

*Leave of Absence**Monday, May 26, 2008***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, May 26, 2008*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House: Mr. Nizam Baksh, Member of Parliament for Naparima; Dr. Hamza Rafeeq, Member of Parliament for Caroni Central; and Mr. Jack Warner, Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2005. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
2. Green Paper on Local Government Reform: Roles and Responsibilities of Local Government Bodies. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**(PRESENTATION)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the Second Report (2007/2008) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the supplementation and variation of the 2008 Appropriation.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION**Mayaro Police Station****(Details of)**

140. Mr. Winston Peters (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

With respect to the Mayaro Police Station, could the hon. Minister of National Security state:

- (a) what is the initial estimated cost of the project, the cost on completion, the reasons for the overruns, the initial project date of completion, the actual date of completion, the names of the contractors and subcontractors employed on the project, the value of their contracts and the actual amounts paid to each;

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- (b) the number of police officers to be assigned to the police station, the ranks of these officers;
- (c) the number and types of vehicles to be assigned to the station; and
- (d) other resources to be assigned to the station?

Mr. Speaker: Minister in the Ministry of National Security, is there an answer?

The Minister in the Ministry of National Security (Hon. Donna Cox): Mr. Speaker, there is no answer. It is not ready as yet.

Mr. Speaker: That is rather unfortunate. We have one question on today's Order Paper and, at least, that one question could have been answered. [*Cellphone rings*] Let me remind Members to stretch their hands into their pockets and turn off their cellphones.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, when the Leader of Government Business told me this afternoon that he did not get an answer to this question, I told him that there is only one question on the Order Paper and I could not believe that there is no answer. I really thought that he would have apologized to the House and give us an undertaking that he would have a meeting with his Members and impress upon them again, that it is important to answer questions, because the record does not look very good.

Mr. Speaker: I have to endorse the Chief Whip's comments. Questions are not being answered in the manner they ought to be answered. Proceed.

Question, by leave, deferred.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) BILL

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2008 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira*]

Question put and agreed to.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Second Report (2007/2008) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the supplementation and variation of the 2008 appropriation.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Friday, May 23, 2008 and agreed to two proposals related to the 2008 appropriation.

The first proposal was for the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$3,490,016,910 to fund urgent and critical recurrent and capital expenditure to September 30, 2008, in areas where insufficient or no allocation was provided.

The second proposal was for the variation of the appropriation for fiscal year 2008 in the sum of \$1,026,425,647. The increases and decreases in the appropriation to be effected by this variation reflect the reassignment in ministerial responsibilities as assigned by His Excellency the President, acting on the advice of the Prime Minister in accordance with the provisions of section 79(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, which was published in the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette* dated December 18, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, the details of the proposed changes were circulated to all Members of the Finance Committee and were discussed at its meeting on Friday, May 23, 2008 where clarification was sought with respect to some of the proposed changes to the appropriation for fiscal year 2008. In instances where responses were not readily available to the committee, written responses to the vast majority of questions have since been circulated to all members.

Mr. Speaker, it is anticipated during the course of the debate that these proposals contained within the Bill would be addressed by various Members of the Government. Please permit me at this time to advise the Parliament on the proposals applicable to five Heads of Expenditure which will be receiving the largest increases in the supplementation of the appropriation.

The five largest heads requiring supplementary resources are: the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in the amount of \$1,010,624,200; the Ministry of Finance, \$893,010,120; the Ministry of National Security, \$317,141,000; the Ministry of Works and Transport, \$262,367,000; and the Ministry of Public Utilities, \$247,928,000.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries advised in February of this year that based on the prevailing high oil prices and based on the current accrual rate, it is estimated that total subsidies on petroleum products would be approximately \$1 billion more than the anticipated expenditure for the year submitted during the preparation of the 2008 budget. Therefore, there is need to supplement the ministry's allocation by \$1 billion to meet the additional subsidy requirement. An additional sum of \$10 million is also required for the National Energy Corporation to complete the purchase of Union Estate to facilitate industrial development on the estate.

Mr. Speaker, in the case of the Ministry of Finance, the additional resources are required primarily to:

1. replenish \$80 million utilized to provide assistance to 3,420 cane farmers for direct and indirect transitional support as a result of the Government's decision to exit the sugar industry;
2. meet the cost of a one-off equity injection of \$142.4 million to Caribbean Airlines Limited to launch and operate the airbridge service between Trinidad and Tobago;
3. meet \$462.7 million in initial equity and other costs associated with the construction of a power plant by Trinidad Generation Unlimited at Union Estate to supply the Alutrint Smelter Complex with electricity and to supply bulk power to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission;
4. increase Government's equity investment in the Export-Import Bank of Trinidad and Tobago by \$50 million. These resources would in turn be utilized to repay the existing debt of \$36 million to local financial institutions which funded a number of small and medium local enterprises to upgrade their plant and equipment which would give them a competitive edge over their regional and extra-regional competitors;
5. provide additional resources through a special window to the Caricom Petroleum Fund at the rate of \$6.5 million per month to assist the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States with infrastructural construction;
6. meet \$4.6 million of cost associated with the administration of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; and
7. meet \$46.3 million of interest and capital cost related to the repayment of a RBTT loan raised on behalf of NIPDEC in the sum of \$286.3 million to finance projects under the Ministry of National Security Construction Programme.

Mr. Speaker, through this supplementation of the appropriation, the Government is seeking to ensure that the security services are adequately provisioned. In pursuit of this objective, the Ministry of National Security is being provided with additional resources:

1. to meet additional cost in the fire service to pay arrears of salary and allowances to fire officers and auxiliary fire officers emanating from industrial agreements, and to meet the increased National Insurance Scheme rates;
2. to cover arrears of salary and allowances in the prison service as a result of industrial relations settlement, as well as that associated with the increased National Insurance Scheme rates;
3. to meet outstanding arrears to Special Reserve Police Officers and additional contributions to the National Insurance Scheme; and
4. to cover additional costs in the Immigration Division and Cadet Force and meet payments for contract employment.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Ministry of Works and Transport additional funding is required mainly for the following purposes:

- (i) to enable the Highways Division to continue its road repair programme on the nation's highway and secondary road network;
- (ii) for the Drainage Division to continue to award contracts for walling, paving, desilting, dredging and embankment works and sediment control of watercourses;
- (iii) to enable the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago to meet arrears of salaries and COLA and wages and COLA, as well as remuneration based on new collective agreements; and
- (iv) to fund the Public Transport Service Corporation to meet payment of arrears of wages as a result of new collective agreement, increased cost of spare parts and services, increased security, insurance for 75 new buses and to purchase a driving simulation system and tools.

In the case of the Ministry of Public Utilities, an additional \$234.8 million is required to meet the arrears of salaries, wages and COLA owed to WASA workers in respect of the industrial agreement for the 2005—2007 period, in the sum of \$223.8 million, as well as interest on the Desalcott Loan Facility of \$11 million and \$13.1 million to supplement the resources of the National Social Development

Programme for the completion of several social infrastructure projects, geared to providing and improving water services, street lighting, electrification of residences, multi-purpose social and recreational areas in communities.

I wish to assure hon. Members that the Ministry of Finance has reviewed Government's finances for fiscal 2008 and wishes to assure that the supplementary funding proposed will not impair Government's fiscal position. The majority of the supplementary funding is in respect of current transfers and subsidies. Supplementary funds are also required for personnel expenditure, transfer to statutory boards and similar bodies, acquisition of physical capital assets, debt servicing, goods and services, and the Public Sector Investment Programme; all of which are unavoidable.

Hon. Members will recall that when the 2008 budget was presented to Parliament by the previous Minister of Finance in August 2007, a surplus of \$89.2 million was projected. This was derived from projected revenue of \$40,381.2 million and expenditure of \$40,292 million. Based on the mid-year review, revenue is expected to grow to \$46,647.5 million, an increase of \$6,266.3 million. It is noteworthy that \$2.5 billion of that increase is projected to come from oil companies and \$994 million from other companies, which is reflective of the high prevailing oil and gas prices, as well as buoyant petrochemical prices.

Other significant contributors to the projected increase in revenue are VAT of \$995 million and property income of \$1,621.7 million. The increase in VAT is reflective of the general buoyancy of the economy by the improvement in property income; is influenced by higher equity profits from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and royalty on oil.

Mr. Speaker, on the expenditure side:

- additional expenditure of some \$3,490 million will be undertaken as a result of the supplementation of the appropriation now before this honourable House;
- the sum of \$1,718.8 million is projected to be deposited into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, by direct charge, in keeping with the provisions of Act No. 6 of 2007;
- additional expenditure of some \$35 million is planned under the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) to meet the increased cost resulting from the higher remuneration rates now being paid in the programme;

- additional expenditure of \$721.8 million is also projected by way of direct charges, primarily to meet salaries and allowances in elements of the public service, such as the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, as a result of new remuneration packages, as well as increased pensions brought about by Government's decision to increase the minimum pension paid to retired public servants;
- capital expenditure under the Infrastructure Development Fund is expected to be about \$990.7 million above the \$4 billion originally projected in August 2007, and this will be drawn from funds previously appropriated to that Fund.

Mr. Speaker, in the process of the review it was noted that a number of projects and programmes being undertaken by ministries and departments have not been progressing at the rate originally envisaged. As a result, a reorganization and reprioritization exercise was undertaken, which yielded unspent balances of approximately \$606.1 million, which when factored into the analysis, results in a projected fiscal surplus of \$5.3 million in 2008.

Once again, this administration has demonstrated that it is committed to the prudent management of this country's financial resources in 2008. The population could rest assured that the Government will continue to address its social and economic needs in a financially and fiscally prudent way.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Mr. Vasant Bharath (*St. Augustine*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What a tangled self-serving, self-preserving webbed intrigue we weave when we first practise to deceive. [*Desk thumping*] Listening to the Minister of Finance I am reminded of a newspaper report I read recently, where it was reported that laboratory rats were being replaced by lawyers for experiments. Not of course, the kind of lawyers we have on our side here, nor of course, I am sure the kind of lawyer you are, Mr. Speaker, unless I be hauled for contempt before you.

The report stated that rats were being replaced by lawyers for laboratory experiments. It went on to advance three reasons for that. The first was lawyers were very plentiful; the second was that the laboratory assistants did not get as attached to the lawyers as they got to the rats and thirdly, you could get the lawyers to do the kind of things that you just cannot get rats to do.

So, in listening to the Minister of Finance here today that is exactly what she came to this honourable House to do. The Minister of Finance came here to

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defend the indefensible. [*Desk thumping*] Much like her colleague, the hon. Attorney General did on Friday, when she stood up for over an hour, extolling the virtues of joint select committees; waxing lyrically for over an hour; going as far to say that it required resolution of both Houses of Parliament; not realizing all this time that her parliamentary colleagues, the Prime Minister and the goodly Leader of Government Business were conspiring to pull the rug from under the feet. [*Desk thumping*] That is exactly what they did. I felt for her as I saw her sink deeper and deeper into her chair across there; pulling her shawl tighter and tighter across her body for protection. That is the PNM; as Mrs. Manning so eloquently put it, "the Prime Minister has spoken".

Mr. Speaker, not a damn dog dare bark, because that is the PNM— [*Interruption*] Yes, I am coming to the budget; that is all part of the budget. Not a damn dog dare bark, because they may have ended up, unfortunately, like my friend in the back here, the previous Minister of Trade and Industry, and worse yet, they may have ended up like his predecessor, the other previous Minister of Trade and Industry, outside of the Parliament building.

I hold no brief for the Member for Diego Martin West, of course, but imagine this is a gentleman, a senior Government Minister, who has been in Parliament for 18 years, who probably was single-handedly responsible, through the housing projects that he instituted, of having put the PNM back into Government in the last election. Here was a man whose cries for transparency and accountability fell on the deaf ears of the Prime Minister. According to his affidavit in court, I believe—I stand to be corrected—it was five long years he has been trying to get the Prime Minister to launch an investigation into UDeCott, but unfortunately, that did not happen.

So, Mr. Speaker, what chance does the ordinary man have of calling this Government to account? What chance do the people of Spring Village—who I represent—or Dow Village or Orange Grove have, of stopping this Government in its tracks, when they come back to this Government year after year, every half year, to get more money; to go back and bulldoze those same people's crops? That is what they are coming here—that is the same money that they are using. Bulldozing bearing crops; entering people's homes illegally. This is a Government, quite frankly, that is now out of control. They have gone completely and totally berserk. They are now running amok with the population and its money.

The Motion we are debating here today is not just about the Government seeking another \$3.5 billion, because it has become a routine matter— [*Interruption*] \$3.49 billion—we have come to expect it now that every year,

every six months they will come back to this House. But it is really to do with the quintessential question, the revelation, the reiteration of PNM corruption; PNM mismanagement; PNM favouritism; PNM nepotism that has been existing all of these years. [*Desk thumping*] Also, it is their general indifference and disregard to good, decent governance. Consequently, we must be under no illusions, whatsoever, that what this coming to the Parliament again for another \$3.5 billion amounts to is nothing but a raid on the Treasury. [*Desk thumping*]

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, let me reiterate what we have said here in previous budgets of this nature, that really coming to the Parliament here—this debate today, really is a sham. It is a sham because as you know this is really just a rubber-stamping of the Government which has spent the money already. They have come here after they have spent another \$3.5 billion to try to get the Opposition or to get the Opposition to just rubber-stamp it. Well, of course, as you would know they really do not need our approval, because at the end of the day all it requires is a simple majority to get the expenditure passed. So the wanton wastage, the wanton mismanagement that was the hallmark of the PNM in the 1970s and the '80s continues unabated; the mismanagement continues unabated. Of course, we have a few new faces, but it is the same old tricks, the same old PNM, because some things would just never die. But sham or no sham, Mr. Speaker, I have sworn an oath to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that I will attempt at all costs to protect their interest and that is exactly what I intend to do here today. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Government is seeking approval for an additional \$3.5 billion of expenditure for fiscal 2008 via this supplemental. When this variation is included, this Government would have spent upwards of \$45.69 billion, and we have not yet reached half the year. [*Interruption*] That means that this Government is spending money at the rate of \$125 million per day. Every single day of the year they are spending \$125 million, \$5 million dollars an hour, \$87,000 a minute for every minute of every day of every month for the rest of this year. That is what the Government is spending. That amounts to over 420 per cent more than what the UNC spent when we were in government.

Hon. Member: True, true.

Mr. V. Bharath: In fact, in this one year alone this Government has spent more than the UNC spent in its first four years in Government. It is important to understand the reasons, not least of which is what has this population gotten for the moneys that they spent. Remember, this is not a one-off thing.

Mr. Ramnath: [*Inaudible*] and Calder Hart.

Mr. V. Bharath: This is not a one-off expenditure. They have been doing this since they came into government seven years ago. What do they have to show for this expenditure? This Government has triggered and fuelled debilitating inflation on this population. They believe that this reckless spending is a sign of development. Crime has reached unprecedented levels, with detection rates falling, and with the police service not adequately staffed, criminals are effectively in control of this country. Skyrocketing inflation has led to increases in poverty, so now there are several people, including, but mostly the older people in our society are now being pushed into the poverty zone, further and further—

Mr. Ramnath: Including MPs.

Mr. V. Bharath:—into the poverty zone. As my hon. friend said, yes, including MPs.

In fact, recent figures from the Central Bank show that 45 per cent of the elderly in this country are unable to meet their demands at the end of the month. Public health and education have come crashing down. Infrastructural development seems to be a consistent promise from an incompetent Minister who has failed in every project—

Hon. Member: All. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. V. Bharath:—he has attempted to deliver. From the infamous water taxis that were supposed to have been delivered since July 2006—

Mr. Ramnath: He is a failure. [*Laughter*]

Mr. V. Bharath:—to the mythical highways, to Point Fortin and Mayaro.

Mr. Ramnath: What a shame!

Mr. V. Bharath: The vast majority of the people in this country are without a reliable supply of water. The agricultural sector has been discriminated, so now agriculture only represents less than half of 1 per cent of GDP. In the UNC days it was 6 per cent.

Dr. Moonilal: Oh, yes.

Mr. V. Bharath: High food prices and food shortages are the order of the day. The administration of justice has collapsed around our ears; criminals are running free, shooting witnesses with impunity; our democratic institutions have been compromised and violated.

The fact is, the standard of living of the vast majority of people living in Trinidad and Tobago has fallen substantially since the PNM has taken office. [*Desk thumping*] This has been the effect of Government's wanton expenditure, wanton waste of our population's money, and it is in this context that we must look at any request for any increased expenditure.

Mr. Ramnath: What an introduction; classy.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, when you look at the supplementals, one of most striking things [*Interruption*] about the breakdown of the expenditure [*Interruption*] as far as the supplementals are concerned, is the fact that many of them are actually predictable expenses. [*Interruption*] Logically, they should have been included in the annual budget, but for some strange reason, the Minister of Finance excluded these from the budget. We do not know why.

They have come here with a supplemental budget, effectively, for us to rubber-stamp these things when in fact all of these things, maybe apart from one expense, which is the one to WASA, should have been in the annual budget. One wonders what is the reason that they want to have this lack of scrutiny. To make matters worse, we attempted in this House to get answers last week Friday at the Finance Committee meeting—

Mr. Ramnath: We were met with arrogance.

Mr. V. Bharath:—the committee stage to determine and to ask questions about the expenditures, and we were condescendingly brushed aside by the Minister who chaired the meeting, [*Interruption*] ably led, abetted and encouraged by the Leader of Government Business. [*Interruption*] It was a sham! It was a futile exercise. It was a waste of time coming here to do the people's business.

In fact, they were so determined not to account to the Parliament and the population about the \$3.5 billion that they spent, that they actually turned up here 25 minutes late, after having allocated only one hour to discuss 57 heads of expenditure—\$3.5 billion of additional moneys spent—they turned up 25 minutes late for a meeting that was carded for one hour.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Contempt of conduct.

Mr. V. Bharath: Mr. Speaker, it is a national disgrace! [*Desk thumping*] It is a national disgrace.

Hon. Member: Well put.

Mr. V. Bharath: This Government's aversion to accountability is now very well documented. It is very well documented and it is firmly established. The most recent examples, of course, when they came to this House to attempt to reduce the number of joint select committees from three to two, [*Interruption*] and then in the other place where the Acting President tried to muzzle Independent Senators—you might know.

Hon. Member: That is a fool.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. V. Bharath: Of course, the desperate attempts on the other side to avoid a commission of enquiry into UDeCott last week had the most recent of it all. You would also recall the failure of the Government to act in the scandal that was uncovered by the auditor general in CEPEP—\$1.6 billion of the people's money, and not a single person has been held accountable for that multimillion dollar corruption fiasco. Not a single person, and the programme goes on, unabated it goes on.

Hon. Member: Corruption going on.

Mr. V. Bharath: We recall also the rapid rail famously referred to by the Member for Siparia in her budget speech contribution as “racket rail”, where there were several questionable practices as far as the tendering process was concerned, and at least deserve some level of investigation to see whether there was any impropriety involved. But the Government did not bother with that. Full speed ahead to sign the contract. That is why it was so important for the Prime Minister and the Government to set up 14 special purpose state enterprises, because none of those enterprises fall under the purview of the Auditor General.

Just for your information, Mr. Speaker, let me just read out some of the irregularities that the Auditor General found in her last report in the last fiscal year—just some of them—and I quote:

“A total of \$59,811,672 was not properly accounted for by the Ministry of National Security”—this is the Auditor General's report; apart from that—“\$244,910 worth of purchases were not registered in the inventory register...”

The Auditor General goes on to say:

“She asked the Commissioner of Police for an account of the number of police vehicles that were in the fleet.”

This has not been provided.

Dr. Gopeesingh: They do not know.

Mr. V. Bharath: “At the Ministry of Planning and Development several payments were grossly understated, leaving room for speculation about wrongdoing...”

The Auditor General's words, not my words.

“At the Office of the Prime Minister there were no signed agreements for the lease of five premises together worth \$389,229 per month. At the Ministry of Health \$1,581,339 was spent in excess of the official release of funds; at the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment...there were...overpayments and over irregularities with respect to 18 contract employees...”

And it goes on and on.

“At the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries”—they signed lease agreements for rental of two premises which were never seen—“these were worth \$46,150 and \$107,944 a month each; at the Ministry of Local Government”—there were signed agreements for rental of three premises which were never produced—“total monthly rental \$125,155; furniture and furnishings were \$327,810 were not even recorded in the inventory; at the Ministry of Works and Transport, three vouchers totalling \$12,168,001 were not even signed.”

Mr. Ramnath: Shame on you!

Mr. V. Bharath: “At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs...there were...unauthorized spending at several overseas missions”—a little cash management system—“at the Embassy of Washington”—for example—“expenditure totalling \$432,000 was incurred in excess of the amount released.”

And this is why these 14 special purpose vehicles, these state enterprises, these special purpose state enterprises have been taken out from under the purview of the Auditor General, simply because they do not want to have any accountability.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Under Central Tenders Board.

Mr. V. Bharath: “At the Ministry of Social Development, computer equipment worth \$256,200 was purchased without approvals.”

And she concludes at the end:

“That for the last fiscal year she uncovered a total of \$13,197,042 that was overpaid”.

Overpaid, \$13 million! The biggest culprit was the Minister of Education.

Hon. Member: "Ooh."

Mr. V. Bharath: The biggest culprit! The sum involved in her ministry at that time was an overpayment \$6,775,392. That is the reason why we cannot have accountability in our state organizations.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Who was the Minister of Education?

Dr. Moonilal: That was the best Minister.

Mr. V. Bharath: Let me go into a little detail about some of the expenses that they are coming here to this Parliament today to get more money for.

The first one I want to talk about is the issue of surveillance. This is included under the heading, "Surveillance of the Chaguaramas Peninsula", for which they are asking for \$2 million. This Prime Minister has been boasting for several years now, ad infinitum, about fortress Trinidad and Tobago, the radar system that is involved, and the high-tech equipment that they have got; not to mention the very expensive surveying system that they have got. I have an article here, earlier in the year in January:

"Radar down again: Drug surveillance system now a roost for corbeaux."

Dr. Moonilal: Oh.

Mr. V. Bharath: And it goes on to say:

"San Fernando Hill radar gone dead again. Corbeaux take over key spy equipment."

This is what is protecting Trinidad and Tobago.

"The radar installation on the San Fernando Hill that forms part of the state's hundred million dollar 360 degree coastal surveillance system went dead again four days ago and has now become a roost for corbeaux."

Mr. Ramnath: That is a PNM newspaper.

Mr. V. Bharath: That is the protection we have in this country. That is the protection the Prime Minister has been talking about. When he talks about the 360 degree coverage, with all of this 360 degree coverage we still have a lot of Colombians coming to our shores. *[Interruption]* They are raided every so often, down in South most of the time, but they are getting through at will. *[Interruption]* No radar is picking them up. We have guns coming in. We have drugs coming in, almost at will.

2.15 p.m.

Here they are allocating \$2 million to commence putting up a radar system in the Chaguaramas peninsula. There was an article in the *Newsday* of July 11, 2005. Ironically that was also the day the first bomb went off on Frederick Street, that was the day Mrs. Yvonne Mc Ivor, I believe her name was, unfortunately lost a leg, and several other persons were injured in that bombing incident. Of course, no one, including Mr. Big, has yet been identified, caught, held or arrested for that matter.

On that very day, it said under the headline:

“Prime Minister net of security over Trinidad and Tobago

Manning declared, 'What we are putting in place is a net, a net so significant that it is with great difficulty that such a net can be penetrated.' ” [*Laughter*]

He was speaking at the time at the Arima Senior Comprehensive School.

“‘We can see everything that moves in a certain distance’, he effused. You can see the Venezuelan coastline; you can see boats coming up the Orinoco River; you can see boats leaving the Venezuelan shore at high speed and coming to Trinidad; you can see where they leave and where they land; you could see from the radar how long they have stayed and when they go back.’”

Words of the illustrious Prime Minister; perhaps, he was mistaking radars for crystal balls, Ouija boards and candles.

At the same meeting the Prime Minister also said:

“Two radar sites were operational.” “By the middle of this month, July 2005, there should be five more in place, and by the end of July, all sites should be operational and the entire system should be in place.”

That was in July 2005. Today they are coming to the House to say that they are spending \$2 million to put a radar system in Chaguaramas. Not even the full amount they are coming for; they are only coming for part of it to commence the job, three years later.

I want to talk a little about water, because one of the items that the Minister took great pains and time to explain, which was not contained in the budget, was the allocation of \$234.8 million for the payment for arrears and salaries at the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA). Let me state, for the record, and categorically, that I have no objections to paying workers for their just dues. As a

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matter of fact, I am of the firm view that this Government is decidedly anti-labour, [*Desk thumping*] which is why this Opposition had to coerce them to introduce the OSH legislation and the Equal Opportunity Act.

More than that, it is my firm conviction that the problem at WASA is one of management, starting at the very helm with the Prime Minister's blue-eyed superman. After close to \$15 billion being spent on WASA, over the last seven years by this Government, the Minister of Public Utilities recently was boasting that a mere 23 per cent of households in this country receive a reliable water supply. Note that this is not a daily supply; it is what WASA calls a "reliable supply", which are two different things, as far as WASA is concerned. So it does not mean that the 23 per cent is getting water everyday. They term it as a "reliable supply".

In fact, over 50 per cent of the water produced by WASA is leaked, wasted, and over 45 per cent of the network needs to be replaced because it is so old. Of course, the Minister comes and asks the people of this country for an increase in water rates. It must also be remembered that this was the very same public entity in which the Chief Executive Officer, a close friend of the Prime Minister, was being paid \$50,000 a month, plus perks, in 2003. He had a salary reduction subsequently when "de mark was bus", and he went down to \$36,000 plus perks. Of course, the promised report that an investigation would be done, never materialized, as we would have expected, and we have no way of knowing if Mr. Grimes ever actually repaid the thousands of taxpayers' dollars as a result of this corruption that was uncovered; Nor do we have any way of knowing if Mr. Grimes has subsequently received an increase in salary, for the bungling that he has performed at WASA since then.

It is of no surprise to us on this side that, once again, the Treasury has had its pocket picked and the perpetrator has walked away scot-free, as is traditional PNM style. [*Desk thumping*] There is no doubt now that WASA is in serious trouble, and has been for a long time. The only shame is that I hope they do not come to the population until they fix the issues with regard to management, the problems that the management has perpetrated on WASA.

I want to quote the Prime Minister talking about his good friend, the CEO, at that time:

"On Grimes' sizable salary Mr. Manning said that when a company is in trouble it needs the best management it could get and you have to pay for it. The country has to get accustomed to the reality of the situation and good managers are not easy to come by, that is why in the private sector they pay them so well."

That was the *Trinidad Guardian* of April 2003. For the past five and a half years, we have been paying a gentleman who is supposed to be the best as far as management has to offer, as far as you could get. We have paid this man, at least, \$2.5 million; at least that we know of, plus perks like a company car and so forth. Today, after having paid for the best management possible, by the Minister's own admission, three quarters of the population do not have a reliable water supply.

In the private sector this man would have been fired for incompetence a long time ago. [*Desk thumping*] Even in the public sector he should have been fired a long time ago.

Mr. Ramnath: If he was in Petrotrin, he would have been fired!

Mr. V. Bharath: Instead, like the king of the Estate Management Business Development Company (EMBD), and the master of disaster at the Ministry of National Security, incompetence appears to be a criterion for the job. [*Crosstalk*]

I want to touch a bit on Caribbean Airlines, because the last time the Minister of Finance came to this good House, only a few short months ago, to ask for more money, she had this to say about BWIA:

"Mr. Speaker, in the case of BWIA, the Government was faced with an intractable problem of having to support an inefficient, overstaffed and unprofitable airline. It was, therefore, incumbent on the Government to stop the hemorrhage of state resources by finding a permanent solution to this problem."

She went on to talk about putting a new board of directors to face a new vision and chart a new course. She concluded by saying that:

"The closure of BWIA and the capitalization of Caribbean Airlines Limited represents yet another instance where a lasting solution was implemented to resolve long-standing problems with an ailing state owned enterprise."

A lasting solution was implemented. On that occasion, they came to the Parliament for \$724.9 million to capitalize Caribbean Airlines. We must also remember that from what we were told, because it was a very secretive deal, none of the debts of BWIA were transferred to Caribbean Airlines, so, effectively, this was a debt free organization and its balance sheet was clean. That was supposed to be the lasting solution.

Today, they have come back to ask us to approve a further \$152 million to capitalize further Caribbean Airlines. To date, the Minister of Finance has still not answered questions posed by the Members for Caroni East, Princes Town North, Siparia and Cumuto/Manzanilla with regard to BWIA; questions that were posed at

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[MR. BHARATH]

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the last Finance Committee Meeting of January 16, 2008. Those questions are still unanswered as to the capitalization of BWIA, what amounts of money were the Government investing, and the rights that were attached to the workers. Those questions have not been answered. But that, like the price of natural gas to foreign companies, is also a national secret.

I want to ask the Minister of Finance publicly: What is the profitability time line of Caribbean Airlines? At what time, at what stage and in what year would Caribbean Airlines become a profitable and feasibly and economically run airline?

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little about the Strategic Services Agency. I would forgive you if you, like me, and I am sure many members of the public, have never even heard of this agency. The Government, nevertheless, has come to us to ask for \$7.826 million to meet increased salaries in this agency. It would appear on investigation that this is yet another arm of the Ministry of National Security charged with gathering information on behalf of the Government. It appears that this Government, and, of course, this Minister of National Security, gathers a lot of intelligence, but yet still they cannot make a dent in crime because of a lack of intelligence; that is the reason. They have all this intelligence, but they do not know what to do with it.

Despite all these groups and these hundreds of millions of dollars spent on spy ware and high-tech equipment, there could be no doubt, in anybody's mind, that criminals have taken control of Trinidad and Tobago. One week ago in the constituency of my colleague for Princes Town North, the police could not respond to a murder scene just a few metres away from the front door of the police station, because they had no vehicles and no policemen to go. In fact, the fingerprint expert did not turn up to take the fingerprints of the dead man until the day of the funeral, and to inflict further pain and trauma on the family, they actually took this man's hand out of the coffin to take his fingerprints, in front of the family, during the funeral ceremony. That is where we have arrived in this country.

What was the official response from the Commissioner? "We have launched an investigation." How many investigations has this Commissioner launched, and where have they gone? Nowhere; they are all cover ups.

More than two years ago, a senior police officer in this country was given an assignment to find out what happened to 32 kilograms of cocaine that went missing from the same police station; up to today, no sign of that report. I do not have a clue what the street value is; maybe Mr. Ramnath could help me. [*Laughter*] What has happened to these reports? I dare say, like many other reports, this would just be covered up; nothing would be done.

I do not want to bore you and the national community with the multiplicity and the duplicity of quotations that I have on record from the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security, declaring war on criminals and promising a reduction in crime. These are well documented. The fact is that crime is now out of control. We are a nation living in fear. Crime has actually now touched the lives of every single person; yet still the Prime Minister continues to foist his incompetent blue-eyed Minister on this population.

Mr. Speaker, there is now a river of blood flowing in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] The murder rate has quadrupled since 1999, from 7.66 per 100,000 to over 30.3 per 100,000 in 2007. Look at some of the headlines we are now seeing in our newspapers:

"Five more murdered, who's next?"

Saturday, May 17; only a week ago.

"Murder & mayhem"

Look at these headlines. Is this the Trinidad and Tobago that the UNC left six years ago?

Hon. Members: No!

Mr. V. Bharath: Look at this:

"Warfare

Families flee as rival gangs torch Laventille homes"

Mr. Speaker, if you saw this anywhere else, you would think this is in some Central African dictatorship; persons with their knapsacks, their belongings on their backs, leaving their homes in sweet Trinidad and Tobago.

2.30 p.m.

Are you not ashamed? It looks like a Central African dictatorship, if it were Indian people you would say it looked like Bangladesh. The point is, this is what we have descended to despite the billions of dollars they continue to come for, the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago has descended into chaos.

Mr. Speaker, to add insult to injury, the detection rate is now a miserable 8 per cent and the conviction rate is less than 1 per cent. What does that mean? It means for every 100 murders committed in Trinidad and Tobago 92 murderers get away scot-free, they are never apprehended at all and when they do catch them, only one is dealt with. So are we at all surprised that the crime spree continues?

In 2007 Trinidad and Tobago ranked number eight of the highest ranked places for murder in the world and, of course, with the dramatic increase we have seen in the last six months in Trinidad and Tobago where I believe up to yesterday we were close to 200 murders, and Mr. Maharaj SC has just told me that we now rank second in the world. A 75 per cent increase from last year alone, almost 200 murders already this year with May 2008 recorded as being the bloodiest month in this country's history. But that is nothing, because next month will be the bloodiest and the following month and every month we are breaking a murder record in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, this has, of course, to be placed in the context of the more than \$15 billion that this Government has spent to try to do something about crime, and they have the gall to come here today to ask for another \$317 million. That is shameless; it is a disgrace, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a bit about health now because the Minister of Health is coming to the Parliament to ask for a further \$68 million for the ministry. Prime Minister by my colleagues, soon to be my Minister—at least I have brought a smile on the Prime Minister's face. My colleague will deal with the details of the allocation to the Ministry of Health, but suffice it to say that the Ministry of Health in this Government remains the most challenged, apart from of course, the Ministry of National Security and for the same reason, incompetence of the line Minister.

Mr. Speaker, the *Daily Express* newspaper of May 20, 2008, again only a few days ago reported that surgeries at the San Fernando General Hospital had been halted because of a lack of beds. There are no beds, so they cannot do any operations. The report advised that 40 persons had come in the Sunday afternoon before and up until Monday evening they were still waiting for a bed. Also, the dialysis machine at the San Fernando General Hospital is continually shutting down. It shuts down for weeks on end, and these are all issues the Minister of Health stated that he would deal with in his 100-day plan. Three hundred days have probably gone already. Mr. Speaker, you know this same bed shortage was raised in this House by the UNC almost one year ago and after an entire year, this Minister does not even have the competence to buy 40 or 50 beds to put in the hospital. It is beyond his competence.

Mr. Speaker, we know just like Mr. Grimes, Garcia, Rao, Ragoonanan, Joseph and Jones, the Minister of Health enjoys a special relationship with the Prime Minister so we do not expect anything to come out of it.

I want to talk about inflation because outside of crime that is the one thing that causes major distress to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to say at the outset that I have absolutely no problem in paying people their just dues, my

concern is that there are so many people who are in full-time employment and still unable to make ends meet. Can you imagine the Prime Minister is continuing to boast about a 5 per cent unemployment rate and a 16 per cent poverty level? Let me say that these are figures that we dispute irrefutably; they are just plain wrong, outdated and cannot be proven by the Prime Minister. In addition to that, the poverty line of 16 or 17 per cent was based on a figure of \$625 I believe.

That certainly cannot still be the case, that was three years ago and with the cost of living and inflation, we estimate that is probably closer to \$1,100 which means that the poverty line is probably now about 30 per cent. But let us humour the Prime Minister for a moment and for the sake of argument say that he is right about the 5 per cent and the 16 per cent. That means that there are people who are in full-time employment who are below the poverty line. That is what it translates into.

Mr. Speaker, in a *Newsday* article of May 21, 2008 headlined “TT managing inflation”, the Prime Minister advises:

“We are managing successfully with the worldwide problem of inflation...”

Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of Government Business likes to say and I quote him today: “What arrant nonsense!” Mr. Speaker, inflation is now at 10 per cent, during the last seven years alone overall prices have increased by 54 per cent. What that means is that the purchasing value of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar is now half what it was just a few short years ago when the UNC was in office. So what you would have spent \$1,000 on five years ago will now cost you \$1,540.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, 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. [*Mr. R. L. Maharaj SC*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. V. Bharath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Chief Whip for his indulgence. Worse than the 54 per cent overall increase, there has been an increase in the price of food in this country by over 218 per cent in the last five years and by every indication those prices will continue to rise.

