

Leave of Absence

Tuesday, September 14, 2010

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 14, 2010

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received verbal communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from the sittings of the House due to illness: hon. Jairam Seemungal, Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, and Mrs. Nela Khan, Member for Princes Town. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2011) BILL

[Second Day]

Question proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Mr. Speaker, in more ways than one, 2010 has been, and continues to be, an historic year for us here in Trinidad and Tobago. It was a time when we were called upon to confront and survive global economic threats and stress. It was a time when our gaze focused on a dream of becoming a developed country by the end of the next decade. It was a time when our ambitions were questioned by many, objected to by some and even mindlessly pursued by others.

For the PNM, which managed the affairs of State for the first decade of the 21st Century, it was done against the background of "boundless faith in our destiny", the statement of confidence to be found in our National Anthem. For those in political Opposition to us, this was their opportunity and, indeed, their duty, to identify and highlight all that they disagreed with and articulate alternatives which they would follow if given the chance to govern.

As we meet today, we do so against this stark background; a surprising development for some and realization that in the first six months of 2010 there has been a comprehensive change in the management of Trinidad and Tobago. Not only has there been a change in government, but there has been a swift change of political leaders in both major parties: the PNM and the UNC. Additionally, the COP has formed itself into a coalition government with a strong majority in this Parliament.

We of the PNM are celebrating our 54th anniversary this year, and it is against this record of service to the country that we once again take this opportunity to warmly congratulate our colleagues on the other side, for the fine victory which they engineered and obtained on May 24, 2010.

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The election also threw up our first female Prime Minister and we congratulate her once more. Clearly in Trinidad and Tobago, whereas there is still a lot to be done, the gender policy is seeing some significant successes.

Mr. Speaker, while it is true that the coalition was only put together at the calling of election 2010, and some may say that they only came together for the election, one thing that is indisputable is that the people who today form the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the coalition, did not get their office as their birthright from their bloodline; they got their office after years of campaigning and criticizing, offering what they called obvious commonsense alternative solutions to virtually all the PNM policies and programmes. Their cynicism knew no bounds and their brilliance was sold as deliverance from evil.

From a PNM perspective, we must acknowledge that we did wonderfully well in keeping Trinidad and Tobago whole, but we did make some mistakes for which we paid the ultimate political price, resulting in some musical chairs here in this Chamber. For those avoidable mistakes, we acknowledge our shortcomings and reject them as not being representative of the ethos of the PNM. To the extent that any mistake of the PNM's tenure is deemed to warrant investigation or any other legal action, we have absolutely no quarrel with that, since we resolutely reaffirm our party's commitment to morality in public affairs as a fundamental pillar of PNM policy.

Arising out of our recent unpleasant experiences as a country, we anticipate management upgrade consequent upon the findings of any and all enquiries and, as such, we fully support the Government on matters of this nature. In the event that individuals at any level are found to have fallen short of the requirements of their office, the PNM will not defend wrongdoing on the part of any person, regardless of his or her station. However, we warn the Government to act within the oath of office which compels us to discharge our duty without fear or favour, malice or ill will and, might I add, without political motivation, and to treat fairly with all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, scrupulously observing and respecting the individual's rights at all times. Investigate to your total satisfaction, as much as you want, and that includes me, who has been the subject of countless investigation and enquiries. All we demand is fairness, decency and justice for all. Properly conducted investigations hold out the prospect of two distinct benefits to our society: one, identification of the culpable and the guilty and, two, exoneration of the innocent. On that score, there is a clear distinction to be made between proper processes and political witch-hunting.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, we stand firm on the vast majority of our policy prescriptions, as pursued in an effort to develop the people of Trinidad and

Tobago. It is against that background that we are prepared to vigorously debate this budget as presented by the coalition of political entities.

Given all that was said before, all that was on offer as new ways of distributing and managing our resources, all that was held out to us for the prospect of dramatic change for the better, it would have been reasonable to expect that once the PNM was out of office, the replacement government would roll out its template and there would be discernible change. Mr. Speaker, to the shock and surprise and even embarrassment of some people, nothing of the sort has happened. What is now crystal clear to all and sundry is that the new Government has no plan. [*Desk thumping*] They never had any well thought out cohesive and sensible plans and they are clearly now trying to make them up as they go along, for whatever time they survive.

Here are some of the solutions from the lofty vantage points of Opposition which they occupied in their heyday; the place where they all earned their dubious reputations to be tested now in the forge of the full glare of this country. Regarding food prices, I quote:

“An immediate relief for people who are being affected adversely by food prices. We are talking about a reduction of VAT to 10 per cent.”

Spokesman: Winston Dookeran.

Hon. Member: What?

Dr. K. Rowley: "Food prices are now fueling inflation at over 14 per cent."

Budget presenter, Winston Dookeran, not a word; hoping that we forgot the promise. I quote again:

“...direct subsidies in the production of food so that there would be more food supplies.”

Speaker: Winston Dookeran; not a word; this prescription is absent from the budget; may be the matter would be addressed by my friend, the ubiquitous Minister of Works and Transport, in his contribution. [*Laughter*]

Regarding the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund I quote:

“We would take the National Insurance programme and old age grants and the heritage component of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund to fund the pension programme.”—Winston Dookeran.

These were just some of the mirages masquerading as brilliant ideas, which caused some people to vote them into office in the full expectation that these

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would be the policies by which we would be governed; no such luck. Reality has stepped in and the Minister now silently subscribes to the new politics of yesterday was yesterday, today is today. [*Desk thumping*]

The budget as presented, with two significant exceptions, is a ringing endorsement of virtually all the policies as crafted and executed by the PNM, save a little tinker here and a little tickle there. Even when they sought to make dramatic change with the rapid rail and the aluminium smelter, after all their grand charge, they are not now in a position to offer any concrete replacement positions to treat with the specific problems which these policies were meant to address and solve. Hopefully, before the end of this debate, they would have made something up, and if they do, we are likely to get two, three or four versions, for that is the hallmark of this coalition which functions like the Tower of Babel, where no two people speak with the same voice. In fact, some of them are said to even speak with forked tongue.

This budget is as pretentious as it is disappointing. It is a mish mash of peripheral adjustment of PNM policies, and all that we are guaranteed in the coming days and months will be a massive scramble of personnel singing the tune, "Is we time now". Contrary to what the country has been led to believe, that we were spending too much and should be saving more of our earnings, the budget is long on expenditure and short on revenue.

Given the nature and content tense of this budget, the country can take comfort in one aspect of our national business, and that is, that most of the solid foundation laid down by the PNM has not been recklessly disturbed by some of the vote-catching, hare-brained schemes advanced as superior policies of the coalition partners.

A dispassionate observer could easily take this to mean that finally we have a foundation with widespread national acceptance, and all that separates us are management styles and management issues.

10.15 .m.

In this scenario the PNM takes satisfaction in being the architect of this foundation. The problem and hindrance for this country enshrined to build on this foundation is the absolute lack of trust in the new Government and the absence of the necessary confidence which we need to go forward. Not only did the change in Government not deliver the magical new policies, but the deceitful and shameless renegeing on campaign commitments have indelibly labelled the Government as questionable and untrustworthy. [*Desk thumping*]

This is not the climate in which one sets out to establish and build confidence, the ingredient most lacking in our national aspirations in this significant year, 2010. It is our view that this Government will never be able to raise the necessary level of confidence required to propel the economy and the country as a whole, forward, since it has stubbornly insisted that it will nakedly deny its pre-election blustering and campaign promises as it arrogantly speaks untruth to the population. Not only did we not see the acceptance of carrying out of significant manifesto promises but instead we got insults and about-turns cloaked in questions of paternity and outright obfuscation. The coalition parties, now the Government, in no uncertain terms, told senior citizens that if they were elected they would do these three things:

1. Raise the value of pension to \$3,000.
2. Remove all restrictions and qualifications for people to receive old age pension, thus every citizen will automatically receive old age pension upon attaining pensionable age.
3. Upon reaching pensionable age of 60 years, every citizen will automatically qualify for old age pension.

That was their promise. [*Desk thumping*] By offering to remove the qualification, the coalition skilfully and deceitfully held out to pensioners that they will all receive a cheque of \$3,000 per month from the Government since there will then be no account taken of whether a person has NIS or any other income which could cause their payment from the Government to be reduced to less than \$3,000.

Whereas the Government did indeed raise the ceiling of payment from \$2,500 to \$3,000, it is only for those persons whose monthly income is less than \$500 per month. All other persons receive less from the Government, as little as \$1,200 in some cases. The system groups old age pensioners into nine bands, eight of which—that is the vast majority—receive less than \$3,000 per month and, therefore, have been deceived by this Government. Yet the Government boldly trumpets that "we have kept our promise". Kept what promise? Fool old people and play smart.

To those persons who are approaching age 60 and those who are already between 60 and 64, it was held out to them that, and I quote:

“Upon reaching pensionable age 60 years every citizen will automatically qualify for a State old age pension.”

In the run-up to have general election in May, for the avoidance of all doubt as to what that meant, pensionable age was clarified by whole page, paid advertisements which were put there by the UNC/COP with their party symbols in

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every newspaper in Trinidad and Tobago, emphasizing the offer in bold print. By the time this budget was being prepared in August, that emphatic bold print became a misprint and when that travesty severely damaged the Government's credibility, the Prime Minister bolted from the issue saying, "It wasn't me." What she was doing by that approach was pointing fingers and directing us to the COP policy document called the People's Platform which stated, and I quote:

“We will establish a universal pension plan under which every citizen will be entitled to a minimum pension on reaching the age of 60.”

Lest she thinks we forget, we are constrained to remind the self-appointed "Mother of the Nation" that in August 2007, she is recorded in *Hansard* as saying this, and I quote:

“We say that in this country the minimum wage that a worker should get is \$3,000. I have said it before and I will say it again, whether it is pension or grant, you should start at \$3,000.”

This position was repeated and recorded in *Hansard* on September 26, 2008 when "Mummy" again reiterated, and I quote:

“I repeat the UNC's call and commitment that pension be increased to \$3,000.”

So we are not buying any "It wasn't me", or any misprint. We are not buying that story. This is infamous and disgraceful conduct on the part of the Prime Minister—[*Desk thumping*]*—*and on the part of all those who constitute the Government. Senior citizens requested, on their behalf, that I cry shame on all of you. I so do now. [*Desk thumping*] Our country cannot find the widespread confidence that we so desperately need in the face of this kind of dishonest leadership.

This budgetary matter does not end there. In the face of this record of deceit and deliberate falsehoods, how are we now to take the commitment given the NIS pensioners that "we will rise to \$3,000 per month"? This is a commitment given by the hon. Prime Minister who addressed an audience in Diamond Vale, Diego Martin on Tuesday, July 20 on the eve of the July 26 local government elections. Just in case the hon. Prime Minister intends to invoke "misprint Garvin" or "It wasn't me; it was he", please be advised that Sean Douglas of the *Newsday* has faithfully recorded your words for posterity.

The Minister of Finance went out of his way to bombard us with details about consultations in preparation for this budget, yet on a matter as fundamental as this one, one which has the potential to bankrupt the NIS or, alternatively, demand significant increase in NIS contributions across the board, the Minister of Finance is conspicuously silent. It is actions like this which cause us not to trust this Government

and not to be confident of what to expect as the Government conducts our business, since underhandedness and trickery seem to be the preferred code of conduct. This is one of the altars upon which confidence has been sacrificed.

The Government's apparent obsession with pension seems to be only at election time and they see pensions as an election magnet aimed at attracting the votes of pensioners. Any genuine concern for effective policy formulation on a national pension scheme or on pension issues would have seen the Minister of Finance outlining or at least recognizing the need for reform, pension portability or other critical matters of pensions and savings and pension sustainability. But alas, not a word. The elections are over. Their handlers laugh and congratulate themselves, believing that they have got away with the scam.

By the way, while I am on this matter, I notice one of the business houses which managed and presented the coalition propaganda campaign for the general election has stepped forward to take responsibility for the political backtracking, the so-called misprint on the old age pension issue. Since Ross Advertising Agency is so willing to pull the Government's chestnuts out of the fire, now that they have come on stage in the interest of full disclosure, I trust that they will tell the public what they did for the millions of dollars they received from Royal Castle, including the last cheque for \$2.5 million which they received one week before the May 24 election. Helpful people that they are—and I am sure they are—I am sure that they will have no difficulty in telling the country who forwarded the letter to the bank and who signed it; who gave the instructions to the bank to pay that money and whether such persons need the Attorney General in any legal matter and whether they will accept any responsibility for the curious behaviour of the Attorney General in certain matters of international interest. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I come to the property tax. Let us examine another of the manifesto promises. We are told triumphantly that "We have axed the tax". However, when we look at the revenue statements we note that while they have changed the name back to lands and buildings taxes, they are keeping the money targeted by the dreaded property tax. This is seen clearly from the Revenue Estimates laid in this House, in this document. What we see there is steep increase for an actual collection which was, in 2009, \$71.4 million. That is scheduled to rise in 2011 to \$173.8 million, approximately \$100 million more from municipalities alone. That does not include Port of Spain, San Fernando, Point Fortin, Chaguanas and Arima—\$100 million from the municipalities alone. Add to this about the \$125/\$150 more that you will get from the other cities and boroughs, and you will see a total property tax take of approximately \$300 million under the new name of Lands and Buildings Taxes.

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The budgetary estimate for the discarded property tax for 2010 as presented in this document was an anticipated \$324 million. In other words, another con trick is at work. By whatever name the tax is called, the Government has put measures in place to collect significant sums of money through increases. This is even more disturbing when one reflects on the exuberant assurance given by the Prime Minister herself, who tries to fool people again by giving comfort that the tax is to be computed at the old rates and on the old valuations. If that were so, then on what basis is the Minister of Finance forecasting in this budget autopsy a 200 to 300 per cent increase on property charges? Call it what you may: land and building; property tax, it matters not; it is the same thing. The taxpayer pays only money. The name of the tax is irrelevant and the Members of the Government knew that all along.

But before it becomes another misprint, let me take you into this document and tell you what is here for 2011. Remember we are having no tax in 2010, so forget 2010. The last property tax collection, lands and buildings tax was 2009: Lands and buildings taxes, St. George West, that is Carenage, Diego Martin, St. James and so on, in 2009 the take was \$11.8 million; 2011, the Minister of Finance budgets here for \$27.9 million. St. George East, 2009, \$8.1 million, to go up to \$19.7 million. Caroni was \$32 million; is now going to go up to \$79 million. St. Andrew/St. David, \$3.1 million; that will go up to \$8.8 million. St. Patrick was \$4.4 million, in 2011 that is going to go to \$9.5 million; Nariva was \$1.9 million; in 2011 it is going to go to \$4.9 million. Victoria was \$6 million; that is going to go to \$13.3 million. Tobago was \$3.8 million; that is scheduled to go to \$9.9 million.

10.30 a.m.

What was \$71 million in the last year after property tax collection or lands and buildings tax collection or whatever you call the tax collection, is scheduled in this budget to go from \$71 million to \$173 million.

I quote: "Read my lips, no new taxes, including no property tax, but what you will get is what was there before." Let me repeat that: "what you will get is what was there before." It pains me to quote the other part. "We will revert back to the lands and buildings taxes." She wants to back-back so far, she is reverting back: "We will revert back to the lands and buildings taxes." That is the Prime Minister, primus inter pares, head of the Government, telling you, same old rate, same old valuations and same figure, but the Minister of Finance is budgeting for an increase, as I have just described.

The authoritative words, supposedly comforting for the Prime Minister, were spoken at Coco Reef Hotel in Tobago. We all saw it and heard it. In the face of what I have just read from pages 3 and 4 in the Draft Estimates of Revenue for our financial

year as presented by the Minister of Finance—you could mumble as much as you want, you could deny as much as you want, do not quarrel with me, talk with your Minister of Finance, he was the one who laid this here as the budget in this Parliament. How could we trust this Government? "Read my lips." Anybody who resorts to quoting George W, as Lloyd Best would have said, "dem is people to watch".

Mr. Speaker, if the Minister of Finance does not immediately withdraw this document with those proposed revenue conditions today, then the hon. Prime Minister must today, offer an unqualified apology to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for her own conduct. *[Interruption]* Well, if there is tax why are you putting it in the budget and laying it in the Parliament?

Mr. Speaker, we have here two diametrically opposed positions of the Government and that cannot be allowed to stand in the public domain, as if the people are always to be treated with such disrespect by the Government; a Government that they have hired. We have had enough of this disgraceful conduct from this Government. Enough of it! The non-collection of any taxes on property for 2010 is no loving gift of amnesty from mother dear. I want to repeat that, the non-collection of taxes for the year 2010 is no loving gift of amnesty from mother dear. It is the combination of gross incompetence and irresponsibility, bordering on dereliction of duty. Since there was no law other than the property tax, which came into effect on January 01, 2010, the government was required, by law, to reenact the old lands and buildings tax or whatever you want to call it, in order to collect any tax on property. Knowing their stated political position to abandon the property tax law, they preferred to go gallivanting in Miami and New York, instead of doing what was supposed to have been done by mid-September and know the budget was upon us and the financial year for 2010 ends on September 30, they cannot pass the law, they cannot collect any tax for 2010, so they declared an amnesty. Thus, it was in this budget, with an \$8 billion hold, they chose to forego approximately \$300 million to cover their incompetence, calling it an amnesty to take credit where only a severe rebuke and censure is deserved.

Notwithstanding the brazen endangerment of Government revenues and demonizing of property tax collection, let me quote from page 12, paragraph 4 of the budget statement of a UNC Minister of Finance, September 14, 2001. I want you to listen this against the background of what they have been saying, what they are saying that they are doing and how they treated that tax. I quote Mr. Speaker, not you, the other Speaker.

“In keeping with our objective of transforming our tax administration into one that is more efficient and equitable, Government will undertake a reform of the existing property taxation regime.”

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The first government that mentioned property tax regime in this country was a UNC government. That was in this Parliament, September 14, 2001. I go on to quote:

“The new system will allow for a more equitable taxation of properties. Phase I of the reform has been completed and focused on the development of a new property taxation system as well as a detailed mapping and valuation of properties in private sites in Arima and Point Lisas. Phase II will focus on full-scale valuation of all properties through an aerial survey throughout Trinidad and Tobago.”

In 2001, property tax was "to ensure a more efficient and equitable taxation of properties". Today is axe the tax campaign. He comes into the Parliament and jumps up "We have kept our promise, we have axed the tax." This is placing political expediency above national interest; hypocrisy, irresponsibility and deceit of the worst kind. I fully understand the anxieties associated with this emotive issue of added taxes on property. It is an issue which generates great debate around the world and sometimes results in disastrous consequences for governments; in the United Kingdom, under Margaret Thatcher and right here in Trinidad and Tobago recently. What I cannot understand is the unethical opportunistic behaviour of some of our leaders who would abandon all principles when dealing with the issue in the furtherance of political interest above their national duty.

I believe that there is an issue here that requires attention outside of the fury of an election campaign. I also believe that the PNM's handling of this issue was unfortunate and consequently ineffective. I also believe that there is a role and a time for adjustments to the regime of taxes and property in Trinidad and Tobago. We can argue a bit about the level of any such adjustments before coming to some widely accepted agreements and it is my position, as outlined at a PNM convention earlier this year, that any and all moneys so raised under this tax should be retained by the relevant local government authorities, thereby reforming the authorities as those taxes will form the basis of meaningful local government changes. Local authorities so empowered collecting and keeping these funds, will then be able to use this revenue stream as a direct source of funding for the effective servicing and locally managed development of their districts. This is the essence of meaningful local government reform, which we will enthusiastically support.

Mr. Speaker, as Sen. Watson has admitted, there has been a slow down in the economy since this new Government assumed office. He blames it on the lack of private sector spending, but facts are saying differently. The critical causes are these: First, the non-appointment of state boards, which has caused most state enterprises—and there are many, many of them organizing our economy; no boards. All boards are in a holding mode—unable to make any financial decisions

of any consequence. Instead, of systemically changing the boards, in an orderly manner, this Government has crippled the state sector by their unexpected planned mass destruction approach.

Secondly, the slow down in the construction sector caused by the non-payment of fees by state companies, which had no boards to approve those payments. Given this scenario, one would have expected a Minister of Finance to include in his budget preparation on the measures presented, all those corrective actions to revitalize the economy. Instead, we are treated to vague platitudes and the reintroduction of a number of failed policies. The nation is still unclear as to the level of funding that would be made available in the short term to meet the arrears owing to the construction sector. We are expanding the application of the free zone legislation without any analysis of its contribution, if any.

Over the years, failed attempts at incentives of the late 1980s are reintroduced with great applause. In 1988, the then government introduced the special development area incentives. Today it is called growth poles, same thing. What has been the success of the 1988 special development areas exercise? I do not know. It did not work. Nothing happened. They just changed the name and brought it back.

This budget is based on premises that run totally contrary to all the virtuous ideas spouted by various Members of the UNC coalition. Many of them were clamouring for fiscal discipline and the decreased dependence on the energy sector. In fact, diversification is still one of their most favoured mantras. This, alongside the frantic calls to curb spending, was one of their main beacons of hope. I identified the Minister of Finance. That was his story; Sen. Watson, that was his baby and our good friend from the Senate who is now Minister in the Ministry of Finance who is here with us today. That was their call. They knew what to do with the economy; "Just give us a chance and we would just do it." They are in Government now, nothing new, nothing different, nothing happening. They are up and the first thing they do is to present the largest budget in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Furthermore, they based this budget on an oil price of US \$65. The price used in the last budget was US \$55 and they had a lot to say about that. This sends a clear message that, contrary to their rhetoric, they intend to increase the economy's dependence on the energy sector. When I checked my facts, the budget initially was predicated on US \$55 and when things changed it was adjusted lower; going from lower than that to US \$65. The estimate of revenue for 2010 was \$40.7 billion. It actually performed much better by delivering \$45.6 billion. While this was happening, the current Minister of Finance was out there

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depressing the economy by misinforming people about the true state of affairs of the country's economic performance. He was lecturing authoritatively that the economy was on the verge of collapse. He was the proverbial prophet of doom and gloom. The numbers are in now, the budget for 2010 performed substantially better than predicted at the time of his presentation. He was lecturing and he was saying "Put me in office and I will fix it." Having obtained the job under false pretences, he now brings a budget with expenditure of \$46.2 billion, on the basis of revenue figures which are full of "ratchiffee". This budget forecasts a decline in taxes and incomes and profits from \$25.3 billion to \$24.9 billion; decline in taxes and incomes and profits from \$25.3 billion to \$24.9 billion. Taxes on goods and services are expected to increase by \$800 million, just so. International trade, those taxes are expected to increase from \$1.65 billion to \$2.1 billion.

VAT which he was going to reduce, as I told you earlier, by 10 per cent—but his budget is forecasting VAT to increase by almost \$1 billion from \$5.8 billion to \$6.4 billion, all of this, from an economy which they are rapidly depressing to a recession state with no plan for improvement in collection of revenue; that effort having been scrapped by their rejection of the Revenue Authority, which was meant to do just that.

10.45 a.m.

Out of the blue, Mr. Speaker, the collection of taxes and duties on motor vehicles are said to have increased dramatically from \$291 million to \$394 million just so, pure magic; either there will be a motor car buying spree or they intend to raise the taxes. He must tell us which of those he expects.

Even as the anti-smoking laws have kicked in and cigarette advertising and cigarette use are trending downwards sharply with no increase in cigarette taxes, this magician forecasts an increase in collection of taxes on cigarettes by 5 per cent.

He mentions road construction and immediately the earnings from quarries increase ten-fold. Of course, quarries contribute to road construction not in the beginning of the programme, but at the end. When you start to build a road you are doing surveys, clearing, cutting and so on. It is towards the end of the programme that you begin to use subbase, and wearing costs and so on; so quarries do not come into play in the first phase of road construction. But immediately, scrounging for money to make up a budget revenue, increase it by 10 per cent, ten times, that is the kind of thing you have in the budget. Look for money here; look for money there; change a number here; change a number there; even if it does not make sense. The budget is full of these fudges to justify the dramatic increase, the surprising increase in the budget presented by the Minister of Finance.

This all means that unless there is a sizeable increase in oil and gas prices early in 2011, next year will be a struggle for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we will hear a lot of excuses from the great pretenders on the other side.

Another strange feature of this budget is the premise of a 2 per cent rate of real economic growth in 2011. Nowhere in the budget does it explain where the economic growth is supposed to come from. Apparently they want us to believe that somehow growth will magically happen just because they are in power. Just say it and it will happen. Or is it that they truly believe that simply offering some basic incentives will cause a stampede of economic activity. The truth is that they do not understand how the economy works, which means that the economic progress is now an endangered species under this Government.

Let us have a look at the state of the economy in May 2010. The 2020 vision approach set Trinidad and Tobago on the ambitious path to developed nation status by the end of the next decade. To that end, we targeted five areas of growth through which this growth will be achieved in the stipulated time frame.

Standing out among these were areas of focus themed, "Developing an Innovative People". We understood very clearly that for transformation of the country, this was a sine qua non; without it nothing would happen.

In developing the 2020 vision framework, the result was a comprehensive, all inclusive plan to enhance the quality of life of all the people of this nation. While people and infrastructure constitute the engine of the vision, economic policy is the cabin in which the plans and programmes have been designed for implementation. With objectives including maximizing income from the energy sector and employing it to enhance the competitiveness of the non-energy sector, the vision was put in motion.

With respect to the economy, there were challenges along the way, but we also had successes. Our greatest challenge came in the form of the global financial crisis which started in the USA in 2007. We felt the impact here by 2008. As the crisis spread globally, international demand for Trinidad and Tobago's products fell, leaving our manufacturers and producers with falling exports, slowing production, high inventories, falling revenues; all of this resulting in declining economic growth. Through a deliberate economic stimulus, the PNM government was able to navigate the country safely through the perils of severe global recession.

When the government changed hands in May 2010, the country was left in a good economic position. As observed, there was low unemployment at 5.3 per cent; one of the lowest in the world. There was import cover which denotes the amount of foreign reserves available to settle foreign trade activity. That was there to guide us for 12.7

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months; three months being the normal safe yardstick. Also, we had in savings, our official reserves of US \$8.7 billion and additionally, in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, US \$3 billion; the debt-to-GDP ratio was 38 per cent, one of the lowest internationally; all of this after the global recession had taken full effect.

There were challenges with the inflation rate. Core inflation had been very steady at about 4 per cent; headline inflation in May was about 9.57 per cent. This has since risen to 14.1 per cent and we heard no clear plan from the Government to reverse this steep climb, which is largely driven by increased food prices.

I want to take a moment to address two misleading statements made by the Minister of Finance, an authority on these subjects. I want to pay particular attention to these statements for good reasons. One shows that the Minister of Finance is allowing himself to be a victim of his own script; and the other shows that the Minister either has no knowledge of or no respect for the facts surrounding the country's economy.

The first statement, which is on page 31 of the budget, refers to spending. The statement is made in the context of the revelation that under the last government the debt to GDP ratio was 49.4 per cent. However, on page 32, the Minister is congratulating himself for keeping the current debt-to-GDP ratio below 50. So, for the same debt-to-GDP ratio, if it happens under the PNM, it shows irresponsibility; but under the PPG, it is a matter for praise and self-praise.

What makes this even more interesting is that the Minister's pronouncement on the debt-to-GDP ratio has raised serious questions of veracity. For while the Minister of Finance is telling us that the last debt-to-GDP ratio under the PNM was 49.4 per cent, in Appendix XXV of the Review of the Economy, a document produced by his own Ministry, under his own hand, we are told that the ratio was really 38.4. Where did the Minister of Finance get his figure? He must clarify that for us when he winds up.

We also know that the 2010 deficit was originally budgeted to be \$7 billion. What his review has shown is that the realized deficit was actually only \$3.8 billion, if payments in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund are included. If you exclude the payments made to the savings account, you will see that the debt to GDP ratio was in fact 1 per cent. He did not tell us that. [*Desk thumping*]

The point is that one must now question the source of the information used by the Minister of Finance when he speaks as an authority on the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, which is why we advise him to stop bad mouthing the country. You are damaging our prospects for improvement. Clearly he does not

access official statistics and, therefore, should not be taken seriously unless he is willing to acknowledge the facts.

The second questionable statement, Mr. Speaker, appears very early in the Minister's budget statement. On page 6, the Minister tells us:

“the country's gross domestic product tripled from \$56 billion in 2002 to \$171 billion in 2008. Yet in that time the average person was no better off. Many were in fact worse off.”

Mr. Speaker, this statement is so erroneous, that it is unbecoming of a senior member of the Government. [*Interruption*] You want to talk? I can sit down you know.

This statement by the Minister of Finance is unbecoming of a senior Member of our Government and he is getting so carried away by his bias or political pettiness that he does not bother to check the accuracy of his statements.

What are the facts? As you know, the Central Statistical Office carries out a sample survey of our population on a regular basis. It is called the Continuous Sample Survey of the Population (CSSP). To verify the Minister's claim, we have used the CSSP data from as early as 1987. What does that data show about the living standard of the population? One thing the survey measures is the number of persons earning income below \$1,000 a month.

According to that survey, we see in 1997, with the UNC in power, the number of persons earning less than \$1,000 per month was 160,000. However, by 2008, after seven years of PNM rule, this figure for the number of low-income persons dropped to 35,000; 125,000 fewer persons in this country were earning less than \$1,000 per month. That is an improvement of 75 per cent. What is more, the data tells us that while prices went up by 62 per cent, income earnings went up by 95 per cent. In other words, on the average, people were better off because their incomes were growing much faster than the prices.

These are the data from CSSP or the CSO. Those are the official country data. If you want to talk to me about this matter, I will talk to you on those statistics; not on mind games. If you want to talk on our economy, talk about the official statistics. Do not fabricate data. This means it is palpably false for anyone, Minister or no Minister, to say that under the PNM in 2002 and 2008 the standard of living was falling and that people were worse off. That is not true and we reject that.

The population knows that the country is just coming out of a very rough period brought about by world events over which Trinidad and Tobago had little control. We went into the crisis with unemployment less than 6 per cent and

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because of requisite economic management we have come out of the crisis with unemployment still less than 6 per cent. As I told you earlier, the economy inherited by this Government is one that has many good things going for it. The economy experienced 3.5 per cent negative growth in 2009; we know that. This was turned in the other direction to record positive growth of .5 per cent for 2010.

11.00 a.m.

Now, there is a new Minister of Finance offering to turn the economy around. I think that is the title of his presentation, "...Turning the Economy Around". It has moved from a negative 3.5 to a positive 2.5, and he comes into office to turn it around. Mr. Speaker, I respectfully, on your behalf, wish to decline his offer of turning this economy around. [*Desk thumping*] The economy has been turned around, and what is required now is to keep it on that growth, even at a time when the rest of the world is still in bad shape.

This is the challenge that the Government is facing, and the prediction of 2 per cent growth in 2011 can by no stretch of the imagination be viewed as a positive turnaround as against a growth of 2.5. If we are now going in a positive direction and he is going to turn it around, he can only be turning it back to a negative position. That is logic, and I know him. Take him seriously, he will take us there. So, we decline that offer.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is one of missed opportunities. The last Government was successful in putting the economy back on growth, and this means that the role of the Government is to consolidate that growth, and you do this by mainly selecting infrastructural and human capital investments; no magic. That is how it is being done.

The PNM was planning to build five highways. They came into office, big announcement: Stop! Partner stop all; no highway. Review them, forget it; employment, construction, no, stop; local government reform; no word. Mr. Speaker, the PNM understood the way to deal with the employment challenge and the way to deal with the fiscal challenge, and we brought about growth in a difficult situation. The formula included public infrastructural projects; initiation of major industrial projects; and facilitating regional development through institutional changes. There was nothing wishy-washy about this.

What do we hear from the other side? We hear about a cluster development approach; we hear about realigning the economy; we hear about opening a new economic space. All of these are vague concepts which mean different things to different people. A country cannot be run on the basis of nebulous ideas. This budget demonstrates that this Government does not have a strategy on which to

keep the economy growing at this time. [*Desk thumping*] Because of manifesto promises, they must now throw all economic good sense out of the window, and kill any project they disliked in the run-up to the election, knowing that they have nothing to put in place of these growth-oriented projects. They are hoping that the country will buy their flop, and that the price of gas will rise to get them off the hook.

Mr. Sharma: We will rise.

Dr. K. Rowley: The Minister of Finance triumphantly announces the death of the rapid rail project which was meant to treat with the chronic traffic issues along the main trunk and arteries of our national transportation network. This was done on the justification that it costs too much. This might very well be so, but inexplicably, at the same time, they are cancelling the rapid rail project because it costs too much. We are introducing the concept of a tunnel at a far greater cost to provide quicker access to bake and shark if you live in Tunapuna. [*Desk thumping*] In the meantime, the traffic problem has not gone away and will not go away. The madness does not end there.

The new plan includes a tunnel and/or a bridge to Tobago, as sanctioned by my friend, the Minister of everything. I thought I heard the last of that foolishness about a bridge to Tobago when a carpetbagger approached the PNM government many years ago with that idea, but it seems that some ideas are immortal and diehard.

For one moment, Mr. Speaker, we almost lost the highway programme, but good sense has prevailed and the Government has accepted that to abandon these necessary projects would have been to effectively scuttle the major chance the economy has to consolidate growth after this period of recession and, in doing so, he would unnecessarily put the economy in serious jeopardy. We are happy that the Government has seen it fit not to abandon those projects.

Mr. Speaker, the same Government that is talking about diversification as a major objective is the Government that has now put the country in a position where only the high price of gas will keep us out of stagnation. The Minister has not been forthright with the population in acknowledging any continuity, but we on this side want to encourage them for the sake of the nation to stay on the sensible course.

What the budget shows is that the Government does not understand what is required of them at this time. So, like a batsman going out, not understanding how the wicket is playing, when in doubt, lash out—close his eyes and whoop—that is what we have now—hoping to connect. Mr. Speaker, that is hit or miss.

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Let us see what the budget says about growth, remembering what I said about the need for short-term measures to deal with the budget deficit. In this connection, the budget says—we are talking about improving infrastructure. However, what was presented was a string of clichés focused on operational deficiency, financial management and customer service. In another place, pontification of economic growth is based on the rate of capital formation and the level of investment. What does that mean? What are you going to do?

Mr. Speaker, he then goes on to tell us that this year he expects to pull together about \$20 billion of investment which will materialize out of the air, and from that he expects to get 3 per cent to 4 per cent growth. What we have here is pure abracadabra, because the Minister does not share with us how this is going to happen, and where this \$20 billion is going to come from. When he winds up, he must address that issue. Tell us where that investment is going to come from and on which projects.

This black-box approach to growth flies in the face of what Prof. Arthur Lewis told us in his noble lecture; that no matter how much capital we have, if in our society we do not have enough people with the right attitude to change, we will have no development. The point is that the people in the society must always be the centre of any strategy for growth; capital alone will not do it. So, to announce \$20 billion coming from somewhere without a proper understanding of how the people involvement will be or where it is going to come from, we who understand this know that nothing will happen.

Mr. Speaker, before I proceed, I need to respond to the audacity of the Minister of Finance to suggest that he is coming with a growth plan that is theoretically superior to the growth model initially proposed by Sir Arthur Lewis. The Minister said that Prof. Arthur Lewis did not realize how important entrepreneurship is to the growth process. Is he serious? Since the Minister knows about the value of entrepreneurship, he now sees himself towering above the region's first Nobel prize winner, Prof. Arthur Lewis. Mr. Speaker, the Minister is not only fast, but he does not know what he is talking about.

In the very early statement of his model in 1954, Prof. Arthur Lewis made it clear that if society did not have enough people with a passion for making money, we would not have a growing economy. In other words, if you do not have enough entrepreneurs there will be no growth. He told us later in his works that it was the embodiment of skill and training in workers which has caused a society to produce new income and wealth, and this is something the PNM has always taken very seriously. This was in 1954, but it is fundamental. Do you understand? There

are some fundamentals that do not change, and change for change sake could be dangerous. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is not fooling anybody who knows what he is talking about.

I want to take a look at the human capital development. In 2002, 4,228 persons, mainly young students, benefited from the Dollar for Dollar Programme. To address the many inequities and other shortcomings, the Dollar for Dollar Programme was replaced by the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses Programme, commonly called (GATE). That was done in September 2004. GATE initially offered 50 per cent tuition at public institutions; 50 per cent up to \$5,000 in private institutions and 100 per cent for persons most in need, so discovered by a means test.

By 2008/2009, approximately 34,000 persons were benefiting from GATE. This programme makes tertiary education affordable to all so that no citizen of Trinidad and Tobago can be said to be denied tertiary education simply on the basis of the inability to pay. The objectives of the programme are to build and strengthen the national tertiary sector in both the public and private sectors, and also to widen and deepen access to tertiary education that will support economic development and promote social equity.

The Government's expenditure is required to be maintained above the levels of 2010 if its claim of expansion in 2011 is to have any real meaning. The opening up of the programme to vocational studies is good, but if that is accompanied by a reduced rate of approvals for applications or a reduction in the overall allocation, then this too will become another PP's backtracking, and we intend to monitor you very closely on these programmes.

In the same way that the Government appears not to understand the economy, it clearly does not understand the thinking behind the country's commitment to the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). This university is a prime mover in our industrial and social development. How else will one take a statement from the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education when he says that UTT should be a feeder for UWI? One of the greatest setbacks that occur in the country, at this time, will be if this Government's hostility to UTT results in any stymieing of the programmes of this institution and the ambitions of those thousands of young persons for whom UTT is their gateway to personal development. We are proud of UTT and we want to see it grow, and we ask the Government to stay away from damaging and destroying it.

Under the social programmes, the PNM has always placed great emphasis on ensuring that a wide enough range of social programmes are in place to cater for

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the varying needs of those citizens who for one reason or another are not able to access the regular channels of self-improvement. The PNM has often been criticized for introducing and expanding these programmes, they being viewed as engendering a dependency syndrome. While it would be disingenuous of us to deny that the programmes we have put in place have been subject to some instance of abuse and misuse, the PNM maintains that these programmes are necessary to provide the basics for many families at the lower end of the income scale.

Many social programmes, necessary as they are, by their very nature, are open to some negative fallout which by themselves should not thrash the positive aspects of the programme. We should always be striving to eliminate waste, abuse and reduce or eliminate dependency on these programmes. I trust that the Government can see the difference.

Apart from their obvious beneficial impact on the individuals who participate in these programmes, the thinking that has guided the PNM was that on the macro level these programmes have always been of benefit and positive value to society; this is for two reasons.

First of all, a number of these programmes serve as second chance opportunity for human capital development. Many of these programmes cater for young persons who have not excelled at secondary school, but who have now reached the stage where they are ready to do something and something useful with their lives. In this category, we can list programmes like MILAT, MYPART, MuST or YAPA and similar ones. The economist will tell us that the most important driver of economic growth is human capital. In this sense, these programmes can rightfully take their place in support of economic growth objective.

11.15 a.m.

By taking more members of the labour force, treating them better and making them better endowed with relevant skills, the productive side of our society is duly enhanced. An improvement in the attitude and behaviour of these people is a welcome added bonus which is too difficult to quantify. We commend these programmes to the Government for continuation and support.

Added to this supply side contribution to the economic growth, is a demand side contribution. One of the most important conclusions of analysis of living market—and this has been done in recent times—is that the single most consistent and effective determinant of employment levels is aggregate demand. That, Mr. Speaker, is essentially the consumption spending by those with investment or with moneys coming from the programmes I just described and those who spend

basically all that they have available to them, they keep the economy going very significantly.

Since the major beneficiaries of these programmes tend to be individuals at the lower end of the income distribution, it is known that social programmes which involved the stipends or other cash transfers, contribute significantly to aggregate the demand. This means that programmes like URP, CEPEP, TCCTP all play an important role in maintaining levels of employment in the society. Moreover, to the extent that the aggregate demand contributes to the economic growth, these programmes are also to be seen as positive contributors to growth in the economy. I hope this Government understands that, especially as we approach on the threshold of potential economic stagnation or possible increase of unemployment.

In respect of the reach of the social programmes, in Appendix III of the SSIP for 2011, there are over 200 NGOs benefiting from Government's support and in Appendix IV there is another 150. This latter includes \$1.7 billion going to old age pension. Secondly, we see GATE at \$625 million.

