spoke sometime ago is yet to be done. It has been delayed because of the market for steel and drill pipes in China. It has delayed the drilling of that well and it should take place sometime around the second quarter or so of next year. But we wait with great anticipation to what is likely to come out of that.

Now that the discussions are through with bp, we move to British Gas (BG) because British Gas has production-sharing contracts and we have already signalled to them that in the context of changed international circumstances, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would like to review these things to ensure that there is an equitable stake.

Mr. Speaker, if the situation had changed adverse to the companies, what they do is tell us they are hurting, as Texaco did in 1983/1984 which led to the State owning all of Texaco’s assets in 1985. If the companies are hurting, they come to you and say this is not working anymore, we are hurting, let us talk.

In the same way, if oil prices go up significantly for reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with the companies involved, then the Government will
say; well we assisted you in the bad times, now that times are good, let us talk to see if we could not have a more equitable—[Desk thumping] and the companies understand it.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the new arrangements are normally operational from the day discussions began, that is to say—and this is the principle of retroactivity that many people have condemned—it is the norm in the industries in Trinidad and Tobago. I have been associated with it for a long time. I have seen tax negotiations take place on a number of occasions, and if you start talking in 2003, then any arrangement at which you arrive is normally effective from the day that you start.

There are many complications because on this occasion it took us much longer than normal to come to an agreement because of the complex nature of the situation. It is extremely complex and those who are not associated with it would not fully understand it. It is extremely complex. It took us a long time. It took us so long that time elapsed during which companies had already published their annual reports for particular years.

If, therefore, we wanted to adhere to the principle that has been accepted in the industry, what it would have meant was companies having to redo already published reports which has an adverse implication for balance sheet and share price on the international market. In those circumstances, notwithstanding the fact that we had amended the oil legislation to allow for that, we understood the companies’ position. It is a symbiosis you know, so we entered into discussions with them to see whether we could not do it in a different way, prospectively rather than retrospectively, but essentially arriving at the same arrangement. And I am pleased to report to this honourable House that we were able to successfully conclude negotiations on that basis. [Desk thumping] We are protecting the revenue base, Mr. Speaker.

6.30 p.m.

Royalty is another issue that is very emotive. I listened to hon. Members opposite and I wonder if they understand what they are saying. Royalty is the rent that a company pays to the people of a country for depleting their natural environment. In principle and in taxation principles, you take royalty upfront. Before you think about profit, loss, operating costs, none of that is normally considered before the people who own the resource get a fair rent for it. That is royalty.

In terms of natural gas, the royalty that has been paid traditionally when natural gas was not the important commodity that it is today, in Trinidad and
Tobago it was one and a half TT cents per MCF per thousand cubic feet. That was the royalty. When we took the decision in 1992 to go the route of LNG, we knew that that royalty situation could not stay as it was, especially for export gas. Amoco was the company at the time. We made it clear that not one MCF of gas is going to be exported from this country until proper and more equitable royalty arrangements are put in place.

The companies accepted it. They did not like it but they accepted it, because in principle it was the right thing to do. We were negotiating Train 1. We did, in fact, negotiate Train 1 almost to completion. What was outstanding in respect of Train 1, more than anything else, was the concomitant arrangement in respect of natural gas royalty payments. That is what was outstanding.

So when the Government came in, in 1995, do you know what the companies did then? It is what we say in football, “playing the man and not the ball”. You hit him a body beat; you watch the man and you do not watch the ball and you fall for the beat; that is what happened to them. The companies studied them and the companies got a proper measure of that government. Therefore, what the companies did was this: They came to them and said: “Listen, time is running, if we do not do this, and that, this thing ‘ain’t go fly’; agree to this thing.” And they agreed and scuttled the carefully laid plan that the PNM had put in place to ensure that the country gets a fair share by way of royalty payments for the natural gas that is produced and exported. That is what happened. But it is not once that they did them that; they did them it twice. Do you know when was the second time? The farmland project.

