HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Friday, August 24, 2007

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

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

MEDICAL BOARD (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Medical Board Act, Chap. 29:50, brought from the Senate. [The Minister of Health]; read the first time.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual audited financial statements of Trinidad Nitrogen Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2006. [The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)]

To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.


JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

DEOXYRIBONUCLEIC ACID (DNA) BILL

(Presentation)

Dr. Adesh Nanan (Tabaquite): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Bill, 2006.

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [August 20, 2007]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.
Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (Siparia): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. After five and a half years of PNM governance, our country is precariously perched on the edge of an abyss of social and economic disaster. This Government has received the highest revenue levels in our nation's history and they have also spent more than any other government in our nation's history. They have spent more than $200,000 million at a rate of about $1 million per day. But our citizens are worse off today than they were five and a half years ago.

This Government has consistently failed to deal with the critical problems facing our country and facing our citizens. So that after five and a half years of mismanagement, incompetence and dereliction of duty, today we witness the following: a substantial number of our citizens live in poverty and destitution whilst Government Ministers and their friends and family are smiling all the way to the bank.

A large portion of our workforce has been humiliatingly reduced to being the working poor. The business sector has expressed a lack of confidence in the local business environment and is forced to compete on an uneven playing field. Worst of all, food prices continue to skyrocket at double-digit inflation rates, in spite of all Government's bleating and schemes about lowering food prices.

The cost of housing is increasingly prohibitive as building materials and labour costs continue to soar. Citizens continue to live in fear of being raped, of being robbed, of being murdered, as crime continues unabated in spite of Government's A to Z of crime plans; from Anaconda to Zero Tolerance, accompanied by limping blimps.

The education system continues to fail our children in spite of the billions squandered therein. Our health sector is in crisis with citizens unable to access basic health care. Our roads are congested and crammed, resulting in hours of traffic gridlock and loss of productive man-hours; indeed this very day for those making their way to the Parliament, we spent hours in gridlock, in traffic, on the highways, getting into Port of Spain.

More than 70 per cent of households do not have an adequate supply of water, whilst WASA has spent over $8.5 billion in the five and a half years. Power outages are the order of the day as electrical resources are stretched by demand. Indeed, right here in the Parliament, during the last two sittings, budget day notwithstanding, we experienced power cuts.

Flooding continues to be a common occurrence resulting in substantial property damage annually, because of poor drainage and watercourse maintenance, yet farmers
get 49 cents and 50 cents and $100 compensation for crop damage. The economy continues to be polarized with increased dependence on the energy sector and a widening non-oil fiscal deficit, in the face of volatile output and prices in the energy sector.

Our agricultural sector continues to contract as farmers are forced out of the sector because of Government's neglect. High inflation caused by Government's excessive spending has resulted in higher borrowing costs. The environment is under serious threat from proposed Government projects.

The administration of justice has been severely brutalized and compromised. The country is perceived as being increasingly corrupt according to the international indicators. Instead of institutional strengthening in the public sector, institutional weakening and destruction is the modus operandi of this Government.

These are the problems affecting the standard of living of our citizens and the quality and substance of our lives. A responsible and caring government would have addressed these priority issues in his budget. Instead, what did we see? What did we hear? The 2008 Budget is nothing more than a feeble, lackluster political attempt to deflect public pressure for the Prime Minister's constant failure to deal with people's issues. And so I ask, Mr. Speaker, where is the love? Where is the love, hon. Prime Minister? Where is the love? I need to remind you, as the song says, "that people cannot make love on hungry belly". [Desk thumping] So when you tell us this is a love thing, I ask, where is the love?

The Prime Minister does not understand that a country and its people progress only through sustained programmes for development and prosperity. Such programmes must provide every citizen with a sense of security and well-being, with equality of treatment, equality of opportunity to benefit from the exploitation and development of the country's resources.

The Prime Minister does not understand or does not want to understand that a country cannot develop with a burst of feverish frenetic activity, predicated on broken promises in the closing weeks of the life of a government. It is a gross insult therefore, to the intelligence of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, for the Prime Minister to try to deceive us in what I term his swansong budget statement, with reruns of broken promises, of airy-fairy projects and grandiose plans in the dying weeks of his tenure as Prime Minister. [Desk thumping]

It is a gross insult to the intelligence of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to find Ministers obscenely falling over each other in the last weeks of their life in government, repeating their broken promises to provide water, roads, transport,
housing, health care, education, schools, police stations, affordable food, agriculture and everything under the sun, including national security.

It is a gross insult to the intelligence of the people for the Prime Minister to present, yet again, a series of rehashed promises, inadequate prescriptions and an abundance of deliberate misleading statements and embellishments of the truth.

In these circumstances, hon. Speaker, I call on all right-thinking citizens to reject these contemptuous and futile attempts, at pre-election pacification, in the face of the reality that this Government has become irrevocably brutal, reckless and irresponsible, and is guilty of perpetrating the most heinous, abusive and offensive assaults on the lives and livelihoods of our citizens. [Desk thumping]

Today, therefore, I make no recommendations to this Government. We all know they know not what to do, they know not what they do, nor do they listen. They have stuffed up their ears so they do not hear the cries of the people; of the fathers; of the mothers and the children of our nation. So, I warn them in the words of Proverbs 21:13: "If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered".

So, today I make no recommendations to the Government; we have done that before. Instead, in our contributions today, as I lead off, we intend to highlight the critical issues of the day and the failure of the Prime Minister and his Government to address them. Further, as the alternative government, I intend to share with you some of the measures the UNC Alliance will pursue to take our country and our people forward when we form the next government. [Desk thumping]

Last year, Mr. Speaker, in my budget contribution, as we looked at the macro-economy, I had warned that this Government has lost its way; that it was mismanaging our finances; that it did not care about the people of the nation. I say now, having lost its way, the Government became confused, and in their confusion, they have become increasingly reckless and irresponsible, so much so that there is no hope or salvation for them.

This recklessness and irresponsibility is manifested in the fact that in a time of excess demand, in an inflationary environment, the Prime Minister has expanded budgeted expenditure by $3,000 million over last year. Such excessive expenditure comes at a time of shortage and structural constraints and represents the height of irresponsibility to the citizenry.

Government's presence in the competitive marketplace has already had a significant effect on both price and availability of resources. And so the proposed
substantial injection will further entrench Government's position at the expense of the other players in the country, including the business community.

The stage will be wheeling the might of the Government cheque book, in direct competition with the cheque book of the ordinary citizen and in direct competition with the business community in order to access resources. This exposes the definite potential for displacement of the business community, who are being forced to compete on an uneven playing field.

10.15 a.m.

Further, with excessive Government expenditure over the years, it is no surprise that people are finding it difficult to source contractors, to source workers to build or repair homes or to obtain the basic building materials such as cement and blocks. Worst of all, Government's massive building programme has drastically forced up the price of building inputs over the last three years. So that excessive expenditure, that injection in the system is causing, first of all, the difficulty in sourcing materials and labour; and secondly, is pushing prices up and up and up. So this is, in my view, an inflationary budget just as the one last year.

In last year's contribution, I predicted that Government's inept management of its fiscal package would have resulted in double digit inflation. It is now history that mere weeks after my words, the inflation rate did climb to double digit, to 10 per cent. They did not listen then, Mr. Speaker; I hope they listen now. Once more, the country will have to brace itself for double digit inflation and there is every indication that if the proposed injections are applied as scheduled, we may get to double digit inflation before the end of the year just as happened last year. Double digit or any inflation would mean a double blow to the consumer. The first blow is that people will now have to pay higher prices, even higher prices for goods and services, especially food. The Prime Minister has increased the minimum wage by 10 per cent, but if inflation grows also by 10 per cent, there will be no real increase in the minimum wage.

The Prime Minister has increased old age pensions, disability grants and given lump sums to public employees, but how callous, how uncaring, how irresponsible, indeed how reckless of the Prime Minister to give to the poor on the one hand, to give to the elderly, to give to the disabled in a very direct, highly public manner, and then, to come like a thief in the night with the other hand, when they go to buy their food, when they go to buy medicine and the milk and all that they need, to rob them of that benefit. This is what inflation will do and it is Government’s induced inflation. As
Trini would say, the Prime Minister would get a “cattleboil” because he is giving and he is taking back.

Three months ago, in this very Chamber, I presented an analysis to prove that CEPEP workers, persons on fixed incomes as pensioners, those on disability grants and those working for minimum wages were part of the working poor, they were condemned to poverty by this Government. I indicated then that a realistic minimum wage would be in the vicinity of $16 per hour in terms of what the cost of living is. I proved then that the minimum pension should be in the vicinity of $3,000 per month to keep the elderly above poverty levels. The same $3,000 should be applied to disability grants and so to come now and offer a paltry $1 increase in the minimum wage is an insult to our workers. It does not even cover the hike in the cost of living caused by past inflation, induced by Government's profligate spending. To offer a pension of merely half of what is calculated to be needed is an insult to our elderly.

Mr. Speaker, it is instructive to remember that while the Prime Minister was refusing our request repeatedly for a higher minimum wage, for a more realistic pension, he increased his own salary, income, three times, effectively doubling his salary since he became Prime Minister. It is even more instructive to note that whilst the poor and elderly are offered these paltry sums of $1 and $300, he wants $100,000 per plate for people to have conversations with him; and to sit with the mighty emperor to eat and drink, $100,000 per plate. If the Prime Minister would tell the truth, he would also accept that the $1 increase in an environment where the price of food has doubled, would do nothing to improve the workers’ lives and he knows that. He would admit to knowing that the increased pension and disability grant is not enough for the elderly and the disabled, it forces them into poverty. And so I ask again, where is the love; where is the care?

Mr. Speaker, the 2008 Budget, I repeat, is an inflationary one. While the Central Bank has been able to intervene positively to control in some measure, the rapid escalation in prices, it appears that Government is determined to pursue a second attempt to undo the work of the Central Bank, as the fire fight between Government's fiscal profligacy and the Central Bank's monetary policy will continue to the detriment of the ordinary citizen. The bank will then have to introduce massive interventions to absorb the additional liquidity, to sell more bonds and/or to increase the reserve requirement, and even so, it will still have difficulty in controlling inflation.
I commiserate with the Central Bank Governor because now, in addition to having to pay higher prices for goods and services, particularly food, people will now find it more expensive to borrow money as liquidity control mechanisms will push the interest rates up. The people who will be most affected by the increase in interest rates will be those holding mortgages with floating interest rates. These are the majority of mortgages, Mr. Speaker, as you may well know from your own practice within the law, that the mortgages are all with floating rates, flexible rates and so those who will be hardest hit will be persons with mortgages, with floating rates of interest and also new borrowers, all those who are intending to go out there and purchase a new home, that these interest rates are being pushed up.

The business sector will also be adversely affected as increased interest rates are translated to increased financing charges, increased overdraft costs, leading to a further decline in competitiveness. Because these are all passed on costs to the consumer—the businessman himself does not keep that cost, they pass it on to the consumer—the consumer will be subjected to yet another round of price increases. The combined effect of the new round of Government induced inflation, contained in the proposed budget and the Central Bank’s response to it, will negate the material benefit to be derived from something that in principle is very good, which is the proposed increase in the depreciation allowance, for plant and machinery, but that would be negated with what is happening in terms of the inflation. And so we will go one step forward, but we will also go one step backwards. We will be like Alice in Wonderland: we are running away very fast, but staying in the same place. So, Mr. Speaker, the problem will not easily go away.

The Minister of Finance in his presentation on Monday reveals in my respectful view his ignorance of economics and production management when he condescendingly chastised those who questioned Government's spending, saying such criticism is based on spurious indicators of absorptive capacity. Mr. Speaker, that was unkind. That was very unkind also. I found it shocking that the custodian of our financial resources was ignorant of the fact that there is a limit to how much we can spend efficiently as a country. The notion of absorptive capacity is the key to understanding why our economy is where it is, and as a result, informs policy decision in determining operating and production levels. Simply put, absorptive capacity refers to the ability to transfer inputs into outputs without waste or minimal waste.

Each plant manager knows the capacity of his plant. He knows how much output he can produce using the materials and equipment at his disposal over a given shift,
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[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

that is his plants’ capacity. If we apply the concept to the economy, we will observe as follows: In 2000, the national budget was $13 billion. In 2008, that figure increased by some 300 per cent to $42.2 billion, I believe.

Mr. Manning: What?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: $13 billion.

Mr. Manning: 13?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thirteen, yes Sir. During that period—that is from 2002 to 2007, 2008—however, the capacity of Government to discharge its function did not increase by 300 per cent. Over the past seven years, the ability of Government to implement projects has not increased by 300 per cent. In fact, it would be safe to say that over the past seven years the capacity of the Government to discharge its functions remains basically unchanged. So in 2000 for example, when the budgeted expenditure was $13 billion, inflation was not an issue of concern.

In 2002, when that Government came into office, again, there was no inflation problem. In 2003, again, no concern over inflation. You may well ask why, Mr. Speaker? And it is simple; the answer is very simple. There was no inflationary spike, despite the injection of over $60 billion between 2000 and 2003 because there existed at that time tremendous excess capacity in the country.

You see, when the PNM was voted out of office in 1995, the UNC was confronted by an economy that was staggering to recover from a protracted and severe depression. That had resulted in huge amounts of idle capacity and capital availability in both the private and the public sectors. We recognized this and we began a programme of sustainable growth aiming at full capacity in 2005. History records that we were cheated out of office before we got there.

However, in 2005, it was this very PNM Government, budgeted at $27 billion, that was fine, they had no problem then, but it is when they exceeded that mark by supplementary appropriation, they crossed to $30 billion in government expenditure, inflation became a problem for the first time in this country since 1982. They crossed over the $30 billion mark because of the supplemental appropriation and that is when inflation became a problem since 1982.

That $30 billion represented the watershed level, demonstrating that the economy had reached optimum level; we could efficiently do no more. If this had happened under UNC Alliance government, you could be certain that we would have scaled
back operations, so that there would be no pressure on prices and lending. The PNM, on the other hand, was unwilling to curb its lavish expenditure patterns. And you know, the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central is talking about a first year economics student will say that. Mr. Speaker, I say a CXC, Principles of Business student would have predicted the result. Where you have too much money, chasing too few goods what is going to happen? The price will always increase and that is what happened.

And so the PNM squandermania continued and continues and inflationary pressure continues. Prices will continue to rise as long as Government fails to appreciate that they have reached the limit of absorptive capacity. So that when the Prime Minister gloats that we are where we are because of the PNM, he is speaking the truth. The national crisis of high prices, the resultant societal pandemic of poverty, the associated ills of crime and breakdown of family structure, these were caused solely by the PNM Government. [Desk thumping] So, he is right, we are where we are because of the PNM.

What is the position of the UNC Alliance? It is our view that Trinidad and Tobago must never have an inflation rate greater than that of our trading partners and this is estimated at 4 per cent. Given our understanding of absorptive capacity, and our intention that citizens get value for money and our desire to ensure those more vulnerable in the country will have more real incomes, a UNC Alliance government will determine what the country can efficiently spend and we will commit to ensure efficiency of resources across the board. This will obviously impact on the level of national savings and it is to national saving I now turn.

The UNC Alliance’s view on saving is similarly straightforward. Having determined what the nation can efficiently spend, we will place the rest in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and thereby build up a balance so that by the year 2020, it will not matter, it would be immaterial whether Trinidad and Tobago has exploitable levels of hydrocarbons because in that fund would be a buffer. You would recall of course, that the HSF is a product of UNC foresight, UNC initiative, UNC creativity and commitment to the welfare of all our people. It was the UNC that formalized the HSF.

This fund must ideally generate a level of returns equal to the amount of revenue we receive from the oil and gas sector. And so given today's situation, our intention is to build this fund to such an extent that if today we are collecting $15 billion from oil and gas, 30 years from today, we should collect at least the same amount from the HSF, from that fund. In the interim, what do we do? We
must be bent on saving, saving, saving, until we have reached a level where we can be confident, where we do not necessarily need natural resources for economic subsistence. This position is one that we hold firm. We are of the view that it is not okay to gamble with the future of the nation.

Quite frankly, I find it ironic that the Prime Minister, who is chastising the poor man for gambling in Play Whe with $1 of his own money, thinks nothing of gambling away $3,500 million of our money directly or via tax concessions for oil and gas exploration in the hope that he might get lucky. That, in my respectful view, is hypocritical and deceitful. The Prime Minister claims to be anti-gambling, but he is gambling with our lives. He is the biggest gambler and casa man in Trinidad and Tobago.

10.30 a.m.

The UNC Alliance pledges that we will not gamble with the nation and our future; we are cautious, conservative and careful. That is how we will show that we care; that is how we will show our love.

As we turn to the energy sector, it is very important to note that there can be no argument that today it represents the engine of growth of the Trinidad and Tobago economy. At present, 43 per cent of annual gross domestic product (GDP) originates in that sector although it employs a mere 5 per cent of the labour force. The UNC Alliance has long expressed concerns about the absolute dependence of the Government on the energy sector as a whole and the concomitant failure to develop other sectors of the economy. Further, we have advocated restraint and a carefully managed monetization of our resources so as to ensure a constant stream of income over a long period of time; neither has been forthcoming.

What has become most prevalent, however, has been the high level of secrecy regarding the contents of the memoranda of understanding to which the Government commits. This has led to allegations of collusion and concerns about the abuse of our national patrimony. Government has assiduously ignored its obligation to account for the use of the nation's resources by refusing to provide information on the price of gas committed to Alcoa and other downstream users. We are told that this is confidential, top secret and cannot be revealed.

The revelation of excerpts of the Ryder Scott gas audit has put the issue back on the front burner. It has highlighted the clandestine manner in which this Government has been operating. The Minister of Energy and Energy Resources initially promised to lay the report in Parliament; just like the other promises, to date they have not laid the report in the Parliament.
Further, while the Prime Minister insists that we take his word that gas will be found when it is required, his assurances ring very hollow in the absence of any supporting technical evidence. How and when we utilize our diminishing and increasingly valuable reserves, at least that part over which our Government has some control, is of critical importance to our intergenerational well-being. The exposure of the damning finds of the audit prompted a panic response from the Prime Minister who immediately announced the budget date so that he could declare incentives for hydrocarbon exploration, even while he protests that there is no problem. He comes within this budget to announce all the concessions for people to go out there and gamble with our moneys in order to find more resources.

The UNC Alliance calls for the immediate publication of the full contents of the Ryder Scott Report. [Desk thumping] We call for full publication immediately of the Ryder Scott Report. What was leaked is out there. We need to note that no one knows what other damning disclosures may lie in that report. So whilst the Prime Minister said that we should not believe it, whilst he said that the people are wrong, if that was so, why does he not make it public? What do you have to hide in the report? [Desk thumping] Lay the report; show us what is in the report. If as you said the people are wrong and that you hired them some time in the past, why did you pay all this money to hire them again?

**Hon. Members:** We never said that!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** It makes no sense, and so the Prime Minister continues in his mad rush to gas based industrialization. [Crosstalk]

**Dr. Rowley:** Propaganda!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** In flagrant defiance of the findings of the experts, confident only in the visions of his prophetess that there will more oil and gas to be found. We put no trust and faith in false prophets. The fact of the matter is that no gas has been found in this country in the last two years. The Ryder Scott Report further revealed that our proven, probable and possible reserves have all dropped. They have all said that. The refusal of the Prime Minister to temper his industrialization programme, to desist from committing this country to additional projects until and unless additional resources are found, flies in the face of common sense, especially when one considers that already projects committed by this Government are in danger of becoming gas strapped based on the existing level of proven gas reserves.

The arrogance of the Prime Minister in believing that he could generate a sense of comfort by assuring citizens that he, Prime Minister Manning, has said that there was
sufficient gas, therefore, it must be so; we must believe him, despite the fact that the evidence is 100 per cent against him. This God syndrome in my view is exceedingly and extremely frightening.

If present trends continue, the nation is likely to be confronted very soon with a reduced revenue stream. This in turn will prompt a reduction in Government expenditure. I do not want to be a doomsday messenger, but these are the facts. When you look at the statements put forward by the various chambers and experts, this may come sooner than we think.

When the oil and gas run out, the Government Vision 2020 will be dog-eat-dog. We have been there, we have seen that and we have done that when the oil ran out with the price shocks in the last syndrome, in the last incarnation of the PNM Government.

Mr. Manning: When did the oil run out?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: We can have two kinds of shocks: output shocks and price shocks. On the last occasion it was the price shocks; prices fell. We faced in this country a crisis; we went into depression and hardship. What is looming in front of us now: We have the volatile prices, so we could go into price shocks anytime, but we also have added to that, based on the findings of the Ryder Scott Report and other experts, the very real possibility of output shocks. Already they are saying that the proven, the probable and the possible reserves have all dropped in that report.

It may come sooner than you think, given the five gas based projects that Government has to come on stream in the short term, and there are about another six projects that Government has been touting of late. I am talking about the mad rush to monetize gas; the mad rush into these gas-based industries, in the face of a situation where there is a real possibility of both output shocks and price shocks in the sector.

What is our position in the UNC Alliance? We will slow down the exploitation of finite resources. These are not resources that grow like tomatoes or mangoes on a tree. They are finite resources that cannot be renewed, and when they are done, they are finished; therefore, we will have to slow down exploitation of these non-renewable resources.

A UNC Alliance government will put new projects on hold until proven reserves can be located to support the additional demand. We will develop a clear programme of monetizing, based on true consultation with stakeholders. [Desk thumping] We do
not have to reinvent the wheel. We have seen in other jurisdictions, in other countries what they have done. We will look, for example, at the Dubai model. Dubai recognizes the potential for severe consequences as a result of the exposure to an output shock, as a result of diminishing returns in their oil economy and gas audit. Because of what they saw in their gas audit, they proceeded to build up their savings stock and they also started to activate non-oil sectors.

We have seen this Government is determined, hell-bent on putting all our eggs in the basket of the energy sector, while every other sector has been deteriorating over the past five and a half years. If we go into manufacturing, contribution to GDP has fallen; if we go into agriculture or tourism, in every sector, we are putting all our eggs into the basket of the energy sector. Let us learn from what has happened elsewhere.

A UNC Alliance government will increase the rate at which we convert our energy into foreign exchange to be saved in our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund (HSF), and we will develop other sectors of the economy, while we continue exploration in a planned and structured manner. We must plan it; we must not go out there in a mad rush, in a haste to monetize our resources, without having it done in a planned and structured way. As you may discern, our economic philosophy is diametrically opposite to that of the Government. The country is looking for an issue to take a stand on. The UNC Alliance holds the view that the country has gotten a second chance; that God has been kind to us; he has forgiven us for allowing the PNM back into office. The good book says that God provides and helps those who help themselves.

Mr. Manning: What part of the book says that?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: God has already provided. Our present and future depends on we use what he has given us. The Prime Minister professes to be a pious man, yet he seems to have learned nothing from the scriptures. I want to remind him of Proverbs 21:20:

"In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but the foolish man devours all he has." [Desk thumping]

Whilst you are hell-bent on monetizing our resources, you are not putting away and storing up choice food and oil. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Instead, this Government is hell-bent on devouring it all now. The Prime Minister spent the better part of three hours last
Monday boasting of how much money he was able to sink into his failing ministries over the past five years and they provided very little by way of service.

Mr. Speaker, you may have seen the very popular advertisement which says that there are some things that money cannot buy; for everything else there is MasterCard.

**Dr. Moonilal:** "Where Camille?"

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Obviously, the Prime Minister does not subscribe to this view. We expect his new public relations campaign will look something like this, in terms of his allocations: $3.7 billion for a failing public health care system; $4.4 billion for a bogus national security system, but you know what takes the cake? Mr. Speaker, $42.2 billion to buy the love of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the budget. [Crosstalk] He said it was about love, $42.2 billion to buy the love of the people.

Obviously, the Prime Minister believes that there is nothing money cannot buy, and so for everything else there is the "Manning Card". [Desk thumping] My staff was so kind as to help me prepare what the Manning Card will look like.

[Member shows card]

This is the Manning Card, $42 billion; this is what it will look like. [Laughter] So the Prime Minister, unlike the advertisement which says that there are some things that money cannot buy; for everything else there is MasterCard; the Prime Minister believes that there is nothing that money cannot buy; for everything there is the Manning Card. [Crosstalk]

**Dr. Rowley:** Put on the Balisier!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I understand that they agree that is what the card should look like; all that is missing is the Balisier. All they want on that card is the Balisier.

The 2008 national budget is characterized by a continuation of the traditional PNM practice of throwing money behind programmes, rather than sensibly analyzing the issues involved; without determining root causes and devising proper solutions. For this reason, although this Government has spent more money than any other government in the history of the country, it has failed to make a dent in the major problems confronting the nation.

The Minister of Finance and his colleagues will come in this debate and regale this Chamber with all the committees they have formed; with all the buildings they
have built; how much money they have spent on the problem issues; how many persons they have exposed to some form of training; the number of jobs they have created during the last six years. They will chant the contents of the transformation in the progress book they supplied last Monday, which they claim speaks of Government's performance, but these numbers do not tell the reality of the situation in Trinidad and Tobago.

They are public relations gimmickry; glorified conmanship; statistical manipulation and prolific spin doctoring. Under this Government, every ministry now has a designated communications unit, including several staff members, press officers and, most often, highly paid consultants whose only job is to convince the nation that the Government is performing. It is not accidental then that the expenditure on the propaganda vote escalated with every passing year, as this Government required increasingly more money to mask its increasingly incompetent performance.

You will recall that for almost every budget since we have been in Opposition, I have compiled tables of what I have termed "the propaganda vote" of the Government. It comprises four Heads within each ministry and the votes the numbers I have been giving are only with respect to the ministries. They do not include the propaganda votes for statutory bodies like the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA), the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) and the National Lotteries Control Board (NLCB); this is only for the ministries.

10.45 a.m.

Those four items are: Entertainment, Overseas Travel, Promotions and Publicity and Hosting. When we look at this “propaganda vote” the vote for the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has been consistently larger than most of the other Government Ministers, perhaps it is because the Prime Minister has to make a lot more effort to cover the multitude of damage control things he has to do after each of his statements.

If one looks at this which I have compiled from 2001 when the UNC was in office up to 2008, one would see in 2002 in the first year in office, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance spent $5.5 million on the various aspects of the propaganda vote.

For the year 2007, which was the last fiscal year, it increased by 300 per cent to $22 million so when they came into office that 2002 vote really was the one that had been passed in the UNC budget, it is only an expenditure of $5.5 million, but by 2007, that vote had increased by 300 per cent to $22 million.
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[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

It gets even worse. For 2008, the relevant estimate is a whooping $27.4 million. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance would have spent $111.8 million during his term in office on this propaganda vote but you are giving people $1.00 as an increase in the minimum wage and a few dollars for disability grant and pensions and so forth. An amount of $111.8 million was spent during his term in office.

His wife, the hon. Minister of Education who spent half a million dollars in 2002, by 2007 that propaganda vote has been increased to $16 million, an increase of 3,138 per cent, and the estimate to spend another $17.6 million in 2008. So from 2002 to 2008, there is a total sum of $63 million in the PR vote for the Minister of Education. In fact, between them, Mr. and Mrs. Manning would have spent a massive $174 million on propaganda during their term in office.

People in this country are starving and homeless but they can spend $174 million on publicity stunts. Do you know what that works out to, Mr. Speaker? On an average per day it is $80,000 every day for the last five and a half years and $1.00 for the minimum wage, and $200 or $300 for disability and pensions and you tell me that is love and caring.

This Government would have spent $63.7 million since 2002 to prop up the sagging performance of the Minister of National Security, another chronic blunderbuss. The Minister of Health would have spent $67.3 million to bolster his image. As before, the biggest spenders have been the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education. As before, each year I come with this vote, the Minister falling at the bottom of the list is the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, the Minister of Agriculture. Always at the bottom of the list!

Hon. Member: The Minister of Agriculture?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Minister of Housing, sorry, former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources now Minister of Housing. So when we look at it, from an expenditure of $17.8 million on propaganda in 2002, the total propaganda vote is $17 million. Do you know what it is now for 2008? The total for 2008 has increased by 1,353 per cent to $260 million.

For the year 2008, the Government proposes to spend some $260 million on that propaganda vote—on entertainment, overseas travel, promotions, publicity and hosting. By way of comparison, the UNC government spent $40 million during its last year in office in 2001 and the expenditure prior to 2001 was even less than $40 million. Today this Government has been spending in the vicinity of
$260 million in one year, and when we look at the total the Government has spent on the propaganda vote close to $1 billion in the five and a half years they have been in office.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Squander!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, in 2002, $17,849,618; 2003, $48,590,745; 2004, $123,302,972; 2005, $125,245,947; 2006, $162,651,532; 2007, $241,352,228; and estimated in 2008, $259,363,200, which brings us to just over $1 billion in five and a half years that this Government would have expended on a propaganda vote.

So while they are feting and spreeing, Mr. Speaker, they offer to the working poor $1.00 in the minimum wage.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Two dinner mints.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, one of the difficulties which even the best spin doctors will have with this Government is that it has developed a reputation for broken promises and this has resulted in a loss of confidence in the delivery of commitments made by Government. The public remains baffled as to why there are so many broken promises emanating from the annual budget.

One school of thought is that it is because persons who actually make decisions for Government are not those elected by the people and the country is being run by persons who control in the shadows. That this is so makes a mockery of the democratic process. [Interruption] They probably do not even sit in the Senate, they are from outside of the democratic process.

**Mr. Manning:** Who are they?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** You know who they are. I find it surprising you will ask me who are your back room boys. You know who they are, and you will find out who they are if you do not know—before this debate ends, we will tell you.

Mr. Speaker, others have suggested that many promises are made with no intention to implement them. Tell us why so many promises are broken. That is the hallmark of the PNM. It is contrary to the principles of democracy. In the fiscal package presented on Friday, the Minister of Finance made many promises, some of which were familiar. In fact, throughout the over three hours speech, one would be forgiven for asking whether the Prime Minister was not reading from a previous year’s document because the language and the promises are so familiar.
Mr. Speaker, I call it a cut and paste because he took out the pieces from last year’s budget and paste them into the budget document speech. I will not go into all of the broken promises; my colleagues, as they deal as shadow Members of Parliament and shadow Ministers will go into various areas and give details of them. I will just highlight a few of them. [Interruption] They are shadow Ministers in the alternative government.

In 2003, the Minister of Finance assured the nation that Caroni (1975) Limited will remain in the sugar processing business and cane cultivation and production will be done by cane farmers. Today, the sugar industry is dead and cane farmers are out of business.

The second point was that the allocation of land to former Caroni (1975) Limited workers for the production of food for the country has been a constant undelivered promise since 2004, this year is no exception. The construction of the Mamoral Dam and Reservoir Project was a priority of the 2004 budget, but it was not started. In the following year, 2005, the promise was recycled and an allocation of $100 million was made for the project. Nothing happened and the process was repeated in 2006. Since then, in 2007 and 2008, at least the Prime Minister had what people would call the shame, some may say the decency, some may say he had the shame not to repeat it again because it had been said so many times and broken repeatedly.

Mr. Speaker, the Government seems to have abandoned that project because no mention of the Mamoral Dam was made in this year’s budget or last year’s. In 2008, the Government has promised once again to build and rebuild police stations which it had promised to rebuild every year since 2003. Every year, the police stations at Brasso and Manzanilla are to start, yet they cannot start. Since 2004 to date, every budget has come with promises of new highways to Mayaro and Point Fortin, not one has commenced.

A parole system was promised in the 2004 budget, it was never mentioned again. Comprehensive local government reform has been promised in 2004 and just recently again. It has not happened.

New hospitals were promised to Point Fortin and Scarborough in 2005 and 2006, up to now, none has been built. The Minister of Finance promised that those projects would be started by 2007. In the 2008 budget speech, the Minister advised that construction was about to begin. So every budget year we are about to begin, no wonder the Prime Minister says that he is going, going, going and he will never get there. He is forever lost on his way, he is going. We on this side say, you will be going, going and you will be gone at the next election. [Desk thumping]
The same Minister of Finance promised that the National Oncology Centre would be started in 2004. I understand it has in fact started, but I am told it would be completed in 2009. Given the way this Government operates, even when it gets started it never gets finished. So I would not hold my breath waiting for that to happen.

The one which is really outstanding is when it comes to the young children and infants of this country; the broken promises of the Early Childhood Care and Education Centres for the pre-school children that have been repeated year after year. The Government has failed to meet its target every year. In 2003—2004, the Prime Minister promised 50 pre-schools will be built; in 2004—2005, the promise was for 43; in 2005—2006, it was for 150 because the promise was 600 by 2010. In 2006—2007, the promise was 150. If the Prime Minister had kept his promises, today there would have been a total of 393 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres constructed and functioning in this country.

The hon. Prime Minister in his statement admits that this year, only seven have been built; yet he comes again and promises to build 33 in the new fiscal year. How can we believe him? Where is the credibility? There is no explanation. He has broken every promise with respect to the Early Childhood Care and Education Centres and I will come back to what has happened with the cost.

A new procurement reform programme due to begin in June, 2006 has not commenced and I can go on, but these are the 11 I have selected and my colleagues in our shadow Cabinet will in due course give the details of all the other broken promises.

This Government and Prime Minister have lost all credibility when it comes to keeping promises.

Mr. Manning: Who are you shadowing?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I am shadowing you, Sir, [Desk thumping] and I will tell you who they are shadowing in due course. Somebody may be shadowing me, but I am certainly in this House shadowing your good self.

Mr. Manning: Are you shadowing Panday?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: This Government and the Prime Minister have lost all credibility when it comes to keeping promises. And it is not just us saying that. A survey done by PriceWaterhouseCoopers has found that 77 per cent of the projects promised in the 2006—2007 budget have not been delivered. That is a 77 per cent failure rate from last year to this year and if you check every budget the pattern is the same.
So how are we to believe you? On the eve of an election you come promising manna from heaven; promises and more promises. We say we do not believe you because your pattern of behaviour speaks for itself. If that trend continues, it will mean that most of the promises made this year will not be delivered at the end of financial 2008 as long as that Government remains in office.

What amazed me was that so many of these projects are behind schedule, undelivered, abandoned and yet the Government will not have the courtesy, will not come with accountability, to tell this honourable House the reasons for its inability to get the projects completed. Worse, having failed to deliver year after year on their promises, the Minister begins to promise anew. So, as I say, the Minister has lost all credibility; the Government has lost credibility when it comes with all these grandiose promises in budget 2008.

Nowhere is it more startling than in the agricultural sector, when we look at the history and the pattern with respect to broken promises on the part of this Government. The lobby for increased emphasis on agriculture has been pleading for decades to be taken seriously, without success. This Government has its priorities all mixed up.

Last year the Prime Minister said, as he had said the year before and the previous years, that agriculture is a priority. In the 2007 financial year, expenditure on agriculture was a meagre $697 million. Do you know what that represented? It is 1.7 per cent of the $41 billion that was blown away by Government during the last fiscal year—1.7! Yet in that budget he said agriculture was a priority. The sum of $697 million for the whole agricultural sector, but do you know what? $1 billion for the over-priced, incomplete, unwanted Brian Lara Stadium and $200 million for a palace for the royal couple. So is agriculture a priority?

Under the heading: “Fiscal Operations for 2008” on page 49 of the budget speech, the Prime Minister has advised that in this year’s allocation for agriculture it will be $1.2 billion. However, this is at variance with the Appropriation Bill, which shows about $674 million under Head 25 for agriculture. This is the same figure that we find in the Estimates of Expenditure at page 126. So the Appropriation Bill was printed with an allocation to agriculture of about $674 million and the Prime Minister stands up, orally, and in his written budget speech, talks about $1.2 billion. The contradiction, in my view, requires clarification. Obviously there was a change of heart.

Mr. Imbert: You cannot read.
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Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I can certainly read and I can give you the page numbers: $1.2 billion in the budget speech; the Appropriation Bill speaks of $674 million and when you go to the Estimates of Expenditure at page 126, you will see the item there, of $674 million in terms of the Appropriation Bill and another $50 million that will not come out of the appropriations. [Interruption] I am speaking of agriculture.

So we have a discrepancy in terms of what has been presented to this Parliament and it needs to be clarified. Agriculture is a most important sector in our economy. If the proposed allocation is, indeed, $1.2 billion, the question is: Why now; why so late and why not more? After the Prime Minister has ignored all the pleas and supplications of the farming public to invest in land, why should we believe in this sudden intense focus that is being placed on agriculture? Every year the Minister professes he is placing intense focus on agriculture and every year he neglects the sector. None of the support systems materialize and for that, agriculture became an infertile venture.

From 1995 to 2000, the UNC developed infrastructure access roads and bridges; we built and refurbished markets; NAMDEVCO was restructured and given a new mandate to provide technical and market support. Financial incentives and assistance were provided to make the acquisition of machinery and equipment more affordable and thousands of persons benefited from training in various aspects of agriculture and animal husbandry. We were dealing with the issue of flooding by developing and maintaining drainage infrastructure and reducing the hardships and losses to farmers. Agriculture was beginning to flourish and prices were much lower than they are today. Inflation was then about 4 per cent; the desired amount.

The PNM has annihilated the agricultural sector. In my budget response last year I noted not a single mention was made of the dairy industry in the 2007 fiscal package. Exasperated dairy farmers began abandoning the industry. Again, this year there is no mention of the dairy industry. The Government continues, as I said before, to put too many eggs in the energy basket.

The reckless disregard with which Caroni (1975) Limited was shut down reeks of malice and raw politics. Twenty-eight thousand acres of productive agricultural land were laid to waste because of a desperate political agenda to break the backs of the Opposition support base. Thousands of kilometres of paddy were dumped; farmers were put out of business in January because the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Affairs says it is cheaper to import rice than to grow it locally. The farmers and consumers could have gotten lower prices if Government supported the industry.
Fragments planting tomatoes, managing cabbage and other crops say the same thing. Neglect of access roads, irrigation, pest control, marketing and distribution increase production costs.

Balliram Maharaj from the Supermarkets’ Association and Karen De Montbrun of the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers’ Association told last week’s food prices talk shop that inefficiencies on the ports increase importation costs and these are passed on to the consumer. In the same way, losses incurred by farmers due to flooding, will end up being passed on to the consumer. That is how business operates.

It was not about price gouging, as the Government is so fond of accusing farmers and grocers of doing, it is that this Government views farmers with scorn. It cannot conceive that there are small and medium business persons—entrepreneurs—struggling against tremendous challenges.

In December 2006, hundreds of farmers in Penal and environs lost thousands of dollars as a result of floods. A Barrackpore farmer, Popo Narendas, age 78, lost 4 acres of shadon beni, oregano, fine thyme and mint. Do you know what happened? The Ministry sent him a cheque for $100.50; I quote from the Trinidad Guardian of December 16, 2006:

“…the Government will not be paying compensation to farmers. Allocations are tabulated not on the amount of produce lost for flooding but instead based on the amount of damage to farmers’ plants and the farmers’ replanting needs.”

Tell me, are you real? Can $100.50 repopulate four acres of land? Can it buy seedlings and fertilizer? Can it cover the cost of sanitizing the land and ploughing? Every year the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has told us that it is because of the schedule that they pay it; and they pay it and they pay it. Well, look, it is five years now and you have not. Even though you recognize that you had a fixed schedule for the payment for farmers who suffered damage, you took not one step to change it. And you want to say that agriculture is an area of intense focus? We cannot believe you. Your actions speak louder than words.

So we say you cannot have money to invest in technology if every year your profits are washed away in floods or stolen. Farmers have been kept back in a cycle of underdevelopment and poverty because they have been struggling to overcome the challenges of lack of access roads, irrigation, markets and praedial larceny.
I pledge that the UNC Alliance government will provide the absent technical, financial and infrastructural support to those farmers. It is about 19,000 of them who still remain in the sector and they can produce food and others may be encouraged to join them. Any production shortfall, thereafter, may be addressed by these super farms. Any other approach may be perceived as another case of big business running small business out of business. That is what those super farms will be about, big business running small business out of business. We must give the smaller farmers the assistance they need and they will produce the food that we need in this country. [Desk thumping]

The nation has seen no comprehensive agriculture plan. They only get bits and pieces whenever the Prime Minister and his Minister need to find something to say to quell the public disquiet. These super farms are the PNM’s panacea, but they will not address the issues of supply and price control. Government has been promising to lower food prices every year since 2002 and it has failed. It has no credibility for the public to believe that it can bring prices down. In addition, where will the labour come from for these super farms? The make-work Government programmes have destroyed the labour market. Will labour come from China, Guyana, India, other Caricom islands? Why are we giving the lands to foreigners when there are so many locals who are capable of managing the farms? What they need is your support and assistance.

The distribution of Caroni lands to the over 7,000 former workers, remain a bone of contention. The Government lied to these workers repeatedly and has cheated them in the VSEP. The majority who signed and were expecting residential lands have received none. The handful that got agricultural plots was given a mere two acres instead of the agreed five. Most do not have leases; they are unable to access funding from banks to get equipment and supplies, and so on. Now the Government is looking at the 7,000-plus Caroni workers whom they put on the breadline, to continue to promise land and they continue to break these promises. My colleagues would expand further on our proposals in the agricultural sector.

I turn now to speak about infrastructure, very briefly. This Government came to office scandalizing an engineering solution to the congestion at the Grand Bazaar intersection. At that time it would have cost $150 million. To date, all they have done is a new design that cost more than double the price—$321 million. They allowed tens of thousands of commuters to suffer in agony, leaving homes in the dark. They face many hours in traffic just to get to work, and then you do it again in the evening to get back home—leave in the dark and get home in the dark.
That is not Government performance; that is plain “ol’” talk. The Rights Group of India conducted a traffic survey in Trinidad and Tobago in 2003. They projected by 2005 an average of 23,000 persons would travel into Port of Spain per peak hour. The Minister in his budget contribution last year acknowledged the Rights Group and suggested the actual traffic may be heavier now. Using the minimum wage of $9 per hour—peak hours are 6.00 a.m to 8.00 a.m and 4.00 p.m to 6.00 p.m—the average person spends two hours to go and two hours to return; four hours. If you had to compensate the average citizen and if you then have to measure a loss in man-hours, it would be $18 per day; $36 per day; $180 per week; $720 per month; $8,640 per year and that would be $51,840 per person for the five-and-a-half years that successive Ministers of Works and Transport did not build that interchange. That is the cost to the average person who works in Port of Spain, because of Government's procrastination.

The cumulative loss of productive man-hours is worth $1.19 billion, so that with the congestion on our roads, we are again losing productivity. Many of the highways promised, as I have said before, have not come to fruition. The famous water taxi—a UNC idea, mind you, guaranteed to be operational by July 2007—my colleagues will find the Hansard during the term of office of the UNC—a UNC idea. This Government has failed to do it. It was to start July 2007. The date has come and gone. Other start-up dates have come and gone. The Prime Minister now says it is coming in the first quarter of the next fiscal year, but he would not put his head on a block to give a date. That is because he has no confidence in his Minister to deliver on time. [Desk thumping] Smart man—the Prime Minister—that is why we have this Smart man card—very smart.