The striking thing about the list is that these expenditures are the brick and depth of the former Government's commitment to social development in Trinidad and Tobago. Spending on these programmes was \$5.6 billion in 2009 and \$6.2 billion in 2010. Mr. Speaker, we note that the Government plans to spend \$7.1 billion on these programmes in 2011. We accept that, but remember we worry because we know that they used to call these programmes all kind of names and say all kind of things about them. In the first year of their existence, they are spending a billion dollars more on these programmes. We will see how that goes.

Mr. Speaker, no doubt that in the impending scramble for revenue, the first victim of expenditure cuts by the Government will be the social programmes. There are people in the Partnership—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Roberts: *[Inaudible]*

Dr. K. Rowley: You budget it. Budgeting and spending are two different things. Let me assist my friend, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. The budget is simply the estimate of what you say you will do. We are saying to you, you are budgeted to spend a billion more even after all that you have said. We are saying to you that we know that when you begin to cut, you will do it against what you were saying before because we know that there are people in the Government who made a career of railing against these programmes and will be happy to see many of them discontinued or emasculated.

Mr. Sharma: Nonsense!

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to warn the Government, to advise the Government: Do not walk this road of destruction of the social programmes. You will cause social instability. Quite apart from the immense social dislocation and hardship which is likely to follow these cuts if they come, as we have argued earlier, the Government needs to be aware that when they think about cutting back on any of these programmes, they may be setting in force, setting in train, forces which could cause economic growth to fall. That will be the worst thing that could happen at this time.

Mr. Speaker, looking at the energy sector, you must forgive me if I seek your assistance in unravelling the thought process of some of those in the Government. The source of my problem is that I know most of the key elements in the Government. I have either observed them or worked with them before, and therefore, I am very willing to try to understand what they are doing. I am very familiar with their energy policies that they spoke about before. When the price of oil was settling well over \$100 per barrel and a PNM government presented a budget with revenues predicated on an oil price of \$50, there was great skepticism and objection from those who claimed that the best management of the country's finances was to use the lower oil price and pay all revenues above that into sterilizing and saving the account in the Heritage Fund.

When the PNM presented a budget with an indicative price of \$65, there was a hold from the specialists, many of whom now reside in the Cabinet. Sixty per cent of all earnings above these indicative prices are required to be deposit of savings. There is now \$8 billion in the Heritage Fund, and that got there by virtue of putting that 60 per cent above the oil price. Without batting an eyelid, the same people who railed against the country budgeting at \$50 and \$65, are now telling us that if we understand what they are saying, they intend to spend basically all that we can earn given the current outlook for oil prices in the order of \$70 to \$80. This is a complete about-turn from what they were saying.

With respect to the indicative gas price of \$2.75, the Minister of Finance who went into minute detail about the new increased fines of the Litter Act was very deliberate in not explaining what that figure represents, if the anticipated earnings from a gas price has to be in the order of \$4 or above \$4. Two dollars and seventy-five cents is not the gas price. It is the earnings that we are looking for and that has to be predicated on a gas price well in the order of about \$4. Is that going to happen, Mr. Speaker? We do not know. We have to wait and see.

Mr. Speaker, currently, natural gas is struggling around \$4 and we are not expecting in the medium term prices, \$5 and above. The outlook for gas is not to get back to where it was in the not too distant past.

The Government's decision to adjust the oil tax regime for the deepwater domain is welcome, since it is the end of a long drawn-out period of discussion and negotiation with the relevant stakeholders. Hopefully, these adjustments will see successful drilling, and we hope we will have some gas to continue fuelling our industrial growth and sustenance from that sector. The Government should be cautious that this is not the best time for our oil and gas industry, and the competition for drilling and the dollars is very keen. Oil companies do not drill to please anybody but their shareholders, so how the Government treats with the oil companies and the energy sector—bearing in mind that this is not the best time and we are competing against serious competition. If they find gas they will want a market for it, and the known attitude of this Government to gas pricing issues, coupled with the coverlet treatment of the aluminium smelter investment, needs a reality check soon or we could find our national interest prejudiced by the folly of the know-it-alls.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM initially raised the issue of a parliamentary committee to oversee energy policy since it is too critical to be left to the vagaries of unstable Government changes. The time is now for this to be affected and the PNM stands ready to co-operate fully with the Government and the Parliament, to ensure that we get the best of the challenging situation that exist, and of all the issues that confront us especially since the Government seems not to know what to do.

Up to recently, persons who are currently in Government were claiming that the gas price contract was public business and should be published in the newspapers and made available to anyone who cares to find out. We look forward to seeing this policy implemented and we were surprised that the budget was so silent on such interesting development. Since it was being advanced that we were giving away the gas, we expect to see the new arrangement, so that we could assess how well the new managers are doing in the jungle of the international hydrocarbon business.

Mr. Speaker, mindful of the fact that the population will notice that they have come into Government empty handed, the Minister of Finance scraped around frantically and surfaced with a plan to promote the use of solar water heaters. To achieve this, he said he will grant duty free tax relief to facilitate the purchasing of these units. Even on a matter like this, the Minister of Finance seems not to know what he is talking about and he seems lost in the woods and would not seek directions from those who know. Any junior officer in the Ministry of Trade and Industry would have advised the Minister of Finance that the granting of duty

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free access by any Caricom territory for any goods produced within the community is a matter for approval by the COTED. Decisions of this nature are based on requests for approval and such grants must be unanimous, and there is no way that the industry in Barbados for solar water heaters would allow their government to agree to what the Minister is proposing here. So this initiative, duty free access for solar water heaters is dead in the water, has nowhere to go.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture. Consider that the budget comments on agriculture, a key statement was that in order to revitalize the sector, agriculture must be made profitable. How does the Minister plan to make this happen? He did not tell us. He tells us that the Government will deal with the problems: problems of water resource management, irrigation and drainage. To complement this, the ADB would have been made and I quote him:

“To return to its proper mandate and use \$75 million to finance agriculture entrepreneurship.”

Again, Mr. Speaker, nothing new here, only clichés. Compare this to the programme from last year. Last year's programmes were the development of access roads; the distribution and marketing support; improvement of storage and packaging; reducing the cost of our cultural inputs; improving access to financing; improving land regularization for farmers, and the need to access incentives at the bank. These were the specific programmes for last year and added to that, the efforts to reduce flooding on farm lands. These were seven specific initiatives and what was going to follow was implementation.

In the light of the emptiness of the proposals as suggested by the Minister of Finance, we recommend to the Government that they follow last year's programme and they might get something done because this year's programme says nothing. Absolutely nothing!

With respect to the promise of returning ADB to its original mandate, where, when, and how did the ADB get outside of this mandate? I would not be surprised if the Minister has no sensible answer to this question.

With respect to the recapitalization and restructuring of its portfolio, the Minister of Finance should know that exercise was conducted with the assistance of the IDB, and that is exactly what it is proposing now. The ADB was restructured, refinanced and is there now in its new version, revenues waiting to treat with farmers.

I would like to ask the Minister when he is winding up, based on what he has said about returning the ADB to its new mandate, to tell us what action of the ADB he considers adrift from its mandate? Make a note of that.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, given the position that the Opposition had taken to the mega farm idea, one would have expected some statement of policy on their use, continuation or discontinuation, but so far the mega farms have attracted only opportunities for Ministers to take pictures and smile with produce.

With the economy just coming out of recession, the PNM recommends that we continue to focus on economic transformation and innovation. From the Minister's statement he did not seem to know that a National Innovation System already existed. This system sought to develop a framework for understanding the process of knowledge creation, transfer, adaptation and monetization that would occur in the country. The emphasis earlier was on the expansion of e-commerce. The PNM now recommends that we implement plans already made for fostering innovation friendly modification in the secondary and tertiary education curricula, as well as developing the technical and financial framework for supporting the manufacturing sector and for creating new products or the innovative production of indigenous goods and services for export.

The budget contains key elements of measures and proposals that are already in place, but they have presented these in such vague terms that there is doubt about whether they understand the issues involved. The PNM always knew that constituting the diversification and transformation challenge we see in the country, there are two key questions; one: What are the non-energy triggers of increased economic activity in the national economy and, two, given the role of foreign exchange in the domestic production process, how can we keep the growth process alive, even as we seek to minimize the outflow of foreign exchange? These are two challenges that would require us to focus upon them. That is there to be focused upon and the systems to treat with that are also there and would remain part of our national debate.

It is because we have been working on these questions that we know that we have the ingredients of a viable plan for the country's growth and development during this period of lowered foreign exchange inflows. The country needs to know this, otherwise we can be carried away with gobbledygook from the Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance made a bold statement, that the country's gross domestic product tripled. In making that bold statement that we went from \$56 billion to \$171 billion, he spoke about the curse of oil. He went on to say that no period in this country's independent history could have better exemplified the

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curse of oil. It would appear that the intention of the Minister was to let us know he was aware of the curse of oil phenomenon associated with the names of the writers Gelb and Otti, but the Minister should know that this phrase makes no sense in the context of Trinidad and Tobago. It is not at all clear what the Minister meant by the statement, that because of this curse of oil the average person was no better off. He must tell what he meant by that when he winds up.

For us in Trinidad and Tobago, oil and gas are not a curse, they are a blessing. [*Desk thumping*] It was this blessing which ensured that the PNM was able to implement policies which this Government has now accepted as worthy of expansion at best, and continuation, at least. These include programmes like GATE, HELP, the conditional cash transfer card, CDAP, OJT, URP and CEPEP. It was the oil and gas earnings that caused us to be able to enjoy improved salary and wages, to experience low rates of income tax and the low cost of fuel and utilities. It was also this blessing of oil and gas that made possible the deshifting of all junior secondary schools, the expansion of the programme of free school meals for all school children, the removal of fees and all services at hospitals at the Eric Williams Medical Complex, where cardiac care and major surgical procedures are now available for citizens, free of charge. It was the blessing of oil and gas that caused us to do that.

So when a Minister of Finance comes here and talks about the curse of oil and gas, that is somebody to watch. It was the blessing of oil and gas that has allowed us to construct the Uriah Butler Interchange, put the water taxi service into operation, put 300 new buses on the road and to provide a reliable fast ferry to Tobago; the blessing of oil and gas. [*Desk thumping*] It was the blessing of oil and gas that allowed the Tamana eTeck Park to position ourselves better in the information, to establish the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), which will supply thousands of technical persons. [*Desk thumping*] It is that oil and gas which would allow us to diversify the economy and to implement the Cove project in Tobago, and many other projects designed to improve the quality of life. It is that oil and gas blessing which would allow us to enhance our operational efficiency and do a lot of other things.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on, but the point is that the Government by its pronouncement should not encourage the nation to be ungrateful or not understand how we have managed to live the way we live. We will pay a very high price if we do not understand the basis of our economy and the quality of our lives. The PNM feels honoured to have been at the helm of the government during the period when oil and gas changed the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The budget makes passing reference to the eradication of poverty, but the US itself, one of the richest countries in the world, has been battling with a 12 per cent poverty rate, even before the global recession. I do not know what it is now, but before the recession it was 12 per cent, and that is because poverty is a much more complex problem than the Government seems to understand.

Our aim has been to keep the rate as low as possible and to put adequate programmes in place to protect the standard of living of those who fall below the poverty line. This is exactly what the PNM has been trying to do over the years. How could anyone seriously claim, as the Minister of Finance did, that the number of working poor was increasing in Trinidad and Tobago?

This is a country where traffic comes to a halt because of gridlock across the country; a country where every second person has one or two cellphones, where nearly every home has cable or DIRECTV, where checkout lines in our supermarkets keep growing longer and longer and where car parks in our malls are crowded on any given day of the week. Let us be serious; the Minister of Finance was dead wrong when he said that in Trinidad and Tobago there was an increase in the working poor; not true.

The country is now enjoying a standard of living such as it has never experienced at any stage, [*Desk thumping*] and the bounty that exists in this country is distributed far and wide. If, therefore, we keep getting measures which imply that poverty is on the increase, we have to review carefully how our estimates are being produced, if we are not to delude ourselves and mislead others. In fact, Government should do some review, before it embarks on any misguided poverty eradication measures, because it clearly does not square with what we know is happening in this country. Just as they now find themselves turning around an economy that has already been turned in the right direction, they may find themselves mismanaging the poverty reduction imperative.

I turn to the Clico/HCU matter. With respect to the Clico issue, we are told that policyholders and investors would receive up to \$75,000 in cash and any remainder they would get in 20 annual payments at zero interest rate. This is quite a different policy to what was being pursued. What was being pursued was that Clico being an ongoing business, the Government was committing over time to try, as far as was humanly possible, to reduce the pain and suffering and anxiety on those persons, especially older persons, who had their lifesavings in Clico, expecting improvements as we went along, and that persons would not suffer huge losses, or any loss for that matter.

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This policy changes that immediately and creates among tens of thousands of persons sleepless nights and probably hopelessness. Let us understand that. This policy has changed things; different government, different policy; your prerogative. We simply want to appeal to the Government to examine this issue, not in the context only of numbers or preconceived notions, but in the context of human suffering. Clico could bring a lot of suffering to a lot of people in this country. There is a human content to this, and since it is a going concern, there are questions about this new policy.

What this new policy means is that given the Government's borrowing rate of around 7 per cent, plus a market spread of 1.25 per cent, this payout works out to 52 cents on the dollar, when it is effected over time.

Mr. Imbert: Less.

Dr. K. Rowley: My mathematics tells me it was 50 cents, but let us say half, we are looking at 50 per cent. However, we are also told that Clico's assets are valued at \$16 billion while its liabilities are \$23 billion, which gives us a ratio of 70 cents to \$1.00. Obviously the question is, based on what I just said to the Government: Why are policyholders and investors being penalized, if these are the numbers? Maybe this thing was thought out in the heat or in the rush of the budget preparation and the numbers are what I just said. The Government may want to rethink this in a more deliberate way, with more time available to it. We are recommending that to the Government. Do not cast it in stone. We know you would like to do something different, we trust you would like to do something better, but this may not be the best arrangement in the context of the severe human suffering.

Mr. Speaker, obviously, we are asking: Why are they not benefitting from this 70 cents on the dollar? What systems are being put in place to ensure that these unfortunate beneficiaries benefit from any increase in asset value over time, over that 20-year period? What if that \$16 billion grows over 20 years, as it very well could, if your prescriptions work? You have given us no indication what would happen to the beneficiaries at that zero rate consideration for their 20 payments. We ask you to rethink that.

We are also amused with the Minister's condemnation of the regulators. You make me want to laugh; serious matter, but I wanted to laugh, because he was condemning the regulator; one of the country's regulators par excellence, one of the longest serving regulators. [*Laughter*] As the *Guardian* editorial noted last Friday, and I quote:

“The difficulties had been building up for a number of years...”

This is not me, the *Guardian* said so while he was regulating:

“The difficulties had been building up for a number of years with moneys that should be in a statutory fund to serve policyholders being invested in the CL's empire.”

Moreover, in September 2001, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC, a former UNC Attorney General, made some startling disclosures right here in this Chamber. I quote: I am quoting the Attorney General of the UNC in September 2001. I want you to listen to this against the background of what the Minister of Finance told us when he pontificated about Clico.

11.45 a.m.

I quote:

“In respect of the Clico matter, I think I owe a duty to also say that some time ago “—Under The Regulator—” some documents were sent to me. I had correspondence with the Minister of Finance, but I consider that it was my duty in the light of what was raised, that I also ought to pass it to the Director of Public Prosecutions, because in respect of any insurance company which may be technically insolvent, it is a question as to whether criminal offences are being committed. Therefore, I considered it my duty to pass it to the Director of Public Prosecutions.”

That was the UNC Attorney General. It may be worth noting that in September 2001 the current Minister of Finance was safely ensconced as the Governor of the Central Bank and the UNC was in government. Mr. Maharaj's concerns were publicly dismissed and told to be untrue by the Government of the day, and that may have turned out to be viewed by investors as a vote of confidence in Clico's business, because it is noteworthy that Clico's annuity business exploded to record levels after that parliamentary rejection of the Maharaj intervention.

Mr. Speaker, I would like you and the country to closely compare the fake posturing of the language of the Minister of Finance who was at the heart of this matter at the Central Bank and the current Prime Minister who wielded a long knife in the parliamentary discouragement of the Attorney General, Lawrence Maharaj. She replaced him after he tried to talk about Clico and draw attention to Clico's possible problem. That was the end of Maharaj and we had a new Attorney General who is now the Prime Minister. The Clico matter is in front of us now and we are hearing a different kind of story as though they were never there; they were never around; they did not know. This country has a record and we are dealing with the outcome.

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The Minister now claims that the Clico bail out was badly handled by the former government, yet he does not say what he would have done at the time and he had nothing to say at the time. In fact, at the time I seem to recall when this Parliament passed the Clico bail out and the country breathed a sigh of relief, there were editorials praising the Government's success in bringing about the bail out of Clico. How come it has changed now? How come?

Also, he asserts that the Government wrongfully saw the problem as one of liquidity. But if that was not what it was, then what was it? If the Clico problem was not one of liquidity, is the Minister of Finance implying that CL Financial was awash with cash and Mr. Duprey on that fateful day approached the Central Bank for some friendly advice? Is that what he is saying? Our understanding is that the Clico leadership went to the Central Bank for a financial bail out because of a liquidity crisis. So what is this Minister of Finance now telling us about wrongfully treating with the problem because he thought it was one of liquidity? This is madness, to think that he is the Minister of Finance and he is saying that the Government wrongfully saw the problem as one of liquidity. This illogic is impeccable, but it is "Dookeranian".

With respect to the Hindu Credit Union, you may recall that during the debate in this House when we assembled to treat with the stunning news that Clico had collapsed, or was about to collapse, I made recommendation then that the Minister of Finance should consider offering some form of relief to those who were harmed by the failure of the Hindu Credit Union, that organization that collapsed. My position then was driven by four considerations: One, that poor people had put their money in an institution which state agencies had a duty to oversee and somebody dropped the ball; two, purely on humanitarian grounds; three, credit union money gets spent and it generates economic activity which is good for the country and; four, most importantly, that there were persons in and out of the political arena who would seek to portray the plight of ignored depositors as an act of racial discrimination. Wrong as that position was, it is sufficiently destructive to a society to spend \$200 million only to destroy the germ. That was my position then; it is my position now. These conditions still apply. But now the Minister has argued the case for bail out in a way that he has equated systemic risk as posed by Clico, with whatever happened, mismanagement or otherwise at Hindu Credit Union, and he has argued the case based on equality or inequality and discrimination. I hope that he knows that having done that, there will be many more small knuckles knocking on his door and we wait to see who else will come for a bailout from the credit union sector. They will be lining up. The Minister of Finance has laid the groundwork.

With respect to the question of the laptops, the country's continuous investment in education has been a feature of our independence effort and to this end, the PNM has been the unquestioned pioneer. We support to the fullest, any and all efforts of the Government which can meaningfully provide opportunity for citizens as they seek to develop themselves for whatever worthy purpose they choose. With respect to preparing students for entrance survival in this communication age, we support access and training involving the use of computers in schools. Where we differ from the current approach is that the PNM considers the Government's laptop caper to be doomed to failure, wasteful and possibly counter-productive.

It is our view that the policy of establishing and maintaining modern computer labs in schools for access by all students, was far better and a better way to service the needs of the student body. For years we have been teaching chemistry and physics in schools and we let students go to labs. They did not have to own the personal—they did not have to carry home Bunsen burners and own them to become good chemists and physicists.

The provision of laptops to entry level students, while seniors largely have no access or very little access, is downright foolhardy. It is logistically burdensome on students and parents; it puts some students at risk; it is overly expensive and we are not convinced that the action flows from any well-thought-out policy but from the need to produce goodies for an election campaign when you think that the more you give, the more votes you will get. Given that a not insignificant proportion of our youngsters are challenged to score well in basic reading, a computer in some of those hands could be an unintended distraction.

Mr. Roberts: What?

Dr. K. Rowley: The research is there, but this Government knows everything, as you see from the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. They would not be bothered by the little matter of proper scientific research on this subject. It has nothing to do with children being denied access to computers or laptops; it has to do with public policy in providing the best for all.

With respect to the arrangements for the purchase at the incomplete cost of \$83 million, the Government should feel very uncomfortable. Nothing that the Minister has said to date has done anything but raise serious questions. Not the least serious of which is, what is the purpose of providing these computers? Is it to make children computer literate? Or is it to teach the standard curriculum? What is the policy we are following? Is it to just teach computer literacy or is it to use the computer in teaching in the school?

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There is a huge difference in approach, depending on the answer which the Minister clearly appears not to know or certainly has not provided. The procurement procedure makes one very uneasy and the fact that the Government is going on and going out of its way to comfort the population that there is no local agent involved and that no local agent for a popular brand as HP has come forward or is identified, tells me that the Government is not coming clean on this matter, not even to confirm that there will be an annual purchase to be repeated in the years ahead.

What should be very clear is that whilst the Government is playing coy or foolish, the manufacturer and the agent—because there is one—they have no such requirement to play coy or foolish. Agency fees could be as much as 3 to 10 per cent, somewhere in that range. In that case, a fee of \$2 million to \$10 million is due on that purchase, or double that in the years of replacement whenever computers are replaced across the board. And when the whole school gets laptops, that is when the real big money will flow.

I defy this Government to tell us that they know for a fact that there is no agent for HP in this country and no agency fees are paid. The more the Minister tries to defend the process, the more the unease grows. The defence which has been put up for HP's criminal conduct by a Trinidad and Tobago Government Minister, is superior to any that HP has put up in its own behalf. He is a brave man to have spoken so definitively about a process from which he should have kept arms' length. If there was any doubt that we should not take the Minister seriously, all that doubt was dispelled when he sought to allay our fears by confirming that Trinidad and Tobago's purchase was not done with HP America or HP Russia, where they are facing criminal charges, but they were done with HP Latin America where bribery and influencing bids do not take place and HP Latin America, the Minister tells us, do not get involved in bribery, peddling influence or engaging in bid-rigging. Latin America, Mr. Speaker; Latin America. We did business with Latin America and the Minister is telling us that we are protected from criminal conduct of HP in America or Russia. On this explanation, the Minister of Education has a laptop for you. He thinks you are a "duncy-head" first former. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, if there is one area of significant difference between the policies of the PNM and the UNC-led coalition, it has to be in the models of economic development in industrialization. Point Lisas Industrial Estate escaped the wrath because they were not as well organized then as they are organized now. Mercifully, we continue to benefit immensely from the industrial plants and other

investments which currently sustain our economy and they would have denied us that for their narrow political objectives.

The PNM's position on diversification of the economy is that we support the need to expand non-oil activity to increase earnings while taking care of, and also maintaining growth in the hydrocarbon sector. It is not an either/or situation. We believe we can do both. It is also our position that oil is not gas and gas is not aluminium or steel. Thus the creation of an aluminium industry in this country must be viewed as diversification away from oil and gas, even though gas is a component of the industrial process involving aluminium smelting.

The joint venture arrangement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and China—\$400 million investment—as represented by Alutrint, is meant to be a major development in the country's industrialization, even though the plant is only a small modern unit of the very latest efficient technology. This project was deliberately located in the south-west peninsula in order to address the chronic unemployment and economic stagnation which has been a feature of this area for too long. The Government has indicated that this project will come to a halt without providing any information on the huge cost associated with this decision. They also have failed to provide specific justification for crushing the hopes and aspirations of the thousands of citizens who were looking forward to this project providing opportunities to them and their families.

There is a question on the Order Paper which was filed under my name in this House seeking the information on these matters. I trust that the answers would be immediately forthcoming so that we could understand the depth of irresponsibility or rational decision-making to which Trinidad and Tobago is now exposed. The project which utilizes 3 per cent of our gas consumption meets and exceeds all international standards of environmental pollution and management and provides a much higher ratio of jobs to capital investment than any other industrial project currently operating in the hydrocarbon sector.

12.00 noon

The products from the aluminium smelter are the raw materials for a variety of downstream industries which are expected to create approximately 3,000 high quality jobs. In terms of gas monetization, the local aluminium industry would contribute significantly to economic growth, as well as become a welcome addition to our foreign currency earning capacity; so crucial in the face of ever declining oil production and other exports. In preparation for this planned operation, a \$2 billion power plant is nearing completion to service its operation.

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The port investment has already been made and the Brazilians have indicated a willingness to purchase 60 per cent of the project which dismisses the erroneous view peddled by some in Government that the project is inherently uneconomic. The very fact that the Government can sell 60 per cent of the project at this stage and recover significant portions of the initial capital outlay, does nothing to dampen the misinformation peddled by the Government and its allies who would accept no reasoning but their own.

The political objection of some experts never surfaced in 1998, when the UNC government proudly announced its intention to sponsor and support the establishment of the first aluminium smelter in Trinidad and Tobago. Apparently, at that time, those who are now prepared to obstruct the project with their very lives, were afflicted with pip. They could not talk then but they are talking loud now. They saw no risk of chemical poisoning from that project then and environmental degradation that is so visible now was of no concern then. The UNC as a party has undergone a dramatic conversion from sponsor of a smelter in 1998, to prosecutor against one in 2010 and all of that is a position taken, depending on which way the political wind is blowing. *[Interruption]* Listen to the people? The people of Point Fortin and La Brea, more than anybody else in this country, voted in support of that project.

What is most amazing is that is the same budget statement, wherein the Government is declaring the shutdown of an important existing project at tremendous cost to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on the grounds of concern for the environment. They are gleefully inviting many and all to come and drill for oil in our offshore acreage. Anyone who followed the recent bp disaster in the Gulf would have obtained a good appreciation for the risk associated with drilling in the ocean. We have been doing it for years and will continue to do so, because we know that all industries have levels of associated risks, but these can be managed successfully and we would never have had oil refineries in our country, especially sited in the heart of Point Lisas and Pointe-a-Pierre within spitting distance of San Fernando. To take their current position with Alutrint would mean that we should not have an oil refinery and we should not take the risk. As far as they are concerned, if there is any risk, have no project. In industry, as elsewhere, if there are risks, risks can be managed. It is only when the risks are unmanageable, that you take their position.

This is the third occasion—*[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I crave your protection from him and injury time.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Hon. Members, I would like to listen to the hon. Leader of the Opposition. Everyone else would have an opportunity to speak. So, could we have your undivided attention whilst the hon. Leader of the Opposition is on his legs?

Dr. K. Rowley: And some injury time. I would appreciate it. This is the third occasion on which the PNM has sought to bring socio-economic relief to all the people of the south-western peninsula only to have it thwarted by the UNC after a change of government. It happened with their attempt to locate the miskempt fertilizer plant, which was negotiated as a greenfield site but found itself under the UNC in developed Point Lisas, at great financial loss to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Then, there was the Labidco Industrial Estate which was shut down for the entire term of the UNC and only came to life as a fabrication yard for offshore platforms on the return of the PNM. My friend from Pointe-a-Pierre would know what I am talking about. It is not surprising that as the Government takes this decision to derail the smelter, as with other vaps, it has absolutely no credible alternative to present to the people of La Brea, Point Fortin or the south-western peninsula. Even with the tremendous capital outlay and infrastructure already in place, the Government could offer no alternative as to what to do in that area.

Insofar as the Government is guided by the vocal activist of this cause célèbre, the Minister of Finance meekly mumbles the Kooblalsingh alternatives of converting La Brea into the country's location of choice for a giant garbage dump in furtherance of an uneconomic recycling venture. He has also proposed a photovoltaic cell industry, but even the venerable Minister of Finance himself could not bring himself to advance that idea and when he did not mention it as an alternative, it should tell you how to take it; unworkable and cannot replace the benefits of an aluminium smelter.

Today, on behalf of all the right-thinking people of this country, especially the people of the south western peninsula, La Brea, Vessigny, Point Fortin, Vance River and their neighbours, the PNM calls on the Government to abandon its reckless misadventure over the aluminium smelter and reverse its decision in the interest of the wider national good.

The manufacturing sector is under pressure because of the deteriorated financial circumstances of our Caricom neighbours and also because we are dealing with a situation where we compete head to head with other manufacturers throughout the world. The Minister of Finance gave the sector an increase in wear and tear allowance from 10 per cent to 25 per cent and hope that this incentive will turn things around. Because of the way in which the wear and tear allowance is calculated, the savings will become smaller and smaller as the years go by. In our view, much more will have to be done before the manufacturing sector responds in the way the Minister anticipates.

Tobago: On May 24, many Tobagonians like others across the country, bought into the message of change advanced by the coalition, but now, 114 days

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later, the first stage of buyer's remorse has settled in Tobago, as it has in Trinidad. The 2011 budget represents the clearest manifestation that Tobago will derive any benefit from that decision.

They are five points I want to raise about Tobago with respect to the budget. I wish to correct the cleverly crafted statement of the Minister of Finance regarding the proportion of the Budget that was allocated to Tobago. The Minister correctly indicates that THA's share of the budget would not be defined by minimalist interpretation of the Dispute Resolution Commission's findings and its 4 per cent rule. However, the actual allocation to the THA provided by the Minister of Finance is in fact the said 4.3 per cent. As is also true, the overall allocation for Tobago, which should not be confused with the allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly, was again slightly over 5 per cent this year, just as it was last year and the previous year under the PNM. What that means is that Tobago did get no benefit, no favour from the Minister of Finance. He simply followed the practice established under recent years; same thing. The change of government changed nothing for Tobago with allocation.

What the Minister did not do was to give Tobagonians the assurance about the continuation of those projects and initiatives which central government was not legally bound to fund, but which were informed by a genuine desire on the part of the previous government to facilitate meaningful development in Tobago. Such projects and initiatives include the desal plant at Cove, the activation of wells at Mount Irvine, Englishman's Bay and Bacolet and the facilitation of Enterprise Development at Cove. In this context, while the Minister tried to create the impression that the 2011 budget fiscal allocation to Tobago was the largest ever, if he had only done his homework he would have discovered that in recent years the recurrent and development programme allocations of the Tobago House of Assembly are as follows: 2007, \$1.64 billion; 2008, \$1.75 billion; 2009, \$1.993 billion; 2010, \$1.77 billion; and 2011, \$1.96 billion. The evidence is clear, it was the PNM in 2009, allocating the largest volume of recurrent expenditure and development programme money to Tobago at \$1.993 billion. The sum of \$1.993 is always larger than \$1.960 billion.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the percentage of the THA's budget funded by central government, in 2007, the request was funded at the level of 58.7 per cent; 2008, 61.8 per cent; 2009, 68.3 per cent; 2010, 61.8 per cent; and 2011, 54.3 per cent. So, you see the difference? Thus, Tobago received the lowest percentage of what was requested, not under the PNM but under this coalition, with the percentage falling from a record high of 68.4 per cent under the PNM in 2009, to 54.4 per cent under this Government.

The second issue in Tobago concerns the question of the collaboration issues. The sector remains crucial to Tobago's development. Over the past decade, starting with the Basdeo Panday administration, the Tobago House of Assembly and the central government have worked closely. It is troubling that despite the partnership's manifesto which says: "collaboratively with the Tobago House of Assembly and the tourism sector...to ensure that tourism is sustainably developed in Tobago", the Minister of Finance would come to Parliament and announce a proposal concerning some luxury resort in Tobago before any initial discussion or consultation with the Tobago House of Assembly. If the Minister is genuinely convinced of their urgent and immediate need to expand the stock of high quality rooms in Tobago, he should urge his Cabinet colleagues to move more expeditiously to facilitate the renovation works at the former Hilton, which we now call the Vanguard Hotel.

The Minister also spoke of encouraging direct flights to Tobago, but even a cursory consultation with the THA would have informed the Minister that is already in place. It is this lift that he is talking about which explains the direct weekly flights to Tobago by British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, Monarch and Condor; the result of marketing arrangements which were already in place when the Minister looked in Tobago's direction. It is meaningful collaboration, not unilateral action, which would guarantee the future of tourism in Tobago.

The third issue I wish to mention is with respect to the Government's response to the island's economic diversification effort. The budget offers inadequate support for many of Tobago's emerging industries that are now at takeoff stage. For the island's preferable processing initiatives, a project which has been endorsed by a present Minister of Government, there is no support for Tobago's commercial fishing or fish processing. There is no mention of support for Tobago's Venture Capital initiative and, of course, there are other things that have been requested for which the Government has given not even an acknowledgement to the relevant letter. The rhetoric of their manifesto and the budget is not matched by tangible support for Tobago's economic development.

The fourth issue concerns the environment and the developmentality introduced in the budget, something called North/East Tobago Growth Pole. If the Minister had chosen only to ask, he would have been told that the Assembly already has a North/East Tobago Development Plan that is progressing and is being implemented under the marketing design "Keeping Tobago clean, green, safe and serene." That is Tobago's marketing slogan.

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12.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Tobago view the proposed excursion into north-east Tobago, without consultation, as yet another signal threat to the autonomy of the Tobago House of Assembly and this could be inimical to the fostering of a harmonious relationship between the central government; not to mention that the premise of unsolicited, bumbling development prescriptions could open the door for the permanent destruction of the very tranquility and natural beauty which offers Tobago its unique place in Caribbean tourism.

Finally, on Tobago, Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Scarborough Hospital, we have noted the ridiculous comments of the Minister of Health regarding engineering and other issues on this project and, subsequently, the equally if not more outlandish remarks of the Prime Minister about the cost per bed. Both comments show regrettably an utter lack of understanding of the history or content of this project, but we trust that the provisions made in the budget for the Ministry of Health are adequate for the completion of the hospital.

With respect to the Shaw Park Cultural Complex, the Financial Complex and the Scarborough Library, the Minister of Finance cannot just complain about the projects, he must also ensure that the resources are provided in a timely fashion in order to facilitate the completion of these projects.

Mr. Speaker, since the budget, I have been given the assurance by the Tobago House of Assembly that, despite sharing the disappointment of the minority leader over the allocation to Tobago, despite the misstatement of the Minister and despite the abandonment of their election pledges, the Assembly will remain focused on continuing to improve the quality of life of all Tobagonians. The Assembly and the people of Tobago will certainly have to reprioritize the range and scope of activities previously planned for the next fiscal year. I have been informed that all sectors, communities and interest groups on the island will be involved in the process.

I urge central government to collaborate with the Assembly in efforts to increase the development thrust in Tobago and resist the temptation to engage in acts of political collusion to the detriment of the people of Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, law and justice: The role of the Attorney General is to give the Government sound, unbiased, non-political, legal advice; nothing else. We have noted carefully the appointment by the Attorney General of a team of so-called investigators, the A team, where A stands for Anand, to conduct an investigation into the UTT, Petrotrin, eTecK, the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago, T&TEC, Scarborough Hospital and the fast ferry.

We are advised that the members of this team are all very close friends and associates of the hon. Attorney General; five of which are lawyers; and two hold briefs for him in the courts now that he is temporarily out of private practice. In fact, I am advised that they operate out of his private office. One of his mentors, from whom he sought a costly legal opinion, when there was no need for such, in an earlier matter, is on the team as well. Yet another is a close associate of his mentor and also a close associate of the Queen's Counsel—one big, happy, legal family; brothers in law if ever there was one.

Mr. Speaker, let it be known that we of the PNM have no problem with any effort to treat with wrongdoing, but there are proper ways for this to be done. Firstly, why are they all lawyers? Why are all demonstrably close associates of the Attorney General? What criteria were used for their selection? What is their track record in this type of work? Good governance demands that these matters be dealt with properly.

They are not a commission of enquiry. They are not police officers. They are not from the office of the Auditor General. We are advised that this friend/friend team wrote a letter to one state enterprise that is the subject of their attention and demanded a list of all contracts entered into by the enterprise for the last five years. This is not only onerous and burdensome, but because they have no known terms of reference, the enterprise is at a loss to know what to do.

Further, the enterprise has asked them on what legal basis or authority they seek the information. The process is therefore stymied and off to a poor and sorry start, but alas, we have noted that the allocation for fees for this assignment in the budget is \$13 million for this exercise and similar ones. So his personally-selected friends have access to \$13 million in circumstances where the Attorney General is on record as saying that there is no limit to what he is prepared to pay these lawyers.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what will happen? There will be no sworn testimony by persons speaking to this A team. They would wind up with slander, gossip and innuendo, presented in a report to maintain the flow of fees and the Attorney General would lay this report in Parliament under the cloak of parliamentary privilege. Persons affected would have no opportunity of protection; and even if the A team gets to the point where they consider there is sufficient evidence in any particular case to prosecute, the matter would then have to be referred to the police who would have no choice but to investigate all over again. They speak loudly about waste, graft and inefficiency and this is what we get: himself to himself for himself.

The Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago has enshrined within it several freedoms, including freedom of association and the guarantee of protection from

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inequality of treatment. In the 1960s, Dr. Eric Williams introduced special works, now called the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP).

It is a historical fact that the programme was introduced in the urban centres, particularly in the city of Port of Spain and it was intended to deal with the steel band violence and other conditions. Over time, the programme spread and became national. There was quite naturally a high concentration of these programmes in Laventille and similar areas. This was not for any reason other than the fact that those who qualified for access to the programme were largely concentrated in these areas. It is also an historical fact that those are consistently people who lend support to the PNM.

In similar manner, over the years, milk and rice subsidies were extended to other citizens outside the areas I have just described. This is a historical fact. The residents lent consistent support to other political parties.

Today, fortunately, there are many social programmes that have given young people of the communities access to more meaningful pursuits. So when we are told by the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, who spent most of his professional life representing labourers, those little people of our country, that his concerns about questionable employment within the URP and that he intends to resolve these concerns by ensuring that people who are known to be PNM and having the lion's share are to be removed, we become acutely concerned.

We say without fear that is not what fairness and good governance is about. Is it that the Minister will go around and whimsically decide who is PNM, with no reference or knowledge as to who they have voted for and deny these persons the opportunity to benefit from a social programme for which they may be qualified only because he considers them to look like PNM? Mr. Speaker, this is an unholy and dangerous development in its own right. This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that the UNC-led coalition promised these very people they would not discriminate against them and they doubled the URP gangs for the last election and rushed to pay them on a Saturday and a Sunday before election and now they are to fire them because they look and sound like PNM.

This Minister is the same trade union leader who now sits quietly while his colleagues treat him with disdain with respect to the minimum wage. One sentence: It will be reviewed; after he told the country that a new minimum wage would be announced in the budget. What can we say to all this?

Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Minister has a problem, it should be with the fact that he, too, is now no longer credible and that many people are disappointed. Further,

he should desist in engaging in his plan for discrimination and malice against people he believes are not his supporters.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has won a handsome victory at the polls and we should all be proud. We have a democratic political economic system which has consistently served us well. On the back of that victory, the entire population is entitled to expect good governance and they could be excused for anticipating dramatic change; not everywhere, but certainly in those areas where the specific issues form part of the largest national consultation, which we call an election campaign.

For the people of this country to be faced now with a group of persons who will not speak the truth to them; will not even acknowledge some major campaign promises and seek to pass responsibility to others, is nothing short of a stain on our political landscape. To win so handsomely, but attempt to govern through chicanery, sophistry and outright "smartmanism" is disappointing in the extreme. It is actions like these that cause people, especially young people to have no respect for those of us called politicians; and as they do so, they withdraw from the process because they see us as self-serving and untrustworthy.

Mr. Speaker, if there is any one thing that this Government has done which sums up how rotten has been its short tenure and how short an expectation it has been, you only have to read Camini Maharaj's investigative column on Sunday last in the *Express*.

The defiant placing of Ganga Singh as CEO of WASA, a job that is supposed to be non-political, executive management, without so much as a fig leaf of transparency or no concern for the public opinion, tells us the level of contempt with which the Prime Minister holds the country. That gentleman is well known to the Prime Minister and his legendary exploits with the pipes at Desalcott was the highlight of his career.

The *Express* story is not gossip, is not innuendo; it is the substance of an official affidavit prepared and submitted by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) of Trinidad and Tobago to a foreign court of law. For the Prime Minister to make the appointment in the full knowledge of these facts and come now and put out a call to people that those who know something should come to her is jokey. She is not an investigator. What she has to do is her sacred duty to act according to the highest traditions of the office she holds.

As I end, I say: These are not the best of times, nor are they the worst of times. We the people of Trinidad and Tobago are a fortunate and blessed people who have the privilege of sharing this wonderful land. We are all required to make our contributions in an effort to leave it a better place for our children from whom we borrowed it.

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The People's National Movement will continue to play its part and make its mark as we have done since the middle of the last century. The PNM will defend our democracy; be the voice of the oppressed, the victimized and the downtrodden and a tireless advocate and defender of our economic potential. As our country's loyal Opposition, we have stated clearly and publicly that we will support the Government in advancing any measure which, in our opinion, will benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we will vigorously oppose any measure which is deemed by us to be inimical to the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We look forward to discharge our duty according to our oath of office in a successful but short stint on this page. We expect that the people will join us in defending their interest, protect their opportunities for equal advancement and holding this Government to high ethical standards, and expect that elected officials will keep their commitment to the people.