They were a most gullible government, you know. It is not an industry for neophytes. The governance of a country is not a job for amateurs, nor is it a job for infants and people who operate on the basis of prejudice. If we had come into government with the attitude that they came in with, that everything they did was wrong, we would have made the same kinds of mistakes. We did no such thing. Do you know what they did them? Farmland, a new industrial estate in La Brea; we knew that the industrial estate was in the vicinity of the pitch lake; we know what the implications of that are; we are geologists. We have four geologists in this Government so we understand what it means. Therefore, we knew that caution had to be exercised in establishing the industrial estate and that there are certain parts of the industrial estate on which certain plants could not be put. We knew that.

Notwithstanding that, we went ahead with the estate because there were other parts of the estate, which were quite capable of taking plants of a processing
nature, of the plants that were contemplated. We did it because we knew that in La Brea you have the best deepwater harbour in all of Trinidad and Tobago. But it is a new industrial estate and to get companies to go to that industrial estate, we gave them a discount on the natural gas price, of 20 cents per thousand cubic feet. That was an incentive to go. The alternative was Point Lisas. Everybody wants to go to Point Lisas. The first plant to go, we gave that incentive so that we could open the estate and other plants would then follow under different terms and conditions.

Farmland did not like it. I remember Prof. Julian brought the farming people to me, as Prime Minister, and I told them in no uncertain terms that that plant goes in La Brea or it does not go. And they went to La Brea. But the minute we went out of government, understanding what those gentlemen were about and understanding that they were looking for anything to hold the PNM and to say the PNM did this and that wrong—they went to them.

What I would say now is that San Fernando is a small place. The Member for Oropouche knows that very well. You go to places in San Fernando and meet all kinds of people. I was in a position where I met some of the consultants and I know exactly what happened. If you are not accustomed to dealing with consultants, then you would not know. You could get consultants to tell you anything you want. The consultants knew what they wanted to hear and told them it, that is to say, that the industrial estate in La Brea was not fit for the Farmland Ammonia Production Plant. As a result of which, they were so anxious to say that the PNM misappropriated funds and spent money badly, they agreed with Farmland. They transferred the plant back to Point Lisas. They were the ones who talked about converting agricultural land to industrialization, and so on, and they put it one and a half miles to the north of the industrial estate—off the estate—in the swamp.

That is what they did, and they left the gas price exactly where it was. So the 20 cents incentive that we had given Farmland to go to La Brea, Farmland was now able to go back to Point Lisas and retain the 20 cents. They, therefore, found themselves in a special privileged position of having a 20-cent discount on their gas price over and above all the other plants in the area. That was not the end of it. They did not know at the time—because I cannot believe that they knew and did it—that for some of the other ammonia and methanol producers, there is something called a most-favoured nation clause, that is to say, that if you give me a certain price for gas and then somebody comes to you in the same industry—a competitor of mine—and you give him a price lower than mine, by this clause I
am automatically entitled to the price that he gets. Therefore, the 20 cents that Farmland got was not just a benefit for Farmland, we now had to go back and give it to all the other plants in the Point Lisas estate. And when you add it up, up to a year ago when we counted, the figure was $633 million. That is what we had foregone. As of now, it costs $700 million and counting.

It is a powerful case for consultation between Government and Opposition on energy policy, because they made the mistake before and somebody is going to come behind and make it again. It is not the first time that a government has made that mistake. Prior to that, in 1986, the Member for St. Augustine was the author of the NAR manifesto in many parts. There was an energy policy in it—

Hon. Member: Trevor Farrell wrote that.

Hon. P. Manning: It was Trevor Farrell? [Crosstalk] You see, in order to say something different from what the PNM said, they put out a manifesto in 1986 and said this: They condemned the PNM's tenacious holding on, as they put it, to mega projects; ammonia and methanol. They said that they would change the paradigm. They would now develop new sub-sectors in the petroleum industry that are not large plants—smaller sub-sectors—the viability of which, as they put it in the manifesto, is guaranteed on the basis of the domestic market. To say that in relation to the petroleum industry is to demonstrate that you do not understand the industry at all.

What is worse, they carried out the policy for three years. It took them three years to realize the mistake and then began to change it. So when we came back into government in 1991, it took us two years to reestablish Trinidad and Tobago on the international radarscope of the companies that invested in these industries because of what the Government that preceded us had done. This was the government of the Members for St. Augustine, Caroni East, St. Joseph and Siparia. They were all in it. And they come to the Parliament now and regale and telling us, we do this and we do that.