The UNC delivered water to 80 per cent of the population. Today only 30 per cent have a proper supply. The infrastructure has collapsed and this, after WASA has spent $8.5 billion; over $1 billion drain on the Treasury per year. There are members of my constituency, as in others, they are forced to use ground well water to drink, to cook, to wash, to bathe, and we are talking about Vision 2020. We are talking about a $42.2 billion budget.

We see in the Guardian editorial of May, 15, 2007, and I quote:

“While the current administration has gone about committing huge resources to the construction of many high rise prestige buildings in Port of Spain, it has not shown the same commitment to addressing the water distribution problem. Government has committed a paltry US $200 million to increase WASA’s pipe-borne water supply.”
That is like taking a baby cafenol when you have a migraine. The problem is a huge one; it is a serious problem.

11.15 a.m.

The issue with respect to electricity is the same. The demands are outstripping the supply. The Government’s mega projects are coming on stream in 2009. We will have load-shedding; electrical blackouts and unreliable supply. We are already experiencing that.

At last week’s food prices talk shop, the Prime Minister came under fire for the inefficiencies at the port in Port of Spain which have resulted in increased fees to importers. Again, they would pass on these fees to the customers. The Prime Minister’s solution is to simply build a new port, but this would take years and the problem would remain unsolved.

We are seeing rapid construction in Port of Spain. What about in other parts of the country? We are in gridlock and lockdown in Port of Spain. What about elsewhere? Chaguanas is begging for a hospital. Point Lisas, a hub of industrial activity is like a ticking time bomb. It needs a burns unit. The residents in Point Fortin and Couva are calling out for proper hospital facilities. Is our money being spent to address these needs? The answer is no.

Flooding continues to be a perennial problem. Is our money being spent to deal with it? The answer is no. Why is there not the same enthusiasm to deal with flood alleviation as there is this passion and obsession to put up tall buildings in Port of Spain, costing hundreds of millions of dollars? If we look at what the Government’s industrialization policy amounts to in terms of the environment, it is equally alarming.

I turn to the vexing issue of the environment. The 2007 Budget, like all previous budgets, treats the environment with scant regard. Perhaps, the Government is being the worst culprit in destroying the environment. The entire smelter issue has exposed serious deficiencies in our environmental protection legislation; the procedure, rules and regulations for developing large acreages for industrial purposes. I would return, if time permits, to the environment. I would deal with some proposals; if not one of my colleagues would go in detail on the environment.

I turn to a very important issue which has to do with business. The business community plays a very critical role in the development of the economy. This is overshadowed by the sheer size of the energy sector. Given the constraints within which the business community operates, the survival of many of these businesses is
testimony to their resilience, sacrifice and self-management. As the economy becomes increasingly open and exposed to the vagaries of international trade, their mettle would be even more fiercely tested.

In the last five and a half years the experience has convinced me that the Government does not have a clue as to how to treat with the business sector. What is the result? Exactly one year ago—I am not referring to the Member for Diego Martin Central, but I am sure that he will defend himself—the junior Minister of Finance, hon. Enill, confessed that the decline in the manufacturing sector was one of the major challenges facing the Government, as increasing numbers of persons were leaving the sector and getting into distribution. After six years; six budgets; multiple meetings with the business sector, including recommendations for budgets, the Government has not been able to bridge the haemorrhage in this vital sector. It is either ignorance as in not knowing what to do or ignoring as in difference.

I refer the Prime Minister and the Government to the IADB publication, Policy Perspectives for Trinidad and Tobago released last year and this informed the preparation of the IADB country strategy for Trinidad and Tobago. The topics in that report were presented and discussed in a conference by the IADB in Port of Spain in July 2004. It was opened by the Prime Minister so the Government had knowledge of this information since 2004. If Government had only paid cursory attention to the private sector outside of PNM friends, the business community in this country would have been well on its way to being efficient, internationally competitive and an even more significant contributor to employment, investment and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Under this Government the contribution of the manufacturing sector to the GDP has continued to decline. It is clear that the Government needs to be retrained, retooled and even re-educated to understand its role in facilitating a business environment for development and growth. The political mindset and attitude of this Government are inimical to a sustainable development agenda. The evidence lies in Government’s failure to transform the private sector in any meaningful way over the last five and a half years, or at the very least, to set the stage for transformation.

Instead, the Minister of Finance prefers to offer short-term solutions to long-term problems. With the development of the private sector, the business community is viewed as described in the report. You will note that the policy prescriptions in addressing our capital shortfalls will impact simultaneously in a transformation, evaluation and elevation of a work ethic, knowledge-based and social focus. We would then find ourselves improving capabilities and competence of our workforce
which itself impacts on earning potential; job security; market ability and personal independence initiative. This in turn has the potential to transform the way we look at ourselves as individuals and a people.

When we say knowledge is power that is what we mean. It is our view, that the Government lacks the commitment and desire. To do so will reveal absolute failure not just of the business community, but the entire nation. Government has failed to create an environment for business development. Worse, it has eroded whatever business confidence that existed before.

Our private sector is reeling under the assault of criminals. Businesses are spending hundreds of millions of dollars with respect to providing security. That has become an added cost that is passed down the line. This is a cost passed down because of the failure of Government to deal with crime. Last year, when I raised the issue of extortion in my budget response, the Minister of National Security was callous in his response saying that the business community was encouraging extortion. As a result he has done nothing to deal with the problem; it continues. In mid February of this year the Caribbean Development Strategies conducted the crime risk assessment survey of the business community of Chaguanas. The results mirrored the concerns of the private sector throughout the country. As a matter of fact, it reflects the same concerns expressed by the average citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Central Bank Governor has already noted the potential for significant capital flight consequent to migration of several large business families from our shores. We recognize too the loss of valuable members of the entrepreneurial class, many of whom come from families with long histories of business. They are migrating.

The Vision 2020 document at page 43 identifies as its primary focus for industry and entrepreneurial development in this country, the act of creating an enabling environment which encourages and increases levels of business investment.

When the business community in Chaguanas was asked whether they would be investing in expanding businesses over the next 12 to 18 months, 75 per cent said a resounding no. Is this enabling environment the Vision 2020 refers to? Far from being provided with the support to grow and expand, the business community of Chaguanas is being stifled to death by this Government. It is not just in Chaguanas. That same lack of confidence can be found throughout the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago.
The Arthur Loc Jack Graduate School of Business produces a corporate confidence index and that index displays a similar thread and lack of confidence on the part of the business sector.

The CCI measures the business outlook as seen by executives and business leaders in Trinidad and Tobago on a quarterly basis. According to the second quarter, 2007 results, executive confidence in the local economy continues to slide over both the sixth and twelfth month horizons. The index fell from 44 to 28 CCI points over the six-month period and from 54 to 27 over a 12-month period. Over 85 per cent of executives attributed their declining confidence in the local economy to perceptions of uncontrolled government spending, while inflationary pressure and crime remain the other most influential factors. Uncontrolled government spending; inflationary pressure and crime are the factors for the loss of confidence in the local economy and business environment. Every economic indicator assessing performance of this country with regard to business shows that the private sector is collapsing and has been so throughout the tenure of this Government. This is reflected in the growth competitiveness index as well as the business competitive index. Both indices are produced by the world economic forum. The last report revealed an even low ranking than average in terms of our institutions, infrastructure and market efficiency. You say that you are providing an enabling environment when all these indices are pointing to the opposite. The World Bank Group in its Doing Business Review has already reported that we continue to fall in our rankings rating, the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. We continue to fall.

These facts reveal the unfortunate truth that this Government has been decidedly anti business for a long time. The survival of the private sector thus far has been despite the inactivity of the Government and the absence of any support structure or initiative. Many of the problems confronting the business community have been known for a long time such as the absence of Government support; the paucity of institutional arrangements; corruption; high input costs and a general lack of incentives for development.

The Commonwealth Business Council in its soon to be released business environment survey, 2007 has reported in the Trinidad Guardian of August 18, 2007, just a few days ago, that foreign direct investment is good for TT economy. They recognize the need for Government to provide a favourable environment for the development of business. Interestingly, among the three recommendations promoted by their survey were increasing measures to reduce corruption and imposing harsher sanctions on offenders. It is recognized by the World Bank and other international agencies that corruption is rampant under this Government and, worse, nothing is being done to stop it.
The current budget contains no measure to suggest that the Government recognizes the need to go beyond the rhetoric of Vision 2020 statements and objectives. Government has manifested a disdain for the business community and that is evidence of an absence of vision.

In the ‘70s and ‘80s we witnessed the migration of a substantial portion of the beleaguered business community of Guyana encouraged by an obdurate government from which that country has never fully recovered, almost half century later. Consequent to this visionless budget, and equally obdurate government, this country may look forward to a further contraction of the manufacturing sector in 2008, with a resultant progressively smaller contribution to GDP. It has contracted each year. We will provide the figures for you.

In 2003, in the Draft National Strategic Plan, the Government considered the private sector as the engine of economic growth. By its actions the Government has strangled life out of the business community. The business community may come alongside the agricultural sector as in the graveyard of this PNM Government. The result will be an increased polarization of the economy, an emergent absolute dependence on the energy sector. That is where we are heading.

Mr. Manning: Take all the time you want.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I took that basket last year, I am not taking it this year. It was a broken promise last year.

I may say categorically, that as we come to the labour sector my colleagues on the UNC Alliance Bench are very happy and my shadow ministers are very happy that CEPEP workers have received a pay increase. It is five years overdue and it is still too low. I hope that they get it very soon because this Government breaks its promises. If these workers have been working for the past four years, how long will you take to identify all of them to give them their backpay and this retroactive increase?

11.30 a.m.

So, the 15 per cent raises the CEPEP salary to $1,725. So after feeding a family of four, the worker will remain with only $25 extra per month. So, you have this great increase, but you will only have $25 a month for transport and to go to see a movie. Out of that amount, $1,700 is for food only for yourself and your family.

Under this Government, a $250 increment can buy very little, because everything is expensive, and we are talking about inflation. A CEPEP worker or any other person just has to go to the market or the grocery, and he or she would realize that the increase is almost as good as nothing.
We said that in this country, the minimum wage that a worker should get is $3,000. I have said it before and I will say it again—whether it is pension or disability grant or whatever it is—you should start at $3,000. You have come now to give an increase when inflation has already taken away the purchasing power of that money. It no longer has the purchasing power, even before it goes into your pocket.

Mr. Speaker, the retroactive payment of $3,000—I am glad for the workers—what will they do with that grand sum? Upgrade their homes! Mr. Speaker, do you know what the cost of gravel is? It is $2,000. So, you have $3,000 back pay, but what are you going to do with it? You could pay for only one load of gravel and with the other $1,000 you could pay for a half load. Why? This is because of the Government’s inflationary measures.

I want to go further. I am happy for the increase, but the workers deserve decent terms and conditions of employment as mandated by the ILO. They do not receive maternity leave in this day and age, and they have to go off the job. Who are to look after these women? Many of them are single mothers. They do not get any benefits. Their terms and conditions are substandard and, therefore, it is all well and good for them to take the increase. I stand with the CEPEP and URP workers to demand terms and conditions of employment in keeping with the ILO mandate. I have said this before. This is not the first time.

The Minister proposes to increase the minimum wage by $1. I want to point out that the Minister did not say when it will take effect. So, we are going to ask him, before he closes this debate, to tell us when this will take effect. He said that the machinery will be put in place for it to be done. So, this is another promise like so many others. They take forever to materialize. There is no start-up date.

Secondly, that increase, if it ever comes, will be worth about $8 per day. Again, we are happy for persons who receive the minimum wage, because they will have more money but, again, that increase is insufficient. It will take them to a monthly salary of $1,600 again, below the amount that the Government on its own has admitted is needed just for food for a family of four persons, $1,700. The salary increase was not thought out in the context of the bigger picture.

The manufacturing and servicing sectors are complaining that they cannot find labour, because CEPEP and URP programmes are paying more for less productive work. CEPEP salary is higher than the minimum wage and, therefore, there is a possibility that the labour shortage can worsen. You need to put the workers on par. You need to give all of them a basic minimum wage of $3,000.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  Friday, August 24, 2007

Mr. Speaker, in their current forms, the 250-odd conspicuously named make-work and social handout programmes of the PNM have failed in every possible way to empower the people who were targeted.

CEPEP was introduced at a time when employment was around 10 per cent, and declining as a result of sustainable well-paid private sector jobs. When the programme was introduced it had no impact on the employment figures, because the jobs were not sustainable. They were short-term contracts. In order to make the jobs qualify for being counted, the Government extended the contracts to one year. Although the contracts were for one year, the jobs were not paying, and productivity was not at desired levels.

Mr. Speaker, CEPEP and the alphabet soup of programmes such as MuST, HYPE and YAPA have not taken participants on to better lives. CEPEP workers have remained in CEPEP. The highest they may reach is at the level of a gang supervisor. They cannot own a company; to do that you have to be a PNM financier.

MuST, HYPE and OJT have created another form of exploitation. It is a well-observed phenomenon—OJT trainees have complained of it—that when their training is over, they are not hired on. They are sent home to make way for another batch of trainees whose stipends are subsidized by the Government. It is an avenue for cheap labour where you keep bringing in a new batch to train and the trainees keep going home. There are no jobs that they can take up. These youths are afraid to speak out because they might face victimization.

I noticed in the newspaper today that people are saying that they are afraid to come to this $100,000 a plate dinner, because they are afraid that they would be victimized and so on. So, from the biggest to the smallest to the youngest, under this Government, everyone is afraid of victimization; the highest to the lowest. [Desk thumping]

According to the Guardian newspaper of April 13, 2006, the Prime Minister said that while many trainees of the Government’s HYPE and MuST programmes were not fully certified, they are being used as apprentices in many of the housing projects. Mr. Speaker, “apprentices” is code-speak for cheap labour. It is like the trainees under OJT. You are forever in training and you will never graduate into a better paying sustainable job. That is the result of these programmes.
An inspection of these sites will find individuals performing tasks for which they do not have qualifications and for which they are not fully remunerated. While these programmes have created an artificial illusion that the unemployment problem has been solved, the truth is that it has a tremendous damage to the labour market.

Interviewed by the *Guardian* in an article on August 03, 2006, National Canners Limited Managing Director, Jeremy Matouk, said labour shortages are preventing him from increasing his production capacity by 50 per cent. I quote:

“I cannot meet demand, locally or abroad. I could expand production in my company by a cool 50 per cent and sell everything,”

Matouk said.

“I could take on 50—60 people tomorrow morning.”

Matouk said the difficulty in sourcing reliable, skilled-labour is artificial and said:

“The problem won’t be that bad were it not for government’s ‘make-work programmes.’”

He said he had workers who have left full-time jobs for the make-work programmes. He said this was causing wages to increase without increasing productivity.

Kiss Baking Company director and then TTMA President, Paul Quesnel, in the same article said employers are being forced to “sweeten the pot” to keep workers. He said:

“That is causing the cost of doing business to escalate. The cost of producing what you produce goes up and when you have to sell it, you become less competitive.”

Mr. Speaker, that is how the Government’s mismanagement of the labour situation and their politically expedient tactics have affected the price of bread. Perhaps, the only way for the private sector to remain competitive and raise productivity is to do like the Government and hire foreign scab-labour. While that might bring down the price of goods and services, the population may find itself unemployed and broke.

Mr. Speaker, one of the stated aims of the CEPEP programme when it was introduced was that it would create entrepreneurs. Since 2002, there have been arguments from all quarters that the method was not consistent with the concept
of entrepreneurship. It leaned more towards profiteering. The evidence is here and it is buttressed by the findings of the Auditor General’s special report on CEPEP and documents sourced through the Freedom of Information Act.

The general theme is that not many entrepreneurs were created. The majority of CEPEP contractors were established in some form of business before joining the programme. Most of them are not involved in environmental maintenance and landscaping. A significant number of them have been identified as PNM supporters, activists and financiers. Indeed, in this very House, we have gone through the list and that is recorded in the Hansard.

Mr. Speaker, as we move from CEPEP, where we are talking about training, there is really no training, but we are staying in the same. We need to take a look at what is happening in our education sector.

I had indicated at the start that I will be looking at the areas that are of critical concerns, and looking at what has happened with these sectors under this Government, and to propose our own solutions and so I look at education now.

As I have said in the past, I believe that all our children are capable of learning. However, I recognize that they will learn at different rates. This was the UNC government’s rationale behind revolutionizing the education system. [Desk thumping] We wanted to change the reality that children are excluded from the secondary school system if they did not fit into the narrow mould defined by an archaic approach to education. Instead of placing pressure on a child to scramble to reach fixed levels of education, we resolved to meet a child at their own level so that they can comfortably develop at their own pace and, therefore we trained remedial teachers; we developed a special curriculum; and we built additional schools so that we were able to cater to the needs of every single child at every level of learning.

We abolished the traumatic Common Entrance Examination and we introduced the Secondary Entrance Assessment and established the Form One Specials. Once again, under the UNC government, children at lower performing educational levels were being specially targeted and a framework for improving their abilities had been put place.

We worked very hard to realize our policy that no child must be left behind by the education system. However, this backward, wrong-side, upside-down Government took the retrograde step of reversing our policies by casting a significant percentage of our children out of the education system—not a child should be left behind.
When school opens in a couple days, we will have the trauma that happened under their watch happening all over again, where those children who have not been sent on to a secondary school will be humiliated and traumatized to go back into a primary school classroom that has already failed them. They have already failed in that classroom. That is why they did not pass the SEA by their terms. You are condemning them. It is like the children of Sisyphus that as they roll the boulder up the hill, it keeps coming back down; the children of Sisyphus. You want to keep them forever at the missed stone. You should move them on. I give the pleasure that a UNC Alliance government will ensure that every single child is placed in a secondary school, and their needs are met in an environment.

Mr. Speaker, what does it matter, whatever name you call it by, what is in a rose? A rose by any other name will smell just as sweet. Why are you holding back the children in the primary school? Place them in the secondary school and give them the remedial classes that they need there; give it to them. That is the vision. Do not humiliate them; do not traumatize them. [Desk thumping] You did that for all those years.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall in the bad old days of the PNM with the Common Entrance Examination, those children would be weeping the day the results came out. They would get a slip of paper saying that they have failed. You have gone backwards; a retrograde step. I said that we will correct that when we form the next government. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, the learning capabilities of some children are not as developed when compared with some of their more successful peers. That is okay. Not every child is the same. They develop at different stages, but that does not mean that you will abandon them if they do not live up to your standards. You lead a child from where that child is, and not from where you think he or she should be. [Desk thumping] That was the rationale for our policy of inclusiveness, unlike this PNM Government which seems to favour a policy of natural selection.

Mr. Speaker, when the UNC Alliance claims victory in the upcoming general election, we will continue from where we left off in a drive to ensure that every single child gets the opportunity to learn. [Desk thumping]

11.45 am.

Mr. Speaker, under education I have already spoken about the broken promises with respect to the construction of the early childhood centres. After promises upon promises each year, a total of 393 should have been built by now, but only seven, we are told, are built and I said I would come back to that issue.
The Government has set itself a target of 600 centres by 2010. I have already spoken of the broken promises to build a total, it would have been now, of 393, only seven have been built.

The question remains as to the cost of each centre. The Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) for 2007 indicated that an expenditure of $63.2 million was incurred for the completion of six centres. You could find it on page 6, item 17 of the PSIP documents; $63 million for six centres. In other words, one early childhood centre cost this Government $10.5 million per centre. This figure is inordinately high.

Mr. Speaker, a mere few years ago, under the UNC government we constructed early childhood centres at the sum of $250,000 for one. [Desk thumping] They are still standing and functioning. How has it reached to $10.5 million for one centre? How has that happened? Page 6, item 17 of the PSIP; look at it; $63.2 million for six centres; in your own documents.

The Minister must explain why the construction cost of these schools has increased by this high percentage. One of my colleagues will go further on the issue of education and the state of the sector as the debate goes along. Suffice it to say that under this Government the education sector has gone progressively worse in terms of results and discipline.

I turn now to the health sector, which will be expanded upon by my colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, the shadow Minister of Health. [Desk thumping] It is very simple; there is one word to describe the health sector, "crisis"; the health sector is in crisis. I quote:

"The worst in the Western Hemisphere"

This is how the Oxford Policy Management Group, who assessed health sectors in various countries, including Africa, India and Pakistan, has described the pathology department at the San Fernando General Hospital. The "worst in the Western Hemisphere". We have become very famous for having children who, in the GCE A level exams, scored at the top of the world; we are making news as being the worst in the Western Hemisphere in the health sector. How far have we gone from our moorings?

The crisis in the health sector and the accounts of the plight of sick and suffering are numerous, well documented and undeniable. Hospitals are overcrowded; understaffed; infested with rats, flies and mosquitoes; lacking basic equipment despite huge Government expenditure; glib assurances from the Prime Minister and the Health Minister. There are long waiting lists for basic surgery. Patients are made to wait for hours before being treated at the public health institutions.
Hon. Member: Where?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Minister is asking me where. Well, as I invited other Ministers I will invite you; come, I will take you to the hospital, but you will have to come in disguise, because when you come in your garb as Minister, everybody is bowing and scraping and running. [Desk thumping] But when you come as an ordinary man or woman into that hospital no one has time for you, because they are overcrowded and they are understaffed, so there are long waiting lists.

Hospitals are without medication; the infrastructure is antiquated and poorly maintained. And hon. Minister, I am sure you did not have to go to see people sleeping on the floor in the hospitals of our nation; it was shown on live national television. The health sector, Mr. Speaker, is in crisis. Why has it come to this?

The very words of the hon. Minister: “now, where, how, what”—his own words. Why has it come to this? It is his own words. This is the view of the Minister. Trinidad Express, Friday May 25, 2007:

"When questioned as to the number of deaths of children in the public health sector, Rahael in defence said that the system is functioning well."

"The system is functioning well"; for whom, Mr. Speaker? An innocent child, a baby, had to suffer for six hours in the Eric Williams' Medical Sciences Centre before dying from an asthma attack. Functioning well, Mr. Speaker? Jonathan Belix died because our system could not treat his broken leg. Functioning well? Little Faith Williams died because our health system could not treat her for umbilical hernia. Functioning well? Baby Shawn Ganness had his collarbone and left hand broken and his cheek burnt during a forced delivery at the San Fernando General Hospital. Functioning well, Minister? Innocent children are suffering, pleading for help, they are dying, but the system, according to the Minister, is functioning well.

Hon. Members: Is functioning well!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: At San Fernando, there is also a major water problem. We have been told by MPATT that a senior anaesthetist who was found partly responsible for the death of Faith Williams was promoted. But the system is functioning well.

Hon. Members: Is functioning well!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Psychiatric Ward of the Scarborough Regional Hospital is being flooded when it rains. But the system is functioning well. Let us look at the strange case of the Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Centre.
In the 2003/2004 Budget Statement, the Prime Minister said: "construction of an Enhanced Health Centre in Sangre Grande will be completed in 2006." This was not a start up date; it will be completed in 2006. But then in the 2006/2007 Budget Statement, the Minister contradicted his earlier statement. He said:

"The construction of the Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Centre and the Toco Maternity Unit are scheduled to commence in 2007." [Laughter]

When I say upside down, wrong side, inside out, I mean it finished before it commenced. According to the Prime Minister that centre will be completed in 2006, the year before its construction was scheduled to begin. That may make sense to him but I am sure it makes sense to no one else.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the hon. Prime Minister—your Ministers send you statements, you have to do some due diligence checks on them. In the same way you are going out in the constituencies and running your surveys in terms of performance; you have to do it with respect to your ministries too. So you will complete a centre before it starts. [Desk thumping] You will not do it.

Dr. Rowley: We will read yours.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Read mine, that is all right. [Interruption] You could come to my seat, that is all quite right; I always welcome you there.

When we look at the PAHO/WHO Country Strategy Report 2006—2009, it laments that the implementation of the Health Sector Reform programme has been slow and challenging. And it states further and I quote:

"At this time, the Ministry of Health has been unable to effectively assume the leadership role and transform itself into an effective policy, planning and regulatory organization."

The Ministry has been unable to effectively assume the leadership role. Who is that? Who is that? I continue with the quotation:

"There is insufficient evidence-based planning and decision making in health due to the lack of an integrated health management information system.

There is an inadequate system for drug utilization, outdated national drug policy and formulary, and a lack of drug utilization reviews.

The laboratory system has been unable to adequately meet service needs due to many factors, including limited financial resources, an inadequate
physical plant, insufficient professional and technical leadership, outdated
regulations and poor dialogue with clinical services.”

This is the Pan American Health Organization 2006—2009 Trinidad and Tobago
country cooperation strategy report; this is not the UNC Alliance; this is not the man
in the street; this is the Pan American Health Organization report, condemning what
is happening in the health sector and the Minister says, it is functioning well.

In this very report, PAHO presents a SWOT analysis of its activities in Trinidad
and Tobago. PAHO lists as a weakness and I quote:

"Support staff provided by the Ministry of Health do not always meet
competencies required by country office"

Under threats to their work, PAHO names:

“Lack of strong leadership in the Ministry of Health, Minister of
Health

Limited technical, managerial and implementation capacities of the Ministry
of Health

Lack of technical counterparts in the Ministry of Health

Technical matters being influenced by political decisions

Lack of preparedness for a major disaster/emergency (natural, man-made,
health emergencies such as pandemic influenza, et cetera)

Increase in cost of living inflation affecting purchasing power within
decreased budget

Deterioration of social environment"

And I ask again, Mr. Speaker, how did things get so bad? The answer comes
again, from the hon. Minister of Health, in his budget contribution last year, when
he said and I quote from the Hansard:

"Indeed, we are proud today of the tremendous success achieved through
the implementation of some of our current initiatives and that we are bringing
quality and quantity care to the more vulnerable in our society who are unable
to meet the enormous cost of private health care."

Totally out of touch, Mr. Speaker, with the reality of what all these international
reports are reporting and what every man, woman and child in Trinidad and Tobago
knows about the public health sector in Trinidad and Tobago.
In other words, Mr. Speaker, he knows not, and he knows not that he knows not. [Laughter] I would not go with the extension of what ends up then, only a foolish man would be able to answer that.

We turn to tourism—and I am just checking on my time. We talked about not really putting all our eggs into that energy basket. We talked about diversification of the economy. We talked about agriculture; as I said my colleagues too would give some further details about our plans in the agricultural sector. We talked about manufacturing, the failure of Government; the business sector to get an enabling environment.

I want to talk about tourism because this is an area that could really be opened up in this country and I would like to spend some moments on it. Like most of the other non-oil sectors in this country, tourism has been battered. Visitor arrivals have declined; there seems to be no comprehensive effort to bring visitors to our shores for holiday vacations; the developing market for conferences and business meetings is good, but that does not offer much to the ordinary taxi driver and the other providers of goods and services. [Desk thumping]

Business class tourists spend most of their time and money at the hotel. Most dine at more upscale restaurants, and while this benefits those service providers, those who depend on the tourist dollar to really eke out a living are left without.

Simply put, there seems to be no direction of plan for developing the subsectors of our tourism industry to the fullest potential. [Desk thumping] We are already importing all the food that we eat; can you imagine what is happening in the hotels? So we are not developing the subsectors of our tourism industry to the fullest.

12.00 noon

The Ministry has a Draft National Tourism Policy posted on its website. Perhaps nothing is supposed to happen until 2010, I do not know. The Minister is lagging behind in every stated objective that is put up on that website in terms of the Draft National Tourism Policy. Further, the 10 goals seem overly simplistic and repetitive. If it is a road map, then I am sure it is not a road map to anywhere, far less to the 2020 developed status. The plan, as I have suggested, does not seem directed at anyone else, but the affluent and wealthy construction conglomerates.

The Minister's goal, like his leader, is to build tall buildings in the capital city and to encourage the building of hotels. Nowhere in those 10 objectives, is it listed as a priority to get people here. And so, maybe the Minister is accustomed to telling the people, "Well, the club in the Chaguaramas"—down at Pier 1, I
think it is—“and it is opened so and so time”, and that is just good enough for him. Telling people that Trinidad and Tobago exists is just the start of the process. You have to reach out and get the visitors, influence them into wanting to visit the country. You have to develop the product; you have to develop the events. You must have a calendar and your product must be a diversified list of activities to suit the wide variety of tastes from visitor to visitor.

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that you are a patriotic Trini in your heart as much as I am, and therefore, if we are to face the fact, is Trinidad and Tobago really in a position to compete with some of the other islands in the Caricom region in tourism? If it is sun, sand and sea they want, they get it from almost anywhere else and they will get it cheaper and without the fear of being kidnapped, robbed or murdered. [Desk thumping] Why then come to Trinidad where the only interesting sight that you are likely to see, is the bumper in front of you as you are stuck in the gridlock traffic in Port of Spain. Where is the tourism in that? When a cruise passenger who has a few hours to do everything, when that cruise ship docks here, will he be able to get to Maracas Bay or Toco to eat a bake and shark, to take a swim and come back in time for his departure? Will he be able to go down to La Brea to look at the pitch lake and come back in time before his departure? Bumper to-bumper traffic. Gridlock.

Dr. Moonilal: He would miss the boat.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Miss the boat; he would certainly miss the boat. The answer is no. He would be lucky if he made it to Grand Bazaar.

Mr. Manning: Who wrote that speech?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Who wrote yours? When you tell me who wrote yours, I will tell you who wrote mine. And incidentally, because at the end I may run out of time, I really want to take a few minutes to pay tribute and to thank the very dedicated staff at the Office of the Leader of the Opposition [Desk thumping] who have spent many sleepless days and nights and are still sitting with us and still working with us. In particular, I want to thank Dave Tancoo, Sunil Ramjitsingh—through you, my staff is not allowed to sit there.

[Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar points to the South Platform]

That is something we have to deal with. They have to sit in the public gallery. Rayden Boodan, Barry Padarath, Sarah, Caian. I would like to thank them.

Mr. Speaker: Having done that, do not do it again because I have said before here that you must not refer to members of the public gallery.
Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I am referring to the members of the staff in the Office of the Leader of the Opposition and I want to thank them for their dedicated hard work in assisting us in the research that was done. Of course, I would like to thank my colleagues as well and all those whom we held discussions with in assisting us in the research.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we want tourism. Let us not be sidetracked because this is an important matter. I am saying this is what we talked about when we say that the infrastructure is not developed. In the BVI (British Virgin Islands) there is infrastructure that allows cruise ships to anchor off almost any of its 52 islands and quays and passengers can disembark and enjoy the beaches and patronize the bars and so on, the seaside restaurants.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the waterfront, look along the creek when you go, there is a whole strip of water beach. Now, why can we not have, like anywhere else you go, that waterfront, the seaside restaurants, places for people to sit, entertainment? It is called the creek.

Mr. Manning: When the water comes out—[Interuption]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Ah, do you not believe in every of those places there are, under water, over the water and under the water, they build above the water. The water comes up, but you build to take that into account. We have no vision because we have put all our eggs in the energy sector basket, so we do not want to diversify. We will not diversify, so the same thing can happen. But you see as far as the hon. Prime Minister is concerned, all you need is a Minister with a little more than common sense and a very level head.

Common sense and a very level head, and that is why we cannot see construction except in Pier 1; we cannot see it in the Maracas Bay. Why can we not have places there that our ships can come in as well? The cruise ships can come in so they do not have to journey all that way. You are developing an industrial estate somewhere else. You have a bay down there too. Why is it that we are only looking at the oil and the gas and not at the tourism and the manufacturing? We can increase interest for vendors and these other places; we can brighten the place and attract new and varied services and vendors. We would provide opportunities for residents of the area to open businesses and earn salaries. It would leave cruise visitors with a more picturesque memory of Trinidad and Tobago, than downtown Port of Spain, as I said, gridlock traffic, smelly streets, rape, robbery and murder. We can do similarly at Toco; we can have a pier at Toco. We can create opportunities there as well.
So let us face it, cruise ships passengers are not usually big spenders. They may purchase a souvenir and one or two small things; they are really on a trip to relax. They do not need a room. So it is not practical these days for cruise ship passengers, again, to leave Port of Spain and go down to Caroni Swamp and these are the tourist arrivals, the Minister boasts that he is bringing, short-term, non-repeat visitors. So, we need to identify packages of activities to suit the various types of tourist visitors. When you offer someone a four-day vacation, you must have a package of activities so he or she can occupy his or her time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister reshuffled his Cabinet in 2003, he signalled his Government’s intention in these words, "We shall now place a greater emphasis on tourism and shall establish a separate Ministry for this sector. Tourism must now be brought to the centre stage of economic development." This sector, however, continues to suffer from neglect by central government. In recognition of the enormous potential of this sector, the UNC Alliance has prepared a detailed tourism development plan which we shall present to the national community for public comment. That is how we will dialogue. Some of our initiatives include:

- creating a national tourism programme in schools to give various communities exposure;
- construction of eco-friendly pier facilities for cruise ships at Maracas and Toco;
- to set up a training agency for tourism promotion ambassadors;
- restoration programmes for historical buildings;
- encouraging international sporting events;
- the sanction of a Trinidad and Tobago international institute for degree programmes for all students.

Mr. Speaker, those are just some; as I said we have developed a plan which we will take for consultation in due course. I do not want to close on this issue of tourism; without talking about a major cultural event in this country—two, but they run one into the other. Carnival is one event that brings the greatest influx of visitors, whether of our own returning home or of others who want to come and enjoy.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, Divali and Ramleela celebrations equally can be a tourism product that attracts many, many people if we market it; if people know of it. There is a Hindu diaspora out there, a largely Hindu diaspora, out in the Western Hemisphere who would come to Trinidad and Tobago for Divali and Ramleela, but
we have to market it. So, in addition to the carnival product; in addition to the sand and sea product that you want to sell, there is also the “Festival of Lights” which is a very beautiful time in this country. In addition, there is the whole celebrations of Eid and the Hosay; those are products we certainly need to look to because they are an integral part of the culture of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a short look at how Government consults so that we may judge for ourselves how much of a farce it is when the Prime Minister thinks that citizens are fooled when the Government pretends to consult them. The fact is that the Government has already made up their mind what they are going to do and they have done it before they come to pretend to listen to the citizens. Last year after much protest, the Prime Minister had a consultation on the smelter issue. The problem was that he had already signed the MOU with Alcoa—done deal—and they had already begun preparing the site for Alutrint. What then did you come for? What was the purpose of the consultation? The deal was already done; mission accomplished.

The Prime Minister next had a crime consultation or a series of them. This was after the Prime Minister spent the last six years throwing money behind blimps, spyware, foreign consultants and English retirees. What is he coming to ask about? He had already done what he wanted to do. After that, he had an energy symposium timed to coincide with the bad news they knew they were going to get from the Ryder Scott Report.

At that meeting, Dr. Saith advised that agreements had already been signed with a gas producer and that the PM's friends sang from his page book and that all was well. What did they come to consult about? The deal was done. Recently we had a joke on the food prices consultation. Again, they came to tell us that Super farms were coming—agreements done—when they had already signed the agreement with Cuba. Done deal again for these Super farms. These have been coming since last year and that a new set of committees will be set up. Do we really believe that they listen? Look at this! Someone provided me with this.

[Photograph of the Prime Minister was shown]

The Prime Minister would say it is very unkind. If you look at this photograph, this is indeed the hon. Prime Minister at the Food Consultation, that is what is was about. The gentleman seems to be convinced. They had already made the deal, so there was not point in listening, so where was the consultation when the Prime Minister bought the blimp? Where was the consultation when he agreed to spend almost a billion on the Tsunami Stadium? Where was the consultation when he
decided that he was going to bless himself with a $200 million play house? Where was the consultation when he travelled to Africa and agreed to help them fight poverty?

Where was the consultation when he raised their salaries? Where was the consultation when he made his wife, the Minister of Education? Where was the consultation when he decided that 30 per cent of the children writing the SEA must be failed? Where was the consultation when he signed the MOU to build aluminum smelters here? Where was the consultation when he gave preferential gas prices to Alcoa, condemning future generations of this country to that commitment? Where was the consultation when he met with known criminal gang leaders and renamed them community leaders, offering them prime jobs in URP and CEPEP contracts?

Where was the consultation when CEPEP contracts were being shared among PNM groups and friends? Where was the consultation when he supported the Chief Magistrate and launched an attack on the Chief Justice and the administration of justice, generally? Where was the consultation when he shut down Caroni, BWIA, (now Caribbean Airlines) and so many other companies sending hard-working citizens on the breadline? Where was the consultation when he began persecuting employees of the casino industry? Where was the consultation when he laid the Gafoor Report showing the collapse of the health sector, but chose to keep the Minister responsible?

Mr. Speaker, for five years, the hon. Prime Minister consulted no one, except perhaps for Benny Hinn and we all know how that worked out. [Laughter]

**Mr. Panday:** And the prophetess.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** And the prophetess. For five years he spent our money; for five years after he spent the $200 billion, the government comes to pretend that they are consulting with the people. Our people are not to be fooled. Even in the case of this budget, if I heard correctly, the Prime Minister boasted that he had not even consulted with his Government Ministers with respect to this budget.

**Dr. Moonilal:** They did not know anything.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** They did not know. In fact when one Minister was asked, “Would the budget be on Monday morning or Monday evening?”, the answer was, "Well, if it is on Monday—" This was after the Prime Minister had announced—if it is on Monday—budget day was Monday. So he did not even
consult with his Ministers. His consultations are fraudulent, but they fool no one because we know that they have not listened to the pleas of the people for the last six years.

12.15 p.m.

We know that it is an election gimmick. They did not care then and they do not care now. I say to the hon. Prime Minister: That is not performance; that is "ol' talk". [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk] The hon. Prime Minister fancies himself as a religious and virtuous man. I have no doubt that he is a religious, virtuous and pious person. I ask him to tell us how he can justify the fact that the Children's Authority Bill is still outstanding? For the past three years the Minister of Social Development has promised to bring the package of children legislation to the Parliament; again in 2007 at the end of their term, they still have not brought that package of legislation.

In October 2006, Minister Robert advised this House that the package of legislation is expected to be presented for the consideration of Parliament by the end of 2006. Mr. Speaker, 2006 has come and 2006 has gone. Where is the package?

The Prime Minister in his 2006/2007 budget presentation stated:

"The Government is also determined to address the scourge of child abuse in our society and to protect those vulnerable children who are most at risk of facing a myriad of negative outcomes including neglect, exploitation, malnutrition and even death."

All the right words, indeed. I was listening to a commentary of this year's budget on the radio. It said that one thing was that the language contained all the right words; all the right vocabulary. The point is that there is no implementation. [Desk thumping] It sounds good. The rhetoric is grand; you have to agree with it. I agree with those words, that we must protect the children, those vulnerable ones at risk, but the point is the implementation. You must not only talk the talk; you must walk the walk. [Desk thumping] The PNM has failed so to do in terms of implementation of all the promises; that was last year.

Again this year, the Prime Minister promised to establish the Children's Authority. A UNC Alliance Government will move decisively to establish the Children's Authority following the requisite amendments to the legislation. You cannot tell me that was passed since 2000. This is the year 2007; over six years later, seven years, and we cannot put a Children's Authority into place? We will
implement the Children's Authority and it will, in effect, function as the guardian of all the children of Trinidad and Tobago. Nothing has been done to protect our children. Let us look at the family support system. The family as a core institution in society has been singled out for special attention by Government:

"The National Family Policy will be a blueprint for creating and promoting a family friendly society and for mainstreaming family issues into wider sectoral policies.

In order to ensure the broadest possible consensus on this most fundamental issue, the draft policy document will be presented to the public at a series of upcoming public consultations."

These were the words of the hon. Prime Minister in September 2006; to date, nothing has been done; no public consultation on the issues; no draft policy; not anything; another broken promise. Yet he repeats the same promise in this year's budget presentation. What is going to be the difference this year? Government is still not going to implement any of it, because it simply does not care. To them it is just another recycled cut and paste promise.

There are a few persons trained in Trinidad and Tobago to recognize child abuse. Our National Family Service, the main Government agency responsible for supporting and counselling families has a total staff of 12 persons for the entire nation; 12 persons trained for counseling families. Our Ministry of Health has 25 social workers to service all hospitals and health centres; a ratio of one social worker for every 50,000 persons.

We have eight communication officers in the Ministry of Health, I am told, but you have 25 social workers, one for every 50,000 persons in all the hospitals and health centres of this land. What are the priorities? Our education system has 50 guidance counsellors for a school population of over 200,000 students; no wonder we see what happens in the schools.

Even if all these persons were well trained in children's affairs, given what is known of some of them that is doubtful, it will still be a heroic task to expect them to be able to do their jobs and simultaneously change the public's attitude towards child abuse.

There was a recent article appearing in the Trinidad Guardian of Thursday, May 18, 2006 entitled:

"Clinical child psychologist

I have been thinking carefully and I have realized there are both laws and rules about our children in this country. The laws tell us that we must not
mistrat, injure or kill our children. The rules tell us what actually happens. As far as I can tell, the rules are as follows:

You may kill your child in T&T. You may not commit murder, which involves planning and forethought, but a sudden act of violence will almost certainly be pardoned in law. This is particularly so for children five years and under.

You are more than welcome to kill your stepchild in T&T. This applies especially for men who are subsequently forgiven by the child's mother and any fast 'quenk' who wants to interfere afterwards you better remember this is your family and your business.

You are allowed to interfere with children in T&T, either your own or someone else's. The latitude here is somewhat greater than with killing, so many more children are available to you. If you do not have a child or stepchild of your own, a victim will be provided to you free of charge, preferably from your own socio-economic level or lower one. If you should wish to kill this child, it should definitely be one of lower status. Girl killings would attract less publicity than boy killings, but the public interest in either one will be strictly limited.

Beatings, injuries and general damage short of killing are allowed with no penalty attached. This applies to children of any age."

The article was saying that there are laws and rules. The laws are that you must not mistreat, injure or kill our children, but the rules tell us something else. This is where the article went on to set out what the reality was in terms of what happens.

This is a true and real representation of what happens in our society, whether we want to admit it or not. The only issue is if we admit it, then we might be able to deal with it sooner; we might be able to save more of our nation’s youths.

Again we come to the point: Where is the package of children legislation? How many more Sean Lukes, Amys, Parman and Persads? Has the killer of Akiel Chambers been brought to justice? Have they found 10-year-old Vijay Persad? These are questions that haunt parents like Pauline Lum Fai everyday of their lives; yet Government does not provide the answers.

Once again, the Prime Minister has failed to deal with legislation that protects our children. All they do is to promise and promise and promise in every budget, and each year they continue with their broken promises. I give the assurance again
that the UNC Alliance government will implement the package of children's legislation. [Desk thumping]

Criminal injuries compensation is another failure on the part of the Government. After much pressure from the Opposition UNC, Government was forced to establish the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board. Through my office I was able to submit the first ever set of applications for compensation on behalf of victims and dependents, of crime. That was on May 04, 2007. To date, there has been no response to these applications. To date, the Prime Minister has done what many will call flip-flop. He agreed with us when we had our crime talks at Whitehall, that the ceiling figure for compensation of the victims would be $250,000.