As I continue this discourse at Piggott's Corner this evening, I invite you to join us.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 12.29 p.m. This sitting is now suspended until 1.30 p.m.

12.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the invitation to join in this very important and very historic debate on the 2011 budget. Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind my hon. friend, the Leader of the Opposition, that this debate is historic in that it is a debate that has been mandated—a budget that has been mandated by the 432,026 voters or 59.21 per cent of those persons casting their votes on May 24, 2010. [*Desk thumping*]

I remind him that his party which he leads—a party which he began to lead by undermining his leader and jeopardizing his party—putting his party in such jeopardy such that they lost the election and was reduced to 12 seats in the Parliament; a party that once enjoyed stature. He undermined him and, more than that, look where he relegated him to sit! On the last seat; the twelfth man on the team there. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Ohooo!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: This is the treatment meted out by the Leader of the Opposition to his leader. Mr. Speaker, he undermined his leader. He so much wanted his leader's job, he jeopardized his party. Do you know what? I sat here

for two hours and a half hoping to hear something new. I was hoping to hear a new vision that he will articulate to hopefully give his party a chance of returning somewhere—though this is really something that is not possible again—in the future to office, but my book is bereft of anything. Page after page, there is nothing to write. There is no new policy and nothing to show, because it is the same old thing.

Mr. Speaker, they got 285,354 votes or 39.5 per cent of the votes that were cast. But let it be recognized that the margin of difference between them and us was 20 per cent, or in absolute terms, 146,652 more persons voted for the People's Partnership than the Opposition. It is the largest ever margin, and by far the most votes ever cast for a party in this country. That is the mandate that commanded the kind of budget that was presented here; a budget for the people, of the people and by the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this budget represents the desire of the electorate and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to have such a government; a government that is people centred; a government that cares; a government that loves; a government that feels; and a government that identifies with the problems of people. This is why, on the very first day, the Prime Minister put on her tall boots and said to her Ministers to put on theirs too, and let us go and deal with the problems of the people. I never saw that from the benches of the PNM in the history of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the mandate given to this Government by the 432,026 persons also represents the extent of the disgust; the disappointment of the people with the then government; a disgust about the manner in which the resources of this country were used; the corruption; the mismanagement; and the fact that the people who should be the beneficiaries of the patrimony and duly so, were not the beneficiaries. The resources of this country were not being managed and administered in their interest and, therefore, they fired them.

Today, according to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, as he loves to say, that is why we are here and that is why you are there. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we will continue to be here and you will continue to be there, because of your callousness and arrogance that you have displayed towards an unsuspecting population; and the manner in which you treated them with scant courtesy and respect. They have fired you and employed the People's Partnership to deliver to them the things that they consider are important like the physical systems; the infrastructure; utilities; health care; the schools; the public transportation system; the jobs and an environment within which they could aspire and achieve and as well feel safe and secure.

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This budget was presented and delivered by one of the most respected economists in the Western World; one who was even invited by the top universities of the world including Harvard, to speak to their students about re-organization and transformation of economics. This is a service-centred budget with a service-centred philosophy and a direct response of the people to return to the basics and put things right, to govern with the people in mind. It is about a brick and mortar budget. The only brick and mortar that they knew about was the brick and mortar that Calder Hart used and which he took away in another form with him when he left this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the hon. Leader of the Opposition became a merchant of mischief here this afternoon; a merchant of contradictions; real contradictions. Imagine, after undermining his leader; and after jeopardizing his party—after causing his party to lose an election after he claimed in the opening lines of his speech where he made apologies and said that they made mistakes and so on, he came back and said that this budget is about the same PNM politics and we should go back to that. So leader of the PNM—I know the Member for Point Fortin said that you are her leader and that is why she sits next to you and distinguishes herself from the rest. [*Desk thumping*] He is your leader, right!

Mr. Peters: Who is your leader?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Who is your leader, Member for Point Fortin? Tell me that the Leader of the Opposition is your leader! Get up and say that, Member for Point Fortin! I will sit for you to say that or tell me whether Mr. Manning is your real leader. That is the division that exists on that side, but the merchant of mischief tried to create mischief here this afternoon.

I noticed that even amidst his mischief, he studiously avoided some things. He studiously avoided talking about housing and his tenure in housing. He should have talked about that. He should try to say to the wise, why so many houses built under his tenure cannot be delivered to the people. Why is it this People's Partnership Government has to spend so much money to rectify problems where houses are collapsing? He should say that. Why did he avoid that? Why did he not speak about that? Why did he not say whether, in fact, the 28,000 houses that they claimed to have built were really built? Is it that when they announced housing projects they began to count the houses even before the first pillars were put down? If an inventory is taken, you will see that there is a difference between what they have announced and what was actually built in this country. Shame! Shame! And he talks about who should be ashamed!

He studiously avoided the hospital issue in Tobago; the most expensive hospital in the world—\$7 million per bed. I mean, the only people who were "boboless" in that were, in fact, the people there who presided over the building of that hospital, and now he says that the People's Partnership must provide the resources to finish it. Yes, we are going to finish it, because we are a government who cares, and the people of Tobago are important as the people of Trinidad. [Desk thumping] That is why we are a partnership.

Most importantly, he studiously avoided the word "crime". What is the PNM's record on crime? Member for Diego Martin Central, what is the PNM's record on crime? Can you tell us? What is the PNM's record on crime? Why did the Member studiously avoid crime? It was a crime for him to avoid mentioning crime because he knew that despite the billions that they have spent, they never did anything to affect the crime and security of the people of this country in the way that it should be affected. [Desk thumping] We are going to do something about it and we are already beginning to see the winds of change in the attitude of the police service as they are really moving onto the streets. That is why in the last couple of weeks you have seen such an attack by the police upon the criminals. The most number of guns ever seized have been seized under the People's Partnership than under the last government. [Desk thumping]

We are going to take away the armoury from the criminals and we are going to put it in the hands where it belongs and that is in the hands of the police service; the men and women who put their lives down for the sake of all of us. We are going to give value to them; a value that you as a government never gave to the police service in this country. You have demoralized them and caused them to be on the periphery when they should be at the centre stage working as they want to work for the benefit of this country.

He talked about the debt of the country and he gave the picture of the country's debt. He quoted from this book *Facing the Issues; Partnering with Our People* the book that deals with the review of the economy. He should have really quoted from it. Member for San Fernando East, you should teach him how to read these books. Perhaps you did not mentor him well. Perhaps somebody else mentored him to undermine you. What a tragedy! Nevertheless, he talked about the public debt.

In Appendix 25 on page 74 of the *Review of the Economy*, gross public sector debt, \$49,953,000,000; contingent liabilities, \$21,001,000,000 and if that is not enough, letters of comfort; \$8,924,000,000. What is the real debt of this country? If tomorrow the debt has to be paid, is it only the \$49.9 billion or the \$49.9 billion

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plus the \$21.1 billion as well as the letters of comfort of \$8.9 billion? What is the real debt of this country? You relied on the *Review of the Economy* and I am relying on the *Review of the Economy* for you to tell the country the truth. Do not come here with half-truths, tell the country the whole story, because you talked about the legacy that was left by the PNM was a good legacy.

Mr. Speaker, this is the state of the country. When you take that \$49 billion plus \$21 billion which is \$70 billion and you put it over the \$124 billion which is the GDP as of 2010, then you will see it goes to 55 per cent. That is what the hon. Minister of Finance was, in fact, relating to. So, do not come and tell the country half-truths. Tell the country what is the real debt you left. What is the real debt you left in the country? If that is not enough, then you should also tell the country what has happened to the cash position of Trinidad and Tobago. You should tell us how much cash you left in the Treasury. I think it is very important that you do that. Why did you studiously avoid speaking about that also?

Is it true, as it says in the documents, that the cash balance moved from \$17.7 billion in 2008, and one year later, in 2009, it went down to \$9.7 billion, a difference of \$8 billion in a year? Where did it go?

Mr. Peters: Calder went with it!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: When we took over, the cash balance was \$5.4 billion. It went down a further \$4.3 billion, between fiscal year 2009 and when we came into office. At the end of September, it is \$4.3 billion. Where did that cash go? Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, do you want to tell me where it went? Did you get a better school? You are wondering yourself! I hope they will educate you as to where it went so that you can tell the country where it went. Where did it go? Where did you spend it? Is it at CHOGM, the Fifth Summit of the Americas, or highways? It could not be on hospital beds, because people are still sleeping on chairs at the San Fernando General Hospital. It could not be the Brian Lara Stadium.

Mr. Peters: Not on the Brian Lara Stadium.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It could not be on the Brian Lara Stadium. Where did it go?

1.45 p.m.

Where is the evidence of the transformation of the people's infrastructure in this country that would have reflected a proper utilization of cash like that in this country? Where it went? Where is it? Was there a cultural transformation? NAPA? I thought we borrowed \$800 million to build NAPA?

Mr. Peters: Yes, we did.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: We did. So it could not have gone there. We borrowed to do that. Where did it go? I ask that question, seriously. Member for Point Fortin, I notice that you are getting uptight. Where did it go?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I am listening.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Okay, where did it go? I would really like to know where it went. What did the Leader of the Opposition do? He came here to create a sense of fear, the same kind of fear that they created during the last election campaign. "Boy, yuh go loss yuh CEPEP. Boy, yuh go loss yuh URP work. Dey go take away yuh pension. Dey go take away yuh GATE." Merchant of mischief, merchant of lies. Not the Merchant of Venice. Merchant of Diego Martin West.

Dr. Moonilal: For now.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I wonder where he has disappeared to. Maybe he should come, sit and really listen. Is it because he does not want to be embarrassed with the fact that we are telling him that he undermined his leader, he jeopardized his party and caused them to lose an election in the country? He blames the former Prime Minister for the PNM loss today. You did not realize that in his first five minutes of his speech he was blaming the Member for San Fernando East for the loss. But today, he took over the party and has not come with anything new. Nothing new, not even a new policy. I tell you, my page is blank just as his mind was blank in terms of change, and he talks about change. The audacity to talk about change. He wanted to create fear in the population.

Do you know what I want to tell him? I want to tell him that we have a Prime Minister in this country whom the people trust; and we have a Prime Minister in this country who has closed the gap between what she says and what she does. [*Desk thumping*] She is a woman of integrity. He talks about the difference between the PNM, and asks us about management and leadership. Yes, it is. It is about management because we are going to manage this country to deliver what the people need. We are going to do so efficiently and we are going to do so within the kinds of cost that we need to do it, so the saving will benefit and redound to the people. That is how we are also going to increase the revenue of this country by being efficient in terms of what we do and saving cost.

You do not just raise money by taxes. You also raise money by savings and being efficient. [*Desk thumping*] He talks about our Prime Minister and alludes to her being the "mother of the nation". My Prime Minister never did that. My Prime

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Minister did not get up and say "I am the father of this nation". My Prime Minister never did that. My Prime Minister never has those grandeurs of illusion. My Prime Minister is a practical lady; a lady who operates very differently to the leadership of the PNM; one who is a servant of the people; and one who knows what servant centred leadership is all about. [*Desk thumping*] The distinguished Minister for San Fernando East will be able to give you a lecture on what is servant centred leadership. He would certainly be able to give you a lecture on that, given that he is a man who reads the *Bible* often and has studied the life of Christ, one of the greatest leaders of all times. A servant leader is a leader who is collaborative, not dictatorial. Our leader is a collaborative leader. If she takes a little longer to get something done, it is because she intends to have the fullest partnership, participation and collaboration with the people so that the right decisions are made. [*Desk thumping*]

She is a lady who has a compassion for children. She is the first leader in this country who is showing such a sense of compassion for the children and poor of this country. This is why she spends so much of her time walking among the people, shaking hands with the people and commensurating with the people. This is why she does that. That is what leadership is about. Leadership is not about status. Leadership is not about power. Leadership is really what people ascribe to you being a Leader and people have to name you a leader. You do not name yourself a leader. [*Desk thumping*] It is because of her genuine care for the future of this country that she is where she is today, the Hon. Prime Minister. Just at a point in time of the history of this country when Dr. Eric Williams said that the future of the country lies in the school bags of the children, she says the future of this country now lies in the laptops, in the bags of the students. [*Desk thumping*] But what did we have here today? We had, a Leader of the Opposition, a supposedly future leader but after today there is a [*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Prophet!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—question mark, an aspiring Prime Minister of the country who did something and said something, that the man whom he undermined would have never done as such. Never have done! He referred to children as "duncy head". "Duncy head" children! Imagine that, "duncy head" children!

Mr. Speaker, I thought it was an affront to you and I thought you deserved an apology for the comparison that he made between you and a first former, saying like a "duncy head" first former.

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Could you imagine that we have a Leader of the Opposition who refers to the children of this nation as "duncy heads"? Can you imagine that? That is the view of someone who is aspiring to be a leader. Tender minds! What is he telling these children? You know something, there is a philosophy that says, "What you believe you become." Imagine what message you are sending to tell those children that they cannot perform? Why are you jeopardizing the future of this country by communicating a message of despise about themselves, of low self-esteem about themselves to the children of this nation. Shame! And he talks about who should be ashamed.

He needs to apologize. [*Desk thumping*] Apologize to the country. Do you know why he has problems with our Leader and Prime Minister? He has problems because she is the first leader in this country to demonstrate beyond the shadow of a doubt that she has been able to unite people in a way that is incomparable in a diverse country. [*Desk thumping*] She has been able to show people in this country how to celebrate diversity and still be themselves in this country. She is a unifying force in this country. She has vision for this country, and that is why CNN and *Time*, just after she had two months in office, named her as one of the top 10 female leaders in the world. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot compare leadership on that side to this kind of leadership. We talk about chalk and cheese, maybe you have to find a new description for that.

So as a Leader of the Opposition with nothing new to offer, trying to create fear, starting to create fear of increased taxation— He talked about the collection of lands and buildings taxes, but what he failed to recognize—and I want to quote from Cabinet Minute No. 673, September 08, 2010:

- “(i) With respect to measures to improve tax collection”—we agreed—“to the repeal of the Property Tax, Act 2009, and the reinstatement of the Lands and Buildings Taxes Act, Chap. 76:04, the same rates to be applicable utilizing the old evaluations; and
- (ii) To the waiver of lands and buildings taxes for the year 2010.”

Here is the Cabinet Note. Not the mischief that the merchant of mischief, the merchant of confusion and the merchant who is perpetrating a different set of disbeliefs to the population wanted to perpetrate; this is the truth. The Member for San Fernando East will understand the value of a Cabinet Minute and a decision taken collectively by the Cabinet.

You see what the Leader of the Opposition failed to recognize and what he should have told us since he quoted CSO, he should have gone to his CSO partners and tell them to find out what percentage of the population pay their lands and

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buildings taxes. If everyone were to really pay their lands and buildings taxes in accordance with this Cabinet decision, you will see that you will collect much more taxes in this country. You will collect it. It is there. It is just that the system for collecting the taxes has not been efficient and that is what we intend to do, and that is the difference in management between this side and that side. [*Desk thumping*]

So what did the Leader of the Opposition do this morning? He was prepared to twist the truth. He was prepared to cast aspersions without support for what he was saying. He was prepared to cast it upon public citizens and make up his own version of the truth. It is one thing to tell a lie, it is another thing to begin to believe the lies that you tell because then you become deluded about yourself and in that state of delusion you can act irrationally. You guys better be careful about that kind of thinking because you are subjecting yourself to an irrational type of leadership behaviour on the part of your leader.

He talked about the legacy that was left by the PNM. But he did not talk about the debt left to contractors and the billions of dollars owed to contractors which we have inherited and which we have to pay; about all the contracts at the HDC which were not signed; about the number of projects started and did not have contracts; about the cost overruns on all the projects. He did not talk about all of that. So he is a stranger to those truths. Then he talked about this country is blessed with oil and gas, very true and that is great. This country is blessed with oil and gas and we should be happy for that. We should thank God everyday that we are blessed with oil and gas. But in a sense, it has been the curse of the PNM. They do not know how to use money in the interest of the people. Yes, there are some good things that you did and let us recognize that.

Every government does good things and where good things are done, it must be acknowledged. But when you buy a boat called the *Su*— This boat has not run yet. We had to pay to repair it. It still cannot run and then you had to sell it at half the price you paid for it. Tell me, is oil and gas a blessing or is oil and gas a curse? Tell me which one it is. Is it a blessing or a curse? Then we still have other matters to talk about. We have the matter of the unresolved OPVs and what have you. You see, because of this blessing or curse, you decided to spend \$900 million on a Brian Lara Stadium, and now you have problems to decide whether the structure is safe. You spend all that money on the Brian Lara Stadium, but half mile from there you have a community called Gasparillo and within the Gasparillo community there are seven playgrounds, but not one got lights. Not one got lights.

Thanks to the Minister of Public Utilities when I approached him; [*Desk thumping*] Four of those grounds are being lit up now. Why were they not lit up before? Was it because you hated the people of Gasparillo because they never voted PNM? I want to tell you something. There are PNM people in Gasparillo and when you could do things like that and batter and bruise your own people, it shows the calibre of thinking that exists in the PNM in this country. Shame! Imagine that in two months the People's Partnership Government can begin to light up four grounds in Gasparillo when they had none before, and you could not do it for 40 years [*Desk thumping*] where you have votes. You do not even care about your own people, your own voters, and your own party supporters. If you can behave with your own party supporters like that, imagine how you will behave with other parts of the country.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about the well-off people—people with cars, television sets, cable TV and what have you and so on. Do you know what is interesting? It is interesting that he studiously avoided talking about the working poor. There is a group called the working poor in this country and that working poor is under pressure. Real pressure! Some of them cannot even pay their loans in this country. Some of them have reduced the baskets of food they buy every month. Some of them belong to the public sector, and public sector wage negotiations have been kept back by you. This is why we put that as a big item in the front of the budget, that one of the issues we will deal with and deal with quickly is the question of public service wage negotiations. Do you want to know the kinds of things that concern this Government? Public sector wage negotiation concerns this Government because of the increasing working poor in this country.

When that working poor cannot buy the groceries and when they cannot spend money in the economy, then you threaten the support services sector which employs so many people in jobs in this country. You affect even the public servants who cannot hire a maid to take care of their homes—she is paid a wage. You threatened all of that, but you talked about the poor. This is why I find that the Leader of the Opposition likes to quote from documents.

2.00 p.m.

My erstwhile friend, the Leader of the Opposition, likes to quote from documents. Well, this is a 2009 document;

“Stakeholders’ Meeting Report. MDG 1.

Millennium Development

Goal 1. Poverty and hunger

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Cascadia Hotel and Conference Centre

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Page 12, “Survey of Living Conditions.”

They always denied the poor in this country.

Based on data for the Survey of Living Conditions, 2005, 16.7 per cent of the population was considered poor. But do not take it only as 16.7 per cent. Take the absolute numbers. You know how much that amounted to? That amounted to 210,815 persons living below the poverty line in Trinidad and Tobago. In this country? With a GDP of \$124 billion?

In this country? Where people in Brasso Venado, in my constituency, live off rainwater and do not have pipelines up to this day; and where 40 children go to school and they live off rainwater. And you are proud of that? And you thump the desks, and you are proud of that? You should be ashamed. [*Desk thumping*] Ashamed that you ran this country for 44 out of 54 years, and people cannot have water lines in Brasso Venado, which is half mile, as the crow flies, from the Navet Dam. Shame. What a shame.

The Member for Chaguanas West has adopted the Brasso Venado Primary School. He has adopted it. [*Desk thumping*] I am quoting the document. Trinidad and Tobago was identified as having experienced significant economic growth. However, this document—your document—16.7 per cent poor was considered to be too high. This is the conclusion. They are agreeing that 16.7 per cent of the people should not have that level of poverty. This is why we have set a goal to reduce poverty by 2 per cent per year; and this is why we set up the Ministry of the People in order to do that. [*Desk thumping*]

Information is needed on the age groups of the working poor. Do you know what is the working poor in Trinidad? In 2005, the working poor was 11.4 per cent of the population; 143,909 persons. And that was before the financial meltdown. That was before people started to lose jobs. That was before prices of foodstuff started to go up. That was before rent prices also went up in the country. You know what that means? That means that you guys sat there, erstwhile, hon. Members of Parliament—Members of Government—and you presided over the poverty of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: Shame.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: What a shame. Member for Diego Martin Central, I have always had great respect for you. I thought you were a person whose heart was always full of compassion. I know your work in the programme. You did

well. But you know what? I feel sad that you joined that Government, where that compassion and that heart for people instead were replaced by a Hart from Canada. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, the erstwhile Leader of the Opposition is a bright man, but he let his politics get in the way of his sense of rationality today. He talks about laptops for children. Like he has forgotten that there is a programme in some countries to put a laptop in the hands of each child. I believe Uruguay is the country attempting to do that. Latin America. The very Latin Americans he talked about and criticized them and said they were corrupt, and so forth, today. But they are trying to put a laptop in the hands of every child. India has developed a laptop for \$35, and they hope to distribute a hundred million of those laptops very soon.

Closing the gap between the haves and the have-nots. [*Desk thumping*] When he criticized the laptop programme—and we have no disagreement that there should be computer labs in schools. We have no disagreement with that. All the secondary schools should have that, and they should be updated. You did a good thing if you did that. Congratulations. But do not tell me that the poorest child in this country should not have the same opportunity as the richest child in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I am sure that those of you who have children on that side, your children have laptops. Is it that you want to deny the poor child a laptop so that your child could have a competitive knowledge advantage against the poorest child in this country? [*Desk thumping*] Member for La Brea, I do not want you to go. I want you to stay and listen. If the heat gets too much, do not go. Stay. You are a teacher. You know about empowering people. You should be supporting the laptops for the help of children. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition's children have laptops. I am sure. You have to start somewhere, and you start with the first Form Ones; and there is nothing wrong with that.

This is a courageous government which is willing to take courageous decisions; which is willing to take people-edge decisions. The kind of decisions that are in favour of people. And we are going to take the decision, as we have taken, to supply the laptops to children, because laptops in their bags are the future of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The future of the world is going to be a knowledge-driven economy. Those countries that succeed will have people who are knowledge adept. Cyber-wellness. If we cannot compete knowledge-wise, then we are going to fall back. This is why countries like Singapore, the United States, and other societies put such emphasis on knowledge. This is why we are putting emphasis on innovation, as we have to put in the society.

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In the Global Competitive Index, you know what it says about innovation in Trinidad and Tobago? Innovation is the 12th pillar that talks about global competitiveness. The capacity for innovation of the 139 countries ranked, do you know what is Trinidad and Tobago's rank on innovation? Anybody knows on that side? One hundred and thirty-eight. So when you ask us what we are going to do; when you ask us how we are going to empower the people, this budget is a budget of empowerment, and we are going to empower not just the people, but through them, the country, to be a competitive country in the global environment in the future by focusing on innovation. [*Desk thumping*]

If we have to do that, we have to empower companies and organizations to spend money on research and development. We have to have university industry collaboration in research and development. We have to have a government that procures advanced technological products in this society. And in all of these, for example, companies spending on R & D; we are ranked 114 out of 139. We cannot win in the future like that. This is why the Minister of Finance and this Government have placed emphasis on innovation as one of the pillars by which we are going to win in the future, and win for Trinidad and Tobago and secure the future. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, he criticizes the Minister of Education for his statements defending the process by which the laptops were ordered through HP. It is very interesting, you know. I wonder if the Leader of the Opposition ever criticized his own Government on the question of transparency. [*Laughter*] Serious transparency. I think he only did that after he was hauled over the coals by the Member for San Fernando East and he was placed under severe pressure. We have nothing to hide as a Government. This is a transparent Government. [*Desk thumping*]

I will tell you something. Our Prime Minister has made it very clear what she expects in terms of honesty, integrity and transparency of every one of her Ministers. [*Desk thumping*] He talked about inflation and food prices, and then he talked about flood control and listed eight points about agriculture and said, "You must adopt that," and so forth. But what did you really do to affect floods in this country during your time? The floods did not start with the People's Partnership, you know. It did not start with us. What did you do? Where did you spend the money on drainage? What did you drain? Which rivers did you clean? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: The Treasury.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I asked a question earlier. How come we moved from \$14.7 billion to \$4.4 billion in a year and a half, you know? Cash reserves. How did we do that? I would really love to sit down and get an answer. We hear nothing about it.

Food prices; floods. Because of the way the farmers were treated in this country; lack of access roads; lack of proper drainage. In fact, they were given problems by WASA to even get water from the rivers to water their crops during the time of difficulty, and they wanted to charge them for the water. The people who are feeding the country, they wanted to charge them for the water. Imagine that. What callousness.

It was under you that food prices skyrocketed, because you failed to deal with the needs of farmers. There are farmers who are waiting; when the floods occurred in May of this year, farmers were waiting since 2008 for compensation. Do you know what the compensation was? If you lost a head of cabbage, you got 53 cents for that head of cabbage. A full head of lettuce, you got 53 cents. If you lost a tomato tree which was growing, you got 93 cents for it. And they were waiting up to two years to get their compensation. We have a Minister of Food Production appointed by the Prime Minister, who, within six weeks of the floods occurring in Tabaquite and other areas, paid compensation to the farmers. [*Desk thumping*]

That is a working Government. That is what the people expect. Service-centred Government, people-focused, delivering. That is why I can stand proudly here today and join the Minister of Finance when he recaptured for us the 120-day plan and said, "Done, done, done, done;" because we have delivered on our 120-day plan. Tell me your record. Go back and you will see how many promises you have made that have not been delivered to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They have not been delivered. Had I the time, I would read to you 54 pages between 2001 to 2009 of promises you made but remained. That is why the name of your party is, "Promises Never Materialized". [*Desk thumping*]

You come and you talk, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, about our social programmes. You know, the Leader of the Opposition today was a man of contradictions. First contradiction, after undermining his leader, taking away his job, putting him to be 12th man so he does not have a chance to play on the team, he comes back and says, "These are the PNM policies that we want". Failed policies. He is trying to bring back failed policies upon a progressive Government. [*Desk thumping*]

You think we were born yesterday? We are in the cyber age. I will tell you something. This Government is consulting with the people. You see our manifesto, this is Government policy. This did not come up by somebody sitting in a room. Widespread consultation took place over the last three to four years because we were preparing for this day; that when we presented a manifesto, it would be a manifesto that the people accepted. This is what they voted for, and this is what we are implementing. It would do you wise to educate yourself by reading it a little more in terms of its contents, because that manifesto is also the basis of the budget document that has been presented here.

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So, man of contradictions. He acknowledges that we expanded the social programmes. Yes, he acknowledges that. He said that we have put more money in the budget, and so forth. But then he said, we will close it down. You know, what kinds of things are these? A man of contradictions. We are expanding the social programmes, but what we are saying is we are expanding it in a way that we will empower people to get out of poverty and not remain as perpetual political dependents, which is what you have created in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

When you serve people, you do not serve them to leave them where you find them. You serve them to empower them so that they can become independent and have a better quality of life. That is what you do. A man of contradictions you were. I really and truly wondered about the Leader of the Opposition today. He criticized the growth poles concept of the People's Partnership as described by the hon. Minister of Finance. How has this country developed? Everything seems to be Port of Spain-centred. As a result of Port of Spain-centeredness, what do we have? Big buildings.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Minister has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, colleagues. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

We are talking about the growth poll concept. Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have to do in this country is to stop rural underdevelopment and begin with rural development. We have to build new towns in this country and when we build new towns we will get new jobs for people. This is what this growth poll development is about. It causes us to think about the whole society and not just one part of the society. It brings about opportunity for all, which is what we are, a Government of opportunity for all. It takes the resources of the country and distributes it among the people of the country as they are rightly entitled to be fairly and equitably treated in the country.

The rural people must have the right to the best quality of life, equal to that which the people in the urban centres or in the towns are entitled. Rural people work hard. They work very hard. They are farmers, they are agriculturists. They feed the nation and they must also now enjoy an equivalent quality of life. The town centred philosophy must be changed to a country-centred philosophy.

My friends, look at what has happened. The honourable Member for Chaguanas West showed it. We have the Licencing Office in Port of Spain, however, when he went to Princes Town and San Fernando and saw the deplorable conditions under which people were working or to which people had to go in order to get service, it was unbearable; and you expect people to perform, you expect people to be productive? As a Government you are supposed to provide the environment and set the example within which people can perform and give you the productivity. When productivity rises, it is the best strategy to defeat inflation in a country, [*Desk thumping*] the best strategy to defeat inflation, and this budget is intended to do that.

This budget is intended to put the country back to work and to provide the kinds of incentives to people so that people become productive in the society, and I want to tell you something. People have adopted this Government. People realize that this Government is about moving this country forward and people are now willing to produce in this country. People are willing to make extra efforts.

I can speak—when the floods took place in Gasparillo, people came out, doctors—Dr. Rai Ragbir, Dr. Colin Furlonge, even Mrs. Cumberbatch and the team from South-West Regional Health Authority came out on their own, no pay, voluntarily, and gave of their time and effort. [*Desk thumping*] It is a new momentum that has taken place in this society. [*Desk thumping*] I did not see that when the floods took place with you guys. What I saw and heard of was an ODPM that said, "We will contact", part of the contact society that existed under the PNM. [*Interruption*] Yes, yes; town-centred philosophy. We must have a country-centred philosophy. We must deal with rural underdevelopment in order to deal with rural neglect and rural poverty. We must argue for the right of people in the rural communities to enjoy a better quality of life.

My dear Mr. Speaker, it is a tragedy for me to see the conditions in the rural areas. In fact, you know, for the Opposition, certain communities were non-existent as far as the last administration was concerned. This is why the Mamoral bridge collapsed. This is why the people of a place called Baboolal Trace—I do not know if anyone knows where Baboolal Trace is—cannot get an ambulance to come to their village and the people of Howisa Trace could not get water in all these years.

This is Baboolal Trace Road. "Watch it good." [*Showing document to Members present*] "Watch it good." "All yuh" spend \$565 million for a feasibility study for a rapid rail but you could not fix this road in Baboolal Trace which the Minister of Works is going to fix for me. They could not fix. "Look it." [*Showing document to Members present*] "Look it." [*Desk thumping*] That is what you did with people—\$565 million to tell you that you have to spend \$22 billion for a

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rapid rail but you could not fix quarter mile of road and so there is a man in there now, a man in there, whose wife came to me in tears because an ambulance could not and cannot go to pick him up. That is what is happening.

My dear friends, you talk about neglect and rural neglect in this country, it is amazing what exists in this society. Here is a list of the constituency of Tabaquite [Showing document to Members present] and you talk about neglect? Every Member of Parliament here has it. There are 78 side roads in Tabaquite without water in 2010—78, "Look it", without water. You talk about neglect? You talk about heartlessness? In Brasso, Tabaquite, there are six households that cannot get lights. Imagine that, "eh"?

Five hundred feet away from where they live there is a light pole but they cannot get lights. Do you know why? It is because they came to me and they said, "We want lights", and I sent a letter to T&TEC and T&TEC wrote me a letter and T&TEC says, "Further to our letter and the conditions of supply it has revealed that you will be required to pay a capital contribution of \$87,015.93 to install the infrastructure necessary to provide lights. So those children living there had to continue to go to school and study by flambeau, right? They cannot have lights. They cannot have street lights. Right? And \$565 million you spent for a feasibility study but \$90,000 you could not spend and you cannot spend to put lights. This People's Partnership Government is going to change that kind of policy in this country at this time. [Desk thumping] We are going to change that. That kind of callous indifference to the basic needs of people, cannot be tolerated. It cannot be tolerated at all in this society.

Mr. Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago there are a lot of people who are in need and you really have to go among the people and live among the people to know they are in need. Yes, Point Fortin, I recently went to your constituency which you claim to represent and I delivered a wheelchair to a man there who could not move from his house for the last year because he could not get a wheelchair—your constituency, but you would not go to Cedros because Cedros voted against you.

Mr. Speaker, it will be interesting for you to know that a container of 280 wheelchairs from China costs US \$56,000 or approximately TT \$360,000, yet people every day have to beg from Rotary and beg from Lions to get a wheelchair, but you had a Minister of Sport who celebrated a \$2 million flag. [Desk thumping] That \$2 million "coulda" bought six containers of wheelchairs or sixteen hundred and eighty wheelchairs and give every person who needed a wheelchair in this country a wheelchair in this country. [Interruption]

Mr. Peters: Ah, that would have been a legacy.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Then you were criticizing the Prime Minister's idea of the Ministry of the People. The first Ministry the Prime Minister announced, and now you see the merit and her vision, was the Ministry of the People and you say, "How this going to work? What is this Ministry?" Well, when the very hard working Minister of the People went out to the areas in the country, he will tell you that 3,000 and 4,000 persons came out and they came out because of the need and there was no more need for any justification for the Ministry of the People.

Those who criticized the Ministry of the People and the vision of the Prime Minister did not realize—those of you on that side, you did not realize because of your arrogance and your attachment to position—you did not realize the psychological and physical distance that had grown between you and the people. You have to be poor to know what poverty is and to feel poverty. As a government you grew immune to the poverty of the people. It is one thing, you know, to boast about social services that you claimed, the this and that. It is another thing to bring it within the geographic reach of the people who have to benefit from it.

You know, in the first three months of my office I got 81 applications for food cards, 81 applications, and I interviewed every one of them myself and realized the extent of poverty in this country and I asked them, I said, "How many of you applied for food cards before?" About 60 per cent had applied for a food card before, up to a year before, and they had no response from the old Ministry, none, none; none at all. Why? Is it because you were giving it to your partners? Your partners? Is it that?

Why do you look so stunned? Have I stunned you into submission? Do I need to awake you or bring you to a new reality? Because I need to do that. You must begin to appreciate what we are saying here. La Brea, you know about poverty. You grew up amidst poverty therefore you could understand and empathize with what I am saying. This is why I said earlier that this budget aims at empowering and bringing about social justice to people.

If I may, with the permission of the Minister of the People, say that the Ministry of the People is a Ministry that demystifies government and brings the government closer to the people. It is a Ministry that magnifies the People's Partnership governance philosophy that governments are there to serve the people and not for the people to serve the government. That was the philosophy of the PNM, people serving the Government to keep you in office but then you are brutalizing them.

You know, this Government of the People's Partnership of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar recognizes that there are many vulnerable groups in the society and it is with such vulnerability that in her vision she stated during the

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campaign and now she has made it a part of the budget that the Milk Feeding Programme will be introduced to complement the School Feeding Programme. Milk will be supplied to all health centres to nutritionally vulnerable or at risk persons including antenatal mothers and patients of the child welfare clinic. [*Desk thumping*] She makes her vision alive so do not sit there and talk about the disparity between what she says and what she does. She closes that gap between promise and fulfilment of the promise.

You know, my friends, Mr. Speaker, the People's Partnership Government is a government that has been partnered, not just by the people, you know, but by both the private and public sectors. The Leader of the Opposition criticized the budget but what he failed to relate to the country were the statements made by all the Chambers of Commerce including the Chambers in Central Trinidad and South Trinidad as to how they saw this as a progressive budget that had hope for a country that was thrust into a state of hopelessness by the PNM. To quote from one of the newspapers, the *Newsday*, Friday September 10th:

“Members of the business community have expressed satisfaction with several initiatives revealed in Wednesday's budget presentation by Finance Minister Winston Dookeran...

...the Chamber of Industry and Commerce said they were pleased that Dookeran placed emphasis on governance, accountability and strengthening the regulatory environment for financial institutions.”

The country is pleased but you are not pleased, and that brings me to the matter of the Hindu Credit Union and the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition made four or five points on the matter of the Hindu Credit Union and he criticizes the bailout. Well, I want to ask the Leader of Opposition something. Was it not at Balisier House that a group of people from the HCU, and I believe it included the HCU leader, went to Balisier House at a time when the Minister who was in charge of cooperatives, Mr. Conrad Enill, was telling the Prime Minister that, "Look, things are not right there and you got to intervene", and Conrad Enill, as a Minister in charge of the cooperatives, he was admonished. Therefore, you sat there and you allowed the HCU also to collapse, although you had information from one of your Ministers, indications that things were not going right there but it was politically good for you at that time, politically opportune for you at that time, not to say anything or do anything.

It is this People's Partnership Government that is concerned with the well-being of 160,000 small depositors, the common man, the little man, the little man, who

are moving to save that and they are happy and the country is happy today that they see that those savings are going to be saved. [*Desk thumping*] So you should be happy, very happy, very, very happy. And then you talk about regulations and supervision and so on? You talk about doing the right things? Well, it might have been politically right at that time but in fact it was wrong that you allowed regulators who were supposed to do a job and they did not do the job they were supposed to do.

2.30 p.m.

Go into the files of the Ministry and see how many letters there are complaining to the Commissioner of Cooperatives that things were not right with the HCU and that they were going into the credit union but could not get their money. I am sure that the 160 persons who are going to get their \$75,000 are very happy in their homes today, because many of them thought that they would have died and not seen any part of that money. [*Desk thumping*]

As we build, we know our challenges and we will work to effect them. In fact, the latest competitive index shows that the five most problematic factors for doing business in Trinidad and Tobago today are crime and theft. We have inherited this from you, therefore, we are taking this as a step from where we are going to move in order to do something:

1. Crime and theft;
2. Poor work ethic in the national labour force;
3. Corruption;
4. Inefficient government bureaucracy; and
5. Access to financing.

If you want to take a sixth one: Inadequate supply of infrastructure; that is what you have left us. You asked about a legacy, that is what you left us.

That is the Global Competitive Index in which the Institute of Business, the Arthur Lok Jack Institute of Business—imagine that, an entire university sold for \$20 million to one of your partners, so he could put the name "Arthur Lok Jack Institute of Business" on it. Why did you just not leave it as the "Institute of Business"? When you name an institution or university, it must be because the name behind it has a tradition. [*Crosstalk*]

As I close, let me say that the Leader of the Opposition referred to what we were doing in order to bring investments into the country and what have you. I think he did not read this book. [*Dr. Rambachan displays book*] You must read it; this book contains all the strategies and projects that are going to be undertaken

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by the People's Partnership. It is an important book and you must read it, because it informs what is going to be done.

I want to refer to some of the things that we have been doing in terms of bringing investments to the country. I recently went to Japan as part of a Japan/Caricom ministerial meeting and having made representation along with my colleagues, it was very interesting what came out of that. For the very first time, the Japanese officials and the Japanese Government have agreed that Japan would dispatch public/private joint economic commissions, for example, in the financial and tourism sectors, to Caricom member States; that Japan would host the Japan/Caricom business seminar in Tokyo and would also host the Caricom one village/one product fair, in Tokyo and that they would invite and dispatch experts in order to develop products suitable for the one village/one product project. We emphasized to them that we needed to go into exports, as well as bring direct foreign investment into Trinidad and Tobago. The youth of the Caribbean will be very happy to know that Japan agreed to invite 300 young leaders from Caricom member States to visit Japan in the next three years. These are the things we are doing.

It is also important to tell you that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is re-orienting itself towards trade and investment. Our ambassadors would be chosen and have as their remit getting and bringing business to Trinidad and Tobago. It costs a lot to run the missions overseas. In fact, you would be surprised, if I were to tell you, for example, that it costs close to \$150 million to keep those missions going, as the Member for Point Fortin could tell you. It is very, very costly to do so. If I had the time, I would have gone through some of the costs, but let us take an example.

The cost of the residence where our people stay in Abuja in Nigeria is \$2,385,500 for three years, \$2.4 million for three years; \$800,000 a year. The cost of the Chancery is another \$800,000 per year, so it costs money to run these. We will be going on a value for money diplomacy. There must be a return for what we invest in our missions. Our missions are there for diplomatic and bilateral relations, but at the same time, our missions must enhance the economic fortunes of Trinidad and Tobago. We have something to offer to the external world by way of our natural resources but, at the same time, we have to attract those people here. Our ambassadors will become salespersons on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago, marketing Trinidad and Tobago.