If ever—I would put it differently. Mr. Speaker, they so wanted to lock me up, they did three investigations into the La Brea Industrial Estate. Three times they questioned me, Malcolm Jones, Prof. Julien—three times—and if we had done anything wrong they would have locked us up. So you know why they did not lock us up? They did not lock us up because we did no wrong. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Rowley: I am afraid you cannot say the same for them.

Hon. P. Manning: It was necessary to go through it. In the face of that, what the companies did them with Train 1 was postpone the royalty payment to 2017.
The companies said, “Okay, let us agree”. They were agreeing to a 10 per cent royalty but in the year 2017. This is the year 2005. They did that in the year 1996. Do you know how much money that is? We come in now to find this situation and we said that is unacceptable; let us renegotiate.

Do you know what we were able to do? They brought forward the payments to a current date. Immediately in the year 2005, royalty is paid but not in cash, because if you pay it in cash, there is, what is called, a pass through clause, which means to say that the cost of it must be passed on to the consumer, and you are going to raise the gas price. We did not want that so we took it in kind. So in 2005, it is 50 million cubic feet a day; in 2006 it is 50 more and by 2008, when we are up to the full 10 per cent level with the royalty, 150 million cubic feet a day.

The Member for Caroni East said it was free gas. They can speak of it as disparagingly as they wish. It is that gas, now owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, which the Government is able to price at a level that guarantees the development of an aluminium industry. [Desk thumping] That is how it was done. And as we develop an aluminium industry, what, in fact, we are doing is securing the revenue base of Trinidad and Tobago. They want to know whether our fiscal measures are sustainable. They are, indeed, sustainable, as a result of all these things that we are doing.

I would take it further. In 1992, when we talked about LNG, there were those who said to us: “What is wrong with ‘all yuh’. You are exporting a natural resource without any value added. Do not do it.” We did it. Do you know why we did it? Because we understood the situation far better than they did, and it is the very LNG that today guarantees us of the revenue levels that we are anticipating. I would tell you something else, that the day the prices fall, whether it be gas prices or oil prices, a minimum level of revenue is guaranteed because of the volume of our exports. That is why we are going to Train 5. When we go to Train 5, it means that we would be exporting at LNG, 2.4 billion cubic feet of gas a day, enough volume even at low prices to guarantee you a certain minimum level of revenue. [Desk thumping] We are protecting the revenue base. That is what we are doing.

So it is not a job for neophytes and countries would pay dearly if those who have the responsibility to govern do not understand what they are doing. In 1981—1985, George Michael Chambers—I made the point sometime ago; I make it again. I had a visit recently from the President of the CAIC and he said that the manufacturing sector in Trinidad and Tobago today is internationally competitive and it has developed a capacity that is beyond the capacity of the region to
assimilate and, therefore, we have to go global. How did that come about? What made Trinidad and Tobago so competitive in relation to others? It was the forward-thinking policies of George Michael Chambers, the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister at the time, who, in the face of a collapse in the oil price market—$34 a barrel in 1981; it collapsed at $28, $27, and then $9 in 1986—still decided that he would give priority to the manufacturing sector; would give them a tax cut. Even when we were cutting back on subsidies and even when unemployment was rising as it was, to 17 per cent in 1986, from 9.8 per cent in 1980, George Chambers took the fateful decision that he would give a tax break to the manufacturing sector to allow them to retool, because that was an investment in the long-term sustainability of economic activity in Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, revenues. [Desk thumping]

6.45 p.m.

Today, the manufacturing sector is internationally competitive and the Trinidad and Tobago manufacturing sector is the most efficient in the region, growing last year at the rate of 9.5 per cent and 8.6 per cent projected for this year, 2005.

I am going through the whole argument so that people could understand. In the ‘70s, the argument was that we had to reduce our dependence on oil and the government of the day took the decision to diversify from oil, but in the energy sector. What was the figure in 1971? Oil production was about 129,000 barrels per day; the gas production in barrels of oil equivalent was about 51,000 barrels per day; a total of 180,000 barrels per day gas and oil. Do you know what it is today?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries placed on record our oil production as 146,000 barrels per day, projected for 2005, and gas production in barrels of oil equivalent per day, approximately 545,000 for a total of 690,000 oil equivalent in oil and gas production, as opposed to 1971. We now find ourselves in a situation where we are too dependent on natural gas. There is a disproportionate dependence on gas as opposed to oil which now leads us to diversify within the energy sector away from gas and oil. So successful has the PNM’s policy been of diversifying from oil and gas.