Then they said that the Government could not pay such a high figure and that they would put the ceiling at $50,000. That is unacceptable. Is the Prime Minister saying that the woman who lost her leg with the bomb blast in Port of Spain in July 2005 is to live on $50,000 till she dies? Is that the compensation if she is a victim of crime? Can she live on that $50,000.

Incidentally, even though the hon. Prime Minister told us in this House that he knew who Mr. Big was, he is still at large. [Crosstalk] You have the privilege of the House, you can tell us now. [Crosstalk] Are you protecting Mr. Big?

The $50,000 is not acceptable. We need to reconsider that, given the hefty amounts being given elsewhere. No one can put a price on the lives of our loved ones, but the issue is: How do you survive on $50,000 for the rest of your life? If you are maimed and sick you cannot work or take care of your family.

We move on to equal opportunities. When that Bill was before this House, we warned the population that this Government would send it before a committee for it to die, for it to lapse; so said, so done. [Desk thumping] Kill Bill. They sent it to the committee, never brought it back and we all know that this Parliament stands dissolved in October, whether you like it or not. It will automatically be dissolved according to section 60-something of the Constitution. On October 16, the Parliament stands dissolved.

So when are we going to do the Equal Opportunity Bill? When are we going to do the DNA legislation promised and touted? They said that the one we passed was deficient. You took six years; you are now going out of office and you still have not put it in place. So when they keep promising and promising, it is very clear that they will not keep those promises.
I want to go very quickly to the governance indicators. When we look at the failures on the part of Government, it is no wonder that the World Bank's periodic index called "Government Indicators" measuring the government's performance, that under this Government we have slipped on every one of the six indicators since it came into office to the present time. We have continued to slide.

The first indicator of voice and accountability deals with the processes of democracy. When the UNC was in office in 2002, our rating was 65.4 per cent. In the latest 2006 rating, Trinidad and Tobago had declined under this Government to 62 per cent. The second indicator is political stability and absence of violence 48-point. In 2000, we were ranked at 48.1; in 2006, were ranked at 41.3; we slipped again under this Government. Government effectiveness, in 2000 we were at 68.2; after this Government in the year 2006, 63.5; we slipped. The results show a reduction in the quality of public service, the civil service and a fall in the degree of independence from political pressures.

The most instructive of these is the one which measures regulatory quality. This examines the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations to promote private sector development. Since the PNM came into office, they have indicated that we have fallen consistently; from 75.6 in 2000, to 71.2 in 2006.

On the rule of law we are not surprised to see again that where we were at 62.4 in 2000, in 2006 we have slipped down to 48. We look at the control of corruption and, again, the UNC in office received a credible rating of 62.1, but under this Government, that raises its hands and shouts that the UNC was so corrupt, for corruption on that index we have slipped down to 54.9. So do not sit there and pretend that you have clean hands. [Crosstalk] I will come to you in a moment.

What these indicators reveal is a fall in standard of governance by the PNM. Democracy is increasingly under threat; there is corruption and abuse. This has resulted in a loss of confidence in Government and in the administration of justice as well. It reflects on this country. They are the facts. These are not our indices; these are international indices.

When you talk about government indicators, I want to make it very clear that a UNC Alliance government will observe the three rules of good governance.

12.30 p.m.

The first rule is service to the people first, the second rule of good governance is service to the people first, and the third rule of good governance is service to the people first. [Desk thumping] Those are the indicators of good governance.
As I go through the issues of crime which would be given in more detail by my colleague, the Member for Princes Town, this issue of crime is a political one and the Government lacks the will to address the issue with any serious action. The crime reduction policy is essentially a public relations exercise and so with respect to all the anti-crime plans we say that they have failed.

We must look at the statistics. A decade ago, when the UNC government was in office, the total number of murders in 1997 was 101, 101 too many, but as we see, the figures have been escalating each year.

In 2001 when the UNC demitted office, out of the 151 murders committed, 70 were detected, a 46 per cent detection rate. In 2005, the worst year for murders to date, a whopping 386 death toll, a mere 94 per cent was solved, the detection rate had been slashed to a pitiful 24 per cent in just four short years under the PNM. From a detection rate of 46 per cent, we have slipped to a detection rate of 24 per cent.

Clearly by all empirical evidence presented even on occasions on their own admission, this Government, under the direction of the Prime Minister who perhaps is under the direction of a more mystical lady, is unable, unwilling, uncertain of how to tackle the crime epidemic that is plaguing our nation.

Over the past few years, the Opposition UNC has listened to the pleas of stakeholders; the business organization and we have formulated our own anti-crime plan and I will go quickly to some of the features of it. We will merge the SRP force into the conventional police service and increase the number of fully trained and equipped police officers to 15,000. We will increase the use of paralegal trained staff for taking complaints, reports and answering telephones. We will utilize the Strategic Services Agency (SSA), the organization which acts as a central co-coordinating agency for the development, collection, processing and dissemination of information from all relevant agencies.

We would have police salaries that will reflect the risk, the hours of work and the stress of police work. Police must be properly compensated if they are to do their duty properly. We will give enhanced insurance coverage for police officers.

When we come to law enforcement, we will deal with extortion by establishing an extortion unit. We will use a body of mounted mobile communication for foot patrol officers. We will use close circuit TV cameras at city centres; the introduction of computers in police cars, cable for accessing data from various sources; computerization
of the records of the police service and harmonization with computerized records of the prison service, Customs and Excise, and the Inland Revenue Division so there will be one body of information that could be accessed by all government departments.

We will restore the full force of the E99. When we come to the care of victims, we will develop a victim services division complete with facilities and counselling services for victims of crime and their relatives as appropriate. We will establish a special victims unit for domestic abuse intervention and victims of sex crimes. [Desk thumping]

With respect to corruption in the police service, we will create a more aggressive Police Complaints Authority to be married with an effective internal affairs division. That is happening in the United States of America, there is an internal affairs division which is a very serious watchdog and monitor when it comes to corruption in the service.

We propose to consider the categorization of murders by degrees with the death penalty being for the most heinous of murders. This had come out of the death penalty consultations that because the death penalty is the only penalty once there is a murder, that there may be circumstances where for the most heinous crimes, what is called murder 1, you will have hanging, then there will be second degree and third degree. So we would put the legislation in place because it was drafted. I do not know why you are dragging your feet to bring it to the Parliament.

The death penalty for severe, heinous cases of rape and sexual abuse of children would be given consideration but would only be implemented after full consultation with the national community.

There will be reintroduction of hanging for persons who have exhausted their appeals. Review and revitalize the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board and increase the quantum of compensation to crime victims and members of the protective services. [Desk thumping]

We will fast track the passage and implementation of the DNA legislation, introduce sexual harassment legislation, implement the Children’s Authority Act, develop a Central Vigilance Authority to receive complaints, investigate and report to the Parliament. We will develop a proper functioning witness protection programme in conjunction with the United States of America, Canada and the wider Caribbean.

For the children, a UNC alliance will ensure that every school is outfitted with social workers and child psychologists. Teachers will be trained to detect early signs
of deviant or challenged behaviour in schools. We will offer parenting classes for parents and guardians of minors convicted of anti-social behaviour or displaying same.

When we come to money laundering, there will be enforcement of money laundering rules increasing the efficiency, staff, and power of a money laundering agency. There will be periodic forensic audit of suspect industries, enterprises and persons with respect to money laundering.

When we come to traffic congestion, the use of automatic trip, close-circuit camera at traffic lights will be introduced, we will increase penalties for reckless driving and speeding, driving under influence, and introduction of the three strikes Bill, which has fallen by the wayside. We went through so much trouble to pass this Breathalyser Bill. Is it in effect? The answer is no. New start-up date, new start-up date.

Establishment of a former Motor Cycle Highway Patrol, and increased presence of police patrols with stationary posts especially at peak time. Construction of Highway Patrol Police Stations at strategic points along the highway.

We would look at prison reform, training and apprentice schemes, mentoring and big brother programmes in schools, maintenance of records of inmates after leaving the centre and periodic assessments.

Mr. Speaker, you may well know there is a very high rate of repeat offenders—

Mr. Manning: Recidivists.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Yes, recidivist is the word. The hon. Prime Minister will know how to pronounce that very well. It is similar with his habit of broken promises. That is it, Sir. There is a very high rate and so prison reform is very important.

Establishment of an aggressive system of monitoring former inmates in daily lives; increase staffing at the Forensic Science Centre; construct additional subcentres in south, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, when we come to agriculture we also have some suggestions, but they are not for this Government, they will form the manifesto and budget of the next UNC Alliance government. [Desk thumping] Stimulate and sustain agriculture activity as an engine for food production; we will implement a programme of infrastructural development to address the challenges posed to farmers by lack of access roads, flooding and water shortages; develop markets and distribution mechanisms to keep
agriculture profitable; deal with the package of subsidies and benefits to farmers and agriculturists and, of course, the compensation scheme to farmers.

When we come to infrastructure, we will fast-track the construction at the Churchill Roosevelt and Uriah Butler Highways interchange and other complementary works. [Interruption] It is under construction for six years now, Mr. Speaker. Election is coming so they are clearing the area. [Interruption] I will tell you about those contracts in a minute. We will expedite the development in the national transport plan, and give some attention to the Mamoral Dam.

Mr. Speaker, in defence of our environment, the UNC Alliance will legislate and introduce an Environmental Protection Agency. We will issue an aggressive programme for reforestation and revive the population of indigenous wildlife.

We will undertake community-based initiatives; we will also do so with respect to the development of green spaces in conjunction with the private sector and schools.

With respect to business development, we propose to improve efficiency at all major ports by addressing the deficiencies at the Customs and Excise Division, ports of entry and related agencies.

When it comes to labour and employment, Mr. Speaker, a UNC alliance government will restructure the CEPEP to protect the rights and welfare of the workers; they will be given ownership of the programmes in a reorganized UNC Alliance programme. A job market database would be introduced to help persons find regular, gainful employment. My colleagues, the Member for Oropouche—the shadow Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Developments—and the Member for Nariva will give us some more in terms of training done.

Under education, a UNC Alliance government will resume the process of transforming the education system by working with all stakeholders to do the following:

1. Construct schools to further develop the objective of universal secondary education. Under no circumstances will any child be left behind. [Desk thumping]
2. Ensure that all schools have safe, productive learning environments
3. Revisit the Concordat and improve the working relationship between the State and the denominational boards;
4. Revise the curriculum to equip all students with a broad base of relevant knowledge and skills to meet the demands of the job market;
5. Increase the accessibility of graduate and post-graduate tertiary education by boosting financial assistance to students and creating more classroom spaces.

With respect to health, Mr. Speaker, to resuscitate our flat lining health sector, a UNC Alliance government will take the following steps:

- Immediate refurbishment of all existing public health facilities in Trinidad and Tobago to bring them up to acceptable standards of health care;
- Decentralization of primary health care by the upgrade and resourcing of existing district facilities and the establishment of new centres;
- Top priority construction of general hospitals at Point Fortin, Couva Point Lisas, and definitely in Scarborough;
- Expansion of the fleet of ambulances in the public health system to provide rapid response to emergency;

Never forget that it was a UNC administration which introduced the rapid response and ambulances to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

- Implementation/execution of the recommendations of the Gafoor Commission with a view to correcting the deficiencies in the sector;
- Widening the scope of medications available under the CDAP and reviewing the criteria for accessing this benefit.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to housing, my colleagues will speak on that. I just want to repeat what I said last year that a UNC government would be interested in establishing. It is what I call a HOSP, it is known as a Home Ownership Savings Plan. With this, the cost of decent housing is still prohibitive.

The person earning $1,440 per month, the Government is of the view that to feed a family of four, you need $1,700 per month, so what would be left with to pay a mortgage? So the UNC alliance prefers to implement a home ownership savings plan for first-time homeowners who earn less than $4,000. For every dollar the prospective homeowner puts into the savings plan, the UNC Alliance government would match it dollar for dollar. [Desk thumping]

This is not reinventing the wheel; this is in fact being practised in North America; HOSP. To defend the working poor from slipping out of the formal
economic structure, we would implement an earn income tax credit to augment monthly salaries up to $3,000.

Mr. Speaker, last year I proposed—and they did not listen, they will not listen, they are on their way out—and I say under a UNC Alliance government, Trinidad and Tobago will be the first country in the world to implement what is known as a Public Sector Maintenance Programme to be supported by a computer database system so that preventive and restorative work can be performed. Our public infrastructure is rundown and broken. We wait when every public building, whether it is a school, or hospital, wherever it may be—we do not have a planned programme for maintenance of plants.

12.45 p.m.

We can do this PSMP. In the same way when you bring your PSIP you have the PSMP in tandem—they go in tandem—so when a project is planned for in the PSIP, right away you know when maintenance will kick in and you could plan for it. [Desk thumping] So it would be totally planned. For an old plan, you would have to create a database for it, but every new project will be planned for. So you will not have that backlog. We will do it when we form the next government.

When we come to legislation—and I am almost to the end—some of the priority areas of the UNC Alliance legislative agenda are:

1. equal opportunity and gender laws;
2. the Children’s Authority;
3. increased compensation for victims of crime;
4. increased compensation for members of the protective services who are injured on the job;
5. modern sexual harassment legislation;
6. reform of the laws governing election activities with particular emphasis on the issue of the campaign financing;
7. the development of a public procurement policy to promote greater transparency and accountability;
8. appropriate legislative amendments to ensure that ALL public officials are under the scrutiny of an independent Integrity Commission;
9. swift implementation of the legislative requirements for local government reform to empower local government bodies to better deliver service to the people;

10. overall and comprehensive constitutional reform based on widespread consultation with all stakeholders in the national community.

As I come to the end of my contribution, I want to spend a few moments dealing with the issue of corruption. I give the assurance that a UNC Alliance government, in order to combat corruption, particularly in Government agencies and amongst public officials, will take appropriate steps to establish an independent, central vigilance commission within 90 days. The job of that commission will be to advise and guide agencies in the field of vigilance. This is of utmost importance in light of the following, which I will share with you.

The Corruption Perception Index is an annual publication of Transparency International. It ranks 163 countries according to the degree to which politicians and public officials are perceived by senior business leaders and non-residents to be corrupt. The higher the value of the index, the more corrupt the country’s politicians and public officials are believed to be. The analysis reveals a belief that the PNM and corruption are intricately linked and that the longer the party stays in government, the more corrupt it becomes. These are not my words; this comes out of the Corruption Perception Index (CPI),

According to the CPI, there has been a significant increase in “the abuse of public office for private gain” since this Government assumed office, and this is supported by the data. You see, they hold their hands up and they wash their hands and say: “We are clean; we are clean”, and they pelt mud across on the other side, but here it is, the CPI is saying, under this Government, that your rankings have dropped and you are perceived to be more corrupt than ever was under the UNC. [Desk thumping] Under the UNC government in 2001, we were ranked at 31; we slipped after five-and-a-half years under the PNM to the rank of 79. It is not my index; this is from the international agencies.

In the 2006 Transparency International Report, it was found that following the establishment of the special purposes state enterprises—you know these 15 state companies—and the refusal of the Government to pursue public procurement legislation and the absence of any accountability structure for their expenditure, the CPI fell to 79. Those were the reasons it is said within the survey that the CPI fell to 79. This was not only influenced by the arresting and charging of two of the highest ranking PNM Government Ministers and sitting Members of Parliament for
corruption—it was not only because of that that the ranking went down to 79—or up, whichever way you want to look, that we are perceived as more corrupt—Transparency International revealed as follows, and I quote:

“...it appears that large amounts of public expenditure are effective ‘off budget’ suggesting that there is an unpublished parallel economy.

This lack of transparency and accountability has given rise to the suspicion that corrupt influences may be at work in the decision making processes and practices of these huge projects, actual and planned.”

Needless to say, the disclosure of this shocking indictment against the Government created much public furore. But we need to ask ourselves: “Is Transparency International wrong?” “Is its assessment that there is a local and international belief that our public officers are corrupt?” “Is that wrong that corruption has thrived under this Government?”

The 2006 report of the FTSE provides the answer, another international report. According to the assessment of FTSE, this country has now been placed on a high risk list in the area of bribery. This list contains countries which have the highest levels of exposure to risk of engaging in bribery. Do you know who FTSE is? It is an independent company owned by the Financial Times and the London Stock Exchange and is a world leader in the creation and management of over 100,000 equity bond and hedge fund indices. They do not give financial advice to clients, therefore their information is more objective because they do not have to collect fees from any country with respect to what they are doing.

On these indices, we have seen what has happened with CEPEP—we have spoken about it before and my colleagues will go further into it—the massive corruption as shown in the Auditor General’s report with respect to $1.6 billion in CEPEP. But do you know what it is about? It is like everything else with the PNM when it comes to corruption. Nothing happens! The Auditor General, a constitutional office in this land, points to so much corruption with the CEPEP, an expenditure of $1.6 billion, and up to today, nothing has happened; not an official has been brought to book! No one has paid; no one has been able to own up.

But it does not end there. I want to bring to the attention of this honourable House some very disturbing information which has come to my attention in the last few days. On Monday last, the Prime Minister announced the award of the contract for the Rapid Rail Project to the Trinitrain Consortium led by the internationally reputed French Bouygues Travaux Publics. [Interruption] You see, they know all the French, because they have been talking to these Frenchmen. I
will spell it for the Hansard: B-O-Y-G-U-E-S. I will pronounce it according to the phonetic spelling of it, Bouygues. I will go phonetically; I will not go with the Francais. [Interruption] I am not going to get distracted on this, it is a very important issue and I believe I have about 15 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think the Hansard Reporter is having a little difficulty. Please assist her and myself in hearing the hon. Member.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister said the Government has been at pains to establish the highest standards of transparency and integrity in the procurement process. One cannot forget the scandalous situation that obtained in September 2006 when it was revealed that the Prime Minister and other senior government officials had accepted a free jet ride on an executive aircraft at the invitation of one of the short-listed bidders, Bombardier. Despite much public furore, neither the Prime Minister nor any other Minister has, to date, provided a satisfactory explanation of the purpose of that flight. There was speculation that the jet ride was some sort of inducement from Bombardier for the railway project. Questions arose, also, over whether our free-spending Government wanted to buy an executive jet as the Prime Minister pursues his ambitions to be Executive President.

Both Bombardier and the Government promptly denied that the free flight was in any way associated with the rapid rail or for the sale of aircraft either to the Government or to the State-owned airline, Caribbean Airlines Limited (CAL). As that incident consumed public attention, fuelled outrage and prompted allegations of corruption, another puzzling event occurred. The consultants for the evaluation of bids, Parsons Brinkerhoff, was fired on September 13 for failing to disclose earlier that they were also working on a project in Israel with Bombardier Transportation.

Under a new consultant and amidst loud protestations, the Government awarded the contract to Bouygues with an assurance from the Prime Minister that the contract is clean. From research I have done over the past few days I have made some jaw-dropping discoveries. In this file, there is some of the evidence to support what I am saying, which I will be happy to pass, through you, to the hon. Prime Minister.

The company that has been awarded the contract is a subsidiary of another company of the same gentleman, Bouygues Construction. It is owned by a businessman, Matrin Bouygues, who has interests in telecom, media and construction. He is a close friend of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. He was also very close to former President Jacques Chirac who, in 2005, was embroiled in a £60
million racket, supplying government contracts in exchange for political funding. It is alleged that Chirac’s political party received millions of pounds from Bouygues in campaign financing in exchange for £2.8 billion in contracts. This gentleman has a reputation for romancing country leaders and then receiving public works contracts.

According to Transparency International’s June 1996 Quarterly Newsletter, it states:

1. In December 1995, he was investigated and 24 of his high ranking employees were accused of corruption including:
   
   (a) Inflating costs on the Channel Tunnel and the construction of the Mitterand’s Grands Projects;
   
   (b) Illicit party financing from the right wine to the socialists.

2. He received a licence for all water works in Cote D’Ivoire after his television station gave former President Houphouet-Boigny a flattering documentary, and among even other scandals.

3. He was given a contract for the airport of Agadir in Morocco after a similarly flattering documentary was done on King Hassan.

Remember we said he does media, road works and such stuff.

You will recall that the Prime Minister has said that a cartel is operating in the construction industry and is responsible for artificial shortages of building materials, inflation and overheating of the economy. I am beginning to wonder if on this rare occasion the Prime Minister is actually correct. Let us look at some subsidiaries and some dealings.

In light of the sentiments expressed by the Prime Minister that the highest standards of transparency and integrity must be maintained to protect the national interest, I believe it is important that I let you know the following: The same gentleman has an international reputation for bid rigging. In March 2003, he and 14 other French companies were fined a total of £48.5 million for collusion on contracts (the International Herald Tribune, March 23, 2006). The collusion caused “…serious damage to the economy…” according to the French Competition Council. The fine was levied for “…colluding on public contracts in the Paris region from 1991 to 1997. The practice has kept prices artificially high”, according to FCC.

“...the builders created software that calculated an equal split of the government’s contracts among them. The report by the regulator said that companies held up to 10 round tables where they divided the market, including a Paris subway line and regional highways.”
He was fined £10.5 million.

“In December 2005, he was sentenced by the regulator for colluding with other builders in northern France’s highway markets. Its subsidiary, Colas, was fined £21 million.”

In January 2007, the leading foreign company of another company, Thessaloniki Metro Joint Venture, who was the contractor on the 220 billion drachma metro project in Greece, was referred to the European Ombudsman. He won the bid, despite its tender not complying with specifications and conditions in the tender documents. The Greek authorities were held responsible. No penalties were imposed.

In 1998, he was among three large construction companies at the centre of a major investigation by two judges for operating a corrupt cartel over building work for schools in France between 1989 and 1996. [Interuption] I will tell you. Have patience. Good things come to those who wait.

Contracts worth 28 billion francs (about $500 million) were shared out by the three groups. The system involved political corruption. A levy of 2 per cent on all contracts was paid to finance the major political parties in the region.

1.00 p.m.

He also has a history of colluding with other big industry players to circle contracts. They form consortiums and joint ventures with a mix of each other’s subsidiaries and tender for projects. This serves to thin the flock of bidders and provide opportunities for negotiating prices upwards. The other companies pull out once their partner gains enough advantage over the competing bidders to guarantee the contract.

Information that has come to me suggests that this tactic was attempted in the railway bid. Further, I am advised that three employees of the National Infrastructure Development Company (NIDCO) were paid inducements to change the evaluations. Standard international contracts provide for the automatic voiding of the contracts once the process is tainted with corruption.

Additionally, in Trinidad and Tobago the offering and accepting of bribes is a criminal offence and anyone participating in such activity is liable to prosecution according to the law. I will leave that trail for the Director of Public Prosecutions; the Commissioner of Police and the Integrity Commission to follow.

It is difficult to comprehend how a company with a reputation such as this one could get past a careful screening process that was employed in this railway project.
As you are aware, that company is involved currently in a major $1.7 billion construction project in Port of Spain, the International Waterfront Project. Martin Ogiste visited the site—[ Interruption] whatever his name is; we know how to spell it; that is important, so we could find him—in December 2006. He was accompanied there by the hon. Prime Minister and Mr. Calder Hart. Mr. Hart is the chairman of both Nipdec and UdeCOTT. Those enterprises, Nipdec and UdeCOTT, are both involved in managing state construction projects worth billions of dollars.

The contractor on the waterfront project is none other than the same man whose name you want to pronounce for me, a subsidiary of another of his companies. [ Interruption] You know it; you know the company. That is a joint venture of which Home Construction Limited (HCL) is a member and Mr. Andre Monteil, treasurer of the PNM, is a member of the board of directors of the HCL. You talk about the interlocking directorates. There is far more that will be revealed in the days to come. This is just part of the file that has been passed to us. I am setting out the chronology of events and I am pointing to the interlocking directorates. The Member for Diego Martin East should not be bleating too loudly. Hon. Prime Minister, I will send the documents to your good self.

Mr. Manning: Where is the crime?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: If you do not see the crime, I am very sorry.

Mr. Andre Monteil, treasurer and board of directors—you will recall that Mr. Monteil was the chairman of the Home Mortgage Bank (HMB) up to recently, when he made the controversial purchase of $100 million in shares in HMB. Mr. Hart who is the director of HMB serves alongside Mr. Monteil. When Mr. Hart awards billion-dollar contracts to the companies of his friends and co-directors, this is a serious thing. It is even more suspect when the constant figure who is always so providential that everywhere he turns lucrative million and billion deals just land in his lap and he just happens to be the treasurer of the PNM, the governing party. It begs the question. When the treasurer of the party in government is linked to a company, HCL, that is involved in a joint venture with another company—the same name you want to pronounce for me—that company has an international record of bribery and political funding. A billion-dollar state project on the waterfront and that company secures another multibillion-dollar project as the Rapid Rail Project, that is a hotbed of controversy and alarm bells and they go off.

I am saying that this is a matter that should not be taken lightly. These are very important issues. We are being perceived by the international community as a haven for corruption. I listed the corruption indices for this honourable Chamber; not mine.
The international community is blacklisting this country more and more as a haven for corruption. This would undermine our reputation and confidence in our government. When this contract for $15 billion for the Rapid Rail Project is awarded to this company which is in partnership with Mr. Monteil (HCL) on the final approval of a Cabinet sub-committee headed by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, who is also a PNM man—it is awarded on the approval of a Cabinet-appointed committee to the treasurer of the PNM. It is outrageous that conflicts of interest such as these are treated with such disregard by this Government.

On behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, I demand that the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project be halted and scrapped; the International Waterfront Project be halted; that a commission of enquiry be established to probe all contracts awarded by UdeCOTT, NIDCO and Nipdec; the Auditor General, the Commissioner of Police, the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Integrity Commission do their statutory duties and immediately launch investigations into the award of contracts relating to the waterfront project and the rail project to determine if there exist collusion and corruption and to what extent. It cannot be by chance that you have all these friends and all these interlocking directorates. It is a matter that begs for investigation.

I give this honourable House the guarantee in the public interest that the UNC Alliance government will bring these projects to a halt when we form the government and seek to provide answers to the public to ensure the protection of the public interest in this matter. [Desk thumping]

As I close, I say that this Government brings the kind of destruction that Revelation speaks of that has been brought by the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. The first horseman brought conquest in election 2002.

The second horseman brought war as we witness spiraling murder, maiming and mayhem in this country.

The third horseman of this Government brought famine as we witness the decline in agriculture and the astronomical increases in food prices.

The fourth horseman will bring death, political death to that Government as the UNC Alliance will form the next government.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, I say goodbye to the honourable Prime Minister as he demits office.

Thank you.
Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is time for lunch. The Sitting of the House is suspended. We will resume promptly at 2.00 p.m.

1.07 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

2.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I have the dubious pleasure to respond to the Member for Siparia.

Mr. Valley: Task.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am trying to be polite. It is clear that the interim Leader of the Opposition did not prepare that speech or read it or was set up. I prefer to believe the last alternative. The Member for Siparia throughout her rambling contribution re-wrote history and essentially gave us a wish list of what the hon. Member hoped was the reality in Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to pull out some of the inconsistencies, inaccuracies and purely ludicrous statements made by the Member for Siparia to prove the point beyond the falsehoods. One of the statements made by the Member that struck me was a comment about interest rates. The Member for Siparia carried on about persons with mortgages and persons looking for houses being unable to afford them. Quite apart from the fact that the current interest rate for houses built under the National Housing Programme is 2 per cent and the Government has recently implemented a no downpayment policy thereby bringing affordable housing within the range of virtually everyone, the statement about interest rates was so absurd, that I draw your attention to Appendix 17 of The Review of The Economy, 2007. Page 52 gives the interest rates of the commercial banks.

The basic prime rate under the UNC —of which the Member for Siparia formed a part before it crashed out of office under the weight of corruption—in 2001 is 15 per cent. I can tell you that the overdraft rate was considerably more. Under the PNM six years later, the prime lending rate of the commercial banks is now below 12 per cent. It is 11.5 per cent. Mr. Speaker, I know that you have some knowledge of these matters.

When the Member for Siparia said that they will carry us back and deal with interest rates and take it back to how it was under the UNC, the Member meant that they will increase interest rates from its current low of 11.75 per cent to 15 per cent that it was. The term rate was 16 per cent.
So, when the Member for Siparia said that they are going to carry us back; they are going to deal with interest rates and take them back to what they were under the UNC; what the Member meant was that they are going to increase the interest rates from its current low of 11.75 per cent to the 15 per cent that it was. The term rate was 16 per cent. You see, as soon as I heard that, I knew that the Member had been set up. She has absolutely no knowledge of financial matters or economics or anything remotely close to that specialty. Imagine that!

Interest rates under the UNC were 16 per cent; interest rates under the PNM are lower than 12 per cent, but they want to carry us back to the UNC days as an improvement. That is their promise to the voters. They are going to take this country back to the days when interest rates were almost as high as 20 per cent. When there was excess capacity, interest rates were almost 20 per cent under the UNC, and they want to take us back there.

The other aspect of the Member's speech that made me realize that either the Member had not read the speech before today, or did not understand it, or had gotten set up, was when the Member kept bleating about the contraction in the manufacturing sector. I found the statement so astonishing, because even a primary school child will know that the manufacturing sector, the non-oil sector, has outstripped the petroleum sector in terms of annual growth rates over the last five years. Even a child will know that. If you go to the Review of the Economy and you check the growth rate in the manufacturing sector, you will see it was in the order of 8 per cent in the last 12 months. If you go into the text and you read the performance of the manufacturing sector, you will see four examples. Under “Productivity” it says:

“Productivity for all workers in all industries as measured by the All Items Index of Productivity, increased by 7.8 percent in 2006.”

When you look at the manufacturing sector on page 17 it says:

“The Manufacturing sector is expected to grow in real terms by 8.0 percent during 2007...”

If you go to the back and you look at the Appendices, in terms of the changes in “Gross Domestic Product of Trinidad and Tobago at Constant (2000) Prices...” you will see that in 2003, the manufacturing sector grew by 12 per cent; in 2004 it grew by 5.2 per cent; in 2005 it grew by 12.6 per cent; in 2006 it grew by 9.4 per cent; and in 2007 it is projected to grow by 8 per cent. What kind of political leader, aspiring Prime Minister, in the face of this—almost a 100 per cent increase...
in output in the manufacturing sector under the prudent management of the PNM Government over the last five years—will make these kinds of inane comments, that manufacturing has contracted and it is in depression and so on. Nonsense! I am afraid that I have to use the word. There is no other word to describe the contribution. Nonsense!

Mr. Manning: Arrant.

Hon. C. Imbert: Let me repeat; it is arrantly nonsensical for a senior Member of this Parliament, in the face of robust performance by the manufacturing sector, year after year, for the last six years—averaging 9 per cent per annum every year—to come here and say that the manufacturing sector contracted in the last year. That is why there were problems with remedial education. Growth and contraction are not the same.

I also heard the Member say a falsehood that when the UNC took over the Government in 2005 they inherited an economy in depression. It was this administration that turned the economy around in 1994—all the statistics will show it; all of the reviews of the economy presented by UNC ministers of finance in 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 confirmed that after 10 years of negative growth of decline, the PNM administration turned around the economy in Trinidad and Tobago in 1994. [Desk thumping] It started in 1993. That is common knowledge. Even our most mischievous detractors have acknowledged that the economy was turned around in 1993 and 1994 with a host of measures—including the floating of the currency and so forth was responsible for that and a lot of fiscal incentives and so forth—turned the economy around in 1993 and 1994, and the economy has been in growth ever since. This aspiring political leader will come here and say that they inherited an economy in depression.

Mr. Speaker, for me, the most pathetic part of the contribution of the Member for Siparia was the repetition of the failed policies of the NAR. Now, it is no surprise to me, because Members on the other side go through all kinds of different manifestations, incarnations and mutations. I know that the Member for Siparia was a defeated candidate in 1991 for the NAR. I think I remember that. I think we put a good “lashing” on the Member for Siparia in 1991 when she was an NAR candidate.

Mr. Speaker, listen to this foolishness! “The PNM Government is in a mad rush to monetize our gas.” The UNC will slow down the exploitation of the oil and gas sector. This is the same rubbish that was in the 1986 NAR manifesto when they spoke about sunset industries and mega projects. They said they would close down the petrochemical sector; they would mothball Point Lisas; and they would
stop looking for oil. That is what was in the 1986 NAR manifesto; this same
nonsense. Look what they have here now! The UNC will slow down the exploitation
of oil and gas.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what bothers me? The Member started off by
saying that a UNC administration is going to increase pension to $3,000; increase
the disability grant to $3,000; minimum wage should be $16 and over; minimum
pension, $3,000 a month; and minimum grant, $3,000 per month.

Mr. Speaker, there were so many mixed messages coming out from the other
side. It tells you that the UNC is in a state of confusion. In fact, the whole bench
over there is in a state of confusion.

The first part of the speech is all about inflation; hyper-inflation—the PNM is
spending too much money and the UNC is going to slow down everything and put
everything in the Stabilisation Fund; leave the gas in the ground; stop exploiting
our energy resources; stop spending; stop building and close down everything.
That is the first part of the speech. Fire everything; stop everything. That is the
first half of the speech and the next half is that they are going to increase the
minimum wage to $16; pension to $3,000. How are you going to do that? Where
are you going to get the money? You are putting all the money in the heritage
fund; you are not drilling for oil, but you are increasing pension to $3,000. Pie in
the sky! It is pathetic that, as I said, somebody as an aspiring leader does not
understand basic economic principles.

How can you promise to double wages, double pensions, double grants and
double this and that—raise everybody’s salary by 100 per cent—and reduce inflation
to 4 per cent? They are going to double the size of the police service; pay policemen
more. I could not believe this. Eventually I had to stop taking notes. How are you
going to do all these things and keep inflation down to 4 per cent? It just goes to show
that they are bereft of ideas and bankrupt of ideas.

I heard the Member refer to the good book, the Bible—something about the
foolish man devours his stock; something so. Well, I too, read the Bible from time
to time. I called for a copy of the The Jerusalem Bible. This is the Catholic
version, if you did not know. In fact, the most recent one is the New Jerusalem
Bible, but this will do.

I now go the Gospel according to Luke, Chap. 19:11 “The parable of the
pounds” and it says:

“While the people were listening to this he went on to tell a parable…‘A
man of noble birth went to a distant country to be appointed king and
afterwards return. He summoned ten of his servants and gave them ten pounds. ‘Do business with these’ he told them ‘until I get back.’

‘Now on his return, having received his appointment as king, he sent for those servants to whom he had given the money, to find out what profit each had made. The first came in and said, ‘Sir, your one pound has brought in ten’. ‘Well done, my good servant!’ he replied ‘Since you have proved yourself faithful in a very small thing, you shall have the government of ten cities.’ Then came the second and said, ‘Sir, your one pound has made five’. To this one also he said, ‘And you shall be in charge of five cities’. Next came the other…”

The Member for Siparia:

“‘Sir, here is your pound. I put it away…because I was afraid of you…”

Hear is what the King said:

“‘You wicked servant!’ he said ‘Out of your own mouth I condemn you. So you knew I was an exacting man…”’

You have not invested my money.

“‘Then why did you not put my money in the bank? On my return I could have drawn it out with interest’. And he said to those standing by, ‘Take the pound from…”’

Her:

“‘and give it to the man who has ten pounds’…‘I tell you, to everyone who has will be given more;’”

Even what they have will be taken away. [Desk thumping] To paraphrase it in political terms; for you, my Prime Minister, I give you ten more seats. [Laughter] [Desk thumping] And for you, even what you have will be taken away from you. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, you know, even in biblical days, they recognized that taking your money and burying it in the ground—when you look at other version of the Bible like the New American Version, The King James Version, they speak about it in different ways. They talk about five talents and ten talents, but the message is the same; to those servants who took what was given to them and invested it wisely and multiplied it five-fold and ten-fold, they would be given the kingdom of heaven, and the one who buried it in the ground, “crapaud smoke yuh pipe”. 
It is interesting to listen to the economic philosophy of the Member for Siparia. Their solution to this country’s issues is to stop spending money. So, you do not build roads, hospitals, schools, houses; stop drilling for oil; stop exploiting our natural gas reserves; stop industrialization; and shut down the Waterfront Project. The Waterfront Project is almost finished. They are outfitting rooms in the Hyatt Regency Hotel as we speak. They want us to bulldoze that project and turn it into a car park. That is their solution to the economy of this country—contraction. Again, that is an NAR philosophy. That is exactly what they did when the NAR came in 1986. They cut public servants’ pay. They contracted the economy; crashed the economy. They took 10 per cent out of their salaries. This is what they will do.

2.20 p.m.

It is clear when you hear the philosophy of the UNC, it is the same people talking about Point Lisas is a sunset industry; leave the gas in the ground; do not drill for oil; do not spend money.

In the last three years, I think, this PNM administration has put almost $11 billion into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and they want to tell us about saving. Eleven billion dollars and I have no doubt that having pegged the budget on a conservative $50 oil price that oil prices are going to average in excess of $60 in the next fiscal year, and there will be tremendous transfers to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. That is prudent fiscal management, Mr. Speaker. That is the difference between us and them, you know.

If you look at the actual increase year on year, from last year to this year, it is a mere 7 per cent in overall terms and we banked $3 billion last year into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. And yet again, this year we have pegged our budget on a $50 oil price. Clearly, once the international economic conditions remain the same and you have this rapid growth in India—India has been growing at more than 10 per cent per year; China, 10 and a half per cent per year growth. The developed countries are growing at 3 per cent. Many of their economies are recovering.

When you have this demand for energy, I have no doubt that we are going to bank another billion or $2 billion or $3 billion into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund in the next 12 months. That is all because of the fiscal prudent approach of the PNM administration to economic management of this country.

The other thing that bothered me was the Member for Siparia’s inability to read. The Member made a big song and dance about the statement made by the hon. Prime Minister in the budget speech about expenditure in agriculture. And
the Member claimed that the Prime Minister said $1.2 billion would be allocated to agriculture but only $674 million is in the documents; proving to me that the Member cannot read; cannot read interest rates; cannot read growth in the manufacturing sector. It is not surprising that the Member cannot read the estimates of expenditure.

If the Member had gone—for example, which I did; I took three minutes; I do not have all the documents here—to page 158 of the estimates of recurrent expenditure; the recurrent allocation for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is $525 million. Page 9 of the Estimates of Development Programme, $139 million for agriculture; page 187 of the Estimates of Development Programme under the IDF, another $57 million for agriculture; page 204 of the Infrastructure Development Fund, $350 million to EMBD for creating the two-acre plots and putting in the infrastructure to convert those Caroni workers into farmers. I barely reached $1 billion and I barely looked at these documents for three minutes. Who wrote that speech? And it should be a lesson to the Member that does not read what they give you to read. It is some COP spy in your office that wrote that, trying to set you up.

Dr. Rowley: To make Dookeran look good.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, to make Dookeran look good. [Laughter] But you know my friend from Diego Martin Central would deal with all of this craziness here; that the survival of the private sector has been in spite of the Government; no support to the manufacturing sector. As I said, the manufacturing sector is contracting a further contraction. I will leave that to my colleague from Diego Martin Central because if I had to respond to every inanity from the hon. Member it would take me 750 minutes and regrettably, I only have 75 minutes. But let me move on again. [ Interruption] Yes, if you want more you will get more, you know.

The hon. Member also demonstrated a classic misunderstanding of the training programmes of the Government. I also see here that she pooh-poohed our training programmes and said that apprenticeship is code speak for cheap labour and that these people never graduate. One of the success stories of this PNM administration is the Multi Sector Skills Training programme (MuST). That is one of the success stories.

I was talking to the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education just last week and he told me the programme is so successful that over 65 per cent of the trainees in the Multi Sector Skills Training programme are being absorbed as permanent, skilled workers into the permanent labour force within the construction industry and the hospitality industry, immediately on graduation from MuST. [Desk thumping] Two-thirds of the graduates are getting permanent,
long-term, meaningful, sustainable jobs. They cannot even come close to that, and yet the Leader of the Opposition says that these people will never graduate; they will always be apprentices for life and so on. [Interruption] More prepared? I am coming to you just now.

Mr. Speaker, before I go on, one of the features of the contribution of the Member of Siparia was, as I said, their wishful thinking; their rewriting of history; this thing about the economy being in depression and the contraction of the manufacturing sector. This is one of the practices and policies of the Members opposite. At the end of that rather dry and boring contribution, the Leader of the Opposition decided to “buss a mark”; but when you are “bussing a mark” do not “buss” a half mark or a quarter mark, “buss” a real mark.

Dr. Rowley: “Buss” Wade Mark.

Hon. C. Imbert: Or “buss” Wade Mark, but “buss a mark.” You know some Members of the Opposition are becoming so desperate. I do not know, Mr. Speaker, if you received emails. [Member shows photographs] This is what is circulating on the Internet. They are so desperate they are circulating photographs on the Internet of an ornate, elaborate house, showing gothic and roman columns, plush tapestry, Louis XIV furniture and so on. I happened to get this email being circulated by the Opposition—[Interruption] yes, by the Opposition—and at the end of each photograph of this house, you have some sort of critical caption about how the Government is spending its money.

Then I was also sent another email after I got all these photographs and it was clear to me, when I looked at one of them, I saw mature date palms from the Middle East. I saw all sorts of foliage that does not exist in this country. So it was obvious to me right away that it was not true. Then I got another email and I shall read it. This is from the perpetrator of this hoax:

“Today I sent an email I received from my friend with respect to the Prime Minister’s residence. When I got it I called her and I asked her if she was sure of her source and she assured me that it was. My apologies. Within 30 minutes, my schoolmate living in India emailed me to say it was indeed the interior of a house in the Middle East. Apologies all. I have learnt a lesson. I want to set the record straight and I do not want this to reflect badly on the integrity and honesty of those involved, the Members of the Opposition in Trinidad.”

So they sent out the email—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: You make up that.
Hon. C. Imbert: Nobody “ain’t” make up anything—with bogus pictures of a house in the Middle East and then when they “geh ketch”, when somebody was ble to identify that it was a fake, they sent out an apology, hoping it would not reflect badly on the political fortunes of the Opposition. That is the level of desperation to which they are sinking.

Let me deal now with the Rapid Rail Project. Imagine they are sending out photographs of a house with a fireplace in it and saying, this is what is in here:

“Manning is so ridiculous he put a fireplace in his house.”

That is it. [Interruption] You want to see it? Do not try that on me is you who sent it.

Let me deal now with the selection of the preferred contractor for the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project. Now, because of the amount of money involved in the Trinidad Rapid Rail Project—it is a billion dollar project—because of the interest in this project; because of the many attempts at sabotage of this project by persons who were not successful in the bidding process, local and foreign provocateurs; because of all of that; all of those attempts to sabotage this project, the Cabinet set up a system for the receipt of tenders, evaluation of tenders and recommendations with respect to this project that has never been implemented in this country before.

In November 2006, the Cabinet established a broad-based ministerial committee comprising the following persons: the Minister of Public Administration and Information as Chairman; the Minister of National Security; the Attorney General, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Works and Transport. That was the ministerial committee supported by a technical team comprised of senior public servants; representatives of NIDCO and a variety of other technocrats; all of this to oversee the procurement process.