In fact, according to the other Minister of Finance—I do not know which one is the real one—he is quoted as saying there is no such thing as cheap food again. I will give a quick comparison of a few basic items between 2003 and 2008 which was done at my local supermarket in the East.

2003	2008
Crix—\$6	Crix—\$9
Brunswick sardine—\$2.99	Brunswick sardine—\$5.75
Klim Instant Full Cream Milk 800 gms—\$20.99	Klim Instant Full Cream Milk 800 gms—\$65.99
Swiss Spaghetti—\$2.99	Swiss Spaghetti—\$5.99
Lentils 1 lb pack—\$2.25	Lentils 1 lb pack—\$8.25
Happy Parboiled Rice 20 lb—\$37.99	Happy Parboiled Rice 20 lb—\$110
Hostess 4 litre oil—\$33.99	Hostess 4 litre oil—\$63.99
Flora Margarine 454 gms—\$8.49	Flora Margarine 454 gms—\$12.99

Just those items, the total basket in 2003 was \$123 and in 2008 it is \$300 and, of course, we have not counted the items that have really gone up in value which are fruits and vegetables, and in this basket alone, the increase is 172 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, the level of poverty is rising dramatically and increasingly in Trinidad and Tobago and the elderly are unable to meet their daily needs. In the *Daily Express* of Wednesday January 23 the headline says: “Too many retirees in financial hell BROKEN AND OLD Central Bank survey reveals alarming figures”.

It goes on to say:

“Almost half of this country’s retirees do not have enough money to give them the standard of living they hope to have in their retirement, according to a National Literacy Survey conducted by the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago...”

This is why I would have thought that this Government would at least have the heart to make some provision for the hardships that these elderly people are going through. [*Desk thumping*] I thought they may have used some of the \$3.5 billion to increase the old age pension because these people are suffering, they are on fixed incomes. I thought they may have used part of the \$3.5 billion to provide subsidies on flour, rice and milk for the elderly, but no.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is so arrogant that it will refuse to take advice even from their own experts. One month ago, the Governor of the Central Bank, an international economist by trade, a man who has worked for the World Bank and other international agencies warned this Government that its spending was going to lead to double digit inflation. That was the headline.

“Central Bank warns of hard times ahead PRESSURE!

- Excessive spending
- Poor agriculture
- Food, services cost more
- Double digit inflation
- Business expenses rise”

And the Central Bank Governor is on record as saying:

“Unless something is done, we are going to be swimming in double-digit inflation.

Government spending is an issue and the Bank has a responsibility to inform the government of its concerns, Williams said, but admitted that as an adviser, the Bank could express its concern but this was not always heeded.”

In the *Trinidad Guardian* of Tuesday, April 22, 2008 it says:

“Money is the problem ...says Central Bank Governor

Inflation country’s biggest problem—Governor Williams”

It goes on:

“Central Bank Governor Ewart Williams says increasing inflation poses the biggest threat to the country’s economy...

We need to reduce the growth of public expenditure, noting that he was referring both to spending directly by the central government, as well as expenditure by quasi-government institutions.”

That is the Central Bank Governor, the man who runs the economy as far as the money supply is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, only a few months ago the IMF issued a similar warning saying that the directors reiterated their concern that the sustained increase in public spending and the widening non-energy fiscal deficit with the economy operating near full capacity could exacerbate inflationary pressures and jeopardize fiscal sustainability.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, what was the Government's response to these experts? Well, the Government's own resident expert on all matters, the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, headline:

"Despite Central Bank concerns

Full speed ahead

Imbert: Difficult to reduce Government spending"

—and he goes on to say inside—

“It would be possible to have any ‘urgent reduction’...

Yesterday, Imbert disagreed with Monday's call by Central Bank Governor Ewart Williams for the Government to urgently reduce its spending, as well as spending by quasi-government institutions.”

That was the response from the Government, from the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, the goodly Minister of Finance, on the same date, Tuesday, April 22, 2008, continued her attack on the Central Bank Governor when she said, and I quote:

“Finance Minister Karen Nunez-Tesheira yesterday dismissed claims that Government's rapid pace of development remains a primary cause for this government's spiralling inflation.

She said indiscriminate levels of consumerism...”

—not Government spending; in other words, she blamed the population for the inflation, not the government spending as the reason why the Patrick Manning Government battled to reduce inflation.

Mr. Speaker, as late as today, in today's *Guardian*, the hon. Prime, Minister:

“Criticising those who accused the Government of over-spending, Manning said it was a ploy to prevent the country from achieving developed-country status by the year 2020.

But, instead of slowing down, he said, the Government must accelerate the country's rate of development...”

So despite all the warnings from the international agencies, from the Central Bank Governor, it is full steam ahead, ignore everybody else. This is the context in which we must examine this Government's expenditure.

I want to touch a little on housing. The Government has come to this Parliament for an additional \$20 million for several purposes, related primarily to squatting. It would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to plead a case for my constituents, who have been so brutally abused, mistreated and mishandled by this Government and its agents in the last few days.

I refer to the residents in Spring Village. These are people who have been occupying these lands for well over 30 years. Promise after promise has been made to them with regard to the tenure of their farms and their homesteads, as well as the provision of a 5.5 acre recreational facility. Along came the HDC, no doubt on the instruction of the Government and, Mugabe style, they bulldozed all the crops, entered the people's homes, threatened them, and destroyed the area that was to be used for the recreational facility. Bearing crops—corn, ochro, baigan—were destroyed completely.

Let me put on record how deeply proud I am of the people of Spring Village for standing up to the brutality and excesses of this Government, forcing an apology from the Minister; forcing the HDC to remove its bulldozers and its security and to rethink its position.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at some of the economic indices that emanate from this wanton waste and mismanagement. The gross domestic product of Trinidad and Tobago has grown from \$48.2 billion in 2000 to a whopping \$132 billion in 2007, a growth rate of 274 per cent. In fact, the price of oil and gas is at all time high and that has driven the gross domestic product; maybe through their ignorance they do not know what gross domestic product is.

By the Prime Minister's account, the country is booming. The skyline is littered with mega products and mega expenditure and all sorts of office buildings, rapid rail and water taxis. How has this affected the average citizen? What has been the effect on the economy and the country generally? How has this booming energy sector benefitted the nation as a whole?

We need to look at the human development indicators as a gauge to the true performance of the Government. It is my belief that the performance of a government cannot only be judged by income and expenditure and its level of savings. Contrary to the Prime Minister's perception, it is not the number of tall buildings, helicopters, gun boats, being perceived as the godfather of the Caribbean or even the father of the nation. That is not what determines the performance of a government.

The human development report ranks countries based on basic standards of their quality of life. It includes measures of life expectancy, literacy, education and, of course, GDP. During the period 2001—2007, Trinidad and Tobago fell consistently from 41st on the scale to the 59th position, suggesting a consistent worsening of the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Another development index, of course, is the bogey one, the Corruption Perception Index. As custodians of the public purse, parliamentarians are duty bound to ensure value for money and to ensure that the moneys allocated are used for what they are allocated for. There is no doubt that the issue of corruption will always rear its head when you talk about the very large sums we have before us today. According to their website, Transparency International is a non-profit, non-governmental organization working to counter corrupt international business and government practices.

This organization is responsible for the generation of the Corruption Perception Index on an annual base. In 2001, Trinidad and Tobago entered the survey and was ranked at number 31. By 2005, this country had plummeted to a rank of number 61. The most recent CPI survey now puts Trinidad and Tobago at a score of 79, very close to our new best friend, China, on 72.

I know the Minister of Finance has a penchant for comparison, so allow me to offer some figures on our Caribbean neighbours. Barbados is ranked at number 23, fractionally ahead of St. Lucia, which is listed at 24. St. Vincent and the Grenadines rank at number 30, just edging out Dominica, which is at 37. Transparency International has revealed further, with regard to Trinidad and Tobago:

“...it appears that large amounts of public expenditure are effectively ‘off budget’”—just like we have here today—“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.”

Here we have \$3.5 billion of off-budget expenditure coming before us again today.

Mr. Speaker, every business index, including the World Economic Forum Business Development Index has shown that we have slipped consistently. It is a difficult time for businesses in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, in 2001, this country ranked 35th in the Business Competitiveness Index. By 2007, the ranking had slipped to a miserable 74. The same goes for the Growth and Competitiveness Index, where Trinidad and Tobago moved from a very credible 38, in 2001, to a position now of 84.

There you have it. We have a situation where, in addition to that, the data clearly shows a polarization of the economy because of our increasing dependence on a volatile energy sector. In 2002, 22.6 per cent of the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago was produced by the energy sector, with 27.9 per cent of its revenue coming from that stream. Last year, the energy sector contributed 43 per cent of GDP, with a whopping 56 per cent of total government revenue. The irony of that, Mr. Speaker, is that sector only accounts for 4 per cent of the employed people of Trinidad and Tobago.

This polarization highlights the increased exposure that this country will suffer if we have any external shocks; more so the failure of this Government to plan for the future and to diversify our economy accordingly, leading to possibly what we all know as Dutch disease.

In conclusion, if it were not so pathetic, it would be funny. It is not just the additional request of the \$3.5 billion that requires our strictest scrutiny. It is your duty as representatives of the people to let the Government know it cannot come before us every Monday morning after having spent a weekend in drunken stupor, intoxicated by the rising price of oil, cap in hand, after having squandered their money, like some masochistic, self-flagellating, drunken gambler, and expect to get more money just so.

This Government continues to spend money lavishly and inappropriately. This Government has sought supplemental appropriations every single year since 2003. In 2003, the budget was increased by \$1.7 billion; in 2004, \$2.7 billion; 2005, \$4.7 billion; in 2006, \$7.2 billion; in 2007, \$4.2 billion; and now in 2008, with only half the year gone, by a further \$3.5 billion.

Mr. Speaker, it reflects a simple incompetence, an inability to manage and a stubborn refusal to pursue the benefit of the wider community, in short, incompetence on the part of the Ministry of Finance to exercise any fiscal discipline and restraint. Despite the major expenditures, this country continues to sink deeper into chaos.

But, Mr. Speaker, the bigger problem looms ahead of us. There is a bigger problem that we will have to confront. When this economic crisis leads eventually to a social crisis, there will be riots in this country. The social programmes of this Government have become handouts with no genuine attempts to create any industry or productive capacity in the economy. Therefore, any potential reduction in the amount of revenues from oil and gas will affect these programmes first and will adversely affect the social problems in Trinidad and Tobago.

3.00 p.m.

Already, as I have said, the human development indices have indicated a significant slide, in spite of the substantial wealth that this country has. In this scenario, the discovery of more oil and more gas will not impact positively on the life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have reached, we must remember, this stage of crisis, despite having higher incomes than ever before in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. What is required is a commitment, a genuine commitment, to the development; not to growth, but a commitment to development. That must come from this Government in actions, not in words.

There must be a deliberate attack on crime and criminality, on poverty, the severe constraints and the severe problems and shortcomings in the health sector. There must also be a reorientation of the educational sector towards a knowledge-based technological society, driven by research and development.

We need to rebuild our society from within, for the next generation, whilst we set about on working on our present one. We need to lead our people in that direction. Our educators as well as our politicians must be involved in that process.

For now, the economy is the Government's strength. Its polarization and high inflation, its deliberate pauperization and miserization of the people, as well its own incompetence and ineptitude, will be its eventual downfall.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Esther Le Gendre): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill and to share with this honourable House some of the more significant areas that are currently engaging the attention of the Ministry of Education.

I know that it is part of the tradition of this honourable House that I pay some cognizance of the points made by the previous speaker. "Doh brakes." The Member for St. Augustine rambled along, not unlike a child along the seashore picking up shells, throwing them into the water, creating hardly a ripple, going from point to point. I think when you listen to the hon. Members on the other side, one would lose sight of the real purpose of today's meeting. What we are doing is an administrative duty. There would have been a budget, there would have been a set of actions taken during the course of the year and we return to this honourable House to adjust some of our expectations to meet realities that would have been on the distant horizon at the time of the budget. That is all we are doing here today.

Instead, we come to this House and at every opportunity the Members on the other side treat it as a hiking expedition, dredging up information that has absolutely no relevance to the particular debate. If all they can discuss, in relation to education, is some old charge about \$6 million, I cannot even recall what the Member was saying in that area, surely it must not have been worth remembering.

I would like to speak about some of the main areas of focus which were identified for the education area and to bring the discussion back to where we really need to be, to discuss what we plan to achieve, what our budget was at the time, what the projected budget is at this time, and to give to this honourable House some rationale for the increase in spending to satisfy this House and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago whom we represent, as to why we are returning to this House.

The impression is given that somehow the Government comes back every Monday morning, I think those were the exact words of the Member for St. Augustine. That is so far from the truth, as to what has happened on that side. We would deal with those things one by one, including those bombshells. We will deal with those.

The Prime Minister, in his budget statement of 2008, outlined several areas of focus for education. The first of these areas was the area of early childhood care and education. The Ministry continues its thrust of guaranteeing access and opportunity for every child. This has been identified in our corporate plan. In respect of early childhood education, this will translate into the creation of 600 new ECCE centres by 2010, as is currently planned and by 2012, will cater for 40,000 new three-and four-year-olds.

During 2008, the Ministry of Education was mandated to deliver 33 new ECCE centres. I am pleased to report that we have already delivered 17 of these new centres. As a matter of fact, last Saturday I opened the last of these in Strange Village, Barrackpore. By the end of fiscal 2008, we would have started another 22 of these centres because they are currently at varying stages of construction. This honourable House is asked to note that a new initiative to accelerate the construction of these centres is on the way and would be implemented between this fiscal year and the following fiscal year.

The hon. Prime Minister also, in the budget presentation of 2008, spoke about the construction programme of the Ministry of Education. I am pleased that the Member for St. Augustine has been reading from the playbook of this side of the House when he speaks to what is required in the education system. I am pleased to report that it is already happening. It has been happening for the last seven years.

The Ministry has a mandate to modernize the primary and secondary level education, in terms of its infrastructure, the curriculum, its administration, teacher education and development, and ensuring that our schools become the kind of learning organizations in 2020 and what they would look like. Therefore, in addition to the construction of the ECCE centres referred to, the Education Facilities Company Limited (EFCL) has commissioned the first phase of the programme, which runs from September 2005, up until 2009. In that first phase, the EFCL will construct 50 secondary schools, inclusive of those schools which will be deshifed. There are another 25 projects which have been tendered for construction to date and construction has also begun in another nine schools. Twenty-one primary schools have been assigned to the EFCL. One has been completed to date and the rest are at various stages of design and construction. Mr. Speaker, our construction portfolio is managed by the EFCL. It is funded through the Infrastructure Development Fund.

Mr. Speaker, funds which were originally allocated for the construction of 15 primary schools, under Head 26: the Consolidated Fund, have been reallocated to project B120, that is improvement, refurbishment and extension to primary schools. The reason we have reallocated the funds from the construction of certain primary schools is, while these schools are in the process of construction, the phase at which we are is a design phase and as such the sums of money previously allocated for actual construction are not yet needed, but will be needed in the next financial year. We are seeking to transfer these funds to the area of refurbishment, improving and extension of primary schools. This transfer of funds will reduce the total amount of funds required to implement the 2008 Vacation Repair Programme, which gets on the way in June of this year.

The Ministry of Education continues its programme of repairs and maintenance to improve the facilities of 477 government primary and government-assisted primary schools and approximately 133 secondary schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Consequent in the signing of contracts with the denominational boards, the Ministry now funds 100 per cent of the contracts of the work to be done in denominational schools. The reason we must return for funding in this particular period is because our initial projections were not based on the outcomes of the signing of new agreements which were signed about six weeks ago, with a remaining number of denominational bodies. As a consequence, the Ministry must now move towards undertaking some of the repair and construction work which would come out of these new contracts where the Government is funding 100 per cent of the work to be done.

Furthermore, the Ministry has now sought and obtained Cabinet's approval for repairs to government-owned and/or managed ECCE centres. Repairs to all of these schools are essential to provide a satisfactory environment for our students and teachers and to comply with health and safety requirements.

From January 2008, these repairs are also being undertaken by the EFCL. This year the Ministry sought and obtained Cabinet's approval for two phases of works in primary and secondary schools. In respect of primary schools, in the first phase, general repairs were conducted at 86 primary schools. Electrical upgrade is on the way in another 139 schools and an assessment is being undertaken by SWMCOL for all the sewage systems and septic tanks, with a view to repair and upgrade these where required.

In the second phase, the Ministry of Education has begun implementation of works at another 230 primary schools and all this work is required to be completed to facilitate the reopening of the new term in September and within this fiscal year.

The cost of these two programmes is estimated at \$186.7 million and is estimated that about 70 per cent of this, or \$130.7 million will be payable in this financial year. As at March 31, the balance available under the relevant item of expenditure for these works was \$47.6 million. The Ministry has identified savings in other areas amounting to \$56.5 million. These savings can be transferred to these works.

3.15 p.m.

Under the primary school vote, B120, the amount of \$26.7 million is still required to complete these works. Details are as follows: repairs to 86 primary schools, \$39.7 million; electrical upgrade to 139 primary schools, \$60.8 million; and repairs to sewage and septic tanks, \$2.2 million.

In the second programme, repairs to 230 primary schools are to be undertaken from June and will cost \$84 million. In total, we expect to spend about 70 per cent of this amount in the 2007/2008 budget and that would be \$130.7 million.

If we look at the balance of funds available to March 31, 2008 which is \$47.6 million, we require a total of \$83.2 million, and less savings identified from other projects of \$49.9 million, the funds required to complete the project under consideration would be \$26.7 million.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to secondary schools, approval was obtained for repairs to be undertaken at 76 secondary schools; 22 of them in the first phase of October 2007 to March 2008 and 54 in the second phase which runs from April to September, 2008.

The original provision under the item of expenditure, project C-331—improvement/refurbishment/extensions to secondary schools was \$30 million. An increase of \$51.5 million is required to facilitate the completion of the works in secondary schools.

Additional funds are required to meet projected expenditure of project C384. My friends on the other side would be interested in this particular one, which is the construction of the Sangre Grande SWAHA Hindu College. Do you remember that one? The activities included—let me refresh the hon. Member for St. Augustine’s memory—he is giving us one of his quizzical looks. The Members on the other side raised the issue of the completion of the Sangre Grande SWAHA Hindu College. At that time, we had to share the sordid story of an institution going into the construction business and getting way over its head. At that time, construction work was the responsibility of the particular denominational body. The SWAHA Board had an original contract of \$29.4 million. The total value of the incomplete work to date is \$21,066,964. The Ministry of Education’s contribution to date is in excess of \$14 million.

You would recall that the last time I spoke in this honourable House, I mentioned that we had not yet had a complete value of the final work to complete this college. We now have the figures, and it is a whopping \$38,263,000.

Under the new memorandum of agreement, the Ministry of Education will fund 100 per cent of the difference between the project final cost and the original cost. That figure is now \$16.8 million. So, we are returning to this House with a request for \$6.7 million to make up that \$8 million projected expenditure.

Mr. Partap: Am I to understand that the estimated cost is \$23.5 million?

Hon. E. Le Gendre: Yes.

Mr. Partap: Thank you.

Hon. E. Le Gendre: So, we have identified that the original provision to complete this project was \$1.5 million, and we now need an additional \$6.7 million to complete it.

Mr. Speaker, changing and reforming the Ministry of Education is the second of the ministry’s key strategic priorities. This emanated from recognition of the integral role of the ministry in establishing policy to oversee the effective leadership, management and development of the education system. There are four major dimensions to this priority, and one of them is organizational development, that is, planned changed efforts involving the employment of interventions aimed at increasing the ministry’s internal capacity to be more effective and self-sustaining.

Mr. Speaker, institutional strengthening is a significant component under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP). The projects are planned to develop the capacity, skills and technical expertise of staff in the ministry. The funding allocated in this area has been utilized, and an additional amount of \$5.5 million is required to undertake payments under contractual agreements through awards made by the Central Tenders Board for public awareness and process review consultancies. These payments are payable during the period June—September, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, SEMP originally requested \$8.8 million, but in the last period it was allocated \$5 million. Its expenditure to date is \$4.9 million. The shortfall relative to the original request is \$3.8 million. The areas which are being covered by this are the school development programmes, process review consultancy and the Education Management Information System (EMIS).

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister in his budget speech also spoke of one of Government's major areas of focus being the infusion of information and communication technology in the curriculum of schools. In achieving this goal, the ministry has commenced the establishment of a dedicated Internet backbone for the education system and the implementation of an education management information system which is to be used in teaching delivery, management and school administration. We have begun to introduce computer laboratories and multimedia classrooms in primary schools and secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker, at the primary level, we have begun the primary school computerization project. The ministry has entered into a contract with a provider for the computerization of some 340 primary schools in the first phase of this project. Having completed this, the ministry will move on to the second phase where we will complete another 137 primary schools to ensure that all schools in Trinidad and Tobago are offered the same kinds of opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, this phase requires that physical infrastructure should be made ready for the deployment of computers. An assessment of the 137 schools which we plan to undertake computerization before the end of September indicates laboratories are ready in 20 schools, upgrade is necessary at 72 schools and computer laboratories must be constructed in another 45 schools.

The ministry proposes to undertake the upgrade in 72 schools at a cost of \$9.9 million in this financial year and construct computer rooms at 45 new schools in the new financial year. The amount required under the relevant item of expenditure, item 347—upgrading of facilities of the computerization of primary schools for this financial year—is \$9.9 million.

Mr. Speaker, under the teaching and learning strategies of the SEMP, the ministry is outfitting secondary schools with a range of information and computer technologies including computers, white board, Ebeam technology, as well as library material and resources and library detection systems. The original provision under this item was \$47 million and an additional amount of \$26.7 million is required to meet contractual obligations, in particular, payments are required on two new contracts as follows:

- the award of a contract for the amount of \$35.7 million for mobile laboratories in secondary schools of which 50 per cent is now payable; and
- it is expected that the award of a contract in the amount of \$23 million for supplemental library books will be made in June 2008 and 50 per cent is also payable before September 2008.

Mr. Speaker, I have highlighted some of the significant areas that have occasioned our request for additional funding from the Consolidated Fund in this financial year.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to assure you that the Ministry of Education's expenditure remains aligned to those areas of focus identified by the hon. Prime Minister in his budget statement of 2008, and these are: the Early Childhood Care and Education centres; the construction of primary schools; the computerization of primary schools and special schools; and the completion of the computerization of secondary schools.

In closing, we view the approval of additional funding as critical to the furtherance of ensuring that the revolutionizing of the Trinidad and Tobago education system continues, and in the words of the hon. Prime Minister, one that will strengthen the social fabric, deepen democracy and give our students the tools for success in today's world.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker and hon. distinguished Members of this House, I rise to contribute to this Bill on the variation of appropriation for fiscal year 2007/2008. We have seen that the Government is asking for an additional expenditure of \$3.45 billion, in addition to what was in the budget debate of approximately \$42 billion.

Mr. Speaker, this would amount to, as my colleague indicated earlier, more than \$45 billion for the financial year 2007/2008. In this context, it is worthwhile drawing some comparisons to what existed between 2003—2007 when yearly budget statements made by the hon. Prime Minister indicate that the Government was going to end up, not in any deficit, but with a positive balance at the end of each year.

From year to year, even though they have asked for a variation in the appropriation, the Government has found itself having to report on annual deficits on a yearly basis. For example, in 2003, the revenue was \$19.6 billion, and the actual expenditure was \$20.6 billion, a deficit of \$969 million. So, there was a deficit of revenue of \$4.9 billion. In 2004, the expenditure was \$23 billion; in 2005, \$30 billion; in 2006, \$39 billion and in 2007, \$41 billion.

3.30 p.m.

Every year there has been a deficit as far as the Government's expenditure is concerned. They have gone beyond what was budgeted and allocated to them, and have ended up with budget deficits from 2003—2007, ranging from 3 per cent to almost 8 per cent on an annual basis, and ranging from \$829 million to \$1.7 billion per year, during the period 2003—2007.

So, in their five-year period, this Government would have spent almost \$157 billion during this period of time, and the income generated to have this expenditure of \$63 billion came from the energy sector and the rest came from others. When you look at what is happening with the \$63 billion coming from the energy sector, you would see the Prime Minister has been speaking about diversification of the country's economic sector but nothing has really happened over the last five years.

The energy sector has continued to contribute but the two other sectors, the services sector has only contributed approximately 10 per cent per year and the manufacturing sector has been about 8 per cent. So, when the Prime Minister spoke about diversification in his budget speeches from year to year, he mentioned and gave a number of statements about expenditure and I want to quote from the 2008 budget document. He said:

“Over the six-year period, the recurrent expenditure amounted to \$125 billion...”

Wages and salaries...\$29 million; goods and services, \$17 billion; transfers to educational institutions, \$5.3 billion—that is UWI, UTT and GATE—to these institutions over a five-year period and I will want to discuss a bit of that subsequently.

Then there were current transfers to state enterprises and statutory bodies amounting to \$18.8 billion and the largest recipients were BWIA—and my colleague alluded to the fact about Caribbean Airlines—WASA and the Airports Authority. So, \$18.8 billion has been spent on current transfers to the state

enterprises and statutory bodies. We have been saying all along that a number of these statutory bodies have not been performing creditably and Government has had to give loans to these statutory authorities and write off significant debts; \$18.8 billion have been given to them over a five-year period.

In addition, the Government has stood security for a number of loans by these state sector companies, amounting to another \$18 billion. So, \$18 billion has been spent and the Government has had to stand another \$18 billion in writing off off-balance reporting in terms of contractual arrangements with these state enterprises and statutory boards and so on. So, \$36 billion have been spent basically by these statutory authorities and state enterprises, including the 15 special purpose companies.

We have spoken about the special purpose companies that have not had a procurement regime in place. Each one is operating individually with their own procurement regime. There are members on the tenders committee who are appointed by the board and they are board members themselves on these tenders committees. And when they sit in a tenders committee meeting they then approve certain tenders—sometimes three or four members on a tenders committee—and in the next moment they go into the boardroom wearing a director's hat and then approve the same tenders which they had approved before.

This is what is going on in a number of these special purpose companies and that is untenable. Last Friday, the Prime Minister indicated that when we spoke about these special purpose companies, we were speaking about \$36 billion in expenditure to state enterprises and special purpose companies. The Prime Minister indicated and agreed that these special purpose companies from 2003, when they were formed, were supposed to have a procurement regime, but five years later, a universal procurement regime has not been adopted for these 15 special purpose companies.

He indicated that each one of them has their individual tendering practices and procedures, but what was supposed to be the Government's comfort to the population—they said that they would have brought a procurement regime for all these 15 special purpose companies and it has not been done even five years later and we do not see them forthcoming.

UDeCott is just one of the companies under these special purpose companies. There are many others which we question how the money has been spent and how the money is being spent. I will give some examples. One, the Estate Management Business Development Company (EMBD); \$1.2 billion has been spent on the

development of former Caroni lands for building plots and housing plots, under the direction of Mr. Rao. Because of the inability to have transparency and accountability, nobody knows who gave these contracts ranging from \$45 million, sometimes to \$85 million to different people for the development; how they were selected; what tendering procedures took place. He was unable to give that type of information when he came to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee of Parliament, in a manner that showed that there was transparency and accountability; that is \$1.2 billion.

As a result, it seems as though the Government feels satisfied that he has not been able to do the job properly and has not given the country the accountability and transparency and it seems as though the Prime Minister was forced to remove him. Today we see on the newspaper that Mr. Noel Garcia has taken over the EMBD and he is going to be executive director of NAMDEVCO and then be a chairman of the two other companies including EMBD. So, we have indicated from our side, not only on the UDeCott matter but there are many other special purpose companies including EMBD we would like to see more transparency and accountability and we would like to see a financial statement and audit done on this company particularly.

The other company that we speak about is the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). I want to raise some matters on UTT here. UTT is one of the other special purpose companies and UTT has spent almost \$1.2 billion—and we are speaking about billions—over the last three or four years. As was indicated here in Parliament, I think the hon. Member for La Brea read into the *Hansard* that UTT is a private company and has not been incorporated by an Act of Parliament as a university like the University of the West Indies.

Here it is you have a private company spending \$1.2 billion of taxpayers money and has not been properly incorporated by an Act of Parliament; and the President or the provost, we do not know what position Mr. Ken Julien holds or whether he holds both positions—

Mr. Manning: He is President.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: He is President and provost? Okay.

The question is that \$1.2 billion has been spent by this institution as a private company. The President was called before the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee to answer some questions and he refused to come to answer these questions, because we asked the question: Why did he not come to answer these questions and why was he avoiding coming to answer these questions?

The other issue is that he sought legal senior counsel advice to see how he could beat the Integrity Commission, so that members of his board will not have to account to the Integrity Commission. He sought Senior Counsel Daly's advice and he was told that you increase the membership of the private members to the board of directors and therefore you will not have to account to the Integrity Commission. Therefore, he had sought to move away from the Integrity Commission.

Mr. Ramnath: And from parliamentary committees.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And from parliamentary oversight as well. So, he has failed to come before the parliamentary Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee; he has failed to come before the Integrity Commission, but yet still \$1.2 billion has been spent by UTT over a period of three or four years.

Mr. Speaker, as a party, as an alternate government, we have asked questions about UDeCott which the Prime Minister had to back down and appoint a commission of enquiry into UDeCott, but I have just enumerated the company of EMBD and I am now mentioning UTT.

In UTT, following a question that was asked in Parliament, the professors' salaries in UTT amount to almost \$100,000 per month, almost twice the salary of a full-time professor at the University of the West Indies. What is so different at the University of Trinidad and Tobago from the University of the West Indies, where in the University of the West Indies—[*Mr. Imbert stands*] Hold on, you will answer, Colm, I will give you a chance; I am sure it is probably not all that important yet. [*Laughter*]

So, Mr. Speaker, to become a professor at the University of the West Indies, you have to go through the ranks. You have to publish in international referred scientific journals; you will be appointed as a lecturer or senior lecturer. A lecturer is equivalent to assistant professor in the American system; a senior lecturer is equivalent to an associate professor and a full professor is a full professor. But to become a full professor at the University of the West Indies, my distinguished colleague from Diego Martin Central would tell you that you must publish a number of scientific articles in the international referred journal. We do not know what is happening with that university, everybody is being called a professor; everybody is getting beyond \$50,000 to \$100,000 per month and taxpayers' money is being spent.

Also, you ever heard that members of the staff are being given scholarships to pursue PhD degrees in a university when they are employed by the university? They have to take leave of absence from the university to get it, but UTT is giving scholarships to the members of staff to the tune of millions of dollars to go and do their PhDs while they are lecturing with the university.

3.45 p.m.

The other question is the question of accreditation at UTT. For many years these students have been through programmes, they do not know whether they are going to be accredited and at the end of it all sometimes they go through a three-year or four-year programme not knowing whether their programmes have been accredited, and therefore they are left in abeyance. It is only after they have gone through the programmes then they find that sometimes they get accreditation.

But there are a number of courses at the University of Trinidad and Tobago which still do not have an accreditation and what we find that the Government and people's money, \$1.2 billion, is being spent on an institution that is privately run by one person, whether he has a board or these are members of a board that has been hand selected and not running as a true university. There are students with O levels at the UTT. Have you ever heard about a university with students with O levels? A significant percentage of the students' enrolment at UTT are those with O levels.

Hon. Member: O levels?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: O levels.

Mr. Sharma: You sure you did not make a mistake with that?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am sure it is not a mistake. In addition, have you ever heard about any university that is worth the salt, except Western Pacific which calls you, writes you and gives you a degree by telephone or something, and they give you a PhD by fax. [*Laughter*]

This UTT has not been in existence for more than three or four years and they are awarding PhD degrees. The award of a PhD degree has to go through a number of processes; you have to be scholarly, and I am sure members opposite know you have to be very scholarly, you have to write your thesis properly and that PhD has to be peer reviewed by a number of professors, not only in the country but around the world. But UTT is spending taxpayers' money of \$1.2 billion in a short period of time, not accounting to Parliament, not accounting to PA(E)C, not accounting to the Integrity Commission, doing everything willy-nilly as they want to do.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we see that the UTT is going into the thing now of initiative cardiovascular services. The University of the West Indies has scholars; professors in medicine with tremendous skills and ability in cardiovascular services and the ability to deal with cardiac services throughout Trinidad and Tobago, but we see that the UTT is now embarking upon cardiac services, heart surgery.

Mr. Sharma: O level people doing that?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I have seen here in the response to the question that we asked the hon. Minister of Finance and her response on the cardiovascular and diabetic services which are to be undertaken in conjunction with the Johns Hopkins University are not yet operational. This is not yet operational—the cardiovascular and diabetic services—but here it is we are being asked to approve \$59.3 million—

Hon. Member: Additional.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—additional, and when I examined the accounts here I found that on page 2 of her document in response as Minister of Finance, under Head: 28; they have it under Ministry of Health, not UTT. I do not know who they are trying to fool, it is under Ministry of Health—cardiovascular services initiative, but it is under UTT. Is UTT under the Ministry of Health or is it under the Ministry Science, Technology and Tertiary Education? They seem to be confused as to where UTT really lies. I do not know whether they are deliberately trying to fool us and to make it appear that cardiovascular services is under the Ministry of Health, but the Ministry of Health has nothing to do with the cardiovascular services. Do you know how much money has been budgeted for cardiovascular services? Three hundred and twenty five million dollars has been budgeted for it already and they are asking for \$59 million more, for a total of \$393 million for cardiovascular services under UTT. Which professor of medicine who is in UTT knows how to deal with cardiovascular services?

Hon. Member: Ken Julien.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And you have an expenditure of \$393 million under UTT with a Johns Hopkins University programme.

Hon. Member: That is Dr. Julien.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: That is a joint thing between Ken Julien himself, and Johns Hopkins University. There seems to be a private arrangement somewhere between both of them that the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] have to pay almost \$393 million for what is “so called” cardiovascular services, and by her own admission, the Minister of Finance is saying, and I just want to quote her again:

Hon. Member: She does not like that, she does not like it.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: “Cardiovascular and diabetic services which are to be undertaken in conjunction with the Johns Hopkins University are not yet operational.”

So, Mr. Speaker, this country is being asked to give \$393 million and they are asking for more money on a programme that has not even started—that has become operational—and they are trying to put it under UTT which has no clinical medical competence and ability.

Mr. Sharma: “Ah”, that is the point. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: What is the UTT doing with cardiovascular services? What are they doing with cardiovascular services?

Hon. Member: Imbert should go there.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And they say with respect to the cardiovascular part of the project, the infrastructure has been put in place at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. The infrastructure includes cardiac catheterization laboratories and other associated works. Infrastructural works with respect to diabetic services are expected to start shortly. So, that money has been spent already, they are asking for more and nothing has been started yet. That comes under UTT, and they are trying to fool the population saying it is coming under the Ministry of Health.

The question we asked, the Prime Minister had indicated under diabetic services that they are talking about—the Prime Minister in his budget statement indicated that they would give out glucometers to diabetic patients who are on insulin. Do you know where that has reached? Imagine Johns Hopkins University is saying that they are working with the UTT on diabetic services, when the University of the West Indies and Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and the consultants of the San Fernando General Hospital and Port of Spain and throughout the country are experts on diabetes and hypertension around the world, but you are giving it to somebody in UTT who does not have a clue about the treatment and management of cardiovascular services and diabetic services. [*Interruption*] They are spending \$393 million of our money.