I have not worked out the figures but a ballpark figure seems to suggest that at a level of oil production of about 340,000 barrels per day we should have a balance in terms of revenue, as between oil and gas and that is the kind of balance
for which we strive. We are taking every step to further protect the country’s revenue base by seeing what has to be done to stimulate exploration activity around the country to ensure that our oil production goes up.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spoke about what is being done with the acreage on land. We took back a lease from Petrotrin. I want to tell the Member for Couva South who made reference to this in his contribution that we negotiated with Petrotrin. We did not unilaterally take it even though we had the authority to do that. We own the company. The Minister of Finance as Corporation Sole holds it in trust for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and therefore is authorized to summarily take it, even though we did not do that. We discussed with Petrotrin and on the basis of the agreement, Petrotrin was left with their core acreage and the rest was available for further invitations to other companies to explore and develop and that would happen very shortly.

While that was going on, the much maligned arrangement from Exxon involving Soldado is now coming to a head; the seismic work and the geotechnical studies have been done and they are now selecting their locations for exploration activity. Of a total production of 146,000 barrels a day, today, Soldado produces about 34,000. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has said that we will have two more lease sales next year, the third one and there would be four in all. It would be the north coast marine area; the ultra deep; it is land and the west coast Soldado field. That is the subject of exploration activity over the next few years, so we can keep our production up and ensure that our reserves to production ratio do not fall to unacceptable levels.

It might have been the Member for St. Augustine who talked about that. It is 19 years reserves to the production ration of gas. In Saudi Arabia it is 50 years and Iran/Iraq, 50, 60, 70 years. The mere fact that in Trinidad and Tobago it is 19 years—it is significantly lower than it is in other countries, yet Trinidad and Tobago can now boast of 10 ammonia plants; nine methanol plants and a host of other developments that is coming—suggests that there was something Trinidad and Tobago knew that other countries did not know. What we have been able to do on our small reserves is today a source of great commendation by the industry and is described as the Trinidad and Tobago model of development.

A minister of this Government who was in a symposium in Venezuela heard a Venezuelan technocrat said that they tried all kinds of models of development all over the world, but the most successful model they had not tried was right on their
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
Friday, October 07, 2005

[HON. P. MANNING]

doorstep and it is Trinidad and Tobago. A Venezuelan official said that in the presence of a Minister from Trinidad and Tobago. That is what they think about us on the outside.

Today, the Government is not fearful of its revenue base. As it now stands, we have been so successful in attracting investment in the energy sector based on oil and gas, that right now we have five plants that have been approved and awaiting gas. Memoranda of understanding have been signed and that is being negotiated. Three of them, gas to ammonia to urea to Urea Ammonia Nitrate (UAN) are in La Brea; one in Point Lisas and another plant in Point Lisas that would produce melamine in addition to that. We have MOU signed for two aluminium smelters and both are moving rapidly; one is by a consortium from the Western Hemisphere and the other by ALCOA with a production of 341,000 metric tons per year and the other one is half of that. We are moving as rapidly as we can to introduce in Trinidad and Tobago an aluminium industry which would complete the industrial base of the country together with plastics when it comes to ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago is indeed a modern industrial state.

All of them will pay taxes. Days ago I got a letter from the Indian company SR that is proposing a US $1.4 billion investment in steel. There is another one in respect of which a DRI plant is now being constructed and the smelter is to come. Together with that the upgrade of the Petrotrin refinery is about to begin, notwithstanding what was said by Members opposite. It will cost about US $500 million.

I took the time to go through all this so that hon. Members and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would understand that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has no fear about our future revenues. When we say that we will give you a tax concession that would result in approximately $900 on average in the pockets of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that is sustainable. If it were not sustainable we would not have done it. It is sustainable! When we say that from January 01, 2006, tertiary education is free to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, it is because we believe it to be sustainable.

Last Saturday, I was in Jamaica interfacing with the university officials and they were very pleased with the statement in the budget which said that in respect of the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago guarantees the authority that any space that will be available would be accessed by a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago at the expense of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It means that they can now proceed to expand the capacity of the university on a guarantee that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would take up all the spaces and that we will do.
Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking of the hon. Prime Minister 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. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. Members for their generosity in extending my time.