The negotiating team was headed by Mr. Hospedales, the co-coordinator of the Divestment Secretariat and supported by a number of senior NIDCO personnel; by teams from White & Case, well known and reputable London-based international attorneys and by teams from Marshal, Macklin, Monaghan, international Toronto-based project managers and engineers, well known and highly regarded in their field.

The process began as far back as March of 2007; we took our time with this project. The proposals and negotiations began way back in March, and after having selected the final two bidders—and what I found intriguing, Mr. Speaker, after we whittle down the six bidders who had submitted bids; one came late, that
was the German consortium from Siemens that arrived after the bids were closed; we disqualified that immediately; then two others were deemed to not have met the minimum requirements in terms of the request for proposals; those were discarded and then a third one failed in material respects in terms of financial capability and track record; that was out and we boiled it down to two: the Consortium led by Bouygues, not boogie, boygie or Boy George or whatever it is—

Hon. Member: Not “bhowjee” either.

Hon. C. Imbert: Not bhowjee either—by Bouygues Travaux Publics Works, that was one; and the second one was the consortium led by Vinci Construction Grands Projects. It is intriguing, the firm of Bombardier International, the aircraft designer and manufacturer and also a manufacturer of planes; in fact one of the largest manufacturers of railway equipment in the world. The firm of Bombardier was associated with the Vinci Consortium, and there was a song and a dance and a “tralala” all over this country, inside and outside of the Parliament about how there was some sort of conflict of interest with Bombardier and they had an inside track; that they should be disqualified.

2.35 p.m.

I remember standing in this Parliament hearing Members opposite, shout to the top of their voices that the Vinci Consortium with Bombardier should be disqualified from tendering. Throw them out! It is intriguing, now that we have come down to the end and the consortium that has Bombardier in it did not win, we are corrupt because we give it to the other one. So, if the Government had decided to award the contract to the Vinci consortium with Bombardier of Canada, we corrupt, because, you know, they offered inducements. That is what they say.

Now that we have decided after an evaluation of the entire process that Bouygues Travaux Publics is the preferred contractor because they are giving us the most attractive proposal with the least risk, we are corrupt. So what are they saying, Mr. Speaker?

Dr. Rowley: Close it down.

Hon. C. Imbert: Close it down! Have no railway! You cannot give it to number one because they have an association with Bombardier. When you do not give it to Bombardier, you are corrupt because you give it to the other one. Grasping at straws!

Dr. Rowley: Hoping to “buss” mark.
Hon. C. Imbert: Hoping to “buss” mark. Mr. Speaker, I would like to know who are these three anonymous officials at NIDCO, who, it is alleged by the Member for Siparia, allegedly accepted inducements. Call names! You want to “buss” mark, call names. [Interruption] Go outside and call their names too.

Mr. Speaker, they are just grasping at straws. As I said, when you want to “buss” mark, “buss” the whole mark; not a half mark. Ludicrous!

Now, let me go on in terms of the process. The negotiations commenced on March 26, 2007 and, as I said, the evaluation committee was supported by White and Case London attorneys and Marshal Macklin Monaghan, Toronto-based engineers providing technical advice. So the negotiations commenced on March 26, 2007 and by May 04, 2007 the initial negotiated contracts were concluded subject to review by NIDCO and by both tenderers. During the period May 12 to May 13, 2007; meetings with both tenderers recommenced simultaneously and separately. The intention being to achieve on May 14, final negotiated contractors with two tenderers.

On May 14, 2007 both tenderers delivered to the corporate secretary of NIDCO the final terms and pricing, final proposals in separate sealed envelopes. Consequently, an evaluation team again comprising, as I said, MMM of Canada and White and Case of London evaluated the proposals and made a submission to the board of directors of NIDCO and on June 04, 2007 the board of directors of NIDCO with the evaluation team presented to the ministerial committee for its consideration a recommendation report on the preferred tenderer.

We did not accept it just so, Mr. Speaker. That is since June 04, 2007. Following the presentation of the report from the evaluation committee; the ministerial committee looked at alternative options; looked at the best value in terms of the best system for the country before proceeding with the contract. Subsequently, on July 19, 2007 the ministerial committee, after thoroughly examining the alternative options decided to make a recommendation for the consideration of Cabinet on the basis of the recommendation report, culminating in the announcement by the hon. Prime Minister that the consortium headed by Bouygues Travaux Publics was deemed to be the preferred contractor and now final negotiations are going to take place.

Mr. Speaker, this has been an exhaustive process. [Interruption] Exemplary and exhaustive process! [Interruption] We have been at this for one year. We have employed some of the most reputable auditing and accounting firms in the world to audit this process, to ensure that there is no possibility of ministerial interference; to ensure that we brought the best expertise from all over the world to examine this project. Having done all of that; having brought, as I said White
and Case one of the largest and most specialized construction law firms in the world and Marshal Macklin Monaghan one of the most reputable engineering firms in the world, recommended to us by the Canadian Commercial Corporation which is a state enterprise of the Government of Canada, we took our time with this project, Mr. Speaker. As I said the proposals came in March and here we are in August, we have taken months of evaluation, audit, scrutiny, examination and testing the various solutions, looking at all the contract factors, looking at the factors in terms of price, looking at the factors in terms of contract terms, value for money, risk to the country and so on, and at the end of that process which I said has been audited by some of the most reputable auditing firms in the world, this is how we came up with the final selection.

We always knew that there would be interference at the end of the day. When the Siemens bid was thrown out because it arrived late, the first thing was there were attempts to get us to accept the bid. Could you imagine if we did that? You have a tender date; you have a closing time; you have a tender box, the tender does not arrive; it arrived afterwards, it got lost somewhere and attempts are made to get us to accept that tender.

**Dr. Rowley:** Siemens.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Siemens, and when we do not accept it, attempts are made to scuttle the whole project with a set of *mouvais langue* all over the country.

**Dr. Rowley:** Their local agent.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Their local agent, sorry, not Siemens. Their local agents or their local provocateurs and associates are the ones who tried to scuttle it. As we went through we came upon another tender that, as I said had failed in terms of its financial capability and in terms of its technical capability. Then when we threw that one out and we boiled down to the last two, “all hell broke loose” in this country, they are having symposium, they are having seminar, they are shouting, screaming and running all up and down; stop the rail project! Where have I heard those words before and, as I said, we always knew there was mischief.

About two weeks ago I got an anonymous letter, which I understand has been sent to everybody. Every Tom, Dick and Harry has received this letter which says—“Dear Sir”—no name, I got this about two weeks ago and then various Members of the Cabinet and others started to give me their copies. The letter states:

“There has been a manipulation of the tendering procedure in the Rapid Rail Project…”
And it goes on to be a whole bunch of allegations.

**Dr. Rowley:** No name, no signature.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** No name, no signature and everything is absolutely absurd and ludicrous, nonsensical, Mr. Speaker. Everything is wrong when you look into the allegations here. And all that is happening here is a lot of money involved. It is a lot of money, that is what you expect and that is why I challenge the Member for Siparia. Call names! You want to “buss” mark; call names! Tell us who; tell us how; tell us where and tell us how it was done!

It is rubbish, Mr. Speaker, after we went through a process for one year, hired international experts and international lawyers. I called the offices of the lawyers in London to tell them about this querulous piece of garbage and I said, anyhow, just answer every question here, they start to laugh. I say, “But, what are you all laughing for?” They said, “but, it is trash!” I said, “That is all right, answer it.” So for the benefit of anybody who wants to come with any stupidness, I have a response to everything.

So that the Opposition can keep trying to sabotage the Rapid Rail Project; they can keep trying with all agent provocateurs all about the place; with all the persons who are showing clear and naked vested interest; they can keep trying. But I am satisfied that the process can stand intense scrutiny. And that is all I have to say about that. [Interrupt] Yes, TTI—[Steups] I would not bother to answer them; same thing, aiding and abetting the agent provocateurs who want to stop the project.

The whole point is, Mr. Speaker, we are being so careful about this Rapid Rail Project, so careful that the only dollar figure in the contract at this point in time, is the figure for Phase I of the project which is the planning and design aspect of it, which has been set at a figure at US $67 million. While I am on that, this querulous, anonymous letter claimed that the other one should have gotten it. This is the kind of foolishness we have to put up with. As I said, if you give it to Bombardier, you are corrupt; you give it to Bouygues, you are corrupt. [Interrupt] Yes, "Boggie and Bougie."

This piece of garbage, Mr. Speaker, says that the other one should have gotten it. This one is saying it should not be Bouygues, it should be the other one, okay. Yet when you look at the evaluation you see that the Bouygues consortium bid US $67 million for Phase I for the planning, design and so on, and the other one bid US $103 million. But we are being asked with all of this and all of that nonsense over there, we are supposed to accept a proposal that cost US $100-odd million in favour of another proposal that cost US $67 million.
**Mr. Sharma:** The Scarborough Hospital was more than that.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, you know one thing we have done with respect to this project and the other projects like the offshore Patrol Vessel Project is that—

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Works and Transport has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. C. Imbert:** One thing we have learnt, Mr. Speaker, is how to evaluate complex tenders in a highly technical procurement process. We have used the same approach for the offshore patrol vessels where we had expertise from persons from the United States Coast Guard and other international standard experts to advise us on technical matters. We have international lawyers advising us on contract terms and we set up a system where you have an oversight committee comprised of Ministers, a technical support team comprised of experts and an evaluation process that is entirely water tight.

That is why when I heard one of the Members of the UNC carrying on about how the PNM in Government has awarded a contract for the offshore patrol vessels for $12 billion, I had to laugh. Because here am I looking at the documents and the contract is $1.4 billion and they are screaming and shouting all over the place [ Interruption] in the Parliament and carrying on, that it is $12 billion. So, that is all I have to say on that. As I said when you are “bussing” a mark, “buss” the whole mark. They have nothing here for you. Nothing! There is nothing in there.

So, now let me move on to—[Interruption] Yes, you could say what you want. There is nothing in there! Let me move on now to more important matters. Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to give some clarification on some of the infrastructure matters outlined by the hon. Prime Minister in his budget speech. One of the other things that I found incredible about the Member's speech; I took some notes and one of the promises that the UNC made, and one of the promises that the hon. Member for Siparia made is that they are going to commence construction of the interchange. What happen, you do not live in this country? You do not drive on the highway? You do not see piles driving up at the intersection of the Uriah Butler and the Churchill Roosevelt Highway.
This is what we have to put up with, Mr. Speaker, and that is why I used this example of this obscene email that is circulating with some house from the Middle East. [ Interrupting] They honestly believe that people would believe their rubbish. The road diversions have been in progress now to allow the pile driving for several months. Pile driving began around August 06; almost two weeks ago, they began to drive piles for the foundations for the elevated bridge structure that takes you from west to south, and in fact I am told they completed the pile driving for the west abutment, and they are now going to start constructing the pile caps and you will soon start to see the piers for the elevated bridge structure go up in the air.

Construction is going on like mad at that intersection, but one of the promises they have made is they are going to commence the construction of the interchange. Talking some foolishness about when they left they had $150 million interchange and now ours is $300 million. [ Interrupting]

2.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, when they left, the interchange project was stalled; it was the subject of injunctive action. There was a restraining order on the Government, awarding the contract for the interchange, because it was alleged that a Minister in the UNC government had interfered in the procurement process and had directed a state enterprise to award a contract to one of his friends. That is what happened to the interchange project, it was stuck in court and the decision was only given in that matter in 2006. Stayed there for six years; tied up in the court and no award could have been made on that interchange project that they had initiated because of ministerial interference. That is their legacy in terms of road improvements in this country.

The Member for Siparia also uttered the ludicrous promise that they are going to complete the DNA legislation. I wonder what is going on in this Parliament. I arrived a little late because one of our friends decided to dig up one of the access roads to get to this Parliament. So I came a few minutes late and enquired as to who had presented the report from the Joint Select Committee on the Bill entitled the Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Bill, 2006 and I found out it was my honourable colleague from Tabaquite, a member of the Joint Select Committee; a member of the UNC no less who filled in and presented the report of the Joint Select Committee on the DNA Bill.

It is finished, laid on the Table; the findings of the committee were unanimous; the committee had the support of everyone and yet the Member for
Siparia says that a UNC government is going to complete the DNA Bill. Completely oblivious to the fact that one of her own Members had proven that we have completed our work on the DNA Bill—representative of the UNC sleeping or shopping in Miami.

Mrs. Job-Davis: New York.

Hon. C. Imbert: She is still on a shopping spree. Had to be. Had to be and that is what we have to deal with in this Parliament, so let me move on. As you know, the construction of the interchange is well under way and some of those superficial approaches to transport that the Member trotted out are already in progress. In fact, I was going through some of the promises that the Member for Siparia said that they will do and I had to put down by every one of them; in each case when I looked at what they were promising, we had already done it. I have given an example of the laying of the DNA legislation. Well, let me move on now to what we are doing about traffic.

Apart from our rapid rail project and we are proceeding with that project—

[Interruption]

Hon. Member: No cellphones in cars.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, we are coming to that—and the point that has to be understood is that all we are doing at this point in time, is signing a contract that has a US $67 million commitment in it. As soon as the planning and designs start to emerge, the final designs, and we get an accurate assessment of what the cost will be, what the final elements of this project will be—at this time we are planning to go from west, somewhere in the Westmoorings area, the West Mall area, that is the western end of the railway, all the way to Sangre Grande, into the town of Sangre Grande, that is the East-West Corridor of the rapid rail, and from Port of Spain in the north, all the way down to San Fernando and beyond as the Prime Minister said, deeper into Penal, Debe and so on. I also believe we need to go across to Princes Town, which is a big population settlement in South Trinidad.

As the planning and design contract evolves and as the details come out, the number of stations, the number of trains, the final alignment of the tracks, the final cost of the project, the way we have structured it, the Government in order to protect the citizens of this country, has the right under the contract to walk away from it. Each element of the project, the contract has built-in to it, that as you move along, you can walk away from it, so that we are not committing the country at this point in time to any billion-dollar investment; we are merely
committing the contract to a $67 million investment, so that we get the kind of
detailed information we need to make the investment decision and that is how we
go about doing all our business.

The idea of closed-circuit television at traffic lights; been there, done that. I
have already announced on behalf of the Government, that Cabinet had approved
a contract for the installation of a traffic management system along the East-West
Corridor, involving primarily, the installation of closed-circuit television cameras
at major intersections. And if—[Interruption]

Hon. Member: Old news.

Hon. C. Imbert: Old news—the Members opposite bothered to read the
newspapers, the tenders have already been invited for that traffic surveillance
system and tenders will be closing within the next couple weeks. A contract will
be awarded in this year, 2007 and Trinidad and Tobago will be well on its way to
acquiring sophisticated traffic surveillance technology.

We also announced that Cabinet had approved the construction of overpasses
at El Socorro and at Aranguez; the construction of fronted roads and construction
of a flyover at Bamboo Village which is an integral component of the interchange
project. And if you can picture it in your mind, Mr. Speaker, as you come out of
Port of Spain, come onto the Beetham Highway, as you keep going you will no
longer be troubled by a traffic light at El Socorro and no longer have to stop at a
traffic light at Aranguez. You will go up on the interchange over the intersection
by the Grand Bazaar, come back down, pass Bamboo Village, again you would
not be troubled by a traffic light there and from thereon in, there would be no
traffic lights all the way to San Fernando. Just think of it; just picture it. This is
one of the major infrastructure projects of this administration; already well on its
way.

We are adding lanes on our major highways as we speak. Just a couple weeks
ago, the Ministry of Works and Transport in record time, within one month, added an
additional lane on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from the UWI intersection, all the
way down to the Kay Donna intersection. We did that in about two months and we
are now completing the addition of another lane from that location all the way up
to Macoya, and soon we will be tripling the capacity on the other side, coming
down from Macoya, all the way down to UWI and all the way down to Kay Donna
and so on.

The intention is to convert the Churchill Roosevelt Highway into a six-lane
highway with three lanes on either side, with interchanges at every location; with
flyovers wherever there is a traffic light; and with frontage roads wherever they
are required, so that you would be able to drive from Port of Spain to Piarco without having to encounter any obstructions; and from Port of Spain to San Fernando without encountering any obstructions.

I hear them talk. How many interchanges did you build in your time? None, Zero, Zip, Zilch, just like housing. I heard the Member for Siparia talked about house. How many houses did you all build? Two? In our administration, we built over 25,000 houses in the last five years. Twenty-five thousand houses, you hear the number? Twenty-five thousand; you built two. How many interchange you built? Naught. Naught. Zero.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, the Member carried on about the water taxi project. Clearly, the hon. Member does not drive through King’s Wharf or down by Flat Rock. She is not familiar with San Fernando at all because if the Member went down to San Fernando—[Interruption]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I would take the water taxi.

Hon. C. Imbert: Spending too much time in other places—the Member would see a dredger hard at work; working almost 24 hours a day, seven days a week, dredging the approached channel and turning basin for the water taxi project.

The pile driving for the permanent jetty, part of it has already been done and the second part is about to be resumed. The National Infrastructure Development Company has finalized its arrangements to make a recommendation to the Government, which will be made to Cabinet next week. As a matter of fact, on the selection of vessels for the operation of this service, I can tell you that the vessels that we are considering will have the capability of travelling about 40 knots, very similar to the fast ferries traveling to Tobago, actually a bit faster, will be able to make the trip between San Fernando and Port of Spain in about 45 minutes or less, depending on weather conditions.

So, to recap, the status of the project is that the approached channel and the turning basin is being dredged as we speak. Arrangements are being made for the berthing facilities, vessels are being procured and we have already identified a location in Port of Spain where the vessels will berth. But in all of this, and this is something that we learnt with the fast ferries and one has to be practical when one deals with this thing. It is not a joke. How many ferries did they put in the services? Zero, naught. How many fast ferries did they acquire on commission for the interisland ferry service?

Dr. Rowley: Zilch.
Hon. C. Imbert: Zero, zilch, nada, nothing. You know, it is not a child’s game when you are entering into the world of high technology. This is what we discovered when we acquired those two fast ferries that when you want to get vessels that are state-of-the-art; that can carry people in the required comfort; can operate at the required speed, with the required liability and so on, it is not a simple task. It took us quite a while to identify suitable vessels for the inter-island fast ferry service. We have already identified about 10 potential vessels for the water taxi service; I already have the evaluation report on my desk.

As I said, the matter will go to Cabinet next week and once the selection process throws up the three or four vessels that we need to start the service, and once these vessels are available; and once they are checked out by a classification society, like, Lloyds of London or Deck NorskiiVeritas, these are the agencies that we have to use to establish the bona fides of these vessels, Mr. Speaker, you will see the commencement of the water taxis service. I am told that the vessels will be available in October, and this is why we have given a tentative date of October 2007 for the commencement of the water taxis service.

Now, we are not going to compromise our principles and we are not going to acquire any vessels that would be unsuitable for the route, so maybe it will go to November. I really do not think that is an issue. What I know, is that we have identified vessels; we have done the primary designs; the harbour in San Fernando is under construction; and what I know, is that in 2007, the water taxi service will be implemented. What I also know—[Interruption]

Dr. Moonilal: We will hold our breath [Inaudible] water.

Hon. C. Imbert: You could hold your breath, you would be in opposition. Your breath is offensive, you should hold it. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have also dealt with the issue of public transportation. If you look at the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) and you look at the tremendous work done by the PTSC over the last year—and I have to congratulate the Chairman, Mr. Ethelbert Paul, a former Mayer of Port of Spain and all the board members of the PTSC [Desk thumping] for a job well done.

What Mr. Paul and his colleagues at the PTSC have been able to do, is to bring the beleaguered PTSC, which was punished by the UNC; punished, because in 1995, there were almost 300 buses in the fleet of the PTSC and over 200 buses in the fleet of PTSC in 2005. By 2001, they pushed that down to 80, from almost 300, down to 80, through wanton neglect. As the Prime Minister had announced and I am also pleased to announce, we have reversed that ugly trend and now there are
almost 200 buses on the roads in Trinidad and Tobago [Desk thumping] and more to come, as the Prime Minister has announced within the next fiscal year, we will be acquiring another 100 buses. We would get the fleet back up to 300, the same level it was under the caring administration of the PNM in the early 1990s.

3.05 p.m.

At the commissioning and operation of the new bus services, I was very surprised at the very positive reaction of the general public to the introduction of the new fleet of buses on the road. We have them all over the country. We have them in the Southwest; Southeast, Central, North and East Trinidad. We have left out nowhere. We have been completely non-partisan. We have sent buses to Tobago, and there are more to go to Tobago; more to come, more to come. Some of the 112 are for Tobago.

I am always pleasantly surprised when persons come up to me on the street and thank the PNM Government for its foresight in implementing this visionary policy of radically upgrading our Public Transport Service Corporation. They really perform extremely well.

So when you add the widening of the highways; the removal of traffic lights; the installation of the flyovers, interchanges and so on; and when you think that within the next couple of months we would have a fully functional coastal ferry service, the water taxi as it is known, from San Fernando to Port of Spain; when you consider that we have selected a contractor for our rapid rail project who has told us that it would take about 18 to 20 months to complete the planning and final design and then another four years to actually install the system all the way from Diego Martin to Sangre Grande and all the way down to San Fernando, you think about the choices that people will have in terms of transportation.

You can drive on a freeway. You can ride in an air-conditioned bus in comfort. You can choose to go on an air-conditioned, comfortable modern fast ferry or you can choose to go on an air-conditioned, comfortable, modern, state-of-the-art railway car. This is a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to transportation; not that piecemeal, hodge-podge, arbitrary nonsense that we heard from the interim Leader of the Opposition.

In addition to that, part of our programme is to open up this country. Mr. Speaker, I wish I had 750 minutes. Over the last several years, the Ministry of Works and Transport has done a considerable amount of work in terms of completing designs for a national grid of freeways and highways in Trinidad and Tobago. Designs are virtually completed for the freeway from Wallerfield to Manzanilla. Designs are
ongoing for the freeway to Point Fortin and La Brea. Designs are complete for the freeway to Princes Town and ongoing towards Mayaro. Designs are well advanced for the advancement of the highway to Diego Martin.

Mr. Speaker, you would have heard the Prime Minister outline his vision as to the system of freeways that we are going to establish. In the few minutes remaining, let me give you a mental picture.

You have the East-West Corridor, as it exists with the Churchill Roosevelt Highway and Beetham Highway, and the North-South corridor as it exists with the Solomon Hochoy Highway. You are going to have a system of freeways going south from San Fernando, going down towards La Brea and down towards Point Fortin, going through Penal, Siparia, Debe and Fyzabad, all the way down to La Brea and Point Fortin. You are going to be going east with a system of freeways from San Fernando to Princes Town, Rio Claro, all the way to Mayaro; designs are completed already. We are ready to go out to tender.

We are going to be going east towards Sangre Grande and Manzanilla with a freeway and then a spur off to Toco. We have plans for either a completely new highway to Diego Martin, a causeway out in the sea or using the tunneling technology to get us down to Chaguaramas. [Crosstalk]

Yes, all of this. While you were sleeping, we were working. We will be constructing a freeway to the North Coast using tunnelling technology. [Crosstalk] How many interchanges have you built? You have built none. How many roads have you built? You have built none.

There will be another North-South link between Curepe and Princes Town, which will link up with the highway between Mayaro and San Fernando. When this system of freeways is completed and we are going design/built, we are not going to repeat the mistakes of the past. We are packaging these projects into packages large enough to attract experienced international contractors, who will do it on a design, build, finance, operate, maintain basis—very similar to the approach with the railway—and they will also operate these roads using a concessionaire system with subsidy from the Government.

We are confident, based on experiences in other countries, that having done all the design work for these projects, having already mapped out the route alignment, having determined exactly where the highways would go, what shape they would take, what their design features would be, where the interchanges would be and so on, we are already packaging this for invitation to international
tender. Within the next couple of months we will be able to start awarding contracts for this completely new national grid of highways, so that at the end of our next term in 2012, you should be able to drive from any one point in Trinidad to any other point in less than one and a half hours.

I will invite the hon. Members opposite sometime in 2010, 2011 and 2012 to join me as we drive on the new Trinidad and Tobago roads. Of course, we are not leaving out Tobago. You would have heard, as we went to Tobago recently, that we were also going to be using the same approach to expand the Claude Noel Highway from Scarborough into Charlotteville and into other parts of Tobago.

With those very few words, and I wish I had 750 minutes, I wish to support the presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance. Like the person who was given the one pound and he turned it into 10, I wish my Prime Minister 10 more seats and I wish to support this national budget.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Winston Dookeran (St. Augustine): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister hastily announced this early budget date, I was convinced that he was in a state of panic over the disclosure from the Ryder Scott audit. I was in no doubt that he intended to come to this Parliament with a repeat, quick fix prescription focused firmly on re-election and had to put the nation at risk, as we deepen the continuing anxiety over our economic future; this, in spite of the fact that we have had a massive windfall of energy revenue that this country has ever seen.

It is evident to me that in the few days he gave himself to write this budget statement, he could find no viable solutions to the peril in which his style of governance has placed what should have been a strong economy, robust and sustainable, marked by low inflation and an all embracing prosperity.

In the budget presentation last Monday, the nation witnessed a Prime Minister and Minister of Finance tottering from panic to contradiction, to confusion, to incomprehension, to embarrassing failure, to rationally come to terms with a runaway overheated economy driven by a spend-the-money-quick mindset and predicated on the wrong premise for economic development. [Desk thumping]

No one can accuse the hon. Prime Minister of demonstrating either common sense or a level head in this budget adventure. Fortunately for us, this will be the last opportunity that the Member for San Fernando East will have to present a budget in this House, either as Prime Minister or Finance Minister. [Desk
This does not mean that the country will not have to be victim of the confusion, contradictions and panic actions of this terminally inept administration. [Desk thumping]

On Tuesday morning, the nation woke up to a scandalous traffic jam around the Queen's Park Savannah; a trip that would normally take 15 minutes, took two to three hours. Thousands of commuters were angry and frustrated. It was a scandalous episode that reflected the larger problems affecting the nation: no planning, no sensitivity to people's feelings; no regard to the issues of productivity and loss of production in this oil rich nation of ours. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: There was no common sense and no level headedness that came from those who organized it, the Ministry of National Security. Was it simply that the Ministry of National Security just could not care less about the people who commuted to and fro the Western peninsula/Maraval Valley and from the North Coast? That scene of chaos underlies how remote this administration is from the people and the real world around us. [Desk thumping] The Prime Minister and his Ministers have become arrogant, isolated and indifferent. [Desk thumping] There was stark evidence of this isolation and indifference in the budget statement. Let me start by making reference to one specific matter; it pertains to the disabled community in that of the disability grant.

At present, the disability grant is a meagre $900 per month. It is perplexing that if a differently abled person were to receive or earn a cent more than $300 per month, he or she would lose the $900 grant.

Furthermore, persons under the age of 18 are ineligible for the grant; this raises the question: Does someone born with a disability not need care, attention, medicine and therapy before the age of 18?

At this point, it is no point asking the Government to do anything about it. [Desk thumping] A Congress of the People government will immediately correct such government abuse of members of a differently abled community.

3.20 p.m.

Further evidence of the Prime Minister’s isolation and indifference is that while he speaks of racial and religious harmony, he has up to now said nothing about the desecration of the temple in the sea. [Desk thumping] We have been hearing about the Children’s’ Authority Act particularly since little Sean Luke and Emily Annamunthodo were killed; now we hear it again, but nothing is being done.
The Prime Minister’s isolation and indifference were very evident in the budget presentation. It was a vacuous document and a budget conceived in a total vacuum. [Desk thumping] Not many national budgets were formulated anywhere in the world with absolutely no reference to, no review of global economic trends, focus and linkages especially in a country so dependent on foreign direct investment.

What was an even greater aberration was that though there was the reference to Cuba, the Prime Minister had nothing to say about economic circumstances and prospects among Caricom countries, the dominant market for our manufacturers. The Review of the Economy made mention of the fall in trade surplus of 12 per cent during the last year in trade with our Caricom partners. There was no mention of handling that issue.

There was no word in the budget for Jamaica, our biggest Caricom customer which was known to be in the chartered course of “Hurricane Dean”. This is not just an aberration, this is sheer madness but our nation is indeed blessed. This administration continues to operate in a cocoon of complacency while insisting on gambling with a country’s future and that of every child and unborn child.

The oil boom of the 1950s saw a political cycle ebbing into the streets of Port of Spain in 1970, then the dramatic rise in the price of oil in the 1970s ended the economy's recovery with a violent attack on this Parliament in 1990, now in this.

The first decade of this second millennium, the risk of a repeat of that political cycle is upon us and so our expectations and resolves to free ourselves from the direct influence of energy prices and output shocks are giving way to anxiety and fear of the risks and dangers ahead. The end of the rainbow is how some experts from many internal and external sources dubbed this budget.

It is particularly frightening that in this case, the rainbow is reflected from a bubble. The future of our nation is at risk and the Government is moving from blunder to blunder. When we look at the Article 4 consultation, we get a picture of a Government oblivious to advice.

In 2003, the Article IV Consultation said:

“Despite strong growth, the underlying fiscal situation has deteriorated steadily despite high energy-related revenues. With the growing importance of the energy sector, the economy’s vulnerability to external shocks has increased.”
Three years later in 2006, it was said that the non-energy fiscal deficit had widened substantially adding to demand pressures in the short run and heightening exposure to long-term vulnerability. They then asked the question directly: How long is the existing fiscal position tenable?

In the report dated January 2007, the IMF was more direct and warned the Minister of Finance in several sections that the team was seeing signs of intensifying risks in the workings of the economy. The time to change course had come. In 2005, real GDP grew to about 8 per cent and is set to accelerate at 12½ per cent this year. However, the underlying fiscal situation has deteriorated and a non-energy fiscal deficit has risen. Greater exchange rate flexibility may be needed given the persistent terms of trade shocks and the absence of fiscal restraint. It pointed out that portfolio outflows prompted by excess liquidity have accelerated surpassing foreign investment inflows and at the same time, rising inflation has led to negative interest rates and have encouraged capital flight.

It suggested that although the banking system was well capitalized and profitable, it remains vulnerable to shortfalls in energy prices and outward shocks. In 2007, these alarms were sounded again.

The underlying fiscal situation is likely to deteriorate and the non-energy deficit increased to over 16 per cent of GDP. Inflation is projected to accelerate further continuing to exceed that of trading partners, it will eventually require a very large fiscal policy adjustment once energy resources are depleted.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance chose to ignore these warnings and gamble with the people's patrimony. The energy’s income has been squandered in a fashion as if it is a drunken sailor spreading joy on shore leave. [Desk thumping]

Now there is a new Government gamble with our gas reserves and our energy security which somebody has called the “wappie” game. The Prime Minister says there is nothing to worry about, since as a young geologist he came across a letter written in 1905 where Texaco claimed that oil was about to run out. In other words, the Prime Minister’s position is that the population must have faith in the self-proclaimed “Father of the Nation”. We have always found oil and gas and we will continue to do so.

The Prime Minister was emphatic that the Ryder Scott audit information will not affect five large gas-based projects which are set to come on stream in the short term. As I said before, this was in stark contradiction to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries sobering response to the Ryder Scott findings.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  Friday, August 24, 2007
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Let us examine the environment in which the Member for San Fernando East is formulating his energy dogma. Current total gas consumption in Trinidad and Tobago is now 1.4 billion cubic feet. When the new projects come on stream, the gas consumption will rise to 1.6 billion cubic feet which, on a proven result, will only last 10 years.

At the energy conference, the Prime Minister was reportedly moot on his previous claim that he would get gas from the Lauren Manatee Field that straddles the Trinidad/Venezuela boundary. The truth is, the Prime Minister gambled on his belief that reserves are always available and called the nation to have faith in his belief. He completely sidestepped the reality of the most critical issue facing the future of the economy with a passing comment that new fiscal incentives will be given for exploration in 2008.

There was no mention or reference to the extent of these incentives, or the impact of unprojected Government revenue or the country’s ability to service the cost of the new capital projects that do not generate revenue. At the Energy Conference the Prime Minister proposed a single integrated state company to the energy sector; one energy correspondent said that is a sure recipe for disaster.

Not only was the Prime Minister not level headed in this issue, he has not, and is not levelling with the population. The period of drilling and testing wells and declaring commercial discoveries is about five years. This means that an incoming government will need a very broad shovel to clean up after our current Minister of Finance. [Desk thumping] When the Prime Minister hastily brought the budget date forward, I said that he was in a state of panic and wanted to reassure the nation with an attempted quick-fix prescription. It is now evident that he could find no viable solutions and has now resorted to the public relations game. Today we must ponder the Prime Minister’s lack of foresight and the grave error in his reckless calculations.

Are we at the end of the rainbow? Can the bubble economy sustain itself in the hands of the Minister of Finance, the Member for San Fernando East? Are we to be assured by the sudden TV appearances of the CEO of BP, Mr. Robert Riley, and Mr. Derrick Hudson of British Gas who intervened as high-powered proponents in a critical public debate on the audit of the Ryder Scott Report; a report which is still denied to Members of Parliament and the public of Trinidad and Tobago?

If the CEOs of BP and British Gas have the full Ryder Scott Report, why has it been withheld from Members of Parliament, the media and citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Singh: Big business is controlling him.
Mr. W. Dookeran: Why then did the CEOs decide to make sudden television appearances in an election year?

Mr. Speaker, once again we see the unrelenting marginalization of our most democratic institution here in Parliament. [Desk thumping] Since President Robinson gifted the Member for San Fernando East with the opportunity to run the Government without Parliament, he has continued to operate without regard to Parliament’s fiscal protocol of transparency or accountability. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Singh: Runaway horse!

Mr. W. Dookeran: He has reportedly violated the constitutional rights of the citizens who were forced to go to the Privy Council to have the wrongs that were done to them righted. [Desk thumping]

The integrity of our system of politics and government is under threat. The political legitimacy of leadership in this country questioned since 1970 is once again on trial. Imagine we have the largest number of Government Ministers ever in this country and in the region. The ministry that controls the driver of the economy, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, has a part-time Minister who shares his portfolio with public administration, which is under the watch of the Prime Minister. When the nation’s public business is being determined without accountability by an energy cartel that comes from the old boys’ network of the former Shell Oil Companies that once operated in Trinidad—

Mr. Singh: Julien and Jones.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Today, I make the call and demand that the Prime Minister declares the assets and interests of the members of his energy cartel and come clean with the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

3.35 p.m.

He must also declare the assets of those he has put in charge of UdeCOTT, the Rapid Rail Project and the Home Mortgage Bank. [Desk thumping] The Integrity in Public Life Act must aptly apply to all. When the public interest is compromised there must be no exceptions and no cover up.

I want to mention the allocation that he claims he is making to the CEPEP workers—$1 billion. My arithmetic tells me that each worker should, on average, receive $166,000. I am sure that the workers did not receive this. Where, therefore, did the money go?
Mr. Singh: Ray Brathwaithe.

Mr. W. Dookeran: The time has come for us to get our economics right and put serious programmes for the people of Trinidad and Tobago so that we can reverse the mismanagement of our economic future. To do so, we must first confront the risk and challenges that our nation is facing. The dominant risk is that of the safety and security of our citizens.

The Prime Minister casually said that the budget allocation for national security will see tangible results over time. The minute he said that, the anxiety index among individuals and corporate citizens across the country shot upwards. He repeated previous announcements that he would build new police stations, buy 350 new police vehicles, buy offshore patrol vessels and set up a National Security Training Academy. He said these things before and has even fudged from what we, in the Congress of the People, have said. [Desk thumping]

Here are some more of the promises that the Government has made since the 2003 budget and has failed to deliver:

- Expansion of fingerprint and mug shot systems to sub-divisional headquarters;
- Servicing all security systems and their agencies via high capacity microwave backbone and point to multi-point systems.
- Acquiring reporting and analytical tools, including GIS linkages to Magistracy and High Courts, Prisons and other agencies. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: There are many. The Prime Minister, with billions of dollars and six national security ministers, including himself—the three of them as highly paid advisers—has failed the public on every issue of national security. [Desk thumping] Our safety is not secure. It is the first requirement of good governance. I want to assure this nation that the Congress of the People government, having done specific research and viable plans to restore safety and security for all our citizens, will take a number of urgent measures.

A Congress of the People government will lose no time in establishing an enhanced and greatly expanded system of community policing where each municipal and regional corporation will be responsible for public protection and safety measures on a decentralized basis. [Desk thumping]
In Tobago, subject to intelligence and logistical requirements, the new Tobago House of Assembly will have full political autonomy for the police service under a COP government. [Desk thumping] A Congress of the People government will aggressively attack the drug trade and the illicit economy that facilitates importation of illegal guns by taking innovative steps through the tax revenue system to enforce the Proceeds of Crime Act with a zero tolerance policy. [Desk thumping]

A Congress of the People government will expand the number of policemen on the roads with a strategic arrangement with members of the Estate Police Association, subject to proper training, certification and recognition to ensure a clean and competent police force for the protection of our citizens. [Desk thumping] A Congress of the People government will administratively de-link the criminal justice system from the national security enforcement arm of the Ministry of National Security and establish a separate ministry of justice to focus on fixing the criminal justice system, which is now near total collapse. We will establish a modern security protective service training academy in accordance with a crime reduction initiative—100-plus steps to a safer Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

The second major risk confronting Trinidad and Tobago is the entrenched and deepening poverty cycle that has persisted under Mr. Manning, even in the best of times. The Congress of the People has developed a programme of social reform which focuses on poverty eradication and social development. We have established a social sector committee under the leadership of Dr. Sharon Gopaul-McNicholls, who has devised a comprehensive programme, referred to as HOMECOP, House of Multi-dimensional Empowerment for Communities and Overcoming Poverty. [Desk thumping]

One of the vexing problems that re-enforces poverty levels in the country is the question of insecurity of tenure for homeowners, farmers and squatters. The Security of Tenure Act establishes question of ownership, but lack of clear title remains an everlasting problem. Three Acts were passed in 2000 to address such problems via a national land-titling programme. These Acts are: the Recognition of Titles Act; the Land Adjudication Act and the Land Tribunal Act. Preparatory work for implementing these Acts has been completed and they are yet to be proclaimed. Should these Acts be implemented, over 50,000 households would be eligible to benefit. Accordingly, a Congress of the People government will immediately establish an independent land tribunal to administer the legislation that will ensure proper titles for those
homeowners and farmers who are affected. A Congress of the People government will add a new schedule to Act 25 of 1998 to allow the regularization of squatters on private lands. This will be on a voluntary basis by private landowners.

The third major risk facing the country is the quality of employment, particularly for the youthful population of our society. This requires a full development of modern and diverse industries in the service sector. This is the challenge that the Prime Minister fails to understand most of all. He thinks that massive growth in nominal revenues from export of liquefied natural gas is the same as economic development or transformation of the economy. He does not understand that putting LNG in a tanker is no different from exporting oil in a tanker. It is raw material export; unprocessed energy export.

He does not understand that using some of the gas to make steel at Point Lisas, or ammonia, means only that you have diversified the use of energy; you have not transformed the economy. You have done nothing to significantly impact the youth in Tamana, Couva or Arima. The budget has said nothing to give hope to the country concerning the development of a vibrant service exporting sector in the country, where innovative, entrepreneurial youths are joining the world market for non-traditional exports. There is nothing to suggest creating the foundations for a vibrant and sustainable export industry in education, in music, in art, in tourism and intellectual property. There is no sign of instigating research and development of the arts based on our cultural traditions from India, Africa, China, Syria, Lebanon and other regions.

Rather than closing down the gaming industry, a Congress of the People government will open it up with enforceable regulations [Desk thumping] that will respect standards and values in our society and eliminate illicit activities like money-laundering and other transactions inimical to the economic interests of the country. [Desk thumping]

A Congress of the People government will build a modern and diverse economy to engage our youthful population in jobs in the global economy in the field of information technology, sport, culture and the new media. Accordingly, the expansion of our economic base in our economy must seek opportunities from the large outsourcing industry in the world economy. Today, the outsourcing global industry is in trillion dollars levels derived from new technologies in telecommunications and from the development of international sport, recreation and leisure industries. Public expenditure, therefore, will be diverted to provide for that infrastructure, education and training, to prepare young people for the new global economy of the 21st Century. It will start with the skills of the people. [Desk thumping]
It makes little sense talking about Cubans growing food in Trinidad and Tobago. It is bizarre to talk about importing food from Uganda into Trinidad and Tobago and using fast ferries to import food from Caricom. It is just ol’ talk. To ventilate about more money for agriculture while ignoring business enterprises and farming traditions inherent in the culture of Trinidad and Tobago is just ol’ talk or just money in abundance will not drive an industrial or agricultural revolution. [Desk thumping]

It will take State support for entrepreneurial culture, together with supporting fiscal policy to kick-start new entrepreneurs and sustain them. Expanding party jobs in the public service does not achieve that. [Desk thumping] The business of this country must become business and the youth, not the Government, must be at the centre of this business. [Desk thumping] The PNM touched and destroyed the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, an institution that was most highly regarded in the world. They destroyed agriculture to spite estate owners. They had no use for overseas professors or their graduate students.

Tertiary education is a multi billion-dollar global growth industry that does not care where the professors come from. Their ideas alone are considered once they are best in the world. Singapore, China, Australia, New Zealand and Japan are challenging the dominance of the USA and the UK in exporting educational services. [Desk thumping] They use ideas and methods generated at MIT, Stanford, Oxford, Cambridge, Yale and Harvard. What have we done in Trinidad and Tobago?

The PNM has done little in tertiary education to build those new possibilities. What they have done is attempted to politicize it. They are bent on lowering standards and destroying, in so doing, the very integrity of our educational system. The Concordat is under threat at a time when we need a deeper role for religion and values in our curriculum. [Desk thumping]

A Congress of the People government will expand the Concordat to set up school boards to run the affairs of Government-owned schools. A COP government will introduce a new model of governance for the educational sector, one that brings the community in direct responsibility to educational performance of the school system. This will be part of a new system of community governance that will replace the local government system and will honour community rights.

3.50 p.m.

We must reverse the political exploitation of education that victimizes the poor. We must become a world centre for quality education in attracting all
students from every region of the world. This must be built on the foundation of a world-class quality primary and secondary school and one of the emerging industries today. Why are we not a centre of global business of teaching of English and tertiary education in English? The South West Peninsula is an ideal place for the creation of a university village, not for dangerous aluminium smelter plants as the Prime Minister demands it must be over the people’s protest. [Desk thumping]

We must develop our intellectual property potential. We have unmatched talent and potential in the performing arts; visual arts; literature; street theatre and the new media. The Government has failed to develop non-traditional service industries that can absorb thousands of persons now enslaved to low wage and poverty. Productive jobs to create wealth and contribute to development must mean jobs which produce marketable services and products people want at home and in other countries. In that context the development premise has failed this country.