I went out there as a Foreign Minister and I took with me a seven and a half minute DVD of eTecK and a 10-minute Power Point presentation. I visited companies like Mitsubishi, Marubeni and others, about five companies, including the Japan Investment Bank. At every one I presented my DVD and Power Point presentation and that was what resulted in the end with Japan also agreeing that they are going to send this

investment mission to Trinidad and Tobago, to look at the eTecK Park. I had discussions with Fujitsu about the data centre in Trinidad; so we are doing things. When the Minister of Finance told you that we were going to bring foreign investment, it was because the remit of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is exactly that, to work with the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Tourism in order to ensure that the investments we have to get are here for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to make this contribution this afternoon. I want to assure the national population that our Prime Minister, Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, might seem at times to be a very soft and compassionate person, but when it comes to the business of this country, even among her ministers, she is an exacting leader. She drives the process. She is not a leader just to talk, she walks the talk and [*Desk thumping*] because of that we identify with her. We pledge to the people of this country that we will work assiduously, we will work hard. We are not going to disappoint. We are going to put in the hours; we are going to put in the energy and we are going to work in a way to inspire this population to join us in this very, very difficult time of transforming this country and making it into the paradise it was supposed to be. It will become so because we have the leader who has the vision and whose mission is: serve the people, serve the people, serve the people.

I thank you.

Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. Member for Tabaquite on his contribution to this House; very energized, very enlightening and very insightful; though I must say at times I felt we were back on the campaign trail. Having said that, may I ask that we do not jump at every opportunity to misrepresent and twist reality to suit our own agenda. [*Desk thumping*]

I listened attentively on Wednesday last as the hon. Minister of Finance delivered his budget presentation for the fiscal year 2010/2011. As an educator, I was delighted to note that a very sizable portion of the budget allocation was given to education, \$8 billion, the highest actually. I was even happier to learn that the Government would continue the GATE programme, initiated under the administration of PNM, and would even expand it to include technical/vocational training. However, I remain anxious about the continuity of the educational development programmes initiated under the previous PNM administration, such as the YTEPP programme, the OJT programme and others such as MuST, HYPE and YES.

While I am delighted that our three major tertiary educational institutions, UWI, UTT and COSTAATT would be located in Tobago, I remain skeptical about the integrated campus model which would accommodate three campuses.

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Mr. Speaker, I was disappointed that there was no mention of the laptop issue, which is currently the hot button issue in education. As a matter of fact, so little was mentioned overall in respect of the Government's plan for education, especially considering that this Ministry was allocated the lion's share in the budget. I could only hope that the hon. Minister of Education would elaborate upon all these issues that were either bypassed or briefly mentioned, and that he would enlighten the public accordingly.

The public wants to know what is the Government's plan for education; they want to know how the Government intends to utilize the \$8 million for the holistic development of our young people of school age. Indeed, in most developed and developing countries major investments have been made in education, in the belief that development of the human potential would naturally enhance national development. If we examine the trends of most developed countries, especially the Asian countries like Singapore and Japan, where the focus has been on education, we would observe that this philosophy has paid off handsomely, for the Asian tigers all enjoy developed nation status.

The hon. Minister of Finance in his opening remarks declared that the budget was driven by the seven pillars of the People's Partnership manifesto, which has been adopted as Government's policy. Since that document is bereft of a fully articulated policy on education, it follows that the People's Partnership Government has no policy on education and that any plan the Ministry now claims to have developed is a rush job, entered into without the required national consultation.

Mr. Speaker, despite the touted increase in the education budget, achieved by combining the budgets of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, an in-depth analysis of the Ministry of Education's budget shows a callous hollowing out of the heart of education. The axe wielding Minister of Finance has decapitated funding for education's development programmes initiated under the PNM administration. The engine room for the driving of education improvement has decreased from the 2010 estimates of \$740.9 million to the 2011 estimates of \$5.8 million. This follows the trend established in the recurrent expenditure budget, which saw the Ministry's capital development programmes reduced by \$15.1 million, with a mere \$2.7 million increase in infrastructure development.

It is primary level education, the very foundation of our education system, that has fallen under the axe. The Estimates of Development Expenditure show that from actual expenditure of \$39.8 million in 2009 and \$41 million in 2010, the social infrastructure for primary education has been viciously chopped to \$6.4 million, a cut of \$24.6 million.

Also on the chopping board were the construction of the El Socorro Government School and the allocation for teaching and learning strategies, from \$15.2 million to a paltry \$2 million. Educational services suffered a \$5.8 million cut, as well as the much needed development of a management information systems unit.

Mr. Speaker, there is no provision for funding for school intervention strategies of the type provided by non-governmental organizations (NGO) and professional psychosocial support services.

2.45 p.m.

In addition, contracts for personnel in the student support services unit are not being renewed. With fewer specialist support personnel it will now be incumbent on school personnel and the inadequate number of guidance officers to deal with incidents of indiscipline in schools.

Institutional strengthening within the Ministry is down to less than 50 per cent of 2009 levels, losing \$4.5 million of the funding that would have been spent on improving the ministries, systems and processes. Ironically, however, the Ministry of Education has allocated \$40 million to four new secondary school construction projects: Shiva Boys' Hindu School, \$12 million; Parvatee Girls' Hindu College, \$12 million; Siparia East Secondary, \$10 million and \$2 million will be spent on new construction at the Lakshmi Girls' Hindu College and ASJA Boys' College respectively.

In addition, the Government plans to throw another \$6 million of taxpayers' hard earned money to pursue occupation of the controversial Biche Secondary School. These are all new projects in the fiscal year 2010/2011 in respect of secondary schools. At the same time, funds for emergency upgrades in all other secondary schools have been cut from \$27.9 million in 2010 to \$5 million in 2011 and funds to support the work on schools under construction have been slashed by \$27 million.

While all this major slashing was executed in areas deemed critical to the ministry's mission, it is now common knowledge that \$83 million—and much more, given actual implementation cost—will be spent on the purchase of laptops for successful SEA students who have entered Form 1 in secondary schools.

In 2003 I was fortunate to have been selected to be part of a delegation of education administrators from across the Caribbean to visit Japan and Singapore on a learning mission sponsored by the Inter American Development Bank and the Ministry of Education to observe the integration of information and communications technology in the curriculum. Even prior to this mission, in the school where I was principal, we had begun to train our teachers in the use of technology as an

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integral part of smart pedagogical practice and to outfit the school with the equipment critical to the successful implementation of this initiative.

In addition, over the past seven years the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) was instituted under the administration of the People's National Movement to oversee and manage the implementation of ICT in secondary schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago, equipping them with computers, servers and printers, establishing the requisite networking capabilities and training teachers to effectively and efficiently deliver the curriculum using the technology. So today, as a forward-thinking educator and an avid and experienced proponent of the use of technology as an integral part of smart pedagogical practice, I am happy to see this Government opting to continue the advancements in technology in education forged under previous PNM administrations.

This initiative was part of the PNM's vision to create a highly technologically literate society as part of its plan to take our beloved country of Trinidad and Tobago to First World status by the year 2020. Indeed, the promise to supply laptops to successful SEA students was first mentioned by the UNC-led coalition during the May 24, 2010 general election campaign and the Government is now set to deliver on that promise. I cannot decry the proposal of the Government to furnish our students with laptops. There is no doubt that technology has been dominating progress, allowing us to access information at a speed faster than light; information that is the greatest wealth dominating and generating currency in today's world. So it is only natural that we should place technology at the very core of student learning.

Having said that, I will be remiss if I fail to register my grave concerns in respect of this Government's plan to issue laptops to the new Form 1 students. Firstly and most importantly, I am concerned about the safety and security of students as they travel to and from school with their laptops. Secondly, I am preoccupied with the pedagogical issues associated with the integration of technology in the curriculum. I am most concerned that this Government's intention to fulfil a carelessly made election promise without a clearly defined and well-thought-out plan may well result in undesirable student outcomes in particular and the degradation of our society, in general. Thirdly, I am concerned about the readiness of the school system to receive a project of this magnitude so hastily implemented.

Specifically, I am concerned with the readiness of the administrators and teachers, in particular teacher-training and with the technical infrastructure in respect of networking capacity. I am also concerned that alternative strategies with the potential for positive student outcomes at a cost far less than \$83 million were not considered, especially at this time when our economy seems fragile and our deficit is almost \$8 billion.

In addition, I am preoccupied with the lack of attention paid to transforming schools into enabling environments for creative learning while millions of taxpayers' dollars are being spent on delivering on a campaign promise that appears not to have been carefully thought out. Finally, but my no means least, I am concerned with the implementation and procurement processes.

I shall now elaborate on these points. The primary duty and responsibility of an educator is the safety, security and well-being of the students. As such, I am concerned about our young students, beneficiaries of the Government's laptop programme travelling to and from school in possession of such equipment. As I speak, we are all aware that there are criminal elements that are waiting to prey upon these unsuspecting young people with their laptops. Let us not pretend that this is not the reality facing our young, innocent charges.

In an article published in the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper on July 19, 2010, the President of TTUTA, Mr. Roustan Job, expressed his concern about the safety of SEA students who are expected to be given laptops to carry home this term. Mr. Job stated:

“We are concerned that there would be a number of thefts...if children are allowed to carry home the laptops, they will become open targets for the bandits.”

Mr. Job went on to say that:

“...he was certain that parents shared TTUTA's concern about safety. TTUTA is calling for more information on how the Government intends to keep the students safe. even as they are allowed to carry laptops home.”

He continued:

“We also want the NPTA (National Parent/Teacher Association) to speak out on the matter of laptops being allowed to be taken home by the children.”

So it seems that the major stakeholders in education: parents, teachers, administrators and, indeed, the general public, are all very concerned about the children's safety. Though the Ministry has plans to install anti-theft devices and tracking devices as a deterrent, we know that these are measures that can and would be hastily foiled by the criminal element. The fact is that the Ministry of Education may run the risk of being an accessory, albeit an unwilling accessory to crime by dint of providing the opportunity for crime or as we say in local parlance, "laying trap for gouti to run."

Education is serious and complicated business by virtue of the fact that it deals with development of the human potential in general and the nurturing and moulding of the human mind, in particular. The issue of using technology for

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curriculum delivery and student learning are indeed pedagogical issue and as such must be grounded in a philosophical base, an expressed belief in the desired outcomes for students and society.

Indeed, the Ministry of Education's communication entitled: "Official Laptop Information" published in the daily newspapers on September 04, espouses the Government's philosophy on the laptop issue as: "Ensuring our country's destiny by providing the finest for our school children, our future leaders," and defines its goals as: Firstly, arming each individual student to succeed in the knowledge-based world and; two, closing the gap in our national community, levelling the playing field for all social sectors and giving each child, no matter what their circumstances, an equal opportunity; thirdly, equipping the developing Trinidad and Tobago to hold its own in the already developed world. And its policy definition that states:

“Our commitment is to imparting 21st Century skills, creativity and innovation, communication and collaboration, research and Information, critical-thinking, problem-solving and decision-making, digital citizenship and technology operations and concepts.’

While I concur in principle with the Government's philosophy in respect of the laptop issue and its vision for equipping and developing Trinidad and Tobago to hold its own in the already developed world, I cannot help but note that their overall philosophy does not constitute a holistic approach to student development. I am hearing the "what". What the Ministry and by extension the Government of Trinidad and Tobago wishes to achieve by this initiative: developed nation status and technologically literate individuals; excellent goals; excellent goals. I do not disagree at all. But what is worrisome to me is the absence of the "who".

I am not seeing a clear road map, a comprehensive plan for student holistic development. The Government's interest in developing our students into highly, technologically literate individuals should be paralleled by a vision to mould them into strong citizens capable of making a meaningful contribution to the socio-economic development of our beloved Trinidad and Tobago and, indeed, the world.

In this regard, I am disappointed that nowhere have I seen any reference to the quality of citizen we believe this initiative would yield. I am speaking here of the nature of the individuals, not what they can achieve; not the professionals that they might become; not their academic achievement, but the quality, the nature, their characters; their capacity to become strong, sound citizens with the potential of making a meaningful contribution to the social fabric of our beloved country of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government's policy definition speaks of developing critical and creative thinking skills and innovative competencies, problem-solving and decision-making skills. But I would be renegeing on my duty and responsibility as an educator if I fail to respectfully advise the Government that unless the development of these competencies is complemented by a parallel development of character of personal and social attributes, we may awake one day to find that student acquisition of the very critical and creative thinking skills and innovative skills that we are so ardently pursuing, is not channelled in the direction that we envisage, but sadly in areas inimical to our society's well-being.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware of the capacity of technology to advance individuals and nations into First World status of development, but we are also aware of its capacity to achieve just the opposite causing social degradation and creating individuals who, instead of developing into assets of society, degenerate into societal menaces.

Today our society is besieged by crime. We have individuals who are so creative in the way they manipulate technology to the detriment of those who cross their evil paths that it has become worrisome for us all. In her Independence Day address, the hon. Prime Minister declared that Trinidad and Tobago is not truly independent. She stated that:

“When our people no longer cower in fear from criminals, we are truly independent.”

I do agree with the hon. Prime Minister. As a people, we cannot boast of being independent or of taking our place in the developed world if we are unable to produce holistically well-developed, strong citizens. So, may I, out of an abundance of care and caution, respectfully urge the Government to put in place the relevant strategies to ensure that while we are hastily providing easy access to technology, we are not just as hastily aiding and abetting, nurturing and perpetuating the criminal elements in our society?

Mr. Speaker, installing technical devices to prevent student use of certain sites inimical to their holistic development is not a foolproof approach. Those creative and innovative minds could so easily and cleverly disarm, dismantle, de-programme and reconfigure settings to suit their every need. It is critical that a programme of character development be an integral part of the curriculum of all schools.

This programme, based on a value system that seeks to inculcate within individuals core societal values, would address students' personal and social development while simultaneously teaching them to make well-informed decisions about their actions and to choose right and reject wrong.

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Mr. Speaker, these are very young impressionable minds who still need much guidance, coaching, nurturing and maturing. When we place technology in the hands of our precious little ones without any consideration for their character development, we are putting the proverbial cart before the horse and setting the stage for disaster. We need to go beyond simply envisaging the benefits of technology to the point where we appreciate the risks associated with the technology and act positively and responsibly to minimize them.

When the character development of the young student is formally and comprehensively addressed, we would not have to spend time, effort and money in protecting them from the ills of technology because we would have nurtured within them a keen sense of discipline, responsibility, decorum, respect for self, respect for others, tolerance, common courtesy, empathy, integrity, honesty and commitment, as well as the key character traits such as self-esteem, self-confidence and perseverance.

I must emphatically urge that technological development go hand in hand with character development. These two aspects of a student's development must be seen as two sides of the same coin if positive student outcomes are to be achieved.

Mr. Speaker, I do not speak simply from a theoretical point of view. I address this issue from practical experience, having witnessed the holistic development of students who have been exposed to technology in the learning process and have yet been able to maintain a well balanced and grounded approach to people and situations only because their technological development has been forged alongside their personal and social growth.

There are schools right here in Trinidad and Tobago that are exemplary in that regard; schools that have set precedence; schools whose curriculum and operations are worthy of emulation. We do not have to go far to look for best practice in respect of the integration of technology as an integral part of teaching and learning. We have examples of successful implementation and extraordinarily successful student outcomes right here in Trinidad and Tobago; at least I know of one such school.

When the hon. Prime Minister sought to dismiss claims that computers would damage the children and encourage violence; by politicizing the issue and making socially inflammatory comments like: How is it, when rich parents can afford to give their child a laptop, nothing is wrong with that and when we want to give it to poor children, that is where the issue has arisen?

Hon. Prime Minister, in her absence, with all due respect to your good office, issuing laptops to children is not about rich children and poor children. It is simply about children, rich or poor, black or white, Indian or Chinese; it is about

our children in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, it is our duty to ensure that we do the right thing to facilitate their holistic development.

Mr. Speaker, I am concerned about teacher readiness. The hon. Minister of Education must inform the public as to the state of readiness of the entire education system to receive the technology. He must tell us how it would be effectively and efficiently integrated into the curriculum. [*Interruption*] This is a new project. I want to know how your new laptop project would be successfully and efficiently integrated into the school system. I will tell you how we did it under the PNM administration. I want to know how you are doing it.

In this regard, I should like to address the following. It is my understanding that during the August vacation teachers received some five hours of training in the use of technology as a teaching strategy. Five hours of training! This is preposterous. Many teachers will not be ready to use the technology to efficiently and effectively deliver the curriculum so that learning truly takes place.

Research, coupled by my own humble experience over the past eight years, tells me that teachers must undergo at least 120 hours of training to be able to use the technology as an integral part of smart, pedagogical practice if learning is to become easier, quicker, more interesting and fun.

In the school where I was principal, teachers underwent 90 hours of training before they felt confident to effectively and efficiently infuse technology into their curriculum delivery; but in this new dispensation, teachers have participated in a single five-hour workshop that has left many of them quite confused. I am told that one facilitator advised them to use certain websites to deliver the curriculum, while another informed them that those very websites were prohibited to the students.

In addition, many teachers, especially the new teachers, have never received official training in the use of technology in the teaching and learning process. As a result, many feel insecure and ill-equipped to use the technology for curriculum delivery. Furthermore, many teachers feel that the Ministry of Education is now seeking, after the fact, to gain their buy-in to the programme. Teachers are not unwilling to cooperate with the Ministry of Education on this laptop initiative, but some of them are harbouring feelings of insecurity and inadequacy in respect of their ability to conduct a class of 40 students; all using computers and they themselves facilitating the process via their laptops. They just are not ready. They do not know what to do. It is like the blind leading the blind.

Using technology to access software applications, Mr. Speaker, to play games and view movies is one thing; but using technology for pedagogical purposes; for

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teaching and learning is quite another. ICTs alone are comparatively useless without well-trained teachers to exploit them. If teachers are not adequately and competently equipped to deliver the curriculum using technology, then the positive student outcomes that we are all hoping for will never be realized.

Research has shown that technology, placed in the hands of young people without the proper structures and guidance in place, does little to facilitate learning and oft-times exerts a negative impact on student development. The amount of time that students may spend off-task viewing movies, playing games and generally exploring the various capabilities of the technology will inevitably exert a deleterious effect on student learning.

Mr. Speaker, I am not singular in my concern. Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association president, Mr. Roustan Job, in an article in the *Guardian* on July 19, asked:

“Is the laptop going to be part of the classroom teaching? If so, teachers must be familiar with what's happening in the classroom.”

He continues:

“Are there going to be extra personnel in the classroom to assist teachers?”

I challenge the hon. Minister to state that a proper foundation has been laid since I feel we are moving with indecent haste at the risk of student fallout in the learning process. To whom will the blame be apportioned in the final analysis? The teachers? [*Interruption*] It cannot be the PNM now; we are not implementing this.

While teacher training is critical, there are many other issues of system readiness that are worrisome. There is a question of content and methodology. The question begs: Have adequate and relevant programmes been selected that would complement and facilitate delivery of the official and written curriculum and address student multiple intelligences?

TTUTA has also queried whether the laptops would be used along with planned programmes for teaching. I would like to further ask: Have steps been taken to ensure that methods of assessment reflect this new technology. If all of this has not been done, we are wasting time and taxpayers' money since student learning will not occur.

This laptop project is fraught with a plethora of issues to be ventilated; namely, storage space for laptop parts. I understand that the computers will be put into laptop carts and will be installed in the classrooms. Most of the classrooms in

secondary schools have little space to store laptops. They are quite cumbersome. We have them at the school where I was principal. Where are they going to be stored? The TTUTA President asked: Is there enough storage space? Will they build extra rooms? You must be concerned.

I am also concerned about the electrical upgrade of some schools and/or the upgrade of panel boxes to address redistribution of supply in order to provide power to areas where those laptop carts will be located.

3.15 p.m.

If these infrastructural problems are not addressed, and if they are not in place, the system will not work. A large part of the benefits of using technology in the learning process derives from the use of Internet to access information. The questions are: Have these laptops been programmed to access only those sites that would positively impact student learning, in particular and underscore the values more than standards of our society in general? Do all schools possess Internet access? Many schools in outlying areas do not. In those schools that do possess Internet access, do they possess the bandwidth or speed to accommodate the vastly increased traffic? Will Internet access be provided to the homes of these students receiving laptops?

The current school network implemented under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) designed to accommodate 36 to 38 users simultaneously will require additional configuration to allow additional users to connect to the school network in order to gain access to the Internet and to other teaching and learning resources such as file-sharing, printing services, et cetera. I have to ask the hon. Minister of Education: Have all these configurations been considered? If the school system is not ready for implementation, I respectfully suggest the Government hold its hand and rethink issuing laptops to students at this time, until the requisite support systems and structures are in place. It ought not to be simply a desire to fulfil a campaign promise at all, at any cost.

Mr. Speaker, TTUTA President, Mr. Roustan Job, has also addressed security of equipment issues, stating that “schools are also open targets for bandits because there have been instances where security guards were tied up and schools broken into.” Many administrators identify with the security concerns posed by Mr. Job and are wary about the additional burden that will be imposed upon their onerous responsibilities to ensure that laptops left at school are secured and their presence constantly monitored. I agree with the TTUTA President when he stated that it is not only about putting laptops in school. I join him in his call for more dialogue

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on the issue of laptops. Mr. Job feels, just as I do, that there are more questions than answers and it is now incumbent on the hon. Minister of Education to provide the stakeholders and indeed the public with those answers and be transparent in respect of any hidden costs to be incurred.

I would like to ask the hon. Minister about the continuity of this project. I would like the hon. Minister to tell the public whether this laptop initiative is a one-off offer devised on the campaign trail, or whether the programme will be continued on an annual basis. He must also tell us how the Ministry of Education intends to sustain this project, which will attract new costs and maintenance and service needs.

Mr. Speaker, since it is obvious that the Government would be unable to provide all students with laptops at this time, and they are going to provide laptops to a certain sector or segment of the student population, I beg the question: Why the Form I students, when the need for the use of the technology is critical to the students in the upper school? These advanced students are faced with the daily challenge of in-depth research necessary for school based assessments for the CSEC exam and for internal assessments for CAPE. What will be the psychological repercussions for these senior students who have worked so hard and reached so far, seeing the younger ones with a much lighter and easier workload in possession of the very technology that they the seniors so critically and urgently need?

Mr. Speaker, should the laptops not have been assigned to the schools for use by all students as required? It seems to me that would have created a much more equitable distribution of the relatively rare resource, so that every child could be afforded the opportunity of learning, using technology. This very system has already been installed by SEMP, under the previous PNM administration that saw it fit to cater to the needs of all and not just a few. Under the PNM administration, there was a comprehensive plan to integrate technology into the curriculum and to create a highly technologically literate society. There was no political agenda or gimmick. This was a well devised plan to take our beloved country of Trinidad and Tobago to developed nation status.

I would have reneged on my duty and responsibility as an educator and my approach would not be considered constructive if I fail to humbly and respectfully offer—*[Interruption]*

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I would have reneged on my duty and responsibility as an educator and my approach would not be considered constructive if I fail to humbly and respectfully offer alternative and possible solutions to those which are being proposed. Many alternative strategies could have been considered that would have yielded positive student outcomes at a far less cost to the taxpayer. It would have been more prudent to provide only the teachers with laptops and the required training to use the technology as an integral part of smart pedagogical practice. Three thousand, five hundred and thirty-one laptops have been ordered for teachers, as opposed to 16,869 for the SEA students. At the cost of \$4,068 per laptop, had the Government only purchased laptops for teachers, that would have resulted in a saving of well over \$68 million.

Research has shown that concentrating the technology in the hands of the teachers not only reduces overall cost and complexity of an ICT deployment, it also decreases ICT effectiveness. Teachers are a smaller number to reach. They also have a greater capacity to understand the deeper usage and applicability of ICTs and children, especially young children. In addition, the use of the technology by a teacher has the potential to increase the teacher's capacity to educate, impacting the lives of countless students in a very meaningful way.

The use of information and communication technology or ICT, by the teacher in the classroom, using basic technology, for example a laptop, a multimedia projector and a screen, is a much more practical and simpler strategy that has proven to be very effective in the teaching and learning process. This strategy provides for a quick injection of technology in the curriculum and softens the challenge for teachers who are able to grow with the technology. They have one laptop, a multimedia projector and a screen and they are projecting and teaching the children. They do not have 40 children with laptops before them trying to deliver the curriculum.

In addition, the portability of equipment used in the classroom would afford a greater percentage of students the opportunity for exposure to learn in, using ICT. This strategy would be much easier, more effective and less expensive to integrate into curriculum delivery for those very young students entering secondary school for the first time, when they typically struggle to adapt to a brand new environment and a brand new curriculum. This proposed approach would obliterate almost all of the issues identified earlier. The young students would still

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be afforded the opportunity to learn, via the use of technology within a much more structured, controlled and guided framework. They would still experience learning to the visual advantage of ICT, but make their learning easier, quicker, much more interesting and moreover fun.

I would like to ask the hon. Minister: If it is that the Government really wants—and they really do or the intention is—to give every child a laptop, whether the one laptop per child (OLPC) initiative was ever considered? I just want to know. I am asking questions. Was it ever considered? If not, why not? The OLPC is a global non-profit initiative that provides laptops at a very affordable cost of TT \$600 approximately, per laptop. The OLPC's one laptop per child educational model is having a tremendous impact on educators and students globally and has been successfully deployed in countries like India, Africa, Malaysia, to name a few; most countries in the world where the initiative is led by dedicated teachers and administrators and support staff, determined to make the project work.

The purchase of the 20,400 laptops under the auspices of the OLPC, would have cost this country TT \$12,240 000, as opposed to TT \$83 million, or a saving of TT \$70,760,000. Did we ever explore the opportunities that are being used in some of the developed countries of the world, the one laptop per child initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I am speaking from the standpoint of research findings globally, but more significantly, Member for Chaguanas West, I am speaking from my wealth of experience gathered over the past 36 years in education and specifically over the past eight years as an advocate of the integration of ICT as an integral part of small pedagogical practice. I am not against what you all are trying to do. I am for it, but are we doing it the right way? Do we have everything in place? Are we spending too much money? I am asking questions. I am a proponent/advocate of technology in education.

Mr. Speaker, given the delicate nature of the nation's economy, I remain concerned about the lack of attention paid to transforming schools into enabling environments for creative learning. Millions of taxpayers' dollars are being spent on delivering campaign promises in a manner that seems to be neither carefully thought-out nor practical at this time. I am concerned about the neglect of other education needs in the face of this waste of taxpayers' money, as it is being spent with this initiative.

3.30 p.m.

This Government is determined to spend \$83 million on a need that could easily be deferred or modified. Instead, the Government should invest in the physical upgrade of schools so that they become student-friendly environments conducive to teaching and learning.

Mr. Speaker, there are several schools in a state of disrepair, 35 of which could not be reopened at the beginning of the new school term. For example, we had the Biche High School and the Biche Presbyterian School that did not meet health and safety requirements. In addition, some schools were reopened without furniture, like the Oropouche RC School and others have been displaced for years, "begging a lodging" in other schools, or barely functioning in temporary accommodations. *[Interruption]* Well, we are looking to you to fix these things now.

Every year the recurrent expenditure on maintenance and upkeep of schools—it is continuous, Sir. You are going to learn. It is continuous, it never stops. It is like your home where you always have to maintain and spend and repair. In my constituency alone, hon. Minister, the Rose Hill RC School and the Belmont Boys RC School are such examples—

Dr. Gopeesingh: What did you do for nine years?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—yet others have no sporting facilities, for example, multipurpose courts and playing fields. There are schools with science labs that need to be refurbished and the list can go on. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, there is an urgent need to transform our schools into enabling environments for creative learning, and that is where the money should be spent. What is the purpose, Member for Moruga/Tableland, of spending \$83 million and more to provide students with cutting edge technology when, in many cases, the environment is not conducive to teaching and learning?

Hon. Members: Ohoooo! *[Interruption]*

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, it is a question of maintenance and upkeep that is ongoing. As I said, you will learn. It is consistent maintenance to keep schools in that quality of environment that is needed for teaching and learning.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is a condemnation of your government.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, the implementation of ICT projects for the Ministry of Education has for the past seven years been the responsibility—hon. Minister, I would like to address this issue with you— of the Secondary Education Modernization Programme better known as SEMP. This unit possesses the requisite expertise and has successfully implemented ICT projects in schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago. For example, the installation of school networks which include three servers and Internet access in school libraries, administration areas, teacher staff rooms and computer labs in 133 secondary schools throughout the country.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You just said the schools are not ready.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: They are not ready for your project. What you are seeking to implement is quite different from what was implemented under SEMP. You are bringing at least 40 computers per classroom. In some schools, that would be 120 computers in the larger schools, 240 computers. You are dealing with a new project.

The IT department of the Ministry of Education has recently been given the responsibility to implement this laptop project. Historically, the IT department has been charged with the responsibility of providing maintenance, servicing and support for ICTs in schools after the implementation phase. Mr. Speaker, my question is: Why was the IT unit, with absolutely no prior experience at all in implementing ICT projects in schools, far less one of this magnitude of the laptop project entrusted with this onerous responsibility instead of the SEMP unit which is fully equipped with the resources, expertise and experience to get the job done?

It is my understanding that the highly qualified and competent project managers, procurement specialists and education technologists who are eager to be incorporated in the laptop project, have been sidelined and deprived of the opportunity to utilize their skills and competencies to the benefit of the Ministry of Education in general, and the students in particular.

Hon. Member: Wrong! Wrong!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, the present networking systems in schools cannot support the increased number of computers that would be used simultaneously. Only 36—38 users could be connected at the same time. In order to facilitate the increased load, it will become necessary to increase the wireless capacity throughout the school in order to gain access to the network and to refigure the servers to accommodate the increased workload.

I challenge that in the absence of such urgent technical improvements, the laptops would be of little use in the learning process, since they will not be able to access the resources for learning, namely the Internet and shared resources such as programme files and printing services.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that a committee was established to examine such inadequacies and make the necessary proposals to remediate them. That committee, instead of recommending that the available resources and expertise resident in the Ministry of Education, namely in the SEMP unit, be utilized to undertake the modifications, came up with a hidden proposal, a document entitled: Request for Proposals for the Supply of Equipment and Services for the Implementation of Wireless Network Connectivity.

Mr. Speaker, the IT department of the Ministry of Education was set up to handle the technical issues of a project. This is their function. Once a project has been implemented and handed over, the IT department is equipped with the network specialists and 20 technicians, quite apart from the 133 highly qualified technicians attached to schools.

Mr. Speaker, I, myself, sat on interview panels to select these technicians for hire by the Ministry of Education. I have to ask: Why are we not utilizing them, together with the other highly qualified personnel in the IT department to execute the necessary technical modifications?

Mr. Speaker, at the school where I was principal, we were able with the help of the school's technician, to implement a campus wide wireless system, so that anywhere on the compound wireless connectivity is accessible. It appears to me that IT department of the Ministry of Education is highly underutilized. Its function seems limited to accessing and recommending requests from schools for equipment. The IT personnel are quite capable of handling the new technical needs as part of their function at no cost to the Ministry and no cost to the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, my question is, therefore, what is the purpose of having an IT department and qualified IT technicians in schools? Why is this committee proposing to tender this job when the available resources exist within the Ministry? This will incur an additional and substantial cost to the taxpayers' pocket and I dare say, it is either the hon. Minister is blissfully unaware of the competencies resident in his own Ministry, or one of the deliverables of this hidden proposal is for the successful bidder to conduct site surveys at the 152—this is the expanded quota of secondary schools—and analyse the requirements of each school, all to be submitted within a one-month period. The question is: Why is the Ministry paying a contractor to execute these activities when the required information and data, the result of extensive surveys undertaken over a three-year period are readily available from SEMP? There exist within SEMP files on each school that address technical, infrastructural and teacher readiness.

In addition, SEMP personnel have continuously been collaborating with schools with which they have developed close relationships and are totally au courant with all their technical needs. So, I would like to know, why is the Ministry yet, again, incurring further unnecessary expenditure for a contract to provide information on data that is readily available within the Ministry of Education? This constitutes hidden cost and an increased financial burden on the taxpayer.

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Mr. Speaker, I have several concerns in respect of the procurement of these laptops. In the first instance, it seems passing strange that the hon. Minister advised that the 20,400 laptops would arrive in the country very soon, a mere three weeks after the announcement that the Government had entered into contractual arrangements with Hewlett Packard. Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about 100 or 1,000 computers, we are speaking about 20,400 computers. No manufacturer or supplier keep a stockpile of this level of equipment which, by the way, has to be kept in air-conditioned storage, lying around idly in anticipation of an equivalent order from Trinidad and Tobago or any country in the world for that matter.

Mr. Speaker, a three-week time frame for the supply of such a huge order strongly suggests to me that discussions had been in progress with Hewlett Packard well before the signing of the contract. [*Desk thumping*] I have been recently informed that the eagerly awaited laptops will not arrive in the country in the designated time frame, since the Government was not actually able to consummate the deal and there is now much posturing taking place on both sides with Hewlett Packard wishing to re-negotiate the contract and the terms of the award.

Mr. Speaker, in an article published in the Trinidad and Tobago *Guardian* on September 03, 2010, the hon. Prime Minister, speaking at a Post-Cabinet news briefing, while assuring the nation that the promised laptops would be given to students by the end of the September, admitted that there were delays in the procurement process.

In light of all the above, I must ask these questions: Has the Government in its haste to deliver on a campaign promise failed to ensure the required level of due diligence necessary in a transparent procurement process, entered into questionable arrangements with the supplier who, aware of the desperation of the Government to deliver on a campaign promise now has the upper hand and is calling the shots? Hewlett Packard is a company that is currently at the centre of international scrutiny in respect of charges of corrupt practices in the United States of America and Russia. Mr. Speaker, are all of these the reasons why the former director of the ICT Division, realizing the irregularity of the procurement process, unexpectedly demitted office? I have to ask.

Mr. Speaker, it is my duty and obligation to inform and educate the public on these issues of the disbursement of laptops to our young students so that the fulfilment of a hastily made campaign promise does not redound to the detriment of our young people in particular and our society in general.

Mr. Speaker, in my two-fold capacity as educator and duly elected representative of the people, I cannot, and must not stand idly by while this Government plays politics with the lives of children and citizens alike. First, it was the case of the senior citizens

and now it is the children; two of the most vulnerable segments of our society. While I do appreciate the Government's anxiety to deliver on its campaign promise, as a long-standing educator, I adamantly refuse to be a silent bystander as the future of our nation's children stands to be compromised.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as I take my place in this legislative Chamber, representing 1.4 million citizens, I hasten to remind the Government that education is critical to national development and the Government must live up to its responsibilities and provide the public with clarification, answers and, most of all, solutions.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the Government should have considered all the logistics and anticipated the implications and consequences. In other words, proper and careful planning before they arrive at the point of implementation. Again, the cart before the horse syndrome. It could be disastrous and result in a colossal waste of our taxpayers' hard-earned money, and even worse, it could redound to our children's under-development and moral degradation.

Mr. Speaker, we have to start with an end result and then devise a carefully forged road map to arrive at our vision. I am afraid that I am not seeing that happening. Everything seems to have been assembled anyhow and without the high degree of rigour expected in the process of good governance.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to respectfully advise the Government that without proper planning and without the establishment of a solid foundation, any imposed structure will surely crumble like the proverbial pack of cards, or like the luxury apartment in Maracas, St. Joseph.

My hon. colleagues on both sides of this august House, visitors present, members of the viewing public, members of the media, I thank you for the kind indulgence of your attention, especially the Member for Chaguanas West. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Hon. Stephen Cadiz): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to congratulate the hon. Winston Dookeran, the Minister of Finance, on presenting the first People's Partnership budget. It sets out a new development path for Trinidad and Tobago, the theme: "Facing the issues and turning the economy around". It is not about turning it around and around, it is turning it in the right direction. It is indicative of the priority of the Government to usher in good governance and inclusive development that fosters economic growth, people's well-being and future prosperity under the astute leadership of our Prime Minister, hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

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Mr. Speaker, I would first like to apologize to the citizens of this country for the rainfall that just happened; the leaking roof in the Red House and that is just indicative of what has happened over the last eight years.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry will play a very pivotal role in turning this economy around. As stated by the hon. Minister of Finance, the key role of Government is to catalyze economic growth and provide opportunities to allow our people to achieve their maximum potential. Therefore, the Ministry of Trade and Industry must create an enabling environment to turn the economy around from being over dependent on the energy sector. The Ministry's core responsibilities include promoting and developing trade with an emphasis on generating sustainable export-led growth and development; growing and developing industries, particularly in the non-energy manufacturing and services sectors; and attracting investments both local and foreign.

In keeping with the pillar of economic transformation, the Ministry of Trade and Industry also spearheads activities to diversify the economy through the development of innovation strategies aimed at generating new sources of wealth. When we speak of innovation, we are obviously going to need laptops to assist in that.

Mr. Speaker, the global trading environment has changed significantly particularly over the last two years. The global financial and economic crisis has impacted significantly on the economies of fellow Caricom states which traditionally have been this country's main export destinations. Their diminished purchasing power has contributed to a fall in their demand for Trinidad and Tobago's exports, contracting trade significantly. On the average, Caricom accounts for over 15 per cent of the total exports of Trinidad and Tobago. You may wish to know that in 2008 the value of exports to our Caricom neighbours was approximately TT \$21 billion. However, by 2009, the value of exports had declined to approximately \$9 billion, a 57 per cent decline.

Hon. Member: We know that.

Hon. S. Cadiz: Equally, Trinidad and Tobago's main trading partners, the United States, continues to grapple with its recovery from recent international crisis.

Mr. Speaker, attempts have been made by the Ministry of Trade and Industry to seed the non-energy sectors, particularly food and beverage, merchant marine, film, music and entertainment, yachting, fish processing and printing and packaging. These efforts have met with varying degrees of success, and we now take the initiatives to a new level or we discontinue them where they are unworkable.

It has been said by many that one of the challenges to growing and diversifying trade is the apparent risk averse nature of domestic firms. We in Trinidad are very, very concerned about risk. While one may argue or disagree with this assessment, in an attempt to overcome any shortcoming, perceived or real, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is striving to build stronger and more formalized partnerships with the private sector.

Before we present our one-year action plan, we need to know where we are, where we are now and how we arrived here. For too long the public purse has been the private bank account for so many on the other side, with little or no accountability to the owners of the patrimony, the good citizens of this country, Trinidad and Tobago. The people's money must be accounted for, every single solitary cent. [*Desk thumping*] What we have seen is not persons just dipping their hands into the national piggy bank, but more likely them driving a front loader up to the Treasury and loading up.

As of May 24, however, this came to a sudden stop. The People's Partnership was voted in, the people have said no more, enough is enough, and the good citizens of Trinidad and Tobago voted for change. With this change comes proper representation. The recent devastating flooding shows how a responsible Government responds to the plight of our people. With this change, comes financial accountability of the public money, and with this change comes the end of the joy ride with other people's money. It is very easy to rule, but it is not so easy to govern. This is what we the People's Partnership give to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, good, responsible government.

What this country has witnessed in the past, is the wastage of State resources in the execution of capital projects, many of which this new administration is now forced to complete, given the sound costs already associated with these endeavours. What happened is nothing short of sinful. As far I now, when you committed a sin, the first thing you have to do is repent. When I hear the Member for Diego Martin West talks about this side having to give an unqualified apology to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to know what he is talking about because they are the ones who have to give the unqualified apology to this country.

Permit me to share some of the stark facts associated with three projects that fall under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The first one: The Member for Diego Martin West referred to the Vanguard Hotel in Tobago. For those of us who might not be aware, this facility is located in the Tobago Plantation in the lowlands in Tobago and comprises roughly 20 acres of land excluding the golf course. The hotel was opened in 2002, and was operated and marketed under the

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name, "The Hilton Tobago Golf and Spa Resort" via a company called Hilton Tobago Limited. They were the operators, not the owners. They had an investment in it, but they were mainly the operators and they were the subsidiary of Hilton International. That was operated up until May 31, 2008.

In 2008, the then government, which is on that side right now, through etecK which reports to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, negotiated a buyout, transferring TT \$139 million to Citicorp. Merchant Bank Limited who was the trustee for the Vanguard Hotel Limited Bond for the purchase of the hotel, given the departure by Hilton International because of the deterioration of the property due of the negative effects of the marine environment on the facility. The effects of the environment were clearly not taken into consideration during the hotel's construction. So it really and truly started off on the wrong end.

Additionally, in 2008, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago disbursed an additional \$15.1 million of taxpayers' money for the purpose of repairing the hotel that they had just bought. So here it is we buy the hotel for \$139 million and we are saying here, we have to go and fund another \$15 million, bringing it now to a total of \$154 million.

The current estimate right now to complete the refurbishment of the hotel to maintain this premium facility in the Tobago tourism market has been placed at approximately \$155 million. So let me recap. We buy it for \$139 million, in the same year we spend \$15 million, and now we have realized that things are so bad we have to go and fund the estimate, and you know on the other side when they estimate is a two to one. They always end up two to one, or three to one. So another \$155 million. When you get this into consideration, we buy a hotel property and we have to spend the equivalent on it to bring it to what will be an acceptable standard.