It is against such a secure and guaranteed base that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago now proceeds to address the basic needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Priority number one is crime and security. What have we done so far? We have amalgamated our intelligence capability under one agency that is very efficient. We have agreed to apply technology to the limit in the fight against crime and security. We are putting a radar system that is about 80 per cent operational at this stage. It is in!

We have agreed to buy offshore patrol vessels that could patrol the deep waters, our exclusive and to ensure that we have a better interdiction capability in respect of drugs. Three of them are to be purchased and the first to be delivered in about April 2007. Cabinet has now agreed to buy six fast patrol boats and we would go out to tender for those very shortly. We expect those to be delivered for the latest by the first quarter of 2007.

We had brought in Prof. Mastrofski and a complete training programme for the police service to ensure that our police officers have the expertise that is required to do the job that they are expected to do. We have committed the financial resources that are required to ensure that the police are properly equipped to do their jobs. We have entered into discussions with the new Chairman of the Police Service Commission to see what we can do in the context of existing constitutional realities to bring about a change in the way the police do their business.

The gaping hole in all that is the acknowledged need for reform of the police service. It is not for want of trying. We were in opposition in 1999. We approached the then government, the Prime Minister, the Attorney General and the Minister of National Security. My colleague for Arouca South and I sat and negotiated arrangements. When those discussions were completed it took us three years. I had to comment that of all the exercises in which I had been involved in my political career, that was the most fulfilling. It was a pleasure to see
Government and Opposition, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Basdeo Panday—it is a pleasure to see government and opposition sit and talk and discuss a matter of interest to the national community.

We agreed to work through a technical team headed by Sir Ellis Clarke. All that has been aired already in this Parliament. We also agreed on the eve of the election of 2001/2002, that whoever won the election would have the support of the other side. The work that was done was extremely well done. We used experts from the region and the United Kingdom and when the time came, just as they did with the Crowne Plaza Accord, we were unable to secure the support of hon. Members opposite, then, and up to this day. That is the gaping hole.

You will understand that it is with some measure of hope that I heard the comment of the Member for St. Augustine, the new political leader of the UNC. Perhaps, I should take the opportunity to congratulate him very sincerely; wish him well in the new exalted office that he holds and let him know that I accept his offer for discussions. As political leader of the PNM we will meet and talk; we will discuss as priority number one, crime and we hope that at the end of those discussions, we would be able to secure the support of hon. Members to bring about the passage of legislation which the entire national community believes is now necessary.

7.00 p.m.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, may I also say times are changing and that at the stage of development this country has reached, we are about to enter into a new phase of Government/Opposition relation. It must take place! [Desk thumping]

I also give hon. Members opposite the assurance—and I understand that you are going through a difficult period, I am not uninitiated in politics, but hopefully that, too, shall pass, but you still have a responsibility to provide a proper Opposition to Trinidad and Tobago—that we are prepared to talk with them in the interest of the people who elected us to serve them. [Desk thumping]

Priority No. 2, Mr. Speaker, is education—look at it! We have free universal primary and secondary education! To ensure that the nation's children benefit to the max from those two facilities, we have put in a programme to ensure that students have food to eat: lunch and breakfast.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to transportation, all those who require transportation, in most parts of the country, now have access to it.
We have given the nation’s children a Book Grant, which is now being replaced by the Book Rental Programme where we look after their books.

Mr. Speaker, these are three important adjuncts to the education system, which are now in place so that our students have no excuse for not taking advantage of the free universal primary and secondary education that is available to them.

They talk about the millennium goals. The millennium to 2010 at the UN, in terms of education, is universal primary education. Mr. Speaker, you know we have gone past primary and we have gone past secondary. In this budget we have taken it a step further with free tertiary education, not universal as yet, we hope that in due course we would get to that, nobody has achieved it, but we are working towards that. It means to say, Mr. Speaker, that a philosophy of the PNM that was extant from January 15, 1956 when the PNM was formed, we are now giving effect to that in a very tangible way; nobody must be denied access to education purely on the basis of their inability to pay. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, it is a pity that the Minister of Education did not have a chance to make her contribution but she will make it in the ‘Other Place’. When she makes that contribution, I am sure that she will spend some time to talk about universal pre-school education, a poverty eradication measure to which this Government has committed itself, by the year 2010. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, 600 pre-schools centres are required, 60 of them are to be constructed next year.