The Minister of Finance has responded to the question that the Member for Princes Town North asked: “Were glucometers and diabetic testing strips supplied to the population as promised in the 2008 budget?” Her response was: “Nipdec has recently awarded the contracts for the supply of the glucometers and testing strips to two companies, and the ministry intends to launch the service by the end of June 2008.” The Prime Minister made a statement in his September budget speech of 2007/2008, and they are now coming to say that in nine months, 10 months later they will do it by June. Based on their track record and their performance they have failed miserably in implementation. [*Desk thumping*]

Do you expect that this country and the people who are diabetics will get the type of treatment that they will ever see the light of day for the glucometer testing?

Mr. Sharma: Which company was awarded, SuperPharm?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Bryden PI and Marketing and Distribution. [*Interruption*] With respect to the question asked by the Member for Caroni Central; in the response by the Minister of Finance, she said: “The Johns Hopkins University has had discussions with the University of the West Indies as it relates to the project. Pilot projects for the diabetes initiatives are expected to be executed at two regional health authorities.”

The management of diabetes throughout the country is done by clinicians. The Ministry of Health has a responsibility to educate this population and spend that same money educating the population on the prevention of diabetes and the management of diabetes. This Government has a responsibility to give each diabetic patient in Trinidad and Tobago testing apparatus and the glucometer strips, if you really want to talk about management. [*Desk thumping*] So, this \$393 million that has been almost spent already and nothing is operational—

The Ministry of Health should launch a massive educational programme in educating the population about their diet—one million bottles of soft drink consumed on a daily basis, that is about 400 calories per day, and some patients have three bottles of soft drink, and they say, “Doctor, I doh eat”. That is giving rise to obesity, and some of these patients have a genetic predisposition and therefore they become diabetic.

The Ministry of Health should be using this type of money in educating the population, watch your diet, watch your exercise, and then you have prevention of diabetes, make sure you exercise, you diet properly, so that at the end of it all you may be able to reduce the incidence of diabetes in Trinidad and Tobago. If it is detected, it has to be managed properly. Even when it is detected, they tell you go to the CDAP programme, get the drugs to manage the diabetes and hypertension, and the drugs are of no use whatsoever. Patients with diabetes become worse; patients with hypertension become worse, and both patients end up with strokes, they end up with heart disease, they end up with renal failure and they end up with amputation; a combination of both diabetes and hypertension giving rise to these. All the Ministry of Health has to do, take some of this money and have massive education programmes throughout Trinidad and Tobago, on both the radio and the television, educating the population on these two most important diseases and then the prevention of cancer or early detection of cancer, which is another discussion.

So, when this Government comes to ask for \$59 million more in addition to the \$300-plus million which they say they have spent, it is a shame and a national disgrace that we have to sit down. Then as my colleague, the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine indicated—

Hon. Member: That was a brilliant speech.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—we had to sit down and discuss this in 35 minutes with 59 heads of expenditure and expect that we would sit down and be happy about it. How could you tell the population that you want to discuss the further expenditure of \$3.5 billion in addition to the \$42 billion that you have had already, and you want to discuss that in 30/35 minutes and give answers.

Today we come here now and we see that your answers are not worth anything at all.

Dr. Moonilal: Where is the PRO of the party?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So that brings me to the whole question of health as I embarked on this a while ago on cardiovascular and diabetes.

During our period of time, hon. Prime Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, our budget for health during the six years that we were in government amounted to \$7 billion dollars. In your six years, you have spent almost \$15 billion, and I am sure you, Mr. Prime Minister, with a new team, having recognized that you have had two failed Ministers of Health—

Dr. Moonilal: Imbert was one, you know.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—well, the Member for Diego Martin North/East is one of the Ministers whom he removed after two years. Because you realized that he had not been able to deal with it.

I would like to advise you, hon. Prime Minister before you allocate somebody to health; health is one of the most important ministries in this country today. Previous governments have had—while you have been in Parliament for—

Dr. Moonilal: For 100 years.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—37 years. I do not know how you could manage that. If I am here for 37 months I might be tired. [*Laughter*] You are 37 years here—

Mr. Manning: You come here and see if you will get tired? [*Laughter*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am never tired. I have an insatiable appetite to work [*Interruption*] and I could combine so many things in one day and I am sure you will agree with me on that.

Hon. Member: Yes, yes.

Dr. Moonilal: I am sure the Prime Minister could—[*Inaudible*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: You combine so many things but I am sure that you would recognize that many of us on this side are quite capable of doing. [*Crosstalk*] Give us the opportunity.

4.00 p.m.

Why do you not step down and give us the opportunity, and we will show you how much smart work we could do on this side. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: I would be very much prepared to accede to the request of the hon. Member for Caroni East, if he would tell me when I step down who would replace me. Is it going to be the Member for Tabaquite, the Member for Couva North, the Member for Chaguanas West or the Member for Siparia? Would you let me know, please? [*Laughter*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The Member for Diego Martin West; he is sitting on our side already.

Hon. Members: Diego Martin West; somebody from on this side! [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Watch it; you never know. You know; you have been in it for 37 years; politics is a variable thing; it is fluid and dynamic. [*Crosstalk*] You may have to give way to us before that.

Prime Minister, the advice I was giving to you is that to understand the health sector takes years. That is why the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East was unable to do anything within the two-year period, because it would have taken him two years to learn about the health sector.

When Minister Rahael came in, poor thing, he found himself in tremendous difficulties because he did not know where to start. He was badly advised; he started to look at tertiary services: knee and hip replacements and kidney transplants, when there is the real basic thing in health care.

You have 105 health centres in Trinidad and Tobago; from that you have the district health facilities and from that you move to the hospitals. So the health care centres are primary health care; the district health care facilities are intermediate—between that and secondary—secondary is the hospitals. From the hospitals you move to tertiary health care where you do kidney transplants, hip replacement, heart surgery and so on.

Sen. Narace is a nice guy, but he is not in a position to effect anything in health care. That is why, hon. Prime Minister, for six years your Government has been floundering in the health sector and you will continue to flounder. Innocent patients will continue to lose their lives on a daily basis, because of poor management. [*Crosstalk*]

There are many persons around the world with good health care management expertise. Unfortunately, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) was supposed to train persons in health care management. We have a deficit of health care managers in Trinidad and Tobago. This is one of the reasons the hospitals have not been able to work well, because of a lack of accountability and because the managers are not held responsible. But that is a different situation.

If you build these 105 health care centres, staff them properly with doctors on a day-to-day basis, have some of them working up to 8.00 in the evening and pharmacies working in them, you would find that persons would not have to go to the hospitals.

You promised that you would build six district health facilities; hon. Prime Minister, you have not built one yet. We built two and a half during the time we were there within the last three and a half years, because we inherited a PNM board from 1994—1997. We only had three and a half years to deal with the health sector. If you build these six district health facilities, like the Couva District Health Facility, where patients can go for ultrasounds, blood tests, ECGs, et cetera, you would find that patients who go to the hospitals and overcrowd them, would not have to go there. They could be taken care of at the district health facilities. I would advise that the hon. Prime Minister take heed of this. We are giving you free advice: accelerate the development and construction of the six district health facilities and you would find there would be a difference in the hospitals.

You promised a burns unit and an intensive care unit at the San Fernando General Hospital. You promised construction of the Point Fortin Hospital. You also promised to complete the Scarborough Hospital. You promised to have the cancer centre going from as early as 2002. I feel very sorry that you probably do not have competent persons around you and a competent government to effect your thinking and what you have promised from year to year. For six years you promised all these things I am speaking about, and yet still nothing has been accomplished. You have the Scarborough Hospital in a quagmire; over \$100 million has been spent. Persons are talking about refurbishing the old Scarborough Hospital.

You spent \$100 million on the National Cancer Centre, and only the foundation has been built. While that has been happening over seven years, patients are waiting for three months at the Cancer Centre for radiotherapy treatment, and are dying with their cancers. Do you know, Prime Minister, that there are persons drawing salaries of \$150,000 per month for the last two years; some are drawing salaries of \$60,000 and \$70,000 a month at the National Cancer Centre, and there is no cancer centre at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex? You need to do some investigations. We are not going to press you for another commission of enquiry into the health sector. You appointed a commission of enquiry into the health sector. All this money, the \$45 billion—we know that putting money into health is like putting money through an open bucket; at the end, it falls out. The real thing about health is management.

The Commission of Enquiry by Gladys Gafoor made almost 30-something recommendations, starting from page 33 and moving to page 49. There are critical recommendations in the report of the Commission of Enquiry; a whole heap of things. I do not need to reiterate them. Prime Minister, you promised when this was laid before Parliament that you would have appointed a team—and you did—that would do the work on the recommendations and report back to Parliament in a month. Unfortunately, you have not told the population what has happened to it, and where the report is that you promised from the team you spoke about which would report back to the Parliament.

In addition to that, the Minister of Health coming in and knowing that there were significant recommendations after three years of work by the Gladys Gafoor Commission, went about saying that he had a 100-day plan. He went about setting up a 100-day plan. You must ask him whether his 100-day plan is a 100-day trip around the world, because he is more out of the country than in. Today we have a matter on the adjournment and he is not here. You have to take this thing seriously, because lives are being lost, hon. Prime Minister.

We have told you, time and time again, and Members of the Government know it, that patients are dying on trolleys in the hospital. This morning I did surgery, and two of my colleagues told me after, "Tim, why do you not speak about this?" Do you know that a patient went into the Mount Hope Hospital with a heart attack, and spent three days on a trolley; he could not be admitted on to the ward. The patient died of a heart attack.

Another anesthetist told me that he had to do a case last night at the Community Hospital; a patient transferred from the EWMSC who had a hernia. It was an old man of 60 years, who was afraid to go for the operation. The hernia became strangulated. *[Interrupted]*

Mr. Manning: How old was he?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: He was 60 years; he was young; 60 years young. *[Laughter]* I am in my sixties as well; but good sixties. *[Laughter]*

So here it is a gentleman with a strangulated hernia being sent to the Mount Hope Hospital. He wanted to go to the Sangre Grande Hospital, but they advised him not to go there, but to go to Mount Hope Hospital where they would operate on him right away. He went to Mount Hope and was kept on the ward from Thursday to Saturday; no surgery was done on him. He ended up at the Community Hospital as a transfer from the Mount Hope Hospital, and one of my colleagues had to reset almost three feet of gangrenous bowel, because of the blood supply to the bowel. He is critical now, fighting for survival, because of the inability at the hospital.

I want to bring to your attention and the attention of this country a question. How much money has been spent on the transfer of cases from public to private institutions? The answer was given to us some time ago; it came to almost \$18 million in a two-year period, 2006/2007; for taking care of patients from public institutions in private institutions. That means that public institutions have fallen down tremendously. They are not able to take care of their patients, and persons have lost confidence in them. That \$18 million does not include the cost to the doctors, which is possibly almost the same thing again. In two years you have had to spend, as a government, close to \$160 million. Community Hospital alone, from the transfer of patients, received \$25 million.

Mr. Speaker, \$160 million being spent in private institutions, when that money could have been put to proper use in the public institutions to improve the quality of service there. That could prevent patients from dying on trolleys. That would prevent patients from falling out of beds and dying on the floor. There was a 23-year-old guy who had a kidney transplant, and a few hours after the surgery he dropped on the floor and died. Lives are too cheap in Trinidad and Tobago.

I am available to give help to any one of my colleagues at any time; not in terms of gynaecology. Remember I was a general doctor before gynaecology. *[Laughter]* I teach young doctors every day. As a doctor I pain, with 34 years experience in medicine; as Mr. Maharaj SC has almost 30-something years experience in law; the Prime Minister has 37 years experience in politics. All my colleagues on both sides are very experienced; you are professionals in your own way.

It would pain you to know that this thing is happening; your own family could die in a split second before your eyes. I have a sister-in-law who is a vegetable today, because of bad care at an institution. We are falling down too in this country today. I thought it was important to make some recommendations on the health sector in terms of expenditure. Instead of asking for \$3.5 billion to spend here, there and everywhere, utilize some of that money properly; although the health sector has enough money already.

We can train almost 1,000 nurses in Trinidad and Tobago on a yearly basis, so that in any three-year period, we could have 3,000 nurses in the health system. We can also have nursing assistants. Why are we training only 300 or 400 nurses per year when we could train, at least, 1,000 nurses per year?

Why are we letting our good doctors from the University of the West Indies leave Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent of the medical doctors who qualify at our university, leave Trinidad and Tobago because they are not offered jobs by the Regional Health Authorities. We have to bring doctors from other countries, because we are not taking care of our own. [*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Prime Minister and Members on both sides for allowing me a further 30 minutes.

The hon. Member for Tunapuna, the Minister of Education, spoke about the education system. I thought it was important to respond to that.

When Mr. Manning's administration took over, from 1991—1995, 200 of the best educators in Trinidad and Tobago came together to bring about a White Paper on education reform. That reform was published in 1993 for a 10-year period; it was called the White Paper on Education. I am sure most of you would have probably read it. The main thematic aspect of that, one of the most important, was that for a 10-year period, 1993—2003, to remove altogether this question of de-shifting the junior secondary schools.

4.15 p.m.

That created most of the problems for years because these junior secondary school students, you had one group going in the morning and the other group in

the evening and, therefore, there are so many students being left out of the system without any care and attention, and this is where most of the students fail to get passes. There are 70 per cent of students in the secondary education that fail to get a full pass in the government secondary schools and most of that came from the junior secondary schools.

Now you have been asking for \$500 million in the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) programme for tertiary level education. What is the use for spending all that amount of money for tertiary level education? Nothing is wrong with that for those who have reached that level now, give them the education because nobody must be left behind, but why are you spending \$500 million when the students from early childhood to tertiary level are not being taken care of?

It is unfortunate that your Government said that it will build 600 Early Childhood Education Centres by the year 2010. During six years you built only seven centres and during our six years we built over 44 Early Childhood Education Centres and at a cost of \$200,000 for one, and you are building yours at \$2 million each.

[Miss E. Le Gendre rises]

I only have a few minutes left. So you say you were going to build 600 Early Childhood Education Centres by 2010 and by 2008 you built only 20 or 21.

Mr. Speaker, they said that they built so many secondary schools and we cannot see them. We do not know where they are built. I do not know whether they are constructed under the Educational Facilities Management Unit which is another of the special purpose companies spending almost \$800 million without any proper tendering procedures, accountability and transparency.

Miss Le Gendre: Could the hon. Member please give way?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: All right.

Miss Le Gendre: Thank you very much, Member for Caroni East. Mr. Speaker, I rise to correct a number of inaccuracies presented by the Member for Caroni East when he speaks of a lack of activities in the area of Early Childhood Care and Education and in the building of secondary schools.

Certainly in the course of a number of questions in this House, the hon. Member should know by now that the deshifting will be concluded at the end of this year, the building of education centres began in 2005, we have a clear programme moving forward, the schools are being opened on a weekly basis so I really do not understand the Member's position.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I allowed you to free your heart and your mind, but it really did not make any sense whatsoever. It is one of these repetitions of promises and promises. We have the documentation of promises and you are my friend so I would not deal with you severely yet. The former Minister of Education made some promises, she meant well, but was unable to deliver as promised.

If this Government was responsible and built these senior secondary schools and was able to deshift the students from the junior secondary schools, we would have complimented them. But today almost 15 junior secondary schools still have to be deshifted and this is where the problem in the education sector comes out as far as the secondary level. At the primary level when 30 to 40 per cent of the students who are writing the SEA examination, are unable to get a pass, then something is radically wrong.

We need more training at the Early Childhood Education Centres, we need to expedite the construction of these schools, equip them properly, bring the teachers and we need to look at the primary school education with literacy and numeracy and at the secondary schools in terms of the education system.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Prime Minister and Members on the other side, you have a number of school principals who are in acting positions; there are a number of vice-principals who are in acting positions; there are no school supervisors and all this information can be found in a report of the joint select committee looking at the Teaching Service Commission and the education system. I do not have it now but the information can be found there. You need to look at all these things in a holistic manner rather than talking about building schools and not doing anything.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with something on the energy area. The hon. Prime Minister in his 2008 Budget Statement said:

“Mr. Speaker, as is customary in our Budget presentation I would like to review the Government’s plans and policies for our main productive sectors. I wish to begin with energy.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the energy sector has been the main engine of growth in the Trinidad and Tobago economy. Since the early 1990s the expansion and diversification of the energy sector have propelled the overall growth and increased the resilience of our economy.”

He went on to say on page 13 of his budget speech:

“As a result a lot of exploration is now taking place both on land and in marine areas.

Four Rigs are now engaged in exploratory drilling and 16 wells are carded to be drilled in the last quarter of 2007 and in 2008. Earlier this year B.P and EOG drilled a deep exploration well—Ibis Deep to 19,000 feet at a cost of US \$80 million or some TT \$500 million which did not discover any new reserves.”

Mr. Speaker, today in the midst of a booming economy, the richest this country has ever been and while the Prime Minister is boasting that the PNM Government has so much experience, but 41 years it has governed this country and never been able to get it right.

When the Prime Minister boasted about the good work of tsar, Mr. Ken Julien, and proudly said the dependence on this sector was benefiting this country well today, hon. Prime Minister, I want you to know that we know the truth about the oil and gas sectors and it is frightening.

Do you remember the Ryder Scott Report that you all tried to hide from the population last year? A report commissioned by your own energy ministry to analyze the state of the country’s resources showed that the oil and gas reserves will be depleted by 2015 and then it will be hell to catch. Today I want this Parliament to know that it is already coming to pass.

Just last week, British Petroleum President, Robert Riley announced retrenchment of several workers, job cuts at bpTT.

Mr. Manning: How many?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: One hundred and fifty, around there. He said it was part of the company’s global cutbacks, but that is only part of the story. The country does not know, and I think it is a secret that the BHP Billiton has also been cutting back on staff, much retrenchment is going on and they only have skeleton staff in Trinidad and Tobago right now, minimal staff to just do administrative work. I am sure my colleague, the Member for Couva South would endorse this.

These two major companies along with British Gas and Repsol—the Prime Minister knows this, he is smiling—have not been able to find any oil and gas in all their explorations throughout the country. My information is that they have been scouring the East, West, North and South coasts of the country but have not been able to find any gas or oil reserves. Ryder Scott is coming to pass. I am told that they have been told by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries that they should dig deeper and must be careful that they do not go into Venezuelan waters.

Mr. Manning: You do not dig for oil.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: For gas. We understand that these companies have approached the Government—not for the first time of course—to spend millions and millions of dollars to fund these underwater explorations. My information is that the PNM Government is now very close to agreeing to spend millions of taxpayers' money to fund these explorations to save face.

[The Prime Minister rises]

Let me make a few more statements and you will respond. I call upon you and this House to give us the true state of affairs as far as the oil and gas reserves go. Tell us how you intend to attract foreign companies and keep those that are currently here when they are all on the verge of stopping further explorations because we have no more reserves.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that this country cannot break on the global trademark when you are trying to bring investors into Trinidad and Tobago because China and India economic explosions have made this impossible. So it is important for the hon. Prime Minister to tell this country what is happening in the energy sector.

You have the Chairman of the National Gas Company's seat vacant for eight months, you do not have any board members on the National Gas Company and NEC. The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago consolidated financial statements for the year 2006/2007 assets are \$18 billion and they are two of the companies under the special purpose companies. Yes, hon. Prime Minister, they are two of the special purpose companies, it is on the documentation. Look to see what your special purpose companies are. They have assets of \$18 billion and yet they do not have a chairman on the board; they have to put shift chairmen and are spending billions of dollars and asking the country to spend more on offshore exploration and do not want to tell the country what is the price of gas.

What are you giving Alutrint and the other companies for gas that are operating in Trinidad? When I return, I will give way to the hon. Prime Minister. Are you sure you do not want to answer now? So the point here is that we have so much of these state enterprises conducting business without that procurement regime, without the transparency and accountability and we find ourselves having to spend billions of dollars. One year from a \$26 then to \$34 billion budget, then to a \$45 billion budget in 2007/2008. What will it be for 2008/2009?

When you predicated the price of oil at \$45 based on your budget assessment and before that, it was \$33 and the price of oil then was about \$80 per barrel, the price now is \$120 on the world market, what are you going to predicate the price

of oil now in your next budget? Is it going to be \$65? And is it necessary to predicate the price of oil which keeps going higher and higher to afford you more and more opportunities, to have more and more money to spend worse and worse?

Hon. Prime Minister, you really have to tell this country why you are choosing that route of massive expenditure from year to year. Because the price of oil is going up, you feel that you must spend more and more money. You have the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, \$67 billion was obtained from the energy sector, but yet the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund only had \$11 billion put into it.

Mr. Speaker, so when the hon. Minister of Finance said they had gotten \$2.6 billion because of the increase in the price of oil and gas, that is fine, but not because you have received this money of \$2.6 billion and have had better taxation system, \$6 billion, that you must spend it willy-nilly.

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

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I mentioned to the Government, particularly the Prime Minister, who is head of the Government, that there are 54 statutory boards and similar bodies, 35 state enterprises and 15 special purpose companies that need strict monitoring and evaluation, with reference to expenditure, policy and programmes. In all of these, there is the absence of a comprehensive, transparent procurement regime, which it is hoped that the hon. Prime Minister will implement as quickly as possible.

In those, there is the recipe for large-scale theft and grand corruption. Many of those are being perceived as rogue enterprises where there exists large-scale corruption. That procurement regime must not be a government of e-auction procurement transparency. The Minister in the Ministry of Finance has fallen short because this is not the type of thing expected in terms of transparency and accountability.

This evening, I close by quoting some of the words from the hon. Prime Minister in his budget contribution 2008, when he ended his statement.

“And so, with this Budget, like with everything else we have done, we invite the judgment of the people. This administration is not afraid of judgment, either here or in the hereafter...”

Mr. Prime Minister, I am sure that the judgment of the people on your expenditure of this \$42 billion and now that you are asking for another \$3.5 billion will be condemnatory and damning towards your performance in the expenditure of this \$45.5 billion. You will have a lot to answer because the voice of the people is saying that you have not expended this money properly.

The hon. Prime Minister said:

“Our main concern as servants of God and the people, is the interest of the present and future generations of Trinidad and Tobago.”

The future generations of Trinidad and Tobago are telling you now that after \$200 billion in expenditure for a six-year period and now in 2007/2008, another \$45 billion, they want to see prudent management of all the financial resources this country has available to it because of the windfall in the price of gas and oil.

We look, as an alternate government, to your putting together sound policies and programmes, particularly financial, in all these state enterprises and statutory boards so that the country will benefit from the money it has available at the moment.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Member for Caroni East is not a neophyte in terms of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, but certainly one in terms of parliamentary conduct and protocol. It is simply bad manners when someone asks him to give way to clarify a matter for him to be so churlish and rude. I advise him to cease and desist from that practice.

One of the things that bothers me about the Member for Caroni East is that either he has severe amnesia, is politically deceitful or is illiterate. The Member was the chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority. I heard him for some time talking about members of boards of state enterprises and statutory authorities sitting on tenders committees and then as members of the board and reviewing and examining recommendations from these committee. He made a song, dance and hullabaloo about it for some time now; carrying on as if it were evidence of some gross impropriety.

I have with me the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago, Chap. 29:05. I refer to the Regional Health Authorities (Contracting for Goods and Services) Regulations, which most certainly was in force when the Member was chairman of the North West RHA. I have looked at it and wondered whether it is political deceitfulness, illiteracy or amnesia. I have come to the conclusion that it is illiteracy. He is politically illiterate.

I shall read clause 4 of the regulations:

- “(1) A Board may establish a Tenders Committee for the purpose of inviting, considering, accepting or rejecting offers in excess of fifty thousand dollars for the supply of goods or the undertaking of works or services necessary for carrying out the objects of the Authority...
- (2) The Tenders Committee established by a Board...shall comprise seven members consisting of:
 - (a) the Deputy Chairman of the Board”—which is a board member; at least the last time I checked—
 - “(b) two other members of the Board;
 - (c) the Chief Executive Officer;
 - (d) two employees of the Authority; and
 - (e) such other person appointed by the Board.”

That is English.

The hon. Member for Caroni East presided over a regional health authority at least for five years, where the tenders committee was chaired by the deputy chairman of the board and had two other members of the board on it. For months and years this tenders committee, comprised of board members, reported to the board of which he was the chairman and the deputy chairman and the other members, who sat on the tenders committee, reviewed and deliberated on the recommendation from the tenders committee with respect to the acquisition of goods and services.

I say it is political illiteracy because the Member must have presided over hundreds of his own tenders committee, comprising three members of his own board who made recommendations and sat with him in the boardroom and reviewed those recommendations. It is shameful for the Member to come to this House and state such rubbish. Little school children are listening to this foolishness and this pious sanctimonious, self-righteous MP is pontificating on why it is wrong for boards of state enterprises to sit on tenders committees and to review recommendations in this self-righteous pompous way. Little children have to listen to this garbage. Arrant nonsense! [*Desk thumping*] Political deceitfulness! Illiteracy! It can only be that. Duplicitous is a good word.

I also have to sit and listen to the Member for Caroni East who waged war against the Member for Caroni Central for five years. He wanted his job. I happen

to know that when the Member for Caroni East was chairman of the North West RHA, he would come into meetings in the Ministry of Health and when the Member for Caroni Central, as Minister of Health, would preside and give directions, as he was entitled to do, the Member for Caroni East would say he is not listening to him; that he would only answer to the Prime Minister. I have to listen to this rubbish, when the history of that period is well known.

The Member for Caroni East tells us that the solution to the prevalence of diabetes in this country is public education. What did he do in the six years the UNC was in power? How many education programmes did he run? None! But he will come here and talk this garbage. It pains me to listen to this foolishness.

What happened to the health sector when the hon. Member for Caroni East was chairman of the RHA? It went downhill. Member for Tabaquite, I read the *Hansard*. There was a debate some time ago where I was speaking about the disappearance of money at the North West RHA, when the Member for Caroni East was the chairman. He denied it and I checked the *Hansard* and no less a person than the Member for Tabaquite came into this Parliament and reported the matter in his capacity as Attorney General. Money had gone missing under the chairmanship of the Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I stand on Standing Order 36(5). The Member is trying to—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Two Members cannot stand. Member for Diego Martin North/East, will you clarify that point? The Member said that he can give particulars of the point.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is a matter of record.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Deputy Speaker, you will remember that the Member for Tabaquite, the Opposition Chief Whip stood and indicated that if he has to go deeper—you will have to give him the opportunity.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am on my legs. On that occasion, I ruled that the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East not proceed. If, on this occasion, he indicates that he can properly clarify and prove what he is saying, I will allow it. If I am not satisfied, I will stop him.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is in the *Hansard*. The Member for Couva South at the time also reported the now Member for Oropouche East. That is in the *Hansard*. As the hon. Prime Minister is fond of saying: "Hurry dog eat raw meat." Do they want me to bring the *Hansard*? I will. I can see Madam Deputy Speaker, that they want the verbatim record. We will deal with them before the debate ends tonight.

We have heard about leaks at the level of CXC, I think it has been going on for a while. There are certain Members whose qualifications I am concerned about. The hon. Member for Caroni East made a statement that the President of UTT is earning \$100,000 a month. That is not true. It is much less than that. In addition, I have to wonder about the qualifications of hon. Members opposite, when they cannot tell that the highest position in the University of Trinidad and Tobago is the President. The equivalent post in the University of the West Indies, as the hon. Members should know, is the Vice Chancellor. The highest executive position, the administrative position, within the University of the West Indies is the Vice Chancellor.

5.15 p.m.

Below the vice chancellor is the principal and there are the various pro vice chancellors in the various campuses. Below that there are the deans of the faculties and below that are the professors. It is politically disingenuous and duplicitous of the Member for Caroni East to attempt to equate the President of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, who is equivalent to the Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, in terms of salary, to an ordinary professor at the University of the West Indies. The salary of the Principal and the salary of the Pro Vice Chancellors at UWI is in excess of \$100,000. I can tell you that here today. The persons at the University of Trinidad and Tobago earn far less than the equivalent positions of the persons at UWI. The hon. Member knows that. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: Even the Prime Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: It bothers me that you know that the equivalent position is vice chancellor, but you want to compare the President of UTT to an ordinary professor at UWI. That is duplicitous and politically deceitful. Little children are listening to this nonsense. Some of them would be fooled, because they do not know any better and would not expect an hon. Member to be talking this nonsense. They would not expect it. It is necessary for me to get up and point out the kind of duplicity that we have to deal with in this Parliament.

The President of UTT gets less than the Principal of UWI, St. Augustine Campus, less not more, and he is in a higher position, not a lower position. He also taught the principal. Absurd! This is what I have to listen to? I have to wonder about the qualifications of hon. Members opposite. He is telling me about accreditation. Is UWI accredited, yes or no?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Hon. C. Imbert: By whom? *[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Deputy Speaker—

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not giving way. It is a rhetorical question. This is the illiteracy I am talking about. It is a rhetorical question. If you want to know what a rhetorical question is, consult the dictionary. I, as Minister of Health, when the medical degree at UWI was discredited by the Greater Medical Council of the United Kingdom—in order to protect graduates of the UWI, St. Augustine from being unemployable because the law at the time required that in order to become a doctor in Trinidad and Tobago, your degree had to be recognized by the Greater Medical Council. The Greater Medical Council of the United Kingdom decided that they would no longer recognize the medical degree at UWI. [*Interruption*] I am not giving way to you. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Deputy Speaker, I stand on a point of order. He is giving erroneous statements to the House. He is misleading the House. I would like to correct the hon. Member. The University of the West Indies has always been recognized in the medical graduate programme, by the General Medical Council of Great Britain. When the European Community and the others came into being, the General Medical Council of Great Britain indicated that they will no longer recognize UWI, because it was only able to recognize European Union countries. Then UWI sought to have that corrected. At all times and for all practical purposes, UWI has always been recognized by the General Medical Council of Great Britain.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I gave way to you, not to him. I will not give way to you again. What he has just uttered is an untruth. It is an untruth. The Greater Medical Council does not recognize the medical degree at UWI. It does not recognize it because the Greater Medical Council decided to discredit UWI. I had to come in this Parliament, as Minister of Health, and change the schedule of universities in the Medical Professions Act to allow doctors graduating from UWI to be employed as doctors in this country. To this day the Greater Medical Council of the United Kingdom does not accredit a UWI medical degree. The Member for Caroni East could jump high and low, he knows that is the fact.

In addition, it is also well known. The Member for Caroni East is getting a bit jumpy. Now that UTT has started to enter the field of medicine, it is bothering you. You are getting worried because it is all about turf. The University of Trinidad and Tobago has partnered with John Hopkins University. The Member for Caroni East would try to fool uninformed people, but those who have some knowledge about medicine will know about the prestige and reputation of John Hopkins University. Since the University of Trinidad and Tobago is partnering

with one of the most prestigious and most recognized medical institutions in the world, it is bothering the Member for Caroni East, because once the medical programmes begin at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the stranglehold that the Member for Caroni East and his cronies have on medical education in this country may soon be a thing of the past. That is the problem. *[Interruption]* You could say what you want, you have a URP job at Petrotrin. You get paid and you do not go to work.

Let me deal now with the Member for Princes Town North. *[Interruption]* You cannot deny that you have a URP job. You know that is the truth. Let me deal with the Member for Princes Town North. Last Friday, I had to listen to the Member for Princes Town North when he got up and made the most scandalous claim that the Joint Select Committee of Parliament that he chaired never had any meetings, discussions; it never happened and that there was no committee. I had to stand here. Members of the press actually believed that he was speaking the truth. It was a colossal untruth. The hon. Member for San Fernando East exposed the duplicity of the Member for Princes Town North by reading out the verbatim notes of the First Meeting of the Joint Select Committee to enquire into Municipal Corporations and other Government bodies, chaired by the hon. Member for Princes Town North. *[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: You would force me to speak.

Hon. C. Imbert: In the same sitting—The Member for Princes Town North does not have the common decency to get up and apologize for misleading the House. *[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: I would deal with you.

Hon. C. Imbert: He does not have the courtesy and decency to let the population know that he had uttered an untruth.

Mr. S. Panday: “Wajang”, I would deal with you.

Hon. C. Imbert: You could say what you want, but you know what I am saying is the truth.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member—

Mr. S. Panday: I apologize.

Hon. C. Imbert: *[Interruption]* That is okay. We would see if you would get an increase in your URP pay just now. You are a URP worker.

Who told him not to give way? What also bothers me—“Ah tell him ah go wet him”—is the financial illiteracy of the Member for Caroni East. He is not just illiterate, in terms of accreditation and knowledge about universities, neither is he illiterate about the functioning of boards of directors and tenders committee, his illiteracy knows no boundaries.

Let us deal with your financial illiteracy now. If you had listened to the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, you would have understood what we are about today. We are not being profligate. We are not engaging in squandermania, profligate, profligate, whatever. Whether it is American or English, you know what I mean. We are not being profligate, if you want to be English. *[Interruption]* No problem. What the hon. Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara told the hon. Member for Caroni East—*[Interruption]* “Stick break in his ears. He cyah hear. He have ah hearing problem.” He is hearing impaired. The hon. Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara indicated that because of larger than expected collections from companies, there has been an increase in revenue.

Let me read out what has happened. Based on the midyear review, revenue is projected to grow to \$46.6 billion. That is revenue, not expenditure, an increase of \$6.3 billion. Let me break that down into the simple kind of primary school Mathematics that you might understand. The budget was \$40 billion. The revenue was \$40 billion when the hon. Minister of Finance, at the time hon. Member for San Fernando East, presented the budget in August 2007. The hon. Prime Minister projected revenue collection of \$40 billion at the time. But because of higher than expected collections in taxation, our revenue projection is now \$46 billion. We now have additional revenue, a surplus of \$6 billion and we have to do something with it. We cannot just leave it there. Member for Caroni East, what do you expect us to do with money? We are collecting \$6 billion additional. What do you want us to do with the money, give it to you? Do you want us to give it to you, so that you can give it away again? Is that what you want?

The sum of \$2.5 billion of the surplus of \$6 billion is projected to come from oil companies and approximately \$1 billion from other companies. You also have another \$1 billion in VAT and \$1.6 billion in property income. I think this needs to be repeated for those who are watching, not for them. They are not interested. We went into the fiscal year, with a revenue projection of \$40 billion and now there is the increased oil prices and growth in the economy, increased GDP, better collection and also the positive effects of the tax breaks that we have given.

It has been a pattern in many countries, when you reduce your personal income tax and corporation tax level, it results in better collection. Rather than lose

revenue, you in fact gain revenue because people are more compliant and feel more committed to declare their income and, therefore, our tax take goes up. It does not go down. There was a significant situation of tax reform in Trinidad and Tobago. About two or three years ago, we reduced the rate of income tax to 25 per cent and we are now reaping the dividends from that. We are now beginning to see the benefits of that very proactive and positive move on the part of the Government. We have \$2.5 billion extra from oil companies, \$1 billion from companies that are in the non-oil sector, \$1 billion additional from VAT and \$1.6 billion from property income. All of that has occurred in terms of what has happened over the last six months.

It may go up, because when the analysis was done it was looking at an average oil price, over the period of, perhaps, US \$75 or US \$80. It started at \$50 at the beginning of the fiscal year and now it is US \$135, the last time I checked. Maybe there is an average of US \$75 to US \$80 over the six-month period under review. As we go forward towards September 2008 we may see the average kicking up to US \$120 or US \$130, as the case may be. The surplus at the end of the year may be even more than this. We have to do something with it.

One of the things we are going to do with it, in accordance with the law, is that of the \$6 billion, \$1.8 billion is going into the Revenue Stabilization Fund. I would give you a breakdown of what is happening. We are here today debating a supplementary appropriation of \$3.3 billion.