Mr. Warner: "You all ain't shame?"

Hon. S. Cadiz: It is worthy to note that the current international benchmark—I am getting to know about the hotel business—for the construction of a resort hotel— If you are looking at investing in a resort hotel, the question you ask is: What is it going to cost per room cost? The per room cost includes all the public areas, the lobby, all the utilities, the pool and whatever goes with it. The current cost if you are going to do that investment, you have to cater for roughly TT \$945,000 per room. So where we have reach now at \$945,000 per room—so in other words, if the Government of Trinidad and Tobago wanted to build a brand new hotel in Tobago, that is what it would have cost per room. When I said two to

one, I was not too far from the mark because right now it works out at TT \$1,545,000 per room which is basically twice what anybody would be willing to pay for a similar facility.

We are now doing our endeavour best to deal with this problem which we were presented, for the demise of the hotel will impact very, very negatively on Tobago. There are other areas, but if this hotel is not completed, we will run into major problems with the airlift in Tobago. I am going to leave that for the Minister of Tobago Development to deal with.

The Vanguard, as the Member for Chaguanas West says, it is just like the Su. We buy it for one, then we have to add a next one and we end up with something for two that is only value for one. Trinidad Hilton Hotel that we all know, the Conference Centre, that hotel was there since in the '60s.

Mr. Speaker, etecK in its role as manager of the lease operatorship for the Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre, undertook the refurbishment and development of the hotel in 2007. The original estimated cost of this project where it is was thought about and conceived in 2004, was \$222 million. Let me backup a bit. The Vanguard Hotel only has 200 rooms, the Trinidad Hilton and Conference Centre has 418 rooms. So the original price when it was repaired in 2004 was \$222 million. Nothing happened. The plans in train for hosting Summit of the Americans and the Commonwealth Heads of Government, the revised price now goes from \$222 million to \$483 million. That is TT dollars by the way. I would not assume it is US dollars.

In 2009, the estimate for this project was further revised. We started off with \$222 million, we have gone to \$483, and we now reach \$633 million. So as of March 2010, the then Government spending the taxpayers' money— I want everybody to understand and the House to understand, when we are spending money here, it is taxpayers' money. This money does not belong to Balisier house or anybody. It belongs to the taxpayers of this country.

4.00 p.m.

As of March 2010, \$441,000,9000 was expended, and it is expected that another \$58.9 million in cost would be incurred during the period April to September, which we are now in. And then another \$133 million on top of that projected for 2011. And again, let us start thinking. Let us go back. It is simple to do the math when you are doing the hotel business. It is \$945,000 per room. That is the estimated cost. We could have demolished the Trinidad Hilton and built a brand spanking new facility for half the cost. Half the cost. The overrun on the Trinidad Hilton right now, on an estimated \$222 million job is \$411 million.

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Mr. Speaker, apparently, the other side also knew about the hotel business, because when you divide that by 418, guess what? You end up with \$1.5 million per room. So it seems that the other side has discarded all the norms in the hotel business and opted to only produce hotels that are going to cost \$1.5 million per room instead of \$945,000.

Mr. Roberts: Yes, but do not give children laptops.

Hon. S. Cadiz: But that is PNM policy, Mr. Speaker, and the Member for Diego Martin West keeps talking about morality in public affairs and how the PP has no plan. But, again, I refer to the Trinidad Hilton and the Vanguard, now, are likened to the motor vessel, *Su*. Then we go to another area that the eTecK is responsible for, which, of course, is Tamana Park out in Wallerfield.

Mr. Speaker, the Tamana InTech Park (TIP) is supposed to be a green industrial and technology park with academic research and development facilities which will contribute to the diversification and sustainability of the nation's non-energy export base. It is noteworthy that the original feasibility study for the Tamana InTech Park was conducted by the United States firm, Lockwood Green, during the years 1999 to 2002—I do not know if you all remember who was here in 1999—under the oversight of the then company called TIDCO.

And, of course, in 2003, responsibility for the development of Tamana InTech Park was assigned to PIDCOTT, which is now eTecK; so we are dealing with eTecK. Infrastructure construction for TIP commenced in August of 2006, however, formal Cabinet approval of a budget of \$1.08 billion was only obtained in 2008. So it took them two years to get the budget for the park. At that time, the park was forecasted to be completed in early 2010. By July 2009, the cost to reflect the completion of the park increased above the approved budget of \$1.08 billion by TT \$768 million.

Mr. Speaker, the current estimated cost to complete Tamana stands at TT \$2.8 billion, which comprises the original budgeted cost of \$1.08 billion, plus escalation in project cost of \$768 million, plus enhancements of \$951 million. This represents an increase of 180 per cent of the original price, and this is within two years. From 2008 to 2010, two years and we get 180 per cent increase. Well, the other side has moved from the norm of two to one to nearly three to one now.

Mr. Speaker, the total estimated overrun, just for those three projects—the Vanguard in Tobago, the Trinidad Hilton, and Tamana Park—stands at TT \$1.333 billion. And my colleague from Tabaquite asked, where did it go. It did not go to Tabaquite, because he is still calling about bad roads, and what have you. Where did it go? In the Vanguard, the Trinidad Hilton and Tamana Park. That is where it went.

The Member for Diego Martin West was making a sly remark about the curse of oil and gas. From looking at old movies, the curse of oil and gas is when the pirates take over, Mr. Speaker. That is what happened. Piracy is what happened. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we must all understand, again, when we are spending taxpayers' money, every time one single dollar is stolen from the people, somebody suffers. Somebody suffers; whether it is a wheelchair, a road, a hospital bed, a school place or a laptop. Somebody suffers every single time. And here it is, we have overruns of \$1.3 billion. Think about what we could have done with that money.

Mr. Speaker, as of today's date, over \$120 million in payments outstanding to contractors. And they want to know, and they say we have no plan? Of course we have a plan. We are planning to pay the bills that the other side ran up—that is the number one plan—to satisfy the vendors and contractors that you all went and contracted, not having the approval and not having the money. So when you talk about us not having a plan, you all had absolutely no plan. None whatsoever. Pirates of the Caribbean. [*Desk thumping*] But, I will tell you, this current Minister of Finance, hon. Winston Dookeran, has given a commitment to settle all those debts in the shortest possible time.

Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear that Government is committed to completing this project, given its tremendous potential, and providing an additional plan for our economic diversification. We already have it and we are going to have to finish it now; but we are finishing other people's work. The new Government is faced with the task of bringing these projects to completion, by ending the financial haemorrhaging that has gone on unabated for too long. It is unbelievable.

In keeping, however, with the theme of this year's budget—so I am going to leave the overruns, because there are a lot of people to talk about overruns. So, Mr. Speaker, in keeping with the theme of this year's budget presentation, the Ministry of Trade and Industry proposes the following measures: One is value for money approach to expenditure on capital projects. Mr. Speaker, in fiscal 2011, it is proposed the Ministry will receive an allocation of \$110 million-plus under the Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure; and \$180 million under the Public Sector Investment Programme. The Ministry will use its allocation in a cost effective manner to ensure value for money and, thereby, execute the activities detailed in our one-year action plan.

Mr. Speaker, trade is seen as a crucial factor in the development and improvement of the well-being of our people, and for ensuring prosperity for the citizenry. We need, therefore, to drive increased investment in the manufacturing and services sectors to facilitate job creation. When we talk about job creation, we are talking about well paying jobs.

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Mr. Speaker, our work plan for fiscal 2011 will focus on the implementation of these agreements already negotiated; refinement of the current draft of the trade policy; completion of negotiations for a Canada/Caricom trade and development agreement, in which Trinidad and Tobago, as part of Caricom, is currently engaged. We have already had conversations with my counterpart in Ottawa, and we are committed to having this trade agreement completed.

Seeking enhanced trading relationships with the Americas, Europe and Asia. In keeping with the initiatives outlined by the Minister of Finance in his 2011 budget, the trade agenda of the Ministry of Trade and Industry in fiscal 2011 will include assisting with the reduction of the country's agricultural bill and ensuring all related issues are covered by trade negotiations. Our current agri-processing percentage to the GDP is less than 0.5 per cent, so we have a long, long way to go when it comes to agri-processing, and, of course, which will mean lower food prices.

Growing services trade at the level of Caricom, ensuring that services will be covered in all agreements. This will have a positive effect on the creative sectors; fashion industry, tourism, professional services, and so forth. Embracing the focus on innovation; and we come back to the laptops. We cannot stay in the chalk and slate mode. We have to move away from that. [*Desk thumping*] If we are going to be talking about innovation, that is one of the key elements about innovation.

In negotiations on this component, emphasis will be placed on ensuring that we are able to negotiate cooperation in the area of innovative systems. We will strive to improve competitiveness via reducing the cost of inputs into production and efficiencies into our enabling institutions. Establishment of trade representation in more than two foreign capitals. That is something that the Minister of Foreign Affairs mentioned this morning; that one of the areas, when we are dealing with trade, is to have competent people in our missions to deal with trade.

Free trade zones. The Minister of Finance made reference to that, where the products from the free trade zones right now are not currently embraced in the Caricom trading arena. Also, such products are generally not incorporated into our negotiated trade agreements in any meaningful way. Given our stated policy interest in this sector, it will be necessary in 2011 to review our national positions on free trade zones as we engage regionally and internationally in various trade agreements. The free trade legislation we have is over 15 years old and it has to be brought up to date.

Also on the trade agenda is the development of a comprehensive strategic plan for the local services sector, designed to increase the capability of service

providers to take advantage of export opportunities under the partnership agreement, the EPA, and the proposed Caricom trade and development agreement.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is currently committed to trade agreements in different trading arenas. At the regional level, Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the Caricom Single Market and Economy, which is governed by the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. We have a number of other agreements that were signed: signed with Venezuela, 1992; Colombia, 1994; Dominican Republic, 1998; in Cuba, 2000; and Costa Rica, 2004. However, nearly all of these agreements require further work to bring them to full fruition.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago will also encourage Caricom to expand the formal trade relationships to include other countries in Central and South America. Trinidad and Tobago has achieved some success in building trade relationships with Cuba. Trinidad and Tobago will continue to build its trading relationships with Cuba using the Caricom/Cuba bilateral trade agreement as the foundation for a number of proactive interventions. Dealing with Cuba is an issue. It is not as easy as the other agreements. The Cuban Government has issues. And one of the things that we will be doing, of course, is through the EXIM Bank, a line of credit for local businesses willing to do business with Cuba with a line of credit to a maximum of US \$10 million. These negotiations are at an advanced stage and are nearing completion.

With regard to the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between CARIFORUM and the European Union, the work in this area is still in the implementation stage. The Ministry of Trade and Industry will seek to ensure that the EPA Bill is considered by the Parliament at the earliest opportunity. The focus in fiscal 2011 will be on implementing obligations and working with our manufacturers to take full advantage of the opportunities created under the agreement.

A number of the stakeholder awareness sessions will be conducted in 2011 by the Ministry and the Business Development Company Limited. In the multilateral arena, the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements form the basis for rule-making in the trade area. There have been problems with the dual development round, and those have been stalled, but the WTO review of the Trinidad and Tobago economy is to be conducted in 2011, and we already have commenced preparations in this regard.

Caricom is currently engaged in trade negotiations with Canada toward a reciprocal trade and development agreement to replace the existing preferential CARIBCAN Agreement which is scheduled to expire in 2011, so we do not have much time in

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dealing with that. While Trinidad and Tobago currently has some access to the Canadian market for goods, the new agreement will seek to make such arrangements permanent, and to negotiate for the removal of many of the existing nontrade tariff barriers to improve access and negotiate for market access for our service providers.

For future trade agreements, Mr. Speaker, on completion of the Caricom Trade and Development Agreement, our efforts will be directed towards negotiating with Central and South America. We do believe that many of these economies are similar to our size and the level of development, and are also very close in proximity. We have tended over the years to look north rather than looking south.

Mr. Speaker, in this regard, our radar is focused on such countries, but this is not south; this is going to be west, of Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala and Chile. At the Ministry, we are in the process of reviewing our priorities as we engage Caricom on this matter in keeping our treaty obligations. Thus far, exploratory discussions have commenced with Chile for the negotiation of market access on products of strategic interest to Trinidad and Tobago. So, we are already dealing with as far south as Chile.

4.15 p.m.

In presenting the trade agenda for 2011, we wish to emphasize that as part of the partnership with the wider society we intend to engage in significant and meaningful consultation with stakeholders. As such, we will engage in regular dialogue on a number of trade measures as we roll out our plans for fiscal 2011. Since we took office, Mr. Speaker, we have had umpteen consultations with as many of the stakeholders as possible. So if it is one thing with this new People's Partnership it is the dialogue with the people. [*Desk thumping*] We go to the people. [*Desk thumping*] We ask them what is it they need. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Trade and Industry will continue to represent the interests of local manufacturers and businesses of the trade complaints at the Council for Trade and Economic Development, that is COTED, which is normally held three times a year. There are a number of issues which have been beleaguered, the trade in Caricom, and I will do all within the power of the Ministry to deal with this situation. When I first got into the Ministry, one of the first things that confronted me was issues with Jamaica, and these are issues that have been going on for a very, very long time. When we had the opportunity to go to Jamaica for the Caricom Heads of Government in July, we sat with the trade Minister, my counterpart, and we have already—the dialogue is there and we are both committed to dealing with all those issues dealing with trade with Jamaica.

Mr. Speaker, there can be no meaningful trade if there are no products or services produced for export by locally based businesses. Globally, the search for renewable energy resources, the need to reduce carbon footprints, and when we are talking about carbon footprints there is a carbon tax that is being applied for the flights going from the UK into Tobago, which again is going to hamper development in Tobago. So it has come to Trinidad and Tobago, the issue of your carbon footprint. That, coupled with the significant slump in petroleum exports, signals the need for a far more aggressive approach towards diversification of the economy.

In strengthening the diversification thrust, the Ministry is in the process of formulating an industrial policy which will identify new sources of wealth creation and prescribe innovative strategies to achieve sustainable growth that goes way beyond oil and gas. Preliminary research indicates that there is a viability in knowledge based industries, the creative industries, inclusive of entertainment and fashion, ethnic products, food processing, maritime industry and, more specifically, the clusters that we talk about speak to shipbuilding and repair as well as high-tech manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, food production and processing and alternative energy. We will be vigorously exploring all of these opportunities.

When we talk about fashion, Mr. Speaker, people tend to think it is only what is considered high fashion, like my colleague here from D'Abadie/O'Meara, but what we are talking about is revamping and bringing back the garment industry because what the garment industry provides is the actual trade in the cutting and the laying out and the production of the garments and the garment industry in this country has practically disappeared and it is about revamping the garment industry.

When we talk about shipbuilding and repair we are talking about re-training people in Trinidad and Tobago because the type of training that you require for shipbuilding and ship repair is slightly different to what we are accustomed. So even if you are a welder, for instance, working in the refinery, if you had to work on a ship, you would require different skills to do that. So working in conjunction with the Ministry of Tertiary Education, we will, in fact, start building up that capacity so Trinidad and Tobago—we had it before. We had a wonderful ship repair business here in Trinidad and Tobago before, and that has more or less disappeared. Why? Because gas and oil was easier to make money with rather than making the attempt and pushing and putting time and effort and energy behind building these new industries. Right now we have approximately four different proposals regarding the ship repair business and these are all under active consideration.

Mr. Speaker, as you would recall, as was previously mentioned, the former government that is on the other side, in its efforts to diversify the economy,

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attempted to seed seven non-energy industries, however, they did not try very hard. Maybe they thought that the people who were not working in gas and oil were all “duncy”. So to date the growth in those non-energy industries, the growth and development of these industries have generated very little success. In recognition of the critical role played by the Ministry of Trade and Industry in the economic transition process, our technical experts would hasten to review these seven areas of activity paying particular attention to their economic impact and relevance to the changing international environment in which we operate.

Mr. Speaker, a new growth pole with the potential to make a substantial contribution in revenue and employment generation with the economy is in the creative industries. By United Nations’ definition, the creative industries comprise the creation, production, marketing and distribution of products and services resulting from human creativity. Mr. Speaker, research shows that globally the value of the creative industries is estimated beyond 1.3 trillion—now I know they like to talk about billion next door there but “I talking about” trillion dollars—US \$1.3 trillion. That is what the creative industries represent worldwide. In Trinidad and Tobago there is an abundance of human creativity waiting to be tapped and explored. Mr. Speaker, any country in the world, especially a country small like Trinidad and Tobago, that could produce its own musical instrument—any country the size of Trinidad and Tobago to not only produce your own musical instrument but produce your own type of music, you have to be a creative people and that is what we are going after, the creative genius of our people.

As the Minister of Trade and Industry, I am grateful for the emphasis placed by my colleague, the Minister of Finance, in his budget presentation, on developing a, and I quote, “culture-based industry for both the local and export market”. Notwithstanding the fact that the former government seeded the film and entertainment industries with these subsectors as subsumed under the creative industries umbrella, there are other subsectors, namely the fashion and animation industries, also deserving of attention.

The animation industry worldwide is worth over US \$50 billion. Who are the people who are the animators? The creative people, the same “duncy” people they are talking about—the same “duncy” people we are talking about. Those are the creative people and those are the people you hire to do the animation and you become part of that US \$50 billion industry. That is how we have to look at it, not sit down in the—stay inside the box. We are moving way outside the box.

Trinidad and Tobago can play a meaningful role in the growth of this industry. Mr. Speaker, rest assured, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is desirous of

facilitating the business aspects of the creative industries in light of its role in the diversification thrust, therefore strengthening capacity, building, branding, exposure of stakeholders to foreign markets, reviewing the incentives, knowledge dissemination and other factors are critical for the creative industries to achieve their full potential. Again, they are proposals that have been brought to the Ministry of Trade and Industry regarding many of these areas, including animation, that we are actively pursuing.

Mr. Speaker, rest assured, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is committed to developing the creative industries from a more comprehensive perspective in light of their potential contribution to the diversification drive. We will focus on strengthening capacity, establishing solid brands, pursue foreign markets, review incentives, expose stakeholders to international best practices and pursue a range of other initiatives to ensure that the creative industries achieve their full potential in terms of contributing to the economy.

One of the issues of the creative industries, of course, is when we talk about exposing stakeholders to international best practices. Those are issues with which we have to deal and we have to deal with them here, so when we go offshore and we go into the foreign markets that we do not come home saying how they did not know and the agent did not pay them, all this sort of business. It is that education and that knowledge that they are going to require.

In fiscal 2011 the Ministry of Trade and Industry will be examining the various state entities under its portfolio with a view to realigning and rationalizing these bodies. As such, there may be new dispensations in the upcoming year for some of the entities under the Ministry. The Minister of Finance in his budget presentation has already alluded to the review of the Trinidad and Tobago Film Company and the Trinidad and Tobago Entertainment Company to ensure that their mandates are consistent with their operations and financial management. As further indicated, steps will be taken to ensure that these companies function increasingly as true entrepreneurial entities.

Mr. Speaker, the merchant marine industry has identified the shipbuilding and repair clusters as viable initiatives for growth and development. Beyond the potential to contribute to revenue and employment generation, the shipbuilding and repair cluster opens a window for training in high paying jobs and specialized skills development as well as for a series of spinoff industries. We may remember that the expansion of the Panama Canal is going to be completed in 2015. That means the traffic that is going to be going through and coming to this part of the world is going to be substantially increased, and, therefore, one of the areas that Trinidad and Tobago can benefit from is that, through the ship repairs.

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Mr. Speaker, as the Ministry responsible for the Business Development Company Limited, our technical team will work on realigning and rationalizing the Business Development Company in line with budget measures to enhance the link between the entrepreneurs and business development. We will seek to ensure that our initiatives will be the subject of consultations with our stakeholders. It is the firms not the government that conduct enterprising business, and, in order to facilitate the convergence of state and enterprise goals, the Ministry will strengthen and formalize stakeholder alliances.

The Ministry's outreach programme is geared to consulting both public and private sector stakeholders with a view to identifying the needs and interest in respect of the advancement of Trade and Industry initiatives. The Ministry will also be reviewing the horse racing industry with a view to reducing its dependence on the State and its future sustainability. Right now every dollar that is betted goes in and comes back out and not one single cent comes to the Treasury. *[Interruption]*

I see you are laughing because money "doh mean nutten" to them, whether they spend \$1.3 billion, "it doh matter to them", you know, *[Interruption]* and, therefore, to reduce its dependency on the State and the future sustainability, in this respect the Ministry will undertake the relevant consultations so that the best options for the industry can be ascertained and appropriate actions taken. There have been two reports, Mr. Speaker, that have been done in the horse racing industry, one as far back as the late '90s and, of course, they just sit there. "Let de people money go where it ha' to go, no problem."

The Ministry will also be reviewing the Venture Capital Incentive Programme with a view to determining its future viability and relevance. That has not been the most successful programme that we have, the Venture Capital Incentive Programme, so we really have to look and see what we can do to have that become viable.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, with regard to Tobago, the Ministry will be re-establishing within a very short time a Trade Licensing Office in Scarborough to cater to the citizens in Tobago thereby eliminating the need for travel by Tobagonians for a trade licence. *[Desk thumping]* This is all on a small—and people might think that is insignificant, but it is not insignificant. The time has come when Tobago can stay in Tobago and conduct all the business that they want right there in Tobago. *[Desk thumping]* We will be working with the Minister, with the Ministry of Tobago Development to have this implemented ASAP.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is also mandated to attract investments, both local and foreign, and there are several initiatives under way to

increase investment. These include finalization of the investment policy, formulation of an integrated investment promotion strategy, refining the model for bilateral investment trade agreements and a review of the incentive regime including developing a policy on all small approved companies, a new policy on free zones and building a compendium of incentives for the non-energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, a critical part of the Ministry's agenda is the finalization of the Trinidad and Tobago investment policy 2011—2015. This policy seeks to prescribe the institutional and regulatory framework which will underpin new legislation for investment promotion and strategies for attracting sustainable investment both inward and outward. As noted, the Foreign Investment Act of 1990 has become obsolete as it was conceived during an era of relative protectionism and focused on regulating the acquisition of lands and shares in private and public companies by foreigners. A new piece of legislation therefore needs to be introduced that is relevant to the current liberalization global investment environment and that is attractive to prospective investors. This policy and the new investment legislation is expected to be in place by the end of 2011.

Also on the Ministry's agenda is the formulation of an integrated investment promotion strategy whose main objective is to provide a coordinated approach to investment promotion. Currently investment promotion takes on a sectoral approach among several ministries, state agencies and special purpose companies having responsibility for specific sectors.

The benefits of an integrated approach include cost savings, minimizing duplication of effort and the development of coherent integrated plans to achieve common interests and objectives. Basically what we are saying is that within all the different Ministries and all the different agencies, each one has a part to play in investment and that is just taking way, way too long and we have to do something about that. When investors come to Trinidad and Tobago they do not want to have to go to 15 different places.

4.30 p.m.

We will be working with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs to carry this approach forward.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the competitiveness of a country is a factor in attracting foreign direct investment and thereby generating wealth. A major international benchmark of a country's competitiveness is the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index. The Minister of Foreign Affairs already

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alluded to that and went through in detail where we were as a competitive nation. We are way behind the ball. During this fiscal year you would see and we commit to moving Trinidad and Tobago's competitiveness from the score of 84 to—I cannot tell you yet, but we would figure it out—better. My friend here said "more better". [*Laughter*]

There are four broad areas, however, on trade and industry which are in need of urgent attention by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago: Building a national innovation framework—we come back to the issue of laptops—reducing the levels of crime, we know that is a crucial area and that has to be dealt with, and overhauling Government bureaucracy. [*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Members, at this time we will suspend the sitting for tea and we shall resume at 5.05 p.m.

4.33 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. S. Cadiz: Mr. Speaker, just before we broke for tea, we were talking about the competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago and how we intended to improve the competitiveness of this country. Obviously that is going to be a priority under this Government's National Strategic Plan for Trinidad and Tobago. In that regard, for the Ministry of Trade and Industry, our plan is to reverse this country's downward slide in international competitiveness—even though we moved just two points, but still, that is not a win—to include working with the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs to establish a national innovation system under the aegis of the Economic Development Board, which would be aimed at improving our global competitiveness and innovation rank over the next 10 years; the implementation of the SEW, the Single Electronic Window for trade and business facilitation, which would provide a single electronic platform with re-engineered business processes and clear service standards for 11 Government departments, at least, in the first place, to deliver their services on time. The SEW is a major initiative and we are looking at January 01, 2012, to have that up and running.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

As highlighted by the hon. Minister of Finance, there will be the establishment of an IBC, an International Business Centre, which will replace the previous concept of the failed International Financial Centre. This IBC will be part of the institutional structure of a new thrust in investment promotion and innovation and will be supported by the Economic Development Board under the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs and the new Competitiveness and Innovation Council under the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Together these entities would be responsible for an innovation and investment strategy in Trinidad and Tobago.

The research and development facility of the Business Development Corporation will be targeting those business enterprises that would like to introduce innovation ideas into their own business, to improve competitiveness and profitability, as indicated in the budget statement. The sales turnover criteria for processing this facility from the BDC will be expanded from its maximum of \$5 million to \$25 million. Additionally, we will increase the grant for single projects from \$100,000 to TT \$500,000 and for alliance projects from \$200,000 to \$1 million. Mr. Speaker, we believe that this will support the new national innovation system.

The new model to managing industrial estates: Under the Ministry of Trade and Industry and, of course, with the eTecK agency reporting to us, there are a number of industrial estates that they manage. You would appreciate the benefits of engaging the private sector in public/private partnerships with a view to making additional industrial space available for business activity. This will be undertaken under a new model for managing industrial estates throughout the country, to build non-energy export platforms and to attract foreign investment in targeted areas.

Mr. Speaker, eTecK's 19 industrial parks comprise approximately 320 hectares with a tenant base of approximately 400 companies. However, right now, those parks are full and for this country to expand its economic base, it will need to make more space available.

Regarding the free zones, we will be reforming our free trade zones programme to encourage local and foreign investment in export driven projects that create jobs, develop skills and create markets for our products. We propose to amend the Free Zones Act to include new large scale projects, over the present cap of US \$50 million, with an export bias. This measure will incorporate amendments to the Free Zones Act and will come into effect from January 01, 2011.

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As part of our mandate to support business and industrial development, our Ministry is working on several policies which would address issues related to consumer safety, unfair competition and more structured business practices. We are right now reviewing closely the sale of foreign used tyres on the local market. The streamlining of foreign trade show is a major problem with that. The unregulated scrap metal business, again, major problems with that, and the Ministry is engaging those various sectors to ensure that they are regulated to where there is a fair deal. In all these cases, the Ministry will continue to work closely with the relevant stakeholders, to arrive at policies consistent with our national development drive.

What does this all mean for the man in the street in Trinidad and Tobago, all the issues of trade agreements that we spoke about, innovation and the various issues pertaining to business? It means that every time we negotiate a new trade agreement, more jobs will be created due to the ability to export our goods and services to foreign markets, under better terms and conditions. Goods and services in the country would also be cheaper and poverty would be alleviated as a result of imports under these agreements. It means that the man in the street: pan man, dancer, chutney singer, fashion designer, any trade person or whoever, would have enhanced opportunities for career advancement through increased access to foreign markets for the creative talents.

It means that the resources which would allow us to continue to build hospitals, schools and roadways and to provide services, would continue to be available long after the dependency on energy has ended. It means that we would be able to create the opportunities that would allow the State to treat with poverty and the social ills that impact our society. Every initiative we take to create jobs will help us reduce crime. It means that we will continue to provide the environment for business to grow, to ensure that opportunities will exist for our young people leaving secondary and tertiary education facilities.

While the State utilizes wealth, it is the business sector that creates wealth. Therefore, I find it very, very difficult sometimes to sit here and listen to the other side, when they say that the People's Partnership Government has no plan. I do not understand that, because they had plans, plans and more plans and could implement none, which is very strange. That is very, very true, especially when I hear the Minister of Foreign Affairs referring to the Member for Diego Martin West as the "merchant of mischief". I truly understand now what he means, because when he talked about the People's Partnership, less than three and a half months in Government, he talked about "voops" and "hit and miss" and what have you, that were totally uncalled for. The Members on the other side spent eight years doing what?

Mr. Warner: Nothing!

Hon. S. Cadiz: Mr. Speaker, \$300 billion gone. The *Su*, the *Su* and more *Su*. In fact some of you all might be sued at the rate we are going. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

You hear them say that there was nothing new, how could you say that? How could you say that with everything, all the plans, eight years of planning? How many years are you celebrating now? Forty-something years in Government. What plans? [*Crosstalk*] Three and a half months and what we have been able to do is to change the direction of this country to where people feel confident, confident to invest. [*Desk thumping*] In eight years you could not do that. Every single solitary deal you went into has a huge question mark; just write "SU" below them. It is a wicked, sinful government that ran this country for eight years. [*Desk thumping*] And you want to come and tell me about "ratchiffee"? What kind of parliamentary language is that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? "Ratchiffee" is not parliamentary language. You are watching this side and "bawling "ratchiffee"?"

Dr. Rowley: You are the Speaker?

Hon. S. Cadiz: "Yes, I speaking now."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would give them five years to contemplate and five years to understand what they did to this country and I hope that after five years, as I said in my earlier statements, they would actually understand what sin is and they would repent and ask this country for forgiveness for what they did. [*Desk thumping*] Really and truly, until they ask this country for forgiveness, it is going to be very difficult to sit here and hear those accusations about "what all yuh did in three months".

5.15 p.m.

Eight years of *Su*; eight years of rapid rail; eight years of Hilton; eight years of Vanguard; eight years of eTeck. All of that is eight years. Apologize to this country before you make any further statements regarding this side here. The curse of oil and gas, I tell you something; the pirates, really and truly, the pirates.

In conclusion, I wish to stress that in 2011 our ministry will concentrate on continuous consultation and dialogue. That is what we are committed to, speaking to the people, not working, as the Member for Diego Martin West says, "voops" and "vaps". That is not the case. We sit and we dialogue with the stakeholders. We recognize that only through a process of constant exchange, we would be able to maximize the tools and other resources at our disposal.

We call on you, the national community, to work with us in this regard and to be willing to explore a new perspective in respect of partnership and feedback. We cannot all have what we desire but we can all work to make life in Trinidad and Tobago more desirable. The Ministry of Trade and Industry is key to a better life for our people and our Ministry is therefore central to the achievement of a new government's development path. We commit to a better life for all of our citizens.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I feel very privileged to rise and enter the debate on the Appropriation Bill, the budget for fiscal year 2011. It is my special honour to dedicate this, my maiden contribution to the people of St. Ann's East whom I have the honour to represent. [*Desk thumping*]

My constituents, with whom I am in constant communication, have mandated me to place their many concerns before this honourable Chamber. Therefore, on their behalf let me firstly extend congratulations to all Members of Parliament who have been elevated to higher positions. I refer, in particular, to your good self being elevated to the position of Deputy House Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister and representative for Siparia, my sincere congratulations to you on your appointment as being the first woman Prime Minister of this country. Your elevation signals a new direction for the future of women politicians in our country. [*Desk thumping*] I also refer to my esteemed Leader of the Opposition and Member for Diego Martin West, the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley. His experience and knowledge is far superior to many and I congratulate him on a well-deserved position.

I congratulate also the Opposition Chief Whip and Member for Port of Spain South, the hon. Miss Marlene Mc Donald. Like our hon. Prime Minister, her elevation is confirmation that the glass ceiling has been broken and the pathway is now open for all women of this country. Let me not forget to acknowledge all Members of this House. I wish to encourage all of us as Members to conduct ourselves in a manner that is befitting of this honourable House, which is the highest forum in the land. Such exemplary behaviour will generate enthusiasm for and guidance to our younger population to aspire to these positions we now hold.

It is said with great power comes great responsibility. Therefore, as we begin the debate on budget 2011, let me also extend congratulations to the hon. Minister and Member for Tunapuna on his maiden presentation of this year's financial budget, the largest in the history of this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker and Members of this honourable House, as I reviewed this budget to prepare for this debate, certain aspects of the proposal which maps

our way forward have given me cause for great concern. I specifically refer to local government reform. This area of our country's development has significant bearing for me, having served at the level of local government for quite a number of years. To my great concern and alarm, nowhere—and I want to emphasize—nowhere in the Minister's presentation have I heard or been able to read about the measures to improve local governance in this country. The absence of programmes to improve and modernize the local government system is disconcerting, especially since all of us know that the local government systems have not been functioning very well.

Recent events have proven this point. The frequent and torrential rains continue to cause massive flooding and destruction. It was only last week on the media that I saw citizens of central Trinidad complaining about the frequent flooding and the fact that they have not seen either their representatives or their councillors. You see, there is real work to do and real work means changing the structures and systems that now exist to bring about efficiency and sustained provision of quality service to all citizens.

Already this Government is overwhelmed and yet they keep promising the heaven and the stars and all we get is more water and mud every time it rains. The PNM as a government understood this and began making every effort to forever change the way we do business at the local level. But what is the Government doing? According to the budget presentation, nothing. They are doing nothing, even in light of the fact that the Prime Minister has promised to reform local government. I refer to a *Newsday* article of June 19, 2010 and I quote:

“Stating that local government was too important an institution to be deferred, Persad-Bissessar disclosed that any reform of the country's local government system will be done after July 26.”

The newspaper article continued:

“The Prime Minister further advised that local government elections will be called using the existing law following upon which mechanisms will be put in place to effect further change.”

The newspaper continued:

“Persad-Bissessar added that new arrangements to finance local government bodies will be reviewed and implemented.”

From these utterances it can be clearly understood that this local government reform was of significant importance to our Prime Minister and the people of this country and it is for this reason I again ask: where are the programmes to be financed for local

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government reform in this budget? Are we fooling the people? The citizens of this country are not stupid. My constituents are not foolish. They understand that money must be allocated in the budget to facilitate the development of programmes for the coming financial year. Every housewife knows how to budget; every worker has a budget and is clear of the way forward. Where is the statement that guides the local government programme of this People's Partnership coalition? How much money has been allocated to local government and what is to be done with the money?

Pillar No. 2 in the local government manifesto of the People's Partnership Coalition Government refers to good governance with the theme:

“Strengthening local government shall be a cornerstone of our democracy.”

It further states:

“The objective of the reform will be to re-enforce the commitment of the People's Partnership to the decentralization of authority in order to facilitate more effective and responsive governance what will mean the qualitative broadening of local government as an institution to bring it closer to the people.”

What does that really mean? Let me repeat it:

“The objective of the reform will be to re-enforce the commitment of the People's Partnership to the decentralization of authority in order to facilitate more effective and responsive governance that will mean the qualitative broadening of local government as an institution to bring it closer to the people.”

And while we try to sort out the confusion of language let me tell you, our burgesses are wary of living in flood waters and they are looking forward to this reform to bring relief. They feel betrayed and disappointed on not hearing any information about improving local issues in this presentation.

I want the Minister of Local Government to tell me that it was an oversight in the non-mention of this and that it is somewhere hidden amidst the entire flurry. I further wish to again quote from the *Daily Express* of July 08, which reads:

“Baksh said local government will not be starved of resources as in the past and would be treated with respect and dignity.”

This is the commitment that they made. What is to become of these promises? I am here to represent the people of St. Ann's East and when they ask me to enquire about certain issues, it is my responsibility to do so.

Their second concern is the cleaning up of this country. I was most amused to hear the hon. Minister of Finance speak about a clean-up budget. Clean up what?

Clean up where? After the widely publicized gimmick to clean up the country, the country is even dirtier than it was before May of this year. Look around. Look at the garbage all over the place. I heard the hon. Prime Minister blame the PNM corporations, saying that garbage was not removed from the sidewalks and pavements because they wanted to sabotage the clean-up and beautification drive that was under way. Tell me, now that they are in control of most of the corporations, who sabotaging who? The whole country is filthy. You drive around and look; it has never been so bad, both in PNM and People's Partnership coalition corporations. Stop fooling the people. They will become angry and they will turn on the Government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Members of this honourable House, it is now a question of trust and belief.

Going back again to the local government manifesto of this People's Partnership Coalition Government, it is stated that the new local government will deal with the new council and the concept of the new councillor. Councillors are now into their second month of governance and they want to know when will this new local government take effect.

In the *Daily Express* of July 28, it was reported and I quote:

“Newly elected local government councillors were told yesterday they would be outfitted with offices and given phones to stay in touch with their constituents and could expect no political honeymoon.”

It further stated and I quote:

“Sharma said repairs to vehicles owned by councillors would also be made to ensure constituents were met often and anyone without a driver's permit was advised to get one quickly.”

I address this question to the hon. Member for Fyzabad. What is going on in local government? I have been told nothing is happening. The Ministry is at a standstill; local government is at a standstill. The country is looking on with a lizard eye. The local issues are not being dealt with. Be careful that the last stage is not worse than the first.

People are getting tired already with the flam and the emptiness. They have started to grumble.

5.30 p.m.

I was very pleased to hear mentioned in the budget about the public service wage negotiations. In the list of persons affected by these wage negotiations are the daily-rated employees of the central government and municipal corporations. It was also mentioned that the Government would make sure that this issue was

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settled by the end of 2010. I wish to let the hon. Minister know that some of the 10,000 employees have asked me to let him know that they are waiting with baited breath and great anticipation.

On another matter of interest for employees in the local government system, I refer to an article published in the *Trinidad Guardian* on January 29, 2010 with the heading "Kamla, we will fight to save local government jobs". Mr. Speaker, I remind Members that at that time the hon. Member would have been on the Opposition Bench. I quote from the said article:

“New political leader of the United National Congress, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, says she has great concern and regret over the expected job losses resulting from reform of the local government system in Trinidad.”

The article ends with—and I quote:

“Persad-Bissessar said the UNC was of the view this is not necessary and will fight strenuously to ensure that jobs of local government people are protected.”

Mr. Speaker, I ask the hon. Prime Minister and Member for Siparia to confirm that this is still her position and that in the new reform no jobs of local government people will be lost.

I remind Members of this honourable House that we are still very much in the rainy season. Disaster is all around us. The hon. Prime Minister, on her first day in office, was faced with major flooding across the country. She had to go straight from being sworn in to put on boots and hard hat to deal with some of these issues. I hope this is not the portent of a bad wind.

Only recently in my constituency, a pensioner lost his life when his house caved in on him. All over my constituency there have been widespread disasters. Other Members can attest that the reactive help is not enough to deal with the issues being faced. We must be proactive and much more attention needs to be given to a proactive approach to disaster management to eradicate the pain and suffering brought on by disasters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is also clearly stated in the local government manifesto of the Peoples Partnership Coalition Government (PPCG) that specific measures would be taken to address this problem. I ask the question: Where in the budget presentation is it mentioned about special focus on disaster management?

As I deal a little more on the local government reform, I refer to a heading in the manifesto, "Adoption of a truly decentralized approach to governance". There

are several key areas under the heading "Local Government Involvement of the People ". The ones to which I refer:

- “Establish an Internet portal, ‘E-view’ for the people to express their views on development;
- Ensure that Broadband service is available countrywide;
- Establish government-funded free Internet cafés in communities across the country.”

Have these promises been allocated for in the budget for 2011? Permit me to draw to the attention of the Member for Fyzabad the issue of the San Juan Market. The construction of this new market has been the dream of the burgesses of Baratara/San Juan and environs. I wish to draw attention to the unfortunate turn of events that is taking place with the stoppage of the construction works of the new San Juan Market Complex.

I recall the utterances of the Minister of Local Government just a few days after he was sworn in and had visited the Marabella Market. It is reported in the newspaper that the hon. Minister had questioned the cost of the construction of the San Juan Market and the Marabella Market. It is regrettable that the hon. Minister has adopted a posture which is causing tremendous uncertainties and discomfort to the thousands of users of the San Juan Market.

The construction work in the San Juan Market has been halted for the past several months and patience is running out. We are very close to the end of the financial year 2009/2010 and I recall that in the last budget funds were allocated for the construction of the new San Juan Market Complex.

Prior to my being elected to this honourable House as Member of Parliament for the constituency of St. Ann's East, I served as a member of council of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation from 1996 to May 2010. I am, therefore, cognizant of the long and painful history behind the construction of this new market and it is really sad that the hon. Minister of Local Government is attempting to derail this project.