Last night the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education—it is the first time I have heard him in a comprehensive contribution to the Parliament—distinguished himself in articulating the Government’s policy in terms of science, technology and tertiary education: It is the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the University of the West Indies, COSTAATT, that will now provide training in medical skills; the Metal Industries Company will build facilities similar to the Laventille Technology Centre all over the country. We have a complete programme now and all that is required for us to put in place is the seamless transfer within the system from one stream to the next; it is all in place. Mr. Speaker, to educate is to emancipate and that is the PNM’s view. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, the time is short, electricity—all those plants I talked about just now, do you know what the option of that is? They all demand electricity. Today, the electricity generation capacity of the country is 1,034 megawatts. For the next five years with all of those plants that are likely to come on stream, the demand
for electricity will exceed the total electricity utilization in Trinidad and Tobago. Today, it is in the order of 1400 megawatts, including the one I did not mention, which is the complex for polypropylene which is the complex for gas-to-olefins, as it is called, the plastics industry. The per capita utilization of electricity in Trinidad and Tobago will put us in the top three in the world—a small country, in the top three in the world.

Meanwhile, we have taken a decision to impinge on the security that the nation feels by way of our electrification of the country. We have committed ourselves—as the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment has placed in the record, in a situation where today we have 7,000 streetlights in the country—to install over the next three years, 82,000 more new streetlights of an illumination of 150 watts, and to upgrade 36,000 existing streetlights from 70 watts to 150 watts. [Desk thumping] The total cost of that is TT $626 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Achilles heel at this time is water, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is going to address its attention to this matter. In fact, we are already doing it. Right now, only 26 per cent of our population gets water on a 24/7 basis—we are talking about the basic needs—but when the three-year plan of the Water and Sewerage Authority is through, at the cost of $1.2 billion, it will be 36 per cent. Mr. Speaker, we have a problem with water: the high amount of losses, the corroded pipes and the age of the pipes; the whole system has to be changed and to be able to do that, new management arrangements would have to be put in place in the water and sewerage sector. I say no more on that for the time being.

I refer now to housing. They talk about Certificate of Comfort squatting, Mr. Speaker, there is a change in Government’s policy. This Government does not believe in regularizing squatters, except in special circumstances. It is our experience that when you regularize squatters in place, what you, in fact, do is to institutionalize slums and we are, therefore, not too anxious to go that route at all. Instead, Mr. Speaker, we propose to construct houses and make them available to all citizens on terms and conditions that make the houses affordable. Just this week we sat with the Minister of Housing and technocrats from the NHA to discuss this matter—

Dr. Rowley: It is now the HDC.

Hon. P. Manning: I am sorry, now the HDC, Mr. Speaker, it is the Housing Development Corporation from October 01, 2005.

Mr. Partap: But you broke down a house in Pleasantville.
Hon. P. Manning: And more will go, Sir, I will explain that to you. [Interruption] It happened in my constituency and I will explain it to you! Mr. Speaker, 10,000 houses per year: 8,000 in the public sector and 2,000 in the private sector. The Minister of Housing has announced that this year we are going to build 8,000, which means we will be up to the anticipated level of housing production, which most people said was not possible. We are up to it in fiscal year 2006 and we will continue to do so until the backlog estimated at 100,000 is out of the way.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Hon. Prime Minister, could I ask you a question as a matter of clarification as you are dealing with housing?

Hon. P. Manning: Sure, my Lady.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I understand that the Prime Minister’s residence is to be demolished and a new residence constructed. I have looked at the Draft Estimates, under Development Programme and I would like, if you could kindly tell us—because under Head: 43 the Ministry of Works and Transport is supposed to build the Prime Minister’s residence. Prime Minister’s Residence, Item: 246, $100,000 is allocated and I understand this is to cost $100 million, so perhaps you could let us know. Is the money budgeted? Is it anywhere in the Estimates?