Billions spent on the multitude of social programmes represent thousands of lost opportunities for training and sustainable jobs. The billions spent in cutting grass; beautification projects along the Priority Bus Route represent food not produced. They represent non-traditional services not sold to foreigners such as services produced from pan, calypso, chutney and all other creative arts. To create jobs and employ our people demand profound changes in thinking about fiscal policy; job creation and culture by the Government. It demands abandoning the Prime Minister’s empty 2020 slogan. It demands responsibility and accountability of ways of spending billions and not to buy support or pacify people with enslavement to low wages. The country needs a vision that focuses on 20th Century emancipation. [Desk thumping] How do we go about that task?

Poor people want to help develop pride and independence, not handouts. Workers want emancipation from poverty, not obligations for the generosity of the Treasury.

Mr. Singh: Good point.

Mr. W. Dookeran: They want liberation from community leaders; gang leaders and drug dealers. Poor people want jobs that have a future, not government grants that trap them at a minimum wage. They want their children to have a future, not the need to be cutting grass by the roadside as their profession for life. Government must liberate our people from aspiring to low levels of existence and build their esteem with the elevation of personal development to a mandatory position in the curricula of the school system at every level.
The Congress of the People government will start the process of changing attitudes. We will change the culture and expectation of people now enslaved by the wrong ideas of what is work. This is Prime Minister Manning’s legacy that he is leaving to our people. We will emancipate people from the obligations to the State and the feeling of powerlessness and give them courage and the will to change their conditions.

Massive foreign investments in the energy sector have fooled the Government. Foreign direct investment to extract and export gas from Trinidad and Tobago has fooled the Prime Minister. He thinks that growth, energy and the billions of dollars that he earns in the nation represent development. How have these billions developed the youths murdered in gang wars in Trinidad? The income of funeral agencies must have grown, but is that development? Many have died killing each other in search of Government’s free money. Is that development? How has the massive inflow of energy wealth changed the life of workers anywhere in this country? People are suffering everyday to buy enough food.

They know that the Prime Minister’s one dollar addition to the minimum wage is showing contempt for their work as human beings. What is the value of TT $300 for old people, when inflation has robbed them of more than $300 in real goods and services during the past two years? An addition of $300 to old age pension will not compensate people for the inflation induced and loss of value of the dollar caused by the Prime Minister’s reckless spending; wanton waste and unethical business transactions by his party officials.

The Congress of the People is committed to bettering the lives of all our people and to forging a development strategy that will increase greatly the range of opportunities to enhance the chances of all on a more permanent basis. We will focus on sustainable and balanced development. To this end, the Congress of the People government will implement an integrated coastal zone management plan which will focus on, among other things, coastal erosion; depletion of fisheries resources; upgraded effective management; coastal development; impacts due to climate change and sea level rise; strategies for mining the riches of our shores and sea.

The Congress of the People government will establish a coastal task force. Among other things to be introduced are coastal community councils to assist in conceptualizing and implementing the national coastal zone management plan and coastal fishing councils to deal specifically with the problems of the fishing community. The Congress of the People government will assess the need of our small fisherfolk at all our beaches with the objective of incorporating all fishing communities
into a viable modernized sustainable national fisheries network. In other words, our development thrust will start with the people. [Desk thumping]

On ecotourism, we will promote it aggressively in Trinidad and Tobago and declare Caura Valley and the area from Matura to Matelot and the North Coast as an ecotourism reserve and set the machinery to make that happen. We are about confronting the future not about establishing an obligation only to the past. We are about searching for a new insertion in today’s world that will benefit our nation and people. [Desk thumping] We are not relying on the laurels of yesterday. We shall take whatever we have inherited and convert it into a new inheritance.

The agricultural sector has crumbled under Prime Minister Manning’s watch. One of the failings of his administration is that it does not understand the difference between sugar and sugar cane. Sugar is a by-product of sugar cane. Although the world economics of sugar would have changed, sugar cane is a feedstock to paper, paper products, ethanol and a number of other products.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member for St. Augustine has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and may I thank the hon. Member for San Fernando East for so moving.

The Prime Minister viewed Caroni (1975) Limited as a piece of real estate as revealed in the Vesting Act of Caroni (1975) Limited. It was a misconception that cost the society dearly. Many lives in the sugar belt were put on hold as underdevelopment of villages and towns in the sugar belt increased and deepened. Such mistakes may be excusable if it were Mr. Manning’s private property, but this is about public interest and the future of 10,000 farmers. What the Prime Minister has done to the sugar industry is brutal, especially since he and his minister responsible at that time, Minister John Rahael, had been warned about his misconception of the development challenges facing that industry. This has cost us greatly.

As we search to win the future we must develop vibrant food production and sugar cane-based sectors. To do that all markets must be designated to become supportive outlets for the sale of food. No more lack of hygiene in the conditions of the market or lack of running water. The development of market infrastructure is critical to the expansion of food production. From Tunapuna to Barrackpore; Mayaro to Sangre Grande; from Marabella to Scarborough; throughout the country our vendors deserve better.
I come to the central question. Are we heading for the continuation of a boom or are we going to see the explosion of a bubble? Clearly, we have had growth without development and the growth had put pressure on our narrow economic base. This has increased the potential for risks in our economy. One such risk is the liquidity and exchange risk. Liquidity is disappearing from the global marketplace. This evidence is shown by the recent coordinated intervention by the Federal Reserve Bank; the European Bank and the Bank of Japan to the tune of US $200 billion, in an attempt to provide liquidity to the banking system. The federal reserve recently lowered the discount window from 6.5 per cent to 5.75 per cent in an attempt to provide liquidity to the real estate and commercial financial sectors.

4.05 p.m.

Surely, this is but the signal that global growth is lagging and it will only be a matter of time before our economy succumbs to this global uncertainty and that growth will become anemic. This global downturn would have happened, despite the booming economies of China and India. The percentage of China and India to world GDP is 4 per cent and 2 per cent respectively when compared to the USA’s 20 per cent world GDP and Europe’s 25 per cent.

Given our trade and financial flows, the Trinidad and Tobago economy will face “contagion effects” by what has happened in the USA, in particular.

On the issue of exchange rates, the Central Bank supported the current rate to the extent that it is unimaginable. I wish to put it on the record. The Review of the Economy on page 20 states:

“Moreover, at the end of the period October 2006 to February 2007, cumulative sales of foreign exchange by the Central Bank increased by 48.5 percent from US$1,411.3 million to US$2,095.1 million over the same period in 2005/2006.”

Mr. Speaker, in other words, we are now supporting the exchange rate to the tune of US$2.095 billion in a six-month period. This amount is over 25 per cent of the gross reserves of the country which have been identified in this very report as US$7.4 billion. It is not something that we can ignore. It is the result of non-compliance with the advice that we have been giving here on this side of the House for some time now to put the economics right. [Desk thumping]

The International Monetary Fund staff estimates the real exchange rate is undervalued to the extent of 15 to 20 per cent which is likely to increase due to changes in the terms of trade.
Mr. Speaker, sustaining the exchange rate at the present nominal value can now be classified as a major risk for the future of Trinidad and Tobago economy. [Desk thumping] In addition, there is the risk of further rising interest rates, and the emergence of a bubble in the housing market.

Mr. Speaker, when reference was made to the low interest rates, in the very report, the Review of the Economy, it suggested that the prime interest rates would have moved from 10 per cent in January 2006 to 11.75 per cent in May 07, 2007. So much for the claim by the Member for Diego Martin East that he has interest rates under control. Therefore, we are faced with a situation of rising interest rates, the possibility of a bubble in the housing market and a major risk in the foreign exchange market. That is the end result of the economic management that the Prime Minister boasted about. What, therefore, must we do?

An abstract from the IMF Working Paper on Reform of Energy Tax Regime in Trinidad and Tobago said eloquently:

"The main fiscal policy challenge is to ensure that the increased revenues from the ultimately exhaustible resources are used in a way that protects the competitiveness of the non-energy sector, builds assets to ensure intergenerational equity and provides a cushion for stabilization."

In his budget statement, the Prime Minister boasted about the TT $10.9 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Let us not lose our sense of proportion—$10.9 billion in a $42 billion budget, at the end of the rainbow, cannot be a safeguard of the financial heritage of our people. [Desk thumping] Even as a stabilisation fund, it cannot buffer this economy against price and revenue shocks, and now production shocks. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the time for action and deliberate action is now.

It is a shallow boast, coming at the end of the rainbow, that we have large sums in our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. So, what shall we do? The examples of Norway, Alaska and Alberta are instructive on how to manage the windfall from our energy sector. We must think again. We must not project fiscal outcomes on false hopes. The time has come to look for a new approach. The Congress of the People (COP) will integrate the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund with the wider pension plans in the public and private sectors and introduce a national pension plan for all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Instead of fiddling with this arithmetic in a piecemeal manner, a Congress of the People government will introduce a comprehensive, universal pension plan that will be accessible to every citizen above the age of 60 years. There will be no eligibility
criteria, but we will introduce a pay-back scheme for persons whose income is above a certain level. For officers of the security service, police, army and coast guard who are required to retire at age 50 or 55, payments will start immediately upon retirement. [Desk thumping] Such officers will not have to wait to reach age 60 before receiving their entitlement of a pension for the service they would have rendered to our country. [Desk thumping]

One of the very first acts of a Congress of the People government will be to commission an actuarial study on this innovation in pension reform in Trinidad and Tobago. For the last six years, pension reform has been mentioned in the Prime Minister’s budget statement. [Desk thumping] The time for action is now and it shall only come with the Congress of the People government. This is but one of the new financial strategies that the Congress of the People will introduce to protect the welfare of our senior citizens and offer opportunities to our aging population.

We insist that there must be an equitable sharing of the wealth in our society. Today, poverty levels in oil rich Trinidad and Tobago ranges from 17 per cent to 35 per cent. The Prime Minister claims a victory in reducing it to 17 per cent; evidence of the bureaucratic mind, but the report commissioned by the European Commission was not laid in Parliament. [Desk thumping]

The Social and Economic Policy Framework 2005-2007 had this to say on the topic:

"For the period 1990—2002 approximately 12.4% of the population earned less than US $1 per day and 39% earned less than US $2 per day."

On the assumption that 20 per cent of our population lives below the poverty line, a Congress of the People government will tackle this situation head-on. Available data confirms that there are only 300,000 households in Trinidad and Tobago. There is enough for all of us.

With a $38 billion budget last year, the Government spent $104 million per day. Yes, Mr. Speaker, $104 million every day. A Congress of the People Government will use direct targeting to the 60,000 households whose occupants may be living below the poverty line.

With strong social workers support, we shall shift policy to target each household, not with handouts, but with financial products like educational insurance, training credits, a minimum income support programme, clean and running water and personal development programme. [Desk thumping]
A Congress of the People government will shift expenditure from mega buildings and palaces, from corrupt deals and waste to directly enhancing the esteem and the possibilities of a population living below the poverty line. [Desk thumping] We will introduce specific incentives to develop a friendly economic environment to facilitate and increase the growth of the personal development industry in Trinidad and Tobago to focus it on the poor. This is the new approach; innovative and ambitious, but one that tackles the cycle of poverty afflicting the country in a permanent way.

We will also introduce programmes to turn renters of government buildings to homeowners. We will do this by converting all past rents into down payments on apartments and arrange easy payments for the balances required for ownership. This proposal will also require the apartments to be of sound engineering nature and these apartments will be valued at a discounted purchasing price.

Occupants in Government housing will have a stake in ownership which can be passed on to their children, and will start a new process of capital accumulation. I have already began discussions on this proposal with residents of Maloney and I shall continue with the residents of Pleasantville and Cocorite. [Desk thumping] We shall adjust it in accordance with the requirements of the people who are going to be so affected.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come for our nation to grasp the future; assess the reality of the future ahead of us; search for a new development paradigm; engage the people in the process of development; and at all times remember that the purpose of politics is not to acquire and keep power, but to provide development for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Singh: You can tell Panday that.

Mr. W. Dookeran: The people must now decide. A Congress of the People government will focus on solutions to the executions and delivery challenges facing the nation. To do that, we shall establish a permanent national performance council comprising key stakeholders from labour, business, civil society and the university. We shall reject the politics of fear and smear.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister’s economic development model is wrong. It has brought us abruptly to the end of the rainbow. Thankfully, the ship is still afloat. We must act now with urgency to reverse the mismanagement of our economic future and save our country from social tremor and turmoil. As I engage the people of all ethnicities, religion callings and agents across Trinidad and Tobago, I detect a sense among the population that it is the end of the line for the Prime Minister. [Desk thumping]
The country knows that the methods are outdated and the styles of politics which are becoming increasingly transparent are merely to retain power not to develop our people and our nation.

4.20 p.m.

A Congress of the People government would foster a national character and reflect it through a genuine commitment to the unification of our society [Desk thumping] and to the fundamental change in our strategies for national economic development. Our philosophy is that the State must intervene to protect the senior citizens and the vulnerable, physically challenged citizens and those who get lost in the workings of an unjust marketplace.

We shall also provide real and meaningful opportunities for youthful population and create models to reduce the cycle of poverty that is endemic in the current social order. The working population must be put to work in a productive manner and receive proper compensation for the contribution to the society's well-being. At the same time incentives for raising productivity and competitiveness of the economy shall be put into place. There must be an equitable sharing of the wealth in our country.

To do that, we must make sure the best team for these times will be governing Trinidad and Tobago after the votes are counted on the day of decision that the Prime Minister has been trying hard to push back. We have grown accustomed to Government by gimmickry from the ruling regime. Given the Prime Minister’s well known aversion to accountability and his equally well known disdain for this Parliament, we ought not to be surprised if he attempts to preempt this debate with the announcement that the country's date for election has been set. [Desk thumping] Nor shall we be surprised if he withholds information about oil finds in the energy, for the campaign trail as a public relations gimmick. This is the modus operandi we have come to expect from a leader who places himself, his dynasty and his obsession with becoming Executive President before all others and above everything else. Notwithstanding this, I have a growing sense that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have already made up their minds.

The end of the line for the Prime Minister has come, not because there is so much ferment or a reservoir of discontent and distrust for politicians and politics in our country, but because his methods are not working and are outdated. It is based on the wrong premise of development. We would build a national character and reflect it through genuine commitment to unification.
We will abandon the obsolete measures upon which he has built the development strategy. Mr. Speaker, the risk is too high. One thing for sure we shall not sell the Office of the Prime Minister to those who are prepared to pay $100,000 a plate to dine with him. The Prime Minister's methods are obsolete and have been tried and tested and have failed. The risk now is that if it were to continue it would be dangerous for the next generation.

And so, Mr. Speaker, as I say farewell to Prime Minister Manning, I say that to him with the knowledge that he has tried and with the understanding that he has failed. I say that to him because we have now reached the stage; a new turning point; we have identified a nation at risk; we must get the economics right. His prescription will take us into new realms of danger and fear; we must not succumb to the politics of fear.

Fear is the dominant attitude in the political environment today; each one is fearful of some form of victimization. I say to all the people in this budget debate that the time has come for us to stand as citizens of this country, committed to a new patrimony, committed to a new future. The time has come not to be cowered by fear; not to be afraid of victimization; not at any time to become a coward in our own society. [Desk thumping]

The time for strength and the time for courage is now. The Congress of the People is confident. We must therefore, not only move forward with our plans of action and offer to this nation real solutions to real problems, we shall not, at any time, fool the people or offer gimmicks in order to deal with the population.

We are ready for government. We have done this by considerable work, outlining our new policy perspectives in many areas, which have already become public and many more that would become public shortly. We have been able to establish a new connection between the people and the politics. We must now reject the politics of yesterday, which was bred on ethnic division. We are now ready to unite this country as it has never been united before. [Desk thumping] And in so doing, as we unite this nation of ours, we shall embark on the new programme of economic change and transformation, where we shall put the people first, second and third in public objectives. [Desk thumping]

We shall abandon those who wish to buy the politics of today. We shall leave that in the hands and ownership of the people of this land. [Desk thumping] We shall at all times, as we search for that new horizon be prepared to accept the risk that we have to face. We shall confront the risk directly. We shall not simply be oblivious to that.
We shall not allow politics and power to determine our action. Our action shall only be served by the basis of how we want to make our country a model country in the world. [Desk thumping] That, Mr. Speaker, is where we are. The time has come; we are ready for government. The time is at hand.

The country is just waiting to change the ruling regime. The population is waiting to exhale. So, I say to Mr. Prime Minister, let us go to the polls. [Desk thumping] Let us go to the people. The Congress of the People is ready to rumble.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we have just about two minutes, but with your leave we can suspend that particular Standing Order and go for tea now and we will resume promptly at 5.00 p.m.

**4.29 p.m.: Sitting suspended.**

**5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.**

**The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members. I am pleased to participate in the debate on a Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2008”.

Mr. Speaker, before I do so, a debate is expected to respond to the comments made by the previous speaker. While I was not here in person, I did pay attention to the comments of the hon. Member for St. Augustine and I noticed he went at length about some of unrealized promises; he talked about the Ryder Scott Report and some other things. And I expect that Members on this side, at the appropriate time, would respond to some of the issues raised by the hon. Member for St. Augustine. Since he did not spend a lot of time on the issues of national security, I will get straight into my contribution.

Mr. Speaker, as we are all aware, the Government's vision for Trinidad and Tobago is articulated in its 2020 vision, the primary objective of which is to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed society on or before 2020. The expectation of citizens in this country is that on or before 2020, the quality of life and/or the standard of living of all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will be comparable to that which exists in a developed society.

Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, it is also quite clear that the Government has put in place measures to ensure that that vision is realized, and as a result five
developmental pillars have been identified. It is common knowledge that the pillar promoting effective government is the developmental pillar for which the Ministry of National Security has primary responsibility.

The goals of governing effectively are as follows: Five goals have been identified:

1. Our society and our government will adhere to good government's principles and practices.
2. Our public institutions will be high performance professional entities, effectively and efficiently meeting the needs of all their clients.
3. Trinidad and Tobago will have modern technologically advanced legal regulatory and enforcement systems.
4. All citizens would be assured of fair and equal justice.
5. Trinidad and Tobago will be a safe and secure place to live, visit, do business and raise families.

Goal No. 5: Trinidad and Tobago will be a safe and secure place to live, visit, do business and raise families, is also the primary responsibility of the Ministry of National Security. And in this document, Vision 2020 Operational Plan 2007 to 2010: Transformation in Progress, 2007 Report, at page 212, you will see that 10 objectives have been identified to meet the requirements of being a safe and secure place to live, visit, do business and raise families.

5.05 p.m.

Let me, for the record, identify those 10 objectives:

- Significantly reduce crime by using a holistic sustained approach that addresses the root causes of crime;
- reduce the involvement of young people in crime;
- increase the homicide detection rate;
- reduce recidivism through the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders;
- instill a culture of law, order and respect for human life among all citizens;
- restore public trust and confidence in the protective services;
create an integrated national security infrastructure, which ensures that the issues of crime, public safety and national security are addressed on a holistic and sustained basis;

- protect the borders of Trinidad and Tobago from illegal entry and exit of people and products;

- secure Trinidad and Tobago's interest through international, regional and local defence efforts; and

- protect all citizens from the hazards of natural and man-made disasters.

Mr. Speaker, key performance indicators have been identified as they relate to these particular objectives. Let me speak to the first key indicator which is spending on national security. Let me immediately go into the allocations provided to the Ministry of National Security. In 2006, justice and security received 9 per cent of the total budgetary allocation; in 2007, justice and security received 10 per cent; in 2008 justice and security received 11 per cent, in keeping with some of the other major ministries responsible for the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago.

The reason I say this and put it on the record, is because earlier today when the Leader of the Opposition and Member for Siparia made her contribution, she talked about the fact that empirical evidence showed that this Government is unable, uncertain and lacks the political will to deal with the crime problem. Clearly, in terms of ensuring that the Ministry of National Security is provided with the appropriate funding to ensure that law and order is given the appropriate financial resources that will lead it to provide this country with the type of law enforcement required in a developed society, is in keeping—I recall for fiscal year 2007, when the allocations were made to the Ministry concerns were expressed as to the extent to which the Ministry of National Security can adequately deal with its financial resources.

Let me just put again for the record: In 2007, the Ministry received $3,154,478,000, total, of which recurrent was $2,247,749,000. Let me just back up here. For 2007, the allocation was $3,154,479,000. As at the end of July, the ministry spent $2,247,749,000 which represents a 71.2 per cent of the allocation as it relates to recurrent. With respect to DP, the Ministry was provided—

Mr. Manning: The development programme.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Development programme, thank you very much. The Ministry was provided $335,665,000. To date, as at the end of July, the
Ministry spent $208,593,000 of its development programme, some 62.1 per cent implementation. Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, from the allocation of $3,494,145,000, the Ministry, as at the end of July, spent $2,456,343,000 or some 70.3 per cent.

I am advised, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, that on the basis of commitments it is expected that by the end of the fiscal year the Ministry would spend, in terms of its recurrent, $2,249,749,000 or some 90.2 per cent of its allocation; and as it relates to its development programme it is expected that it will spend all of what has been allocated, $335,665,000. I am saying this, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, to indicate that the Ministry is spending the moneys allocated to it.

I want to say something else because this Government has been accused of having its priorities wrong. You hear a number of people saying that moneys should be allocated to national security, to the police, etc. The Ministry of National Security cannot complain about the moneys required to ensure that the transformation, as I said, takes place. What we are treating with—and I will speak to as I continue in this debate—is that we have some institutional capacity challenges that we need to address and we are, in fact, addressing them, so that the Ministry will best be able to provide the country with the kind of law enforcement necessary.

So I thought, Mr. Speaker, that I should address that to deal with the question about allocation. So when you hear people saying that this Government does not have the political will to deal with crime and security, nothing could be further from the truth. I have used the first variable with respect to allocations to the Ministry of National Security so it can adequately treat with crime and criminal activities and you cannot fault the Government in terms of the allocations being provided. In terms of the allocations to be provided in 2008, we will see the extent to which those allocations are going to continue to make sure that we strengthen and improve law enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, we are very clear in the Ministry of National Security and the agencies responsible for law and order. We say that the Government's vision is clear: developed society status on or before 2020. So each agency is asked, if this was a developed society, what would you be like? How would you be operating? What would you be doing? Where are we now, and what do we need to do to fill the gap? But there is something else. We do not want, when we reach 2020—because we are benchmarking against developed societies; developed societies are 2040, so at some point in time you will literally have to leapfrog to get there and
then to be able to sustain yourself so that you are never playing catch up, catch up, and we are making that abundantly clear.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say one other thing also. The hon. Member for Siparia, in making her contribution, also raised the issue of the question about the level of crime and criminal activity in Trinidad and Tobago at this time during the last five years. [Interruption] I think it is important for hon. Members present to be reminded again, of the circumstances in which our country finds itself. Yes, over the last five years we have seen an increase in crime in Trinidad and Tobago, but, Mr. Speaker—and people who know better do not like to hear it when we say they feel that we are making some excuse, but it is a reality.

Dr. Rowley: They do not want to hear the truth.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is not unique in that respect. Permit me to put on the record again, the findings of a joint report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Latin America and the Caribbean Region of the World Bank; a report called “Crime, Violence, and Development, Trends, Costs, and Policy Options in the Caribbean”. I did it in the past in making some presentation on some other Bill and I am doing it now. You see, because what is being said is that under the PNM's watch, crime and violence has increased. Yes, it has but it is being made to seem that it has increased under our watch because of our lack of political will and our inability to treat with it. Nothing could be further from the truth! Permit me again, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, to put on the record—I am quoting parts of the Executive Summary, and I have already quoted the document from which it is that I am quoting.

I am at Page 1 in terms of Executive Summary. Permit me, Mr. Speaker. [Interruption] I certainly will. I quote:

“Through multiple channels, crime and violence threaten the welfare of Caribbean citizens. Beyond the direct effect on victims, crime and violence inflict widespread costs, generating a climate of fear for all citizens and diminishing economic growth. Crime and violence present one of the paramount challenges to development in the Caribbean.

Several factors which cut across the diverse countries of the region heighten their vulnerability to crime and violence. Primary among these is the region’s vulnerability to drug trafficking. Wedged between the world's source of cocaine to the south and its primary consumer markets to the north, the Caribbean is the transit point for a torrent of narcotics with a street value that exceeds the value of the entire legal economy. Compounding their difficulties, Caribbean countries
have large coastlines and territorial waters and many have weak criminal justice systems that are easily overwhelmed.”

Hon. Member: “Oor”.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Okay? So we are talking about the Caribbean. The key messages and recommendations from the report include:

“Crime and violence are a development issue. The high rates of crime and violence in the region have both direct effects on human welfare in the short-run and longer run effects on economic growth and social development. Estimates suggest that were Jamaica and Haiti to reduce their rates of homicide to the level of Costa Rica, each country would see an increase in its growth rate of 5.4 percent…”

It goes on, Mr. Speaker:

“While levels of crime and associated circumstances vary by country, the strongest explanation for the relatively high rates of crime and violence rates in the region—and their apparent rise in recent—years is narcotics trafficking.”

I want to make that abundantly clear! So that is what is fuelling—and not only that, this Government, recognizing that, put measures in place to reduce, as far as possible, the inflow of drugs. Because, as the report also indicated, implicit with the inflow of drugs is the inflow of guns and what has happened is that while the drugs continue north, the guns remain in the countries and what has happened is that if it is that Trinidad is a transshipment point and then from Trinidad it is to Europe or North America, then the drugs continue and the guns remain. If Trinidad is just a drop-off point and the drugs continue north, the guns continue north and wherever in the Caribbean is the last drop-off point, that is where the guns remain. That is what is fuelling the increase in gun-related criminal activities in the region.

So that, Mr. Speaker, as this Government puts measures in place to reduce the inflow—and we will talk about some of the naval assets; some of the air assets—it is designed to stem the inflow, because that is absolutely necessary in order to get a handle and be able to reduce the level of violence and criminal activity that is related to drugs and guns. It is clear, in terms of what we are doing. Is that a Government that does not have the political will and not willing to do the things necessary to reduce the inflow and provide its citizens with the protection necessary? The answer cannot be yes! The answer certainly cannot be yes. So to say that we do not have the political will or we do not know what we are doing—Mr. Speaker, one understands that given the season that we are in and that there is
the belief that this is our Achilles heel, the extent to which you could taint this Government as a Government that is unable to deal with crime and criminal activity, you believe that it is going to give you an inside track and as a result, would remove us. But the citizens, hon. Members, are not as uninformed as some of us may have them to believe. [Interuption] [Desk thumping]

5.20 p.m.

So when you talk about the fact that we are unable or uncertain or lack the political will to deal with the crime problem, I hope that we can put that to rest. And as a result, the increase in the level of violence over the years is as a result of that, and you will see what measures we are putting in place to stem that. We are starting to see, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, a turnaround, not as quickly as we would like, but we are starting to see a turnaround in some of the things that we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, let me go to another area about which it is pleased for us to report in terms of the Government’s performance this year. You would recall that the Government, again, recognizing that in order to provide the kind of law enforcement that this country requires—and remember, every time we talk about law enforcement, we are thinking about developed society status. We are thinking about—if this is 2008—in 12 years’ time we ought to be developed society status and we are trying to fill the gaps that exist between what ought to obtain and what currently obtains, and how do we need to—and I said—leap frog and from time to time you will hear me saying that to remind us of what it is that is driving and motivating us.

Mr. Speaker, it was quite clear that one of the issues that needed to be addressed is the issue about the police service and the extent to which the police service could be in step with what is expected of it. You know, it is interesting that as early as 1999, there was a recognition on the part of at least the Government that something needed to be done about law enforcement. When we were in opposition then, we decided that we were willing to do certain things, et cetera. It took some time, but we are at the point now where again, on the basis of collaboration and discussions with the Opposition, we were able to agree on a package of measures that was supposed to have been put in place. We are aware that coming out of that, we amended the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill and we amended the Constitution to do a couple of things. One, to give the Police Service Commission a changed role; we changed the role of the Police Service Commission.

Basically, the question about the Police Service Commission, more public accountability. The Police Service Commission is now, basically responsible for the
selection, discipline and removal of the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police; hears the appeals of personnel matters, discipline and promotion; monitor and evaluate the Commissioner of Police, the Deputy Commissioner of Police and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service; communicate with the Ministry of National Security; and keep the public and policy-makers informed. Basically, a strategic change.

With respect to the responsibilities of the Commissioner of Police—[Interruption]

**Hon. Member:** [Inaudible]

**Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:** Well, yes. I said so. Just now nah, we are going to continue to provide you with the credit. We have done it before and we will do it. We are not ashamed to do that. We are not ashamed to—internal control. You would recall that one of the challenges faced in the past is that you had a Commissioner of Police who did not have internal control. I think one Police Commissioner characterized it nicely as some “toothless bulldog”, God rest his soul. As a result, the Commissioner of Police now has internal control, operational decisions, administrative matters, promotion, discipline, human resource planning, reporting to the Police Service Commission, and then in terms of the reporting with the Ministry of National Security. So that was the second strategic area in which changes occurred. Of course, in the Ministry of National Security, it was necessary for the responsibility of the Ministry of National Security to undergo some change.

Mr. Speaker, this came about and the legislative package that came to the Parliament was approved with the necessary majority, and also the Police Service Act, which was also strengthened as a result of discussions and collaboration with the Opposition, all those pieces of legislation have been passed. What was necessary and for which you cannot take away from the Government, and by extension, the Executive was to make sure that the legislation could be put into operation. Here is what this Government did in short order. This Government ensured that the staff required to support the changed roles and responsibilities of the Police Service Commission, were in fact put in place in short order; some 45 positions were created. I am not going to go back because we went through all these things, but just to remind this House. The reason I am saying that—is this a Government that is not concerned and does not have the political will and does not know what it is doing?

In short order, Cabinet approved the forty something positions required in the Secretariat of the Police Service Commission to do its job. Short order! With respect to the police organization, given the fact that the police organization was being required to discharge duties and responsibilities hitherto, they did not have
the responsibility for, Cabinet approved nine senior positions in the police service on contract; civilian senior positions, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, to make sure that the police organization has available to it the skills and competencies required to move the organization forward and allow it to discharge the new set of responsibilities that it is now required to do.

And lastly, Cabinet just recently approved the need for the Ministry of National Security to put in place what is called an Office of Law Enforcement Policy because hitherto, the Ministry itself was not structured to ensure that the new legislative arrangement can in fact be put in place. Only Thursday of this week, Cabinet approved the eight new positions at the Ministry of National Security that will ensure that the staff and competencies reside in the Ministry of National Security, so that the new arrangements are in place.

I recall when we had the so-called crime talks, concerns were raised as to whether or not we will be able to do these things. And I am saying, while we needed the support of the Opposition and we got the support of the Opposition to pass the laws, if we were not serious, we could have sat on our hands and not make sure that the Executive put in place the administrative requirements to make sure that the legislation—and, Mr. Speaker, again you know, just to remind the House, the new members of the Police Service Commission came here; it is all credit.

Mr. Speaker, you know what is so unfortunate, we are so critical, that sometimes when we do things good, we do not know how to compliment ourselves. When I said it was a red letter day, it was a historic day when we came to the Parliament to put in place the new members of the Police Service Commission. Historic day—[Interruption]

Mr. Panday: We complimented ourselves.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: But there are some people who—we do not know how to take credit. So we now have the new Members of the Police Service Commission, I am sure you would have seen the order now for Police Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner, the selection order, et cetera, have all been laid, and pretty soon the next Commissioner of Police will be appointed under the new arrangements and we have indicated because sometimes you hear all these ol’ talk, “Oh, we want to bring this one”, the next Commissioner, the intention is to hire the best Commissioner. If he could come from Mars, wherever he comes from, the intention is to hire because you hear people talking about, we want to re-colonize [Desk thumping] and we want to colonize and all kind of stuff, and we are bringing
foreigners, et cetera. Wherever—the intention is we are trying to get the best Commissioner, he or she and wherever he or she comes from, is to provide us with the best Commissioner, so that we can have law enforcement suitable and up to First-World standards, that is all. All the measures that we have put in place, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, are designed to do that.

So again, as I said yes, we would have had the support of the Opposition, but if the Executive was not serious about the transformation, all of the other things that the Executive had to do, they would not have done it and the Government has shown its commitment and its will. I keep coming back, so that when you hear them talking about, we do not have—empirical evidence shows that this Government is unable, uncertain and lacks the political will to deal with the crime. I mean, nothing could be further from the truth, but again, we are building institutions.

These things are not going to happen overnight, there are certain things that we are doing—and unfortunately, if we were able to do these things three or four years ago, we would not be in this position now and I give you the assurance, I give this honourable Parliament and by extension the national community that two, three years from now, you will see a Trinidad and Tobago for which the Prime Minister has said on previous occasions, the only dark cloud hanging over is the question about crime and that dark cloud will move away. Because we would have had law enforcement; we would have built a police organization and other law enforcement institutions that are capable and up to the task. So you know what we are doing? We are building an organization that is built to last—built to last, so that, it will have the capability of forever looking at its external environment; seeing what are the opportunities and threats; what are its strengths and weaknesses; and always making the adjustments. So it is not some kind of a superficial intervention, it is not.

Mr. Speaker, let me just indicate one other piece related to that—another critical piece—and I ask in putting that other piece, is this a Government that lacks the will to treat with crime? The other key thing as part of the transformation was the question about, how do you ensure that the leadership of the police organization is allowed to lead? The reason I say “is allowed to lead”, is because we have a system where the basic criterion for promotion was seniority. They had a performance management system, a performance appraisal system that, for all practical purposes, was not properly used because you know what the normal practice is.

There are two things for which—and I do not want to seem as if I am lecturing to hon. Members, I would not be so bold, especially being a visitor here. But you know there are two areas of management responsibility that managers do not like to treat with. One is discipline and the other one is appraising, and in our society it is even
more difficult. It is so difficult because we have not reached the stage where we are able to separate friendship from professional activities. We have not been. So for example, we all like to be liked and, as a result, we will not do anything that will cause us not to be liked because we want when Christmas time comes, we want to get the little gift; we want to get invited and stuff like that; you follow what I am saying and that—[Interrupt]

Hon. Member: Where are you going with that?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: No, I am talking about a reality that exists in our society, so that in those circumstances, in order to remain—[Interrupt]

Hon. Member: Liked!

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph:—liked, when the time comes for you to assess, you are not as objective and clinical in your assessment as you ought to, because you are afraid to do that may cause you not to be liked. And then do not talk about discipline. We do not like also to—and I am saying this because—[Interrupt]

Dr. Rowley: No box fours.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: No box fours—in terms of your appraisal, so that everything, because everybody is very, very good, so there is not a real objective, and as a result, it cannot be used as the basis for determining suitability for promotion.

Hon. Member: I hope you—[Inaudible]

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I beg your pardon?

Mr. Panday: [Inaudible]

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: No, I was coming to the next major transformation effort that was made to help in terms of moving the organization forward, in terms of building it to last, and that is, the change in the way assessment is now done into and within the First Division. And as a result of that, the question about the assessment centre, the assessment process, et cetera, et cetera, so that we have a new regime, and of course, you would have been aware because we debated it here and I am sure those of us who read the newspapers—[Interrupt]

5.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, you would recall that we had introduced an assessment process.

Mr. Panday: In respect of First Division. You were there at that point.
Sen. the Hon. M. Joseph: For the First Division. [Crosstalk] We had also talked about the assessment and promotion process for entry into the First Division, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. It was also very important that it was done by a certain time. By September/November a number of vacancies existed in the First Division and they had to be filled; since we now have new arrangements, it is not the Police Service Commission anymore; it is the Commissioner of Police who has to make these appointments. We needed to make sure a mechanism was put in place in order for such promotions and appointments be done in a very objective way.

We had also said that there were going to be two sets of assessments; one was a written exam. I remember persons came here and said, "Oh, is multiple choice and how people have to go and study; and police had to decide whether they should study or do their police work", and all those other types of things; all to the fact that we had even reached the point where an attempt was made in the court to stop the process, to stop the exams.

I am one of those persons who are very, very careful in terms of not being critical. I do not like to criticize. I have a basic principle: I praise in public and I criticize in private.

I had also indicated that even as we made the transition, there would have been some concerns; there would be anxiety. Anytime you are doing something for the first time there is always a little concern, fear, et cetera. As a result, when I came here and I was asked about the assessment process, I indicated that the executive of the Police and Welfare Association at the time had asked for a one-month extension. [Crosstalk] [Laughter]

There were some concerns and they had asked for a one-month extension, which was provided. We tried to bring everybody together who were going to participate in the assessment process, so nobody would have any unfair advantage. All the material was provided. They were briefed in terms of what was to happen. We put in place measures to help with the coaching, et cetera. There were concerns as to what the curriculum was going to be like and we explained that. There were some concerns as to model questions and how the questions were going to be asked. It was felt that could not be provided.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, notwithstanding all of that, there was a change in the Executive. The new Executive made an approach. We indicated that every effort was already made, we had accommodated. We had time lines for those things to happen and we were not able to accommodate them. One understands when a new Executive
comes in; I do not know on what basis they came in. I think it was unfortunate that they went to court in an attempt to stop the process from taking place.

I just hope that in so doing they did not cause some people to find themselves in a situation where they did not participate, because the written exams took place on August 07 and 08, just at a time when an attempt was made to have the injunction. The reason I am saying that is because I want to bring to the attention of hon. Members here that 188 persons were eligible to participate in the written assessment, of which 154 participated. Some 34 persons did not participate, 81.9 per cent.

Of course, it is a two stage thing: the written assessment and then after they are going to be doing an oral assessment. The oral assessment is due to take place on September 10 and 14; well done, credible and independent. At the end of the day, we are going to see being provided to us, coming out of this, persons who have the competence and the capabilities to help us transform the police organization into the modern police organization which this Government is committed to providing the country.

Is this a government that does not have the will; that does not know what it is doing as it relates to putting the measures in place for the transformation of the police service? The answer is that it could not be.

I will talk just now about some of the statistics that are causing concern in the society, and rightfully so. Even when you look at the statistics, you see things going in the right direction. It is now going in the right direction. We are confident as we strengthen law enforcement. What is law enforcement? It is the officers. All the talk we talk, we are not out there on the front line. We are not out there recognizing what is now required in terms of intelligence on how to deal with crime, how to deal with the criminal element. Remember that the criminal industry now is a more sophisticated industry; it is also international. Persons tend to underestimate the criminal network that now exists in the world.

They spend their lives looking for newer ways. As law enforcement blocks here, they try to find something else. So law enforcement must always know that as I block here, what is going to happen. Take for example another area; I see in some of the proposals the need to establish an extortion unit. We understand that as we have been able to curb kidnapping for ransom, there is a development taking place; there is a certain amount of attempting to extort. I do not think we need to establish an extortion unit.

**Dr. Moonilal:** You denied it last year.
Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: When you all were talking about coward money, I said that we were hearing about it for the first time. More importantly, business people ought not to encourage that, because if you encourage it all you are doing is sowing the seeds for something that is going to blossom worse down the road.

In an attempt to misrepresent what was said, I heard them say that the Minister of National Security said that business people were encouraging kidnapping. If you look at the genesis of kidnapping for ransom, you are going to see the seeds of it being sown some time ago in a particularly strange way. We have to understand that.

What pains me is that, again, persons who ought to know better in the society continue to make these types of uninformed comments all to gain mileage. [Desk thumping] They do not realize the damage they sometimes do in terms of doing that for their short-term political gains. [Crosstalk] As you stop here, they are looking for other ways. There are some persons who do not intend to raise a finger; all they want to do is get an easy living and they want to do that by distressing people. In those circumstances, law enforcement must be up to the task. Crime must not pay. For too long people feel that crime pays; crime must not pay. In order for that not to happen, there are things that need to be done. Just talking about it is not going to make it happen.

You have to build the institution; you have to be intelligence driven; you have got to be able to understand where they are likely to move, where the displacements are going to take place, because as you put measures in place in one area—Trinidad and Tobago is too small to have displacement. Displacement must take place outside the country, but we must be able to anticipate where they are likely to move, what they are likely to do and, as a result, be one step ahead of the criminals. That is what is necessary.

In order to do that, you need a different level of policing: law enforcement, community driven, intelligence driven, et cetera, et cetera. That is what the Government is doing in terms of trying to build capacity. [Interruption]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, thank you for extending my time.
I talked about the merit base; let me say something also about training. It is very important also in ensuring that the society is provided with the type of law enforcement officers befitting a First World country. The question about the curriculum for training is something that the Government looked at; as a result, the training curriculum has now been improved tremendously.

Just for the information of hon. Members, under the behavioural science and communications department, for recruits, 100 hours of training in this department are required. Of course you know that the period of training is six months. Module: Introduction to the criminal justice system, eight contact hours; introduction to sociology, 16 contact hours; communications customer relations, 16 contact hours; report writing, written communications, 16 contact hours; testifying and sworn testimony, eight contact hours; ethics and integrity, 16 contact hours; crisis intervention, conflict resolution, domestic violence, 16 contact hours; special needs group, four contact hours. That is under the area of behavioural science and communications.

Under law: Criminal law, 64 contact hours; civil law, 40 contact hours; other legal issues, eight contact hours; police administration and operations, patrol duties, procedures and operations, 40 contact hours; community policing, 16 contact hours; principles of criminal investigations, 40 contact hours; critical incident management, optional, eight contact hours.

Health and physical fitness areas: Physical conditioning, 40 contact hours; emergency care, 24 contact hours; drilling, 48 contact hours. Then under firearms, self-defence and tactics, lethal weapons, 60 contact hours; control and defence tactics, 40 contact hours; less than lethal weapons, eight contact hours.

Under traffic laws and enforcement: Driving skills and vehicle operations, 160 contact hours; motor vehicle code, 40 contact hours; motor vehicle collusion investigations, 16 contact hours.

Under the police science and technology area: Forensic science lab, eight contact hours; cyber crimes and computer crimes, eight contact hours; computer literacy, 16 contact hours; and law enforcement technology, eight contact hours. Modern police curriculum design.

Not only that, we have also introduced a mentoring system, so that after the police recruits pass out, they are now assigned to a senior officer so there could be some on the job type of training that will be taking place.

5.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the other area which we have as part of the transformation, is an initiative called “policing for people”. As I have indicated in this honourable
Mr. Speaker, like any initiative, it is being implemented on a phased basis and the five police station districts that are the beneficiaries of this policing for people initiative are Arouca, Chaguanas, Morvant, San Fernando and West End. As I indicated, some 148,142 citizens are the beneficiaries of this because according to the CSO that is the population that resides in these police station districts for which this is being implemented.

What is the rationale for the implementation? Reducing crime requires that the public have trust and confidence in the police so that they will cooperate with police and assist them in addressing crime, testifying in court and working to solve community problems.

The initiative seeks to change the culture of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to refocus its attention to the aspects of policing that the public values most highly; protection of the public, service to those victimized by crime and energetic initiatives in dealing with the day-to-day problems the public asked the police to handle.

The guiding features of this initiative are the following:

- Attentiveness;
- Being accessible to the public to attend to their needs;
- Responsiveness, timely assistance that helps citizens solve their problems;
- Competence, knowing how to get the job done whatever it is;
- Reliability, police service that routinely meets acceptable standards;
- Respect, treating all members of the public with dignity and using only the amount of force required by a competent officer to get the job done;
• Fairness, treating people equally under the law and without bias towards personal characteristics and background.