Members of Parliament will recall the famous dance of the late Dhanraj Singh in the late 1990s, who had come into the San Juan Market to turn the sod for the construction of an extension to the market with a large warehouse-type building at the western end of the existing market site. This project remained incomplete and shortly after the PNM returned to government in 2002, phase 2 of the works continued.

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This entailed the demolition of an old building on First Street, San Juan, and the construction of a shed with stalls to relocate the hundreds of vendors affected by the works. I recall the many challenges faced by the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation in making improvements to the existing market in those days. In 2003, considerable time and effort was spent in developing conceptual designs for a new market.

In 2004, the Central Tenders Board awarded a new contract for the design of a new market. Consultations were held with the vendors, San Juan Businessmen Association, the burgesses in the region and other stakeholders. Members of council and technical officers visited other markets in the country, including the Chaguanas, Princes Town and Penal markets. Eventually the plans developed by the consultant were made available for public viewing in the Croissee and in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation offices.

Upon completion of the design and tender documents, the Ministry of Local Government on behalf of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, invited tenders for the construction of the San Juan Market Complex. After a competitive bidding process that complied with all tendering procedures, a letter awarding a contract for the construction of the new San Juan Market Complex was issued by the Central Tenders Board.

In July 2009, a contract was duly prepared and executed by the Chief State Solicitor's Department in the Ministry of the Attorney General. Funds were allocated in 2009/2010 budget for the construction of this market estimated to cost \$45 million.

It was on my birthday on December 14, 2009, that the then Minister of Local Government visited the site of the San Juan Market and turned the sod for the commencement of the construction of the new San Juan Market Complex. Approximately \$10 million had been allocated to the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation towards this project and in February 2010 the corporation was informed that Cabinet had agreed to the engagement of the Community Improvement Services Limited to provide project management services for the construction of the San Juan Market.

The Ministry of Local Government, in consultation with the Ministry of Finance, had identified funds in the sum of more than \$34.9 million plus VAT from its budgetary allocation for the completion of this project. The construction was scheduled to be completed within one year from the commencement of construction and the vendors and users have been cooperating with the authorities to enable the construction to take place unhindered despite the dislocation and inconveniences. Yet the new Minister of Local Government seems to be stalling the project.

In fact, my colleagues in council have told me that the Minister is of the view that the people of San Juan do not need a \$45 million market. With due respect, I would like to appeal to the Minister and indeed the Government at large to reconsider its position and allow this market to be completed.

The design of this market is based on a market and mall concept that will radically alter the landscape in the congested Croissee. It will be a hub for activities that will foster the entrepreneurial spirit that the hon. Minister of Finance spoke about in his budget statement. The hon. Minister of Finance started his budget speech by stating:

“...the key role of Government is to catalyse economic growth, and provide opportunities to allow our people to achieve their maximum potential.”

He further stated on page 7 of the budget statement that:

“...the thrust of this, our first Budget, is to bridge entrepreneurship and development.

We must awaken and harness the vast potential energy of entrepreneurs and engage and focus it on the development of our country.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this new San Juan Market Complex will do exactly what the Minister of Finance has stated. It will create the enabling environment for hundreds of vendors to nurture small businesses by being able to ply their trade in an atmosphere of cleanliness and comfort. It will enable the users of the market to shop in comfort in a mall-type atmosphere with a food court and improved amenities that will transform the region.

I appeal to the Minister of Local Government to move away from the archaic notion that a market should be a shed-type facility and embrace the notion of a modern state-of-the-art market facility that the people of San Juan and environs deserve. Please facilitate the completion of this project. Having to redesign the drawings at this stage will no doubt cause the cost to escalate and impose undue hardships to the thousands of burgesses who have high expectation that this market will be completed by the end of this year.

As I end my very short contribution here today, I close with the very popular saying: As long as you can find someone else to blame for anything you are doing, you cannot be held accountable or responsible for your growth or lack of it. In other words, as James Baldwin said: You cannot fix what you will not face.

I thank you.

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Dr. Rupert Griffith): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In a debate, usually when the opposite side gets up to speak, you would have a lot to respond to but, like my colleague the Member for Tabaquite, there is very little I can respond to.

If I were to do a reflection on what happened on both sides, briefly, of course, I would first of all compliment the Member for St. Ann's for her virgin speech and I wish you all the best in your parliamentary experience. Then I go to the very affable Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's who spoke for 65 minutes on a single laptop. I know that my colleague, the Minister of Education, will deal with that. All I ask him to do is to have mercy on her because I know what he is coming with.

5.45 p.m.

When I listened to the Leader of the Opposition's rebuttal to the budget presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance, I listened to language such as "the Government has no plan", "it is a mirage", "gobbledygook" and "afflicted with a pip". I have not heard that kind of language in a long time. What it really was is a pedestrian statement. It lacked inspiration, no excitement and was downright dull. The Member for Diego Martin West, his rebuttal which took all of two and one-half hours, could simply be summed up as a statement that was a juxtaposition of tired and worn out mish mash statements, which was mainly puerile and useless.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to present my first budget response as Minister of Tourism. Before going any further in my contribution, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to the tourism family, the employees of the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Development Company, as well as the Tobago House of Assembly and our tourism stakeholders, for their unstinting support, constructive inputs and passion and enthusiasm for the tourism sector. We have all been called upon to work together very closely over the last four and one-half months and I trust that these good relationships will thrive and serve us well into the future.

I congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Member for Tunapuna for his presentation of a most progressive visionary budget and one with a clear direction to lead Trinidad and Tobago to sound and sustainable economic recovery.

I would also like to warmly congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and Member for Siparia for her visionary, caring, astute leadership of the People's Partnership Government. Her excellence in leadership has created a renewed hope in the people of Trinidad and Tobago for a better tomorrow.

I would like to begin today by providing you with a sound overview of the tourism industry, report on the current state of the sector, its prospectus and challenges and delve a bit into our plans for the 2010/2011 fiscal year.

Tourism: Despite the fact that the energy sector remains the main deliverer of Government's revenues and exports, tourism is one of the best and fastest ways of generating the jobs we need so badly in this country. Tourism, both locally and globally, is a powerful catalyst for economic growth, job creation and the redistribution of wealth. Globally, the number of international arrivals grew from 25 million in 1950, to an estimated 880 million in 2009. This is according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization. Travelling tourism is one of the fastest growing industries worldwide. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, despite the global economic slowdown in 2009, the industry contributed over \$5.4 trillion to the world economic output. This accounted for 9.4 per cent of the global economy. While global trends and the economic vagaries of major markets do pose great challenges for the industry, particularly in tourism dependent economies as the Caribbean, the tourism industry continues to offer excellent prospects for prosperity and growth.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization forecast a growth in international tourism arrivals between 3 and 4 per cent in 2010. Another critical indicator of the importance of tourism to the world economy is the impact on employment. More than 8 per cent of the global labour force is directly or indirectly employed by the tourism industry.

In Trinidad and Tobago, approximately 32,900 jobs were estimated to be directly linked to the tourism industry in 2008. This is an industry, which not only has direct economic benefits but it also opens up opportunities for a range of small businesses. Tourism has a particularly strong domestic impact, in terms of the provision of goods and services and contributes directly to job creation and poverty eradication.

The tourism sector ideally fits the profile of this Government's economic priorities. It is job intensive, it is small business-friendly and it promotes geographic spread and economic diversity. While it has been said by many international experts that tourism is the most resilient of industries, evident in its recovery from the infamous 9/11, we must also keep in mind the risk to the industry. This includes some of the world's main tourism sources, markets such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Europe are still recovering quite slowly. Global incidents such as the deepest global economic recession since the great depression, the H1N1 virus and the Icelandic volcanic eruptions have once again highlighted the vulnerability of the tourism sector, in terms of external shocks.

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Trinidad and Tobago's perspective: Trinidad and Tobago presently claims a 7.6 per cent share of the annual average of 441,000 tourists of the 5.5 million international stay-over visitors who travel to the English-speaking Caricom countries seeking Caribbean warmth over the last five years. According to estimates from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, these visitors generated US \$572 million in direct revenues to businesses in Trinidad and Tobago.

A further \$8.3 million in airport charges was collected by the State. When viewed within the context of our Caribbean competitors, Trinidad and Tobago's current market is 7.6 per cent, which is relatively low when we consider that, among other things:

1. Trinidad and Tobago labour force represents 19.3 per cent of the total workforce among English-speaking Caricom countries;
2. That Trinidad and Tobago has the largest economy among English-speaking Caricom countries equivalent to 38.2 per cent of the total GDP and has the ability to marshal substantial financial resources from domestic sources for tourism investment; and
3. The twin island republic is one of most biodiverse culturally and geographically unique countries in the Caribbean.

Based on the destination's competitive edge, Trinidad and Tobago can definitely increase the share of the Caribbean market by 3 per cent points within the next five years. While on its own, this figure may seem insignificant, a 3 per cent increase in market share will take our destination's target market share to 10.6 per cent, which translates into 617,575 international visitors. In terms of dollars and cents, 671,575 international visitors by 2015 will add a projected \$5.04 billion in revenue to Trinidad and Tobago's economy, which translates into even more jobs and increased earnings for hotels tour operators, taxi drivers and small entrepreneurs.

Our vision: I am really excited by the opportunity afforded me by the hon. Prime Minister to make a meaningful contribution to our children's future in the role of guardian and steward of the local tourism industry. Our tourism industry is brimful of opportunities and is one of the key pillars for the economic diversification of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me assure this honourable House and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago of the People's Partnership Government unswerving commitment to the development of the local tourism industry. The last government underplayed the tourism industry. For too long tourism has been looked down on as a second-class

service sector. This has to be changed and it will be changed by this People's Partnership Government.

Tourism for the People's Partnership Government is now a first-class priority at the front and centre of Trinidad and Tobago's economic strategy. As an export earner with international visitors and with a strong domestic market, the tourism sector is fundamental to the building of our local economy. I am really looking forward to bringing to fruition the many projects that my Ministry has been working on recently. Indeed, the best method to access success within the tourism sector is measured by the extent to which it has changed the living conditions of people, in particular the rural poor, as well as the extent to which communities also participate in the development and enjoyment of tourism.

It is with this in mind that my Ministry has placed emphasis on projects that develop community tourism, using the resources of the villagers, regional cooperation and resident tourism action committees. Hence, our Public Sector Investment Programme within the 2010/2011 fiscal year has a strong infrastructural component for the upgrade of the tourism product and development of entrepreneurial and other critical skills necessary for the transformation of the sector within the communities.

I must acknowledge that our local tourism industry is not without its challenges. There is still much that needs to be done to improve perceptions of Trinidad and Tobago as a tourism destination at home and overseas.

The tourism policy: The Ministry of Tourism has completed its review of the National Tourism Policy to ensure its alignment with the People's Partnership Government policy framework. The revised policy has been already forwarded to the Cabinet. The revised National Tourism Policy pursues quality and sustainable growth and encourages community participation and empowerment. This policy will ensure that the tourism sector prospers and grows in the face of changing and at times challenging local and global trends and dynamics, which require us to be alert and willing to change and react as required.

The next step is the development of the strongest possible strategic development action plan. The goal of the strategic action plan is, amongst other, to inspire and accelerate the growth of the tourism industry in a responsible and sustainable manner. We would be carefully examining what must be the role of Government nationally as it pertains to tourism, what is required of the regional corporations and the nature and support tourism state agencies must provide to these government bodies, as well as the strategy will roll out our plans for

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stimulating the private sector in tourism and what other policy decisions must be taken in other areas, so as to positively impact upon the tourism industry.

6.00 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Tourism has also developed draft eco-tourism and community tourism policies which are both being forwarded to partner state agencies and tourism organizations for comments. It is anticipated that these policies will be brought to Cabinet for approval by the end of the first quarter in 2011.

The Ministry is also in the process of creating a cruise tourism policy aimed at developing a formalized framework to promote the development and expansion of cruise tourism in Trinidad and Tobago.

Tourism bodies: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as enunciated clearly in the 2010/2011 national budget, tourism is fundamental to the rebuilding and diversification of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. In light of the need to increase the contribution of tourism to the GDP, my first exercise, a mere seven weeks ago, from taking the oath of office as the Minister of Tourism, was to enhance the structural governing framework for the tourism industry to make a more meaningful contribution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a standing committee for the sustainable development of tourism in Trinidad, consisting of senior executives and decision makers from all stakeholder groups was appointed by the Cabinet to provide strategic direction and coordination for the development of our sector. This committee, of which I am chairman, operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Tourism, comprising presidents of all the tourism stakeholder groups and leaders within the Government and corporate sectors as well as representation from the community groups. This committee is providing a forum to engage stakeholders in the development of a long-term tourism strategy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the standing committee for sustainable development of tourism in Trinidad has already started working and sub-committees have been formed to deal with the critical areas of competitiveness, education, awareness and product development. Each sub-committee has been given three months within which to submit a detailed plan for transformation of its particular core area to the standing committee. *[Interruption]* Three months from the date it was formed. That was a little more than a month ago.

Within the Ministry of Tourism, a tourism working group, under the chairmanship of the Permanent Secretary, has been set up to act as a clearing

house for projects and proposals that are brought forward from various organizations and individuals for financial and technical assistance. The working group makes recommendations for support of the proposals based, among other factors, on its strategic alignment to the national tourism policy benefits to the community and contribution to the sustainable development of the industry.

Moreover, significant strides have been made in developing a strong partnership approach within the industry and other government agencies in order to ensure the strategic framework for tourism development is able to respond to the rapidly changing economic and social environment. I have met with all the tourism stakeholders in the industry and virtually all the business and chamber of commerce associations. The Ministry of Tourism is also enjoying a very cordial relationship with the Tobago House of Assembly, attending on a regular basis, the Tobago Tourism Standing Committee. We are now strengthening our linkages with other government agencies in recognition of their inter-relatedness of tourism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the sake of any possible misconception, I would just like to take a moment to set out the mandates of the state agencies involved in our local tourism industry. The Ministry of Tourism is responsible for tourism policy development, awareness, catalyzing and facilitating growth of the tourism sector; encouraging growth in the sector; building stakeholder participation; and monitoring trends in the tourism industry. The Ministry of Tourism has been assigned responsibility of lifeguard services and the Emperor Valley Zoo.

Established in 2004, the Tourism Development Company (TDC) is the marketing implementation agency of the Ministry of Tourism and a special purpose state enterprise mandated to develop and market our tourism industry and its tourism products. The TDC is committed to establishing and implementing standards for the development and maintenance of all tourism infrastructure and amenities at all identified tourism sites.

The Tourism Division of the Tobago House of Assembly is responsible for the formulation of the specific policy and plans for the tourism sector; designation marketing activities; product development; conducting tourism market research; and the provision of tourism information services as they relate to Tobago.

Community tourism: One of the major priorities of our Government is to strengthen and develop local tourism centres across rural Trinidad to enhance local tourism and to achieve a more diversified range of tourism products in order to support the rural industrialization thrust. The local tourism industry is an opportunity to diversify the country's economic base. It is our sincere belief that

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the rural areas of Trinidad and Tobago offer a unique experience that cannot be found elsewhere in the world.

It is also our view that tourism development can serve as a catalyst for the infrastructural development and job creation in rural areas. It is a well-known fact that the majority of our economic disadvantaged live in these areas and most of them are women; single women, who often are breadwinners in their respective households. The lives in these households must change for the better. Whilst we are not under any illusion that tourism is a panacea, we believe that the tourism industry has a very significant contribution to make in this regard.

In line with the available human, technical and financial resources, my Ministry is presently, prioritizing development of various community tourism projects. We recognize clearly that any development of the rural areas must take into consideration the culture and heritage of these areas.

Moreover, this Government has come to the conclusion that development must be done by the villagers themselves in partnership with the Government, regional corporations and the corporate sector. This is in order to ensure ownership of the tourism product by the people themselves and sustainability of the initiative. We intend to allow communities more responsibility and control over how tourism is developed in each local area. In this way, we will build entrepreneurial skills and innovation.

Indeed, I along with hon. Dr. Delmon Baker, Minister of State in the Ministry of Tourism and other technical tourism officers have started a tour of several communities in Trinidad to discuss with village councils and tourism action groups their proposals for tourism development. To date, we have visited Blanchisseuse and Trinidad east coast to examine the feasibility of these areas as prime tourist destinations.

The Ministry of Tourism and TDC are working with the Blanchisseuse Village Council on the establishment of a welcome and heritage centre, construction of a car park, change rooms and other beach amenities within the community and the development of a fish-fry festival that builds upon the region's reputation for the sweetest fish.

Moreover, serious consideration is being paid to placing lifeguards on Marianne Beach and Three Pools beach, taking into consideration the number of visitors that frequent those locations. We have plans to visit other communities within Trinidad over the course of the ensuing months.

In collaboration with the regional corporations and, in some cases, corporate Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Tourism has been working with tourism action groups to develop the capability to manage sites and attraction within their communities, as well as create entrepreneurial mindset.

Our most successful project to date and, perhaps the model for other communities to follow is that of the Turtle Village Trust. The Turtle Village Trust is a partnership of community groups in the north-east region of Trinidad and corporate giant BHP Billiton Trinidad and Tobago. The vision of the Turtle Village Trust is to make Trinidad and Tobago the premier turtle tourism destination globally. Trinidad and Tobago is one of the top turtle nesting sites in the world, and this is an attraction which must be optimized as part of our diverse tourism product.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, recognizing the immense benefits of this project, the Ministry of Tourism has provided both financial and technical support to the Turtle Village Trust. In the turtle nesting season, there has been tremendous success in the organization of the nesting sites; increased visitors and maintenance of the conservational efforts through the work of trained tour guides and environmental activities.

Apart from the turtle season, the Turtle Village Thrust has been able to discover other such sustainable livelihoods for the community by development of nature and river tours, kayaking and hiking trails. The Ministry has also joined with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture; the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, and the Brasso Seco/Paria Tourism Action Committee in a first of its kind agro-tourism pilot project.

The agro-tourism initiative focuses on the cocoa and coffee production at Brasso Seco, as well as its tourism product, which include host home stays within the community; nature trails for hiking; donkey cart tours, camping and turtle watching and Paria Bay.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, indeed, later on this month, the Ministry of Tourism will be hosting an evening of cocoa and coffee testing to introduce Brasso Seco's cocoa and coffee products to the hoteliers, owners of bed and breakfast facilities and other tourism stakeholders, in an attempt to assist the community in marketing and selling their products. This type of interactive business forum will surely assist in developing the community. Mr. Deputy Speaker, projects such as Brasso Seco's could become an example of best practice in sustainable tourism development in the Caribbean.

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An integral part of our strategy is to package and promote existing community-based products across Trinidad and Tobago and also on the international market. This will be undertaken by the implementation agency of the Ministry of Tourism, the TDC. These projects are expected to net a positive return by generating sustainable employment in the communities; stimulating community-based entrepreneurial activity and by improving accessibility of the sites and attractions in these communities, thereby boosting both domestic and international tourism traffic.

One of the TDC's key activities in building communities includes partnering with Trinidad and Tobago's various communities to promote community festivals and events, for example, culinary festival, eco-tourism events, et cetera. The TDC will also support and facilitate the development and upgrade of community, heritage and archeological sites and amenities including the Lopinot Caves, Moruga—that is Christopher Columbus landing site; Penal/Debe doubles pavilion project; Toco Light House Heritage Project; public conveniences in Port of Spain and many others.

6.15 p.m.

The TDC will provide technical assistance to four communities in Trinidad and Tobago, in an effort to empower them to conduct economically successful events. Additionally, the TDC will facilitate one community tourism development workshop and participate in at least six major tourism events/activities on the national calendar.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, marketing. Several questions and concerns have arisen over the marketing of Trinidad and Tobago as a tourism destination. The truth is, we just have not been working hard or smart enough in the past to celebrate our country at home and sell our twin island abroad. The Ministry's challenge is to make optimal use of the available financial resources in order to deliver on our mandate.

In so doing, our marketing efforts will be focused on the right markets, and we target the right audiences. We need to get value for our marketing dollars. My commitment as Minister of Tourism is to have Trinidad and Tobago recognized as a more significant player amongst Caricom tourism destinations by increasing our market share within the region. To achieve this, we intend to bring a whole new approach and a new attitude to tourism marketing. Our approach is one of partnering with the industry and thoroughly understanding the tourism business. But this is not something that we in government can do alone. It is something that we must all do together in a collaborative mode.

A dynamic board of directors at the Tourism Development Company will be installed shortly to provide the policy guidelines for the execution of the organizational mandate. A significant aspect of the mandate of the new TDC board is to lead a new and true partnership/relationship with the tourism industry.

The TDC will have a new marketing plan in place and operational before the end of 2010. This plan must be done hand in hand with the Ministry of Tourism, all the stakeholders and overseas marketing representatives.

High on my agenda is the completion of the review of our marketing representatives in key tourism source markets. We also anticipate that our overseas marketing representatives shall work closely with Minister of Foreign Affairs and Overseas Mission in pursuance of all their promotional initiatives. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this new financial year, the Tourism Development Company will dedicate some of its resources towards branding of destination, Trinidad and Tobago.

In October 2010, we will be rolling out in all our markets, USA, United Kingdom, Germany and the Caribbean a new branding communications campaign themed, "The Art of a Great Holiday". This campaign will bear a consistent message and consistent image across all markets and will demonstrate the full diversity and versatility this nation has to offer. It is intended that the brand campaign will encapsulate what potential visitors to Trinidad and Tobago can expect while on holiday here. The branding campaign will be supported by a strong consumer/trade advertising presence and awareness campaign in our main source markets, especially the United Kingdom and Holland.

Additionally, we will engage the Caribbean diaspora living virtually in all our tourism source markets, through special advertising and promotional activities as they can be great ambassadors. Being the best kept secret in the Caribbean is not going to cut it in an increasingly competitive global market. We need to market ourselves better. Our intention is to use our diverse culture and varied festivals which occur virtually every month, to anchor a significant year round tourism development. We will also continue to follow our destination niche, marketing strategy highlighting eco/soft adventures, bird watching, wedding, honeymoons, leisure, sport, diving, yachting, heritage, culinary and sport.

In this regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the marketing arm of the Ministry of Tourism—the Tourism Development Company—will utilize a range of marketing and public relations measures and these will include:

1. Multi-faceted destination marketing programmes in our key source markets, such as North America, United Kingdom, Germany, Scandinavia and the Caribbean.

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2. Participating in a range of tradeshows to highlight business and leisure opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago. For example, IMEX, Sea Trade, Beneath the Sea, World Travel Market and International Tourism.
3. Conducting Caribbean road shows and multi-media campaigns that highlight our shopping, events/culture, attractions and sports. Whilst the Caribbean visitors typically do not stay in higher priced accommodation, preferring guest homes and bed and breakfast priorities, regional visitors do contribute significantly to several visitor expenditure.

The TDC is developing a new campaign to replace the "Come for the Shopping, Stay for the Fun" campaign that was launched in 2007/2008. The Caribbean campaign will be primarily consumer based and be expanded from four islands to all the English-speaking Caricom countries. It will also include the development of partnership with regional air carriers such as Caribbean Airlines and LIAT, to increase airlift to the island and promote travel incentives to the destination.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, moreover, the TDC will be revamping our advertising techniques. Whereas we will still continue with the travel trade advertising through multiplatform magazines, websites, banners, ads, feature editorials, direct marketing activities and general advertising, a great amount of our advertising will be via social media and online campaigns with major web based tour operators.

In the first quarter of 2011, TDC will be launching its Spanish language website in preparation for a greater marketing presence in Latin America.

Cruise Tourism: As a cruise destination, Trinidad and Tobago is growing. In 2009, the cruise sector posted its best performance since 2006, setting the record for the highest number of visitors within the first half of the year, with a total of 86,727 visitors. Enjoying a five-fold increase—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 33(6), point of order. The Member is an experienced Member and should not be reading his speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 33(6) says:

“Except with the leave of the Speaker, a Member shall not read his speech; but he may read extracts from written or printed papers...and may refresh...”

Mr. Imbert: He read the whole thing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—his memory by reference. I am quite certain that the Member had sought the leave of the Speaker and is allowed to read.

Mr. Imbert: He is a former Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am quite certain he had sought the leave of the Speaker.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I could understand his anxiety. That former administration which is the biggest embarrassment of the century, particularly the Member for Diego Martin North/East—[*Desk thumping*] They are not used to intelligent information. [*Desk thumping*] When the Member for Diego Martin West was speaking about gobbledygook and about people speaking as though they are afflicted with a pip, that is acceptable language to him. So I understand his anxiety. My colleague reminds me that we are developing certified clowns in tourism. Maybe we will have you as one of the court-jesters clowns. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what about sports tourism? I am sure my colleague, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, will be happy to hear this, and I say that with the leave of the Member for Diego Martin North/East. Their estimated market size of the global sport tourism market was US \$600 billion or 10 per cent of the global tourism economy. Up to the year 2014, the sport tourism market is expected to grow at 6 per cent per annum. For the new financial year, the TDC will launch an aggressive marketing of the sport tourism initiative. This project will be developed in conjunction with the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Sport Company and aims to promote opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago to host local and international teams from various disciplines for sporting events and training camps. In this regard, a single point person, a sports specialist, will be employed within the TDC. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Domestic Tourism. Domestic tourism is an essential aspect of Trinidad and Tobago's tourism sector. The duality of our twin island Republic, coupled with the relatively large size of Trinidad, makes domestic tourism a viable option for revenue generation.

In 2008, the TDC study indicated that almost 300,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago took at least one overnight trip with the twin island, generating—hear this, Mr. Deputy Speaker—TT \$1.7 billion in revenue. This is a significant domestic market.

Local promotions such as the "Stay to Get Away" campaign which encourages locals to take advantage of "stay at home" successfully supported the domestic tourism thrust with Tobago reaping significant benefits as it faced the recent shortfall in international arrivals. During the months of August and July—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; thank you colleagues. For 2011, we aim to increase our domestic tourism niche by partnering with arts and cultural groups to promote Trinidad and Tobago's indigenous culture, and increasing the number of stakeholders who participate in the "Stay to get Away" campaigns.

Event Tourism: The Conventions Bureau of the Tourism Development Company is responsible for business and events tourism, marketing, development and support for bids, as well as a business tourism events strategy.

The Conventions Bureau plays a pivotal role as we position Trinidad and Tobago as the leading destination for the meetings, incentives, exhibition and Conference in the South Caribbean. The ultimate goal is to bolster the business tourism industry's impacting on economic development, by generating income through various service sectors. According to World Travel and Tourism Council, more than US \$800 billion was spent on business travel in 2008. Producing high yield visitors, business tourist spend more than US \$1,000 per day. This is more than double the estimated average daily expenditure for leisure visitors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, furthermore, it is estimated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization that as many as 40 per cent of business visitors return with family and friends. It is interesting to note that whilst we have a low share of the Caribbean's leisure tourism market, Trinidad and Tobago ranks second only to Puerto Rico as a business travel destination.

The Ministry of Tourism intends to fully capitalize on our capacity, experience and capability in meetings and events tourism. Moreover, we would be further developing the business tourism niche by leveraging our strong tradition of commercial business travel which is fuelled by the country's robust energy and manufacturing sectors. This is all with the aim of increasing Trinidad and Tobago's share of the multibillion dollar discretionary business travel market.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the US alone, discretionary business travel accounted for an estimated \$50.5 billion in revenues in 2008.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, furthermore, it is estimated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization that as many as 40 per cent of business visitors return with

family and friends. It is interesting to note that whilst we have a low share of the Caribbean leisure tourism market, Trinidad and Tobago ranks second only to Puerto Rico as a business travel destination. The Ministry of Tourism intends to fully capitalize on our capacity, experience and capability in meetings and event tourism.

Moreover, we will be further developing the business tourism niche by leveraging our strong tradition of commercial business travel, which is fuelled by the country's robust energy and manufacturing sectors. This is all with the aim of increasing Trinidad and Tobago's share of the multibillion dollar discretionary business travel market. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the United States alone, discretionary business travel accounted for an estimate of \$50.5 billion in revenues in 2008. That is US billion dollars.

Trinidad and Tobago has achieved quite a formidable reputation for hosting mega regional and global events such as the FIFA under-17 men and women tournaments and the world karate competitions. These events and meetings have drawn international attention to Trinidad and Tobago as a tourism destination. And one should never forget that Trinidad and Tobago amazingly successfully hosts every single year, the biggest street party and cultural extravaganza in the world. That is Carnival, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Trinidad and Tobago Convention Bureau was successful in winning the bid for hosting of the International Conference on Caribbean Literature to be held in November this year. The Bureau has also developed and implemented a vigorous well-coordinated and focused marketing effort, locally and regionally. We have introduced ourselves as destination Trinidad and Tobago to a range of meeting planners, association executives and corporate travel coordinators to key sources.

Accommodation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is another area of concern. Investment in the accommodation sector continues to be encouraging. It is expected that the Star Hotel in Piarco will be completed by the first quarter of 2011, and this will increase the room stock in Trinidad and Tobago to a further 140 rooms. The first quarter of 2010 saw the completion of the much anticipated renovation of our 200-room Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre, with the addition of an updated fitness room.

The Vanguard, formerly Hilton Tobago, which my colleague, the Minister of Trade and Industry, spoke about earlier, will commence operations during the first quarter of 2011, and will add 200 rooms to the stock in Tobago. [*Dusk thumping*] Upgrade of the current room stock is being aided by introduction of the Accommodation Incentive Plan, intended to help enhance the quality of accommodation operations available to international visitors.

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The plan targets hotel and guest houses not exceeding 100 rooms, that have been in existence for four years or more. This incentive plan to have high quality accommodation available is especially needed now, given today's discerning tourists and the diverse choices available. Eight applications have already been received for this plan. The Hampton Inn, that is the Hilton brand, is expected to start construction on Ariapita Avenue shortly. This will add approximately 150 international branded rooms to the national stock, as well as contribute to the critical mass of rooms needed to compete for meetings, incentives, conventions and events market.

With respect to investment facilitation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the last fiscal year, up to August 30th, 2010, 43 projects with a capital value of TT \$342,889,965 received incentives under the Tourism Development Act 2000. Thirty-eight of these projects were tourism transport with capital investment of TT \$5,469,850, which created 38 permanent jobs. Five of these projects were accommodation projects with the capital investment of \$337,420,115, and were granted in respect of new builds, expansion and refurbishment.

Included among them were the Carlton Savannah, Vanguard Hotel Limited, the former Hilton Tobago, and the Cara Suites Hotel Conference Centre. These projects will generate 314 permanent jobs. In fiscal 2010/2011, we expect to see the opening of the Star Hotel in Piarco with 140 rooms as early as the fourth quarter of 2010. In Port of Spain, we expect to see the start of the construction of a 140-room Hampton Inn on Ariapita Avenue in 2011.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I turn my attention to building capacity. As more destinations compete for an increased share of the global tourism market, now more than ever, the adoption and adherence to the international tourism product and service quality standards are key elements in determining the competitiveness and ranking of destination. Recognizing that Trinidad and Tobago's overall competitiveness as a tourism destination is highly dependent on meeting and exceeding these standards, capacity building of the sector's human resource through targeted training programme is a priority.

With respect to safety and security, at a time when people are more fearful of the dangers of global terrorism, tourists are increasingly choosing destinations which address issues such as visitor safety and security. The most important action for any tourism destination, therefore, is to take all necessary steps for the safety and protection of tourists, and to provide adequately for them in times of distress. In this modern era of communication, news of any untoward incident travels, quickly endangering the reputation of the country as a safe destination.

Therefore, notwithstanding a clever and creative marketing campaign, we recognize that a destination will not receive a significant inflow of foreign tourism if we are unable to provide a safe and secure environment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker and Members of this honourable House, in conclusion, tourism is one of the key pillars for the diversification of the economy, and we are committed to nurturing and promoting its sustained growth. For the plan of action that I have outlined, we estimated that the contribution of tourism to the GDP will increase by 3 per cent over the next five years. Visitor arrival should increase by an estimated 3 per cent per annum, and 500 new jobs will be created in the hotel sector for fiscal 2011.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you and may God bless our beautiful islands and people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Collin Partap): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I deem it an honour to participate in this debate on the Appropriation Bill 2011, especially since it is my inaugural contribution to this august assembly. Prior to my election as the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, I had been a mere spectator with respect to such budget deliberations. However, tonight, I am humbled to be given the opportunity to represent the voices of my constituents in Cumuto/Manzanilla, and the broader population of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

For that, I am grateful to them and to my distinguished Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Siparia. I also want to thank the Prime Minister for the confidence she has shown for appointing me as the Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Since this is my first contribution to the House, let me pay my respects to the Chair, and I know this is the Deputy Speaker's first action in the House, so let me congratulate him on behalf of the people of Cumuto/Manzanilla. And if you allow me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me add to the quota of commendation to the Minister of Finance for presenting to this honourable House, the first budget of the People's Partnership Government led by our distinguished Prime Minister.

It is the first time I can remember that a budget is presented and it is embraced by all and sundry without the unaccustomed sound of fury and criticism and pain, and the wailing and gnashing of teeth by those who have and who have less. Truly, as the Prime Minister said elsewhere, and I quote her, "This is a people's budget". [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, our distinguished Prime Minister had some choice words in explaining the rationale of this budget. No one could have said it better, and if you allow me, I will quote two paragraphs from a statement that the Prime Minister made on the budget, published on page 13 of the *Express* of Thursday, September 9th, 2010. I quote:

“This budget indicates a marked departure from the reckless political and economic culture of unproductive development, inefficiency, disorganization, and blatant squandermania, that were the regrettable hallmarks of the PNM regime.”

And let me quote again, the hon. Prime Minister.

“The People’s Partnership administration has kept faith with the people and has steadfastly abandoned the financial lunacy that characterized the previous government.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you can tell from the sound financial construct of the 2010/2011 budget, and with prudent performance-based management, this Government intends to restore the T&T economy to the path of sustainable real growth.

As this budget debate proceeds, I am certain you will hear from my colleagues on the Government side as they elaborate the various projects and action plans that their Ministries are pursuing, as contained in the 2010/2011 fiscal package. Mr. Deputy Speaker, all part of the overall plans of the Government to fulfil the mandate as it serves the people, serves the people, serves the people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I sat here this morning and listened to the pathetic presentation of the Leader of the Opposition, nitpicking at the budget presented by the Minister of Finance. In fact, all he did was to engage in "ol' talk" and political rhetoric. I want to know, is this the same Keith Rowley who attacked the PNM as the conscience of the party when he sat over on that side for almost two years while his party was in Government? Today, he is the purveyor of mischief and fear in this honourable House, but he had nothing to say; no new policies. Just a rehash of the same old failed PNM policies. He mentioned nothing about crime, nothing about housing; nothing at all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when this Government is trying to prepare our students for a first world economy with technology as the backbone, the hon. Leader of the Opposition made this statement that our Form 1 students are dunces, and I want him to withdraw that statement. It was a callous statement and I want him to withdraw it, and I want him to withdraw it now.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the honourable Member was supported by members of his 12-man team who seemed ashamed of the weight of PNM squandermania and financial lunacy, though they still refuse to admit their culpability. Theirs was a perfunctory performance as though they were just going through the motions of debate as an act of penance. Penance it should have been. They do not deserve any sympathy for what they have done to this country. Day after day we are being confronted by the sins they have committed against the people of this country.

The PNM has stretched to the limit the patience of the citizens. A two million-dollar flag, a price tag of \$7 million per bed at the Scarborough Hospital yet to be completed, billions of dollars in cost overruns for UDeCott contracts and if I go to list them I could be here till 12.00 o'clock. As my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas East, stated earlier, the Vanguard Hotel, \$1.5 million per room. We need to get the Guinness Book of World Records here because that is a record, a record of incompetence.

Mr. Speaker, the secret is now being exposed, that, while they held the reins of office and power, they deliberately and consciously brought our beloved nation and its people to its knees by the policies which placed tall buildings ahead of the welfare of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, instead of wearing the proverbial sackcloth and ashes begging forgiveness from a bruised population, they come like Pontius Pilate washing their hands from the acts of financial lunacy while they were in office. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

Hon. C. Partap: People of this country will not forget and will not forgive. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the PNM has consistently failed in upgrading and reforming the system of governance in Trinidad and Tobago. A review of the manifesto and budget promises of the PNM since 2001, and particularly between 2007 and 2010, exposed the PNM weakness in dealing with reform and implementing sound governance.

The PNM had been a colossal failure in reforming local government, the Parliament and the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. The PNM attempt at constitutional reform fell flat on its face and was buried in an avalanche of criticism. You know why, Mr. Deputy Speaker? You know why? The PNM did not take the people into their confidence. The former government demonstrated its disdain for the population when it circulated a working document on constitutional reform, placing it before a round table of technocrats and then, without the benefit of public discussion, and, before you could say Patrick Manning, it appeared as a draft Constitution.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, the PNM was prepared to keep this secret, the matter of the draft Constitution, had it not been for the intervention of our Member for Siparia, our distinguished Prime Minister, who was then—[*Desk thumping*]*—*who was then the Deputy Leader of the United National Congress and Leader of the Opposition. The Member for Siparia raised the matter of a secret Constitution of then Prime Minister Patrick Manning at a meeting of the UNC/Alliance at Debe junction on October 10, 2007. The Member for Siparia told the public meeting that October night that Prime Minister Manning wanted to implement the draft Constitution if he should get a special majority in the November 2007 general election, but, thanks to the people of Fyzabad and Cumuto/Manzanilla, he never received such a mandate. [*Desk thumping*]

When all was exposed on October 10, 2007 and the public began to ask questions, nobody, including the round table participants, knew the author or authors of that draft Constitution. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the former Prime Minister's fingerprints were all over the document as he went from region to region advocating the very draft Constitution designed to make him a virtual dictator. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the general consensus was that the so-called draft Constitution was converting Trinidad and Tobago into an uncontrolled, corrupt dictatorship without consideration for the welfare of the population.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to give the Members of this honourable House a sample of some of the comments by distinguished members of the public after the then Opposition leader, now Prime Minister, "buss de mark".

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Economist Indera Sagewan-Ali wanted to know who drafted the draft Constitution and why it was kept a secret in this democracy. Political activist, Karen Bart-Alexander, described the draft Constitution as, and I quote, "the ranting of a madman and a recipe for disaster". Former diplomat and head of the public service, Reginald Dumas, said, and I quote, "A brazen attempt to bring all the institutions of the country, the Judiciary to be sure, but also the Police, Teaching and Public Service Commissions, the DPP, the Parliament and so on under the control of one man."

Mr. Speaker, the great political theorist, Montesquieu, said that when the Legislature and the Executive powers, that is to say the power to make laws and the power to run the country on a day-to-day basis are united in the same person or in the same body of persons, there can be no liberty. Mr. Speaker, there is absolutely no doubt that it was an act of God that the People's Partnership

administration, led by our Prime Minister, was voted into government to rescue this country from the long arm of the Patrick Manning and PNM dictatorship. [*Desk thumping*] The people's prayers have been answered.

Mr. Speaker, we have had four constitutional exercises before, in 1962 when we gained independence; in 1972, the Hugh Wooding Constitutional Commission; the 1987, Sir Isaac Hyatali Constitutional Commission and the recent debacle that was the round table. Mr. Speaker, all the Constitution commissions of the past were headed by an independent, fair-minded group of commissioners with the country's best interest at heart. The last administration set up a round table made up of technocrats, academics and a team of Ministers headed by the then Prime Minister who now bears the title, the only title, of Member of Parliament for San Fernando East.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the then Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, in what he termed "Lecture One", delivered at the College of Centre City Mall, Chaguanas, on Monday the 3rd of August, 2009 and you remember when he went to the lectures this is the nice, little, glossy booklet that accompanied the lectures and the only face that I see returning from the back line-up, or, there he is right here, the Member for Diego Martin Central [*Showing document to Members present*] the only one who returned. He is right there in the corner.

I quote:

"You see the difference? the process. A different process, Ladies and Gentlemen. A process which, for the first time in our attempts at Constitutional Reform, we involved the politicians..."

"We involve the politicians". [*Interruption*] No, you are here, do not worry.

"...there were about five or six ministers involved in it—meeting with the technocrats and chaired by the Prime Minister."

I continue.

"There would have been some PNM views in it: some of my own personal views; and some of the views of the Ministers in it."

Mr. Speaker, what the then Prime Minister was saying is that the document was wholly and solely a construct of the PNM. It was important to have the input of the PNM party members deliberately excluding and suppressing the views and inputs of the population at large. Mr. Speaker, you are assured that the People's Partnership Government will do things differently.