Hon. P. Manning: Well, Mr. Speaker, it would not come from the Entertainment Vote, or the Publicity Vote, for that matter. [Laughter] Mr. Speaker, we have put in place, as you know, a number of special purpose state enterprises—I will come to that in a minute—and all of them are to be funded from the Infrastructure Development Fund.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: It is nowhere in the Estimates?

Hon. P. Manning: Not in the way you would like to see it, but it is there, we will discuss it and it will be funded from the Infrastructure Development Fund. [Interruption] You could call it what you want, it has the approval of Parliament and all expenditure, as you know, which comes from the Consolidated Fund, must be approved by Parliament. So we are moving fast in housing.

With respect to food prices, Mr. Speaker, I have not seen a government deal with food prices in the way we have dealt with food prices for a long time. Quite apart from the items that are going to be the subject of a reduced level of excise duty, we are putting in place a system next year to use the Smart Card, which has been announced in the budget. But over and above that, the Government proposes to engage, together with the private sector, in bulk importation and distribution in
the national community to ensure that there is no undue profiteering and that essential food items are available to the population at the lowest possible price; it is very innovative.

There are two more things I need to say before I take my seat—there are many more that I could say—but let me deal with these two. The first is a very innovative proposal in the health sector that we have from Johns Hopkins University. Johns Hopkins Medicine, as it is called, is one of the leading medical institutions in the United States of America. They run a hospital and a medical school, which they refer to as an Academic Medical Centre. Incidentally, the hospital has been No. 1 in the United States of America for the last 15 consecutive years and the medical school is No. 2, second only to Harvard Medical School, which has been No. 1 for the last 14 years. Johns Hopkins Medical has accounted so far, for 31 Nobel Prize winners.

Mr. Speaker, they came to Trinidad and Tobago and have been having talks with the Government, and they have been invited to submit a proposal to the Government along the following lines:

- The establishment of a joint team between Johns Hopkins Medical and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to develop a plan for a new hospital as part of an academic medical institution, adopting the North American model of education as opposed to the British model at UWI, but recognizing the ongoing work in several specialty areas now being undertaken by the Ministry of Health and the Faculty of Medicine at the University of the West Indies.

What that means, Mr. Speaker, is that on the site recently acquired by UDecott, the block south of Memorial Park, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is contemplating the construction of a new teaching hospital to replace the Port of Spain General Hospital, in collaboration with the Johns Hopkins Medical Centre. You will hear more about it in due course.

Mr. Speaker, the second element of the proposal is:

- The development of a plan that will lead to the introduction of a more efficient management structure and an introduction of systems that will enhance the delivery of services and patient care at the San Fernando General Hospital.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker:

- The establishment of additional specialty programmes, in particular, two areas have been identified, which I would not like to mention at this time.
Fourthly, Mr. Speaker:

- Development of institutes of research in the area of clinical research and herbal studies.

Mr. Speaker, excellence is what we are subscribing to and in partnering with Johns Hopkins Medical, we are going with one of the premier medical and tertiary education institutions in the world in medicine, as a tangible demonstration of our commitment to excellence, seeking to provide in due course, excellence in terms of medical facilities for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago: medical research and excellence in one or two other areas in health.

7.15 p.m.

The second issue that I want to address before taking my seat is art and culture. When we announced the Academy for the Performing Arts, the comment from informed sources was that they had heard all that before. What is new on this occasion is that we have the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago and the Academy for the Performing Arts now being designed under the auspices of the University of Trinidad and Tobago at the same time. The Carnival Centre, which replaces the Grand Stand at the Queen's Park Savannah, is also being designed and next week we shall have a presentation on both of them. The designs are far enough advanced that the Cabinet will have a presentation on both of them. It is certain, barring unforeseen circumstances, that construction on both facilities will begin in fiscal year 2006. I am very proud of that.

The final point I want to raise is the concern that has been expressed by sections of the national community about our ability to implement the measures of the budget. Much has been said about the special purpose state enterprises, but I do not know that hon. Members opposite fully understand what might be involved in that. For some time now it has been clear to us that the public service is an administration and not an executing agency. “It was designed in colonial times”, others have said. The mistake we have made is that we have been asking the public service to execute in circumstances where it is not geared to do that. What Government has now decided, because it is not novel, you know, other countries in similar circumstances have done certain things and we are merely replicating the very successful model that has been implemented in so many other countries of the world.