In addition, there is additional expenditure by way of direct charges on the Treasury, of \$700 million, \$1.72 billion going into the Heritage and Stabilization Fund and \$990 million for the Infrastructure Development Fund, in terms of unallocated resources. When you add all of that, you get the \$6 billion.

5.30 p.m.

So, of the \$6 billion, we are appropriating \$3.3 billion for actual increases to various ministries and corporations, and the other \$2.8-odd billion is going to various places such as pensions, paying back-pay, arrears to public servants and people in the protective services and so on. So, it is a very simple process in terms of what we are about today. I thought it was necessary to educate hon. Members opposite, because persons like the Member for Caroni East do not have a clue or an idea as to why we are here today.

Member for Caroni East, you do not know why we are here today. We have \$6 billion in revenues—additional to what we expected—and we are appropriating that and distributing it. Madam Deputy Speaker, \$1.7 billion will be

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going to the Revenue Stabilisation Fund. I am sure that with that appropriation, the fund is going to cross \$13.9 billion. As we go toward year-end, I am certain that the Revenue Stabilisation Fund is going to cross \$14 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, also contained in the appropriation as well—it is necessary to let hon. Members opposite know because they do not seem to have a clue of what is going on in this country. We subsidize the price of gasoline in this country, and because the price of gasoline on the world market is tied to world oil prices, we have to put up the difference in terms of a subsidy. So, as the oil prices go up, the subsidy goes up.

If you look at the Bill, which will be dealt with in due course, you are going to see an additional appropriation to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in the sum of \$1,010,000,000. That amount is to deal with the increased subsidy that we have to put in for gasoline.

Now, we could have done what the Member for Caroni East said and not appropriate that sum, but what that would do immediately is to cause an increase in the price of premium gasoline in this country, and it is going to cause significant problems for the ordinary people of this country.

So, if we were to listen to the illiteracy of the Member for Caroni East and take the surplus and put it into some bank account, which is what he said to do and not spend the money—do not subsidize the gasoline; do not appropriate additional funds to subsidize the basic fuel for our transportation economy—do you know what is going to happen? The cost of gasoline would increase significantly and the cost of living would also increase significantly, but because hon. Members opposite have not done their homework, they have no clue about what we are about today.

In addition, there are a number of other increases in important areas. In my own ministry—[*Interruption*—I am now starting on the appropriation—if you look at the schedule that was circulated in this House today, you would see that the Ministry of Works and Transport has been given an additional allocation under item 002:Goods and Services, item 005, Drainage; and we have been given an additional allocation of \$160 million, and that allocation is specifically for dredging, desilting, clearing of ravines, walling and paving; and all of the things that Members opposite are always asking me to help them with. This is what this money is for.

Under “Highways”, we have been given an additional allocation of \$30 million to pave a road in Tabaquite. The Member for Tabaquite is always quarrelling with me about some road in his constituency that requires attention. If we did not come to this Parliament today to appropriate that money, we would be unable to attend to that matter. *[Interruption]* So, do not vote for it. Go and tell your constituents that you have refused to vote for the supplementary appropriation for the Ministry of Works and Transport, and we cannot fix the road in Tabaquite. Go and tell them that! Go and tell them that you have refused to vote for the \$160 million for the Drainage Division, so we cannot dredge rivers and ravines in the constituency of Tabaquite. Go and tell them that!

Mr. Maharaj: You are still going to dredge it.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I always wonder why the contributions of Members opposite—not all of them, but some of them—are so puerile, so juvenile, so immature and so off the point to the point of being off the wall.

I heard the Member for Caroni East talk about procurement. He said that there is an absence of a transparent procurement regime in the state enterprises sector. What happened during the six years under the UNC? Was there a procurement regime? The tender rules of the Regional Health Authorities that I have read out are how they operated for six years. That is how we are operating now with the tender rules according to law.

All the state enterprises operate with a manual of procurement from the Ministry of Finance. What happened under the UNC? The difference under the UNC is that they broke those rules. I think the Member for Tabaquite is quite aware of that. *[Interruption]* Hon. Member for Tabaquite, I do not have anything with you. I am just saying what happened. You see, there is a lot of “ol’ talk” in this country and, in particular, the Member for Caroni East likes to get up and talk about a transparent procurement regime. He says that we do not have one in this country.

The tender rules that the Regional Health Authorities are operating under now are set out in the legislation. We are following the legislation as did the hon Member for Caroni East. All the RHAs have tender rules that are set out in the legislation and also the Airports Authority, the Port Authority and the Civil Aviation Authority. All of the statutory authorities have tender rules which are either prescribed in regulations or referred to in the legislation, but we have to listen to this nonsense about how there is no transparent procurement regime in this country.

All the state enterprises have to answer to the Minister of Finance. Every single one of them is subject to audit by the central audit committee. They have to come and lay their accounts in this Parliament and answer to the Public Accounts Committee and the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. Every single one of them is operating in the same way that every single state enterprise and statutory authority operated under the UNC administration. There is no difference, but the only difference is that we are not thieving. That is the difference under the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] It is the same procurement regime, but we are applying it properly. We are not applying it in a dishonest manner; we are not applying it in a corrupt manner. I cannot say the same for the administration that preceded us.

So, what we are about today is simply reporting to this Parliament that we have increases in revenue of \$6 billion, and we intend to appropriate almost \$2 billion of that for the Revenue Stabilisation Fund. Mr. Speaker, one billion dollars is going for the fuel subsidy and the rest of the money is going to pay for pensions, salaries and wages and for critical expenditures such as expenditure on roads, drains, the health sector, the education sector and so on.

I find the puerile contributions of the Members opposite to be just simply annoying. [*Desk thumping*] I thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I thought that when I left my job at Petrotrin today, I would have been engaged in a useful exercise. Up to the point where the Member for Diego Martin North/East entered the debate, I think we were on a pretty good course, but we have been treated then with irrelevance, excuses and, to use his own term, a lot of rubbish.

Mr. Speaker: When you say that you left your job at Petrotrin today, you are not speaking permanently? [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: I think I should reveal something to you. I am about to leave permanently. I am the only manager of that state enterprise whose retirement was published a year before I am due to retire. Since I do not want to speak about the company for which I work—

Mr. Manning: Do you want to go home earlier?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I would limit my contribution to the matter before the House today. The Member for Diego Martin North/East rambled for the last 45 minutes and did not add any value to the debate. Some of the things he said toward the end would have been the winding up contribution of the Minister of Finance, except that he sought to digress from his portfolio responsibilities, and seek to justify why the Bill is before us.

This is a Minister who is an absolute failure, as a Minister of Works and Transport. This is the Minister that has been given the responsibility for ensuring that people get to work and get home after work in the shortest possible time, so that we can have greater productivity and leisure time.

Nothing has been said by him in this debate which guarantees the population that we are going to ensure that the so-called water taxis are implemented; the rapid rail is implemented as he had promised; and that the highway is constructed.

In times of additional revenues brought about by sheer blessings on Trinidad and Tobago—in fact, we heard nothing from him. We heard nothing that would give the assurance to the public that we could expect a better quality of life. Instead, what he sought to do during the debate was to hurl insults and abuses to the Member for Caroni East, the distinguished eminent medical practitioner, and one whose record speaks for itself. He kept the House amused by the absolute nonsense that he was discussing.

I was in this House when we had a problem with the British who themselves had a problem when they signed an agreement with the European Union and had to disassociate themselves with medical graduates from the University of the West Indies (UWI). It was not that UWI was not producing practitioners of the quality that was expected, but it was simply a political matter which arose. The Minister will make you believe, as he has tried to do, that the standard of the university had dropped and, as a result, their degrees are no longer recognized.

What has been said on this side is that the benefits of the income that we have derived from the favourable prices of oil and gas on the international market must not negate the need for accountability. That is the theme of the discussion so far.

5.45 p.m.

And it is not satisfactory for a government that has been endowed with such massive increases in revenue as a result of the benefit that this country has derived from the rise in oil prices, gas prices and so forth. It is for the Government to tell the country that we are going to take that windfall and use it in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I recall the plan enunciated by the Member for Diego Martin North/East to extend the Solomon Hochoy Highway—a piece of road that you are very familiar with—and for six years the road ended in the Prime Minister's constituency at—what is it called?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: By San Fernando Technical Institute.

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, it ended—

Hon. Member: Golconda.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Golconda. Not a metre of highway has been constructed thus far in some grandiose plan to go to Point Fortin with the highway. I recall as part of my responsibility we had to divert a number of oil and gas lines, so as to prevent the highway from being built across these lines. It would have been in our economic interest as an oil company to ensure that we put our lines along the edge of the highway.

Six years have passed and the people who live in the deep South and in San Fernando East, and especially with the development that is taking place in San Fernando East as a result of the HDC housing estates that have been constructed, one would have thought that the Minister of Works and Transport, who criticizes everybody—except himself of course—for doing nothing, when he himself has not been able to construct a metre of highway for the last six years—

If that is not enough, all over this country people are crying out for better roads and better drainage. We have not been spared the flooding in this country and you know that many Members have moved motions on the adjournment with respect to the devastation caused by flooding. This incompetent Member for Diego Martin North/East, Minister of Works and Transport has not been fulfilling his responsibility. You know what he does best? What he does best is to be the “pot-hound” of the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] Do not complain about that; were you not listening to the language that was coming?

He was the closest ally of the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Diego Martin West could not move an inch without this gentleman following him all over the place. From the moment he was dismissed from the Cabinet he made a 180 degree turn.

Mr. S. Panday: He engineered it!

Mr. K. Ramnath: As if the Prime Minister has not recognized it. I think everybody on that side knows that the Prime Minister takes good notice of their conduct, and for those who have just come into the Parliament, let me assure that your conduct is under review on a 24-hour basis when it comes to this Prime Minister. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Maharaj SC: "And tell him you know what you talking about." [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: I have had my difficulties with leaders. [*Laughter*] I know leaders, Mr. Speaker, in this country. I have had my difficulties and I have learnt. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

I thought we would have heard from Ministers today what they are doing in their respective ministries; not as they would in a budget debate, but in a mini budget debate, especially when we are talking about an additional \$3.5 billion. I am sure when you look at the combined budget of the OECS countries, they probably have not even reached \$3.5 billion collectively, but I am not too sure about that; I feel quite certain though.

So, we are in a very favourable position as a blessed country, except what we have in the last of the dinosaurs on the PNM side, that is the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and with nothing to report in modern times we hear a barrage of insults and irrelevant issues coming from that Minister. Of course, Mr. Speaker, it was all intended to criticize the Opposition; to criticize the brilliant contribution of the Member for St. Augustine. I think that this country will celebrate one of the best speeches made in the Parliament by a recently elected Member. [*Desk thumping*] It was a brilliant contribution, if I may say so myself, having spent 22 years here as a Member of Parliament. And if the Prime Minister wishes to be honest about it, he himself will agree, because I noticed that he was taking serious cognizance of the contribution.

Mr. Manning: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Couva South for giving way. I just want to suggest to him that he ought not to try to speak for me, I am already spoken for. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: I anticipate great danger ahead for him, so he should accept any kind of charity and benevolence that I am about to deliver. [*Laughter*] He is in deep trouble, Mr. Speaker. As the Member for Tabaquite will tell you, it would not be long before he would have to exit the scene.

That group that he has picked there, thinking that he has control over them, he will soon realize they are not from that past era. He will soon realize that they are modern thinkers and they will not accept what other Members of the PNM have had to experience under successive leadership, but that is their internal business, I do not want to get into that.

What I want to talk a little about is that the Government must not fail to heed the concerns of the people of this country. The Government must not continue to believe that they have a mandate to rule. You know I sat in this Parliament between 1976 and 1981, the Prime Minister was here too. In those days he did not enjoy the favour of the

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Prime Minister, Dr. Williams and he will tell you that he never sat in the Cabinet with Dr. Williams. Dr. Williams knew him very well, that he could not be trusted. It was when Mr. Chambers became Prime Minister he got a “ten days”. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I could see that the Member for Couva South is in a particularly mischievous mood this evening. I just want to advise him and hon. Members that I first sat in the Cabinet in, I think it was, October 1977, and I became a full Member of the Cabinet on April 01, 1978. Dr. Williams died in March 1981. Okay?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I will do some research to verify it. [*Laughter*] But he was a parliamentary secretary in the Ministry of Finance and elsewhere. But the point remains is that he really could not be trusted—Dr. Williams knew him very well—because he was a disciple of Karl Hudson Phillips at that time and sought to join with Hudson Phillips and others to overthrow Dr. Williams. [*Laughter*] He knows what I am talking about. He met in Diego Martin with that group of persons who were trying to destabilize the PNM. But I really did not come here to go after the Prime Minister. [*Mr. C. Imbert returns*]

Oh, you are back! Just to refresh your memory, I was saying that you have betrayed Dr. Rowley.

Mr. Imbert: That is all?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes; that you have become a “pot-hound” of the Prime Minister and that you will do anything; you will stoop to the lowest level to secure your position as a Minister of the Government, when you know very well that you are the most incompetent Minister among all of these gracious ladies and gentlemen on the other side. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me come to the Caricom Petroleum Fund; I want to refer to this matter. It says, in support of well-planned infrastructural development, programmes of countries within the OECS, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago proposed that a special window be opened for OECS countries in the Caricom Petroleum Fund. This window was capitalized at \$6.4 million per month with effect from January 2008. [*Mr. Manning leaves the Chamber*]

Well you know it is difficult for me, in his absence, to develop this point. [*Crosstalk*]

Anyway, my question to the Minister of Finance, who is also not here; that demonstrates the lack of interest. You see you have a government now that is swimming in oil and gas revenues; they have contempt for the Parliament; they would not even be here to listen to what is being said in the debate.

Whoever is the Minister that is shadowing the portfolio of energy, my question is, what is the current value of the Caricom Petroleum Fund? What has been paid out of the fund up to this time? And which countries of the OECS will benefit from this arrangement?

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that it was the Member for Diego Martin West, as Minister of Trade and Industry, who raised the issue of countries within the Caricom region who are now purchasing oil and oil products from Venezuela; countries in Caricom that have bought into Chavez's PetroCaribe and who have decided that the conditions are more favourable in PetroCaribe than in Trinidad and Tobago. So, they moved their business from Trinidad and Tobago and went into PetroCaribe.

I am concerned that we are not going to take moneys that are coming from petroleum revenues—giving them to Caribbean countries that have decided to abandon Trinidad and Tobago—[*Desk thumping*]*—products, particularly the products coming from the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery.*

I am not trying to say that we must demonstrate tit-for-tat and we must be vindictive, but we must be realistic. When we take our oil revenues and we put them in a fund for distributing to Caricom countries that have decided to stop buying products from Trinidad, we are depriving our citizens of much-needed funds for expenditure on programmes that would benefit them, especially since you have an incompetent Minister of Works and Transport who has promised all kinds of projects to ease traffic congestion in the country and who has failed to deliver.

In every constituency in this country Members will tell you that they have lots of difficulties to get basic things done. This is a government that has abandoned local government, so you cannot even expect with the allocation that is being given to the local government authorities in this piece of legislation before us, that these departments or these local government bodies will make up for the shortfall from the Ministry of Works and Transport.

I am absolutely certain that the Minister of Works and Transport does not know that there are several roads in this country that fall under the jurisdiction of Central Government and therefore there should be a plan.

6.00 p.m.

This ministry has no plan. This is a ministry that believes that you could import a flyover from France and write on it, hello Trinidad and Tobago, whatever it is. I think they stop moving. [*Interruption*] They have reached a point where they have stopped moving. Six years of continuous increase in revenues

from the oil and gas industry and they have not been able to even complete that much needed flyover at Grand Bazaar. They have no plans! If you ask the Minister of Works and Transport, where is his plan for dealing with flooding which may arise out of the rains that are likely to come in the rainy season, he will tell you that we will deal with that. If you ask the Minister of Works and Transport whether he knows that Rivulet Road which crosses the Solomon Hochoy Highway and ends up into Tortuga, is the road under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works and Transport, he will tell you, that is not so. Because not only does he not know these things, he does not care.

Instead of talking to Members of Parliament about the problems they are experiencing as a result of the lack of attention by the Ministry of Works and Transport, he chooses to come here and indulge in every form of irrelevance, abuse and insults, because he believes that the listening population will credit him as one of the strongest supporters of the PNM. That is as a result of his colonial heritage. [*Laughter*] He continues to apologize for his colonial heritage.

Mr. Imbert: Apologize, I am proud of it.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He has to appear to be more Trinidadian than me [*Laughter*] when all of his interests are outside Trinidad and Tobago. Maybe I should not tell him any more because I have to speak at another important function in a short while, where we are planning to take over the government, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*] So, I think I will—

Hon. Member: Government of change.

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, we believe in democratic—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Public meeting.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—systems. As you know, they conspired to be in government. [*Interruption*] In 2001 they did not win any election. [*Interruption*] There was a conspiracy between the then President of the Republic and the PNM when we had an 18-18 situation and when the UNC got more votes than the PNM, they were installed in the government. [*Interruption*] They would have never been here today had there not been a conspiracy between Robinson and the PNM in 2001. [*Desk thumping*] So, when you come here to talk about being democratically elected—

Mr. Imbert: That hurting your heart.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—you must tell the truth, that it is a result of a conspiracy you are here today.

Mr. Imbert: Oh. [*Inaudible*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: Now, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Imbert: “Thou shall not lie”. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath:—the Minister from Diego Martin North/East talked about the need to continue to subsidize petroleum products in Trinidad and Tobago.

I would like the Government to assure the national community that the petroleum subsidy is not going to be removed in the near future. There have been a lot of discussions, and all you get from the Government is an unclear position, which means that at any time the Government could decide that we are not going to continue to subsidize gasoline and other petroleum products like diesel and other fuels. It is about time that you stand up in this House and give the nation an assurance—the cost of operating public transportation and the cost of operating private motor vehicles is now escalating to a point that people could hardly afford it. Any changes in the price of transportation fuels will have serious and deleterious effects on the average person who must drive and who must go to work.

The Ministry of Works and Transport has a duty to provide an efficient public transportation system. I would like the Minister to say who was the agent and whether there was an agent involved in the importation of buses from Brazil—the Marco Polo buses and the Mercedes Benz buses that they have brought into the country? I would like to find out what was the role of the local agents—

Mr. Imbert: That question is before the parliamentary committee.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Why do you not answer it? Sorry, through you, Mr. Speaker. It is a question that was filed, I think, by the Member for Tabaquite a very long time ago. Whenever it was filed, and no answer has been given up to this date. [*Interruption*] Why do you not stand and answer the question now?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Because he has no answer.

Hon. Member: He is afraid.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Because, Mr. Speaker, I would like to find out what moneys were paid or what agreements are in place with respect to the local agent's role in the purchase of those buses?

Mr. Imbert: File that question.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not have to file questions. I realize that filing questions in this House is a waste of time. You do not see me coming to you, Mr. Speaker, with any questions. They do not answer the questions, despite the many concerns expressed by the Chair with respect to their incompetence and refusal in filing questions. He wants me to file questions for him to say every Friday we are answering questions 102, 121, 155 or whatever it is, and when there are hundreds of questions on the Order Paper.

The point I want to make, is that the Ministry of Works and Transport and ultimately the Minister has failed to provide this country with a decent public transportation system [*Desk thumping*] and citizens have to use their own motor vehicles to get to work. If you leave San Fernando later than 5.00 o'clock in the morning, you are not going to get to Port of Spain at 8.00 o'clock, on time to work. [*Interruption*] I am told that people leave a lot earlier than that. That is a serious burden, not only on the person who is driving but on the entire family of that person, because you could be guaranteed that getting back home will be late at night. The Minister of Works and Transport is not bothered at all. He is not bothered at all.

Mr. Imbert: Not by you.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He is more concerned about the competence of my distinguished friend from Caroni East whose CV extends to more than 32 pages.

Hon. Member: Padded, well padded.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Distinguished, internationally recognized, Canadian-trained, English-trained gynecologist and oncologist. He spends all his time to attack the Member for Caroni East, but he is not able to take people from their homes to work and back in a reasonable time.

As a result of that the highways are filled. Everybody has to buy a motor vehicle in this country if they are going to get anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago. All around us the Government is failing. I see my friend, the hon. Minister of National Security, I do not know how he copes with the criticism that he receives on a daily basis, not from us, but from across the country. The problem is, no amount of money—and oil price can go to US \$200 a barrel that will not solve the problem in Trinidad.

What you have in Trinidad and Tobago [*Interruption*] is an incompetent Government with no direction; a Government that has sacrificed policy and planning at the altar of expediency; [*Desk thumping*] a Government that went on a platform of caring for the people who have abandoned the people. [*Desk thumping*] I read in the papers this morning there is somebody trying to build a gas pipeline from here to the north eastern United States. [*Interruption*] You know there was a pipe dream recently

about building a pipeline in the Caribbean. I do not know where that pipeline has reached, whether it is somewhere under the sea, on the seabed somewhere, [Interruption] where it has gone. All I can tell you is, try and solve the problems that beset this nation; try and solve the problems that impact on the daily lives of citizens before you think about building pipelines to the north eastern coast.

Could you imagine a Canadian oil company is reported to have tested a well, 100 million cubic feet of gas per day which in any test is a small quantity, with 30 barrels per million cubic feet of gas condensate. Based on that, somebody is talking about building a pipeline to the United States. I have never heard such rubbish in all my life, in my 34 years that I have worked as a petroleum engineer with companies like Texaco, Trintoc and Petrotrin.

That is the problem in this country. There is a lot of hot air, particularly, coming from the Member for Diego Martin North/East. No record of success, but a lot of pie in the sky projects, one who believes that he is the repository of all knowledge in every aspect of daily life. He is looking for it, you know! So, we should be celebrating as a nation and praying on a daily basis that we continue to benefit from the high oil and gas prices that this country has earned as a result of world prices. I do not know what will happen to this country if market forces were to result in a precipitous drop in prices, where we are going to be. Because the Heritage and Revenue Stabilisation Fund is going to be depleted in such a short time you will wonder whether you had any such fund. The model that the world has seen that has worked very well is the model that Norway has adopted.

I was in Norway a couple of years ago at a conference and had the opportunity to speak with many of the practitioners there. The amount of interest that is coming from their Heritage and Revenue Stabilization Fund is more than what Norway is getting from its North Sea operations. That is the extent to which they have managed their business. Do you know what they have done? They refused to join the European Union, because they did not want to lose their farming industry. They did not adopt the euro as its currency, they continue to use the Norwegian currency which is exactly the same value of the TT currency to the US dollar. They have spent their money and surpluses in two ways, one in major savings and the other in ensuring that their agriculture is maintained.

I have not heard a word from the Minister of Finance in this debate about agriculture. I would like to hear something, because in your greed for land, you are now the modern day land grabbers! You shut down Caroni and then you come here and talk about, "we rescued Caroni on two occasions". You shut down

Caroni because you wanted to grab the lands so you could put up some hovels, some shacks and some shanty towns and transport your supporters out of the hills and bring them on the plains. You have no interest in these people. None! You discriminate on a daily basis in your allocation of houses in the country. You openly discriminate! [*Desk thumping*]

6.15 p.m.

You will never answer a question in this House with respect to what is happening in the constituencies; "Oh, we do not allocate or keep records on home distribution by constituency." You are afraid to do it, because you know what you have been doing and why you have been doing it. You have destroyed agriculture.

The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, who comes from an agricultural district, has repeatedly called on the Government to take some of this money, this additional revenue that the Member has spent his own 45 minutes articulating, and put it into agriculture. They believe that if you take a few acres of Caroni (1975) Limited land and give it out to sugar workers—Mr. Speaker, persons who work in the sugar industry are not necessarily farmers. Farming is a business.

There is no water. You would think that they would have taken the Couva River and built some weirs—it is very simple engineering— and they would have been able to collect water in the dry season, after the rains have come in the wet season. Persons would have been able to utilize pumps. They could pump their water on to their lands adjacent to the rivers. Nothing like that happened.

Justice Deyalsingh gave a judgment—these people are so evil—maybe I should not use that word; wicked. They appealed the judgment of Justice Deyalsingh with respect to giving the former Caroni workers their dues, based on agreement between the Government and the workers. Nothing about agriculture. They believe that the people who come from South, Central and East Trinidad must continue to find ways of producing food to feed the people in the East-West Corridor. They believe they have a divine right to keep people in perpetual indentureship. It is a government that has definitely not cared for the people of South/Central Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*]

It is about time we start to talk about these things, according to Justice Kangaloo. Too bad he waited until Justice Archie was appointed to make his statement, saying that we must have a conversation about race. We must have a conversation about race. We must not sweep it under the carpet. We must have a conversation about class and agriculture. We must have a conversation about everything. You openly discriminate.

They build 1,007 houses in Couva, behind my house. They could not find seven Indians to put in that housing development.

Hon. Members: Ooh!

Dr. Gopeesingh: You must face reality!

Mr. K. Ramnath: They built 1,007 housing units in Couva, and could not find seven Indians to put in them.

Hon. Members: True!

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath: Whatever I say here, I could say it anywhere. We must face the reality. You must not only talk about a united Trinidad and Tobago, a place where every creed and race shall find an equal place. You must practise it. [*Desk thumping*] You shut down Caroni (1975) Limited for some bogus reason.

My friend from D'Abadie/O'Meara came here and is behaving in the same way as the Member for Diego Martin North/East; trying to seek the favour and attention of the Prime Minister. "You too bright for dat." You do not have to do that. No one who has done it has succeeded. He is a man who will take you in the morning; take your wicket. From the moment you are of no value to the Prime Minister, you are finished.

Do not come here and talk about, you rescued Caroni on two occasions. How many times did you rescue BWIA? How many times did you rescue a lot of ailing companies? Do you remember what happened with Iscott? You were too young at that time?

Mrs. Nunez-Tesheira: Thank you! [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: It took us a very long time before we began to mature as an industrialized country. We paid a heavy penalty for a country that did not have the expertise in the production of steel, ammonia and various things. We lost a lot of money, but today, the industry is bringing a lot of benefits.

I was in Brazil last week at a conference. I was the guest of Petrogas in Brazil last week. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: "He liming away; feting." [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: The work I was doing, for the benefit of this incompetent Minister, was for Trinidad and Tobago. I do not separate my duties; I am a true Trinidadian. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am a proud citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

For every tonne of sugarcane, you could get one 1.2 barrels of oil equivalent; not sugar. If you produce 100,000 tonnes of sugar, which Caroni was capable of doing, with tonnes of cane to tonnes of sugar 15 to 20 to one, you would produce the equivalent of 600 barrels of oil a day.

Mr. Imbert: "Dat is anything?"

Mr. K. Ramnath: I will tell you, for the benefit of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, who demonstrates illiteracy at its highest level; 600 barrels of oil equivalent per day. You multiply that by 130 US dollars a barrel, and I leave the rest to the arithmetic for the Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Crosstalk*] You are talking about a viable industry.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath: In fact, investors are buying up sugar plantations all over the world. Sugar is not about sugar cane; it is about energy.

I would like to take them into class one day and give them a little lecture of where the oil industry is going. We have not found any oil in this country for the longest while. [*Desk thumping*] BpTT produced 115,000 barrels a day at one time, when the company was Amoco. They are not even making 15,000 barrels of oil a day. The largest oil producer in this country is Petrotrin, and I have the honour to work and to operate at a very senior level there.

Mr. Imbert: Not for long. [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: I really wish to retire when my retirement comes. I have a lot of interesting things to do. In fact, I have a young wife too.

Hon. Members: Aah! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: She is alive, unlike—I have warned you before; do not let me tell this House what your wife told me about you.

Mr. Imbert: But she is alive too.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I will tell you who else is alive—not you. You could tell the Member for Caroni East what you want; do not interfere with me, because I will have Kuei Tung call you. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

The oil industry is struggling today. If you look at production across the industry, you will see that we are barely surviving. Those who feel that we are going to get this enormous income coming in, as we have had in the past, will soon realize the oil prices could get very high. If your production does not increase, you are not going to benefit.

The Member for Caroni East raised some very interesting issues about "wither goest the industry". It is a fact that exploration is not yielding the kind of results that we have anticipated. We have drilled wells in this country up to 20,000 feet deep. [*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Many thanks to the Member for Diego Martin North/East who, in his wisdom and grace, has moved my extension. [*Laughter*] He goes overboard.

Let me just finish the point I was making. I know that there are Members in this House who want to see moneys put to good use; I have no doubt about that; but we have to ensure that we do not kill the goose that lays the golden egg. We are in stripper mode production in Trinidad. You would not believe that we pump wells three and four barrels a day. A five-barrels-a-day well on land is something that we are happy with. If you get a well that is making 20 barrels, we are extremely happy.

If you sit in Port of Spain and believe that oil is flowing—not to mention the amount of industrial problems and unrest that we face as a company, on a regular basis. The Member for Point Fortin knows what I am talking about. She probably witnesses the demonstrations and interacts with persons. That is if she is in Point Fortin; I think she is. [*Laughter*]

There is urgent need, once again, for you to look at the tax structure with respect to stripper production, with respect to oil wells that are producing very small amounts. We are not at a time where we are having high volume, high production wells. I know that we had some review of the supplemental legislation a couple years ago. One of the initiatives that Petrotrin has introduced which has been successful is what is called "lease operatorship", where we lease oil wells to persons who invest their money, produce the oil and sell the oil to Petrotrin.

In a lot of cases, those projects have been extremely successful. We are getting private capital; we do not have to put out that money; we do not have to hire labour to operate those fields. But the disincentive is that they have to pay the same tax rate as the big companies. It is about time that we start looking at investing the moneys we are talking about here, the \$3.5 billion, a lot of it, in the industry that would generate more and more income and more jobs. Otherwise, in every debate here, we would talk about how we are going to take the additional revenues that we are getting, whether it is VAT or from supplemental tax from the oil industry or taxation on companies in Trinidad and Tobago; put a portion of that into the Revenue Stabilisation Fund, and the rest give the Minister of National Security, the Minister of Education, and so on.

We have to take some of that money and put it back in the industry as a form of investment, so we could benefit from the industry producing the wealth today. I am not hearing any of that discussion. We are hearing in this debate, so far, that we have collected this money and we have to do something. Could you imagine that a senior Minister of Government stood here and asked, "What you expect us to do; we have \$3.5 billion coming in, not spend it?" I think you should spend it, but I do not think that you should waste it. There is a difference between spending and wasting. [*Crosstalk*] I do not have the time to talk about where they have spent money; other Members have spoken about that. I want to know how useful has been our use of that money.

Is it to take Caroni lands, put down houses, bring your party supporters and put them in there? They have an objective to surround every community in Central and South Trinidad with housing estates.

They have an objective; they are exporting their criminal elements to areas that have peaceful coexistence in those parts.

6.30 p.m.

You are the quintessential Caribbean man, you are proud of that. What happened with you was when they were naming you they made a mistake, it was not Parsanlal it was Natwarlal which means an international con man.

Mr. Speaker: You did not really mean that. I am sure you will withdraw it and apologize.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I did not mean that, Mr. Speaker, and if it has offended my friend, I apologize, but that is the actual definition of the term.

I am no quintessential Caribbean man, I am a proud son of indentureship and I think that those who are proud sons and daughters of slavery should not apologize for that, and together the proud children of indentureship and slavery have come together to build the nation, and we have to recognize the role we must play and we must be treated equally in the country. [*Desk thumping*] Do not pretend that you do not do the things that I am talking about.

Mr. Speaker, if you go to Chaguanas now it is a hell town. In Felicity, which is a place that has 99.9 per cent Indians there, they are living in fear of the gangs that roam the area because they put housing settlements and bring people from all over the place and they have done them a disservice. When you bring people from Port of Spain or from wherever and put them there and they have no work—you do not build housing estates and do not have industrial estates that could create some kind of employment for these people. In fact, they are better off living in Tamarind Square and the hills than moving them, pulling them out and putting them in the plains of Caroni and not providing them with any form of employment.

Mr. Dumas: Will you give way?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes.

Mr. Dumas: I would like to ask; are you withdrawing the objections that you and your party have had to using Caroni lands for industrial estates?

Mr. Sharma: Shut up!

Mr. Dumas: You are telling me to shut up. You are out of place, boy.

Mr. Speaker: All right, please, please.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The question presupposes that there have been some policy statement to take Caroni (1975) Limited lands. That has been an ongoing thing where it is necessary to put down industrial estates as was done in Point Lisas, you put it down. The reason for putting down the industrial estate in Point Lisas is because you had opportunities for better port facilities, sheltered areas, you had gas lines that could be run from Guayaguayare from the East coast into Central Trinidad, but it was not a policy to shut down the industry and industrialize it.

Mr. Dumas: Have you withdrawn your objections?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not going to answer the question you want answered. What I am saying is that the Government will come from time to time and produce a shopping list and say they are going to take this money and do the

following things. I know the Minister of Education is trying very hard to move away from the footsteps of her predecessor; she could not possibly walk in the same footsteps. It is the same thing happening in the Ministry of National Security where it is believed that if we spend more money, we will get a higher level of security, and a better quality of education. The truth is for many of us who were educated in the 1960s, we did not have all these fancy opportunities, but we produced very good quality people, decent people. So if everything is going to be judged on the basis of expenditure, then the evidence suggests that there is not a concomitant improvement in the quality of life with an increase in expenditure. [*Desk thumping*]

I am suggesting that we should be taking part of this money and putting it in some real investment. What is the interest rate we are getting on moneys invested in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund? These days, people with bank accounts in the United States of America are getting less than 1 per cent, but certainly there must be wiser methods of investing your money, there must be consideration given to creating more job opportunities and so forth. When you shut down an industry in the callous manner in which they shut down Caroni (1975) Limited, today you have about 77,000 acres of land that has been abandoned.

When the Deyalsingh judgment came out they began rushing to produce roads to create some small farms. Those farms will not succeed you know. When you pass on that Solomon Hochoy Highway and you see people with barrels on the side of the hills you cannot grow food on any large scale using barrels. How are you going to get the water up to the barrels in the first place?

I have said enough; I just want to make the point that it is not satisfactory for the Government to use the surplus and windfall in the way it has suggested to this Parliament, and what we should be really be seeing are methods of spending money that will accrue to the benefit of people.

One more point, this fella called Ray Brathwaithe, I worked with him, he is talking about "FARMPEP", that CEPEP thing has been an absolute disaster. The money we have invested in CEPEP could have been better invested for the benefit of the same people who are working in CEPEP today. He wants to set up "FARMPEP", he has no idea of how agriculture operates. It is back-breaking, it is 24 hours, when you work the land during the day, you have to watchman at night otherwise every product will be stolen. Praedial larceny is a serious problem in this country, so when they begin to talk about investing the money, they talk a lot of nonsense about putting it into these collective farms where people have low personal interest. If the State is paying you to farm, you are not going to farm, agriculture is backbreaking.

Mr. Speaker, I must curtail my contribution at this stage and I thank you for the opportunity:

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Mr. Speaker, I join this debate on the Variation of Appropriation Bill, 2008 and I must at least make some comment on the contribution made by the hon. Member for Couva South. While I am not going to attempt to address all the issues he has raised, I must take off from the point where he accused this Government of exporting criminal elements into Central by way of the Government's housing projects, and accusing the Government of deliberately exporting criminal elements.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has made bold its intention—and people do not like to hear us say this—to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed society on or before the year 2020, and the fundamental objective of that is improving the quality of life and the standard of living of all our citizens to what obtains in developed societies.