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Pillar 6: Good governance—that is in the manifesto of this Government’s policy framework which is now the government policy framework of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for sustainable development—speaks of people participation, and let me put it in language the Opposition will understand. We will consult with the people at every stage in this process. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition spoke about the smelter plants that they tried to force upon the population. He seems to have forgotten the unrelenting wave of discontent that united all sectors of society, environmental groups, student bodies, media, business organizations, everyone joined under a common banner and said no to the PNM—[*Interruption*—no to the PNM. Even the courts, Mr. Speaker, said no to the PNM but like Pharaoh, Mr. Speaker, their hearts were hardened and they refused to heed the cry of the people. On May 24, Mr. Speaker, they had no choice but to hear the voice of the people of Trinidad and Tobago when they soundly rejected them at the polls. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, our aim is to promote a climate of national dialogue within a framework of civil and consensus building. Mr. Speaker, we will initiate a process of true broad-based consultation to improve the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as appropriate to our current circumstances and stage of national development. You see, Mr. Speaker, the objective of constitutional reform is not to increase the power of the Executive so that one man could be a dictator but to establish a framework for good, responsive governance and to nurture and build a participatory culture to strengthen our democracy. Mr. Speaker, this will move us away from the culture of maximum leadership and develop a politics of inclusion rather than the present system where the winner takes all.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that the rejected PNM government had an obsession with interfering with the rights enshrined in the independent institutions of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. Take, for example, the independence of the Judiciary. You will recall the shameful assault on Chief Justice Sat Sharma and the ensuing public debacle that brought the offices of the Prime Minister, Attorney General, Chief Magistrate and DPP into disrepute. You will also recall the 2007 Appeal Court ruling that quashed the conviction of Basdeo Panday on the grounds of apparent bias and, of course, the Public Service Commission, the judgment received by Feroza Ramjohn and Devant Maharaj, to name a few, a testament to the PNM’s interference in independent institutions.

And what of the Police Service you ask, the Member for Diego Martin Central? Let me tell you. In 2004 the former PNM, the Member for San Fernando East, usurped the powers of the Police Service Commission unto himself and he

flouted the procedure and handed a letter of appointment to the newly appointed Commissioner, Everald Snaggs.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Integrity Commission, such an important institution, vested with essential functions as the watchdog of public officials, the PNM tried to tie their hands by attempting to dissuade whistleblowers from coming forward via a contentious piece of legislation, which was soundly rejected by the then UNC Opposition.

The Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago is the lifeblood, the very foundation of our precious democracy. I vow today that we will never turn our backs on it and we will carry out the awesome responsibility of reforming it and I will do so in partnership with the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in stark contrast to the round table, whenever you engage in an exercise to change the rights and privileges of the people, you must have sound guiding principles by which a constitution commission would operate. I am pleased to report that after substantive research and consideration of other Caribbean, Commonwealth and other jurisdictions the following were developed: Draft terms of reference to guide the establishment of a constitutional commission was prepared and a draft proposal for a constitutional commission secretariat were developed. These are currently being reviewed before it is taken to Cabinet for approval.

The People's Partnership will not make the mistakes of the previous government; we will observe the bedrock principle that the Constitution should emerge out of the collective aspirations, will and judgment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The difference is that our consultations will inform and influence documents produced and positions taken by our Government will not seek to force upon the population any idea or policy direction.

I would like to remind the Members opposite who sat on that round table—it might not be much now, [*Laughter*—that a report was tabled, Public Consultation by Prof. Selwyn Ryan and Prof. John La Guerre. What happened to that report? I will tell you; I have a copy of the report right here. This is the said report. [*Hon. Partap displays document*] That report never saw the light of day. They encapsulated the opinions and comments of the public and it was treated with scorn. Why could they not publish it? They chose to publish this, "Lectures of the Prime Minister", but they did not publish the opinions of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Disgraceful, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame!

Hon. C. Partap: We will engage in a public education programme about the Constitution, before consultation begins. This would facilitate greater participation of people, a problem that plagued the last process.

When people feel as if their input has no value, they would not attend. I have more people present at my party group meetings than the PNM at these so-called constitutional consultations. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me read from a document some of the attendance numbers: UWI Resource Centre, October 12, 2009, 30 persons—let me tell you, at my party group meetings, I have over 120 people at every sitting everywhere in the constituency. [*Desk thumping*]*—*Public Library, Point Fortin, Member for Point Fortin, 34 persons, disgraceful; Chaguanas Government Secondary, 42; Sangre Grande Civic Centre, 38; Petit Valley Community Centre, December 05, 2009, 50; I think that was the peak—*[Laughter]* [*Crosstalk*]*—*Preysal High School, January 09, 2010, 30; Port of Spain City Hall, February 27, 2010, 51; Mayaro Civic Centre, Gypsy, your constituency, March 13, 2010, that was when the Partnership was on the roll, people were seeing the light, it dropped down to 28; Thick Village Community Centre, Siparia, March 20, 2010, elections were close, 25; Cedros Secondary School, March 27, elections closer, 16; Arima Town Hall, April 10, election called, 15; it is dropping.

Mr. Speaker, I will not bore you with the rest; it is pathetic, I know. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

The Constitution Commission's first order of business will be to hold consultations with the public on four issues detailed in the policy framework of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for sustainable development:

1. Limiting the Prime Minister to two successive terms as head of Government;
2. Mechanisms for the referendum process;
3. Fixed election date for national and local elections; and
4. A right of recall for non-performing elected representatives.

I want to turn my attention to some of the matters relating to the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla and the PNM's neglect of constituencies and communities. Promises made by the last government for the development of infrastructure in Cumuto/Manzanilla were ignored. Whatever little was allocated in previous budgets came as a result of protests by residents. This constituency has been saddled with extremely bad roads, because of the arrogance of the former Minister of Works and Transport.

I am happy to announce that through the new Minister, the distinguished Member for Chaguanas West, roads in my constituency are receiving attention for the first time in almost nine years. [*Desk thumping*] Some of the roads paved in the last three months include Gilkes Street extending into Walke Street; Plum Mitan Main Road; Boodoo Highway; Singh Trace and the Guaico Tamana Main Road. Work has begun on building retaining walls to prevent land slippages on the Guanapo Southern Main Road. I was also asked by the hon. Minister of Works and Transport to provide him with a priority listing. That listing includes roads such as Fishing Pound in North Oropouche; two Caigual roads, the Cumuto Main Road and the Tamana Hill Road.

I am also happy to announce that the rehabilitation, paving and drainage work on the St. Marie Emmanuel Road in Cumuto will begin shortly by the RDC, the Rural Development Corporation, under the auspices of the Local Government Ministry. Let me say that work has already begun on the Los Amadillos Road.

What the former Minister of Local Government could not do in eight years, the new Local Government Minister, my distinguished colleague, the Member for Fyzabad, has done in four months. [*Desk thumping*] I share the joy and happiness of the citizens who use the St. Marie Emmanuel Road, as well as that of the former MP, Mr. Harry Partap, who was persistent in his calling for the paving of the road. That is what you call service to the people.

I am also working very closely with my colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities, hon. Emmanuel George, to begin water extensions to various parts of the constituency. This will include relief for the people of Biche, Plum Mitan, Coryal to Four Roads, Tamana and along the Guaico Main Road. We will be working also to ensure that electricity is provided to communities such as Plaisance Drive, Flemming Road and Bumdiarsingh Trace.

Only yesterday I spoke to my colleague, the Minister of the People, Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh, and I asked him to provide a wheelchair to Mr. Vishnu Lochan. I am pleased to announce that Mr. Lochan will be receiving his wheelchair on Thursday. Thank you, Mr. Minister; that is service. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, some of my constituents have also benefited from the increase in pension, like John Marchan, Deosaran Rago, Afrose Boodoo, Eugene Mohansingh and Sahadeo Sooknanan, just to name a few. They would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister for her care and concern shown to them.

The people of Cumuto/Manzanilla will benefit greatly from this budget. I will just take a few moments to highlight some of the other benefits they will be receiving. Agriculture, fisheries and forestry: Under the Water Management and

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Flood Control Programme, there will be a focus on construction of farm crossing and sluice gates and the dredging and clearing of canals and drains at Fishing Pond in Manzanilla and Cushe in Nariva.

Under the Agricultural Access Programme, there will be the rehabilitation of the agricultural roads in Cumuto and Tamana.

Drainage: Under the Infrastructure Development Fund for flood mitigation, there will be a commencement of the North Manzanilla sea wall project, which involves the construction of retaining walls along the North Coast of Manzanilla between L'Branche River mouth and the Manzanilla Beach facility.

Under environment there is a project under in the Nariva Swamp called the Carbon Sequestration Project, which was launched this weekend by the hon. Minister of Housing and the Environment, Dr. Roodal Moonilal, and myself. This project will not only reduce carbon emissions, but also have tangible benefits for the surrounding communities of Plum Mitan and Biche, including areas for sustainable agriculture in Block A and jobs in the reforestation programme. As Kallian Deonanan, an environmental activist articulated, and I quote:

“The project works in tandem with the community which is a key stakeholder. Other projects which did not include the community failed, this one will succeed.”

Tourism: Under the Tourism Action Programme, the Manzanilla Beach facility improvement project will continue.

Education: Construction work will continue at the Sangre Grande SWAHA Hindu College. The issue of the Biche High School will be detailed by the Minister of Education, but I know the Minister is awaiting gas emission and soil testing reports, so we will listen to the hon. Minister for the progress on the school.

There will also be the establishment of a COSTAATT facility at Sangre Grande. I will also like to thank the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education for the laptops which will be provided to hundreds of students in my constituency. They are not dunces, as the Leader of the Opposition and the PNM stated earlier today. They are deserving children that would not have had access to a laptop had it not been for this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

In closing, I will like to thank the hon. Prime Minister for her vision for the country. We, the People's Partnership Government, will continue to serve the people, serve the people, serve the people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute on this Bill.

I commend the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, our Opposition Leader, for his in-depth analysis of the 2010/2011 Budget. The hon. Member exposed the deception perpetrated by that Government through the falsehood presented by the Minister of Finance in the budget for this fiscal period. This budget posed many, many, many more questions than answers for many of us on this side.

The Minister of Finance read 42 pages of a document that was very vague, full of fluff and falsehood, as though he was still on the campaign trail, trying to convince people to vote for them.

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, Members on the other side failed to realize that the honeymoon period is over and the reality is that they are now the Government only but for a short space of time.

I would like to also mention and I must admit that after listening to the very thrilling and exciting contribution made by the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, that tourists will be running to Trinidad and Tobago to eat cocoa. The Member for Chaguanas East who appears to be missing from his constituency—nobody could find him anywhere; Toco/Sangre Grande—

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Miss A. Hospedales: Chaguanas East. You remember? Yeah, that is the one "uh" talking about: Toco/Sangre Grande and Cumuto/Manzanilla, all these Members fail to realize that today we are here debating—it is not about us, you know. Right? But it is actually about the Government. What strategies do you all have in place to maintain the stability of the economy? We have not heard them. What strategies do you all have in place to alleviate poverty? What strategies do you all have to reduce the rate of unemployment and to further the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? We have not heard them. [*Desk thumping*] It is not about attacking us. And you know, all evening I am saying all they highlight is this and that and the other, that they claim that the PNM would have done and this is only their very foiled attempt to actually deflect from the attention that they did not perform over the last three months. They did not perform. [*Interruption*]

They want to talk about nine years? If you look at the achievements listed in this book that you all brought claiming, on top of that, to be yours, it is all branded PNM, PNM, PNM. [*Desk thumping*] It is all branded, PNM.

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All they have to show are the things that we have achieved; the things that we have achieved. All that they have to show are the things that we have achieved while we were in office. Some of them are so bold. You know, I remembered pointing out to the Member for Diego Martin Central that in the Social Sector Investment Programme the Member for—where is he—Caroni Central; they were so bold to present the achievement of the Ministry of Social Development as though it is the achievements of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. That is not honest. So they are so bold that they present the initiatives of the People's National Movement as though it is their own.

I also want to point out to the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, whenever you come into the House to present, you must not borrow notes from others. Present your own notes. Right? [*Desk thumping*] Present your own thoughts and make your own points. All they have done is claim to establish—I want to repeat that again—all they have done over the last three months or 12 weeks or 15 weeks, however long it is, they claim to establish the Children's Life Fund and I will come back to that a little later. We will elaborate. Fooled our senior citizens to believe that they were entitled to \$3,000, not to mention, not just our senior citizens who are 65 years and over, but those persons 60 to 64, making them believe that they would be entitled to a pension of \$3,000. But we know better.

They fooled our minimum wage earners, including CEPEP and URP workers, to believe that they were getting an increase. They went on an extravagant outing in the USA and lo and behold, they have resorted to using bullying and intimidatory tactics on teachers and I will make mention of that later on, and other public servants; fired people from right, from right and centre and there are many more that they claim would have to go.

The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla—again I am coming back to him—is no different from the other more mature Members in his Government, because, you know he had the opportunity to stand up in this House and speak the truth. He comes here and tells false lies about the roads in his constituency. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we can tell you that there was approximately \$75 million spent on paving roads in Cumuto/Manzanilla. Tell the truth, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Tell the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Partap: Seventy-five thousand dollars is more likely.

Miss A. Hospedales: Seventy-five million dollars. You could ask your dad and he will tell you. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I believe that we are going well but we are going overboard. Kindly address the Chair. Do not get into crosstalk and if you address me, you will be safe.

Miss A. Hospedales: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The attacks on us, personal and otherwise, again, are to deflect from their irresponsibility in office. They have done nothing and they have nothing to show for it either. Over the last 12 weeks we have heard, and we have heard over and over again from the Member for Tunapuna, that the economy is in such a bad state; it is in shambles; the Treasury has no money; it empty, whatever. So many things were said about the economy, but to my amazement a budget on Wednesday the 8th, a budget of \$49 billion with a deficit of \$7.7 billion was presented in this House and I am sure every Member on this side was amazed as well; well, of course the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

I remember sitting in this House and hearing negative comments over and over and over from Members who were seated on that side, a whole lot of negative comments about deficit financing, but it is these very said Members who sit here with straight faces and some of them probably smiling, grinning, and, you know, who sit here to defend or stand to defend their budget and giving it a whole lot of compliments and saying, "Oh, how good it is". But I will come to the reviews that were given by members of the population just now. Do not worry.

They are now in government and as a result nothing is wrong with deficit financing; nothing is wrong with spending \$135 million per day; over \$5.6 million an hour; nothing is wrong with that. They have not told us about the repercussions of their robust spending measures. They have not mentioned one thing, and I thought that is what they would have been coming here to discuss; to talk to us about. But they are still on the campaign trail; still looking for votes; still trying to convince people to vote for them. I really do not understand it.

It is quite evident that the Government's debt and public sector debt will increase significantly and we have not heard anything about that. Additionally, many people in society who heard the budget had the following to say and the reviews are as follows:

“A cosmetic budget. \$49 billion fiscal package leaves a lot of urgent questions unanswered. No clear plan on how costs will be covered.”

Second:

“The budget, a no-brainer.”

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Third:

“The budget irresponsible and disappointing.”

And fourth:

“What economic growth strategy informed that budget?”

The budget presented by the Minister of Finance failed to tell us about the strategies that will be employed to address headline inflation which is at 14.1% or probably over that. Further, it is emitting more questions than answers. Again, we have not gotten answers to the questions.

Question number one: What regulatory measures would be put in place to prevent pension fund trustees from being exposed to the potential risks of trading in the downstream energy sector? Question Number two: When will the minimum wage earners be provided with their promised \$20? Question three: How much will it cost the taxpayers of this country to get out of the Alutrint project? There is a cost attached and we have not heard anything about that. What is meant by making East Port of Spain as an old Havana? What is the International Business Centre and how do they propose that that would be operated? We do not know. We need answers. What is the long-term impact on the economy by making payments to the depositors of Clico? We do not know. We need answers.

The Social Sector Investment Programme does not highlight allocation for CEPEP and URP. Mr. Speaker, through you, could the hon. Minister of Finance tell us where we could find these allocations? These are just a few of the questions that I have and I am sure other Members on this side who have to contribute later on this week will also highlight numerous questions that they have in their minds.

Another thing that I did not hear which was quite amazing to me was the fact that we heard nothing about the development of Laventille. This one sticks in my mind because I could remember that on the 14th of September 2009 the Member for Chaguanas West stood in this House as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. This is what he said in his own words. He said:

“There was not a word about Laventille.”

I wish I "coulda" talk like you. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

“There was not a word about Laventille, the transformation of Laventille; nothing about putting a factory in Laventille; nothing about putting a branch of First Citizens Bank in Laventille and nothing to transform the lives of the people of Laventille.”

The hon. Member tried to convince us that he cared for the people of Laventille, but as soon as they got into office, as soon as they got the opportunity to govern, we heard about the development of the four "C"s. You all heard that?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Miss A. Hospedales: We heard about the development of the four "C"s. What is to be expected for the constituencies that the Members on this side represent? What is to be expected? We hear about equity and equality and we hear that we will serve all. We hear so many flattering words but, really, what is to be expected for the constituencies that we represent?

The Minister of Finance did not make reference to the development of Laventille which we had comprehensively outlined and began to implement under the East Port of Spain Company and a Cabinet-appointed committee of Ministers. He highlighted plans for the four "C"s: Couva; Charlieville; Carapichaima and Chaguanas; the building of a port at Felicity; a science park and business incubators.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they would want us on this side to believe that they are the defenders of the poor, but we the hon. Members on this side see clearly, with 2020 vision. We recognize what they really care about—creating jobs for the boys and girls. The Member for Chaguanas East talks about dipping in the country's purse, but \$13 million is allocated for their brothers-in-law. That is amazing!

Other critical issues that this budget did not bring relief in are as follows: The budget did not tell us what strategies would be put in place immediately to relieve the already high food prices. We need to know what your strategies are. What will be done to address the serious drainage problems that have become even more frequent in this country? Which roads will be paved? What new initiatives will be implemented to reduce road fatalities and crime?

The Member for Tabaquite talked about crime, but when they were on this side they spoke as though they were experts on crime; that they had all the answers for the issues of crime that were taking place in the country and made many people believe they could wave a magic wand and the problem would disappear. Three months later and we witness many, many, many more lives lost, including those of members of the protective services. They are facing the reality. It is not as easy as it seems. I know the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, in her contribution, will elaborate more on this issue.

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An amazing and almost laughable initiative that they have proposed is this tunnel. Just imagine! A tunnel from Tunapuna to Maracas! Many persons had the following to say about this: a waste of money; madness; this is impossible; the resources could be used to construct more roads to reduce traffic congestion.

How important is this to the people who continue to hope for the promised increase in their minimum wage? For persons 60 to 64, who were tricked into believing that they would have been entitled to a pension? Members on the opposite side cannot be trusted. I will say it again: They cannot be trusted. According to a former American President Abraham Lincoln, he said:

“You can fool some of people some of time; but you cannot fool all the people all of the time.”

It is in pursuit of this objective that members of the Government continue to deny that they made promises and did not intend to keep them. They are becoming famous for saying: It wasn't me. That has become the personal and popular mantra of the UNC coalition.

Mr. Speaker, I feel as though we were all forced to even find answers to the questions that I have asked. We are all forced to fill in the blanks because we do not have the answers. We are asking you to answer the questions we are posing. The people deserve answers to these questions.

Further, for the record, when we take a close look at the Social Sector Investment Programme, a document which gives details on the policies and expenditure measures outlined in the budget presentation, it is quite evident that the People's National Movement (PNM) has done a great job. As I said earlier, if you look through these documents, the achievements are all branded PNM, PNM, PNM. The Social Sector Investment Programme (SSIP) 2011 highlights the success experienced by the Ministry of Health during the fiscal period 2010, which all occurred under the tenure of the previous Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, two district health facilities in Chaguanas and Siparia and the St. Joseph Enhanced Health Centre were opened. This was just a part of the PNM's commitment to expand the network of health centres in La Romain, Debe, Ste. Madeleine and San Juan, respectively; and two mental health and wellness centres in Barataria and Port of Spain. All of this occurred during the fiscal period 2008/2009.

I highlighted all this to say that the coalition proposals to improve the physical infrastructure through a two-pronged approach by building new facilities and continuously upgrading and expanding existing public health care facilities is

simply a continuation of a PNM objective. Additionally, the building of the Point Fortin Hospital was scheduled to be constructed under the PNM—nothing new; another carbon copy of PNM initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, listen to some of the initiatives they have outlined:

- Improving health care management—nothing new;
- Meeting tertiary care needs of the society's vulnerable—nothing new;
- Supporting patients' rights and services through quality health care standards—nothing new; [*Interruption*]

Thank you for supporting me, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara.

- Focusing on policies and standards—nothing new;
- Addressing chronic diseases and mental health—nothing new;
- Reducing communicable diseases including HIV/AIDS—nothing new;

Although I highlighted this earlier, it is worthy of repeating:

- Improving public health care facilities and physical infrastructure;

Mr. Speaker, this is nothing new. All of those things are highlighted in this document, just worded differently.

- The Ministry of Health's transformational plan, key achievements, priorities, a glimpse into the future; all of those plans are highlighted in this document. It is nothing new.

They are trying to be honest; they say they agree. All those were done under the People's National Movement and it duplicates the policies and programmes that we have implemented. If you look at the achievement report, you will see that has been implemented.

All we see here is a reflection of PNM's policy and programmes for the health sector; our own vision; our own plans. Members need to get their own visions and their own plans and/or acknowledge the sources of the ones they are using.

Going into their manifesto document—the Member for Tabaquite boasted about their manifesto—I can say that a number of policies outlined here are PNM policies. They say they are going to establish government-funded, free Internet cafés in communities across the country. I do not know if they have heard about telecentres.

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Mr. Speaker, another thing they said they are going to do is:

- Give support to charitable causes in the community—PNM policy;
- Maintenance of homes for the aged as well as support to homes for battered and abused women and children—PNM policy;
- Partnership with the NGO community—I am not sure if they are aware that there was a policy in the Ministry of Social Development, and I am sure it still exists in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, on NGO partnerships.
- Poverty alleviation—PNM policy.

Another thing they said they are going to do is to reform the curriculum at secondary level. If you look at our education policy, significant work has been done on reforming the policies in secondary schools.

Additionally, another thing they said they would do, they actually said that principals would have more authority to manage their schools. This was already being implemented, so I do not know why they are putting stuff in here and making people believe they are initiating it. That is false lies. When they do stuff like that they are telling falsehoods to the population.

Another point of great importance to me is the lack of funding in the SSIP allocated for necessitous patients, previously \$4 million. This is separate and apart from all other benefits people received under the Ministry of Health.

The UNC coalition often tried to make members of the public believe that the PNM did nothing for people in terms of health. This is far from the truth. The number of persons who received financial assistance for medical and surgical procedures include 476 cardiac procedures done; and 120 patients receiving continuous dialysis, meaning on a regular basis. There were also seven renal plant procedures done in 2010. In 2009, 575 persons benefited from the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP), 1,000 received free cardiac surgeries in 2009 alone.

That is something else they mentioned here as new. They were going to be giving free hearing testing for students in primary schools and that is another initiative started under the PNM. Thirty thousand students received vision testing in this same period. We know better. We know that all these initiatives outlined in these documents are labelled PNM, PNM, PNM. All these documents are branded by only three letters P, N, M.

7.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you will also realize—[*Interruption*] at least we do not have PP; we have PNM and that makes more sense—that the Children's Fund is nothing new. It is not a new initiative, since numerous children have been able to access health care treatment and surgical procedures under the Ministry of Health, for free. May I say that, for free. This has been occurring since 1965. The Children's Fund seems like a seductive approach of one mesmerizing the public and not a government serious about children's health. Everything seems to be packaged in a sweetie paper with this Government. When you remove the wrapper and you eat the sweetie, what it leaves people with are hurt tummies and belly ache, just as the pensioners, the OJTs and the URP workers. They are all experiencing pain at this particular point in time.

Members on this side would like to know whether—again we are asking more questions and we would like the Member for Tunapuna to provide us with those answers—there is a committee in place to oversee the Children's Fund. We would like to know that. Who is the chairman of this committee? What criteria did you use in the selection of suitable and worthy cases? How many children have received assistance under this fund to date? Finally, what is the role of the Ministry of Finance in collecting the money for this fund? We need answers for these questions. They talk about setting up this fund, we do not know if there is a committee or a chairman. We do not know anything about this Children's Fund, except that they have some money.

What this highlights is the falsehood that has been perpetrated by the UNC coalition government that they cannot be trusted. We have seen their falsehood being perpetrated on a daily basis, to the general public and whenever they are called to account, instead of saying I apologize for misleading you, or I am sorry, they echo their famous statements "It was not me, it was a misprint, we did not do that, or we did not post that there." They blame someone else. That is not responsible behaviour at all, at all, at all. This is not the sign of a responsible Government that has integrity. Do we expect any difference from the UNC? Do we expect any difference from the COP company? No, Mr. Speaker, we do not know expect any difference.

Under the Ministry of Health, there is a decrease in the budgetary allocation for the Princess Elizabeth Home for Handicapped Children for their refurbishment works by almost half. These organizations rely heavily on the assistance from Government to subsidize the cost of operating their facilities, but this does not appear to be known by Members on the opposite side, or is this another

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manifestation of their flattery when they speak about collaborating with NGOs, CBOs and FBOs, et cetera, to deliver programmes to address the needs of disabled children or the differently-abled?

The first opportunity the Members get, they cut their allocation. Just imagine they claim to be the advocates of the poor and vulnerable, but a \$4 million cut was made in the allocation to the National Community Care Programme. A \$4 million cut was made to that programme. For the information of Members on the other side, if they did not know, the National Community Care Programme was established for the purpose of transferring additional patients from the hospitals to contracted homes. This is one of the major projects of the Ministry of Health, to deinstitutionalize patients. Again, these people are poor, vulnerable and unable to afford to pay for the care and attention they need, but they have cut the budget by \$4 million. Just imagine that.

A reduction in the allocation of funds to the programme is therefore not a reflection of a government that pledges to help the poor and vulnerable. The reduction may be in keeping with the words of the Minister of Health, that no one should spend more than four or five days in hospital. What they are really trying to say is after four or five days, they should take care of themselves after that. Is this attributed to the hope that the waiting list will reduce? There is nothing again, in this budget that provides confidence that the health sector would be improved. We did not hear anything. There is nothing. What are your plans? What do you intend to do? Three months have passed and there continues to be bed shortages, long waiting lists and delays in surgical procedures. Three months have passed and there continues to be—from May 24. Again, nothing in the budget provides confidence that the health sector will improve.

I listened intently again to hear about the plans for the education sector and to my surprise and amazement nothing was mentioned about pre-university schooling and what will be done to enhance this area. We already know the answers to this, nothing new, nada.

Mr. Speaker, we have also seen the development where long term contracts were not given to ECCE teachers. Approximately 500 teachers at various levels are hired in this sector and many of them have not been provided with long term contracts. I would like the Member for Caroni East to tell us in his contribution whether the 500 persons would all have to reapply. I do not know what notions he has or whether he is experiencing some measure of paranoia. We just need to find out whether or not these people would have to apply, or is this a manifestation of the kind of dictatorship that is occurring under the UNC coalition? We need to know. We need to hear from the Member.

As I am on this point, I want to make reference to something that really troubles me. Over the last few weeks, we have been hearing so much about the Member for Caroni East in the news, threatening to discipline school teachers in the absence of facts that reports were submitted prior to opening of schools, highlighting the reasons why schools would not be opened due to reasons out of their control, mainly because schools were still under repair or there was no furniture delivered to the schools.

This was not all. I heard recently that he went to a particular school where a new job was actually done, where they had put down toilet bowls but there were no partitions. The Minister went to the school and insisted the schools actually open. Is this responsible behaviour? When parents did an assessment of that particular school, do you know what they did? They kept their children home. Who would want to have their children exposed, especially when they go to the toilet area? Who would like to have their children exposed when they are urinating or defecating?

Is this responsible behaviour? We talk about reducing the risk of child sexual abuse. Could you imagine what children would have been exposed to, while they go to the washrooms without partitions? Just imagine. Is this responsible behaviours? These boys would have been forced to expose their private parts to each other without the protection of privacy of the partitions. Thank God, again, as I said earlier, for wise parents who, after having assessed the risk that their children would have been exposed to, refused to send them to school until the partitions were installed.

I would like to ask the Member for Caroni East if he would have exposed his children to those types of conditions in a school environment? We can almost predict the answer. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Standing Order 35. I would like to clarify something if the Member would give way now.

Miss A. Hospedales: No, I am not.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I stand on a point of order.

Miss A. Hospedales: I am not giving way.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I stand on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of clarification, hon. Member for Caroni East? If the hon. Member does not give way you will have to take that point.

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Dr. Gopeesingh: A point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a point of order?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Dr. Gopeesingh: 35(a), Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, what is the particular point of order?

Dr. Gopeesingh: 35(a).

Mr. Speaker: I think the hon. Member for Caroni East is seeking a point of clarification.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is 35(b).

Mr. Speaker: What is your point of order?

Dr. Gopeesingh: She is making statements which are unfounded and untrue and I cannot sit in the House and allow her to make those statements. At this time I must correct the statement that she is making. She is telling a false lie.

Miss A. Hospedales: The Member for Caroni East should know better. Just imagine that.

There was another issue of no chairs for students at Oropouche RC and the students and teachers were expected to show up at school. What is even more amazing is the silence of the Member of Parliament for that area. How could children learn under those conditions? No chairs and they had to stand to go through their lessons.

Another important point to note is the strategy of the Ministry of Education under the previous Minister of Education. The Ministry was proceeding on a three-pronged strategy, which involved focusing on the school and doing everything for the school, for example upgrades, constructing new buildings, et cetera; changing the Ministry through strengthening the Ministry through decentralization; and the third strategy was involving the community. This third strategy acknowledges that parents, other members of the society and non-governmental organizations have a part to play in education.

I am not sure if the Member for Caroni East is aware of his coalition's commitment to strengthen ties with the NGO sector, or is this the manifestation of their flattery again, which they have frequently used to convince people that they are here to serve the people?

8.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the first opportunity that the Minister gets, he cuts all support for the NGOs that have constantly provided support in the primary and secondary schools to strengthen the work done by teachers, guidance officers and social workers with the children, particularly in the area of psychosocial development under the broad heading of school intervention strategies. Mr. Speaker, no money was allocated in this area. Does this mean that NGOs will no longer be able to provide valuable services to the school population? Is this your example of partnership with the NGO community and facilitating youth development programmes? We need answers for that.

There has also been a significant decrease in the amounts allocated for institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Education from \$7 million to \$2.5 million. This is not high on their agenda and it is not a key component in their non-strategy for the Ministry of Education.

Another observation I made is the inequitable distribution in the allocation for the construction of secondary schools.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, thank you and also the Members in the House as well. As I said, I made another observation in terms of the inequitable distribution in the allocation for the construction of secondary schools. We see here where \$12 million was allocated to Shiva Boys Hindu College and this is listed under new projects; \$12 million for Parvatee Girls Hindu School; \$10 million for Biche High School and \$6 million for Siparia East Secondary School. [*Interruption*] I can read the rest. Let me see if I can find it. The rest actually highlights \$1 million given to this and \$1 million given to that. The construction of Charleville ASJA Boys, \$2 million; the construction of Charleville ASJA Girls, \$2 million; construction of Sangre Grande SWAHA Hindu College, \$1 million; and Holy Name Convent, Point Fortin, \$1 million. So, one can see the disparity. They talk about equity in terms of the distribution of resources and all of these have been listed.

As I said, the ones that I called out earlier like the Shiva Boys Hindu College, the Parvatee Girls Hindu Schools College, the Biche High School and Siparia East Secondary School have all been listed as new projects totalling

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approximately \$40 million when compared to the existing projects as I have outlined—\$1 million being allocated to one school and another million allocated to another school; \$2 million to another and \$3 million to another. Is this the UNC Alliance's example of equitable distribution of the State's resources? It is stated in their manifesto that they are going to distribute the state resources equitably. Is this an example of equitable distribution? Mr. Speaker, is this a good example of prioritization of the Government's expenditure they have boasted about? Could you tell us what funding formula was used? There is a funding formula that is attached to denominational schools, so could you tell us what funding formula was used to allocate funding to these schools? We would like to know.

I would like the Minister of Education in his contribution to tell Members of this honourable House when the Bon Air Government Primary School and the Arouca Government Primary School will be constructed? Through you, Mr. Speaker, for the information of the Member for Caroni East, the Bon Air Government Primary School is over 20 years old, and this is one of the schools that was scheduled to be repaired over the holidays and it is now being pushed back to December. It is approximately 20 years old and is in dire need of being reconstructed.

Mr. Speaker, the designs for the new school have been completed, and it was scheduled to start sometime during this fiscal year. Additionally, the Arouca Government Primary School has an enrolment of over 200 beyond its capacity. The capacity for the school is around 400 and there are over 600 children attending that school, and the school is in dire need of being reconstructed.

Mr. Speaker, this has created many problems for teachers to comfortably accommodate their students at that school. The school is one of the oldest in the Arouca community and is in dire need of being reconstructed. I am inviting the Minister to take time out from his busy schedule to visit these schools to hear the concerns of the teachers, the parents and the children. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, talking about exorbitant funds reminds me of several issues surrounding the \$83 million laptop project. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West made mention of the laptop issue, but I want to go back to it, because it is something that is taking up our attention.

Mr. Speaker, could the Member for Caroni East, when he is making his contribution tell us what procurement procedures were used in the assignment of the contract to HP and what were the evaluated criteria used in the selection of this provider? Mr. Speaker, the selection of HP as a provider has caused numerous questions to be raised since there is an alleged scandal surrounding bribery and

corruption with this firm. Mr. speaker, bribery payments; breach of trust, tax evasion and money laundering are some of the things that hang over the business transaction of this company. Could the Minister tell us why he has been defending HP? Is he trying to cover up whatever is needed to be covered up? Mr. Speaker, added to this issue that is capturing the attention of the international media—this was not just highlighted in the local media, but also internationally.

Mr. Sharma: You are taking so long to say nothing.

Miss A. Hospedales: We have additional concerns. Mr. Speaker, through you, I would like to ask the hon. Member for Caroni East, if an assessment of the basic infrastructure in schools has been done? Are there sufficient outlets to be used by students?

Mr. Speaker: That matter has been addressed and I would like you to move on.

Miss A. Hospedales: I would make my point. Mr. Speaker, in the *New York Times* there is an article entitled: Seeing no progress—some schools drop laptops. I just want to read a bit of what the article says. It says that in Liverpool, New York, the students at Liverpool High have used their school issued laptops to exchange answers on test; download pornography and hack into local businesses. It also says that scores of these laptops break down each month, and every other morning when the entire school has study hall, the network inevitably freezes because of the shared number of students roaming the Internet instead of getting help from their teachers.

Mr. Speaker, they also said in the article that many schools in and around the country, which is the United States of America, are actually giving up the laptops because they have realized that the laptops are not aiding in improving the students' academic achievements. Mr. Speaker, this investment that they would have made is not a worthwhile investment. If they want they can check this in the *New York Times*. There are many other articles stating that the laptops are not a valuable investment. It is not just one school, but many schools across the United States of America are getting rid of them. What they have found is that setting up computer labs in schools and teaching the children in the lab is more valuable than actually giving them laptops.

So, Mr. Speaker, you said that I should move on, but there is another point that I want to make. I am not sure if a proper scan of the school environment had been done. A number of principals would tell you—

Mr. Speaker: Member, I understand the argument, but the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West dealt with that matter. I think you have made your point on the laptops, but could you press on please?

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, I am talking about the issue of crime and laptops and I am tying it in. As I was saying, many principals have complained about the issue of petty thefts in schools; not just in the schools, but outside of the school environment. Many children have had to report losing their bags, phones, books and, in some instances, even their shoes. Mr. Speaker, what measures are in place to address the issue of theft that will occur where the laptops are concerned?

I recall having discussions with principals of two secondary schools in my area who had numerous reports of children being robbed within and outside the school compound. It took not only the intervention of the police but the implementation of various strategies to reduce the incidence of those robberies. Again, what measures are being put in place to prevent students from being robbed of their laptops?

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make another point. The Member for Tabaquite spoke about the future of our nation's children being their laptops, and the Member for Chaguanas East said in trying to defend it that it is a worthwhile project, but as we noted, it is not a worthwhile project. People across the United States are actually giving them up.

8.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, this budget poses many more questions than answers. Many questions that we need answers to. Questions that need to be answered for the benefit of the population. We need answers.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the PNM government had a plan for the development of our nation, a comprehensive and a detailed plan. This budget, while keeping some of our projects because we are—and I am sure that they will admit that some of the projects—[*Interruption*] That is right—they changed the names, they make it sound a little different, but they have kept some of our projects. They have even kept some of our policies. While keeping some of our projects, this budget is devoid of a plan to take this nation forward. We have not heard anything. It is devoid of a plan to take our nation forward. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I ask the hon. Member for Tunapuna: What is your Government's plan that underlies the work you spoke for the budget? How do the many pieces fit together to improve the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? With this question, I thank you again, for the opportunity, to contribute to this debate.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Tourism (Hon. Dr. Delmon Baker): Mr. Speaker, let me take this opportunity to say thanks to your goodly person for allowing me the opportunity again, to speak on the 2011 budget presentation.

Mr. Speaker, let me first start by congratulating the Minister of Finance, hon. Winston Dookeran. This for me is a new situation, and by acknowledging that, given myself the opportunity to say to this honourable House, I am quite pleased to be in your company.

Mr. Sharma: So are we.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, if I could be given some leeway from the hon. Member for Caroni East and the Member for Moruga/Tableland and return to my old teaching service registration, I would be duly qualified to apply a grade A to the Minister of Finance for his budget presentation. [*Desk thumping*] Let us qualify this grade A. In his presentation, he has captured the interest of all sectors. Just by looking at the newspapers, the television, this budget captured almost every single individual in Trinidad and Tobago. His budget represents an investment in the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It represents a breath of fresh air, a new direction, steering away from the mega projects phenomena that brought the last administration down. This budget, Member for Diego Martin Central, is one that certainly deserves a grade A. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me not to thank the Member for Siparia, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who with her determined leadership, has shown to us a kind of caring, compassionate and a collaborative style that has not been seen in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] You see, the choice was easy for the citizens of Tobago West and Tobago East, when they had to decide between a caring administration and one that looks after the interest of big business and their own friends. The choice that they made was clear.

Miss Cox: You are still campaigning?

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Are you afraid of the truth?

Miss Cox: We have passed that stage.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: We are going to present the truth. You will hear the truth, and the truth will set you free. The budget—you want to hear budget—is a substantial down payment on the promises that we made to the lady. Here is the promise, and Minister Dookeran page after page, minute after minute, made a down payment that your party could not even make in nine years. [*Desk thumping*]

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Let me tell you something. I must tell you that I am often and always delighted to hear the words of the Member for Arouca/Maloney. If you look at the person, even after eight or 10 hours, she still looks radiant and bright and I must compliment her. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, before she left, I wanted her to lift those documents that she held in her hands so proudly and called them PNM, PNM, PNM. Remember, just a couple hours ago, the leader of the PNM—I think there is a leader of the PNM, the Member for Diego Martin West attacked those same documents and called them all sorts of names, but yet, she held them up because she found some value in the budget. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: What names did he call?

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, before I proceed with a review and distillation of the plans of the Tourism Ministry under my purview, let me thank the hard-working staff of the Ministry of Tourism under the leadership of my Minister. [*Desk thumping*] My hard-working Minister. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are recognizing this thing that we call change. The spirit of collaboration shows the people that there are good signs for this country, good signs for the future and good signs for the tourism sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Prime Minister, recognizing the importance of tourism to the development of this country, decided that there should be for the first time two Ministers in the Ministry of Tourism. The senior Minister and myself formed a dynamic duo of sorts. [*Desk thumping*] You see what you have is a healthy mix of steadiness and experience and internally motivated personality, and that has the drive for success and success we shall have. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Finance invested over \$185 million in the tourism sector because he recognized the value of tourism to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the part which this country will take as we diversify a way from the oil sector to ensure that our future success is preserved.

The Government will make tourism an important platform to create sustainable jobs and increase the contribution of tourism to the GDP. Change has come. There are smiles everywhere on the streets. The people have been liberated from this evil administration call the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] I will tell you something. For the first time Tobago West saw a Prime Minister that was brave enough to walk the streets of Scarborough and hug the people. All of these Members who are here were a part of that. That is change. This is the caring Government of the people.