Mr. Speaker, again the Government in accepting this initiative went ahead and did a couple of things and I am saying this, and I am asking: is this a Government that is not interested in ensuring that law enforcement provides its citizens with the level of law enforcement required?

Mr. Speaker, in the staffing of police stations, Cabinet approved the creation of 287 additional posts on the staff of the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for the implementation of this initiative. These include:

• 23 posts of sergeants;
• 23 corporals; and
• 125 constables.

In addition, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, Cabinet agreed to the employment on contract for a period of two years in the first instance of 75 data entry clerks, 15 per model station, 20 clerical assistants and 20 victim and witness support officers.

The Member for Siparia in her recommendations is saying what a UNC government is going to do—and she talked about victim and witness support officers. We have already created 20 victim and witness support officers in these model stations with the intention of replicating it. So to say you are going to do that is a bit behind.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying this because the intention is to ensure that the level of policing at the community level—and it is not just ol’ talk, it is rolling down and the measures and actions that need to be taken to make this a reality have been taken and are being implemented. Again, is this the behaviour of a Government that does not have the political will and does not know what it is doing? Nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, as part of that initiative, the question of the remodeling of the five police stations has been completed. There are no charge rooms anymore, the whole interface is different. I heard the hon. Member for Siparia talk about the Government is only making promises about building police stations.

As the person responsible for national security, I feel badly as to the length of time it has taken us to complete police stations. Since I became the Minister of National Security about three or four years ago, we have had police stations—
since January this year the Belmont Police Station was supposed to be handed over. I have some information that says by the end of September. I keep making the joke; Mr. Speaker, you will recall before I became Minister of National Security I was the Minister of Housing and when I came across to the Ministry of National Security, I took a bet with a friend of mine.

Hon. Member: Do you gamble?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: No, a little side bet. It is a good thing it was not a big one because I would be in trouble, because I said we put things in place to build thousands of houses, what is 10 police stations to build? And lo and behold, to date they are telling me that the Belmont Police Station is going to be completed in September. I am not holding my breath. [Interruption] You see I am not building the station.

Mr. Panday: I am not holding my breath either.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, again, the Minister of National Security made recommendations to Cabinet and I have indicated the problems we have had and how as a result of that the Government is embarrassed in terms of its ability, so much so that they are saying we have our priorities wrong, we are building this and building that, and we cannot build police stations. We have the money, contracts are out and we cannot build because, obviously, people do not want to build, so we will find a way.

I give this honourable House the assurance that next year please God when we are coming to report on the performance, I can assure you we would not be talking about five police stations not being built, you would see the number of police stations because we have found a way to get around this bottleneck and we can give the population the assurance that we are going to be building police stations, fire stations and getting these things out of the way. It does not have anything to do with wrong priorities, we will find the way. [Interruption]

Dr. Moonilal: How?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: We will find the way and we have found the way to build the police stations.

Mr. Panday: After the Empress is completed.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, so that the criticism as it relates to our inability to deliver on police stations will be corrected. In the meantime we have embarked on an intensive repair and refurbishment programme, and the
problem with that is that it was conditioned on the fact that we were not going to do extensive repairs in the areas where you are going to rebuild. It does not make economic sense because we want to make sure that we get value for money. We have been repairing and refurbishing and we are in the second phase of that programme so that we can provide police officers with appropriate and adequate accommodation.

Let me just say one other thing because the hon. Member for Siparia also talked about providing police officers with improved compensation—again, a little late. We have put measures in place because in the past, police compensation was determined on some benchmarks or comparisons made with local police organizations—well we do not have local police organizations—they would compare what a security person is working for at Petrotrin or Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC). Those jobs cannot be compared. What you compare is the salary because people who work in the energy sector, their salaries are higher than in any other sector. That is not the modern way of determining police wages.

As a result, the Ministry of Public Administration and Information under which the CPO and everybody fall, has requested the Ministry of National Security to do a proper evaluation of police organizations and how they are compensated. So that at the next round of negotiations we would agree with the police organization, so we will complete what was outstanding and agree to that and then put in place new measures to properly evaluate the worth of a police officer at different levels and pay them accordingly. That, also, is in the works.

Again, I heard the hon. Member talk about providing police with a better wage package. In fact, we have put measures in place so we can do a proper job evaluation which will inform how police are remunerated.

Mr. Speaker, there is also the issue with respect to police vehicles and the question about police visibility. Part of it had to do with a management challenge and as we have put measures in place to strengthen the management capability of the police organization, the question of how they manage their fleet must also be looked at.

Mr. Speaker, you would recognize that a previous government had established VMCOTT as the agency designed to deal with vehicles, and there were some issues with respect to VMCOTT. I must say that on the basis of some of the recommendations we have seen, it is clear that a way has been found where we can ensure the proper management of the fleet.
To say that this Government has taken a decision to procure 315 purpose-built police vehicles—in the past we had been buying vehicles on an ad hoc basis and not a proper assessment and evaluation of the fleet, the question of a replacement, et cetera. All those things need to be put in place.

It is estimated that the police organization needs some 1,000-plus vehicles, but then we have a problem of how we retire these vehicles, and the question about—what is the name of the board again?

Mr. Manning: The Board of Survey.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: The Board of Survey. So all these vehicles are on your books and there is a procedure to go through in order to retire those vehicles. [Interrupt] These are some of the challenges we face as they relate to treating some of the incidents.

Mr. Speaker, there were a number of other pieces of legislation for which this Government has proceeded in 2000—2007. The Justice Protection Act which was not proclaimed because of the regulations needed to support it, that has been done. My hon. colleague, the Member for St. Augustine, during the crime talks, talked about tracing the money. I remember him saying we have to put measures in place to trace the money and we are talking about illegal goods, money and how they have a way that they get themselves tangled up with the legitimate economy.

I am pleased to indicate that the question about the Counter Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Framework is now being actively considered, the anti-money laundering and the combating the financing of terrorism regime have progressed to the point where the Proceeds of Crime (Amdt.) Bill will be coming in the next legislative calendar; the Financial Obligations Regulations and the Financial Intelligence Unit Bill are all ready to come to the Parliament, so it will allow us to treat with that other aspect of crime and criminal activity.

6.05 p.m.

I need to address a final area because, again the Member for Siparia made some comments that I need to address. The hon. Member made some very disparaging remarks about the recently concluded consultation on crime. She said: “The Government has already made up its mind on what it is going to do, so why are they consulting on crime and other matters. These consultations are fraudulent because the Government has not listened to the people over the last six years”. This was from the Member for Siparia.

Not only did the Government conduct a very successful consultation—and the report of the consultation has also been laid in the Parliament—the findings and the
recommendations are clearly articulated and as a result of that, some five major recommendations came out of the consultation. Let me also join with my hon. Prime Minister in taking the opportunity to congratulate and thank the thousands of citizens who participated in the consultation and who brought their recommendations to the attention of the Government. As a result, those recommendations are being considered.

The first thing coming out of the consultation and the recommendations was the establishment of a Crime and Justice Commission. It is now public knowledge that the Prime Minister has announced at least four of the seven members of the commission. The intention is to name the other three members. Is this a government that is not serious or lacks the political will? Or is this a government that sees the crime consultation as some mamaguy, as some public relations gimmick? The answer is no. If that were the case, we would not have moved as quickly as we have done to make sure and identify—as I said, next week the last three members of the commission will be appointed and their letters will be provided. That is one.

Secondly, the Government has moved quickly in terms of establishing the secretariat for the operation of the Crime and Justice Commission: One senior administrative officer; one research specialist; one events coordinator; one administrative support officer; one website master, as part of the support staff for the Crime and Justice Commission.

We have also identified some of the key recommendations. As I said, the establishment of the Crime and Justice Commission would look at the details of the recommendations being made. Then there is also the question of the establishment of a national fingerprint database with the capacity to store fingerprint records of each citizen from birth, a procedure adopted in a number of developed societies. A ministerial committee has already been appointed to look at the specifics as it relates to that.

We also have the establishment of a structured mentoring programme which utilizes trained professionals to provide one-on-one mentoring for youth at risk. The programme will also utilize the services of volunteers who will be given the appropriate training. Again, a ministerial committee has already been established to work out the details of these things. The referral to the Ministry of Education of those matters related to education for appropriate action to be taken—action was taken. Then the launch of a sustained national campaign to educate and inculcate sound family values and positive attitudes utilizing all appropriate institutions and channels of communication, a ministerial committee has also been established.
Mr. Speaker, is this a government; is this an Executive that is not serious? Is this an Executive that saw this crime consultation as some kind of a public relations gimmick? The answer is nothing could be further from the truth. It is quite clear, as I said earlier on, the intention of the Opposition is to paint this Government as being ineffective as it deals with crime, because they believe that is our Achilles heel.

But it is not going to be a one-issue election campaign and I am convinced that when the population sits back, looks at the performance of this Government across the entire spectrum, they will be satisfied and at the end of the day they will be satisfied that this is a government that is committed to improving the quality of life and standard of living of all our citizens. That is what we are here for. We have a proven record. We are not about ourselves and when they compare what is being offered as an alternative, I am convinced that all right-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will stay with the PNM—stay with the PNM! [Desk thumping] Do not trust the alternative, or alternatives, because they are not alternatives.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Nizam Baksh (Naparima): Mr. Speaker, you know we are fortunate today that you started with your usual prayer and during the debate we have had biblical quotations from various speakers and it is good to come and hear this evening the Minister of National Security confessing in this House, the challenges they are facing with regard to the issue of crime and criminal activity in this country. There is this saying that confession is good for the soul.

He has identified a ten-point plan which has been promoted for some time now and we are not seeing the kind of results to give us confidence in this country. They have created no comfort zone for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Singh: That is from personal experience.

Mr. N. Baksh: I could speak from my personal experience and there are thousands of others like myself who are in that position. So despite all the platitudes and good-sounding plans they have, citizens of this country still do not have that comfort zone in which to move about comfortably. The Minister admitted that money is not the problem to treat with crime and criminal activities. It is clearly an institutional and management challenge. This is what we are saying on this side.

The national community is now convinced that the Minister and his Government are unable to effectively and convincingly address the problem of crime he
identified. Is the 360 degrees radar system functional? Where is the blimp? Please tell us. The Minister identified the challenges and problems but, apparently, the Government does not show that it has the will power to radically engage the necessary institutions to effect solutions. With the current crime rate, many of us may not be alive to see the Government’s programmes come to fruition.

You need to embark on confidence-building for the national community by providing information to give that assurance of safety. The crime rate continues to instil fear and uncertainty among citizens, specifically the business community. Migration of human capital continues to have a debilitating effect on the situation in the country. While the figures show a slight decline over the same period of last year, that is no reason for the Government to take comfort and to gloat about it. The Government must know that guns are used to commit crimes. Most of the crimes are committed by young people in gangs and most of the gangs are connected with protection and control of the drug turf or the control of the URP.

Millions of dollars spent on foreign human resource, surveillance equipment and transport services, have not impacted on the volume of crime committed. Crime is still the number one scourge in the country.

I will read from their Social Sector Investment Programme of 2008, page 34. Listen to what they have to say about crime:

“\[quote\]The quality of life in communities has been affected by the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago. As many as 75% of household respondents indicated that they did not feel safe from crime. According to the SLCpr, most people are fearful of being murdered (44%) or kidnapped (14%). However, robbery, larceny and burglary were the most prevalent crimes experienced by interviewees. Most persons (51%) identified the fight against crime as the most important national priority when compared with issues such as ensuring a stable economy (35%) progressing towards a less impersonal and more humane society (9%), and progressing towards a society in which ideas count more than money (6%).\[quote\]

So from their own report we are seeing that crime is the number one problem faced by this country. After six years of continuous PNM Government, we in Trinidad and Tobago could say with certainty that our critical problem have escalated and are now way beyond the managerial capability of this present regime. They have failed miserably. They have failed their supporters and the country.

We have identified, in addition to crime, other Cs, like corruption and congestion. I want to address the traffic congestion a bit. The traffic situation in this country has
attained alarming proportions. To say it has adverse effects on all sectors of the economy is to put it rather mildly. Citizens now spend more time in traffic congestion than they spend with their families. Within the past six years, the PNM Government and the hon. Minister of Works and Transport, to be more specific, have announced and outlined detailed plans to address the traffic problem. Inside this Parliament and outside as well, they have indicated commencement days of construction of additional highways.

The intersection at Solomon Hochoy and Churchill Roosevelt Highways has had several commencement days which never materialized. I think a few weeks ago they made a shoddy start. I have attended consultations on the Environmental Impact Assessment for the Princes Town and Rio Claro Highway and also the continuation of the Solomon Hochoy Highway at Debe. To date, there is no commencement. All that we had so far from the PNM are empty promises—no action. The country had several commencement dates for the water taxis and the high-tech rail system. To date, nothing is tangible.

6.20 p.m.

After six years of PNM’s waste we have a few kilometres of an additional lane on the Solomon Hochoy Highway. We in Naparima have had to block the road for an entire week to get some paving work which is yet to be completed.

They now want another term to tackle the traffic situation. They do not have the capacity and capability to deal with the travel situation. Let me look at some of the effects of traffic congestion. We will experience high frustration levels by commuters; reduced performance levels at work; higher fuel cost to vehicle owners and higher transportation costs to commuters. Persons are seeking relocation nearer to their workplace and that would eat away at disposable income.

Let me take a brief look at the cost of living before I move to my particular area of concentration, the social programmes; the topic of inflation and its effects on food prices and the cost of living in general. Within the past six years, we have experienced the effects of inflation in the cost of living and the food prices index. Over the past two years, the prices of basic food items have been increased by more than 35 per cent. Local produce as well as imported items has increased significantly. The low income earner and those under the poverty line spend as much as 50 per cent of their income on food. It means that basic food items are no longer affordable for a range of low income earners.

Citizens in receipt of social benefit cannot afford to purchase enough basic food items for a balanced meal. The increase in wages and grants given in the budget will
be whittled away early in the new year with the rising cost of food. PNM’s gift to this country is high food prices and a cost of living that many cannot afford.

There is a rising cost in building materials. This morning I spoke to one of my suppliers and he told me that the price of steel had increased last Monday. Aggregate supplied by National Quarries has been increased by $30 a cubic metre with effect from this week. Clay blocks have gone beyond $6 a block; it means that concrete blocks would rise also. This is the situation. The little money that these people get through grants and the increase in wages will be lost.

I have noted the timing of the National Consultation on Food Prices and the involvement of the hon. Minister of Finance. The consultation has come a few days after the contents of the Scott Ryder Report when natural gas reserves were released. It has come towards the end of six years of the present PNM regime and a short period before the general election. The timing seems rather suspicious. Why no emphasis on food prices for the past six years when we on this side have been consistent in our demands for some control on the escalating inflationary trends and their effects on prices of foodstuff? The hon. Minister of Finance has decided to turn suddenly to Mother Earth when the wealth from the oil and natural gas seems very uncertain.

I note the hon. Prime Minister’s recommendation of large farms with the assistance of the Cuban government. I will quote from two newspapers. The Daily Express of Thursday August 23, 2007 states:

“In the recently concluded public consultation on food prices Mr. Manning referred to the heart of the consultation being long term food security for T&T. But why only now? One would have assumed that he would have given a comprehensive review of the problems that have faced the agricultural community over several decades—alienation of prime agricultural lands to housing and industry, inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure, perennial flooding problems, security of land tenure, bank credit, praedial larceny, food processing and marketing facilities and countless other disincentives.”

I look at the Newsday on page 10. It states:

“PM may need Plan B

The plan by the Patrick Manning administration to develop agriculture through large farms has been greeted with significant scepticism.

There are several reasons for this reaction, not the least of which is history. The People’s National Movement, since its inception, has never
placed much store on agricultural development. Not only were the majority of
workers in the agricultural sector not PNM supporters, but Dr. Eric Williams’
vision was an urban-based one which saw industrialisation as the best
economic option for Trinidad and Tobago.

Another reason for the present scepticism has to do with the timing
of the consultation on food prices held last week. In an election year, and
mere days before the annual Budget, such an exercise will naturally be
seen as little but a public relations exercise. Such cynicism is bolstered by
Prime Minister Patrick Manning’s assurance that suggestions made at the
consultation will be incorporated into tomorrow’s Budget. But the Budget
cannot be so easily altered, since the various allocations had to be calculated
according to agreed criteria between the various Ministries. On the other
hand, if Mr. Manning is saying that he can so easily make last-minute
changes, this would mean that the 2007-2008 Budget is not a serious
document.

The third reason for scepticism has to do with the main plank of the
new agricultural thrust—several hundred-acre farms run by Cubans. After
all, Cuba is not noted for its agricultural expertise. The country’s main crop is
still sugarcane, which is now effectively defunct in Trinidad and Tobago.
The country’s main comparative advantage is in tobacco and the manufacture
of cigars, but the Cubans aren’t coming here to grow tobacco. Citrus is an
important export crop, but our citrus farmers are quite competent. Moreover,
that Communist country has to import large amounts of food, including its
main staple of rice.

It would seem obvious that a more effective strategy would have been
to use the resources the country already has.”

This is the view of the media. I do not support the establishment of large farms.
These are destined to fail especially if they are State-owned and controlled. If we are
to establish large farms they must be privately owned. Our history of our State’s
involvement in economic activities has failed miserably in this country. All the
initiatives of Caroni (1975) Limited in agricultural food crops have been dismal
failures; the main reason being State ownership. My take on large farms is without
doubt, privatization. It must be noted that privatized farms will be economical only if
the necessary support services, for example water, roads, electricity and drainage are
provided by the Government. Moreover, the Government needs to be on standby to
subsidize large farms when adverse weather conditions affect and hamper production.
I have noted that over the past three years, the hon. Minister of Finance has reduced, progressively, the amount of details provided in the budget statement about social programmes. The information contained in the budget of 2008 is restricted to a few lines to the effect that the number of social programmes will remain the same as in previous years. His explanation about the scant information would be that details needed are contained in the social sector document. This is not a satisfactory explanation. Certain details usually provided in the budget statement are withhold to avoid criticisms.

I recall that some years ago, the budget document was used to enumerate the different programmes and to identify the strengths and weaknesses. Now, in respect of time, these details caged in social sector documents and limitations do not allow for detailed research. I am convinced that the hon. Minister of Finance deliberately adopted this strategy to avoid criticisms of social programmes, most of which depict a random waste of public funds and create reliance and dependency on social handouts. Government social programmes perpetuate an intergenerational cycle of poverty. Their poverty stock is increasing with little resolving action.

Over the past five years, I have made general criticism of the social programmes, a few of which I should like to emphasize because of their critical relevance in avoiding the dependency syndrome, which the hon. Minister of Finance is not very mindful about. Social programmes are always necessary, be they in developed or developing societies. Apart from the Senior Citizens Grant and persons with permanent disabilities, social programmes must include a rehabilitative content in its structure. This content is necessary to determine the number of persons on a timely basis who have been rehabilitated, trained and provided with the necessary referral to be independent. This means that most social programmes are temporary in nature. I have noted that some of the social programmes keep provisions for rehabilitation on paper and this is as far as it goes.

The typical track record of the PNM Government is its proficiency with paper plans. The country has never been provided with much information about the beneficiaries who enter the programmes and exist via rehabilitation. The success of social programmes relies heavily on the number of persons who have been rehabilitated and can fit into society and contribute to its development.

Social programmes with training components as Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP); Helping Young People Prepare for Employment (HYPE); Multi Sector Skills Training programme (MuST); Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) and the Community-based Environment Protection Employment Programme (CEPEP) have a component that may be similar to the
rehabilitation concept. Thousands of citizens may be exposed to a variety of technical and vocational training which is designed to impart employable and marketable skills. The success of these programmes will be determined by the number of graduates who are able to obtain employment in the particular field of training. This information is necessary because it tells us if the training is standardized and relevant to the employment needs of the country.

The training must be synchronized with the technical and vocational needs of the country. Within the past few years the Government has advised that infrastructural development is so rapid that local skills are inadequate. Is it inadequate or the graduates are not equipped with the standardized skills which are needed in the employment environment? I have been told by a few of my constituents who were part of the MuST Programme that they attended one of these sessions and for most of the time they were idle because the project did not get under way. The trainees in every programme complain about the late payment of stipends and the lack of supervision committed to the acquisition of skills. A number of people will graduate and receive certificates but they would not acquire the level of skills to take them on the job market.

I have no doubt that the social programmes are being utilized deliberately to provide jobs and handouts to boost support for the upcoming general election. I will examine a few of the social programmes.

6.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I now look at the Senior Citizens’ Grant. I note that the grant has been increased to $1,650 with a ceiling of $2,500. We on this side would have preferred to see an increase to $3,000, as indicated by the Leader of the Opposition. [Desk thumping] This sum is more realistic to cope with the current price of basic food items.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to examine some of the implications of the Senior Citizens’ Grant in the Minister of Finance’s budget statement. The implications are that some senior citizens will have their present grant reduced. For example, those who are in receipt of $1,000 NIS pension receive a reduced Senior Citizens’ Grant of $1,250. Now, with the NIS increase to $2,000 in January 2008, these persons’ grant will be reduced to $500.

At present, most if not all workers of former Caroni (1975) Limited receive a monthly pension of $650 plus $1,000 NIS pension. As at January, 2008 with the increase of NIS to $2,000 these persons would exceed the $2,500 ceiling. Their Senior Citizens’ Grant would be terminated. Mr. Speaker, these persons will have a legitimate expectation of receiving the Senior Citizens Grant.
Some senior citizens’ NIS pensions and private pension may total $2,400. According to calculations, these persons will be paid $150 even though the difference is $50. This is according to the Bill that was introduced recently on pensions. I am of the view that this proposal is cumbersome and will be a nuisance, because the current administrative cost of investigation by officers and the printing of cheques will exceed the cost of that $150 grant. I am recommending that this grant be increased to $300.

I have another concern and that is: What happens to the present applicants who have applied for the Senior Citizens’ Grant and who are receiving $1,000 NIS? Will these applicants have to wait until January 2008 for their claims to be investigated? The Social Welfare Board may not be able to take any decision, and these applications that are coming in now will not be addressed until 2008.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has avoided any possible review of the requirements which must be met before the Senior Citizens’ Grant is awarded. At present, a citizen would qualify for the grant only if he or she resided in Trinidad and Tobago continuously for a period of 20 years preceding the claim. With two exceptions as follows: one, an allowance of short periods abroad not exceeding five years in the aggregate and if the citizen spent an aggregate of 60 years in Trinidad and Tobago.

I am of the view that a national born in Trinidad and Tobago should not be subjected to resident qualification of 20 years preceding the claim. This should be reduced to 10 years and the aggregate period spent in Trinidad and Tobago should be reduced to 40 years. [Desk thumping]

With respect to homes for senior citizens, recently this honourable House approved the Homes for Older Persons Bill for the establishment of a unit to monitor and regulate standards for senior citizens’ institutions. The legislation detailed the authority of inspectors and guidelines to ensure that homes are provided with equipment and facilities that would lead to comfortable living. Could the hon. Minister responsible indicate the present status of the committees and what system is in place to give effect to the legislation which was passed in June, 2007? With their performance and record we can conclude that nothing was done.

With respect to mediation centres, I have been reliably informed that mediation centres are rather functional and well subscribed. I have been told that civil matters, land disputes, family disputes, et cetera, which are within their terms of reference have been dealt with quite satisfactorily and with dispatch. I have
been told that they have assisted the Magistrates’ Courts especially in reducing a number of matters which had clogged the system. I have also been told that the Magistrates’ Courts have reposed a great deal of confidence in mediation centres.

As a matter of fact, most of these cases now that are referred to these mediation centres come from the Magistrates’ Courts. Because of the location, it is causing undue hardship to persons who want to access this facility. I am suggesting that since greater emphasis is being placed on court matters, that these centres should be relocated nearer to the courts. This will facilitate persons who want to access the facility to do so with ease and comfort.

The Public Assistance Programme is intended to provide financial assistance to families in need. One of the main complaints with this programme is the length of time it takes to complete investigation before a decision is made. Options to solve this problem include the employment of more staff to manage caseloads efficiently. The local Public Assistance Board should be given authority to grant approval for a short-term period pending detailed investigations.

There has always been a rehabilitative component to this programme which has not been implemented, hence the reason for granting short periods of relief for up to a maximum of one year. It has been the practice that persons who are in receipt of public assistance over a number of years will graduate to the Senior Citizens’ Grant. So, you will want to reduce this and eliminate this as far as possible. I am suggesting that those persons who are beneficiaries of the Public Assistance Grant should be allowed to go and work so that they will be weaned away from the programme. This is not so at this point in time. [Desk thumping] The rule at this point in time is that if they find you working they would cut it out. We need to allow them to work so that they would be weaned away from the programme. The old saying “teach a man to fish” is most relevant in this programme.

In this regard, staff must be trained and increased; and laws and regulations must be reviewed to incorporate the rehabilitation process. Recipients must be counselled and encouraged to become self-sufficient.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch briefly on the disabled. Now, recently we have seen where disabled persons have been to court in order to get certain benefits like the provision to access public places like the Hall of Justice. This is something that we have been talking about for years, but it was not implemented. We need to do this as a matter of urgency. If you go to government offices, recreational sporting areas and offices of public utilities, you do not see any facilities to
accommodate the disabled. We are saying that these problems that they encounter are causing social exclusions of the disabled. They are now crying out for help.

Now, let me look briefly at the system of payment with regard to the Senior Citizens Grant, the Public Assistance Grant and the Disability Grant. These payments are made through personal cheques which are distributed by TTPost. Within the past few years, there have been several reported cases of missing cheques and stolen cheques. I have been told that hundreds of beneficiaries have been affected. I have also been told that instances of stolen or missing cheques are very frequent, and lately the TTPost home delivery personnel are being robbed of these cheques.

Mr. Speaker, financial regulations stipulate that when a cheque is missing or stolen, a replacement could only be prepared after a lapse of six months. This means that our impoverished citizens must subsist without their grants for six months. Should we expose our poor citizens to such levels of inconvenience?

I have been reliably informed that the Cabinet of this present Government conveyed approval in 2003 for all cheques to be paid via commercial banks in this country. Could the hon. Minister responsible tell us why this Cabinet decision was not carried out and why our citizens must continue to face payment uncertainty? These persons have advised me that they prefer to receive their grants through the banks.

Could the hon. Minister also tell the country at large why during an era of technology the entire social welfare records are not computerized? Citizens of this country, as a result of the Freedom of Information Act, should be able to call at any one of the Social Welfare District offices and get information about their cases. Apart from this, computerization is necessary to avoid duplication of applications in different districts which could be traced quite easily.

Mr. Speaker, I have also been reliably informed that reconciliation statements of cheques paid out by the Ministry of Social Welfare have not been done for a number of years. This is a requirement of the financial regulations. How do you know that cheques have not been cashed by persons who have died or migrated? This is certainly an infringement of the financial regulations.

I now want to look briefly at vagrancy. A few weeks ago, I saw a television programme on the Local IETV Station about the state of vagrancy in this country. The Director of the Social Development Unit informed the audience that the present vagrancy population is approximately 1,000. Six years has passed and this Government has done nothing to address the vagrancy problem in this country.
I noted in the budget statement that the Minister of Finance informed of the decision to establish an International Conference Centre which will accommodate international conferences. Will we be showcasing the vagrancy problem to the world leaders?

I also noted that the Mayor of Port of Spain has displaced the vagrants from their sanctuary at Tamarind Square. Where will they go? This was their comfort zone for handouts from good samaritans. They are now expected to roam the streets of Port of Spain especially around the site of the International Convention Centre.

The vagrancy problem is one of the most talked about and the most written about social problems existing in the country. We cannot talk about Vision 2020 and not attempt to solve this problem. Remember, the UNC government set up a Social Displacement Unit to address this problem. We need to know what the unit is doing. There is need to set up social displacement relief centres.

I would recommend that we do about four: one in north, Central, south and in Tobago. These centres must be located on at least five acres of land. Each centre should be properly enclosed and provided with dormitory facilities; kitchen facilities for preparation of meals; bathroom facilities; medical facilities with a doctor or nurse visiting every two or three days; recreational facilities; occupational therapy—persons must be encouraged to do gardening, landscaping, et cetera and adequate staff must be provided.

The homeless vagrants must be counselled and encouraged to relocate to these centres. In cases where the voluntary process is not working, laws must be enacted to make vagrancy an illegal act with the appropriate legal commitment.

Children in need of care and protection: Mr. Speaker, we must re-examine the package of children’s Acts which was passed by the UNC government and is yet to be implemented by this current regime. They indicated that the Children’s Authority Act 2000 was flawed. They said that these Acts will be reintroduced. The nation has been waiting for six years. These laws are necessary to prevent some of those heinous crimes perpetrated on our innocent children.

Mr. Speaker, the cases of Sean Luke and Amy Annamantudo shocked the national community and are still fresh in our minds. Heinous and sadistic crimes have been committed against children. This Government promised immediate action and, to date, nothing has been done. Are we awaiting more of these heinous crimes before positive action is taken? Where are the urgency and priority?
Decentralization of social services delivery: Since 2005 a decision was taken by the Government to decentralize the delivery of social services and they promised to establish 14 social delivery centres and, to date, none of these centres have been delivered.

6.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, while most NIS pensioners would welcome the 100 per cent increase, there are, a number of issues which are affecting the prompt delivery of services from the National Insurance Board. I would like to enumerate some of these issues which require urgent attention. I have been told that hundreds of persons have submitted claims for the different benefits delivered by the board and more than six months has lapsed and the claims have not been honoured.

Over the years the NIB has acquired the reputation for tardiness, delay and arrogance in their dealings with clients. Their service has shown no inclination towards improvement. Had this been a private organization, I am sure after years of operations, levels of proficiency and efficiency would have been achieved and maintained. I have been advised that a large number of medical claims have been subjected to undue delay, because approval must be conveyed by the medical advisor to the board.

I have been advised that there is only one medical advisor for the entire Trinidad and Tobago and his services are only rendered on a part-time basis. This state of affairs has been in operation for decades. Is it the intention to frustrate claimants as some private insurers do? The figures for claims which are outstanding for the different categories of sickness, employment injury, invalidity, et cetera, which should be provided by the hon. Minister, will tell the alarming state of this problem.

We also need to address coverage for the self-employed. For years now this has been promised by the National Insurance Board and to date nothing has been put in place. And I am suggesting that whenever this has been put in place that should be given the same level of treatment as is done with the other employers and employees.

I just want to make a brief intervention on behalf of constituency staff in the 36 constituencies. I have noticed that people across the board have benefited with regards to increases; employees in the private and public sectors have increases in personal emoluments in order to cope with inflationary trends and their effects on the cost of living. This includes Ministers, parliamentarians, Senators, councilors. There
are at present 144 or more employees who have been managing the affairs of the constituencies. These people have not had an increase in their salary for the past five years. I am making an appeal on their behalf that some consideration be given to them. [Desk thumping]

Apart from the lack of increase in the allowance of staff, there has been no increase in the allowance for the maintenance and upkeep of the constituency offices within the past five years. Utility rates have been increased; stationery supplies have been increased as well as cleaning agents and detergents. Members of Parliament in several instances have had to be out of pocket in order to cope with the increased prices.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to enhance and improve the quality of service administered by Members of Parliament, I would like to make a special recommendation, that a constituency fund be established to allow for special projects to be undertaken in their constituencies. These projects may be in response to natural disasters or community in nature designed to generate self-help and economic activities. This fund could be administered by the Parliament and drawdown made when feasible projects are recommended by Members of Parliament. I am sure that Members of Parliament would agree with this proposal here; this is something that is really needed.

I want to look at some further issues in the social sector. At present there are over 200 Government social programmes operating in Trinidad and Tobago. Within the past five years several billion dollars have been spent on these programmes. It would be very interesting for the country to be provided with the statistics in the following areas:

1. the number of citizens who are recipients of social benefits for each constituency in Trinidad and Tobago;
2. the distribution of the different social programmes according to constituencies.

I am positive that these figures would reveal a rather telling story about Government’s failure to honour a social responsibility in a fair and equitable manner.

I would like to examine Government’s social responsibility in a few other services which it administers and distributes to the population. Let me look quickly at community development—the Adult Education Programme I have been advised that persons who participated in the Adult Education Programme in 2005/2006 are
still awaiting their certificates after completion of the courses. They are hoping that they would receive these soon so that they can seek further training and employment where necessary.

I want to look at community centres. I look at the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). On page 106, it says here:

“The programme of refurbishment of existing community facilities and the construction of facilities will continue with an allocation of $20 million in 2008. Work will include:

• refurbishment of twenty six community centres throughout Trinidad on the phased basis including Centres at Techier Village, La Brea, Siparia, Rio Claro, Tabaquite, Modesir, Lopinot and Malabar
• refurbishment of existing export centres at Maraval, Laventille and Diego Martin and the construction of new Centres at Mayaro, Chaguanas and Tobago
• refurbishment of four civic centres and regional complexes at Barrackpore, La Horquetta, St. Augustine and Barataria”

Mr. Speaker, in last year’s budget we were told that over 100 new community centres will be built, and so far not a single one has been built. So, we want to know where the funding has gone to.

I want to raise the issue of the complex at Barrackpore. While this is down for refurbishment, my information is that for the past two years a board has never been put in place.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member for Naparima has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. N. Baksh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and thank you very much, Members. I was at the point where I was saying that at the Barrackpore Regional Complex, for the past two years this complex has been without the services of a board and a secretary. So, while I am happy to see that it is down for refurbishment, I should also like to see that the board be put in place and the required staff be put in place as well.
I note also that:

“completion of five new community centres at Morvant Central, Pelican Extension, Maracas, Thick Village and Preysal, marking the start of a comprehensive community facilities construction programme to be managed by National Insurance Property Development Co. Ltd. (NIPDEC), eTecK, the National Commission for Self Help (NCSH), and National Maintenance and Training Services (MTS).”

I have information that the Preysal community centre has been under construction for quite some time and has stalled because of problems with the contractor and variations of the programme as well.

While we are talking about five new centres, there are a number of other areas that need community centres, and I could speak confidently about those in Naparima. I have been making a request for one at Cedar Hill, which has been using an old dilapidated Government house for many years, in dire need of replacement. There is also one that is required at Lengua and we are not hearing anything about these and we are talking about a massive construction programme of community centres. We need to get a balance.

I have information that there is one contractor who is a close friend of the Prime Minister, an auto dealer in a roll-on roll-off business, who is now a construction contractor at Tortuga and Penal Rock community centre. So, we want to know, to get jobs or to become a contractor you have to be friends of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Panday: Of the Government.

Mr. N. Baksh: I am also recommending that the C-type centres that were built many, many years ago when community development first came into being, should be replaced by modern facilities. Those centres have a very small auditorium and just a washroom at the rear and that is it. Today, with the demand for these centres we need to put in additional facilities which would accommodate a large auditorium, meeting rooms, kitchen and other facilities as well. So, I want to see that we take action with regard to replacing those very old dilapidated C-type centres and replacing them with modern ones.

Mr. Speaker, I looked at the schools and I turn to page 68 of the Public Sector Investment Programme. I saw:

“An allocation of $8.0 million will facilitate the furnishing and equipping of pre-engineered classrooms at primary schools including, Icacos Government, Brasso Seco RC, Kanhai Presbyterian…”
which is in Barrackpore.

“Elswick Presbyterian…”

in Tableland.

“Lengua Presbyterian, Harmony Hall, St. Paul’s Anglican, Paramin RC, Pt Cumana RC, Rosehill RC, Maracas SDA, Penal Rock Hindu and Rousillac SDMS. Funds are allocated for:—

• installation pre-engineered temporary buildings to house additional classrooms and teaching facilities at 12 secondary schools.”

I see you have one listed at Lengua Presbyterian and this has been down for many years. And last year, in the 2007 budget, an allocation of $4.2 billion was made for that school and nothing was done in the last year. I see further down at Item 255 you are saying that you are building a new school; you come lower down and you are seeing continuation of construction of St. Paul’s AC, Icacos Government, Lengua Presbyterian. This old dilapidated building is still standing there. There has been no demolition of the old building, therefore you cannot start construction.

So, further up you are saying you allocated new funds and here you are saying that there is a continuation of construction. It is a shame to know that there is nothing in that school; the building is collapsing, but you have MTS security 24 hours a day, seven days a week—24/07. So that you need to remove the security there because they are doing nothing. They are just sitting there idly and it could be creating mischief in the community. You need to remove them.

There is another situation; it is outside my constituency but I pass there every day and see it; Monkey Town Government. The school has been relocated to Penal but you have MTS security 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It speaks badly for the Government.

7.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch, to some extent, on local government as well. For 11 years now a bridge in Musraph Trace in Barrackpore, has been demolished when the Oropouche River was widened and realigned. To this date the MP before me has been making representation and I continue in the same vein making representation to the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, without success. What they are telling me now is that this bridge is going to cost about $3 million to build and they do not get that kind of funds for the entire programme. I have been to the Minister of Local Government, Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas, and I have
had several meetings with him and with his technocrats. From different stages we have been asking for a new bridge and on the last occasion when we met with him we even suggested installing a temporary Bailey bridge so that the farmers and the residents of that area would be able to travel in comfort. For 11 years now we have been waiting on this bridge, without success and the Minister has promised that he will do something but nothing to date. So, I am making an appeal at this level here that something be done to address this critical problem experienced by the farmers and residents of the area.

I also looked at the Ministry of Works and Transport, St. Croix Road: undue delay in completion of that road. It is under rehabilitation for the past three years—

Mr. Panday: “Hmm.”

Mr. N. Baksh:—and it is incomplete. There is also another critical problem which I drew to the attention of the relevant Minister of Works and Transport. I understand that the road is narrower than specification in certain areas. [Interruption] And I have written the Minister to the effect and I understand he visited the area but we have not seen the problems addressed, so I am hoping that something be done to correct this problem.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. The “Sports for all” philosophy, we have several recreational grounds—usually they are referred to as football grounds and cricket grounds—but the time has come when we should be developing these grounds into really true and meaningful recreational facilities. We need to do this as a matter of urgency if we are to encourage our young people to get involved in sport and productive activities, and to keep them away from crime and criminal activities.

We should be establishing play parks throughout this country. I saw recently in a document where seven play parks are going to be established and three of those play parks are going to be established in the Prime Minister's constituency in Cocoyea—one community, three parks! Where is the love? Is the love only in the PNM constituencies?

I want to look at the Social Sector Investment Programme at page 75, where sport is being addressed. Firstly, I will look at the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres. These centres cater for young people between the ages of 15 and 19, where training in carpentry, hairdressing, beauty care, plumbing, computer technician, literacy and drapery are undertaken. When I looked at the constraints and the problems faced by these people, I want to know if they could learn anything at all.
The main constraints identified were limited staffing in the positions of camp directors, assistant camp directors, directors and trade instructors. There was also no official daily-rated support staff to facilitate the maintenance of the facility. Additionally, the infrastructure is archaic, dilapidated and in need of urgent repair. So I ask myself: What kind of training were you able to do if you had no staff and the buildings were not in good condition? Are these the kind of graduates that you are sending out in the community to seek employment?

I also looked at the district youth services, and again, they are complaining. [Interruption] The main constraints during the period include staff shortages, which have caused limited geographic coverage of the service. The office accommodation is poor and there has not been sufficient adherence to accounting procedures for payment to service providers. Is that saying that there is corruption? It was also recommended that additional youth officers be acquired to work with target audiences at the district level.

Mr. Speaker, I also looked at the Youth Facilities Development Programme: This programme offers training in electrical work, plumbing, music, literacy, production, drumming, drama, aerobics and computer technician training. Again, they are identifying major constraints which include substandard physical infrastructure, and the programme is not broad enough to supply the needs of the youths. The programme also needs more professional staff such as psychologists, social workers and night supervisors. A preliminary proposal has been prepared and presented to the ministry administration to address the shortcomings in delivery services.

Mr. Speaker, this is how the song goes on and on, and I could imagine when they speak about this in the youth sector. Is this applicable to the other sectors as well? It is certainly going to show similar problems. When I looked at the community swimming programme, again they are talking about constraints and those were identified with the long distances from the pool to schools in the area. This led to reluctance to use the facility. There is also insufficient pool management and instructional staff for night-time, weekend and holiday activities and this is the time when these children will be available.

School and community coaching: This programme offers motor skills training in these specific sporting disciplines, cricket, netball, tennis, basketball, track and field, hockey, volleyball and football. The main constraints include getting qualified persons to administer the programme. The remuneration offered to coaches is too small to attract good coaches. It has been recommended that the remuneration be increased by 100 per cent in order to remedy this. Some changes to the programme have been the introduction of Cuban coaches in the bilateral agreement between the
Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Republic of Cuba. So, again, we are seeing Cubans coming into the country. What language are they giving instructions in? Can they speak English? [ Interruption] We recognize there are similar problems in the nursing fraternity as well. So here we have Cubans for sport; Cubans for health, doctors and nurses; Cubans for agriculture and Chinese for construction.

Hon. Member: Cubans for what else?

Mr. N. Baksh: Those they are sending back through the courts, deporting them. [ Laughter] It is a sign that foreigners are taking over the country. Money is going out the country when we have to employ these foreign persons. Where are the thousands that they claim they have trained on the various programmes? Why is it that we cannot focus to fill these vacancies locally? This is the problem I want to identify here today. I am sure, as I said, the problems we identified in sport could apply to other areas as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to address one or two other issues here; small ones, which affect the lives of the citizens of our country. Earlier this year, the Government introduced the electronic birth certificates. This was introduced in January 2007 and they indicated that the existing birth certificates would be no longer valid. When that information was given out, there was a mad rush for people to obtain birth certificates: parents, those who wanted to travel; those who have to get the certificates to obtain new passports. So there was a mad rush for these electronic birth certificates. But while they announced this, Government failed to put in place adequate administrative machinery for this innovation.

Therefore, the elderly and parents waited at the office for an entire day and sometimes they were left without certificates. They were informed, too, that applications could be submitted through the mail but this would have taken three months. As a result of that, those who were in a hurry to get their certificates early, used to leave home and go to the offices at 4.00 a.m. and line up for numbers. If they did not want to do that, they had to pay $100 to the smartmen who are lining up there [ Interruption] early in the morning to sell spaces for $100. This is the nightmare that citizens have to go through, and every day there was only a limited number of requests that could have been processed. So this is the problem with regard to the electronic birth certificates.

There is also a similar problem with regard to the machine readable passports. To apply for the machine readable passport you needed to get the electronic birth certificate. This, too, had a similar kind of problem. When you got there, you had
to form a line and then you had to get a number and wait a couple hours before you were attended to. Many were forced to return the next day and start the process all over again, only when reaching at the interviewing officers to be told that the new machine readable passports were not available and that they were granting you an extension of the old passport. It was also discovered that there were defective passports and this aggravated the problem. Mr. Speaker, it would appear that Government, Social responsibility is to frustrate and demoralize its citizens in respect of services which are due to them.