Mr. Speaker, a key aspect of that development is the quality of housing which our citizens enjoy, and there is no gainsaying that previous administrations have taken a policy with respect to providing housing or accommodation that is fundamentally different from the People's National Movement and we make no apologies for that because we recognize that there are thousands of our citizens who are deprived of adequate housing and this Government has made it its intention to provide those citizens with housing and that is going to be provided throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

So for the Member for Couva South to accuse us of giving the impression that there are parts of Trinidad for which housing ought not to be provided for our citizens, we do not share that view and I challenge him on the statistics he provided that talk about the way in which we are distributing our housing.

Mr. Speaker, clearly there is no attempt on the part of this Government to discriminate in the distribution of housing, none whatsoever. So to say that the Government discriminates and he talks about East Indians who are not being provided with appropriate housing. Nothing could be further from the truth. He talks about the fact that all of us are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and as a result of that, we must be provided with the means of enjoying our lives while we are in this part of the world and we agree with that.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Member for Couva South has this tendency of always seeing everything with respect to race and that is not our philosophy and that is not the way in which we do business in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

He also talked about wasting and spending of moneys and about the Ministry of National Security and I am here to make my brief contribution to treat with the issues raised with respect to the Ministry of National Security. He made the point about the more money we put into national security we are not seeing the results as it relates to increase in law enforcement and policing.

Mr. Speaker, we have indicated this Government has made it clear that its top priority is the security and safety of our citizens. Development cannot take place and the developed society status for which we aspire will not take place in the absence of law and order and a level of security and safety in keeping with what obtains in developed societies and we have said that there is no question that there is a gap between where we are and where we want to get to. So the levels of crime and violence that are plaguing us now are levels we are not satisfied with, and we cannot be comfortable with and as a result, we have to put measures in place to improve on that.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that to a large extent, part of the crime and violence that is plaguing us and the rest of the Caribbean has to do with our location. They do not like to hear us say that, but that is the reality, it has to do with our location that we continue to be a major transshipment point for drugs and guns and as a result of that, the Government has taken pains, and is investing to reduce the inflow of drugs and guns coming into this country.

6.45 p.m.

To do that, it means we have to improve our coast guard's ability to patrol our coastlines. We recognize that we have to procure naval assets—three offshore patrol vessels—and we have already put measures in place for the procurement of those offshore patrol vessels. We recognize that while we are waiting for the delivery of those offshore patrol vessels, we need to put some interim arrangements in place to stem the inflow of drugs and guns. We have acquired two interim vessels.

The last time the Government acquired naval assets was in 2001—the Nelson or something, a 40-year-old boat. We have acquired two interim vessels. We are going to get the three offshore patrol vessels. We have already signed contracts for six fast patrol vessels and six interceptor crafts; all designed to make sure that the law enforcement, in this case the coast guard, is provided with the resources to stem the inflow of drugs and guns.

Law enforcement indicated to the Government that it makes no sense trying to treat with the challenges we face unless we put measures in place to stem the inflow of drugs and guns. To assist in that regard also, we have acquired the radar system.

I heard the Member for St. Augustine asking what has happened to the radar system, indicating that it was supposed to be up by July 2005, that it has not been working and is a haven for corbeaux. That cannot be correct. We know that we now have a 360-degree radar system that allows us to see the pattern of movement into Trinidad. Being able to see that is one thing, but interdiction is another matter and that is what we are putting in place, treating with the question of interdiction. We are putting measures in place to stem the inflow of drugs and guns to reduce the level of criminality, especially that of firearms, that is currently taking place in this country.

The other area in which it is necessary to ensure law enforcement is better able to treat with the criminal activities taking place, is the transformation of the police service. Without casting blame—you have to be careful every time you make this kind of comment; you hear them say that the Minister of National Security is blaming the police, et cetera—over the years, our law enforcement agencies did not stay in step with changes that have occurred in the environment. That is a fact. This is not confined to law enforcement in Trinidad and Tobago, but law enforcement in the region has not kept pace with the developments that have been taking place. It shows itself in the way in which crime is now required to be detected and prosecuted.

Comments were made about the low detection of crime and it is a fact that the detection rate has continued to decline. Part of the reason for the decline in the detection rate is because of the new kinds of crimes that take place and the ability of law enforcement to treat with that. We have historically relied on witnesses and confessions and, in the new environment where there is witness intimidation and elimination, the question of relying on witnesses cannot stand. Again, this is not confined to Trinidad and Tobago.

In other jurisdictions where that started to happen, police moved quickly into a more scientific way of dealing with crime—DNA, forensic, et cetera—but in order to make that shift, it requires law enforcement, first of all, to be provided with the technology; secondly, to become familiar with it and be able to use it. Again, this Government has invested heavily by way of DNA and forensic and we have used the Special Anti-crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) as the agency to spearhead and push quickly that technological drive into law enforcement.

There is a plan; there is an approach. The Member of Couva South said he wants someone to say how the Government is dealing with some of the pressing challenges we are facing. We have to shift gears into a much more modern type of law enforcement so that we have a barometer. We are saying developed society status on or before 2020 and that law enforcement must also reach the point where

they provide the citizens with policing that is in keeping with what obtains in developed societies. And there is a gap between where we are and where we need to get. We are putting the measures in place to deal with that.

The first important measure we have put in place, with the support of the Opposition, is that we have changed the legislation to make sure that the agencies responsible for improving law enforcement are given the opportunity to do that. I have said over and over, on the question of the police organization, that it is now given the authority to run its affairs. The Commissioner of Police is now provided with the means with which to run the police. Recall a former Commissioner of Police characterizing the role of a commissioner of police as a toothless bulldog. That is no longer the case. In short order, we ought to be able to see an improvement in terms of law enforcement.

We have changed the responsibility of the Police Service Commission. Whereas, before, the Police Service Commission was responsible for promotion, disciplining, et cetera, we have revised that. We have now made them solely responsible for the appointment and removal of the commissioner, deputy commissioner and reviewing the operations of the commissioner and deputy commissioner as they relate to promotion and discipline. So pretty soon we will see a much more robust police service where the police leadership has more direct responsibility for the operations of the police organization.

Mr. Speaker, as part of the improvement in law enforcement's capabilities, we have embarked on a heavy programme of training and development. The new recruits entering the police service are now exposed to a much more modern curriculum as it relates to policing. So far, some 350 have been exposed to this new curriculum. Some 1,246 police officers have been exposed to high-impact supervision training; 315 have been exposed to high-impact Supervision II training; 122 have been exposed to customer training in terms of new ways of interfacing with the public; 54 have been exposed to legal court training—these are court prosecutors; some 600 to a crime scene first respondent course and some 70, a crime scene investigator course. Twenty-four have been exposed to strategic leadership courses; all designed to improve the quality of training provided to law enforcement.

We have a challenge with respect to shortages in the law enforcement agencies. In those circumstances, it will be necessary, over the next three or four years, to recruit some 500 police officers per year. We have modernized what was referred to as the police barracks, the police academy, so that we will be in a position to provide the high quality of training to have more law enforcement officers providing the type of policing that is necessary.

Let me treat with some of the comments made by the Member for St. Augustine. He talked about the Auditor General's report for the last fiscal year. He stated that the Auditor General had indicated that \$59 million from the Ministry of National Security was unaccounted for.

Mr. Speaker, according to my information, the notification of expenditure reflecting cheques issued in the sum of \$59 million was not submitted by the Police Service Division to the Comptroller of Accounts on time to enable him to bring the expenditure to account for fiscal 2007. Therefore, the final expenditure reflected in the Ministry's books was in excess, in the Comptroller of Accounts records, by the \$59 million. The notification has since been submitted, but was too late to be included in the appropriation accounts for the year ending September 30, 2007. The Auditor General has now been advised, and the matter has been corrected.

The delay in the procurement process in the sum of \$19.8 million had to do with the Fire Service in terms of \$3.2 million. The contract was awarded on August 16, 2007 and is awaiting delivery. With respect to the Coast Guard, some \$4.2 million; the contract is still to be awarded. The Defence Force is some \$9.3 million; the contract is to be awarded; the Regiment, some \$2.8 million, contract awarded in 2008. Part of the delay, Mr. Speaker, is that the sample materials received for uniforms from the suppliers did not meet the specifications and the contract process had to be delayed as it related to that.

In terms of the non-receipt of outstanding bills in \$26.1 million, before bills are processed, a reconciliation exercise is conducted to verify claims. This is necessary because of the size of the fleet of vehicles for various divisions. The level of consumption of fuel and oil and reconciliation between NP and the police department is an ongoing exercise to settle bills as they come to hand.

In terms of contracts, the Ministry would advertise contract positions locally, regionally and internationally. In some cases, responses are inadequate and there is need to re-advertise. Policy decisions dictate that each candidate has to be vetted and polygraphed, further extending the recruitment process and that explains some of the delays with respect to the filling of contract positions.

With respect to delays in processing payments for food bills, additional control measures to address the delays in processing payment for the supply of food bills were implemented, some of which were enforcing the submission of VAT registration certificates by suppliers and ensuring that suppliers are paid only on the production of invoice orders. The suppliers are still adjusting to the new documentation requested by the defence force and, as the process becomes more

established, the system will be expedited in compliance with the new system introduced by the defence force. I just thought that I should touch some of these issues raised by the Member for St. Augustine.

7.00 p.m.

Again, I want to give the assurance to hon. Members that the Government continues to ensure that it provides our law enforcement with the resources necessary, so that they can improve on the enforcement of the law and the discharging of their responsibilities. We are satisfied that, while it is taking some time for the measures to start giving us the results, we would see the results because we are doing things in a very systematic way and soon we would be able to start seeing improvements in the whole question of law and order, especially in the area of homicides.

Part of the problem with respect to the question of homicide, is the question of a new approach to treating homicides. It is the intention, again, to put resources in that particular direction, in a way that will bring about an improvement in that area.

I thank you.

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town North*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I start my contribution, that Member for Diego Martin North/East, in his contribution, indicated that I was shameless about the joint select committees.

I want to say categorically that I may be shameless, but I am not a traitor. I may be shameless, but I do not undermine my fellow men. I may be shameless, but I will not call anybody a “wajang”—to my seniors. I may be shameless, but I will not be with a group of persons/my colleagues and when the going gets tough, put a dagger in the back. I am not that kind of person. I will not be with a group, eating and drinking and then carry news on them in such a callous and inhumane manner to cause them any pain or suffering.

Since he has spoken about the joint select committee, I want to say categorically when section 66 A of the Constitution was amended, I was asked to put the system in order. Hence, what they have read in 2001, was when I was putting the system in order. I want to state categorically tonight that I never sat on any joint select committee and investigated any organization. They were trying to throw mud on me. Today he continued, by trying to throw mud on me. “Sir, yuh could throw how much mud yuh want, I am still clean”, unlike certain people who carry news and put daggers in their colleagues’ back.

The reason we were against those joint select committees is because those committees could be manipulated. Those committees could be manipulated, not only because of the government having a greater number of persons on those committees, but the integrity of those committees could be interfered with. I make reference to a committee on which I sat. The Member for Fyzabad was suspended by this House. I was a member of that committee. I want to put on the record today and I would amplify it in public. The draft notes of that committee were tampered with by a member who was sitting on that committee. When one looked at the draft report of that joint select committee and one compared the final report, one would have seen that there was a change. You would remember, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I happened to chair that committee, so if you are referring to me, be brave enough to say that.

Mr. S. Panday: What is that M'Lord?

Mr. Speaker: I chaired that committee that you are referring to. If you are referring to me, I hope that you would be brave enough to say so.

Mr. S. Panday: Oh no. What I heard is that it was done with your knowledge.

Mr. Speaker: You have to be extremely careful. You have to be extremely careful going down that road, because you may end up before the Privileges Committee again.

Mr. S. Panday: It was done on the day the Member for La Brea had signed that report. You did not interfere with the report. We came to this House—I cast no aspersions on you—and debated and the Member for Fyzabad was suspended. What I say here I could say in public, hence the reason for our objection to the joint select committee. The integrity of the system, I know, could be changed or tampered with. Since you have indicated, you would remember that I asked for the copy of the draft to compare it with the copy of the final report. I say no more on that.

That was one of the reasons that we thought that the committee system, as it stood with certain Members, should not have gone that way. Under those circumstances, we should have gone with the commission of enquiry, where it entailed a senior Member of the Government being involved. Our own colleague is involved. Because of what I knew happened, involving a colleague, I thought that it was necessary and important to have a commission of enquiry outside the ambit of the House, because we want justice, fair play and the protection of all, including our own colleague.

Mr. Speaker, they tried to bully—he spoke about me being shameless when I chaired the committee. The Member for Diego Martin North/East indicated in his statement: “Let us go with the joint select committee because we could control the commission of enquiry.” The Government could control the commission of enquiry because the Prime Minister has the prerogative of appointing the members of the commission of enquiry. That is the law. He gloated in the public about it. He gloated that they could control. That is why the country today has lost confidence in the Government. He telescoped to the national community that they will set up a commission of enquiry in such a way and make the appointments in such a way that they will get the desired results. *[Interruption]* Telegraphed, okay.

What we see happening is that we were trying to run from that situation with the joint select committee. What has the society seen? What has this nation seen? This nation sees that the Government has indeed set up a commission of enquiry and has already begun to pollute it.

Mr. Speaker: Now, I have given you a little leeway in answer to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, but I think I have been sufficiently gracious to you. I think you need to come back to the Motion before us.

Mr. S. Panday: Gracious? Mr. Speaker, I could spend the night on him, but as you say.

I close by merely saying that they have put someone to head the commission; someone who sends a Member of Parliament from the Integrity Commission to the Director of Public Prosecutions without any evidence. I will stop at that point. The rest, I would say in public.

The Member—“But he gone? He just come here to rehash all he say umpteen times before.” One would have thought that the Minister of National Security would have come and added something new to the debate. That Minister of National Security—I do not want to call him a disgrace but—is so incompetent that he continues to speak about what we shall do in the future, while our citizens are being murdered everyday. Everyday people are dying.

Someone in my village was killed last Saturday. I thought he was No. 175, only to find out that he was No. 180. This morning I heard it was No. 194, but somebody said it is No. 197. Seventeen persons were killed from last Saturday to today and he continues to come here to speak about the future measures we are putting in place. It seems to me that by the time all those measures are put in place, half of the nation would be murdered. He comes here and has the gall to

say we are doing this and we are doing that. You have been there for so long, why do you talk about medium term measures and long term measures? Where are the short term measures to deal with the problems as they stand today?

I ask every one of you here: how did you feel when you looked at the television the night before today and saw a mother and father being killed in Enterprise? The children, when they heard the chopping of their parents in their home, ran out to the neighbour. When they went back, their mother and father were killed. How do you feel? Tell the nation how you feel. Tell the nation what you intend to do about it. How could you come here today and merely rehash the same thing over and over? I have heard them umpteen times.

We have set up the radar and we are looking at the patterns of movement from Venezuela to here. While you look for patterns, drugs and arms are coming in. He said that there are two temporary offshore vessels. If they have that, why is it that crime is not reducing? Why is it that the murder rate is not reducing?

Sometime ago, I think it was Dr. Teelucksingh, the son of former Senator Rev. Teelucksingh, who said: “Do you all not feel ashamed—meaning all of us—when you sit in Parliament? How do you feel about drawing a salary and looking in the papers everyday and seeing people being killed?” Dr. Teelucksingh, we are in Opposition. There are others who should be feeling ashamed. There are others who should hang their heads in shame, while the nation’s blood splatters on the roads and in people’s homes.

The Prime Minister comes here and takes this Parliament and makes it a joke. Member for Diego Martin North/East, I am happy you were not here, you would have seen such a clannish behaviour, it would have annoyed you. They pretend that nothing is happening. Nothing is happening.

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they are thinking about firing this one and firing that one when our people are being killed. They are saying nothing about this in public, but we are looking into the matter. I am not speaking to them tonight, but I am speaking to the nation. Those persons who voted for the PNM on November 05, 2007, how do you feel now? How do you feel seeing so many of your neighbours being killed and your families being killed? They are members of Trinidad and Tobago. Tell us how do you feel. Do you still want them there? Your families and your neighbours are being killed; and your sisters and mothers are being raped. If you have the opportunity now, would you still vote for them?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. S. Panday: Somebody said yes. They really do not have any feelings. Although you are saying yes, I am saying that the people do not deserve you. The people do not deserve the burden of the PNM on them. They do not deserve the PNM! The PNM is inefficient, incompetent and corrupt. That is what the PNM is.

Mr. Speaker, all of them have security. They do not care about the poor people who do not have security. They do not care about poor people who have to travel to get home at nights, because they have security. When they call the police they will come, but when an ordinary citizen calls the police in death they take three hours to come from a half mile. That would not happen to you all. Is it because you have this big salary? Is it because you have been insulated from the pressures of crimes in the society that you do not care about the society? The society is crying out; the society is paining. What are you doing for these people? Nothing!

I want to tell this country tonight that we are not waiting to go into government to deal with crime, but dear Teelucksingh, we shall do our part so that when we go home we could sleep on our pillows. Although I think they all sleep happily, while our brothers and sisters are being killed.

The Minister of National Security comes today and talks about the amount of money that the Government is putting into crime. They are so foolish! That PNM Government is so foolish and so insensitive that it does not realize that money alone is not the solution.

The Minister says that they are spending this amount of money and we are going to see results soon. Well, we have heard that so many times before that we want action now. Trinidad and Tobago needs action now! The poor and suffering people of Trinidad and Tobago need action now. The Minister said that security is one of the most important things for the development of the society toward 2020. He spoke about that today. We want to ask Members today: What are their contributions to the safety of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Nothing! That is why I am going to show you in a few minutes what we intend to do on this side of the House to deal with the issue of crime.

Mr. Speaker, the document before us talks about the surveillance of the Chaguaramas peninsula—they are watching patterns. If you have that \$65 million spy equipment for 360 degree surveillance, why do you need this now? Tell us! You have already spent \$60 million. You boasted that you can see St Lucia in the north to Guyana in the south. If that is so, are you short-sighted? You could see

St. Lucia, but you cannot see Chaguaramas? How is it you can see Guyana and you cannot see Chaguaramas? Is it that Members of the PNM are colluding with persons who are using that peninsula?

Since 2006 you had this 360 degree radar, and you are now coming to tell us that you want \$2 million to commence activities. One would have thought that the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara would have permitted us in the committee to ask these questions but, my lady, not you tonight. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, it says \$2 million to commence activities, and the proposed project of \$5 million for the design. They are now at the stage of designing and operating electric surveillance throughout the peninsula and offshore islands. The 360 degree radar cannot see down the island? Who are you all fooling? [*Interruption*] Somebody said that corbeaux was on the one in San Fernando. Are they not working? Are they inefficient? They are not telling the country that, but when one reads and put everything together, one sees that the PNM Government is pulling a scam on the people, and that is why the murder rate continues to climb.

They said that they want \$317,141,000 for the Ministry of National Security. They believe that money will solve the problem. It says \$70,000 supplementary funds under Head 22: Ministry of National Security. Mr. Speaker, the police service is getting \$70,977,000 and supplementary funds of \$61,734,000 are required to meet outstanding payments to 270 full-time SRP officers for the period 1999—2007.

Mr. Speaker, from 1999 to 2007, we would like to find out from the Minister: Is that for the whole payment or is it for part payment? How much money would be paid to these officers for that period? We want to find out whether these police officers were not treated in an equitable manner. Did they suffer a loss of enthusiasm? Is that loss of enthusiasm still pervading through the police service and, as a result, police officers are not working as they should work? The training that they are spending money on is not going to work if police officers are not motivated. What is the best way to motivate people? A fair day's wage for a fair day's work. That is something we should look at.

I did a calculation, but I cannot find it. When one looks at the figure of \$61,734,000 for 270 officers, it amounts to approximately \$225,000. When that figure is divided by eight, it works out to about \$25,000 per annum, and when you divide that amount by 12 months, it works out to about \$1,905. So, it seems to me that the persons that this Government has been taking advantage of are not persons who could have carried that financial burden.

If you look at the police service, most of the SRPs are below the rank of sergeant or corporal. So, the small people are hurting, and when this spreads through the police service then everybody would say that if that is how they are treating us, we would drop the gloves.

Mr. Speaker, why has the Government waited eight years to pay the officers their money? Is that the way an employer should treat his workers? The police cannot strike, and they should have been paid on time. SRPs do not only go on the beat, but there are SRPs who have been in the CID, who have been court recorders and who have been working in the traffic section. They have been doing a lot of work for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and look what this Government has done to them. They have refused to pay them.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that \$9 million is also needed to meet the increased cost of NIS. Did they not pay their NIS?

Mr. Speaker, when I look at this appropriation today, and I compare it to the one on January 11, 2008, on that occasion, the Government refused to pay police officers overtime in the sum of \$20,800,000 and other allowances in the sum of \$14,700,000. So, that is about \$35.5 million that the Government has refused to pay ordinary police officers. That was in January. Do you know what they said on the last occasion? They said that they could not calculate it in time and, therefore, they did not pay them.

There are On-the-Job-Trainees (OJTs) and young persons who are out of college. They could have brought them in to calculate the allowances due to them, because it is just to add numbers. They also said that the police officers are in different grades. Mr. Speaker, do you know what they took that money for? They took that money which was owed to people for work done to be part of the acquisition for the offshore patrol vessels.

They came here and boasted that they are bringing in sophisticated equipment, and they are doing nothing for the human resource in the police service. They are doing nothing for them. They are neglecting them. They could bring how much equipment they want—whatever sophisticated equipment that they want—once police officers are not motivated, there will be nobody to work them.

7.30 p.m.

And they jump up and said on the last occasion, oh, we paid some you know, we did not pay all; \$20.8 million was the outstanding sum. That Minister of National Security and that Commissioner of Police, I want to ask them here

tonight, in the full view of the public, are they aware that police have to pay bribe at the Police Administration building in the finance department in order to get their back pay? Police officers have to pay bribe to get their back pay.

I ask you, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, as Minister of Finance, to use your good offices; you are new; you are fresh; you are not tainted like—I would not go there—look at the records of payments for the last three to four years and see if there is a pattern where certain people are getting payments three and four times for the year and other persons are not getting it for long periods; check that out.

So, if a policeman has to pay a bribe to the finance department in the police service, to get his money, when he go outside there how do you expect him to behave? How do you expect a police officer to behave with the members of the public if that police officer has to pay bribe in the police service to get his just dues. [*Desk thumping*] That looks like the norm. So when he goes out there, he either says: “I pay to get my money man, I taking a rest” or a “fella” comes and he says, “Put it there nah, because I have to give up there”. This is the state of the society; these are the things we should look at. These are the things we must look at so we could get our police motivated so that they could deal with crime. Unless we get the police motivated nothing will go and this PNM Government has presided on that.

I heard however, the Minister made a remark today that they put some new system in place—did not get his exact words. Is that a new system you put in place to prevent the corruption, which is taking place in the police service? Well, we would find out. So, as I said before and I will show you how this PNM does not care about crime and how they believe that by merely spending money that they will solve the crime.

Imagine, this country had never heard about a blimp. No introduction, but all of a sudden we hear two blimps had arrived on the scene. One was the Aeros 40B Sky Dragon. They brought the Aeros 40B Sky Dragon for \$12.6 million. This sky dragon was acquired by this Government on December 20, 2004; four years ago. This sky dragon could not work, so what they decided to do, Mr. Speaker? They decided that they have to fix this sky dragon. They tried to find out why was the sky dragon, the first blimp not working. What was the answer given to this House? Atmospheric condition was unsuitable. It is the first time I hear that the Government will purchase a sensitive piece of equipment for \$12.6 million and would not get the specifications. They said, oh, the computer on it is very sensitive. Even an ABC child, when that child goes to buy a computer, they would say, do not put it where it has dust; do not put it in a room that is too warm; they give you instructions.

This Government is so slack and incompetent that they did not find out what the specifications of the sky dragon were before it came? I ask them, why it is you did not test drive it? Anybody who is buying a new car does test it. Why did you not test drive it? Their attitude is, we have money man; money falling out our ears; we will spend how we want; "leh we" spend it, they were saying. That is what the Member for Couva South was saying, spend the money, but spend it wisely.

So, the sky ship arrived in Trinidad; kept it for six months and they spent \$1.17 million a month to repair this sky ship. It came up to \$7.05 million; they could spend that in six months, but have to come today in this House to get approval to pay \$61 million for eight years—money for the police people—but they could find money to squander and waste it. I wonder if they made any deal in this. [*Desk thumping*] When we asked them if these blimps were helping with the crime, hear how shameless the answer was. The question of whether their ships have assisted in solving any murders, the hon. Member advised that an air ship is an operational tool in the enforcement regime, not an independent asset. Shame on you to come and give that kind of answer!

Mr. Speaker, that is not the story. Here is the excuse they are making for buying a defective unit: "The Aeros 40B Sky Dragon was not tested in local atmospheric conditions prior to acquisition. Oh my Lord! This is a Government; it is not an illiterate—as the Member for Diego Martin North/East like to call people—illiterate. If you are not illiterate you are bogus! And this air ship did not have the particular range to fly to Trinidad and Tobago under its power from its place of manufacture. If they were coming from California why did they not fly to Miami, refuel and come down the road? Excuses! You must answer to the public. Hear this, Mr. Speaker: Additionally, transporting to Trinidad and Tobago for pretesting would have entailed significant logistic challenges. Big words meaning nothing.

Other additional expense including disassembly, freighting, reassembly and testing process, which would have had to be repeated when they reach to the home base. So he felt that it would not have worked so they had to send it back. But the excuse was the performance of the Aeros 40B Sky Dragon was inadequate as the local humidity of the country affected by the fly by wire—that is fly by night—system, which is an integral part of the air ship. You will tell me that you would spend taxpayers money in such a wanton and reckless manner. That is not all.

They spoke about the wire system in the computer, but they came here; there is no evidence of any money being spent on that affected fly by wire system. You know what they spent the money on? They spent the money— For six months

during which the Aeros 40B blimp air ship was utilized by the Special Anti-crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago, repairs were done to the port engine—not to any computer, to the port engine—and not only that, to the rudder. The rudder is what guides the ship.

It is there the money was spent. So, when they came here and told us that it was some highly sensitive computer system, they were fooling the population. And they come and boast shamelessly after that, “You know, the same price we purchase it at is the same price we sell it.” Not telling the population you spent \$7.5 million on the rudder and the port engine and you sold it to somebody.

Mr. Speaker, this is a matter which deserves enquiry. This matter deserves a commission of enquiry. We want to find out who ordered that blimp. We want to find out what the terms of the negotiation were. We want to find out the terms of the contract. We are calling for a commission of enquiry into that purchase and maintenance of the Aeros [*Desk thumping*] 40B blimp. [*Desk thumping*] and in that commission of enquiry we do not want Gordon Deane. We do not want him as a chairman. His relationship to you all is too close; we fear.

We are talking about crime and the population must know how they are wasting money and do not care about crime. A judge once said that there are criminal elements in URP. We ask them here today, have you ever taken heed of the judge and do an investigation? If you did so, tell us what was the investigation you have performed and what the results were. What the Member for Tobago East said?

Mr. Dumas: Judges say all sorts of things.

Mr. S. Panday: Judges says all sorts of things. People who are engaged in the profession and people who know best, when they speak, hear the contempt the PNM treats them with, judges say all kinds of things. I hope the Judiciary—

Mr. Dumas: You want to know something else the judges said?

Mr. S. Panday: I heard you.

Mr. Dumas: You want to know something else the judges said?

Mr. S. Panday: No, I do not want to hear anything further, thank you. Thank you very much for your kind indulgence. Do me a favour, do not do anything for me.

When one looks at the crime situation in this country one would see that the PNM cannot solve the crime, because the PNM encourages the crime. According to another arm of Government, the Judiciary, the PNM is in cohorts and in the bosom of criminals. That is why as you spend all this money, every year the crime rate

going up higher and higher. Last year today, as today's date, the crime rate was 80, today it is 197. Are you not ashamed of yourselves? Do you think you should sit there and draw salaries, while people are dying like flies?

Like the rest of the public, we say no. We ask them, you come here today, you came here in January, where you refused to pay police officers their \$20 million; we did not see in this supplemental here that you were asking for money to pay that. But you have taken away budgetary allocations for moneys to be paid as overtime to police officers and you put it by the offshore patrol vessel. Today, we see you come here for something for the SRPs, but we are not seeing that you came here with the \$20 million to see if you would pay the police officers. We ask you, hon. Madam Minister, what is the position with that?

Today, the hon. Minister said, you know we are putting things in place and thanks to the Opposition we have been able to put certain legislative package in place to deal with crime. Dear Mr. Trinidad and Tobago; Dear child of Trinidad and Tobago, yes, we assisted the Government to pass legislation to deal with crime.

7.45 p.m.

Two Bills were passed: One was Act 6 of 2007 and Act 7 of 2007. What did Act 6 of 2007 say? Act 6 of 2007—and by the way, that Bill was proclaimed on December 29, 2006, so the legislative action was completed on December 29, 2006, and hear what that legislation says: That legislation, as the hon. Minister of National Security gave the functions of the Police Service Commission:

“(a) appoint persons to hold or act in the office of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police;

(c) remove from office and exercise disciplinary control over persons holding or acting in the offices...”

of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner,

“(d) monitor...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member.

Mr. S. Panday: Sorry, Sir.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. S. Panday: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and especially that hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

It further says in subsection (7) of the Act:

“...the Police Service Commission may, on its own initiative, request a...report from the Commissioner...at any time on any matter relating to...”

his function . It further says, he may be dismissed or disciplined on:

“(c) reported inefficiency based on his performance appraisal reports,”

So, Mr. Speaker, you were sitting there when we gave the Government the power to give the Police Service Commission certain powers. We did not stop there; we gave the Government and the Commissioner of Police the power to manage the police service, so he is no toothless bulldog. We did a dental work on the Commissioner of Police. [*Interruption*]

It further says:

“...the Commissioner of Police shall have the complete power to manage the Police Service and is required to ensure that the human, financial and material resources available to the Service are used in an efficient and effective manner.”

So, he can manage the service, he could ask for resources.

To show you how they are making a joke, and I will come back to this, I now take you to the Police Service Commission 2006 Annual Report and to show you how they really do not care about dealing with crime. I quote from page 7:

“During 2006, 167 persons were recruited in the police service and trained as police constables.”

And in the same report—and that is on page 7—on page 19 it says:

“Retirement from the police service, during 2006 police officers retired from the service were as follows”—and in the interest of time—“146 officers retired.”

So, they recruited 167 officers and 146 officers went home, so therefore, the net addition to the police service was 21. Now, you care about crime? PNM, you all care about crime? You all just want to spend money and give people the impression that you are doing something. You are buying blimp for \$12.6 million; \$1.5 million a month to repair and look what you did to the police service; 167 they recruited in 2006 and 146 went home. How do you solve crime like that?

Finance Committee Report
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Monday, May 26, 2008

Somebody working in a parlour who cannot read and write—that Member for Diego Martin North/East called people illiterate, even an illiterate person could have done better than this PNM in solving crime. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we are showing you that you do not care; you really do not care about crime.

Mr. Speaker, you will tell me that that Commissioner of Police who we gave the power to manage the police service could not have made representation for more manpower? The Minister himself is incompetent. Could he not have asked, when you are looking around, “boy”, look how we are spending so much money; \$15 billion and the murder rate is increasing. We ask the question, could the Minister ask him, think about how many police there is? How many policemen do we have in the service? When you check, 40 per cent of those would be on leave at any time, see where the police service is going. I myself was a victim of that kind of police—

[*Hon. C. Imbert stands*]

Sorry, sorry.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): It is okay. Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 10, I move that the House continues its business till the completion of this matter—the debate on the report of the finance committee and also the supplementary appropriation Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (ADOPTION)

Mr. S. Panday: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, on last week Saturday because of the incompetence of this Government, incompetence of this Minister—and I would not blame the Minister, I blame the Government, and you all should hang your heads in shame and go home, because the security of the people, you cannot see about such a simple thing.

Last week Saturday in my own village, bandits came into a neighbour's house and shot a 26/27-year-old-boy, could have been your son, could have been your brother—shot him. [*Interruption*] I arrived shortly after and I saw he was shot by a pump gun. [*Interruption*] I saw all his entrails on the ground and blood splattered all over the wall and the pictures and on the ground. We waited for some time; they called the police, the police was not coming, so I decided to go to the station myself at 2.15 or 2.45. When I asked the officer, look, somebody got shot—the bandits were so boldface they did not even have a runaway car, they escaped on foot—if you go right now we will catch them. He said, there are only two police officers in the station and nine prisoners.

I do not blame him, I blame the people, I blame the PNM and I blame the Minister particularly, and the commissioner. So I said what to do, the man might die? He said, the hospital just called and said he died. I said, oh God, send the police we will catch them there, they are on foot. Mr. Speaker, the police did not arrive there until about 4.30—4.45. I came and made a public statement about it, and do you know what the senior superintendent in San Fernando said, like the Member for Diego Martin, “I do not know what I am talking about”. I want to tell that senior superintendent that I was there in the station; other persons from the village came and met me there. As a matter of fact, the deceased father came there and he went back crying also. So, if the senior superintendent said I am not speaking the truth, it seems to me that the nine prisoners they had in the station, he probably gave them precept and uniform and made them police. [*Laughter*] Because I was there and there were only two policemen.

Mr. Speaker, and you tell me that you are spending \$15 billion! So, I could not take it anymore. Further, than that, the day for funeral the coffin was there and the pundit was saying the prayers and they came and asked the man to move aside, they want to fingerprint—what humiliation that is to the family.

Mr. Sharma: What a shame! Look what the PNM has brought this country too.

Mr. S. Panday: The mother is bawling and crying, holding her belly, and they say, “Move aside”. [*Interruption*] They said you do not have the fire permit as yet, you know; we could take back the body. [*Interruption*] I was at that time at the San Fernando Police Station attempting to get the fire licence to cremate the body. That is the way they treat people.

Instead of bringing the Compensation for Injuries Act, to help people who have been shot; people have been killed, [*Desk thumping*] look at how you all treat poor people, PNM; look at how you hurt poor people, PNM! That is what you all are! I decided that I am going to do my part to deal with the issue, and I wrote the Chairman of the Police Service Commission asking for the removal and/or discipline of the Commissioner of Police under section 123(1)(c) and (d) of the Constitution (Amendt.) Bill of 2006. I said, I reported the matter, how there were only two police officers at the Princes Town Police Station on Saturday, May 17, and the incapacity and/or refusal of the officers of the Princes Town Police Station to respond to a fatal shooting and robbery at #73 Buen Intento Road, less than one kilometre from the Princes Town Police Station, which distance could have been covered in two minutes. [*Interruption*] The bandits wore no masks, were bareback, escaped on foot, and had the police responded in a timely fashion

those murderers could have been apprehended. Then I quoted section 7 which I just quoted to you there. I quoted also section 123, which gives the Police Service Commission the power to deal with the Commissioner of Police if he is negligent, if he is inefficient and if he is incompetent. I reminded them that section 123(8) gives the Police Service Commission the power to discipline and/or dismiss the Commissioner of Police for inefficiency.

Imagine if the bandits had called the station and realized that there were only two police officers in the station. Princes Town, at that hour of day was very busy. The bandits could have run through Princes Town and killed people like flies or they could have run into the business places and rampaged every business, robbed them. This is what the situation has redounded to. The deplorable situation in the Princes Town Police Station requires immediate action on the part of the Police Service Commission.

So, we have the Act, so when the Minister says, “We helped them to pass the Act”, that is true, but the problem we are having is that they are not implementing the Act. They are not implementing the Act to solve crime, with the aim of dealing with the crime.

The law is there! PNM, why are you not implementing the law? Why are you allowing the law to go on the shelves and gather dust? So, we have decided and we are telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago that although we are not in Government, we are going to implement the law; we are going to deal with crime. We are going to deal with crime in a meaningful way, although we sit on this side of the House. We are calling upon the Police Service Commission to ensure that the commissioner does his work. The commissioner, now knowing that if he does not make his junior officers work, he will face the bounce, so he will make sure coming down the line that all the officers work. If we get the officers to work, I am certain that will have a dent on crime.