We have gone the route of the special purpose state enterprise, National Infrastructure Development Company, a new one to deal with the big infrastructure projects; the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (RuDeCott),
to do rural development exclusively, a new one; Education Facilities Company Limited—the Member for Siparia is here—by that mechanism you will see what the implementation will be in the next fiscal year, that is the third one, that is new; the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited is new; it is the forerunner to the Academy for Sports, that is new. The Community Improvement Services Limited has the responsibility of developing communities all over Trinidad and Tobago, but in the face of RUDeCOTT, at this time, will be restricted to urban Trinidad and Tobago. That is the fifth new one.

We also have the Palo Seco Agriculture Enterprises Limited (PSAEL), which is not new, but which will now be given a new mandate, will also do exactly what RUDeCOTT and CISL is doing, but will do so in the Western Peninsula and in the south east of the country where it has capacity.

The National Insurance Property Development Company (NIPDEC) is not new, but it will be responsible for the health sector and national security—police stations and so on. Evolving TecKnologies and Enterprises Development Limited (eTecK), which is the company at Wallerfield, will be responsible for community centres. The National Energy Corporation (NEC) is not new, but they will be doing some of the facilities, also the National Gas Company.

The Tourism Development Company is a new one in the tourism sector; the National Commission for Self Help is not new, but has a new mandate and funding arrangement. The Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited (EMBDC) will deal with state lands, especially the lands handed over by Caroni (1975) Limited; and, of course, UdeCott, the very successful model on which all the other companies is predicated.

Mr. Speaker, this Parliament will do well to take some time to examine the company UDeCott to see how well it has been doing. It has been doing extremely well. It has succeeded in speeding up our rate of development, and now that we are about to go on a 24/7 basis for construction on big projects, you will see an even faster rate of implementation beginning in fiscal year 2006, so that the Government really has no fear.

I would have liked to deal with some of these matters at much greater length but time does not permit it. However, the Parliament has two more years to go in the normal course, barring unforeseen circumstances, and from here on in Ministers of the Government would be utilizing, to a much greater extent, the item on the Order Paper, “Statements by Ministers”, to enunciate Government policy.
So much has taken place and so much is taking place that, in a debate of this nature, it is not possible to be exhaustive in the things that the Government is doing. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was at pains and left out in his contribution so many important policy positions that we are taking because so much is being done. We, therefore, will use, to a far greater extent, “Statements by Ministers”.

I want to reiterate that the Government sees the Opposition as an essential part of the country’s democracy. We believe that we are entering into a new phase of relations between Government and Opposition in the interest of national development. We are aware that changes are taking place in the Opposition party. We look at these things from a safe distance. Do not interfere in their business, Mr. Speaker! Of course, they are of concern to us because they are part of the country’s Parliament. I can only hope that under the new arrangements that have emerged among hon. Members Opposite, we will see, in Trinidad and Tobago, not just greater collaboration between Government and Opposition, but by that mechanism, the dawn of a new day.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Mr. P. Manning: I beg to move that the House doth now resolve itself into Committee to consider the Appropriation Bill clause by clause, as well as the Estimates.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House will now go into Finance Committee and I must ask all strangers to leave the Chamber until the end of Finance Committee.

Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.

7.22 p.m.: House resolved itself into Finance Committee.

7.39 p.m.: House resumed after Finance Committee.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, if I may—to the hon. Prime Minister. Can I please crave your indulgence for one moment? Each year we get these books which are very bulky. You may have seen this week that history was made when the technology was used to have a court case using teleconference from Port
of Spain to San Fernando. I am asking if we can use the technology on the information in your hard copies, if in your next budget, if you are still there, that you provide CDs with the estimates. They do it like that in the Ministry in any case and then send it out to print. These are very bulky and they take up a lot of space; it would be easier to work with, please, if you can consider that.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure the Member for Siparia that we will consider the proposal and to further assure her that I will be here. I am not so sure that if we introduce it that she will be able to benefit from it. I do know not if she will there.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: We shall see.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday, October 17, 2005 at 1.30 p.m.

I want to inform my colleagues opposite that on that day the Government plans to debate the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order and the Excise Duty Order; those orders arising out of the budget. As you know, there is a time limit to have those matters legislated.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.43 p.m.