I look at a third one here, the licensing offices, and I bring this to bear because people have to interact on a daily basis with these agencies for services and we need to correct and improve the service delivery. I have never seen more disorganization, inefficiency and callousness in a Government institution. A few weeks ago citizens who sought services at the Princes Town licensing sub-office were not able to receive services. For consecutive days there were no examiners; those with appointments for driving test were turned away. There are reports that persons who sought to renew driving permits had to be turned away because the photographer did not report for duty. Physical conditions and obsolete equipment contribute to the demotivation of the staff. I am not blaming the staff, because if you look at all the licensing offices, look at the conditions of those buildings and the facilities you have there.

**Mr. Panday:** True!

**Mr. N. Baksh:** This includes Port of Spain as well. They are treating those staff there like street children.

**Mr. Imbert:** You are against—*[Inaudible]*

**Mr. N. Baksh:** No, no. This is an indication of poor institutional management. *[Desk thumping]* It is not surprising that whenever the PNM is in power the social responsibility of Government is always at its lowest ebb.

**Mr. Panday:** True, true. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, with regard to Government's inefficiency and failure to deliver, I want to put the icing on the cake this evening. *[ Interruption]* I looked at agriculture, 2004—I looked at the budget over the past few years. Under agriculture, 2004, what it says here:

“This Government has assigned a very high priority to the modernization of the agricultural sector and will immediately introduce new and appropriate technologies; improved infrastructure and generate a wave of new investment in the sector...”
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

[MR. N. BAKSH]  

Failed! Failed to deliver!

“To facilitate an expansion of the agro-processing sector, we propose that an initial allowance of 100 per cent be applied to capital expenditure in plant and equipment for approved agro-processing activities.”

Failed to deliver!

7.20 p.m.

“The agricultural infrastructure will be strengthened by the provision of roads, drains, electricity and water to areas of new development for the settlement of new farms, and continuation of the Access Roads Programme and establishment of Water Management and Flood Control Programmes.”

Failed to deliver.

Agriculture 2005:

“Our goal is to increase the sector’s contribution to economic and social development, and employment creation while providing an increasing level of the food requirements of the nation.”

Failed to deliver.…. 

“accelerate the distribution of agricultural State lands and Caroni lands to farmers and in particular to graduates of the Faculty of Agriculture UWI, ECIAF and YAPA.”

I asked how many farms were given to ECIAF and YAPA graduates. Again, failed to deliver.

“NAMDEVCO…will be establishing a multi-product processing facility that provides opportunities for product development.”

Failed to deliver.

“Our distribution of State lands for agriculture will therefore take into account the objective of establishing modern agro processing facilities.”

Failed to deliver.

“We shall promote fish production through the establishment of the Fisheries Monitoring and Surveillance Unit, and will put sustainable management techniques in place for renewable marine and inland fisheries.”

Again, failed to deliver.
Agriculture 2006:

“Over the medium-term, our strategy will be to:

• improve food security and food sovereignty by the development of strategic agricultural subsectors;
• pursue a sustainable rural development agenda; encourage youth involvement in agricultural activity;
• increase competitiveness in export and domestic markets.”

Again, failed to deliver. [Desk thumping]

“To provide the feedstock for the agri-business sector, Government intends to establish two or three large farms in the country through joint venture arrangements with private investors.”

Failed to deliver.

“We are in the process of finalizing plans to develop competitive industries from seven primary products: cassava, paw paw, hot peppers, sweet peppers, pumpkins, tilapia and rabbits.”

Failed to deliver.

“…a major objective of our agricultural strategy is food security…We have commenced programmes to increase the level of sufficiency in five strategic foods, namely, rice, root crops and tubers; small ruminants; aquaculture and dairy.”

Failed to deliver.

“Family Farms:

In implementing our rural development policy we will focus on:

• providing infrastructure to facilitate increased production and productivity by (small) farms;
• increasing the production of local foods through the growbox and community aquaculture projects;
• expanding youth-oriented programmes such as, YAPA, the 4H and Young Farmers’ Programmes;
• establishing agricultural settlements in rural areas; and
• providing training and facilitating the transfer of appropriate technology to farmers, Fisherfolk and agri-business.”
Again, failed to deliver.  *[Desk thumping]*

Agriculture 2007:

“…Food and Agriculture Organization has recommended the creation of eight large scale farms and the Government will be issuing requests for proposals from the private sector for the operationalization of these farms.”

Failed to deliver, again.

“…Government also proposes to operate two additional farms in collaboration with the Government of Cuba.”

Failed to deliver.

“…the thrust now should be on the creation of medium—and large-sized farms and providing the conditions to encourage amalgamation of small plots into larger economic farm units.”

Failed to deliver.  I have to skip from agriculture and go to some other sectors as well.

**Mr. Panday:** I will do it for you.  I will take over for you. Skip, skip.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, I look at Arts and Culture, 2003.

“…in collaboration with Pan Trinbago a programme for the rehabilitation of pan yards throughout the country…implementation of the Pan in the Classroom Programme to follow…a similar programme for the introduction of the harmonium in schools.”

Failed to deliver.

In 2004:

“…Government will develop a strategic plan for the development of culture and creative arts.”

Failed to deliver.

“The Academy of the Performing Arts will also be established.”

Failed to deliver.

“We will begin to showcase (pan’s) image in our physical landscape especially in the design of our public buildings and infrastructure.”

Failed to deliver.

“…we will also establish two academies for the performing arts, one at Princes Building Grounds in Port of Spain” (and the other at Todd Street in San Fernando).  Work will commence in…2006.”
Failed to deliver.

“…a new state-of-the-art National Carnival Centre at the Queen’s Park Savannah…Phase one of the project will commence in March 2006, immediately after Carnival, (and) will be completed in time for (our) celebrations in 2007.”

Failed to deliver. That sounds like a chorus now.

I want to look at pension reforms, 2003.

“We are in the process of evaluating recommendations on pension reform with a view to providing the national community with a comprehensive pension reform framework for wide consultation.”

Failed to deliver.

Pension reform 2004:

“Full portability and transferability of pension benefits; Harmonization of the NIS Retirement Pension and the Old Age Pension.”

Failed to deliver.

Pension reform 2005:

“Modernization of the pension industry…is another major component of the exercise to reform the financial sector.”

Failed to deliver.

Mr. Speaker, after listening to all these, we can understand why the Government were not able to deliver. We heard before “performance beats ‘ole’ talk” and that was the UNC. Now we could put the PNM, “ole talk beats performance.”

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

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Roger Boynes): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance on his delivery of a well thought out and all-inclusive fiscal package. This budget which is appropriately named, “Determined to Reach Our Goal,” is yet another step in taking the nation a year closer to attaining the goals of Vision 2020. It represents one of a series of fiscal incentives which have certainly over a number of years laid a solid foundation for attaining developed nation status

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a number of persons do not believe that we can in fact reach developed nation status. Those on the other side do not see the vision; they do not understand it. I recall those on the other side did not understand the vision
that turned out to be Point Lisas and were in fact opposed to it. The success of the Brian Lara Promenade was also not understood by those opposite, in much the same way that they are opposing the vision of the University of Trinidad and Tobago.

The University of Trinidad and Tobago, in my humble opinion, is in the process of laying the platform for citizens to be able to compete with the best in the world in areas of: academia, business, technology and sport. The University of Trinidad and Tobago is a springboard to build a creative and innovative society in Trinidad and Tobago. And, again, those on the other side do not understand the vision of the Brian Lara Academy and the Institute of Sport, but we will touch on that a bit later.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government, through the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has based all its policies and plans and programmes on the national vision, 2020 thrust. The National Sport Policy and the National Youth Policy continue to be the vehicles through which the sport product is delivered and the young people of this nation are empowered. Since this Government assumed office in 2002, the Ministry has made every effort to address the concerns of citizens of this country in matters under its remit, in the most equitable responsible and professional manner.

This Government views sport as a vehicle for encouraging unity, nationalism, patriotism and pride, for maintaining a society that is fit and encouraging others to become healthy through a regimen of physical, recreation and sporting activities. It can be a mechanism to inculcate discipline and good character among citizens; to demonstrate high values and exemplary behaviour among sporting participants; and to groom future sporting ambassadors to carry the name of Trinidad and Tobago to all corners of the world. This Government also views sport as an element in the further capitalization and expansion of the nation’s industrial base.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last few years have been sensational for this great nation in the area of sport. In this context, sporting programmes of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs have been predicated on three major pillars. You see, in order to approach the work of the Ministry—they work for the people—one has to do it in a very professional manner. Before, programmes and plans with respect to the sporting product were done in a very ad hoc manner; now we have a vision, we have the sports policy and we have the political will.

What we have decided to do coming out of that National Sport Policy, is to look at the tenets, the basis of that National Sport Policy and the main tenet speaks to total participation in sport; it speaks to high performance sport; and establishing sport
as an industry. In other words, we want to ensure that everyone in the country, the community of Trinidad and Tobago recreate, either by jogging, by walking, by taking part in small goal football, some sort of recreation; we want to ensure that we lay that in the country so we that would have a healthy population. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in order to do so, we have to focus on two aspects of that total participation in sport.

How do we get the entire country to play? It is not by accident that we drive along the Priority Bus Route and we see on different grounds a number of persons playing. Go through the country, Icacos, straight to Toco, you will see a number of persons throughout the length and breadth of this country participating in some sporting activity. It is not by accident; it is because what we have done is that we have put sporting programmes throughout the country. That is how you get people involved. We are focused on community programmes and upgrade community facilities to get the people out.

7.35 p.m.

I wish to commend my colleague, the Member for Arima. You no doubt will appreciate, if you drive along the Priority Bus Route in the Aranguez area, that you will feel sometimes when you travel at night, that it is day. Passing the Eddie Hart Grounds, you will feel it is day. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment at this time is lighting every nook and cranny of this country. [Desk thumping] We have 31 grounds at this time where contracts have been awarded for jogging tracks and lighting. That is the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. We have several coming out by the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment. Collectively, we are going to ensure that we have the young people and the old recreating, not only in the day, but in the night as well.

Of course, there are national security implications as well as we light up these recreation grounds. It is simply this: As we encourage all persons to participate in sport throughout the country, it is important to understand how this Government has approached it. The Government ensured that it set up a Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago and, as such, has given it tremendous resources to ensure that it has moneys for community programmes. The Cabinet and the Government also ensured that the Sport Company was given enough funding to be in a position to develop recreation grounds throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Cabinet gave approval to the tune of approximately $120 million to develop recreation grounds throughout the country. So we have the funding under the IDF; we have the funding for the community programmes; that is why you will see in areas throughout the country, hard court facilities and recreation grounds being developed.
I have a list of them throughout Trinidad and Tobago: Mahogany Avenue Recreation Ground, San Fernando; Woodford Lodge, San Fernando; Gilbert Park Recreation Ground, Couva; Diamond Village Recreation Ground; St. John's Recreation Ground; Paramin Recreation Ground; Balmain Recreation Ground, just to name a few; Damarie Hill; Cumana Recreation Ground; La Fillette; Las Lomas. The list is very, very exhaustive, but the fact of the matter is that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago understands the need to focus on all communities equally.

I have been liaising with all the Members of Parliament. My dear friend from St. Augustine has written to me, as a number of you have. All these are on the programme to be addressed. It is important that we understand the importance of getting our national community, our citizens, to recreate. In order to do so, they must have the facilities to recreate. That is why this Government has decided that it is focusing on total participation in sport and putting in the resources in order to do so. And that is not all.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has given the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs the type of resources so it could have so many programmes to have our young and old people recreating. One of the programmes we have is the community swimming programme. My friend alluded to some concerns with some of our swimming pools. We have worked on those concerns.

We are in the process of addressing these concerns, but the fact of the matter is that we do have these community swimming programmes. These programmes are conducted at the Ministry's community pools in the areas of Couva, Sangre Grande, Diego Martin, Siparia and La Horquetta. The programme caters for approximately 7,600 users. They are fully utilized. We have some challenges and we are addressing the same. I thank the Member on the other side for raising a few of the concerns.

These are not all the programmes. On a year to year basis, we also have the National Youth Sport Festival Programme. It was held on June 23 of this year at the Eastern Regional Indoor Sporting Arena and the Eddie Hart Grounds with participation of over 1,500 persons in certain sports. Events included the five a side football tournament; half court basketball; full court net ball; wind ball cricket, six a side; volley ball, five a side tag beat; table tennis; hockey; 5K road race; cycling races; aerobics; Ms Youth Fitness; cheerleading; tennis; sport for the physically challenged and they participated in basketball, football and volley ball. At that time prizes were awarded.

The culmination of this programme took place on June 23. But before that, in every district in Trinidad and Tobago, the district programme took place in these very
similar sports. So throughout the year you have persons participating in these sporting programmes as well as on June 23. It culminates in this massive event, where you have approximately 1,500 young persons participating in sporting activities at the same time.

I do not know if you have ever driven to the National Youth Sport Festival, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When you pass along the Priority Bus Route, you see the entire Eddie Hart Grounds; the indoor and outdoor facilities and the tennis courts where activities are taking place at any given moment. It is a sight to see. It demonstrates that this Government is very serious about ensuring that we have the sporting programmes for our people of this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is in addition to a number of community sporting programmes that are executed by the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago. We have also executed and continue to execute the sport training and enhancement programme which is geared towards talent identification and developing motor skills among the eight to 14-year-old group. The programme was conducted at primary schools in seven administrative districts: Caroni; St. Andrew/St. David; St. George East and West; St. Patrick, Victoria and Nariva Mayaro. One of the successes that we could boast about this year is that we were able to host a very large event that speaks to the development of our women: the Women and Girls Sport Festival Programme.

In keeping with the 1994 Brighton Declaration on women in sport, this programme promotes the participation of women and girls in sport in a day of fun and learning. It attracts participation of approximately 1,000 persons who are exposed to information on developing and maintaining healthy lifestyles. It sends a message to all of Trinidad and Tobago that we are serious about our women in sport. Far too long, with our girl athletes, in particular, we lose them at the age of 17. We recognized this as a serious problem, so we addressed it and continue to address it by ensuring that we fund the National Sporting Organization and have programmes like this one which speaks to that particular problem. We have the counsel/ors; we have all the experts and we encourage and inspire the women to continue in the particular sporting discipline they belong to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also embarked this year on the Sport Festival for Persons with Disabilities. Our brethren have done tremendously well in this country. The character of persons living with disabilities continues to demonstrate to all that it is something we must take notice of and salute. The Government hosted its regional sport festival for persons living with disabilities. We do this normally in the month of
September in collaboration with the Paralympics Organization of Trinidad and Tobago. This normally attracts regional participation by persons with disabilities over three days of fun and competition. These activities include swimming, wheelchair basketball and track and field events.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mentioned earlier the sport company. Year after year it continues to embark on a series of community sporting programmes that touch persons in every community in this country. Members on that side could attest to that fact, because some of them have called me and asked me to fix a particular basketball court, so that the particular community sporting facility programme going on in his or her constituency at that time would be in position to have lights in the night and that sort of thing.

The sport company has embarked upon these community games in such a manner that the impact they have had on the ground demonstrates that the Government, in terms of dealing with crime, understands that it is not only the Ministry of National Security that has to deal with the aspect of crime prevention. All other ministries have a role to play, because we all make up the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. As such, we have been liaising with the Minister of National Security. He has indicated to us some of the particular areas. We have gone in these areas and ensured that we have community programmes in which the young people would be in a position to participate so they would not be idle and they would have no time for crime. [Desk thumping]

I can give you a list of some of the areas that we have gone into: Blanchisseuse; Palo Seco; Balmain; Chaguana; Mayaro; Los Bajos; Carapichaima; Siparia; Fyzabad; Charlotteville; Curepe; Tunapuna; Morvant; Barataria/San Juan; Arima; Diego Martin; Pleasantville; Santa Cruz and Port of Spain. Competitions were held in football; rugby; netball; basketball; cricket; boxing; equestrian; swimming; track and field and table tennis. We have been working on the ground. Your Government has a commitment. Regardless of some persons who will say anything, we as a strong Government are committed to serving the people of this nation. We are committed to making the lives of the people better and safer.

Mr. Sharma: Why nobody believes you?

Hon. R. Boynes: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government in ensuring that there is total participation in sport and it understands that we cannot do it alone. In order to ensure that sporting programmes are conducted throughout the length and breadth of this country, we have partnered with several organizations. The organization, for instance, that puts on the Southern Games, we have partnered with them. As a matter
of fact, Petrotrin which is a state organization is the major sponsor of the Southern Games and we partnered with them.

The Mannie Ramjohn Games; the Point Fortin Games; the Palo Seco Games; Falcon Games in Tobago; Central Games; Hampton Games; Eastern Games and Zenith Games; all these sporting programmes bring athletes, sportsmen and women, from throughout the country and the region. It is important for the young people, or people who participate in sport, to be exposed to this type of sporting opportunity to showcase their talent. [Interruption]

Mr. Sharma: What about tassa?

Hon. R. Boynes: The Ministry in also ensuring that the country benefits from its sporting facilities, also upgraded the boxing facilities at the Port of Spain West Regional Park; installed a beach volley ball sand court at Pleasantville—we will be opening it soon; constructed a multipurpose indoor court at Mayaro. [Interruption]

Mr. Sharma: What about Ria Ramjohn? You discriminated against her.

Hon. R. Boynes: I will come to that shortly.

The Ministry also improved the indoor sporting arenas at Pleasantville, Point Fortin and Chaguanas. We upgraded swimming pools at Sangre Grande, Diego Martin, La Horquetta, Couva and Siparia.

7.50 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all these things have been done in order for us to ensure that there is the enabling environment for persons to be in a position to recreate; to have total participation in sports—sports for all! How do we get there? We must have the sporting programmes which we have demonstrated that we have on the ground, and we have the resources to upgrade the sporting communities. We are also now under the tenets of the sporting policy which speaks to three main issues:

1. Total sports for all;
2. High performance sport; and
3. Ensuring that sport is an industry.

We have demonstrated how we have approached ensuring that the population participates in “sports for all”. We now wish to demonstrate the manner in which the Government has been able to carry out another major tenet of the sport policy that speaks of high performance sports.
How do we really get the “Brian Laras”, our “Soca Warriors” and cricketers to dominate the region year after year? Does it happen by accident? The sporting fraternity has said time and time again—if you listen to the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee, the NGAs athletics and most of the sporting organization—it is the best that they ever had in the history of the country. They have the resources, and they know that the Government is focusing on the facilities for training and that is why they continue to give us the performance they are giving now. They continue to give us the best performance in sport that we have ever got in the history of this country. That is because their Government has decided to give them the type of resources they need.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has given over $61 million in 2007 to approximately 14 national sporting organizations and 13 community sporting organizations to assist in their development programmes. I have a list of all of these national sporting organizations and the funding they have received from their Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to give you a few, we have given the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation a grant of approximately $7 million; Trinidad and Tobago Pro League, $2.5 million; Trinidad and Tobago Volleyball Federation, $3 million; National Amateur Athletics Association, $4 million; Trinidad and Tobago Sailing Association, close to a million dollars; Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board, $4 million; Trinidad and Tobago Hockey Board, $4 million; Trinidad and Tobago Cycling Federation, $3 million; Amateur Swimming Association of Trinidad and Tobago, $2.5 million; and the Differently Abled Association, $1 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have supported the National Sporting Organization, and it has delivered. There are some challenges and we are collectively addressing them.

When one looks at the type of resources that they have both in terms of the ability to hire the coaches they need for the training of the sportsmen and sportswomen under their watch, and also in terms of the facilities we have upgraded and in the process of upgrading—The sportsmen of this country and the National Sporting Organization are pretty much excited about the attention given to them, that is why they deliver in the manner in which they have been delivering.

If I may just take this opportunity to select a few of the National Sporting Organizations that have really performed—I cannot take all because we will be here all night, but if I may just highlight a few of them.

In Taekwondo for instance—because of the Government's support for them and all the National Sporting Organizations—Mr. Osuji made us proud with his capture of the bronze medal at the Pan American Games.
We are continuing to perform extremely well in athletics. We have Darrel Brown and Marc Burns. In terms of medals won, our best ever CAC Senior Track and Field Championships in The Bahamas, we hauled in the most medals and the best ever, as well, our best ever Junior Carifta Games which was hosted in Tobago. We then had our best ever medal haul in the Junior CAC Games which was staged in Port of Spain in July 2006.

Two of our gold medal winners in these games would later conquer the world in the IAAF Junior Track and Field Championships in Beijing. Renny Quow won the 400 metres and Rhonda Watkins became our most successful female track and field athlete when she won the women’s long jump.

Shot putter, Cleopatra Borel-Brown, made history as the first woman from Trinidad and Tobago to medal at the Commonwealth Games when she copped the bronze medal in Melbourne, Australia in 2006. She repeated this feat at the Pan American Games in Brazil earlier this year for throwing the shot-put a distance of over 18 metres.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the Pan American Junior Games this year in Brazil, we had a flurry of wins by our junior athletes. Keston Bledman won gold in the 100 metres; Zwede Hewitt won silver in the 400 metres; Alleyne-Forte won bronze in the 400 metres; Jamal James won silver in the 800 metres; and the Girls 4x100m Relay Team took bronze; Boys 4x100m Relay Team took silver; Men’s 4x400m Relay Team took gold; Women’s 4x400m Relay Team took silver. Janeil Bellile won silver in the Women’s 400 metres Hurdles and Kyron Blaise took bronze in the Triple Jump.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it just goes to show that our programme that speaks to the young people has been paying dividends. Swimming for instance—and I can go on and on—at the Twelfth Annual Goodwill Swimming Championships, the Trinidad and Tobago team won 23 Gold, 40 silver and 35 bronze medals.

In netball, our Calypso Girls won the Americas Tournament held in Barbados in August 2006 and qualified for the World Championships in Fiji in 2007.

In Volleyball, Trinidad and Tobago’s Under 15 Girl’s Team won the Junior Caribbean Cup in 2005, and in 2007, Trinidad and Tobago’s Junior Women had their fifth win at the Caribbean Championships.

The National Men’s Team soared to the heights of regional volleyball with their defeat of Guatemala and qualified for the Central American and Caribbean (CAC) Games held in Colombia. The Women’s Team won gold at the Caribbean Volleyball Championships held in Bahamas, defeating Barbados in the final.
Mr. Sharma: We know all that.

Hon. R. Boynes: Mr. Deputy Speaker, hockey: For the first time at the Third Indoor Pan American Cup in Canada, both our women and men demonstrated this country’s calibre in the sport and our men qualified for the World Indoor Hockey Cup in Austria in 2007.

Golf did extremely well. Our junior golfers have placed in the top four in all of the last six Junior Championships and just a few months ago, we brought them in as Caribbean champions.

Mr. Sharma: Are the footballers being paid?

Hon. R. Boynes: The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has satisfied all its commitments to the footballers. I do not know if you are referring to the legal matter that is in court between the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation (TTFF) and the “Soca Warriors”. I do not know if you are referring to that matter. You know we cannot make mention of it because we have met all our commitments with respect to the footballers. [ Interruption]

Mr. Ramsaran: [ Inaudible]

Hon. R. Boynes: Well, we have made all our payments to the footballers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Chaguanas, if you want to ask the hon. Member something, you can stand and he may give way.

Mr. Ramsaran: Thanks for giving way. I was just trying to assist you. I believe the Member is asking why the footballers were not paid for their services rendered at the World Cup as promised by the TTFF.

Hon. R. Boynes: Oh! You now ask the question. That is a very good question the Member for Chaguanas has asked. As such, as I have indicated to this honourable House, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has satisfied all its commitments to the footballers of Trinidad and Tobago.

At present, they have a legal matter that has reached the court and we as the Government cannot interfere in that particular matter.

Mr. Ramsaran: Member, this sounds very interesting. You have given the TTFF what they asked for—that is taxpayers’ money—and you have not seen to it that the money has reached where it is supposed to reach?

Hon. R. Boynes: What is happening, a request has been made for funding to assist the players in terms of what they needed for their development and that sort
of thing. We had given the TTFF funding for the development of the footballers as they prepared for the World Cup event. I believe the dispute is not the moneys the Government has actually paid to the TTFF but the dispute that is taking place between the TTFF now and the players concerns sponsorship moneys that they have received from corporate sponsors and persons throughout the world, for instance, Adidas and FIFA.

That type of sponsorship money is what the players are arguing about; their contention is that the agreement they had with the TTFF had not been satisfied. That is basically in law, and it is a private matter between the TTFF and the players for funds that speak to sponsorship money. So that matter is presently in the court and we cannot pronounce and adjudicate as to who is right and who is wrong. Suffice it to say the matter is in court at this time and we await the outcome of it.

8.05 p.m.

But I will tell you this. It has been our position that we want this matter to be resolved very quickly so that as our players go to represent us abroad in any event, we carry the best team forward. The taxpayers—and the Member for Chaguanas alluded to that—cannot be putting tremendous resources, as we see here, towards the national sporting organizations, like the TTFF, for instance, and we have not got “bank for our buck”. In other words, we need to get our best team going to represent us.

We can move on to cricket and that sort of thing. In other words, we have really and truly seen our national sporting organizations performing extremely well and we are extremely proud of them all. In squash, for instance, the Trinidad and Tobago Men’s Team won the teams competition at the Caribbean Championships.

Bridge: The National Contract Bridge senior male and female team created history for Trinidad and Tobago by qualifying for the Central American and Caribbean Games in China at the end of September, 2007 following a memorable win in Barbados where they regained the Caribbean Challenge Trophy. We are proud of them and this just demonstrates that because of the resources the Government has actually pumped into sport, we are getting “bank for our buck”.

Many of us will recall the Soca Warriors and their accomplishments; the many goals that they scored through their football feats in taking Trinidad and Tobago to the FIFA World Cup for the first time and we are still on a high from the heart, the passion and the skill with which they represented this country. One other thing
that they accomplished was to underline the power of sport and its value in nation-
building and motivating people, especially young people, to excellence. From where
we stand, the $82.25 million provided by the Government in financial support for
players, coaches and the technical staff, is more than justified. I believe that answers
your question, Member for Chaguanas. Theirs is such a dazzling light that it is easy to
not notice other developments in sport that portend well for our nation’s
development.

Over $2.2 million was granted to the Under-17 Young Soca Warriors in their
preparation for the 2007 FIFA Under-17 World Cup in Korea. Even if the team may
not be performing as we expected, we want to give them full support for their
tremendous fighting spirit and to let them know that it is another stage in their
development. It is a young team and they will go from strength to strength.

The Government will continue the process of providing financial and technical
assistance to national and community sporting organizations to support their
development programmes and activities. We expect that this focus will lead to a
constant pool of talent and the development of a clear pathway for sport in this
country. This will augur well for future performances of our athletes at international
and regional sporting events.

We also focus, not only on the National Sporting Organization in order to
attain the highest standard in sport so that we can get our teams prepared to get
proper representation abroad where they can excel; not only have we supported
the National Sporting Organization and their development programme, because
through their development programme they are able to hire the coaches to train
their sportsmen and women and train their teams so that they can be in a position
to represent us well when they go abroad; the Government are not only saying
that we are leaving it at that, what the Government have done is decided that we
are also going to ensure that we have a programme that speaks to treating with the
elite athletes. Currently, six top athletes who excelled in the 2004 Olympics in the
areas of track and field and swimming, benefit annually from financial support to
a maximum of $250,000 to assist them in their development and preparation
activities to facilitate their participation in the 2008 Olympics.

Gone are the days when we simply jump on the bandwagon after they have
won a medal. What this Government is doing is ensuring that we give them the
necessary resources to hire the coaches to train; to give them nutrition so that they
would be in the gym to prepare themselves well in advance to represent us well at
the Olympics.
Mr. Sharma: Thank you for saying that. You refuse to help Giselle Salandy from Fyzabad.

Hon. R. Boynes: That is entirely not true. Giselle Salandy has received tremendous support from the Ministry.

Mr. Sharma: After the event.

Hon. R. Boynes: As a matter of fact, Giselle Salandy is the sportswoman who goes around with our motivational and inspirational programme to schools, motivating young girls and whatnot. She does a fantastic job and she can attest to the fact—[ Interruption ]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad, you got up, you asked a question. If you want to ask another one and the Minister is prepared to give way, fine, but you cannot be sitting there and talking across the floor. Will you please desist. Continue, Minister.

Hon. R. Boynes: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I just want to say that Giselle Salandy has really and truly been doing a tremendous job, motivating and inspiring the nation’s youth throughout the country.

May I also just allude to one of the things that the Member for Fyzabad mentioned in terms of Ria Ramnarine? She did receive a medal, a national award. Ria Ramnarine, like Manswell, Kurt Sinette, even Giselle Salandy and a few of these professional boxers, have a unique concern, in that, the different programmes that the Government has, speaks to preparing the amateurs, more or less, but theirs is a particular concern because they are very good; they need support in training and there needs to be a programme that speaks to them. So what we have done is actually got a comprehensive development programme for each one of them so we can have them train either here or abroad, because these are athletes who have demonstrated that they are world rankers. So we are, in fact, in the process of preparing for their training.

I want to mention this while I am on this point. The Member for Naparima mentioned about the Cuban coaches and the Member for Chaguanas would attest to the fact that this bilateral agreement that we have with Cuba, was done under his watch and it is working well, more or less, because they are well known for boxing; they are some of the best coaches in boxing. That is why we have this relationship with them and we utilize a number of their coaches and many of our boxers have been benefiting from the development and coaching programmes of these Cuban coaches. That is why we continue to dominate the region, because of the Cuban coaches. It is really an exchange programme, because while we have
the Cuban coaches here, we also have our people going to Cuba to study and to benefit from these programmes so that they themselves can be extremely great coaches.

They have excelled in training in the sporting field, so much so that when they come back they fit into the Ministry and the Sport Company, at the University of Trinidad and Tobago and they add to the sporting expertise that we so badly need in this country. So the bilateral agreement that we have with Cuba has been working fine for us.

Mr. Deputy 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. C. Sharma]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Boynes: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank those on the other side and my colleagues for giving me an extra 30 minutes.

I also wish to mention that the persons who have benefited under this Elite Training Programme are as follows: George Bovell, Candice Scott, Cleopatra Borel-Brown, Darrel Brown, Marc Burns, to name a few.

In 2006, based on a Cabinet directive, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs collaborated with the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee and other stakeholders to develop a comprehensive policy and structure for supporting these high-performance athletes. Following on what currently obtains, this involved the disbursement of yearly grants to facilitate athletes who are world rank in their nutritional training, physiological and other associated needs towards improved and sustained performances at international sporting competitions.

I am pleased to report to this honourable House that in 2007 the sum of $3.8 million was disbursed to 19 individual athletes and two teams, as follows: We disbursed to athletes in track and field, swimming, tae kwon do, table tennis, cycling and rifle shooting. For instance, Roger Daniel and Ato Modibo, together got $250,000. Ato Modibo got $150,000; Sheridan Kirk, Athletics, $150,000; Jacey Harper, Athletics, $150,000; Azikwe Keller, Cycling, $150,000, Darrel Brown, $250,000; Mark Burns, $250,000; Candice Scott, $250,000; George Bovell III, $250,000, and the list goes on and on.
It is instructive to note that all of this funding went towards assisting the athlete in his or her development. That is why Cleopatra Borel-Brown will say to this entire nation that because of the support she is getting from the taxpayers through her Government, she has been in a position to train in the manner that she needs to compete at a high level in the world.

Fiscal 2008 will see the expansion of this support programme to include more beneficiaries and more sporting activities. We estimate that approximately 30 high-performance athletes will benefit from this programme on an annual basis. Fiscal 2008 will also see the development of a policy and structure for rewarding performances at the highest level. Gone are the days when you find persons have really and truly done a tremendous job in terms of sport—but what we need to do is to have a reward policy. We are in the process of working it out; we have to submit it to Cabinet and we would be bringing it to the House as soon as possible.

Many of these achievements are attributed to the successful and symbiotic relationship that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has with the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee. As a key stakeholder in the development of sport nationally, the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee provides the framework to facilitate national sporting organizations in their development programme initiatives to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago is exposed at all regional and international levels.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, in conjunction with the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, has, over the last two years, provided the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee with approximately $5 million to ensure that our qualifying athletes attend major regional and international competition at the CAC Games, Pan Am Games and the Commonwealth Games, and that they themselves embark on development programmes as well.

We have demonstrated to this nation that we are focused on sport in a very meaningful and tangible manner and I am sure all of you will know—and let me take the opportunity to thank all Members in this House for the support given to World Cup Cricket, 2007, with the sunset legislation; all sides participated and we were able to have it in time for the Cricket World Cup games. We are grateful that there was no incident in Trinidad and Tobago. As a matter of fact, the legacy that has come out from this speaks to several aspects; one is the volunteer programme. At this time we have a volunteer programme that is second to none and we are going to use that programme—the list of trained volunteers—as we host the Caribbean Games in 2009.
8.20 p.m.

We are using the whole infrastructure from the office, the staff and everything that we have benefited from Cricket World Cup. We are going to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago becomes the hub for sporting activities and benefit from what we have done before. The Government have pumped about $90 million into Cricket World Cup. We have benefited approximately $10 million from gate receipts. We were able to see exciting cricket in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Brown bag.

Hon. R. Boynes: The brown bag did produce some excitement and exciting matches in Trinidad and Tobago. Do you remember the match between Sri Lanka and India? It was excitement from day one. The fact of the matter is that the level of organization that I saw undertaken by the local organizing committee—I wish to commend them for ensuring that they did a fantastic job and the Cabinet Oversight Committee. My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East, played a very integral role in ensuring that the i’s were dotted and the t’s were crossed; believe you me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We had some challenges. We had to move from the Brian Lara facility that we thought would have been completed in time, but it was not completed in time and we had to go to UWI. Because of the Cabinet Oversight Committee we were able to ensure that we handled all matters in a manner that was seamless. I thank the staff of the ministry, the LOC and Members on all sides who participated in ensuring that the image of Trinidad and Tobago looked very well to the rest of the world during that event. Thank you. [Desk thumping]

I am indicating that the Government has pumped tremendous resources into our sporting fraternity. We have been working with the national sporting organizations and several programmes that would expose our sporting discipline to regional and international competition at the highest level. We have done so.

In terms of our regional centres we have done programmes to encourage our athletes at the highest level and the Government has approved funding to develop the regional recreational grounds. Those are centres of excellence. At this time we are working on five of them in: Toco, Diego Martin, Mahaica, Pleasantville and Santa Cruz.

Mr. Sharma: All in PNM areas.

Hon. R. Boynes: At present we are doing the designs for nine others like, Alescon Comet in Chaguanas; Lange Park and Siparia. We are working on them at
this time. These regional recreational grounds that we will be establishing would be centres of excellence. As we have sport for all in the communities, we would focus on looking for talent throughout the country through our Talent Identification Programme. As we locate these young talented people we would then place them in the centres of excellence throughout Trinidad and Tobago. After they graduate and we focus on them, they would go to the Institute of Sport. That is what the Brian Lara Academy will be. They will get training at international level and have the best coaches and technology in the world. That is what the whole idea is about.

It is a pathway that takes you from the community to the regional centres of excellence to the academy. That is the vision. We can produce the Brian Laras, George Bovells, Darell Browns, and continue to excel. I want all Members to join with us in sport as we provide the foundation for ensuring that we attain developed status in sport. We must be in a position to qualify for the World Cup every time. We do not want to qualify for the World Cup this time and the next 20 years or so, we qualify again. We want to dominate in cricket in the region. That is the template that we are using to take you from the community to the academy for us to achieve that level of expertise in sport.

With respect to the youth, together with all the youth non-governmental organizations, we have launched the National Youth Policy and continue to work towards implementing the youth policy in Trinidad and Tobago. We have the Trinidad Youth Council; the Tobago Youth Council; the girl guides and scouts and YMCA.

**Hon. Member:** What about the Maha Sabha?

**Hon. R. Boynes:** We are in touch with the Maha Sabha Youth Organization and we support them at their games. We ensure that everyone participates in ensuring that we have empowered young people in Trinidad and Tobago. Tremendous programmes are taking place at this time throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We have the young people pushing them because we feel that the young people are in the best position to get their peers to buy into the different programmes that the Government has for their empowerment.

We have a number of different programmes. There is one with Vision on Mission called Link Up. We have been going to the doorstep of young people wherever they are and bringing the programme to them; this is YAPA; this is HYPE. These are the programmes that we need you to benefit from. We go to the basketball court; we find them wherever they are. In Fyzabad, Siparia, we find them wherever they are and expose them to the Government’s training programmes.
We intend for this country to be a developed one. Not only are we focussing on the physical infrastructure, but also the minds of the young people. That is how we intend to take all on board. We intend to take you to a high level of training so that this country could achieve developed status on or before 2020.

Thank you.

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (Chaguanas): Mr. Speaker, if shouting was a sport, I am sure that the Member for Toco Manzanilla would have been the captain of the team. After listening to the Member, he was attempting to rewrite history. I believe that this is very unfortunate. I was looking at him while he was trying to let everybody in this country know that everything started during the last five years. Every programme that he spoke about, I met in the Ministry and some started with me. I did not start everything. All the programmes he spoke about were there when I left the ministry. To talk as if everything happened overnight is unfortunate.

He did not mention that besides the Cuban coaches, we sent young people from this country to Cuba to study sport administration. They are back in the country and I hope that the Minister will ensure that they receive good jobs to continue to build sports in Trinidad and Tobago. He said it when he said that people jump on bandwagons. Recently, somebody told me that the best bandwagon jumper in Trinidad and Tobago is the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. Once a medal is won he is there at the airport but has done nothing to assist.

He said that he provided facilities for sporting organizations in Trinidad and Tobago. I have been looking around this country; I see him on television at the airport almost all the time laughing with the young athletes when they succeed, but I am waiting for him to cut a ribbon to open any sporting venue in this country that he started and finished.

Mr. Boynes: May I take the opportunity to invite the Member for Chaguanas to Africa Ground in his constituency, tomorrow afternoon at 2 o’clock, so we would cut the ribbon.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, well, at least he started six years later. This is the point I am making.

The Brian Lara Stadium—it is a shame for Trinidad and Tobago. Here we have the greatest cricketer of the last 20 years residing in this country and to shame Brian Lara with that stadium named after him which has cost overruns—He is still talking about it and now it is Brian Lara Academy. The next thing you might say is that Prof.
Brian Lara will be in charge. We hear promises from the Minister. As a person who loves and follows sport with a passion, I say he has failed Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister of Finance in his wisdom has given the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs less than 1 per cent of the national budget, where 400,000 persons in this country are youths between 15 and 24 years. When you look at the development programme you will see that the major part is for the Brian Lara Stadium. Maybe, he did not read it. Unfortunately, his back is giving a lot of trouble. Brian Lara Stadium has taken $75 million of his budget. I challenge him to read it when he has some time. You will see that all the headings have appeared in this yellow book for the last 10 to 12 years. Upgrading of grounds; development of sporting facilities; money voted as well as money not voted has been there. Nothing new has been added to this Development Programme.

I thought that I would let the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs know we, Congress of the People, will continue where I left off as Minister of Sport to bring sport once more to the fore in Trinidad and Tobago. We have a programme. We have already started; I precised this to talk about it. In this context the Congress of the People presents its agenda for sport development in an all-embracing package which includes facilities; coaching; physical education; community sport; administration sport; sport tourism and even personal careers after sport through education and sport scholarships. We will work towards the development of a plan for the siting and establishment of community sport facilities to achieve a balanced distribution of facilities in both rural and urban areas.

8.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I could read through this report, but we in the Congress of the People understand sports and where we want to take this country and its young people. I am going to return to sports in a while. I believe it is very important to understand this.

Recently, I went abroad and at the airport—sometimes I feel good about this—I met two youth sporting bodies: one was the Scout body of Trinidad and Tobago. They had a recent jamboree where over 100 Scouts went to England. When they met me at the airport they compared what happened when I was minister and what is happening now. Maybe they gave me basket, so to speak, but I felt extremely proud of what I did then and what seems to be happening now. [Desk thumping]

I met the Trinidad and Tobago Rifle Association that was also in England, and they were returning on the same flight with me. They shook my hands and said
that since I left, they have not received any support from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Boynes: We funded that. That is untrue. [Interruption]

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, let me go to what I have prepared. I am going to touch on sports again. The young people out there are not impressed. [Interruption] I am saying what they told me.

Mr. Boynes: We gave them $1.2 million—

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, the day after the budget was read, I found myself discussing it in the Chaguanas market. I spoke to an interesting sample of citizens who appeared very confused. People were not sure of what was in the budget for them. Our country showed a spectacular growth rate. I listened to the Prime Minister when he said that our economy grew at a high rate and achieved a real GDP of 9.7 per cent per year. He said that the rapid rate of growth led to the doubling of the economy over the last six years from $55 billion in 2001 to $114.5 billion in 2006. Our per capita income in 2006, he boasted, was US $14,790 and when you convert that figure to Trinidad and Tobago dollars it is TT $90,000.

Mr. Speaker, this is Trinidad and Tobago, yes our money is pegged to the United States dollar, but why when we try to hide figures we use US dollars? This is Trinidad and Tobago! If you go to Barbados and you say “dollars”, it is Barbados dollars that you are talking about, but here in our budget—when you have to use US dollars you use US dollars, and when it is to suit some fancy purpose then you use TT dollars on the other hand. I find this is not fair to the population. You are trying to hoodwink the people. The US dollars may sound less, but that is not fair to the population.

Mr. Speaker, I want to continue. Speaking to my friends, especially those whom the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance wishes to confuse, I want to explain to them what is GDP and income per capita as I know it.

The GDP of a country is defined as the market value of all final goods and services produced within a country in a given period of time.

Per capita income means how much each individual receives in monetary terms of the yearly income that is generated in their country. That is what each citizen would receive if the yearly income generated by a country, if its productive activities were divided equally among everyone.

Mr. Speaker, this is what I did and I came up with a figure where each individual in Trinidad and Tobago would have received $90,000 per annum if the money was divided across the population. I ask the question: Having understood
what your share of the national wealth should be—I mean each one of us in Trinidad and Tobago should have earned $90,000 in 2006. Have we the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago felt that $90,000 at work to our benefit? I want everyone out there to imagine earning $90,000 per year and then see what this Government has done for us.

Mr. Speaker, has the Government used this economic prosperity to improve the quality of our lives? If we use, as an average, each individual in Trinidad and Tobago would have earned as per capita half a million dollars over the last six years or more.

Mr. Speaker, if we had earned that $500,000 over the past six years, maybe we, too, could attend the PNM’s “Conversation with the Prime Minister of $100,000”. In passing, what a prize just to speak to the hon. Prime Minister! If he becomes something else, maybe the prize to speak with the Prime Minister will increase.

Mr. Speaker, this is how the Government has managed or mismanaged our money. They have squandered our wealth. Just as we have witnessed the staggering growth in our dollars, we see even stronger growth in poverty, crime, vagrancy, underemployment, unemployment, child abuse, children abuse, school violence and other social ills in our society.