Assuming now that the Police Service Commission does not wish to work and say, “We do not care, you write letters if you want, “nah””. Well, the Police Service Commission has the power to call upon the commissioner to make the police service efficient. Then we shall go to court; we shall ask them what is the reason why you are not acting? The Member for Princes Town South/Tableland, as a lawyer, would know, we will go for judicial review of their decisions. [*Desk thumping*] We will go for them, so we will ensure—Rev. Teelucksingh and all of those persons who are suffering at the hands of criminals and the inefficiency of the PNM, we want to let them know that we shall enforce the law to deal with

crime. So all is not lost, all is not lost. We will deal with the situation until we get rid of the PNM, whichever comes first. [*Desk thumping*]

8.00 p.m.

I have finished with that point, unless you want to hear anymore.

Hon. Members: No!

Mr. S. Panday: Good, good; I will not be long. I move on to another point here today.

Mr. Imbert: No, no.

Mr. S. Panday: No, no; you cannot take it?

Mr. Imbert: We want to go home.

Mr. S. Panday: You want to go home? Stay here and bear the agony that poor people feel when they are being robbed. You are getting food just now; they ordered good shrimps for you to eat. Come and listen to how the people outside there are groaning and crying; the children of Enterprise whose mother and father were killed just this week.

When Act No. 6 of 2006 was passed in this House on April 13, it said that we were going to appoint a police commissioner. For the first time, the Parliament had an opportunity to investigate the person who we are going to appoint as commissioner. It is no longer the Prime Minister with the section 72 veto, so he could put who he wanted. We have taken away that power, in the reform of the law, from the Prime Minister, and given it to the Parliament. I am quoting from section 6 of the Constitution (Amdt.) Act, No. 6 of 2006, which amends section 123 of the Constitution. It says:

"The Police Service Commission shall nominate persons for appointment to the offices specified in subsection (1) (a)..."

That is the Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioner.

It says:

- (3) The Police Service Commission shall submit to the President a list of the names of the persons nominated for appointment to the offices of Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police."

It then gives the process for appointing a new commissioner, because one may come soon.

Finance Committee Report
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Monday, May 26, 2008

"The President shall issue a Notification in respect of each person nominated under subsection (3)"—That is the list which went to the President.— "and the Notification shall be subject to affirmative resolution of the House of Representatives."

This means that when the notification comes before the House, we shall debate it.

It says:

"(5) The Police Service Commission shall appoint the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of Police only after..."—you great men and women of this country, that is, Members of the House of Representatives; not the Senate—"approves the Notification in respect of the relevant office."

If the Police Service Commission sends a number of names to the President, he sends the notification to us for all of us to investigate. At this point in time, we want to make sure that the best person is appointed Commissioner of Police. [*Desk thumping*] We want him to know that when he is appointed, he will not be like the former Mr. Snaggs, who the Prime Minister called to his office and handed him his letter of appointment, to let him know, "You are beholden to the Prime Minister." This new Commissioner of Police would have the confidence of both sides of the House; so when he goes there as Commissioner of Police he is not beholden to anyone.

In those circumstances, that Commissioner of Police would be such a powerful person, that he would not be afraid of any politician, so he could do his work without fear or favour.

How could we investigate that man? Today, I ask the Minister of Finance to make available resources, financial and otherwise, to the Opposition, so that we may hire private detectives, persons in the know, to investigate the person, so that we could make recommendations. If there are four persons, we could say, "Look, we hear this one so and so and so."

Hon. Members: Hear!

Mr. S. Panday: That is the point: We do not want to hear, we want to investigate. [*Crosstalk*] I have heard certain things about certain persons on the list, but I will never mention it, because it will be, "We hear." We do not want to hear; we want to investigate. We want to come here with facts, so that when we endorse a commissioner of police, we would know what we are doing. If a local is appointed, we could make contacts. If a foreigner is appointed, how would we

know his background? There was somebody who came here the other day, some security man, and when he went back to the United States, something happened and they found out something about him.

Mr. Imbert: "Jack bring him!"

Mr. S. Panday: You will get jack up soon; you keep on stabbing people.

How can we investigate him? We need those resources in order to do a forensic or whatever search, so that when the person comes we could say, "We have heard good things about you; we have heard how great you are and we want to tell you something today, Mr. Commissioner; when you are appointed, you have the backings of Trinidad and Tobago." How do you do that?

If we are not given those resources, then when that resolution comes before the Parliament that debate will be in a vacuum and we will be going nowhere. We will be making a mockery of the law. That is why persons say that the law is an— We must ensure that we implement the law in a proper way. We must implement the law in a way that would benefit Trinidad and Tobago; in a way that is not partisan; in a way that we ourselves have taken our oath to do our work without fear or favour, hate or ill will. We call upon the Government tonight. The Whip has mandated me to do the relevant drafting to ensure that we are given those resources.

Furthermore, we want to inform the Government that when the notification comes from the President, it must not come in such a shameless manner as this piece of legislation from Friday for Monday. When the notification comes, we must be given ample time to carry out our investigations. We are serving two notices on the Government: one, resources made available to do our work and, two, give us sufficient time to do our investigations so we could make a meaningful contribution to the appointment of the next Commissioner of Police.

I leave the local government for my friend from Fyzabad. I merely want to say that non-implementation of such an important piece of legislation— Do you know what they did? They put advertisements in the newspapers and told people, "Go by your MP and pressure him to go for this legislation." They did not have to pressure us; we knew what we were doing and we gave support to this legislation. When we give them support, they refused to implement it.

This is not the only law they have not implemented. What about the breathalyzer? You called people shameless. What about the breathalyzer? The Breathalyzer Bill was passed in this House sometime ago. The Member for Diego Martin North/East, incompetent and inefficient as he is— Mr. Speaker, people are

asking for the breathalyzer; look at the number of persons being killed on the roads; lives are lost, not only by the barrel of a gun, but lives are lost on the roads. When they asked for the breathalyzer, he said, "We are dotting the Is and crossing the Ts." Well, he is the cross on the people. [*Laughter*] Have you not dot the Is yet? Is it that you feel your role and function is to be someone who behaves like a comic and insults people? Do you feel that is your position? No, Sir; with great respect to you, you have an important role to play to implement the law.

Some nonsense I heard last week, that the Metrology Act was preventing the implementation. How long did you know that? Why did you not come to the Parliament? Why are you allowing 100-and-something persons to die on the roads, Mr. Minister of Works and Transport? Why are you doing that? Why are you treating the people of Trinidad and Tobago like that? Why have we not seen the breathalyzer? Do you not care that people are dying on the road?

I want to let them know that the law in France has gone further; not only does the police have an obligation to use the breathalyzer, but if you go in a place and you have a certain amount of alcohol, the proprietor now has a duty to give you the breathalyzer. These are the ways we must go forward. We must be innovative and radical to deal with problems. With the nonsense the Minister of National Security spoke about rehashing old things, I want to tell him that on this side look at how innovative we are; we are bringing new ideas to the table. We are saying that even the place where a person is drinking alcohol, like in nightclubs where you drink whole night and leave 2 o'clock in the morning, give them the breathalyzer. If they fail it, make sure that you have police officers there to make sure they do not go. Instead the Member comes to Parliament and uses all his time to insult people, and outside the Parliament he pushes the knife.

What about speeding? The two major causes of death on the road is alcohol and speeding; there are three, but I will come to the other one. Do you know that once it gets dark you could drive as crazy and as fast as you want, because we are using such an archaic system of stop clock timing, they cannot time in the night? That is why when persons come from the nightclub and are going down the road, "all of dem" killing themselves. We need to have speed trap guns, like laser and radar, so we could deal with speeding on the roads day and night, 24 hours a day. Instead of that, we see no policemen on the roads.

I want to give the Government a suggestion today. Instead of wasting all this money on all these highly sophisticated instruments, we need to hire a number of policemen, as many as we could, put them on the streets, put them on motorbikes.

People must see them on the road. The blimp is of no use; bandits do not fly in the sky, like lagahoo and soucouyant, like you; they run in the road. Once you have police officers on the road, they will be there to deal with crime. Not only traffic offences, but they would be able to stop runaway cars. We need more police officers on the road immediately.

As a matter of fact, my colleague from Arouca/Maloney spoke about the panchayat system, there is another aspect to that. There is something called village and rural policing; it is in the law. *[Interruption]*

You look good in a peddling pusher, that Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's. You go and wear your "pum pum shorts" and stop disturbing me. *[Laughter]* I see him posing in one of the newspapers. *[Laughter]* He is a candidate for a "pum pum shorts", and he is heckling me? *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order; order!

Mr. S. Panday: We could introduce something called rural and village policing. We raised that with the senior police officers and they have agreed that we could go with something called "rural and village policing". For example, Diego Martin is a hot spot, we could bring in persons as village police, just as my colleague for Arouca/Maloney spoke about the panchayat, with villagers taking decisions. We could stretch that idea around and have village or rural policing.

The police officers in the station, when they come up the hill somebody could make a cellphone call and the "fellas" know that the police gone. By the time the police are going up the hill where a "fella" commits a crime, he has a friend down the hill on a cellphone. As the police passes, he calls and "everybody gone". If you have village or rural policing, you would have members of the community, maybe retired police officers, retired coast guard persons or any civic minded person who is willing to make a contribution to his society, we probably could employ them and train them, not with arms, but they could use a baton. By so doing, we will be able to get the village to assist in dealing with crime.

These are innovative moves, and we give that to you. We offer it to you, not because of you, because we do not like you; we offer it to you on behalf of the people of this nation. *[Desk thumping]*

8.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, another thing on the road is defective vehicles and that Minister made sure that none of the testing stations are working so there are a number of vehicles on the road that do not have any certificate of inspection and that is another cause of death.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for that extra one minute and to tell that Minister that apart of being the most abusive, he is the most incompetent and inefficient back-stabber.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Hon. Fitzgerald Jeffrey): Thank you very much Mr. Speaker, for granting me the privilege to make my maiden contribution in this august Chamber. I am thanking Almighty God for his guidance and protection; I also thank my constituents who voted for me in the last general election, thus giving me the opportunity not to be served, but to serve them and the rest of the population of Trinidad and Tobago to the best of my ability. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in debating the Supplementation and Variation of the Appropriation Bill, 2008 for \$3,315,16,910 we must look at this Bill within the context of Vision 2020. In Vision 2020, this caring Government is working assiduously and confidently to help this country attain developed nation status on or before the year 2020. This means that on or before the year 2020, we will be a united, resilient, productive, innovative and prosperous nation with a disciplined, caring, fun-loving society comprising healthy, happy and well-educated people and built on the enduring attributes of self-reliance, respect, tolerance, equity and integrity.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to emphasize the words disciplined, well educated, respect, tolerance, equity and integrity because I will deal with that crime situation in a while. Two of the pillars of this vision are as follows: Developing innovative people and nurturing a caring society. If we are to develop innovative people and nurture a caring society it goes without saying that education is the sine qua non for these two facets to be realized.

Mr. Speaker, employment is also critical in facilitating the achievements of poverty eradication and human resource development. A critical aspect of this effort is the emphasis on skills development, training and retraining as well as education to ensure the availability and range of manpower resources to match the requirements of a growing competitive economy.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Member for Princes Town North talking about crime and I could speak for every Member on this side. We feel pain, we are saddened and are deeply concerned when a murder is committed in this country. This is no laughing matter and, therefore, we need to come together as one House to deal with this crime situation. There is an old Chinese philosophy which says that a pebble by itself will not make a mountain but several pebbles coming together could make a very high mountain.

When we hear statements like “do them first before they do you”, “civil disobedience” and similar statements which were made by the Member for Couva South tonight, to me, is very inflammatory. Sometimes statements made in this House about any bad situation in Trinidad, we run to Zimbabwe. It is also important that when we go on the political platform we must be careful about what we do and say. This is a time when we have to look at Vision 2020 and work together for the good of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to correct some statements made here tonight concerning the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). As you know, UTT falls under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and I could not sit here tonight and allow these inaccuracies to go by. I want to make the statement first and foremost that the University of the West Indies (UWI) is not incorporated by an Act of Parliament and, therefore, has no duty to account to any Parliament.

Secondly, the draft Bill to incorporate the UTT as an Act of Parliament is now being considered by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and will be presented to this House in due course. Tonight we heard statements about an O level situation at UTT. To put the record straight, UTT delivers a one-year free university programme which allows students to attain appropriate entry requirements for any UTT Certificate or Diploma programme. Pre-university programme students have to attain certain levels of performance through examinations before proceeding to the UTT programme to be able to get a degree and so, it is very wrong to make that statement.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make the statement that the University of the West Indies right now is considering introducing a pre-university programme in St. Augustine, and there are universities in the United States of America right now that have this pre-university programme. Therefore, this point that the Member for Caroni East made has no basis for a productive and prosperous UTT.

Mr. Speaker, I also want us to deal with the question of transparency. Our Government, ably led by our visionary Prime Minister saw the need to establish the University of Trinidad and Tobago which was incorporated under the Companies Act of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in September, 2004. We have different accounting periods at UTT; the first one is from September 14, 2004 to September 30, 2005. We also have September 30, 2005 to September 30, 2006.

The firm of Ernst & Young Chartered Accountants has been engaged by UTT to audit the accounts for these two periods. A comprehensive transaction-based audit is being conducted which by its very nature is a demanding and time-consuming exercise.

Mr. Speaker, present projections are that the audit field work will be completed and the audited financial statements for the period ending September 30, 2005 shall be available by the end of May 2008, this month. Thereafter, the 2006 audit will commence because as I have said, the firm has been engaged for those two years. The 2006 audit should be completed by December of this year.

I want to remind this House that the University of Trinidad and Tobago is a new organization, that is why steps are taken to do such a comprehensive audit. There is no effort on the part of the UTT and the Government to hide anything. Even without the audited financial statement we all know that the Appropriation Bill will deal with allocations to UTT. Those matters have come before the Parliament and as we begin the budget presentation they will be part of it.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that in 2002 the figure for tertiary education was 15 per cent; in 2008 the figure is now 35 per cent and we are confident that by the year 2015 that figure will reach our target of 60 per cent. We have partnerships with the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom; Johns Hopkins University in the United States of America; Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, Canada; University of Texas Austin USA, the Danish Technical University in Denmark and the Southampton Institute and Maritime Centre in the United Kingdom. We have all these alliances because the Government has said that the University of Trinidad and Tobago must adhere to the principles of excellence. That is why it is using this as it develops all its programmes for the principle of excellence.

Mr. Speaker, some of the programmes that are being offered by the University of Trinidad and Tobago are the National Engineering Technician's Diploma; the Bachelor of Engineering; the Bachelor of Science in Petroleum Technology; the Bachelor of Science in Process and Utilities Technology and the Masters of Science in Petroleum Engineering in Information and Communication Technology. We also offer a Masters in Environmental Science and Management and a Masters of Health Administration.

Mr. Speaker, I point to the centre of Biosciences, Agriculture and Food Technology. This centre will be seeking to make a major contribution to the efficient production of food for the nation. The academic programmes will be guided by the following vision:

1. To inspire the young in pursuing careers in food and agriculture.
2. To enhance the sector's competitiveness in a globalization environment and to transform the food and agricultural sector to be socially considerate.

This centre is aspiring to produce a new generation of food and agricultural entrepreneurs and biotechnologists who can undertake the development of food and the agricultural sectors leading to the goals of wealth creation, food security and safety.

The graduates of the centre will meet the following criteria: they must be technologically competent and creative in thinking. Let me point out the programmes to be offered at this centre. There will be a Bachelor of Science, a Master of Science, a Doctor of Philosophy in Food Science and Technology, a Bachelor of Technology in Crop Science and Technology, a Master of Philosophy in Plant Production and Protection, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Plant Science.

8.30 p.m.

The President of the University of Trinidad and Tobago is internationally acclaimed. He is a scholar and professor. We have problems when people use the privilege of this House to denigrate people's character and cast aspersions. We know quite well the calibre of the President of the University of Trinidad and Tobago and we cherish him and will support him in this House. [*Desk thumping*]

I want us to deal a little with what is happening at our Ministry. Because all our youth do not have the same ability, because their socioeconomic and geographic circumstances are not the same, a variety of programmes geared towards our national goals and objectives are located throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the main tenets of our education policy is that no one must be deprived of an education because of the inability to pay. Not all our trainees come from economically advantaged families; not all come from the urban areas; not all come from stable families; not all were successful at CXC. These are some of the reasons we are bringing those programmes to communities in the north, south, east, west and even Tobago.

Let us take YTEPP. It operates in Barrackpore, Carapichaima, Chaguanas, Fyzabad, Marabella, Penal, Pleasantville, Princes Town, Couva, Siparia, Claxton Bay and La Brea; in the north, Arima, Curepe, Diego Martin, Barataria, Malick, Sangre Grande, Valencia, Belmont, Maloney, Woodbrook and Tobago, Signal Hill. When we look at that, we see a spread of the programmes by this Ministry. We are not looking at particular areas, but the entire country of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, we are walking the talk. We say what we mean and do what we say. This is a government that cares for, not only one part of the

country, but every community. This is a caring government. Despite the geographical spread, transportation costs and personal expenses can still be prohibitive to many a trainee. We must go the extra mile to help them. Hence we provide a stipend to our trainees.

The demand for these programmes is growing every year and we are forced to expand the capacity. In this Bill, under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, we are asking for your approval to spend \$240,237,000 under the recurrent expenditure and \$10 million under the development programme. There are 25 YTEPP centres—six full time and 19 part time—throughout Trinidad and Tobago, offering 14 disciplines for young people between the ages of 15 and 25.

The students are exposed to career enhancement, numeracy and literacy skills, vocational skills training and entrepreneurial development and support services. All graduates are employed on completion of this programme; 80 per cent through an employment bureau operated by YTEPP and 20 per cent find jobs on their own.

A tracer study done by YTEPP graduates 2001—2006 shows that 85 per cent of the graduates believe that local employers accept YTEPP certificates and because of this, they were most certain that becoming certified by YTEPP would allow them greater employment opportunities. Eighty-two (82) per cent agreed that receiving training at YTEPP has made finding employment easier and therefore the majority of the graduates stated that YTEPP training allows them to open their eyes to new career opportunities. Seventy-two (72) per cent of the employers have stated that the YTEPP graduates have met their expectations.

From 2001—2006, over 15,000 graduated from the programme. Incidentally, this year, YTEPP will be celebrating its 20th anniversary. Twenty-five (25) per cent of these trainees come from households with a monthly income of \$1,500, while 34 per cent come from households earning between \$1,500 and \$2,500 per month, therefore there is a great reliance on the daily stipend. The previous figure of \$24 per day was indeed inadequate. We have increased the stipend from \$24 per day to \$60, an increase of \$36 per trainee. Because of this increase, we are seeking the approval of this House for \$6.91 million to meet the increase in stipend to beneficiaries of YTEPP. YTEPP offers over 480 vocational courses in 12 occupational areas. All YTEPP programmes are certified by the National Examinations Council, so there is quality.

Another success story of this caring Government is the On the Job Training Programme, one that we know the other side stopped when they assumed power in 1995. This is a pre-employment training programme that offers participants an

induction into the world of work and focuses on the acquisition of educational and occupational skills. Trainees are remunerated with a stipend between \$1,600 and \$5,000 per month, based on their educational qualifications, for a period of one year.

We are all aware of the problem of many school leavers, who were searching for employment up to just six years ago and were denied employment because they lacked experience. Under the PNM, the programme was introduced during the 1991—1995 period. God knows why. Between 1995—1996, the UNC scrapped the programme. This Government reinstated the programme and it has grown from 913 trainees in 2002 to 10,585 in 2007. This figure is projected to reach 12,000 at the end of 2008.

It was this caring Government that made the timely intervention. Nationals between the age of 16 and 25 years are eligible. The success of the programme is well documented in many an employer's annual report. Between July 2002 and November 2007, over 50,000 nationals applied and approximately 40,000 were placed.

We would like to place all our applicants. As a consequence, we have had to make an alteration to the arrangement with private providers. A private provider was reimbursed with only \$800 for each OJT trainee, irrespective of the amount paid to the trainee, whether \$1,600 or \$5,000. Many private providers did not agree with the standard amount of \$800 for each trainee because that was an incentive to absorb the trainees. All our OJTs are encouraged to enroll for assessment in the Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational qualification certification.

We have decided to have a 50 per cent reimbursement to the provider for each trainee. For example, if a trainee is paid \$1,600 by the private provider, he gets a reimbursement of \$800. If, however, he takes on an OJT trainee and pays \$4,000, the private provider would be reimbursed \$2,000, which is 50 per cent. Many have agreed to accept the trainees. This augurs well for the anticipated 12,000 applicants this year.

We expect to place a higher percentage of applicants this year with the private providers than in previous years. It is because of this new and laudable arrangement that we have sought the approval of the House for the \$45 million to pay stipends and meet other operational expenses in this rapidly expanding and popular training programme. The trainees, while obtaining work experience, have the tremendous opportunity to showcase their capability and work ethic to the employer so, at the end of the year of training, they can be absorbed into the establishment.

Mr. Speaker, our Helping Youth Prepare for Employment Programme (HYPE) caters for the needs of nationals who have at least a post primary education and have been unable to find employment either because they do not possess the necessary skill level or the academic achievement. The purpose of this

programme is to make them more marketable in the workplace, particularly in the construction industry. The programme is open to nationals between the ages of 17 and 25, who have an interest in the construction industry.

HYPE is administered by the Metal Industries Company Limited. The programme began in 2002. Approximately 2,500 young nationals have graduated from the programme, with over 70 per cent finding employment in the construction industry. Upon successful completion of the training programme, candidates will receive a TTNVQ certificate, certified by the National Training Agency (NTA) in their respective trade areas.

Trainees study computer application in phase one for three months and building construction technology in phase two for nine months. Trainees were only entitled to a daily meal, inclusive of a drink and a bus pass. They did not receive a stipend. Some young people, who were interested in the programme, did not register because of financial constraints. Trainees are now being paid a daily stipend of \$50, in addition to the free meal, inclusive of a drink, and free transportation. This is a one-year programme. This inclusion of the stipend has made the programme more affordable.

There are HYPE centres in Macoya, Sangre Grande, La Romaine, Laventille, Tobago and Moruga. We are asking this honourable House to approve the sum of \$5 million to meet the payment of stipends and the provision of meals and bus passes to participants of the programme for the period March to September 2008.

8.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Skills Centre (NESC), like the other programmes discussed earlier, has been playing a magnificent role in developing our human resources in skills necessary for a developed nation. NCSE is tailored around the skills expectations of new plants targeted for the energy and energy related industries. NCSE has centres in Laventille, Point Lisas, Point Fortin, La Brea, Mayaro, Moruga, Debe, Tobago and Ste. Madeleine. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Maharaj SC: But not in Tabaquite.

Hon. F. Jeffrey: You would get that just now. In October 2007, NESC introduced four-year apprenticeship programmes in automotive services technology and heavy equipment maintenance. This year, the apprenticeship programmes included instrumentation, facilities maintenance, industrial mechanical maintenance and power linesman. There are 18 other courses, most of which run between nine and 12 months.

The NESC has spent some of its resources in staff training. Additionally, the NESC has had to recruit additional staff to manage and operate its numerous centres. The number of trainees in skills training has grown from 767 in 2005 to 2,026 in 2008. It means that additional financial resources are required for operational expenses relating to the running of the centre. It is in this context that we seek the approval of this House for \$10 million for the National Energy Skills Centre.

The Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago, by Act No. 16 of 2004, positioned the Accreditation Council as a principal body in Trinidad and Tobago for conducting and advising on the accreditation and recognition of post-secondary and tertiary institutions; programmes and awards, whether local or foreign; and for the promotion of quality and standards for post-secondary and tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago.

The staff at the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago has some salary issues to be addressed. As a result of the conclusion of the negotiations for the period November 2004 to February 2008, it has become necessary to meet the cost of arrears of salaries and allowances, as well as revised salaries due to the staff. It is in this context that this House is asked to approve the sum of \$3 million to pay the arrears of salaries and allowances, as well as the revised staff salaries.

The College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) has been given the mandate to broaden the access to tertiary education for previously underserved groups such as academically underprepared adult students with work experience, financially disadvantaged persons, geographically remote and physical or disabled persons.

COSTAATT has 4,995 students enrolled and is expecting an enrolment of 10,000 students by 2010. As a consequence of the increased number of student intake, the college has been expanding and requires \$4.561 million to meet the cost of leasing four new centres and two sites for 2008, one at Gulf City Hall, Lowlands, Tobago; Sutton Street, San Fernando; Bishop's in Port of Spain and another on Henry Street.

We must understand that at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, the request it is making is justified. We are not thinking in terms of merely quality, but the quality of the programme as we march triumphantly and confidently to achieve Vision 2020 status on or before 2020.

Finally, I would like to make the statement that despite the problems with the crime situation in this country, I am confident, as my colleagues are, that we shall overcome the crime situation in this country and would once more be a peaceful society.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I congratulate the hon. Member for La Brea on his maiden contribution in the House.

Mr. Harry Partap (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for allowing me to participate in the discussion on the Motion before this House. Let me also offer our congratulations on this side, to the hon. Member for La Brea on his maiden contribution.

I listened to the hon. Member for La Brea and at one stage I thought that places like Biche, Cumuto, Tabaquite and Gasparillo were not in Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, you did not cater for those areas. There are people living in Biche, lots of young people, and we certainly would like to have access to some of your programmes, because you are spending \$240,000.

Mr. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I promise the Members for Cumuto/Manzanilla and Tabaquite that we will look into their requests. I think if they are favourable, we would grant them.

Mr. H. Partap: Thank you for the assurance. We look forward to that action by your Ministry.

Mr. Maharaj SC: A true politician.

Mr. H. Partap: I think he is. Before you stood, I was going to say that you are a Government that cares for the whole country, but you were leaving out certain parts of the country. We take your assurance and look forward to these programmes coming to the rural communities.

In the Minister of Education's contribution, she did mention the SWAHA College, in Sangre Grande, which is in the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla. It bothered me because that college had been under construction for the past seven years and it was not completed. It was really a matter of concern. What she said this afternoon was really alarming. This is a school that was earmarked at an estimated cost of \$21,400,000, but would eventually cost the taxpayers \$38,263,000. This is a cost overrun of \$16,836,000. Of course, this does not surprise us on this side, because the PNM projects have always been plagued by cost overruns and also time overruns. Projects were never completed on time.

The Minister brushed aside the point she made with respect to school boards not being in the construction business. She said so. But, as far as I can recall, the Ministry of Education had a policy where denominational boards were not allowed to form construction companies in order to build schools. I say so from personal experience as well as a former member of the Presbyterian Primary

School Board of Education. We were denied the opportunity for one of our statutory boards that had been involved in construction, to get a contract to build our schools. It was the same reason. The Ministry told us that the policy was not to allow the in-house construction companies from the boards to do this work. I was at a loss to understand why the former Minister of Education allowed the SWAHA Board to use an in-house construction company to build the school. I could not understand why she allowed that to happen, when she had refused other denominational boards the same privilege.

Perhaps, she may have to explain that at some time. I know that the present Minister—the problem has fallen in her hands and I think she is doing the best she can to resolve it. In a matter of a couple of months, she has been made Minister and she has been able to resolve it. Eventually, we would have the SWAHA Hindu College back in operation so that the children—they are the losers. Right now they are at the temple in very cramped conditions that are not conducive to learning and education.

In looking through the Schedule to the first supplemental general warrant, 2008, I saw a number of subheads. With these subheads there were substantial allocations. For example, there are subheads like publicity, contract employment, short term employment and other contracted services. There are huge amounts of moneys put into these. I am wondering if that is not the PNM pork barrel and if they are not preparing to use the taxpayers' money to fund their election campaign. The only rationale I can come to is that they intend to use the publicity, contract services, short term employment and other contracting services to fight this election. They would have an unfair advantage on the others.

For example, in the Ministry of Finance, I see from my calculation in looking through the warrants on contract employment, she would spend \$751,619,000. I wonder if those figures are correct. They are in the warrant. In fact, on short term employment, she would spend \$400,000. I cannot understand. That is contracted employment. In the Ministry of Housing—

Hon. Member: Is that \$400 million?

Mr. H. Partap: It is \$400,000. In the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment, they would spend \$22,376,390 in contract employment and in other contracting services they would spend \$126,935. That seems to be a bit reasonable. In publicity, the Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment would spend \$590,800. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources would spend \$590,000 in publicity and \$23 million in contract employment,

\$100,000 in short term employment and \$3,555,000 in other contracted services. Certainly, the Government is awash with money and, perhaps, they do not know what to do with it. The Ministry of Public Administration would spend \$238,337 in contract employment; \$90,000 in short term employment and \$162,000 in other contracted services. The Ministry of Local Government would spend \$4.4 million in other contracted services. So too would be the Ministry of Works and Transport.

9.00 p.m.

The Ministry of Works and Transport would also spend \$3,178,000 in contract employment; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would spend over \$1 million in contract employment; and the Ministry of Information would spend \$462,663.

It is clear from these kinds of figures that some attempts are being made to have an election war chest, and they seem to know where the money is coming from. So, we have to keep our eyes open, and we have to be extremely vigilant as we move on.

Mr. Speaker, I refer now to Head 43 in the papers before us which deals with the Ministry of Works and Transport. They would benefit from \$262,367,200. When I saw that, I was very delighted. I said that some of the 25 bad roads in my constituency, the Cumuto/Manzanilla area, would be completed, but when I looked further into the papers, I realized that only \$30 million would be spent on roads. That is a drop. That is not enough, and I am going to tell you why.

The Minister of Works and Transport promised to rehabilitate the St. Marie Emmanuel Road in Caratal during the election campaign. The PNM candidate, Mr. Sirjusingh, was on a Coosal truck driving through the constituency and telling people that they are going to fix the road. The road has not been fixed. The Minister told me that road is going to cost \$15 million. That is half of what he is going to receive. So, obviously, I may not even get half of the road fixed.

I do not know what the Attorney General is doing, but she is now shadowing for the Cumuto/Manzanilla constituency. She is beginning to promise people from stove to toilet bowls. What they really want is not the toilet bowls, but the road in St. Marie Emmanuel. She is not here, but I am hoping that she would get the road fixed for them.

The Minister of Works and Transport promised to realign the Plum Mitan Road—I am dealing with matters that affect my constituency, because other Members on this side dealt generally with finance. I do not want to be long—Plum Mitan Road at the 7.5 kilometre mark. There is a dangerous landslip there. In fact, there are about five of them.

So, I had raised this matter over a year ago. In fact, I had raised this matter in 2006. The Minister came here and said what he was going to do. I am going to read from the *Hansard* dated June 30, 2006. This is what the Minister said:

“The answer to part (a) is as follows: It is proposed that the Plum Mitan Road be realigned from the 7—8 km mark in order to avoid five landslips at this location. This exercise is expected to commence and be completed in fiscal 2006/2007.”

That was last year. Mr. Speaker, nothing was done on the road.

About one month ago when the residents decided that they would have a peaceful walk from Plum Mitan Junction to Manzanilla Junction one Saturday morning to highlight that problem, since no action was taken with respect to that road and to highlight that problem and the broken promises, the police, at the last minute, withdrew the permission and, presumably, on the instructions of the Government, and we had to call off the march.

I had also submitted a motion for the adjournment of the House, and in discussions with the Minister, we eventually shelved the motion, because he made a second commitment. Mr. Speaker, this time, I was able to get him to put it in writing, and he did put it in writing. It is his handwriting, because nobody can sign like him. This was on January 25, 2008. He said:

“Barring unforeseen circumstances, work will commence on the Plum Mitan Road in May 2008 and will be completed by September 2008 (between the 7.5 km and 8.5 km marks).”

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I kept this letter because I have to frame it. The month of May is coming to a close and not a single thing was done on that road.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I think people are a bit disturbed, and they are acting up. They are going to do things and we may not be able to stop them. I humbly suggest that the Minister do the work that he promised. He said that would start in May, and we still have a few days to go before the end of May, and the work would be completed by September. I hope that he would keep his promise.

The Minister would not fool the people of Plum Mitan, as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources attempted to do last Friday. What the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources did on last Friday was, in responding to a motion on the adjournment, he said that I was misrepresenting the facts. He talked about the number of things that they are doing and the number of things that have been completed.

Now, I could not tell the Minister anything after that, because I had spoken to the villagers there the day before. So, I do not know within the day before and when he spoke if he did all these things. So, I wanted to be sure.

I had a meeting with the farmers over the weekend, and they asked me for a copy of what he said. I told them what he said and they would certainly like to meet with him, because he did not meet with them. He called a meeting on May 16, 2008, but he turned up on the May 14, 2008 and he did not meet with them, and they were very upset.

What I presented on Friday was exactly what is taking place in the Plum Mitan rice field. He said that a range of incentives are being offered to farmers for land preparation, vehicles and tractors and so forth, but they cannot benefit from this, because they do not have their leases. *[Interruption]* All these things are available at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, but the farmers cannot access them because they do not have leases and you must have a lease.

The Minister went on to say that he installed 13 gates. Yes, that is true. The gates were installed, and I said so, but they are leaking. The water is seeping through. It is not retaining the water, and such a gate is of no use to the farmers. The whole idea of irrigation is to be able to get the water out in the rainy season, and then put water back in the dry season. That is the whole idea of the sluice gates—to bring out the water when you have an excess amount and then get the water back inside when you do not have any water in the dry season. That simple thing is not working at all.

The Minister said that the drainage pumps are working. Three pumps were installed, but two are not working. The three pumps would have to work if you are going to irrigate the place. One pump cannot do it. He said that the irrigation pumps are to be installed, but we do not know when. They were supposed to be installed by the beginning of this year. We are approaching the rainy season and the pumps are not installed.

The Minister also spoke about the valves, and every one is leaking again. They are not of any use to the farmers. He spoke about the desilting and the widening of the channels, and that work is not completed. It has stopped. I told him so, and he said no. I can go on again, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I think I have made the point.

You cannot expect the farming community to do what they are supposed to do—grow food for this country—if you do not provide them with the facilities. You must provide them with the facilities.

I want to tell the Member for La Brea that he could have all the technicians he wants—you can give them all the PhDs and so on in agriculture, but you would not get food production moving unless the farmers are involved. Food is produced by farmers, and agriculture is the farmers' business. You have to provide them with the facilities. I see the ministry is getting \$27 million, and I hope some of this money would be used to stimulate agriculture; let it go back to the farmers.

Presently, farmers in some of these areas are waiting for their compensation and they cannot get it. I made the point in this House already that farmers do not want compensation. That is not what they want. They want to sell their crops, because they lose out when they have to get compensation. They do not make money. They do not even get enough money to buy seeds, chemicals, fertilizers and so forth. They need to sell their crops. You could keep the compensation but desilt the river, provide them with the sluice gates and all the facilities that they need. If you do not do that, you would not get agriculture moving. We have been spinning top in mud all these years, and now the problem has come up, and we are saying that it came overnight.

We on this side have been warning the Government about that. We have been warning them in every budget debate. They are spending money as if it is going out of style, and it is not helping the farmers. You have to listen to the farmers. The Minister said that he is liaising with the farmers and meeting with them, but that is not true. Why did the Minister come here and speak an untruth? Why did the Minister come here and make it look good?