It is the Government’s responsibility to ensure that the citizens’ needs are provided for. I speak of such basic requirements like food, housing, proper health care, meaningful employment and support for our differently-abled and needy senior citizens.

What do we see in Trinidad and Tobago? Year after year, under this hapless regime, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance uses this opportunity and appears to be bringing gifts to this nation. In every budget statement, the hon. Prime Minister will stand as if he is the godfather of Trinidad and Tobago, bringing gifts to the people. I want to emphasize this. He will come to us and say: ‘Listen to me for 200 minutes; I will solve all your problems. Tune in and I will give you a little raise here and a little change there.’ How unfair.

Mr. Prime Minister, please understand that the wealth must be shared amongst all of us. How could you, with a per capita income of $90,000, be satisfied that 17.1 per cent of our population live on $685 or less per month? Do you feel proud about that, Mr. Prime Minister? With our wealth that must be shared amongst us, we have 17.1 per cent—this is your own figures—living on less than $685 per month.
Mr. Speaker, the Government, especially the Member of Parliament for St. Ann’s East, spoke with a glow in his eyes when he mentioned that only 17.1 per cent of our population live under the poverty line. That is to say, 221,000 Trinidadians and Tobagonians eke out a living in Trinidad and Tobago and, as the Prime Minister put it, in a country of solid micro-management.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to refer to the Trinidad and Tobago Youth and Social Development Report dated June, 2000. The Member for Diego Martin East will remember this report. The Prime Minister used statistics obscenely to support his propaganda by referring to 1990 poverty level of 35 per cent.

Mr. Imbert: That report is outdated.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It is not outdated. I want to show you that if this report was used properly, this could have been to the benefit of this country today. I want to quote from page 7 of this report. [Interruption] It says:

The World Bank’s 1998 Country Assistant Strategy placed the incidence of poverty at 21 percent…

In 1998. So, when you play with figures, do you see what happens?

“with 11 percent of the population living in extreme poverty. The highest rates of poverty still occur in St. Andrews county, followed by St. George, St. Patrick and Victoria counties. The largest number of at-risk youths live in these four counties.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, based on this report, and a fictional poverty report that the PNM claims to have, especially when Minister Roberts claims that 17.1 per cent of persons are living under the poverty line, and then Prime Minister Manning says 16.7 per cent. who is speaking the truth? Did point four per cent of the persons disappear overnight? Again, I want to repeat, they are living on $685 per month. Mr. Speaker, whichever figure we accept, it shows an increase of around 6 per cent of persons living in extreme poverty in Trinidad and Tobago since 1998. Mr. Speaker, these are the figures here. We have them here.

Mr. Prime Minister, because of your lack of vision, as to understanding the concept of sustainable development and of placing the people at the centre, really understanding they are our most valuable resource, you have failed Trinidad and Tobago; you have squandered our wealth. Mr. Speaker, $200 billion has passed through the hands of that Government, and yet our people have been neglected and there is no improvement in their quality of living.
Mr. Prime Minister, your priorities have failed Trinidad and Tobago. What are really our priorities? Is it huge skyscrapers and investing in sound infrastructure? We, the Congress of the People, will invest in our human capital and with the unprecedented wealth in our country today. With the proper investment in our people—Trinidad and Tobago could be created into an enabling environment to encourage more and lasting foreign direct investment.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago must aim to achieve competitive advantage. As you know, Trinidad and Tobago has placed 67th in the competitive index rating amongst countries in the world. When we are placed at 67th in that index rating, you will understand that we are in trouble.

Mr. Speaker, what would encourage and sustain investments in our country? I want to put on the record that developing a country is not about buildings, but looking at our human capital. We must look at our high level of education; multilingual capabilities; high productivity of workers; communication network like ICT and so forth; lessen bureaucracy, if that is possible with this Government; minimize or eradicate corruption and create a low or no crime environment. These are some of the areas you have to look at if you want to create a First World nation. This is not beyond the reach of a good government that I am sure the Congress of the People will lead us into. In order to develop a country, you must look at the causes that have placed us in this position.

Mr. Speaker, this is where this Government has failed us: business as usual and misleading people into believing that they care, but care about whom? We hear nice words from the Prime Minister. The most successful countries are those that have succeeded in harnessing and nurturing the creativity, ingenuity and inventiveness of the people. That is the Prime Minister talking. You would not believe this by his action.

After listening to the Minister of National Security lamenting why he cannot deliver police stations, we must focus on what I just said. Had we used the opportunity to build a country and build the people who would have had expertise in building, carpentry, masonry and so forth, we would not be in this embarrassing position today where we have unemployment and we have to import labour from elsewhere. This is something that a country should be ashamed of. This is not just to go out there proclaiming that we are so good that we are importing labour, and yet there are persons who are unemployed, and who are trained and have nothing to do. I am going to touch on underemployment later on.
Mr. Speaker, this report would have been a great help if it was read and understood. Let me examine some of the things that were written. Firstly, I want to quote what the Prime Minister said in his speech, and I am going to bring it in context. He said:

“The poor and marginalized are not a homogeneous entity, a sustained effort must be made to gather information pertaining to each group on a continuous basis.

As we craft a more relevant and targeted response to the needs of the poor and vulnerable among us, the Government will conduct research and needs assessment pertaining to vulnerable and at-risk groups including persons addicted to drugs and other substances; persons with disabilities; older persons; socially displaced persons and ‘at-risk’ children.”

This report and other reports like this, we just have to gather them and look at them, and this statement would not have been made by the Prime Minister. We have all these reports. The World Bank produced this report for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in 2000, to assist us in dealing with what is taking place in the country, but nobody paid attention. The Member for Diego Martin East came here and talked about some segments of the population are being discriminated against in a book written by the World Bank.

8.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, page 7 and I quote:

“Poverty is related to high levels of unemployment, crime and violence, social problems and the disintegration of traditional forms of social cohesion and family composition. It underlies many problems that youth experience in Trinidad and Tobago such as abuse, adolescent pregnancy, delinquency and education and employment outcomes, as will be seen in following sections. Youths experience poverty to a greater extent than other population groups, which indicates that poor families with children should be a priority for public poverty alleviation efforts.”

Mr. Speaker, it is written here, but this is what I call a Government that does not care. When the problems seem to be overtaking them, they jump to find nice words on what they are going to do; promises and promises. The Prime Minister spoke to family life and values. Again, if this book was studied; this was for the Government
of Trinidad and Tobago; they did not say which government; it was a World Bank Report made available to us. I continue to read:

“In addition to poverty, several factors in the family environment affect the process of socializing children. They involve: (i) the family’s human and social resources, often reflected in family composition, (ii) attitudes and values, and (iii) precedents of negative behaviors and family-related problems. Positive parental attitudes, values, and child rearing skills and higher education levels contribute to successful development outcomes. By contrast, abuse and neglect relate directly to a series of risk behaviours and poor development results...Children learn at an early age that aggression is an acceptable means to resolve differences and hence, reproduce this behavior later.”

It is all there; it is written for us, but again, with their uncaring attitude, they go on and of course, as we always say in Trinidad and Tobago, “What you sow, you shall reap.” So, are we surprised today that we are reaping the whirlwind. Now we come and talk about all these plans and the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs talked about having grounds across the country so quickly there will be no crime. This is just coming here with nice words to try and hoodwink the population. But I want to tell you that you are already condemned as having failed the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to just go on a bit and there are many studies, as I said before, that would speak to the problem of neglect in this country. We do not have to come back here in 2007 and say that “the family, as the principal teacher and transmitter of ethical, social, spiritual and religious values is indisputably the core of our social fabric.” That has broken down and I want to say that there is hope, but not under the PNM administration. It is only when you understand the development of a country and of placing the people at the centre of the development, then and only then could we get out.

The whole question of sustainable development is something that I have never heard the present Government talk about. I think they just believe that they would get up one morning and there is a problem here, they throw money at it, they throw a plaster on the sore and they move on. You have got to find the causal factors that would have caused these problems and let us solve them.

Having presented a $42 billion budget, they should have been very happy. But Mr. Speaker, what happened? They raised some smokescreens, condom machines. I would have been so unhappy as a Government having presented a $42
billion budget hoping to win some votes with that and you come with a smokescreen like condom machines. I mean, I do not understand it. Condom machines where? In Trinidad and Tobago? We have to understand that we have more, not important things to do, we should not allow that smokescreen to come in. And the other one, cellphones in cars. Those are the big news after the budget. It was my friend from Barataria/San Juan who raised that issue a couple weeks ago, about banning cellphones in cars; it never made the big story, but now it is used and spun by the Government, as that is the big story of the day, on the heels of a budget—$42 billion. So, we have to understand that even their own tactics are not what we expect to see.

Just to show that there are many studies and reports, I am going to read this paragraph:

“Despite the absence of a national case reporting system, there is increasing evidence on domestic violence and child abuse, both of which contribute to other negative youth outcomes. Sharpe and Bishop’s study (1993) of 129 ‘children in especially difficult circumstances’ (institutionalized children, juvenile delinquents, youths in survival strategies, disabled youths and pregnant adolescents) revealed a pattern of abuse and neglect among 64% of the sample (except the disabled). Tobago’s medical social workers documented 243 cases of physical abuse, 65 cases of sexual abuse against females, and 33 rapes during 1993-97. Most of the sexual abuse cases were intrafamilial or involved friends of the family. Groome-Duke (1998)…”

we know her quite well—

“estimates that in Trinidad and Tobago less than 10% of cases come to official attention and one in four girls and one in 10 boys have been sexually abused by age 18. Marshall’s (1999) study of at-risk youth documented that more than 30% of the females had experienced some form of abuse. He cites the increasing number of consensual and unstable unions as a causal factor.”

So, Mr. Speaker, here we have all the records of what should have been done or could have been done to deal with this problem. But today, when we see the young people of this country destroying themselves, when you read it is very sad and yet we come here with policies after the fact. The Minister of National Security talking about what is going to happen in the next year. The Prime Minister now coming with crime consultation and so, as when the horse has bolted you come now to close the gate. And I believe that this country should never forgive and forget the misdeeds of this Government and to ensure that the Congress of the People is the next government of Trinidad and Tobago.
We must now let this nation know, Government never created wealth. This is a fact. Sometimes when we sit here in this Parliament, the Government behave as if they created the wealth in this country, and every time you think about it government never create wealth and I am sure the Member for Diego Martin Central would know that too, but they behave as if they do. The people of Trinidad and Tobago created the wealth and we must allow the 1.3 million people to share in the bonanza. The Congress of the People will ensure that our people must be central to our governance. I have said that and I repeat it.

A stable high income economy must feature solid growth, low inflation and low unemployment. Mr. Speaker, what do we see? We see that this country is really in the reverse. When you examine the budget, as before us, you will see contradiction; you will see repetition; you will see things taking place that really—If I read this without saying what year it was, you would believe it is this year’s budget. It says:

“In addition to these programmes the Government is taking several initiatives in support of our agenda for social programmes as follows:

- The establishment of a Children’s Authority which will champion the rights of children.”

This has appeared in the last five budgets. Again, when we look at the situation with children of this country and we see young children being murdered, abused and so on, as I just mentioned, we wonder why a government could sit on these pieces of legislation for six years. [Desk thumping] Do we really care about the children of this country or do we just pay lip service? Do we sit here and allow the Minister to come—So many questions have been asked and we have not yet received that package of legislation. We have people every day, every week in the newspapers, NGOs cry out about what is taking place.

I am not saying that will solve all the ills that our children would face from time to time, but that has shown the failure of this Government. It goes on to say:

- “The completion of a National Plan of Action on Children which will develop concrete strategies for the development of children.

- The establishment of a Child Indicators Monitoring System as a basis for evaluating progress.”

That is in this year’s budget, almost word for word; five years later. Then we continue as if election is a matter of course and the PNM would run away with election. You could fool some of the people some of the time, but I do not believe you could fool all the people all the time and people would see through it. The
wealth that we the public have created in this country, must not continue to be frittered away without the people receiving the benefit.

I want to come back to sports a bit.

Mr. Singh: Where is the Sport Minister?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: He is not here.

Mr. Singh: His back is hurting him?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: When you read this on sport and youth affairs, you cannot help but understand that the Minister today realized that, look, I have failed over the last five years and I will come and shout at the country this evening and let them understand—Claiming credit for what the young people did in this country. You read in the sports news, in netball we did this, in boxing we did that and so on.

I have asked a question in this Parliament—of course we do not seem to get answers—what has been paid to the coaches in this country? Have all the organizations received allowances for coaches? A simple question like that. You talk about sport; that is a basic aspect of sport, coaches in our country, and that cannot be answered.

I asked a question on how much money has been given to FIFA by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; that cannot be answered. I asked what is the profit sharing with FIFA; that cannot be answered. When I hear people talk about things out there and try to make people believe that they care and they understand what is happening, I feel that they are taking us for fools. Because we know what is happening. The Member for Fyzabad asked it and I want to ask it again. I was there, I followed sports, as I said before, with a passion, from very young, playing sports myself. When I heard that FIFA and the advisor, Mr. Jack Warner, promised a match fee and let me tell you how it happened, I might be wrong and I do not think I am wrong. A match fee was promised to each player and things—Of course you would not leave Trinidad and Tobago with a match fee. I was in Germany and Togo, almost like the World Cup and the Member for Oropouche is aware of that, because they were not given an agreement; it was not finalized. I did not go to that match; I was looking at it on television and Togo players came out one minute before kickoff, because somebody convinced them that they must come and play the football and so on and it was because they were not offered a match fee.
Mr. Speaker, I know, I read it in the Trinidad newspapers that the match fee was settled for the players who went to Germany. But you know what happened? We want to celebrate—big celebration—so up comes the Prime Minister; he does not want to get left out, because he saw the fanfare and what was created and so on, so he decided to give the players money. I have no problem with that. Let me say it here, the players made me proud; whatever happened in Germany, as a Trinidadian I was extremely proud, because I was there with that team developing it for the last few years, and of course, that is by the way.

9.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to state it categorically that my two sons took me to Germany. [Desk thumping] They paid my fare and I am proud of that. Jack Warner took Vasant Bharat, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, Mr. Basdeo Panday and Mrs. Oma Panday—

Mr. Valley: How did you get that information?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs told me who was there, you know. He used to play “both side”—lime with me one night and lime with FIFA the other night. [Laughter] And he used to tell me what was happening—who fall and who break their foot—the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs told me everything, I was not there. [Laughter] [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, back to the serious issue. When we returned to Trinidad and the Government gave them the money—so you are partly to blame. Not that I will give you full blame, but when Mr. Warner saw the “fellas” get good money he said, “I am not giving “no” match fee, them “fellas” too greedy now.” I heard him say that in a private function—“they are getting too greedy now”—but the people earned it.

Mr. Singh: Pay!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: According to my friend and colleague, Jack Warner believes he scored the goal in Bahrain. It is not that, it is Trinidad and Tobago. We won and we went there, and the footballers should have been given their just due.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am still calling; it is Government money that is involved. I still believe the buck should stop with the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Government today to ensure—and you know what is sad, Mr. Speaker? Now that these players have made a name for themselves on the national stage they have to stop playing football for Trinidad and Tobago because they were banned.
They were called what? Bad boys, a couple of them had to resign because they were turning 30 years and the others—

Mr. Singh: They are mafia!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Good players! The bulk of the better players are not playing for Trinidad and Tobago and we sit here and boast about our achievement in sport. I want that matter to be dealt with very seriously.

Mr. Singh: The Minister should resign immediately.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Because we cannot sit in this country and allow people to— yesterday is yesterday and today is today. If the Deputy Speaker was here he would have asked me about a certain term used against me in Felicity. But I would not go there. All I would say is that we have issues to deal with and we must not be sidetracked.

Mr. Speaker, the National Youth Policy was launched in September 2006 and it said so and so. [Interruption] Do not believe everything you read; it is not true. The National Youth Policy Draft was done in 2000, and this was done when I was Minister, and would you believe that it took six years to change a few commas and a few full stops in that, to come now and boast that they have laid the National Youth Policy in 2006 and that they put aside $10 million to put things in place next year.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Shameless!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It is totally disgusting and then you come and say “We care about the youth.” This National Youth Policy—I read it recently, again, to remind ourselves of what took place, and the people who worked on this are all specialists in youth development in this country. It was not a team that was made up of some politicians and so on. They put their heads together, came up with the national draft and it took this Government six years to come to Parliament.

The National Youth Policy, the same thing happened. So far the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—I want to repeat this one: “The Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago will continue to develop recreation grounds, lighted jogging tracks and hard courts in communities throughout the country like Diego Martin, Toco, Point Fortin, Pleasantville,…” and I see Chaguanas here. It was three years ago that the hon. Prime Minister announced that the Alescon Comets Ground in Charlieville will be fixed. Today I heard the Minister say that they are now doing plans.
Mr. Singh: Yes, designs.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Designs! Mr. Speaker, could you believe this? The people are waiting there. They have acquired their property, they are waiting for assistance from the Government, and the young people are suffering. Alescon Comets is one of the better cricket clubs in the country—

Mr. Singh: That is true.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: —playing in division one and would have people playing for the West Indies. Dinanath Ramnarine is a product of Alescon Comets, but yet they cannot have proper facilities. And do you know what the Minister was talking about? Centres of Excellence. The communities he called, with due respect to them, the people who play cricket in this country are not from these areas. Not that I am against people getting theirs, but at least use your brain, “nah”, not only your political brain, use your brain to see—at least help those who help themselves first and then you move out.

I know you build white elephants in this country, you establish big grounds in some places. Nobody uses Irvine Park in Siparia and other places. They just built these things and there was not even a community nearby sometimes to play on these facilities. But we have areas where people want to use the facilities and they are not being supported. We have to understand the needs of our people before we could fulfil them.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to examine this budget as I go on page by page as they say. I come to my favourite now, national insurance. I want to put it on record that this question of national insurance is one which I could describe as one of the biggest hoaxes to hit Trinidad and Tobago. I was expecting it. I prepared for it. I looked at the last actuarial review in 2003 and saw the strong financial position that the National Insurance Board is in, and here we have a retirement pension of $2,000 per month. What that will mean—and the Member for Diego Martin Central will always argue with me but he would always lose—a pension is an income, whether we like it or not; it is an income! Sometimes it is even taxable, according to the height of the pension.

So when people get $2,000 pension, it means that automatically 25 per cent or more of the people who receive old age pension, as we know it now, will stop receiving old age pension, okay? But they are getting less now, [Interruption] $1,650 as my colleague from Naparima tried to explain. They will be getting $1,650 now because they cannot move beyond that. So it is give with one hand and take with the other.
Mr. Singh: That is so true.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: So, having established that—

Mr. Valley: How much are they going to get it?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: One thousand six hundred and fifty dollars. So, Mr. Speaker, the minimum retirement pension is $2,000 per month, I want to say, that together with some of my colleagues, I examined the national insurance, and I would like to read into the record because I want the people out there to know that, yes, $2,000 sounds a lot, but a national insurance is an insurance scheme in which people would contribute. It is not a gift! As a matter of fact, for example, me, I paid national insurance, from the first day it was introduced in this country, as a public servant and I continue to pay national insurance up to now. I pay my national insurance, and we have many public servants around my age who have paid national insurance for 30 years or more; 35 years, and this is what it is.

After 35 years of national insurance in Trinidad and Tobago it is time for a complete overall of the system to make it more relevant, meaningful and useful to the development of the society.

Mr. Singh: Good point! [Desk thumping]

Mr. M. Ramsaran: The system should give coverage to not only employed persons but give a universal coverage, including all citizens: employed, self-employed, unemployed, housewives, et cetera. It is an insurance; it is not a provident fund or what have you. The national insurance has over $15 billion in assets as of now and it can support the present rates of benefits without any increases in contribution for the next 40 years.

Contribution system: We need to move away from contribution by class of wages, salaries to a percentage rate on basic income: weekly, fortnightly and so on. Presently, any income more than $4,300 is not insured. So, I want to congratulate the Government for increasing it a little, but $8,300 just reaches a little threshold, it should have been much wider than that, but we will talk about that later. We recommend on this issue that it should have been at least $10,000.

I would now add some of the benefits a Congress of the People Government would provide, because there is money in the national insurance and now we are talking about doing what was not recommended here; you are going to increase the contribution. Sickness—
Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Chaguanas has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and Members. Mr. Speaker, I am going to read this in detail. I thought I would have just summarized, but this is so important I believe I should look at it.

Short-term benefits: You know, you are paying an insurance, you know, but when you are sick, listen to how you get help. You must lose earnings; you must have at least 10 contributions within the last 13 weeks prior to illness. We would recommend, whether there is a loss of pay or not, you get your sickness benefit. The reason for this, URP, CEPEP and casual workers, do not qualify when they work one fortnight on and one fortnight off. So if a URP worker would have worked this fortnight and did not work the other three fortnights and got in an accident somewhere, he will not qualify for sickness benefit, because you must be working continuously.

Maternity grant: Imagine today the maternity grant payable by the National Insurance Board is $2,000. This should be increased to at least $5,000 to cover cost in private hospitals, nursing homes, etcetera and with the quality of health care today you would want to go to a private nursing home. We recommend that this should go to at least $5,000.

Funeral grants: After those who have lost their loved ones recently—you contribute to national insurance all the time and a funeral grant now stands at $4,000. A paltry sum of $4,000!

Mr. Singh: The Chinese do not pay NIS.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: We propose, because of the cost of funerals, an increase of at least 100 per cent.

If a pensioner contributes $750 or more contributions, that should be paid as a grant. We also recommend—and my political leader spoke about it this morning, about people retiring from the army and so on. There is an anomaly here where you could retire at any time, because of illness, VSEP—you know how this Government likes to send home people. If somebody is sent home at age 45, they have to wait until 60 to receive national insurance pension which they contributed
to. If somebody is medically boarded and they go home, we propose that the pension age should be reduced from 60 to at most 55 to 60 years, so at least they will get something there. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, minimum pension should be equivalent to 25 per cent more than old age pension. Well, now it has gone beyond that. On the question of child allowance, would you believe child allowance is now $320? We recommend that this be increased to $600.

We have much more to say—I cannot say everything tonight—when we hit the campaign trail, because people out there would be looking to see how their lives could be improved. We have everything in this country, if the Government could just sit—I am sure; I could even bet the Member from Diego Martin Central, nobody on the Government front bench or back bench understands what is happening in national insurance. It is business as usual; you do what you have to do and you move on.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about poverty and housing. I am sure that I read it somewhere here that once you work for $1,400 or more, you qualify for a house. People who earn less than $685 is 17 per cent. How many people in this country work for $1,400 and less? I want to tell you the URP workers work for less than $1,400 per month. So it means that people from there come down cannot earn a Government house, and yet we boast about affordable houses to the poor in this country. I want the Government to wake up and understand what they are saying, because salaries are not increased over time; $1,400 and more, then you could qualify for a house, and then they talk about they care about the poor people.

9.20 p.m.

I am trying to reach the poor people with this, that they must understand what is taking place in this country. These people are making us believe that they give you and treat you well, but if you are not rich—and I was looking at a form recently from the HDC and when you look at the requirements, Mr. Speaker, you might have a problem getting a house.

**Mr. Singh:** Nah, nah, nah.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** What I mean is—[Interruption]

**Mr. Singh:** Do not put the Speaker in this.

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** The fact is, it is very, very cumbersome and exacting; that is, if you follow the form. Maybe something else happens behind closed doors, I do not know.
Mr. Speaker, the question of increase in salaries. I want to let people out there know—my good friends from URP and CEPEP and I have good friends there. Because I remember when I recommended to the Minister of the Environment to increase their salaries, people stopped me and thanked me for doing it. I was surprised that they followed what was being said in the Parliament, and I want to put this in proper perspective—15 per cent increase for a URP worker who now gets $56 a day, that will give him the grand salary of $64; 15 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, could you think about it, $64 a day, $640 a fortnight will be a URP person’s pay? In today’s Trinidad and Tobago, is that person not living in abject poverty? The Prime Minister had the audacity to announce in the budget that URP is a poverty reduction programme. That is keeping the people in poverty, and then you announced this big 15 per cent increase as if these people should clap and jump for joy. It means nothing. Fifteen per cent of the Minister’s salary will be plenty, but 15 per cent of the URP salary cannot be anything for him to celebrate. And CEPEP, 15 per cent by $70 for the labourers is $10.50, so his salary goes up to $85.50.

Mr. Speaker, could we survive? That $10 minimum wage by 80 means CEPEP is just 50 cents above the minimum wage. Now you are asking him to pay National Insurance and so on, so he would be taking home less than the minimum wage. We talk about helping these people, we are not! And I want to remind these CEPEP workers, the URP workers that the per capita income is $70,000 per year and what they are receiving is pittance and you are trying to embrace them as your political support.

I spoke to a political leader—not my political leader—who said without poverty, there is no need for politicians. So, maybe there is a truth that we want to keep people poor so that we could give them a handout and get their vote. Why can we not wake up in this country? Why can we not understand what is happening in this country? Why can we not understand that we are not sharing in the wealth of Trinidad and Tobago? When we look at the whole question of the working poor, that is something that we must consider seriously.

We have people in this country who are working—Mr. Speaker, I could bring you in this part of the debate because I know sometimes you go to the grocery. Could you imagine a person working for $685 a month? Well, he cannot go to a grocery to start with and then we talk about—to me it is disgusting. If we cannot get politics right and share the wealth of this country, we are planting a social revolution that we might not want to see.
So I want the Prime Minister—well, his time is short; he has failed; six years with the money that has passed through this country—and it is not the first time. I have heard the Member for Diego Martin East sometimes with a grim, when they talk about 1986. Mr. Speaker, I was a public servant; I lost 10 per cent of my salary, but even then when I looked at the economy of this country, I knew that something had to be done to put the country back on track. Today, I must congratulate the Member for St. Augustine for doing that; had that not been done, we would not have known what would have happened. So, to come and gloat to the people out there, they took 10 per cent of our salary—but cost of living was under control. You control inflation as best as you can in circumstances and people live, but today, 23 per cent by their own admission, every year food prices go up.

The Prime Minister, even in his budget presentation said that food prices have doubled over the last ten years and that is his figure, not the people out there who have to buy. When we come to this country with a budget—I do not want to lecture to the Member what a budget is, but to me, a budget is a financial plan, that any organization or government will present to carry on for a 12-month period as in this case. What passes here for a budget? You came and you talked about everything under the sun; you were glorifying yourself; you ended up making a political speech; you promised this and reading a manifesto, and this is not dealing with the problems.

We would like to sit here—you see when you read these books, these glossy magazines, then you see the catch in it, but some public servants are brave enough to write that. Sometimes they might be shouted at, but this is what is happening. What about Vision 2020? I would have liked to see the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance come here and tell us what happened last year; what happened the year before, but I do not know if he is senile or forgets, but how could you come here and read the same speech year after year.

Mr. Speaker, I challenge you to compare these budgets. Compare them and you would see what I am talking about. Rather than come into this Parliament and tell us, well look—[Interuption]

Hon. Member: [Inaudible]

**Mr. M. Ramsaran:** Mr. Speaker, I used the word “challenge” because when I invite you, you just smile, so I thought by challenging you, you would come and take me seriously.

Mr. Speaker, there are some other small things that I want to talk about, not small in the context of what is taking place. As a Member of Parliament, we write
letters to the Ministers, I have all in front of me here, about roads, about drainage, about amenities in the constituency and sometimes we do not get the courtesy of a reply. One of the Ministers said today that they invite us to work with them. They invite us to work with them; well we want to represent our constituency and we want things done.

Mr. Speaker, this is an election year; election in three months. Prior to today, every election time around now is paving frenzy. Potholes are being fixed, but you know this year that is not happening. Imagine that is not happening in an election year, what will happen to the people if that Government goes back into office? If they do not care to do it now [Desk thumping] and they win election, what is going to happen to our people out there? It would be potholes. Remember the days when we were all PhDs, potholes dodgers? It is back to it.

Let me tell you something. I was driving on the highway—I must bring this into the debate—and when I swung into Munroe Road, my granddaughter, who is three years old, said, “Aja, this is Munroe Road?” So, I said this little child is bright. I asked her how she knows; she said the road is bad. [Laughter] Three years old and nobody prompted her but because immediately, you start to bump, hit potholes and so on. I have written letters almost every year to the Minister of Works and Transport, to the Minister of Planning and Development, listing the roads that I would like to see paved and I know my colleagues would do the same. So if you are a Member of Parliament and you do that, you come to this Chamber and you request certain things to be done, it is not being done and in an election year. I have given myself some hope that as it is an election year, I would see trucks and steamrollers and so on rolling into the area, paving the roads because that was done in the last election, but nothing has happened. And I want to warn people out there, if in an election year, your roads are not paved or you do not get water—and people still come to you to campaign—what would happen after the election? I, as a politician may be naïve, but to win votes you are supposed to go and pave people’s roads; you are supposed to make people feel comfortable and if you do not do that, on election eve woe be unto us, after that.

So people out there, wake up. You got to wake up; you got to smell the coffee; you got to understand that the Government care about nobody but themselves. I do not want to go into how often they increase their salary; I do not want to go there because people are talking about that. They say our salaries are being increased by 15 per cent, but I remember the Ministers got 30 per cent. People out there remember and when we look at the national pie—I hope people understand it out there—and as I come to the close of my contribution this evening, we have to understand, do we
really believe people are naïve out there? Do we really believe that people are not crying and are not hurting when they go to the grocery, when they go to the supermarket; when they go to the market? I go and I want to tell you I still go to the market as usual and I talk with people and people are hurting out there.

Mr. Speaker, when I went to the market in Chaguanas on Tuesday, one lady said, “all them politicians—maybe she means me too, she told me, but I know that she could not be talking to me—all ‘yuh’ want to do is to full all ‘yuh’ pockets and we getting poorer and poorer.” That is a very significant statement. Politicians are filling their pockets, maybe perception, while they, the people, get poorer and poorer, but then it might not be perception. How could you gloat and argue that poverty is 17.1 per cent or 16.7 per cent with people living with less than $685 per month and you have the URP living under the minimum wage, surviving under the minimum wage? You multiply and you would get it. They talk about 15 per cent increase for CEPEP; they too live under the minimum wage.

Mr. Singh: Super rich buying a $100,000 plate.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Imagine that. Mr. Speaker, that malady, you know, when I heard that, I said, “Well look, PNM really believe that we are a country of fools.” Mr. Ganga Singh and I, my colleague from Caroni East were having lunch yesterday, and I told him that is the greatest untruth, that dinner was a lie to start with. Do you know what that dinner intended to do? When the election campaign starts and you see all money spent by the PNM—you would see it, Mr. Speaker, I do not challenge you, I invite you to look at that—all the advertisements, television, radio, and they will say, “You know what? We raised that money, the $100,000 plate.” That is money laundering and when a Government could do that, when a Prime Minister could do that, what do we not expect them to do again?

The naïve people will believe them and that is the unfortunate thing in this country. People peddle lies; people mislead people and because of the political and the emotional support, people defend them. I heard people defending the former Prime Minister who has millions of dollars in a bank account; people defend him and I defended him too. I want to tell you that when that news broke, the television station came to me and asked for my view. I said, no, no, no—that is a little apartment. I went recently and toured it with somebody and I want to apologize to the nation for misleading them a few years ago. It is a massive multi-million dollar apartment; a multi-million pound apartment. But people defend that, you know why? They defend that because of emotions. But I want to tell the people here tonight, Mr. Speaker, through you, that Trinidad and Tobago is, as I
have said it before, in a perilous situation. We have to look at the politics of this
country, the politics of divide and rule.

Mr. Speaker, with due respect to the PNM, they did not invent that. That came
here with the colonial masters because had the Africans and Indians united, then,
maybe there would not have been colonial masters. But they kept us divided so as
to rule us, and of course, the PNM mastered that art. So, this is what we have to do
in this country. We have to get out of this; look at what we are saying from the
Congress of the People; look at the wealth that you the public have created;
governments do not create wealth, they spend it; they appropriate it; they
misappropriate it.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this country create wealth and when you examine
what is taking place today—I am sure, maybe I will not have the time to read it—
when you look at the Review of the Economy in one of the pages, it speaks to the
reduction in royalties. I am sure the leader will remember that. There is a reduction in
royalties now, coming from the energy sector. That was not mentioned at all by the
Minister of Finance, but there is a reduction in royalties collected by some $61

9.35 p.m.

The Prime Minister told us to have faith that we would get more oil, but when
the learned leader of the Congress of the People talked about the fact that we had
to be careful, that we could not gamble finding oil, but that we have to look at the
reality, "yuh laugh"; oil and gas, "yuh laugh". Mr. Speaker, not every time we can
be lucky. I am not saying that we are not a lucky nation; we are very lucky. With
the mismanagement that takes place in this country, we are extremely lucky, but
we must not gamble away our wealth. I thought that this afternoon I should put
these things in perspective.

I want to put this quite bluntly: As a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, I have
seen two governments while I was in this Parliament. One performed well in
office, but at what cost to the nation? People talk about corruption. I hear about
corruption from side to side; they say that corruption raised after 2000. Do you
know why? This is my humble opinion: During the period of the previous
administration, things were hidden in the cupboards, but when they came out the
perception of corruption rose. Both sides are to blame for that.

Mr. Speaker, if I am campaigning, so be it, but the fact is that we have them tried
and tested and they failed. As far as corruption is concerned, both parties failed,
because now they are saying, "Who have more money will feed more fowl". Outside
there, the people must look at salvation for this country. Not because they see glossy advertisements, a helicopter flying, or people see that the blimp has come back, flying around the country with maybe "Vote PNM on it", and they say, "Is a next blimp; is not the same one"; these things will happen. I want to warn the people out there. Let us look at policies; let us look at persons with principles; let us look at how we can save this country by ensuring that the Congress of the People is elected as the next government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Social Development (Hon. Anthony Roberts): Mr. Speaker, when I listened to my colleague, the hon. Member for Chaguanas, a while ago, he was a little confusing.

I have spent around five years in this honourable House. [Interruption]

Mr. Sharma: Do not blame us for that!

Hon. A. Roberts: I cannot remember seeing my colleague coming with a prepared text. He would babbler his way to 55 minutes, but I never saw him with anything prepared. So it was a bit surprising today to see him with a prepared text. It tells me that he is actually having difficulty in dealing with the budget presentation before him; so he had to ensure that whatever he wanted to say he had to put it in writing. [Laughter]

He was a little confused tonight as to some of the issues that he raised. [Crosstalk] I am happy to deal with that. As a matter of fact I walked with a copy of it. Over time we are going to discuss it.

He said that the Government never created wealth. I would think that the policies of the Government, the direction that the Government is pointing the country to, will create the wealth in this country. I feel comfortable that the policies of this Government are responsible for what we are benefitting today. [Desk thumping] I thank the Member though for the lesson in national insurance. Quite frankly, and he is right, some of the things he raised, I was not aware of; they were not in the area I looked to, so I thank him for the lesson we got. He said that there was more to come, so I look forward to hearing it from the platform.

The Member for Chaguanas attempted to put some misinformation on the record when he indicated that persons from the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP), and I guess the CEPEP as well, would not be able to access housing from the Housing Development Corporation (HDC) through the Government's housing programme. That is so inaccurate. Anyone with an income can approach the HDC
to seek housing, because there are different schemes, as you would want to call it, to be able to accommodate persons with small incomes.

As a matter of fact, the rent-to-own is one of the schemes at the HDC to assist persons in the lower income, where they have an opportunity, because they do not have a large income, to be able to pay rent and, at a later stage, to have that converted into a mortgage, anticipating that their situation would have changed over time. So that information is inaccurate.

I will indicate as well that the Government is also considering social housing, because there are persons in the society who, at this time, are unable to afford housing, but they must live somewhere. The Government is giving consideration to those persons as well, because it is our desire to house every citizen of this country who requires housing. [ Interruption]

Mr. Singh: I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. I think that is a very desirable objective. Recently a height challenged person came to see me. In order to access anything, he has to go through all the same facilities. As you know, there are problems with earning capacity and everything else; I hope that in the context of the social housing aspect that height challenged persons will be given preferential treatment also. [Crosstalk]

Hon. A. Roberts: You confused me with the term. [Laughter]

Mr. Singh: It is a term I coined.

Hon. A. Roberts: Yes, you can refer the person to the Housing Development Corporation (HDC). As a matter of fact, you can refer him to my office so we can make specific arrangements to assist them. We are here to assist every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and we will be only too willing to provide some assistance to the gentleman. [Desk thumping]

I am indeed, very, very pleased once again to have the opportunity to participate in this annual budget debate. Budget time for the PNM is like harvest time. We see it as an opportunity to be able to report to you and, by extension, the national community, on our stewardship. This Government's approach to the development of our nation is systematic, and so we are executing our programmes according to a plan. I am proud to say that we do not operate by "vaps". It is not a plan only in our heads; it is documented; it is a stated plan. This Government has a clear vision for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I take this opportunity to refer you to a part of the Bible. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Members: "Is a church service!"
Mr. Hinds: Teach those heathens!

Mr. Panday: "Yuh preparing for the hereafter."

Hon. A. Roberts: Proverbs 29:18 tells us:

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." [Desk thumping]

Mrs. Job-Davis: Amen!

Mr. Hinds: Preach!

Hon. A. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, the PNM has ensured that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have been spared of an unfortunate lot, because there is a vision. The PNM has a vision for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The PNM always had a vision. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Sharma: Tunnel vision!

Hon. A. Roberts: From the days of 1956, that is what you know, you would have been introduced to some of our documents: the Chaguaramas Declaration; Perspectives for a New Society; the People's Charter and now the Vision 2020 document. That is why our successive PNM governments over the period have made significant contributions to the transformation of this beautiful nation of Trinidad and Tobago. [Interruption]

Mr. Sharma: Three hundred murders a year!

Hon. A. Roberts: I have made mention of the vision only to put this budget in context. In this budget, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance continues to demonstrate that he is always prepared to walk the talk. It is not a question of just talking, you know that Parliament is to talk, but you could simply look around Trinidad and Tobago to see the marks of PNM contribution to its development.

Mr. Sharma: And destruction!

Mr. Singh: When I go to Tamarind Square I see it all the time.

Hon. A. Roberts: I wish to join with the rest of Trinidad and Tobago, notwithstanding the few like your good selves, to congratulate and thank the hon. Prime Minister for his foresight [Desk thumping] and dynamic leadership, as he steers Trinidad and Tobago to developed nation status that you too will enjoy.

This budget was prepared against a background of the Government's vision, as we seek to operationalize the Vision 2020 plan for 2007 to 2010. One of the developmental pillars of this plan is nurturing a caring society.
I am pleased to tell you that it is on this pillar this Government will demonstrate its commitment to a caring society, that humaneness, the compassion and that deep concern for others. It is on that pillar you will be able to see it unfold.

9.50 p.m.

So when the hon. Prime Minister said in his budget presentation it is a “love thing”, that is what he meant. A society in which all—and I want to reiterate—all citizens are equally included. Your ethnicity does not matter, neither does your colour, be it black, white, brown, whatever. We embrace all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and in particular, the vulnerable in our society. This Government will ensure that they are loved, cared for, and treated with dignity and respect.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is committed to building a society in which the basic needs of all the people are met, and more importantly, each individual is given an opportunity to contribute and to self-actualize. This is the pillar on which the Ministry of Social Development falls and in short, we at the ministry are well positioned to spread the love of which the Prime Minister spoke.

Mr. Speaker, two of the goals of this pillar, that is the pillar of a nurturing and caring society, point specifically to the mandate of the Ministry of Social Development. The first states emphatically that the foundation of Trinidad and Tobago will be strong families and communities, so it is clear that this Government recognizes the family unit as the chief cornerstone—and the Bible talks about the chief cornerstone—as the chief cornerstone of our society, and by extension our communities, and by extension, the society.

Mr. Speaker, as a visionary Government the type of family we envisage is one where members of the family are fit and well emotionally, mentally and spiritually; where their children are able to enjoy the love, care and protection of the adults and where all are able to communicate freely as they pursue self-development to attain their full potential while discharging their civic duty to this beautiful Trinidad and Tobago. That is the family we see as the ideal and we hope for.

So Mr. Speaker, this Government will take all appropriate steps—and I give you that assurance—to achieve this objective. The Government has approved a national policy on the family which is to be laid in this Parliament as a Green Paper and to be followed by a series of consultations throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Through these discussions, Mr. Speaker, we hope to be able to get and excite the national community so that they would be able to give their side and understand the importance of the family unit.
Mr. Speaker, we at the Ministry of Social Development have done our work and our research has revealed that families in Trinidad and Tobago are affected by different situations such as disadvantaged economic situations, poor parenting skills and practices, poor socialization skills, insufficient and ineffective communication in families, poor, and at times abusive methods of discipline and exposure to the negative influence of the media like cable television.

Families are affected by migrant and absentee parents, the “barrel-children” culture as we sometimes refer to this situation. Again, they are affected by the drug culture and its associated criminal subculture and the drastic changes in community and societal values.

Mr. Speaker, so you will appreciate when we say that if we effectively deal with these issues affecting the families, there will certainly be a positive impact on the society. The answer to our societal problems is not on apportioning blame, it is up to all of us as citizens of this beautiful nation to take responsibility for our actions and commit to fixing the weaknesses within ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, as we facilitate this national conversation to which I refer on family policy, it is the Government’s desires to finalize a policy which would guide the activities of families in Trinidad and Tobago and an action plan which, when computed, will assist in developing commitment and stability in families. It will assist in developing a sense of responsibility and family support; it will also assist in developing family employment for vulnerable families to assist them to become more self-reliant.

Mr. Speaker, during the period when the PNM was out of office, under the distinguished hon. Patrick Manning, the PNM did its homework and took a critical look at every aspect of governmental affairs. It looked at areas that seriously affected the lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and believe me that was the genesis of this Government's social policy; that is why this Government has been so successful with its programmes today.

We have developed as a Government and administered some 120 social programmes spanning the various needs of the citizens of this country. These programmes are intended to empower citizens and move them forward to independence and improvement in their standard of living and that of their families.

However, Mr. Speaker, we have recognized that an appropriate and decentralized system of efficiently and effectively delivering social services to the citizens in their respective communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago has to be developed.
Mr. Speaker, this system will have the reach and impact on the lives of every citizen who requires the services of the State. It will be a system where generic social workers would have responsibility for entire families and will diagnose the problems affecting them. These social workers will be responsible for making the necessary arrangements in terms of bringing together the social support services in the system to bear on those families positively affecting their lives. Whether the social support services come from the Government or the non-governmental organizations, the important thing is that they will impact the family and change their circumstances and situation thereby improving the standard of living of the whole family.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the Cabinet of this Government has given the necessary approvals, and the Ministry of Social Development at this time is moving apace in terms of building, and if they implement this decentralized and integrated system—in our desire to assist the vulnerable families in this society, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that we have recruited a consultant who, in the month of September, will begin work with the Ministry of Social Development in order to develop the system about which I speak.

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, August 27, 2007 at 1.00 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.04 p.m.