Do you know what the Minister did in Caroni? He went down there with the media to show them how the Caroni (1975) workers who have been displaced have lands and they are now planting, and he could not even get a handful of ochros from the fields, because the people could not plant. They were not sure what was happening. They are not getting the land.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these are the points I wanted to raise this evening. I said that I must do and I must do it now, so that we can put them on track. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources should start putting things in place, and stop the publicity. You do not have to go with the cameras. Do you know that presently rice farmers cannot get seeds to buy? But he is putting seeds in the newspapers. That might be a good thing, but I did not get any seeds. What I am saying is that the Minister has to get off from the publicity and start doing the work.

With those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Joseph Ross): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. I did not plan to talk this evening—

Mr. S. Panday: Why do you have so many papers in your hands?

Hon. J. Ross: I have the papers, but I really did not plan to talk, and this is not because the Ministry of Tourism did not seek to have any additions to their funds.

9.15p.m.

First of all, my colleague from La Brea, the brilliant contribution he made this evening, [*Desk thumping*] and when I listened to other contributions from this side, I felt proud to be on this side, Madam Deputy Speaker. But when I listened to the comments coming from the other side—wild allegations, I said that I must get up and say a few—

Mr. Sharma: Kind words.

Hon. J. Ross: Not kind words, but get to the truth. I listened very attentively to the hon. Member for St. Augustine—

Mr. Sharma: Marvellous speech. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. Ross:— and it took somebody like the Member for Fyzabad—

Mr. Sharma: To recognize the brilliance in it.

Hon. J. Ross:—to really recognize that speech as being a brilliant one. [*Interruption*] We understand your problem, Sir. After a very long preamble and I timed him well, he went on to talk about Government spending \$87,000 per minute in this country. I like his analysis, but I could take his analysis even further and ask if this Government is spending \$87,000 per minute, who is the Government spending that money on?

Hon. Members: Themselves!

Hon. J. Ross: I am going to answer it. I want you to look carefully at where the funds that are being spent by this Government are going. The records are there to show that this Government is continuing to develop Trinidad and Tobago to become a developed country on or before 2020 and that is where the money is going. [*Desk thumping*]

He went on to say in this year alone, the Government spent more than what the UNC spent in four years.

Dr. Gopeesingh: In one year, you spent four years of money.

Hon. J. Ross: Nobody is denying that. But the question is again, who was the Government spending this money on and in whose interest? I am telling you that

every single cent of that \$87,000 per minute is being spent on the 1.3 million people in Trinidad and Tobago. Our Prime Minister has gone on record to show this Parliament and to show the entire nation that Trinidad and Tobago is in this favourable position today, largely because of certain actions that this Government has taken in the past.

Hon. Member: "Yeah, like selling oil."

Hon. J. Ross: Not selling oil, Sir. One of the actions that the Government took was to float the currency. Another action that the Government took many years ago was to monetize our natural gas, and these are the facts. That is why I am saying today, we are in this favourable condition largely because of the actions of the Government. That is why today we can afford to spend \$87,000 per minute. *[Interruption]* You could have the oil and you do not have the brain and the commitment to develop the resources, waste of time. We are in a fortunate position today, because we have a Government that is committed to developing this country.

He said many of the items for which we are seeking increases could have been predicted long ago and should have been included in the original estimates. I am really, really disappointed. A man of his calibre, his experience and his training should be one of the last persons to make that kind of comment. Look at some of the items in the Supplementation Bill that we are looking at. You are talking about arrears of salaries for police, for fire service officers. The point is these are items that came out of industrial negotiations. You cannot predict what the outcome will be and make allowances for that in your budget.

Mr. Bharath: Two seconds.

Hon. J. Ross: Two seconds, go ahead.

Mr. Bharath: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is common accounting practice that if you know that you are in negotiations—I am just taking this one point—whether you are a private sector company or public sector company, that you should make some form of accrual for those expenses and therefore, you should have some indication, may not be the full amount, but you should have some knowledge and you should budget for it accordingly. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. J. Ross: Your point is well taken, but it is also practice; go back to government accounting. The Government does not treat their accounting like that and you should know better than that. Government deals on a cash accounting basis; he knows that. I am very surprised again, that you would stand there and make that kind of comment; you should know better.

He also criticized the Minister of National Security for the \$2 million that he is seeking for commencing the radar system in the Chaguaramas peninsula. Is this hon. Member telling this House today that Government must not put the necessary control systems in place to secure the borders of Trinidad and Tobago? That is what you are saying.

Mr. Bharath: I am not saying that!

Hon. J. Ross: That is what you are saying!

Mr. Bharath: [*Interruption*] I said—for the last three years—

Hon. J. Ross: Madam Deputy Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: If he is going to give you the opportunity then, but we cannot just, you know—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Ross: I am not giving him any more time. He is saying to us this evening—and I took copious notes of what you said—that at this point in time for the hon. Minister of National Security to be seeking \$2 million to commence the radar system in the Chaguaramas peninsula—he was severely harsh on the hon. Minister. These are the same people who would come afterwards and criticize us for taking no action; forked tongues as they would say; you are speaking with forked tongues; today you say something, tomorrow you say another thing.

Again, he went on to talk about the inadequate facilities at our hospitals. No one denies the fact that there may be challenges faced by the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Sharma: Tell us what going on in tourism.

Hon. J. Ross: You are going to find out what is going on in tourism just now. You enjoyed yourself over the weekend; that is one thing that went on. I am not aware that this government has ever said that everything is perfect at the hospitals. If you look at the performance of this Government over the last few years in health, the performance has been described by all and sundry, for the last few years, as phenomenal. Ask any one of those old folks who have benefited from the CDAP arrangement.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You are very serious about what you are saying there?

Hon. J. Ross: I am very serious. [*Interruption*] Was the hon. Member telling us today that because of the odd occasion—and I say the odd occasion—when some of our people have to suffer inconvenience, that the Government must not seek Parliament's approval for the \$59 million that it is seeking in the Supplementation

Bill to improve cardiovascular services in this country? Is that what you are saying? That is what he is saying. That is what you are insinuating. You were criticizing the Ministry of Health severely and saying that we are squandering the money.

Mr. Bharath: It had no beds; that is what I was saying; it had no beds.

Dr. Gopeesingh: He spent the money on cardiovascular.

Hon. J. Ross: I did spend some on cardiovascular yesterday, but I spent it on other things.

He asked how is this booming economy, at this present day, benefiting Trinidad and Tobago as a whole. He criticized the Government for the mega buildings and our assistance to our Caribbean brothers and sisters. The developments that are taking place today are part of Government's programme, again, to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country. Some of these very people who are criticizing us in this House, travel all over the world and they come back to Trinidad and Tobago many times and say how backward we are. Now that the Government has a plan and a programme to modernize Trinidad and Tobago they still continue to— What do they want?

Madam Deputy Speaker, they also fail to recognize that when Trinidad and Tobago contributes to its Caribbean brothers and sisters, we are not only contributing to them, but we are developing the region and we are also developing our own economy. [*Desk thumping*] A large part of our exports go to the other Caribbean islands.

He also talked about mismanagement and how this Government has mismanaged the funds that have been made available to us. I want to remind him—[*Interruption*] you are talking about mismanagement; it was that. When they were in power you would recall—[*Interruption*] Yes, do not accuse us of mismanagement, I am going to show you what is mismanagement.

Hon. Member: “Ask Lenny Saith where we money.”

Hon. J. Ross:—TIDCO, when they took road paving and put it under TIDCO just to win an election. Is that good management? TIDCO did not have the resources to handle that, but they took it and they gave it to TIDCO. Contracts were not properly developed; were not properly signed off—

Mr. Peters: That is why all “yuh” come there; to do better.

Hon. J. Ross: And that is what we are doing; the evidence is there. [*Desk thumping*] I want it to be registered, hon. Member for Mayaro, because we have been criticized by you for mismanagement and I am showing you when you had it

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in your hands what you did with it and that is why the people of this country took a decision to put you back on that side. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] I am coming to that too.

Mr. Sharma: Take your time.

Hon. J. Ross: I am taking my time. In haste to pave roads prior to the election. I reside in Barataria—beautiful place.

Mr. Peters: Dangerous now.

Hon. J. Ross: Very beautiful; I have been walking there—and I am going to tell you, they paved the roads in Barataria. They paved on Fourth Avenue in Barataria; they paved around endless cars. That is the quality of work that was done. Even some of the contractors and I recall a couple of them coming to me, asking me to help them to get payment. How could we pay them when there were not even contracts? “Word ah mouth”; go and do this; go and do that. These “fellas” had no contracts to do any work.

Mr. Sharma: Did you report it to the police? In what capacity did they come to you?

9.30 p.m.

Hon. J. Ross: That is the kind of things that we have to listen to. In what capacity?

Mr. Sharma: Yes.

Hon. J. Ross: They came to me as a concerned citizen who they felt could have helped them.

Hon. Member: As an honest man.

Mr. Sharma: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. Ross: Could I help them when they did not have a contract? I would not facilitate you breaking the law, brother. I could go on and on, on this thing. [*Interruption*] I want to look at—

Mr. Sharma: Tourism.

Hon. J. Ross: Yes, I am coming to tourism.

The Member made a plea as well for squatters in his constituency. However, he did not have the fortitude to stand up like a real man today and praise this Government for its successful squatter regularization programme. He did not have the guts. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: You all regularizing by breaking down the houses.

Hon. J. Ross: The Government today is asking for a further \$42 million in 2008 because of the increase in the number of households from 280—699, and let me go to the exact—

Hon. Member: More voter padding.

Hon. J. Ross: Padding?

Hon. Member: Voter padding.

Mr. Sharma: What padding were you thinking about?

Hon. J. Ross: All I am saying is that this Government, in this short space of time, regularized almost three times as many households, people who were squatting.

Mr. Sharma: At what cost?

Hon. J. Ross: At what cost? [*Interruption*] What did you all do when you had the opportunity?

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: We built 55,000 houses, how many houses did you all build? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Ross: Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just mention a few points on my good friend, who has left, from Couva South. He talked about discrimination, and I am saying these things because I could not sit here and allow these things to go unanswered. I could not. He talked about the discrimination in the housing practices of this Government. Those of us who understand how the houses are being distributed would not agree with that, but I am not going to go into how the houses are being distributed. I want to remind them, again, I live in Barataria and the Aranguez Villas are just a few hundred metres away from me and we are talking discrimination and I am telling you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there are people in this House who were able to get more than one apartment.

Hon. Member: “Ooh”. Side by side. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: Who are they? How many persons?

Hon. J. Ross: I am not going to name anybody, you know. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Deputy Speaker, where is the discrimination in the housing practice? You had poor people looking for homes.

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: And doctors and lawyers.

Hon. J. Ross: The houses were built for poor people [*Crosstalk*] and poor people did not have access to those houses. [*Crosstalk*] Not only were these houses distributed in a most reckless manner [*Crosstalk*] but in addition to that these people took the houses that were built for poor people and were renting the houses. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: Why you do not tell Brian that?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Then report it to the police.

Hon. J. Ross: Tell Brian. [*Crosstalk*] The Member also accused this Government of exporting criminals [*Crosstalk*] to Central and he boasted that he is proud to be the son of indentureship. [*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, those who were not children of indentured labourers; those who came here; those who had sons and daughters of African slaves, like myself, I am also proud to be the son of an African slave.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We should all be proud.

Hon. J. Ross: But more than that, I am proud of the performance of this Government over the years. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Bharath: You have very low expectation.

Hon. J. Ross: When you look at—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Continue to sing for your supper.

Hon. J. Ross: I am going to sing for it, my brother, and I am going to sing the truth, [*Interruption*] and you could be sure that everything I say I believe it. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: The truth shall set you free. He is singing the truth.

Hon. J. Ross: Look at the original estimates; look at the supplementary and look at what is being asked for. This is why I believe we came here this afternoon to look at the estimates and to look at the variations that are being suggested and to see if there is any justification for these items. What we found going on was all kinds of wild accusations. Basically, the original estimates, what we are saying, they proved in some ways to be inadequate, to ensure that this Government effectively achieve its objective under the various heads or under the various ministries. Some of the reasons for the inadequacies are definitely outside of the control of this Government.

Increases in the price of oil caused the Government to have to put aside another billion dollars to subsidize, not NP, but to subsidize fuel for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want it to be clear because many people go around

believing that the Government is subsidizing NP. The Government is making it easier for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to live. When they on the other side are accusing this Government of not caring, ask them to take another look.

Again, apart from the price increases in fuel, we have to look at the fluctuation that has taken place in exchange rates and so on; we have to look at the increase in the cost of travel, and all our overseas heads of missions and their relatives, what all this means, is that it is going to cost us more and more to bring these people back to Trinidad on their annual vacation, as the case may be, to which they are entitled. These increases are not normally under the control of the Government and we must bear these things in mind as we look at this Bill.

This Government is also asking for the additional funds. We are asking for the additional funds to sort of speed up in some of the areas where we have succeeded. What they are asking us to do; they want this Government to stop everything. I listened to—particularly, the Member for St. Augustine, they want us to stop and wait for the next budget to start back again. It does not work like that. It cannot work like that! The Government has to seek additional funds, if we are moving, we are moving, you cannot stop.

Hon. Member: You are moving with—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. Ross: We are moving on to another level. That is what is hurting you. [*Interruption*] This Government is taking this country to a higher levels. [*Crosstalk*] You have criticized and I will close off in—

Hon. Member: Listen to your Central Bank Governor, fire him or get rid of him. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Ross: The Member for Caroni East criticized the Early Childhood Care Centres and said that this Government only built so many in the period of time.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Seven in seven years.

Hon. J. Ross: I want to challenge him, look at the quality of the schools that we have put down. [*Desk thumping*] Look at the quality and look at the standard.

Mr. Sharma: Well, name one.

Hon. J. Ross: What are you telling me about name one. There are about three in Barataria/San Juan, I have been in them. Look at the quality of those schools as compared to what you have put down. Look at the system that we have put in place to ensure that these children start on the right footing. [*Crosstalk*]

I would honestly suggest that my colleague, the Minister of Education [*Interruption*] invite the Member for Caroni East to visit a few of those schools that this Government has built and then go to some of the schools that they have built and compare them and tell us.

Hon. Member: Centres.

Hon. J. Ross: Centres, okay.

Dr. Gopeesingh: For \$42 million; \$2 million for each one.

Hon. J. Ross: I hear you “man”, talk; when you are finished talking, sing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the criticisms that they keep making about special purpose companies—again, I cannot sit here and allow this to go. They have been talking—and particularly the Member for Caroni East—about this lack of transparency. I am happy that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, generally speaking, have some level of education and can determine the truth when they hear it. I hardly think that people who think and think deeply would accept that statement that was made by the hon. Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: So why your Prime Minister called a commission of enquiry? Why he called it on UDeCott?

Mr. Sharma: Why he fired his “trade” Minister? [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. Ross: Madam Deputy Speaker, these special purpose companies that we have in Trinidad and Tobago, they are probably some of the most audited companies in the world. Believe it! [*Desk thumping*] These companies are probably some of the most audited companies in the world, and I am going to tell you by whom.

Mr. Bharath: You really believe what you are saying there? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Ross: I believe exactly what I am saying, [*Interruption*] every single thing. [*Interruption*] Which other part of the world you have one company subject to internal audits, subject to external audits, subject to audit committees, subject to ministerial oversights, subject to the Auditor General’s audit, subject to quality system audits and all other audits? I am saying that these special purpose companies and state enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago are properly audited. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: They are a hot bed of corruption. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Ross: The Auditor General's department—and the Member for St. Augustine should know—does not have the capacity to do all these audits [*Crosstalk*] otherwise—

Dr. Gopeesingh: They do not have the—[*Inaudible*] [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Ross: You would not want an audit—[*Crosstalk*] “Nah”, you are talking nonsense. I would not take you up on that. [*Crosstalk*]

The last point I want to make has to deal with this whole question of crime. “The PNM cannot solve crime because the PNM is in cohorts with the criminals.” I think that was a statement made by the hon. Member for Princes Town North. I am very proud that I can stand here and speak for the little people in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] I am telling you that if you go to the streets you will find out—and you are well aware of it, the information you will get—is that the crime in Laventille and in other parts of the country really escalated under the UNC regime. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Under Sadiq Baksh.

Hon. J. Ross: It was their hon. Leader who threw his two hands in the air [*Crosstalk*] and said that he gave up. He could not handle the crime. It was not here.

9.45 p.m.

We, on the other hand, had a different approach. We accepted the challenge and we started putting things in place. We took a very holistic approach to dealing with it. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

I would not take you on with that.

This Government recognizes the seriousness of crime. As the Minister of Tourism, I am fully well aware of the impact that crime could have on the tourism sector.

I also listened to the Member very carefully when he talked about Rev. Teelucksingh. Rev. Teelucksingh should know that the Government alone cannot solve crime. [*Crosstalk*] He should know that the church plays a very important part in solving crime. [*Desk thumping*] As someone who subscribes strongly to the Christian faith, I believe that the church has a very significant role to play. I ask the hon. Member for Princes Town North to inform Rev. Teelucksingh that despite all that is going on, despite the Government's efforts to solving crime, that we solicit the assistance of the church, and his church as well.

Hon. Member: I think you need a puja.

Hon. J. Ross: Madam Deputy Speaker, this evening I also want to clear the air on these original estimates. Those persons on the other side want to make it appear that this Government, year after year, comes and asks for supplementary funds.

Hon. Member: "Dat is not the truth?"

Hon. J. Ross: That is a fact, but this is a normal practice. I am going to go a step further. Under their leadership of this country, the same practice existed. You came here from 1996—2001, year after year after year. What was the amount?

Mr. Bharath: Tell us. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Ross: He said that the supplementary funds being requested by this Government from 2002—2007 ranged between 3 and 8 per cent. Right or wrong? My calculations showed me that the funds they requested were between 10 and 12 per cent of the original estimates. [*Crosstalk*] The fact of the matter is, he was quoting percentages.

Mr. Bharath: I did not quote any percentage regarding the estimates.

Hon. J. Ross: I think something is going wrong with him. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Abdul-Hamid: "Is de Canadian accent."

Hon. J. Ross: This is a normal practice in budgeting. [*Crosstalk*]

I will close by simply saying that this exercise is simply a part of an annual task of making amendments, either through increases or mere transfers in our annual estimate of expenditure.

Our estimate of revenue and expenditure is presented to Parliament prior to the start of the new fiscal year, usually. This estimate is subsequently approved and forms the basis for expenses and expenditure incurred in the ensuing year. Government could never predict, with 100 per cent accuracy, because there are a lot of things outside its control. Seeking supplementary funds is a standard exercise.

When I listened today to how my colleagues defended their requests, I am convinced that we on this side are, indeed, doing our work.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I must express my surprise at the kind of accusations, the kind of wild statements, that came from the other side, speaking to the media—

Hon. Member: "Television gone."

Hon. C. Imbert: As my friend said, he was speaking to the nation. [*Crosstalk*]

We on this side are committed to good governance. We are committed to accountability. The evidence is there, and I am confident that with these funds we are seeking, we are only going to use them for the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that they have a better quality life in the not too distant future.

Thank you.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Mr. Speaker, I had intended to make a very short contribution. In fact, I was thinking of a "pum pum" contribution, short and tight, but having heard my good friend from San Juan/Barataria, I will have to move to track pants, which is a bit longer. [*Laughter*]

One of the challenges new Members of Parliament face is how they treat with newness. During the campaign, I asked a friend in San Juan/Barataria if he had made up his mind who he was going to vote for. He said that he was going to vote for the guy who looked like Morgan Freeman. [*Interruption*] One minute.

Mr. Ross: I want to correct you.

Mr. C. Sharma: Having heard him tonight, he surely was not talking like a free man. He is under the shackles of the PNM. I want to say something to you as brother. I want to say it to all of you opposite: Do not fear making yourselves look foolish, like the Member for Diego Martin North/East. You run that risk. You do not need to score points by being ignorant and being insulting. It takes you nowhere. You have to be like me: simple, sincere and having the human touch. [*Laughter*] I am very serious; have the human touch.

You are in the service of people. Most of us do not win elections based on our individual selves. [*Crosstalk*] Did you hear what the Member said? "We suspended you."

Mr. Imbert: Twice. [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Sharma: They used their power. On one occasion, that was how they suspended Basdeo Panday.

Hon. Member: For rudeness!

Mr. C. Sharma: For whatever reason, they create the situation.

The point I want to make is that people do not vote for us individually; they vote for the party. If you went up as an Independent, you would lose your deposit; the same thing for me.

You used the state resources. You have done this all the years; you use muscle power, and you are paying a big price for that today. *[Interruption]*

You wanted to say something?

Mr. Ross: I want to correct you. The constituency is Barataria/San Juan and not San Juan/Barataria.

Mr. C. Sharma: A rose by any other name is Barataria/San Juan. Do not disturb a nice contribution for that foolishness "nuh man". You see newness; you know that you are on television. Think of the children of the nation saying, "Listen nah, the Member for Barataria/San Juan made an important intervention; he got up to say it was A or B."

I would have expected the last speaker to display some sort of knowledge of his Ministry. He said absolutely nothing about tourism. He felt that hosting a two-day cook shop at another place that cost a few hundred thousand dollars, whatever the sum of money, was enough to establish himself; not good enough. Not a single word about tourism.

He spent all of his time attacking the contribution of the Member for St. Augustine. Did that make sense? He spoke eight hours ago; there were 10 speakers after him, and you come, almost the last speaker on the Government side, to attack the Member; useless. You said absolutely nothing that has added any value to the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

For instance, you should have told us what you borrowed the \$160 million for.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That the Government stood guaranteed for the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO).

Mr. C. Sharma: That is a lot of money; the citizens do not know what that money was taken for. In fact, when you look at the state enterprises, it is \$16 billion.

You were making a point; again, you are suffering with newness. Are you aware that the Special Purposes Company has not delivered a single project within budget on time? You want to answer? When you look at the dollar value we are paying, we are paying more than four, five and six times on some of those contracts. You have to be very careful of what you are saying. You cannot fool the national community. They are all aware of it. The argument today is not about the quantum; it is about spending. We are not getting value for money.

Many persons outside of Opposition Members have said that to you; so if you say that the Opposition is trying to score political points, which is a useless argument, the contractors are saying it; the business houses are saying it; the Auditor General is saying it. You are not delivering anything.

You spoke about discrimination. In less than 163 hours, the national community will be observing Indian Arrival Day, 163 years. I congratulate the Minister of Community Development. Madam, I hope you are listening to me. For the first time in a long time, we are seeing some small degree of improvement at that Ministry; a level of fairness, a level of transparency.

When the former Minister was there, it was a PNM slush fund; \$46 million for friends and family of the PNM. You talked about being a proud son of African slaves. All of us must be proud of our birth; wherever we came from. What happen to the other children? You have to be of African slaves to get the benefits, is that what you are promoting? That is what you said.

If you look at all the projects of this Government, the majority are in PNM areas. You just claimed three early childhood centres in the Barataria/San Juan area. [*Crosstalk*] Where is the distribution?

Mr. Speaker: Order; order!

Mr. C. Sharma: Look at the distribution in any one of the social programmes. Let me walk you through a few. You cannot take all the blame, because you are new. Perhaps, you did not know; perhaps, you did not take the time to read what is available.

Look at the National Commission for Self-Help; the majority of projects awarded are in PNM-controlled constituencies. Not only the majority, but for the number of projects, the dollar value as well

When you look at scholarships, all our kids who go to St. George's Medical School in Grenada, the majority does not reflect the pot-pourri combination of Trinidad and Tobago. You must be concerned.

When you talk about housing in Trinidad and Tobago, all the housing developments are largely in PNM areas. In fact, persons who receive the houses have raised concerns. They say, "But what happen to our friends; they are not getting any?" You must be very, very concerned when you look at the levels of discrimination.

You know what is most frightening in this country—I will deal with the crime situation—when you look at the level of distribution of resources of this country, something has to be wrong. I want to take you to the document presented to us. I think it is on page 50. Members, could you go to your document at page 50? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, when you come with prepared texts, you do not know where to find the information. When you have civil servants preparing your speeches, you come and rattle anything. Let us walk through page 50 of the document. I want to

Finance Committee Report
[MR. SHARMA]

Monday, May 26, 2008

show you item Project 063, Apartment Complexes in Port of Spain. The electrical work is \$2.8 million. You are building these homes and their distribution is discriminatory to the highest level. You pump a lot of money into it for political gain.

Look at Pleasantville, infrastructure work, apartment complexes in Port of Spain, work, large sum of money.

10.00 p.m.

La Horquetta Multi-purpose Complex, \$4.5 million and this is an existing complex. I think the Member for Arouca/Maloney should be familiar with this. Are you? You are not aware of the money that is being spent? But the complex exists and you are pumping \$4.5 million in it.

Pleasantville, the constituency of the Prime Minister, \$4.2 million and this is an existing complex; Maloney, a multi-purpose complex \$840,000 and La Horquetta is a mile apart from Maloney; Bon Air, \$1.5 million; Edinburgh 500, Chaguanas East, \$4.3 million. The point I am making is that you do not see any of these things in other areas. The highest level of discrimination obtains in the sugar welfare community, if you go through that and the one in the PNM area the roads are not maintained in the same way, the street lighting is not the same, there are no complexes in these areas and this is what the country is going to rise up against.

You can say all the flowery things you want to today, you cannot fool the national community and it is not going to be children of one race, it is going to be the children of Trinidad and Tobago because all our communities are very mixed now. You cannot continue this discrimination, it borders on racism in the country and it is state-sponsored racism.

Mr. Speaker, I continue: Golconda, \$177,000—because most of the people who live there resemble me, good looking. La Fortune, \$466,000. Why was there not \$5 million? Frederick Settlement, \$200,000. Why? How much is it, Member for Laventille West?

Mr. Hypolite: —[*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you for correcting me. I wanted to see if you were paying attention. So he agrees with La Fortune, he agrees with Golconda and you disagree with the other one. I purposely did that. So you agree that discrimination exists; \$177,000 in one case, the other one is \$466,000, and you are correct on the \$2 million. It cannot continue. As Members of this House, we have taken an oath of office to be fair. This is the taxpayers' money.

Provision of housing subsidy: Greenfield sites, \$30 million, so the point of this debate today is not to challenge the quantum of money, we are simply saying let the money reach all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. When one looks at the provision for the Tobago House of Assembly, I think it is about \$30million—\$40 million, I do not remember the correct amount, but when one looks at a regional corporation, Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo for instance, it is still 10 cents per day to provide 30 services from scavenging to cemetery upkeep, what have you.

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at what obtains in most of the ministries, the treatment of services totally differs. For instance, in most offices—and when one looks at what obtains in the office of a Member of Parliament, and I make the argument for all Members of Parliament, not Opposition Members only—books, \$71,000, but the office of a Member of Parliament does not get \$1.00 to buy a newspaper.

Overseas travel, close to \$500,000. What is wrong with sending a member from the constituency office to look at what obtains in the Canadian Parliament, or an MP Office in London? Janitorial services, we also have to maintain an office. One small ministry gets \$175,000. Security services, \$85,000 and the time will soon come where offices of Members of Parliament will require security. I saw a second break-in in the office of the Member for Point Fortin.

Promotions, publicity and printing in every ministry, we see millions of dollars. Does the office of a Member of Parliament not have similar work to do? There must be printing of information, and publicity and promotions of what obtains in the office.

Hosting of conferences, seminars and other functions and I make the point. How does a Member of Parliament's office treat with the national festivals of this country? Should he/she not be encouraged to observe and celebrate Eid, Divali and Christmas, whatever? While funding at the ministry level is to the tune of millions of dollars, not a single cent is given to the office of the Member of Parliament, the reason being is that those in office can use the State resources in very clever and legal ways so they are not in the least bothered. If you go to the office of the Minister of Legal Affairs—and he can host a hundred different things including giving out seeds.

Employee Assistance Programmes, in all our offices I am sure by now there are about 200— 300 workers, and they too need to obtain assistance, but it does not happen. So when one looks at what obtains in the provisions we are asked to approve, I go back to page 18 where the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation (HDC) got an increase of \$165 million plus and I ask the question and the hon. Minister of Finance promised and did not deliver. That is another thing I want to treat with for a minute.

The Minister of Finance had promised on last Friday to give answers to questions asked and very little was delivered. The point I want to make is that the HDC was given \$165 million and not a single project has come within budget. Do you know what we are paying for low-cost housing, in excess of \$400,000; housing and settlements, social infrastructure, \$273 million which is an increase and I ask, where is this money going? Not a single Member on this side was consulted, nor his proposal considered. We too represent people; you are not better representatives than us. You are in Government; you can use the State resources. How long will that last? It is wrong. Members of Parliament should be treated across the board.

My good friend, the Member for Laventille West, since he is following will see that the Orangefield Housing Development, extension of the sugar welfare, \$6,954 increase but right below, Tarouba where the Government is trying to get votes for the Pointe-a-Pierre seats, it is \$2.6 million. So the evidence is right here, I do not need to go through every item.

The Government uses all the machinery at its disposal, every programme. My good friend from La Brea who was a school principal and knows better, that you cannot use these programmes to discriminate. The persons who attend the programmes, when they do not see the mix of Trinidad and Tobago ask questions. It should not be so. So when you call Fyzabad and Gasparillo, you are not fooling anybody, that does not represent the people of Trinidad and Tobago and it cannot continue, those same people are going to rise up one day and that is the fear we must all have. The State resources cannot be used to prop up your political party.

In fact, when one looks at contract employment in all the ministries it is in excess of hundreds of millions of dollars and nobody knows how they get those contracts. When the Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke about overseas missions, have you looked at the mix there? It does not represent the people of Trinidad and Tobago and that cannot continue whether it is Canada or London, it must represent all the people of Trinidad and Tobago and you cannot argue that they are not qualified. I know my friend, the “douglá” of the century, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West may not agree with that but we cannot continue that way. It is painful.

Mr. Speaker, I think I will revert to my “pum-pum” shorts contribution and take my seat at this time. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call upon the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, may I remind the hon. Member for Caroni East that the Chief Whip has put you in a particular place and I find you are demoting yourself. So you need to come back to your seat.

Mrs. Indra Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj (*Toco/Sangre Grande*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make only a brief contribution to this very important debate and to utilize the opportunity to speak on an important occasion which this country will observe on Friday, May 30, 2008.

Since this is my maiden contribution to this distinguished Parliament, please permit me to thank the people of Toco/Sangre Grande for having elected me to office. In particular, I wish to sincerely thank the more than 9,700 electors who have expressed their faith in my candidacy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I have listened intently all afternoon and the debate was quite interesting. I want to comment in a brief and general manner on what I have observed and what I have listened to on some of the matters that appear to have escaped the attention of the Opposition Members.

I have not heard any views expressed on the major advances this afternoon, but this country is being turned, yes Trinidad and Tobago is being turned into the financial capital of the region. [*Desk thumping*] Indeed there have been new developments in that regard in recent days, the major initiative being undertaken to speed up delivery in the justice is another matter that did not feature in this contribution of the hon. Opposition Members. These include a legislative agenda, new systems and equipment, a new and modern infrastructure.

Trinidad and Tobago's growing influence in regional and international affairs is also another vital matter that escaped scrutiny. That expanding influence would manifest itself, among other things, in improved trade and diplomatic relations. That also escaped my Opposition colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, on another matter, local government reform is with us and this would take governance closer to the people. In fact, the Government is committed in making local government a major executing arm of the state. Public administration also slipped away, no notice of the reform which is on the way.

10.15 p.m.

Consumer rights are also receiving efficient attention. I was recently proud to attend the formal opening of an Early Childhood Care Centre in Toco/Sangre Grande, my constituency. [*Desk thumping*] This is only one of 600 being built by this Government all across the country. I did not hear that.

This is where life begins. This is where life begins for the next generation. This is part of a comprehensive reform exercise in education, which is one of the proud flagships of this Government. Where did that go? Indeed, education will be

one of the cornerstones of the ongoing development of our country. This includes tertiary, technical and vocational education. Did not hear that.

Health and wellness is also a major national agenda. Did not hear that. But I am particularly keen on referring to the social welfare section, which is fostering and nurturing a caring society where most of us are heading. Did not hear that. The ambition of this programme is to reduce poverty, boost incomes and develop sustainable communities. I can testify that these programmes are bearing fruit in Toco/Sangre Grande. I am sure that Members of the Opposition will quietly acknowledge the same in their constituency.

The accelerated housing building programme speaks for itself and that is a revolution on its own. Thousands of people are enjoying improved and sustained family lives because of the Government's home construction programme. [*Desk thumping*]

National transportation has improved and the shortlist projects will create ongoing improvement. Did not hear that. The national infrastructure is also a work in progress. This includes massive drainage programmes to come. Did not hear that. In addition, the utilities are receiving a measure of focus it has never gotten before.

We all know that this country is close to zero unemployment and this has a strong implication for wealth creation, which is a major hallmark of this Government. Did not hear that.

The corporate sector is also getting focused attention and there are several programmes aimed at building a spirit of savings. The environment is another front line agenda matter and the evidence can be seen across the country in development. I do not know if they saw that.

On the industrial front, I did not know hear any Opposition Member discuss the positive implications of the improvement works at the Petrotrin refinery. Did not hear that. Or any comment on the new fiscal regime for oil and gas over the new gas fields that have been found, that have gone out for competitive bidding. Trinidad and Tobago remains a world leader in energy and this will continue to be so. This will continue to be true when several new gas-based projects come on stream. They forgot that.

My constituency is receiving attention with respect to tourism and soon will be more ready for local and international tourism. [*Desk thumping*] Toco/Sangre Grande is also poised to take off with respect to services in the handicraft sector. The agriculture sector, which includes fishing, is also getting increased attention. With respect to the resources, I am sure it will soon begin to contribute to more GDP.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, I do not want to speak longer at this time of the evening, but I crave your indulgence to comment on the observance this Friday of our 163rd anniversary of the arrival of East Indians to our country. [*Desk thumping*] On May 30, 1845, the historic vessel, which is well known, the Fatal Razac, docked at Nelson Street with the first shipment of labourers—

Mr. S. Panday: Island.

Mrs. I. Sinanan Ojah-Maharaj: Nelson Island, sorry. I am so touched by all the information that I am giving to my colleagues. To my colleague who is trying to distract me, I am very strong.

That vessel docked at Nelson Island, with the first shipment of labourers from India, to serve under a system of indentureship on the sugar estate. By this time this system of importing labourers was on the way to Trinidad and, by extension, our sister country, Guyana and across the globe.

The system of importing labourers was abolished in 1917, by which time a total of almost 143,939 nationals of India were transported halfway around the world and to our country. Many more were shipped to neighbouring countries, most notably Guyana. The story of indentureship is well known and documented, but this occasion permits us an opportunity to mull over the dramatic achievements of Indians in our society and to honour this rich and enviable diversity of our wonderful country. [*Interruption*] My time will come. I am in government; you are in opposition. [*Desk thumping*] I am also proud to stand as an Indian woman in the PNM Government.

Since Arrival Day was first celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago in the 1990s, similar observations have been held in more than a dozen countries, including far away Australia. I wish to stress, not only to the Member for Fyzabad and to his colleagues, that the PNM honours and celebrates everyone who arrived and who built and nurtured our blessed land. They are all critical to our national achievement.

Surely no country has as much to observe and honour as Trinidad and Tobago; not just because of the customs of festivals, cuisine or culture that have been preserved and fostered, but also, in spite of our ongoing challenges in managing a plural society, Trinidad and Tobago is a model nation of harmony, peace, unity, with shared and common goals and ambitions. [*Desk thumping*]

The children of indentureship and all others shipped to this country have contributed as much as anyone else to nation building and the Government utilized this opportunity to pay special and deserved tribute to all of them, including the Member for Fyzabad and my colleagues on the front.

Mr. Speaker, we must continue to seize the historic reality of our ethnic and cultural adversity, to forge a model of self-understanding in our beautiful nation and to serve as a beacon to societies that struggle and that are struggling to manage their own plural nature. In that regard, Trinidad and Tobago is a world leader. [*Desk thumping*] The challenge before us is to continue our dialogue of honesty and openness, seeking to nurture relationships with colleagues; not just at Parliament, but also with everyone.

It has been a signal honour to be asked to bring greetings to all of Trinidad and Tobago on this auspicious observation of the arrival of our forefathers and our pioneers. On behalf of the Government, I wish everyone an arrival day of reflection and rejoicing. That goes also to the Member for Fyzabad. We are all Indians, but we are using the opportunity to extend greetings to all who have arrived. [*Desk thumping*] May I repeat, on behalf of the Government, that I wish everyone an arrival day of reflection, rejoicing and celebration.

I thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: May I congratulate the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande on her maiden contribution.

Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, I also offer our congratulations to the hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande and to the Member for La Brea on their maiden speeches.

I rise to make a short intervention to this debate—just 15 or 20 minutes—because I do not think I can sit here and allow some of the matters related to crime to go without putting the truth on record.

Mr. Speaker, before I came here today, I had cause to visit Enterprise, a village in which a husband and wife were brutally murdered. That is in the constituency of Chaguanas East. I met Sheldon Mendoza, the brother of the lady who was murdered. I told him where I was going and he said to tell you and tell the whole world that if he does not get justice, Enterprise will be worse than Laventille and no politician could ever come back.

10.30 p.m.

A few days ago, I went to Felicity and I visited the home of a young man who was brutally murdered. I spoke to his mother. I cannot describe what the scene in that house was. I cannot describe it. Everyday we are seeing what is happening. I think what that the Opposition has been saying this afternoon is, yes, you have the majority to pass the vote for the money, but if you are spending taxpayers' moneys, come and show us what you are doing in order to get our vote or support for it. That is all we are saying.

There was a lovely article in yesterday's newspaper by a man called Mr. O'Connor. The Government seems to think that they are not accountable. They have placed the blame on everything else.

In relation to crime, the Commissioner of Police is not to be blamed. The police is not to be blamed. The Minister of National Security came here today and placed the blame on the Commissioner of Police, the police and everything under the sun, except himself. If there is a misconception—under section 85 of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, a Minister is assigned the responsibility for any department of government. The Minister exercises the direction and control over that department. The Permanent Secretary supervises that department, but the Minister is responsible for the direction and control. The police service is a department of the Ministry of National Security. The Minister is responsible for direction and control.

Under section 75, the Cabinet has the general direction and control of the Government, but it is collectively responsible to the Parliament. To come here and say: It is not my fault, it is the Commissioner of Police's fault, is not an answer. During the period 2005—2007, 1,300 murderers are outside there laughing at the Government. Thirteen hundred murderers have not been detected. For the year, there have been 195 murders and only 50 have been detected. There are 2,500 persons who have shot with intent to murder and have not been detected; 1,271 rapists have not been detected; 655 kidnappers have not be detected; 24,500 burglars have not been detected; 23,500 robbers have not been detected. The people are seeing that. "Dey say: We eh hear 'bout dat." Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, the people are seeing that. With respect to larceny of dwelling houses, thieves, over 3,000 persons have not been detected. All we are saying is that you cannot come here and ask for more money for crime, when people are suffering.

I want to spend five minutes to look at the context of this thing. We have to understand this. When the Government got into office in 2002, it was recognized that there was a problem. The Minister then was Mr. Chin Lee. When the public reacted, the Prime Minister said: "All you need, to be a good Minister of National Security, is a level head and common sense." The situation grew worse and worse. I am sure the Prime Minister cannot now say that all you need is a level head and common sense to be a Minister of National Security. Seven years after, we are experiencing a precedent boom, no doubt about that, money is flowing like water but, at the same time, blood is flowing like water. The streets of our nation have a sea of blood. At the same time, the blood flows like water, the streets of our nation have all this blood everyday.

If that is development to 2020 status and to be the financial capital of the world, I do not think we could ever be developed as a nation. To be that, we have to stop what is happening. Unless we stop that then there would be peace, whichever government is in power. I am not here to say which party—This issue is a people issue. We cannot, as a people—now is the time of Indian arrival and there would be emancipation—go forward, if we do not acknowledge the fact that we have to put an end to this.

We are seeing the intermingling with this sea of blood and tears. I have seen people cry, I cannot describe it, when they have lost their loved ones in a murder. I cannot describe it. Mothers and fathers have lost their sons and daughters in the most brutal ways. Sons and daughters have lost their mothers and daughters in the most brutal ways. The nation is in mourning.

Instead of building the lives of people, the Prime Minister is building a big palace. There are talks about getting an airplane. Development, according to the Government, is big buildings. I think that we have to understand that there could be no financial capital without social capital.

I want to put this in perspective. After the present Minister of National Security came in at the end of his first year, the Prime Minister said that gang violence is the cause, but that the average citizen is not at risk. Could the Prime Minister look at the fathers and daughters who have been kidnapped, the children who have been murdered, the brothers who have been murdered and the husband and wife in Enterprise?

The gentleman in Felicity, a few months from now, had planned to get married. He was a successful businessman. His family was very close to him. How could that 80-year-old mother live, thinking that her son was taken away? In every society we have murders, but not what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago today.

Under the present Minister, we had Clayton, the kidnapping expert. We had Operation Anaconda and Operation Baghdad. The sum of \$15 million was spent. We had the blimp and the eye in the sky that went blind. We had Scotland Yard, which has not made a difference in the murder rate. We had police officers from England and a Special Anti-Crime Unit. More and more money is being spent. Some of the money that is being spent—I would like to make an appeal to the Government.

When I visited those homes they did not have any counselling or anyone to talk to them. Today, I went to the home of the husband and wife who were murdered. They have six children between the ages of two to 17. Some of them are going to school. I asked them if any member of the police service brought any

counselling team and they said no. I asked if the Ministry of Social Development came to visit, they said no. I asked if anyone had contacted them and they said no. They feel insecure. There is no one to look at the safety of the children, because one does not under the circumstances. Even what was printed has gotten the man more annoyed. They are saying that it was a murder/suicide. Members of the media went into the house. The man has all the photographs and the images on the computer.

Mr. Speaker, I know you may have done this long before, but if you go into the home where the brutal murder took place, see those children, and what happened, it would be very, very difficult to read the newspapers on a morning.

I am appealing to the Government to find a way to create the machinery, quite apart from trying to stop the murders and crime, so that these people can get immediate counselling on a continuous basis. That is what a country is about.

I am hoping that the Prime Minister would really take steps. With the best will in the world, the Minister of National Security is probably trying his best, but we have to face the facts. The Minister of National Security cannot do this job. I know how difficult it is to be a Minister. A Minister's job is not easy. It is a very difficult job, especially the bureaucracy which exists. It is a very difficult job. The Ministry of National Security is probably one of the most difficult jobs, even more difficult than a Prime Minister's job, but it needs someone who would micromanage the Ministry, who would be on top proactively and would actually be there morning, noon and night. If a Minister in that kind of Ministry gets involved with the paperwork, meetings, plans and theory, nothing would happen. I want to make an appeal because, unless something happens very quickly, no matter what plans the Government has, for whatever development status, Trinidad and Tobago is not going to go forward.

In closing, on behalf of the Opposition, I would like to join the Government on the occasion of Indian Arrival Day to wish Trinidad and Tobago and the Indo-Trinidadian community, best of wishes. Trinidad and Tobago is a plural society. Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians have shared a common history. They have both worked very hard to build Trinidad and Tobago. I think that all ethnic groups in Trinidad and Tobago have contributed to the national life of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a very plural society. We have had problems and we continue to have problems.

That is one of the reasons the UNC passed the Equal Opportunity Act. Thanks to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, that Act is being implemented. I am happy that the Member for La Brea has indicated that Tabaquite would be recognized in some of the projects. I want you to know that on June 11, the Privy

Council would be hearing another aspect of that appeal, which would be very significant for Trinidad and Tobago. That aspect deals with the non-implementation of the Act. People who have suffered unequal treatment can still get relief. When that Act is implemented, obviously, a lot of the things we have been talking about; not only the Opposition, but the Government and Members of Parliament, would be able to go to the Commission and the Tribunal. This is not only about taking action because one feels discriminated against. It was Nelson Mandela who said that the greatest blight to any country is if one feels he is treated unequally and there is no redress for it.

It is in that context, I am happy to close this debate on behalf of the Opposition. I offer my comments to the Government in the way I see it. I think we have a national problem. The Government has to treat with this matter very, very differently. It is very urgent and it affects the development and everyday life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Thank you Mr. Speaker. I listened, with interest, to the contributions of the hon. Members of this House, on the debate of the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 2008.

While considerable time was spent on rehashing a number of issues, which were not relevant to this debate, I propose to deal with the matters that are relevant to this Bill. Before I do so, I wish to clear up some matters I felt that needed to be dealt with before I address some issues that I felt were, at the very best, misleading to this honourable House.

The first matter I wish to address is the conduct of the Finance Committee. I noted that the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine—I quoted his contribution where he noted that:

“The committee stage to determine and to ask questions about the expenditures, and we were condescendingly brushed aside by the Minister who chaired the meeting...It was a sham! It was a futile exercise; it was a waste of time coming here to do the people’s business.”

The Member for Caroni East also joined with the Member for St. Augustine in making similar comments. I took precaution and got a copy, not only of the minutes, which I know have not been confirmed, but certainly were prepared from the *Hansard*. What is revealing about the minutes that were completed, but not

confirmed, is that over 30 questions were asked in the course of approximately 30—35 minutes and they were being fired at a rapid rate.

10.45 p.m.

I want to be polite. There was discord and a level of confusion, and one could not even hear the questions that were being asked. If there is a question that was not the case, I have a copy of the *Hansard* report from which the minutes were prepared.

When one looks at the copy of the *Hansard* report, from very early the crosstalk started. Even before we actually started looking at the items on the agenda—the various Heads of expenditure, crosstalk started. I have a copy of it and I am just going to mention that on one of the pages when I spoke there was crosstalk. Dr. Rafeeq made a comment, crosstalk. On the next page; Mr. Sharma, crosstalk. This is just on one page. I am just reading the level of crosstalk. On the next page, crosstalk; Mr. S. Panday, crosstalk. Mr. Panday, like when you talk there is only crosstalk. Mr. Maharaj SC, crosstalk, and I had to say, “I cannot speak if you all are speaking”, and there was crosstalk again and it went on ad nauseam. So, for hon. Members to come here and give the impression that they were not given an opportunity to speak, they must tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The fact of the matter was that in the course of 30—35 minutes, I was being barraged with talk and crosstalk coming from the other side. It was almost impossible to control the meeting. Eventually, we got some order restored, and toward the end, we decided to suspend the hearing of the Finance Committee. Just before that, the final comment from the other side when order was restored, I answered a question and we had Mr. Subhas Panday again saying. “Thank you very much.” What a gentleman. So, I was taken aback when we resumed the Finance Committee meeting to hear the hon. Member for Tabaquite saying:

“Madam Chairman, in the light of the way this meeting has been conducted and in the light of the position we have taken, we want to file a substantive motion about the way this meeting has been conducted. We would ask no more questions in this sitting.”

Now, because of that, the meeting sped along very quickly and it finished quickly. It made me think, why? Was it because there was so much crosstalk they did not want to contribute anymore? The Member for Princes Town North was saying, “Thank you very much”. That was the last thing I heard.

I then reflected and went back to the very beginning of the meeting, and the Member for Tabaquite had this to say in relation to the meeting. He said:

“We were not told last week Friday that this meeting was going to go on; we were not told that there was going to be a debate on this. We found out from a colleague of yours, off the record, that this debate was going to take place on Monday afternoon at 1.30 p.m. I just thought that I should put that on the record.”

When I thought about it, I realized that there were other pressing matters that needed to get prime time, and time was going fast and unexpectedly, not only was the Finance Committee being heard, but I indicated earlier that we may have continued the meeting on Monday afternoon. In fact, we continued the meeting that very day. I do not know if the sense of urgency and indignation that the Member for Tabaquite expressed had anything to do with those considerations. I do not know, but it begs the question.

On another issue, with regard to the hearing of these meetings, the hon. Member of Parliament for St. Augustine—I believe it was him or the Member of Parliament for Caroni East—forgive me if I have it mixed up. [*Crosstalk*] I believe that it was the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine who gave the impression that questions were asked in this honourable House at the Finance Committee level, in particular questions about Caribbean Airlines Limited, and they were not being answered.

Mr. Speaker, I took the precaution, because you are right, I did my homework and I got the answers. There was a question from the Member for Caroni East in connection with the capitalization of Caribbean Airlines Limited in the sum of \$293 million—could a breakdown be given of what was paid, and the details are here. I am going to give him a copy of the response.

There was another question; how much money did the Government pump into Caribbean Airlines Limited to date? That question was answered. There was another question; in the sum of \$68 million or TT \$431.8 million paid for the enhanced voluntary separation of employment plan and buy-out of claims for employees of BWIA, how much was the former employees and retirees who had been in receipt of settlement? The answer was provided. Every single question on Caribbean Airlines Limited was answered.

So, to come to this honourable House and give the impression that questions specifically dealing with Caribbean Airlines Limited were not answered, I have the responses to questions emanating from the first meeting of the Finance Committee of the 2008 Session held on January 16, 2008. I would be very happy to share a copy of it with Members on the opposite side.

Mr. Bharath: Thank you for giving way. Could you tell us, just for my information, when that was sent out? Was this in the package received today?

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Of course, not. You see, you did not read the answers. You did not want the answers if you could ask me that question. We gave these answers months ago. You have to go back to your notes. So, I have dealt with that issue.

The two issues that I wanted to bring out clearly were the question of the conduct of the meeting and answering the questions with regard to Caribbean Airlines Limited. Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, I was surprised. I thought the words used were particularly unkind but, be that as it may—I want to speak on the issue of the joint select committee versus the commission of enquiry. I quote now from the Member for St. Augustine. He said:

“Much like her colleague, the hon. Attorney General did on Friday, when she stood up for over an hour, extolling the virtues of joint select committees; waxing lyrically for over an hour; going as far to say that it required resolution of both Houses of Parliament; not realizing all this time that her parliamentary colleagues, the Prime Minister and the goodly Leader of Government Business were conspiring to pull the rug from under the feet. [*Desk thumping*] That is exactly what they did. I felt for her as I saw her sink deeper and deeper...”

You know, nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact of the matter is the impression is being given in the media that somehow a joint select committee is inferior to a commission of enquiry. It is important to put the record straight. In fact, the Prime Minister has stated unequivocally, had he his preference, he would go the way of a joint select committee.

The joint select committee with its extended powers—according to the resolution which was read out in this House—would have had all the powers of a commission of enquiry. It would have had the power to appoint specialist advisers who may question persons appearing before the joint select committee. It could send for persons, papers and record. It could have sittings in public and, most importantly, televised and heard by members of the public. So, when one looks at why a joint select committee over a commission of enquiry, one would want to say that they are equivalent, but that is not so at all.

One of the advantages—and I think the hon. Attorney General pointed to that—of the joint select committee over the commission of enquiry is that the joint select committee allows for the actual and real participation of Members on the Opposition side and in the Senate.

In a commission of enquiry, who appoints the commissioners? According to the law, they are appointed by the President on the advice of the Cabinet. In a case like that, you are perhaps just a witness or a spectator to the process, but in a joint select committee you are part of the process. You can call for persons; you can call for papers, you can call for records; and you could appoint specialists, and you did not take the opportunity to be part of the process. They did not take advantage of an opportunity like that.

There is another issue with respect to the point of contempt. One of the things—and I want to put the record straight on this—is that the commission of enquiry does not have the power to punish for contempt. In fact, any conduct that would amount to contempt in the Supreme Court, the High Court or the Court of Appeal cannot amount to contempt—whether it is the Magistrates’ Court or a Summary Court—because a commission of enquiry does not have the power to punish for contempt.

Mr. Speaker, the only thing that a commission of enquiry can do—the whole issue is what was put out as a great advantage of a commission of enquiry was the punishment. What is the punishment? The punishment is a maximum fine of \$2,000, and the commission of enquiry does not have the power to do that. The commission of enquiry has to make a report and the persons have to be charged and then the matter has to be heard by a summary court, and it is only then the fine could be imposed. There is no power to punish for contempt.

Now, I know there is a lot of argument as to whether our Parliament, not being a judicial Parliament, has the power to punish for contempt. I would not go down the argument of section 55(3) of the Constitution and whether in fact that is so. Let us assume that the joint select committees in our Parliament do not have that power as they do in England, but even if they do not, they do have the power to report the contemptuous behaviour to the House, and they do have the power to recommend that the matter be referred to the courts.

The courts are not circumscribed by a statutory provision as in the commission of enquiry. The commission of enquiry has circumscribed its powers to deal with behaviour that would amount to contempt by only punishing that behaviour by a fine, a maximum of \$2,000. It has circumscribed and restricted its powers.

Even if one argues that the joint select committee does not have that inherent power of Parliament to punish for contempt, it certainly has the power to report the contempt and for that matter to be taken and heard before a High Court or the Supreme Court. If it is heard there, do you want to know what is the punishment

for contempt? It is not \$2,000, but you can be committed. *[Interruption]* Well, I know the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite knows that famous case, which all my students had to study when I taught contempt in ethics of the profession. I know the Member is very familiar with the case himself.

So, when one wants to put out there that the commission of enquiry is somehow a better vehicle for dealing with this matter, because it has all the powers, one has to put on record that is not the case.

It is my view that it was important to educate members of the public as to the truth. The Opposition had signalled very clearly that they were not going to participate. Well, then you would not have a joint select committee, you would have a select committee, but it would not be joint. The whole objective and purpose of that committee would have been frustrated. It is only in those circumstances where the Opposition took that position, it gave us no other choice.

11.00 p.m.

So, I just want to put that out there that it is unfair to make the comment as was made by the hon. Member for St. Augustine, that somehow the hon. Attorney General was led down the garden path; far from the truth. In fact, the way that the Prime Minister made his contribution that afternoon in a short shift, clearly indicates that he was well prepared; he had understood that they were not going to cooperate; he understood that he was given no other choice, but nevertheless it was important that the people of Trinidad and Tobago understood what they were giving up by insisting on a commission of enquiry. But be that as it may. So, I dealt with the issue of the joint select committee and I want now to go to another comment of the hon. Members on the other side and I believe—

Mr. Maharaj SC: I am sure you are tired.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Could you imagine if I were not tired? *[Crosstalk]* *[Laughter]* The hon. Member of Parliament for St. Augustine made a comment on the Auditor General and this is the comment and the powers of the Auditor General or lack thereof,—according to the hon. Member. I quote:

“And this is why these 14 special purpose vehicles, these state enterprises, these special purpose state enterprises”—I am sure it is “have”, I am sure your grammar is more correct than this. *[Interruption]* No, he would say it correctly—“have been taken out from under the purview of the Auditor General simply because they do not want to have any accountability.”

You know that is not so; that is absolutely not so and that is another misleading statement from the hon. Member for St. Augustine. Because one gets the impression from that statement—and I expect we are dealing with the special state enterprises including UDeCott—that there is no oversight over these enterprises, and nothing can be further from the truth. I would not go into details on the matter, but I would just point to some levels of oversight.

One of the things is that these are incorporated over the Companies Act and the hon. Member for Siparia—I remember very well when that legislation was passed, because I remember attending a session they had on the new companies legislation. But what is the important thing to remember and to note about the companies legislation is the liabilities of the directors, because the directors of companies—and state enterprises are companies of significance.

In fact, further and more serious provisions were put into the legislation in order to ensure that directors acted with the right level of transparency and accountability. Some of those offences to which the punishment—failing to disclose any material interest on a contract; their responsibility under the legislation to act honestly and in good faith, with a view to the best interest of the company; to exercise the care, diligence and skill that a reasonably prudent person would exercise in comparable circumstances. There are a number of provisions that deal with the fiduciary responsibility of a director, but what is significant is the punishment.

According to the provisions, if a director is found liable for and treated as an insider, he is guilty of an offence and on summary conviction liable to a fine of \$10,000 and—not or—to imprisonment for six months. In civil proceedings he is liable to compensate any person for any direct loss incurred as a result of the insider transaction, and the provisions go on and on. The point I am making is this, the companies legislation has very stringent provisions with regard to the fiduciary responsibility and duty of a director. So there is that level of oversight in the companies legislation, but it is not only in the companies legislation, the Ministry of Finance plays a critical oversight role.

In 2005, the Ministry of Finance produced a document called “Standard Procurement Procedures for the Acquisition of Good Services to be provided and works to be undertaken in State Enterprises and Statutory Bodies”. Those procurement provisions mirror the Central Tenders Board’s very rigid and very strict procurement provisions. That, in fact, formed the basis of the procurement provisions. I noticed the Member for Diego Martin North/East in response to a comment that the Member of Parliament for Caroni East made with regard to the

tenders committee. I mean, I do not understand that comment, but in any event, when we look at the composition of tenders committees, this is the norm. These are some of the tenders committee procurement rules:

“The committee shall comprise a minimum of five members, who shall be two members of the board, one of whom shall be selected as chairman of the committee.”

I sat as chairman of a committee on TIDCO board; that same board the Member of Parliament for Barataria/San Juan spoke. So, I knew what he was saying because it was true. I sat on the board after; when we formed the Government I was on that board and I was the chairman of the tenders committee and a board member, including the chief executive officer, the financial controller and the legal officer or functionary.

So, there are a number of provisions that deal with the standard procurement procedures for the state enterprises, not only the composition of the tenders committee, it also goes into detail and talks about the award process; functions of tenders committees; how they should function; decisions of the committee; meetings of the committee; minutes of the meetings; invitation to tender; form of tender; compliance with the invitation to tender; tender boxes and opening of tenders. There are extensive provisions for procurement for state enterprises. We do not only stop there; we do not only have procurement procedures, we also talk about oversight. We exercise oversight over state enterprises and the document is called “The State Enterprises Performance Monetary Management”—[*Interruption*] because you do not like what I am saying, Member of Parliament for Fyzabad; you must listen to the truth; you must not be a stranger to the truth. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. Imbert: He is allergic.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Yes. And it sets out in detail, the monitoring process flow, which deals with the deadline for annual budgets, board minutes, financial statements, cash statements of operations, quarterly reports and I could go on and on. The point is there is a monitoring manual.

Mr. Sharma: Have no TV here, everybody gone.

Mr. Imbert: “We live!”

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Do not judge me by your own standards, Member. [*Desk thumping*] In addition, there is a central audit committee. In 2001, Cabinet established the Central Audit Committee in the Investment Division in the

Ministry of Finance which was mandated to evaluate and analyze the procedures and practices of state enterprises, as they relate to the procurement of property and services and to conduct audits of state enterprises on the instruction of the Minister. So, we have another layer of checks and balances.

That is not where it stops, because I heard the Member for—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Minister, for giving way. You would remember my making the statement that a survey was done by the Ministry of Finance itself and it showed that 27 out of approximately 30 state enterprises did not have an internal audit function. That was a survey done by the Government itself and that was quoted very extensively.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: That is not the information I have here; it is true that there are some of them that do not have an internal audit, but that is not accurate to say that there are—how many you said?

Dr. Gopeesingh: There are over 26 state enterprises.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: You see, when you say that one gets the impression that without an internal audit committee there is no check and balance, all I am saying here, and this is my contribution that apart from the companies legislation and the responsibilities and duties of directors of these companies; apart from that layer of check and balance, you also have the check and balance of the Ministry of Finance, where we have a procurement procedure and then we have an oversight, a monitoring manual and we have a central audit committee. That is not the only thing; we have the Auditor General. I think the comment was made by someone and I cannot remember who it was that—

Hon. Member: Ross.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: No. There was a point made that there was no oversight. I had actually taken—

Mr. Imbert: Pick any one of them over there; pick any one of them.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: One of them. “The Auditor General has no oversight over special purpose companies”; I think that was the statement that was made. That is not true. Section 116(3) of the Constitution provides for the Auditor General to have oversight over special purpose companies and to send those audit reports to Parliament and the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. We know that the Auditor General as an independent, and “shall not be subject to the

direction or control of any...person or (any) authority.” The Auditor General has several extensive powers which include:

- “(a) the Auditor General shall satisfy himself”—well the he includes the she; we know you will forgive them—“that all issues and payments were made in accordance with proper authority;
- (b) that all payments were properly chargeable and are supported by sufficient vouchers or proof of payment; and”
- (c) —there were a number of powers—“all moneys expended have been applied to the purposes for which the same was granted by Parliament, and that such expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it and has been incurred with due regard to the avoidance of waste and extravagance.”

So, there is the Auditor General, but it does not stop there. There is also, as I mentioned, the Public Accounts Committee. These committees have tremendous authority to demand any public official to appear before it and to request the submission of any public record. At the end of its term the committee submits a report with its recommendations to Parliament, and action on the recommendations is at the direction of Parliament.

I have given you so many layers of oversight; the Auditor General, Public Accounts Committee, Parliament, the Ministry of Finance with its own checks and balances built in and of course, the companies legislation. So, to come here and give the impression that these special state enterprises are a law unto their own, operating without controls or any level of oversight, is not to speak the truth. So, I think I have dealt with that issue.

I want now to come to a point which is the purpose of this Bill, but I needed to deal with these issues because they were raised. I want to come now to the Bill. One of the things that we are here for, of course, is the supplementary appropriation, and you know the thing about it, it reminds me of a bit of déjà vu—

Mr. Imbert: Report of the Finance Committee.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Report of the Finance Committee— What it does, I am feeling that I am suffering from a little déjà vu because I went back to the *Hansard* and I saw myself saying the same thing I am going to say again. I have to say it again. At that point I remember the Member of Parliament for Siparia was attacking—let me not use those harsh words—saying that we come here asking for this money, this supplemental appropriation and it shows how we are

extravagant, wasteful and we do not know how to manage our economy, because the fact that we have to come back in mid-year to ask for money shows that we cannot manage our business well. That was the gist of the contribution.

Hon. Member: That was the contribution!

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: That was the contribution. In fact I said, I am quoting myself, because this is déjà vu:

“I must say that the characterization by the Member for Siparia of the Government’s approach to this Parliament for supplementary resources to attend to the needs of the people is that it is somehow illegal or wrong. I want to speak on that.”

You see, when I spoke I really said when you do it, nothing is wrong; when we do it something is wrong.

I want to refresh the Members of this honourable House of the figures because I think that is important. *[Interruption]* Yes, but I am going back. We go to 1995. Let us see what the supplementary appropriation was in 1995 and I compare that to what the GDP was, because I think the comment was made on the last occasion, I think the Member for Caroni East, that I was not giving the GDP; what was the gross domestic product to make the comparison, so I would do that on this occasion.

In 1995, the supplementary appropriation was \$65.1 million and the GDP for that year was \$31,665 million. In 1996, supplementary appropriation, \$383.2 million—

Hon. Member: Wow!

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: Yes—and the GDP for that year was \$34.648 billion.

11.15 p.m.

In 1997, \$1,362.3 million was the supplementary appropriation and the GDP was \$36.626 billion; in 1998, the supplementary appropriation was *[Crosstalk]* \$35 million, the GDP was \$39.796 billion; in 2000, \$1,392.7 million, a GDP of \$51.370 million.

Mr. Sharma: Point taken.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: Well you see now I gave you your figures, but I want to give you our figures because that is important to give the comparison, so we know therefore that every single year, not one year, you know, your side, when you were in government came to this honourable House and asked for a supplementary appropriation. Every single year. *[Desk thumping]*

However, I want to make the point, now all of those figures—that supplementary appropriation—it was just for expenditure, there was no savings, and there is a reason I am making that point. Because when I give you the figures for our supplementary appropriation I want you to bear in mind that of that appropriation a significant amount of it, and I am going to give you the figure represented—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:—deposits into the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. At that time I believe it was called the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. It was treated as an expenditure appropriated out of the Consolidated Fund, but in fact it was a saving, because that money was deposited into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. So, when I give the appropriation figures, I am going to give you the figure which represents the appropriation into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. [*Laughter*]

In 2003, we went for \$1,983.8 million; for a GDP of over \$70 billion; of that \$1,938 million, \$497 million was deposited into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. In 2004, we went for a supplementary appropriation of approximately \$2.8 billion; \$1.3 billion of that amount was deposited into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. And what was the GDP? Nearly \$80 billion. In 2005 we went for a supplementary appropriation of about \$4.831 billion, of that, \$2.6 billion was deposited into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Of that, what was the GDP, \$95 billion. In 2006, we appropriated \$7,456 million, over \$3 billion was put into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. What was the GDP? Nearly \$115 billion. In 2007, supplementary appropriation of \$6.36 billion, \$2 billion went into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and \$2 billion went in the Infrastructural Development Fund, both of that \$4 billion out of that supplementary appropriation constituted savings. What was the GDP? Over \$132 billion in 2007. [*Desk thumping*]

They want to talk about managing an economy. [*Desk thumping*] You want to talk about managing an economy and debt management because that is the extravagance and wastage, that is what we hear from that side. [*Interruption*] How could extravagance and wastage—how could that be when the facts do not—what does one of my Members say, facts are—

Hon. Member: Facts are established, they will not go away.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira:—established, they will not go away. How could we be talking about irresponsible, extravagance, debt management and all of that. I am proud, and I am saying that genuinely, I am proud of this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Our

Finance Committee Report
[HON. K. NUNEZ-TESTEIRA]

Monday, May 26, 2008

external debt as a percentage of GDP is 5.8 per cent. *[Interruption]* Our public sector debt, we brought it down from 58.3 per cent in 2000 to 28.3 per cent by 2007. How could that be the actions of an irresponsible Government? How could that be?

Then we look at when we were in Government, *[Interruption]* surpluses—

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira:—every single year, except I will tell you what year we had a little problem. Do you know what is the year? The year that we had a problem is 2002. Do you know why 2002? Because 2002 we are operating on the budget for 2001/2002, and in the first quarter of that new fiscal year the election footing and there was a disproportionate expenditure in that fiscal year. As a result in 2002—because we came in the late part of 2002—they had a deficit of \$104.3 million. But let me give you their record if they were so good at managing the economy. In 1996, yes, there was a surplus of \$171 million; in 1997, a small surplus of \$41.4 million, but in 1998 the story changed, deficit, a deficit of \$981.2 million. *[Interruption]* A deficit! In 1999, a deficit.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: One moment, please; there is a point of order.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The hon. Minister of Finance is misleading the House and I will quote give us the opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, that is not a point of order. *[Crosstalk]* It is not a point of order.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: Let me continue, we all want to go home. *[Crosstalk]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: I just want to show—*[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: No, no, wait. Order, please! Order! *[Crosstalk]* Order! No, it is not a point of order.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would she give way—

Mr. Speaker: Well, you could ask her.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, just let me correct you on this. *[Interruption]* On page 83 of the Auditor General's report for 2007, it shows that under your regime between 2003 and 2007 every year there has been a deficit.

Hon. K. Nunez-Testeira: Right.

Dr. Gopeesingh: In 2003 there was a deficit of \$969 million; in 2004 there was a deficit of \$1.696 billion; in 2005, \$829 million deficit; in 2006, \$1.681. So you have said [*Interruption*] that there was a surplus—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is 22 minutes after 11; there is coffee available, so please, let us hear the Member, Hansard has to record her. [*Interruption*]

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: You see I am glad you made that point, because what you are looking at is that when the Auditor General is giving a report on the Consolidated Fund, she looks at a restrictive application or a restrictive view of the Consolidated Fund. What the Auditor General does, she treats—actually, it is only the IMF that treats it like that; the Auditor General treats the appropriation—because remember it is an appropriation, the money that is put into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is appropriated out of the Consolidated Fund. It is appropriated out, so the Auditor General treats the appropriation from the Consolidated Fund into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund as if it is an expenditure. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: He has gotten the explanation. It is the explanation, and I am so glad you said that because I will tell you this. [*Interruption*] I will tell you this!

Dr. Gopeesingh: Will you give way? [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: No, no, I gave you an opportunity, I am not giving way again. I am so glad you said that because I am looking for my papers now. In fact, when I was about to read out our surpluses, I was going through your deficits, and I will go to our surpluses.

In 1998 I said that you had a deficit of \$981.2 million—a deficit—1999 another deficit of \$262.7 million and in 2000—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: No, I did not say 1999—a deficit again of \$283.3 million, and I will tell you something. This is your surplus; your surplus did not include the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. So, in fact, because you have mentioned that—I am looking for paper—when I looked at our surplus, the surplus for every year did not include—did I read out our surplus? I did not read out our surplus?

Mr. Dumas: No.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: No, I did not read out our surplus. In 2003 our surplus was \$775 million, and if you add the \$471 million that we put into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund the surplus should really be in the order of over \$1 billion. That is the truth! That is the truth, for every single year—2004 when we had a surplus of \$211.5 million, if I added in the contribution in 2004 of \$1.3 billion to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, it should really be, if you added it in, \$1.5 billion. [*Desk thumping*] I am so glad that you said that. [*Desk thumping*] Then if I go on, in 2005 if I add in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—\$2.4 billion was the surplus—and if I add in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of \$2.6 billion, it is over \$5 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me tell you that the Auditor General's report does not take into account the moneys put into the Green Fund or into the Unemployment Levy. It does not take that money into account! So if you add that—in fact what the Auditor General is showing as an expenditure is really a saving, but because it is appropriated out of the Consolidated Fund it is registered as an appropriation and she registers it as an expenditure. But it is not an expenditure; it is a saving. And I am not giving way again for the evening. [*Interruption*] I am not giving way because all of us are tired.

So, I am just saying to you in conclusion of my contribution today that I think—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: If you all want me to send you home I could, you know. You have a choice, you can either keep quiet or I can ask you to leave. Please, continue.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In conclusion before I leave, I think I just need to—where is the Member for Fyzabad? He was waxing poetic and talking about how the constituency is being starved for funds, but he neglected to mention that this Government, the caring Government, on both sides of the equation, \$15 million has been allocated, a provision made in the estimates for 2008, a revised provision; and additional \$15 million to run the constituencies.

Mr. Imbert: All those allowances.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Plenty allowances and they know that.

Mr. Imbert: Why you all so worthless?

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: So, in closing, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Government once again has shown that it has managed the affairs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago with the usual prudence and responsibility. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to just say the Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande, I believe that her contribution, and our side commended her for that, she really spoke to the issues of what our Government is spending this money on.

It shows that this Government is a caring and a compassionate Government; [Interruption] and responsible and prudent. I think that the report and the contributions from this side clearly bear out that this Government is well on its way to achieving Vision 2020, developed nation status by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I shall now put the question. [*Crosstalk*] Order!
Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Second Report (2007/2008) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of the 2008 Appropriation.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION APPROPRIATION) BILL

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2008, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. K. Nunez-Tesheira: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 70(1), I beg to move that the Bill be now read a third time and passed.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

Adjournment

Monday, May 26, 2008

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, June 06, 2008 at 1.30 p.m., which will be Private Members' Day and I am advised we will be doing the Motion on Food Prices.

Mr. Speaker: You will be withdrawing the other Motion?

Mr. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, there is a Motion on the Adjournment in my name—and I indicated to the Leader of Government Business—it had to do with the urgent need for Government to take steps to immediately repair the Brasso-Tabaquite Road and the Bailey bridge along that road. The Ministry of Works and Transport has started work and therefore in the circumstances I ask leave to withdraw the Motion.

Hon. C. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Maharaj SC: We can do that now if you want. And in the light of what happened last week—was it last week? [*Interruption*] A few days ago in respect of the Motion on the joint select committee, we would not be pursuing the Motion to appoint the commission of enquiry, so we ask leave to withdraw that.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.32 p.m.