Most of the tourism accommodation establishments in Trinidad and Tobago are locally owned, allow locals to meaningfully benefit from the sector. Our tourism policy seeks to ensure that quality and value for money are produced by these establishments.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Tourism, through its policy initiatives, has identified the major issues that affect the potential from the tourism sector to be the power house of this economy of Trinidad and Tobago. The major issues to be addressed are:

Collaborative and communication among major stakeholders;

Environmental degradation;

Tourism education;

Training and awareness; and

Local community investment.

I can list some more for you. Do you want to hear it? Are you listening? We on this side come from the old age. We will tell you the truth. We will meet these challenges head on as we seek to expand and reassure potential investors that the tourism sector in Trinidad and Tobago is sound and open for business.

Tobago tourism. Mr. Speaker, I know that in 2009 and as well as in 2010, these were challenging years for the sector in Tobago. With less than favourable hotel accommodation, it put a lot of hotel owners under some significant pressures over the last two years. As a statement of fact provided by the Central Statistical Office (CSO), the total stop over visitor arrivals for the island grew from 51,828 in 2002—listen to this—from 86,467 in 2005. But the story changed. Since 2005, there has been a steady decrease in arrivals to the island of Tobago.

In fact, if you look at the number itself, total arrivals at that time decreased to 20,784 from 86,467, a decrease of almost 6,000 visitors to the island. Some 75 per cent less in a matter of three years, and what did the previous administration do to boost the tourism sector in Tobago?

Mr. Roberts: Nothing!

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Precious little. The equivalent of nothing. To my starkest dismay, there was a PNM administration in Trinidad and a PNM administration in Tobago, and they boasted year after year that because there was a PNM administration in Trinidad and a PNM administration in Tobago, they had such a good relationship that they can get almost everything from their counterparts in Trinidad. If the numbers tell any story, then what we have heard over those few years was nothing less than lies. In fact, the Member for Arouca/Maloney gave us a new phrase to use. I am careful that two negatives might make a positive. So if I say false lies, I may be saying in fact that it may be—

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You know, I will make a proposal. Let us use the basis that they were using this evening for argument sake, that if we give computers to—what kind of children they call them?

Hon. Member: "Duncy"!

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: I will not repeat that word. In fact, by their own admission and incoherent arguments, the people who should receive laptops are the people on that side. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, if you consider the findings of the World Travel and Tourism Councils latest stimulated tourism satellite account—plenty words—this study which updates research initially conducted in 2005, a group-based in the United Nations, it quantifies all aspects of travel and tourism demand for personal consumption to business purposes, capital investment, government spending and exports.

8.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you see, after they collect the data, it is translated into information that can be used and measured, and used against other concepts like production and GDP, where you can compare one state with another. If you look at the figures for Trinidad and Tobago, the report would show that the travel and tourism sector contributes 10 per cent to the GDP of Trinidad, and 13 per cent of the employment; while for tourism-intensive Tobago, the numbers show that the GDP balance is about 37 per cent, and over 50 per cent of all employment on the island.

So that when the economic downturn—the global economic downturn hit—if there were some effects in Trinidad, those effects would have been magnified by a hundred per cent in Tobago. Thus, it would have followed that a caring administration in Trinidad and Tobago would have sought to put some measure in place to secure the interest of the sector in Tobago. But did they do that?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: In fact, Tobago was hit with a double whammy, and three other Ministers mentioned the same this evening. On top of seeing those numbers decline, guess what the Government allowed to happen to the formerly known Hilton Hotel?

Hon. Members: It died.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: They allowed the hotel to run down. In fact, in its construction, they made several errors. They put the hotel in the wrong spot. That was not recommended by even their colleagues in the Assembly, and the people

of Tobago, but they went ahead because it was cheap. It was in their benefit or their interest; or the contractors' interest; or their friend's interest. And added to that, putting the hotel that close to the seashore, they used the wrong materials, in true PNM style.

You see, if you look behind the numbers for those mega projects in Tobago, you would think that Tobago is getting a set of fancy buildings, a brand new hospital and a sporting complex. Things that would all impact upon the tourism sector. Like health care. When a visitor comes to Tobago, he needs to know that if he falls ill, there is somewhere to go to take care of him. Not so? And when one goes on the ground and walks the ground, and walks the hospital, after nine years, not one single major project on the island except the goat pen that they built in Buccoo is completed. And that is the kind of caring that they had for the people of Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, when you think about this PNM Government, the loss of nearly 200 jobs in Vanguard, you can only do one thing. You cry shame. When you see a \$200 million investment and the hospital degrading, it is one thing you can do. You cry shame, for the poor choice of sites. You see, the reason there are two People's Partnership people from Tobago in this caring Government is because the people of Tobago recognized something; that they wanted a change from the same old.

I tell you, when I read the budget—where is she? She came back? Madam Arouca/Maloney, you have the documents in your hand again? The things you called "PNM, PNM, PNM," can you show me them? Mr. Speaker, through you, I am asking the young lady to indulge me. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker: The Member. Not the young lady, please. The Member.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: The Member. The hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney. The documents that they attacked four hours ago, they suddenly became the bright ideas of the PNM. Incoherent.

Mr. Sharma: Give them a laptop.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: That is right. They are going to get one. With respect to airlift, consistent airlift is a necessity for the sustainable growth of tourism in the country. Trinidad and Tobago already has some of the most diverse airlifts in the southern Caribbean, with flights from Panama and Copa Airlines; from the United Kingdom and British Airways; from the United States with Caribbean Airlines, just to name a few.

The TDC and Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago are in negotiations with several international carriers over time to increase airlift in Trinidad and

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Tobago. We are looking at getting the new service from Canada to Trinidad by West Jet. A hard-working Government. Increased service from Copa Airlines and British Airways and a new Jet Blue service from New York to Trinidad.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, intense discussions are taking place with Delta Airlines for the recommencement of its service to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The recent acquisition of the profitable routes of Air Jamaica provides an opportunity to include additional flights to Trinidad, under that company, thereby increasing accessibility to a destination that we want to promote in this period. Tobago has been adversely affected by the withdrawal of the Delta Airlines flight out of the USA, and negotiations are now growing with Caribbean Airlines, and they are at an advanced stage to ensure that we soak up the demand on this political route.

Mr. Speaker, in July 2010, a high level meeting among Caribbean Airlines, the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Ministry of Tobago Development and the Ministry of Tourism discussed issues regarding the feasibility of Caribbean Airlines taking up some of the USA traffic going back to Tobago as a result of Delta's withdrawal. This Government is working to ensure that the tourism sector in Tobago is revitalized and resuscitated. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, one of our other major capital improvement works is the continuing of the upgrade of the Emperor Valley Zoo. This project is being managed by our marketing and implementation agency. Sorry, the Tourism Development Company. Launched in April 2009, this project, under this administration, when started, will run its course, will stay within budget, and will be completed on time. [*Desk thumping*]

This is a break from the politics and the administration and the management of the past. When the Minister of Finance, the hon. Member for Tunapuna, takes the time out to detail for us his policies in the 2011 budget, he is not giving people another wish list. He is giving you a significant down payment—I say it again—a plan that gives you a significant down payment on the policy matters that are in this document. [*Desk thumping*]

On completion, the Emperor Valley Zoo will include breeding areas, a board walk, a discovery centre, and several gardens, including a fish garden and a native flower garden. A departure from the tall buildings. Now you have some greenery in Port of Spain where people can come and sit down. We have enhanced the tourism product on the island of Trinidad, and we are working to enhance the product on the island of Tobago.

Mr. Sharma: You should send flowers to Arouca.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: We should send some there too. Mr. Speaker, under the purview of the Ministry of Tourism, since 2004, lifeguards patrol the beaches of Mayaro, Manzanilla, Salybia, Maracas, Tyrico, Las Cuevas, Los Iros, Vessigny and Quinam. At times during peaks, like Carnival time, lifeguard services are extended to Toco on Carnival Friday and Ash Wednesday. You see, at the request of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, we are also able to do a limited amount of spot checks and patrols at Balandra for the Carnival period. The Ministry of Tourism is working.

Member for Diego Martin Central, you look a little tired; exhausted. Is the truth too heavy for you? Mr. Speaker, lifeguards play both a preventative and protective role in our nation's beaches. Through the efforts of our lifeguards, many lives have been saved. So far in 2010, we can credit to their efforts, 48 rescues. [*Desk thumping*] In March, 2010, Mr. Speaker, 90 new lifeguards graduated from recruitment training and were introduced to the service. [*Interruption*] Now, if he gives me a few minutes, we can wrap this up quickly, Mr. Speaker. Included among the graduates were five young women. What a tribute to the fact that we now have a female Prime Minister in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Tourism is seeking to develop the lifeguard unit into a professional cadre of men and women. Towards this end, we have embarked upon a three-month review of the lifeguard service to ensure that at the end of those three months, what we present to this nation would be a lifeguard service that is better than the one that we met when we came into office. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, they might like this one. It is late in the evening. In conclusion, [*Laughter*] I am confident. You see, I do not have to speak much, when my lead Minister gave the most detailed presentation for the evening. [*Desk thumping*] I am confident that with the resources and expertise available, we are well placed to positioning Trinidad and Tobago to address the competitive challenges that lie ahead. Tourism remains a vital sector for Trinidad and Tobago, and we will ensure that it contributes its fair share to our economy. Mr. Dookeran, for the \$185 million, I say thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs (Miss Ramona Ramdial): Good night, everyone. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate our new Government on its rise to office on May 24th. That day will go down in the pages of the history books as the nation democratically elected its first female Prime Minister. Congratulations, Madam Prime Minister, and thank you for having the confidence in me to represent the exciting constituency of Couva North. [*Desk thumping*]

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Commendations to the Minister of Finance, hon. Winston Dookeran, and his team, who have produced the best budget yet. Budget 2011 seeks to address the issues which have plagued this nation for too long. Turnaround of the economy is apt because the People's Partnership seeks to move forward adhering to best practices, a new cutting edge vision, and I do not mean Vision 2020. How can the Leader of the Opposition say that this new Government has no plans? Sometimes, the best laid out plans are bound to fail; and in the case of the PNM, subject to rampant planned corruption. [*Desk thumping*]

Under the stewardship of the People's Partnership, the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs embarks upon a bright future. One such policy to be implemented is mainstreaming gender into the legal and constitutional affairs of Trinidad and Tobago. It seeks to promote the human rights of both women and men as partners in development through the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, NGOs, women's groups, professional associations and the academic community. In addition, Mr. Speaker, central to gender mainstreaming policy must be laws that prohibit gender based discrimination.

8.45 p.m.

Gender mainstreaming involves a number of activities such as forging and strengthening the political will to achieve gender equality and equity at the local, national, regional and global levels which this Government will surely embark upon; incorporating a gender perspective into the planning processes of all ministries and departments of government, particularly those concerned with macroeconomic and development planning, personnel policies and management and legal and constitutional affairs including the administration of justice; integrating a gender perspective into all phases of sectoral planning cycles, including the analysis, development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects; developing systems for institutionalized collection and use of disaggregated data in statistical analysis to reveal how policies affect women and men differently; increasing the numbers of women in decision-making positions in government and the public and private sectors; providing the tools necessary and the training necessary in gender awareness, gender analysis and gender planning to decision-makers, senior managers and other key personnel to ensure that they understand the importance of and know-how to integrate a gender perspective into their work and, of course, forging linkages between government the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to ensure a coordination of efforts and resources. I hope the Member for Arouca/Maloney is listening to our plans.

We are going to implement a gender management system which will include a lead agency, usually the Ministry of Gender Affairs, which will initiate and strengthen the gender management system, a gender management team which would provide leadership for the implementation of the gender management system, institutional arrangements, an interministerial steering committee whose members are representative of all government ministries, gender focal points, where senior administrative and technical staff in all government ministries will be well represented, a parliamentary gender caucus consisting of gender aware cross-party female and male parliamentarians and, of course, the representatives of the civil society which will include National Gender Equality Commission, academic institutions, NGOs and professional associations.

The preliminary steps required for this plan of action is, at the national level for gender mainstreaming a number of preliminary steps will take place. These include the data collection and an analysis of law and legal systems and of gender differences and social indicators. After the analysis, an audit of the content policy objectives must be determined and methods for achieving those objectives must be identified. Multiple strategies and a broad range of approaches to gender mainstreaming are desirable.

Legal programmes alone will not be effective unless they are accompanied by public education and advocacy. All stakeholders, especially legal policy and decision makers at all levels in civil society, need to receive the training and education which this Government will embark upon. An integrated approach to gender mainstreaming is required at all levels of government through the use of gender management systems by promoting the political will, forging a partnership of stakeholders, including the government departments and NGOs and building capacity and sharing good practice. The use of the gender management system and a rights based approach to gender mainstreaming will be very effective together with other international instruments such as the Beijing +5 Outcome document and the Cairo Programme of Action.

Mr. Speaker, gender as a concept refers to the socio-cultural characteristics which vary and evolve depending on the religion, education, socio-cultural values or economic variables and it determines the role and place of men and women in society. Gender is the social category, like class or race or ethnicity, or any other group that defines the rights and opportunities that are available for the individuals who make up that group and, as the People's Partnership manifesto said, there will be a place and a space for everyone.

The purpose of bringing a gender perspective to the budget is to ensure that budgets and economic policies address the needs of men and women, girls and boys of different backgrounds equitably and attempt to close any social and

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economic gaps that exist between them. It is well known that in the past women and men have not enjoyed the same rights and access to key resources such as education, land, credit and decision-making power.

Globally, there are more illiterate women than men. More teenage girls than boys are infected with HIV/AIDS globally. Globally, more men than women hold government positions. Women occupy just over 15 per cent of seats in Parliaments worldwide. While men and boys are not discriminated against or disadvantaged by systems of gender and social relations, it is mostly women who suffer from gender inequality, and that was taken from a 2004 UNDP report.

Mr. Speaker, one framework used to measure gender relations and monitor progress towards equality and adopted by the UN Millennium Development Goals Task Force are three levels of equality between women and men—gender equality in the capabilities domain such as health, education, nutrition and other basic human abilities; gender equality in access to resources and opportunity domain refers to equality in opportunity to use or apply basic capabilities through control over economic assets and resources as well as participation in decision-making.

Gender equality in the security domain is reduced vulnerability to violence and conflict. In Trinidad, plans are afoot to research and formulate policies by the Ministry of Planning to bring about equitable distribution of resources to especially women with respect to salaries, maternity and sick leave and terms and conditions of work. The Gender And Development (GAD) framework will also be implemented to ensure that all policies and programmes are designed to take into account the different gender roles and needs of women and men, girls and boys.

Gender budgeted initiatives tend to combine one or more of the following tools—a gender aware policy appraisal which analyses current policies and programmes from a gender perspective and identifies ways in which these policies are likely to reduce or increase gender inequalities; gender disaggregated beneficiary assessment which evaluates the extent to which programmes or services are meeting the needs of beneficiaries; gender disaggregated public expenditure benefit incidence analysis which evaluates the distribution of budget resources among women and girls and men and boys; the gender disaggregated analysis of the impact of the budget and time use which seeks to show how budget allocations and the services they support affect the ways in which different members of a household spend their time.

Gender aware medium-term economic policy framework which incorporates a gender perspective into the Government's medium-term framework for policy

development, planning and budget allocations. Gender aware budget statements which respond to government reports on the gender equity implications of public expenditures. The United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, has undertaken many initiatives to help develop gender responsive budgets across the developing world. Through advocacy and training of government officials and women's group, UNIFEM has succeeded in introducing gender responsive budget work at the local and national levels. In six countries, Mr. Speaker, this work has already shown results such as the dedication of resources to women or women's organizations in Ecuador, India and Mexico; gender analysis of current policies aimed at establishing mechanisms to promote gender equality, for example in Senegal and Brazil, and advocacy for the removal of taxes on essential commodities.

The Commonwealth Secretariat, in recognition that gender budgeting will result in the equitable distribution and allocation of resources, is encouraging all member states to engage in gender budgeting processes. In this regard, Finance Ministers at the Commonwealth meeting were encouraged to ensure that a gender perspective is applied in their budgetary processes. Additionally, at the meeting of the Commonwealth Women Gender Affairs, a concerted effort was made to ensure that financial matters including gender, equitable recovery and growth were among the major agenda items. Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago, through attendance at this meeting, was able to forge direct links with the gender section, Commonwealth Secretariat and held informal discussions with the head of the Gender Equality and Social Transformation Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat on ways in which the Secretariat can support national gender mainstreaming efforts including strategies to engage in gender budgeting.

It is proposed that based on best practices in other member states and the availability of resources, that the Commonwealth Secretariat supports Trinidad and Tobago through the execution of the following projects—a gender budgeting training for Cabinet Ministers and other senior government officials, the establishment of gender units which for ten years the previous government was trying to establish and could not achieve, we are going to achieve such. [*Desk thumping*] The establishment of sectoral performance indicators on gender and the provision of training in women's leadership and decision-making involving civil society organizations and natural training institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs therefore proposes in fiscal 2010-2011 to build capacity in all government agencies to include gender perspectives in all policies, programmes and projects. This exercise will involve engaging in a systematic plan to train

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gender focal points including planners and research and accounting personnel in selected Ministries. Additionally too is to assist all ministries to engage in gender analysis and the preparation of sectoral action plans will be developed and disseminated. It is expected that over the next five years all Ministries will be strengthened to engage in gender budgeting. This capacity building exercise will not only be geared towards the technocrats but through the Commonwealth Secretariat, government Ministers and other parliamentarians will also be beneficiaries.

Mr. Speaker, moving on to the restructuring of certain units in the Ministry of Planning, Town and Country Planning Division is being enabled with GIS or a geographical information system where technologies will qualify GIS personnel to effectively use and apply it, and, as you know, GIS is a computer-based system for capturing, storing, querying, analyzing and displaying geospatial data. Which means that any object on the earth's surface can be assigned a location, a building, an agricultural plot of land or even a water body. So what does this have to do with Town and Country Planning Division? One of the major functions is the production of physical development plans and the control of development.

As a small island developing state, Trinidad and Tobago has no alternative but to make sure it protects and properly manages its limited land resources. This task has been poised with many challenges including the effects of climate change and the reliance on outdated technologies procedures because almost all data used by Town and Country Planning Division can be considered geospatial data. Therefore, GIS will provide us with a suitable option for supporting increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the Town and Country Planning Division if properly implemented.

9.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, what does this mean for the Town and Country Planning Division? There will be a conversion to digital databases for better management of data. This will include better security, archiving and cataloguing, retrieval and updating and data integration possibilities with other systems, with other benefits, for example, the integration with the Ministry of Housing and the Environment, to monitor housing projects on private and state-owned land. [*Desk thumping*] It will support scientific analysis to identify trends and patterns in land use over time; it will also enhance simulation of different land scenarios before implementation, for example, if a housing development was placed at some location, would it cause flooding or sediment discharge into waterways in the long run. [*Desk thumping*] This is what we need. It will provide better and more efficient dissemination of data using the Internet. Data that is not of a sensitive nature

could be placed online and persons who require information could locate data pertinent to them by using an interactive map.

It would also mean support of better collection methods and procedures for creating higher quality data, thereby leading to better decisions; data visualization methods for presenting data to different groups, creating more informed decisions and citizenry because of better understanding; existing consultants and professionals in the Caribbean, especially in Trinidad and Tobago, we have both undergraduate and graduate professionals being produced by the University of the West Indies at this moment, making this goal a sustainable one. As the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara would say, "We localizing it." [*Desk thumping*] It would also mean better asset management of existing state resources, for example, what land uses are controlled by the State in different locations, like aqua culture.

Last, but not least, in keeping with economic and social restructuring, Vision 2020 was just a vision; there were no objectives and strategies. All it said was that we would like to be a developed country by 2020, without saying how we would get there. The National Innovation System is about strategic management with a vision, objectives and strategies. This system fosters a culture of research and innovation by allocating resources and providing incentives for research and development, particularly in the non-energy and service sector.

Our target would be to increase the R & D spending to, at least, 3 per cent of the gross domestic product over the next 10 years. An economic development board will be incorporated to consult with stakeholders and would play an advisory and implementation role in the strategic management of the economy.

The ministerial team, together with the EDB board will have the following core mandates: To design a new framework for the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago; to promote the alignment and strategic incorporation of existing and long-term plans into the new Trinidad and Tobago development framework; to formulate recommendations for the implementation and execution of these developmental plans and to advise the Government on domestic and international issues arising from changes in the economic environment.

Mr. Sharma: A-plus!

Miss R. Ramdial: The budgetary requirement is estimated at \$6.5 million for year one. Funds are available for immediate institution of the National Innovation System under the budgetary—[*Desk thumping*] It is surprising that the Member for Arouca/Maloney is not around to hear our policies and plans. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: "She gone to Piggott's Corner."

Miss R. Ramdial: The moneys are going to be allocated immediately for the institution of the National Innovation System under the budgetary allocation of the former Ministry of Planning, Housing and the Environment.

In ending, I want to pose these questions to the hon. Leader of the Opposition: How come after decades of PNM rule and more than adequate financial resources, we still have: underdeveloped roads; an unreliable water supply; poor waste management systems; high crime and increasing gang activity in PNM strongholds; poor health and education infrastructure; failure to hold local government elections; the destruction of the grand stand with no adequate substitute for Carnival activities; the waste of finance for the Summit of the Americas; the inability to complete the Brian Lara Stadium and the Scarborough Hospital; alleged corruption in URP and CEPEP; the possible connection between the last Prime Minister and Calder Hart and impropriety in the contracts associated with UDeCott? [*Desk thumping*]

Let me reiterate: Only when the Opposition Leader is prepared to explain the extent of the PNM's poor leadership and mismanagement of the country's resources, over the past nine years, then will we lend credibility to the Opposition. If not, then make way for the People's Partnership Government and take pattern as to how to effectively run a country.

Thank you.

The Minister in the Ministry of the People and Social Development (Hon. Dr. Lincoln Douglas): Mr. Speaker, it gives me a tremendous joy to be here to speak on behalf of the People's Partnership Government, the Minister of Finance, our Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, on this budget that was presented for the year 2010/2011.

It is my desire to demonstrate that this budget is a significant contribution to the reduction of poverty in this country and the development of social justice in Trinidad and Tobago. This is a budget, indeed, that encourages us to face the issue. Face the issues, address the issues of poverty and poor people in Trinidad and Tobago, address the issues of social justice and, at the same time, turn this country around. As the Member for Chaguanas East said, not turn around and around, as some people have been doing and as past administrations have done, but putting the country back on track, because we have been taken off track. The destination that was set for us, that was supposed to be a bright and shining light for a country that was endowed with all kinds of resources, today we find ourselves on the brink of a precipice and right on the verge of collapse. So we have to turn this thing around.

This budget is not only consistent with our manifesto, but it is also consistent with the ideals of this nation. According to our manifesto promises, the Minister of Finance said that our budget was driven by the seven pillars of the People's Partnership manifesto, which has been adopted as Government's policies. These pillars are designed to do the following, first of all, to foster people centred development. That is opposed to a philosophy that believes that development has to do with the amount of plant and technology you have, where it pits our people against industry, so it says to our people that the more buildings you have, the more roads you have, the more cars you have, the more technology you have, the better developed you are. They got this idea from places like Dubai, et cetera, that now understand how wrong this philosophy is.

Today we have spent out most of the money and our people still continue to complain. These pillars are designed to foster people centred development, to ensure national and personal security, to entrench good governance, participation, accountability, transparency and equity. Good governance to steer the country towards a diversified knowledge intensive economy, to move towards eradicating poverty and promoting greater social justice, and this is the issue I will address tonight. It is to present an accommodating foreign policy, not irritating our neighbours and looking for unnecessary fights, but expanding the use and availability of information and communication technology.

This budget is consistent with the aims of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. Probably our friends—I almost said the other side; it is kind of strange sitting here. If you read the preamble to the Constitution, it might have guided the kind of ideas they developed, because just the basic preamble reminds us that:

“...the nation of Trinidad and Tobago is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, faith in fundamental human rights and freedoms, the position of the family in a society of free man and free institutions, the dignity of the human person and the equal and inalienable rights...”—that is the right to food, clothing, shelter, life, liberty and the pursuit of a meaningful life—“which all members of the human family are endowed with by their Creator;”

They had read just the preamble to the Constitution.

We would understand that our nation is based upon a:

“(b) respect...of social justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being so distributed as to subserve the common good...”

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I am going to explain this a little further later on. The preamble continues:

“that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions but that there should be opportunity for advancement on the basis of...”—what?—“recognition of merit, ability and integrity;”—Should I repeat that?—“opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity;” [*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: All that is alien to the PNM.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: It continues:

“...belief in a democratic society in which all persons may, to the extent of their capacity”—it does not matter whether you are disabled or otherwise—“play some part in the institutions of the national life and thus develop and maintain due respect for lawfully constituted authority;”

This budget supports our Constitution.

It also:

“recognise that men and institutions remain free only when freedom is founded upon respect for moral and spiritual values and the rule of law;”

Do you remember that, Mr. Speaker? A certain Prime Minister was brought into power based on this, moral and spiritual values. The person who put him in power is shaking his head now.

“desire that their Constitution should enshrine all of the above-mentioned...”

I am particularly interested, as I said before, in demonstrating how this budget intersects with the issue of poverty and social justice, because social justice is the foundation upon which any kind of poverty alleviation strategy relies and rests on. Social justice, as is explained in our Constitution, reminds us, first of all, that the operation of the economic system should be such that the resources of the community are distributed as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions.

I want to go over that in a slower fashion so that they would catch it. First of all, it means that you have to operate the economic system; it means that you have to take charge of the economic system. I repeat what their leader said, that the economic system of this country had been running by "vaps". After a few years they start "vooping" and then they would say, "Well, we have done this and done

that." But if I take my daughter and gave her \$1 billion and I say, "Spend girl, spend," obviously within that context she must buy one or two things that are good. She might buy a whole lot of things for herself, but this is what has happened.

9.15 p.m.

We have taken a whole pile of money and spent it wild; buy all kinds of things. They were addicted to spending. And then in between, a few good things happened and then say, "Well we were operating." That is not operating the economic system; that is running the economic system by "vaps"; "vooping" the economic system.

So first of all, social justice; recognize that you must operate the economic system and that the resources of the community—it says the resources of what? The resources of the community; the resources of Trinidad and Tobago belong to whom? The community; the people of Trinidad and Tobago. One would swear that this past administration, that the resources belonged to them; that the gravel under the hill, they could give it to whoever they want; they could make deals with it; that the oil and the natural gas, that they could give it away or use the money from it as they see fit; that they could sell the sea or the sand or the oil or the natural gas or whatever in this country; that it belongs to them; that they could spend it at will.

But the Constitution is reminding us that the resources belong to the community. The resources of this country belong to the people of this country. [*Desk thumping*] So when people come to me and they are begging for a house and they are begging for a road and they are begging for a bridge and they are begging for water and they are begging for lights, I am so saddened and depressed by this, because I know that the resources of this country belong to the community and people do not have to beg you for these basic things. This belongs to the people and God knows that we have had a lot of resources in this country.

But here we are.

"...the operation of the economic systems so that the resources of the community are distributed as to subserve the common good,"

First of all, it has to be distributed; it has to make its way into the highways; into the byways; into the cracks; into the crevices. What has happened in the history of Trinidad and Tobago; what has happened under the past regime, is that they have centralized the resources in Port of Spain. The further away you go from Port of Spain, the worse things get for you, you know.

One of my family teaches in Toco; he is a principal in Toco and he said, "You know, we do not even get a letter after the event." The further you go from Port of

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Spain—meanwhile all the time, every single thing; you want a new centre, you put it in Port of Spain; you want a new building, you put it on the shore; you want a new this, you put it there. Every single thing seems to be centralized. When you talk about the devolution of power or the decentralization of power, the past regime "doh want tuh hear nutting bout dat." Everything must be centralized in one man and in one place.

The resources of the country must be distributed. People in Arima, Valencia, Toco, Moruga, Manzanilla, Princes Town, Hardbargain, Coromandel and Cedros, all these people; it says it must be distributed so as to subserve the common good. This is what our Constitution is calling us to; this is social justice. I "ain't" making this up. The framers of our Constitution understood that in order to alleviate poverty, in order to reduce poverty, in order so that we would not have poverty, the resources of the country must be evenly distributed to subserve the common good.

Has the common good been subserved in Trinidad and Tobago? Ask these Members here from this past administration if the common good has been served in Trinidad and Tobago: in health; in education; in livelihood; in homes; in places to live. Has that been served in this country? This country has seen, in the last administration, the greatest disparity between the haves and the have-nots and to a great extent that is what has contributed to the significant rise in crime, when we find that one part of our community continues to grow poorer and poorer and at the same time another smaller set continues to get richer and richer. That is not the intention of this Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. It says the resources of this country should subserve the common good; that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all.

Adequate means of livelihood; that is not a simple word. That is talking about jobs and "wuk," as we call it. I am so sad today by the amount and the growing number of young men and women who cannot find a "wuk". They come to me and say, "Boss, if ah could geh a little CEPEP; ah lil URP work." It makes me feel to cry, that a big man would come to me and ask me for a URP or a CEPEP "wuk" when billions and billions of dollars just went away without creating meaningful employment for our men and women.

Every day I am meeting scores and scores of graduates from UWI and they cannot find work in Trinidad and Tobago. I have a whole set of resumés on my desk; mothers coming to me and begging for their children to "geh uh wuk". In this country? In Trinidad and Tobago that had so much resources? And these people have the guts to come here and talk about shame and dishonesty and use all kinds of words? The Leader of the Opposition had the gall to come in this House and make those kinds of statements?

“...labour should not be exploited...”

We are talking about social justice here. That is written into our Constitution because the framers of the nation understood what was going to transpire when bad men get into power. So they put it in to manage our ideas.

“...labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions...”

Go around this country and see people begging for a little job; begging for a little work. Every day you are getting letters after letters after letters. People are being forced, because of economic necessity, to work in inhumane conditions and yet we find millions have gone down the drain and when you talk about this they behave like it is nothing! They think about \$100 million as if it is 25 cents! And all the time we are thinking that this has to do with people's livelihood; that labour would not be exploited; that people would have adequate means of livelihood.

When you hear these things, I do not know if these people "does" grieve over these things. I grieve over these things; over the abuse of power and the abuse of the resources of this nation. And they behave like that is nothing to this nation. Not a word of sorry; not a word of acknowledgement. The Leader of the Opposition started off saying, "Sure, the PNM has made mistakes." Mistakes by billions of dollars? That is not a mistake; that is a direct diabolical scheme!

Mr. Peters: Over and over. "Dah is a habit."

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: "Oh, the PNM has made its mistakes." That is not a mistake. If you lost \$20, that is a mistake; you lost \$100, that is a mistake; you lost \$1,000, that might be a mistake. You might even push it to \$10,000. It would not be a mistake for me; that would be a big loss. But these people, millions, hundreds of millions, billions it went into, and "Oh, the PNM has made mistakes."

Who "yuh" trying to fool? This nation? Our people who are suffering day by day? What the Constitution is trying to tell us is that nobody in Trinidad and Tobago should be poor and we should work real hard to make it so. That is what the Constitution is trying to tell us, that nobody should be poor and we should work real hard so at least we would have a kind of balanced situation.

But what has been the reality? The level of poverty, indigence and vulnerability in Trinidad and Tobago—we have heard it before—16.7 per cent. Indigence is what we used to call it long time, "yuh real scrunting". Right? "Yuh ha no money in yuh pocket; yuh aih ha no money. Yuh go in yuh house, yuh ha no food. Yuh have nutting tuh eat and yuh doh know where yuh getting food tuh eat."

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I have experienced that before. I have grown up in a very large family and I know what it is for a day to come and "yuh doh have food to eat and yuh doh know where food will come from de next day." I do not know if people know that, but if you understand that, you will understand the level of pain and anguish that is.

And the research—I do not even know if they have read the research that was commissioned by the Ministry of Social Development on the survey of living conditions. Thousands of people still, in Trinidad and Tobago, are scrunting! They have nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing; nothing! These are people living on less than \$3,000 for the year. That is what the research says. The last administration—and they are behaving like is nothing going on.

Then we have a next set. Over 200,000 people, poor, poor. Another 9 per cent; vulnerable. It means that if they miss one pay cheque, they slip below the line and they gone under despair. Another 9 per cent of people, "yuh" could as well call them poor too, because they cannot miss a pay cheque. They looking like they working and they dressing nice and they going to work, but is struggle. They could barely pay the rent. As a matter of fact, most of their pay is going to pay a rent or something like that. They cannot get sick, because if they get sick, "dah is it for them". They immediately slip below the line of despair and they gone into deep poverty.

Nine per cent of the population, vulnerable and this is talking about—where is the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara? This is talking about using a figure of \$665 a month. I called the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara because he tried to live on \$666 for a month. He said, "I am going to try this out." The poor boy almost killed himself.

So this is the standard that they use, you know. We "ain't" talking about, like if they had used a higher figure, because really and truly, nobody could live on \$666 or \$665. So the real figure is even more than this. The real, real figure of poverty and the real people who are struggling and desperate in this country is even more than this, because this figure we are using here, you know, we push it down to the furthest that we could go.

So what does this mean for the common man? This means that a lot of people in Trinidad are in bad shape after this administration has spent millions and millions and millions and making us feel like this is no big thing. That is just another day in paradise. But we know that poverty is hunger; it is real hunger; it is not having basic food to eat; it is like hearing your children crying for food and "yuh doh have no food tuh give them"; there is no bread; no butter and no rice; no dhal, whatever. There is no mauby to drink.

You see, this is what we do not understand. We talk about figure and we talk about poverty and we do not understand that it is real people hurting; people do not have house to live in; is people who are renting and the landlords are taking advantage of people in this nation; young women, in particular, who are renting. I know a woman came to me and said: "Boss, the landlord lock me in the house; he lock the door and he put a pit bull in the yard." She cannot come out of her house.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: And what that has to do with the PNM?

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: That has to do with this administration (*pointing to the PNM*) that has wasted billions. If you cannot make the connection; if you cannot make the connection, then is best I sit down. If you cannot make the connection between the wasting of millions of dollars and poverty, then I am probably in a mad house. [*Interruption*] You cool yourself right there; I will get to that just now. Right?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: An unscrupulous landlord. It is not the fault of the PNM; an unscrupulous landlord.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Poverty, not having a job, not having money or acquiring a whole pile of money and you do not know how to give it away or help somebody else. It is like giving a man millions and millions of dollars for doing nothing and then he does not know what to do with the money. He "kinda" poor too. It is like our people who are so religious and so believe in God and they are being exploited and taken advantage of by superstitious leaders who prey on them with all kind of fancy ideas.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: That is PNM fault too?

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Yes, "is all yuh" who scale the Red House and take down the weather dragon; superstition; running the country by obeah.

9.30 p.m.

[*Interruption*] "I lyin'?" I was privy to it—lack of representation; the powerlessness of our people and taking advantage and taking over their voices and the lack of freedom. This is the kind of poverty we have in Trinidad and Tobago. As Shadow say, and you and I know all too well: "Poverty is hell", and there are plenty people living in hell because of this administration's waste of the resources of the community. Refuse to accept, then they want to kill them with smelter, too.

What is sad about all this is that there is no real reason for this kind of poverty in this country. The billions of dollars that have slipped through our hands that have been wasted, as the Minister of Finance said: Corruption, mismanagement and arrogance became the order of the day. Our citizens have looked on helplessly

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as countless millions were spent on pie-in-the-sky projects while their basic needs were ignored and infrastructure neglected at all levels. All over this country, it is flooding like rain. [*Interruption*]

An Act of God is when you have 40 days and 40 nights or even one whole day of rain. Yesterday, rain fell for half an hour and Arouca was flooded. My bridge got washed away in front my house. That is not an Act of God; that is mismanagement of the resources. That is not making a proper drain; that is not fixing the bridge properly; that is not taking care of the resources of the nation; that is not allowing wanton destruction of our hillside and no regulation of building and so forth. That is not an Act of God; that is not a natural disaster; that is a human disaster by people who have mismanaged the resources and the economy.

They even talked about health care. I am getting to that. Hold strain; I am coming at you. The train is coming. Do not get left behind. Talk about food price inflation and health care. Pray not to get sick in this country period. You never know; somebody might cut off the wrong thing. They may leave you in a corridor for how long. I am not making these things up. These are everyday experiences that people come to me with. I have experienced it myself. My son got into an accident and spent the whole weekend sleeping in the corridor at Mount Hope and these people are spending millions of dollars on all kinds of things.

The PNM made mistakes. I want the nation to understand that a mistake is not bad-spending a million dollars. That is not a mistake. That is downright madness and some kind of diabolical scheme at work. So the capacity of our existing health care system is insufficient to meet our people's needs and nothing has been done about it.

You talk to Mr. Ramnarine, a blind man I met trying to feel his way up a dirt track, waiting so long for an operation on his eye. Talk to the lady in the Congo that I met. Talk to Miss Julie in the Congo, who stepped on a bottle and in no time had her whole leg amputated because she could not get—and is now searching for a wheelchair. Talk to Miss George in Myra Lane who “livin” in a plastic house and has no protection from the weather and from evil men who are trying to prey on her. Talk to the people in Arouca, Maloney; the policewoman living in Maloney who is fearful for her life because there are people outside her door selling drugs, shooting drugs, shooting each other and there is a war going on. Talk to them!

Member for Arouca/Maloney, you like to talk. Talk that! What are we talking about here? I am talking about low educational attainment. You all calling people dunce; no schooling; no employment. I am trying to make the connection for you between bad spending and poverty. When we waste the money, it is not, no

proper schooling; no employment, insufficient employment; working poor; people working and any minute now they could end up below the breadline; overall unemployment and high dependency.

I am making the connection for you. I am helping you to grasp the concept because as far as I am concerned this whole Bench (*pointing to the PNM Bench*) has not grasped the concept that there is a direct relationship between wasting the money and people being poor; and they act like it is nothing. I am seeing no remorse; no sense of responsibility to this nation. They act like they could spend \$85 million on a boat and then it "ain't" float and that is okay. This is not a toy boat.

People are poor; they are still people. On Windy Hill Road there are no lights and water. There are still people all over this place who dipping water from a drain and we refuse. We spend a lot of money and say it is okay. That poor quality housing, some of them you all build.

Once again, this budget, I will tell you, is a statement that comes at a time when our people's pains are clear. That is why they made a different choice. They are hurting and you all did not realize they were hurting. The people's pains are clear. Chief among these is national security; the scourge of crime and lawlessness; thousands of unsolved murders and other crimes have deeply scarred the national psyche. Thousands of families have been torn apart. They will never forget the pain of loved ones lost. It is especially hurtful for them to know that the vast majority of criminals and murderers continue to walk freely without fear of arrest and conviction. [*Interruption*] Why did you not ask the twelfth man that? That was a good question; you should have asked that last year. Ask "all yuh" two absent leaders; you should have asked them that last year when they were "duking" it out with each other; all this while the government has spent billions of dollars.

Talk that to the people of Printeryville who said to me that \$300 billion was spent and nothing has changed in Printeryville; nothing has changed in the Congo, Malabar; all of these areas. Nothing has changed.

I grew up in Sherwood Park and so far there is no real major developmental issue. Talk to the people on the old road. Talk to the people in La Resource. So, how does one address poverty? How does one bring about development in a country? Let me read to you what one of the past presidents of the World Bank has said, Mr. James D. Wolfentein. This is what he says:

“The most important lesson we learned from the global learning process is this success”—You can interpret that word as development—“does not depend on the amount of money we spend on a project, but on taking the right approach to

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achieving our strategic targets. And, the right approach is not to turn poor people into the objects of charity, but rather into active participants, into productive assets, into owners of their own destinies. We need to engage these people who are seeking a better life in the search for solutions.” [*Desk thumping*]

That is the IMF, the World Bank, talking to you. It is telling you that it does not matter how much money you have and you throw it at people; that does not mean they will succeed or bring about development.

Something wrong in Laventille? Oh, we are going to spend \$300 million in the next year. "All yuh" set that was not listening to Mr. Wolfensohn from the World Bank and the IMF. You have to engage people; not treat people as used equipment; not forget people.

I walked through Morvant. Somebody called me. I went to visit some houses up there and I could not believe that these were the people who supported you for these years throwing money after money—I will talk about this a little more—and its capacity to keep people in bondage rather than set them free without engaging people in a respectful way. We need to engage these people who are seeking a better life in the search for solutions.

If only this past PNM administration knew this, it would have understood that the process of their development includes, first of all, validating the dignity of our people, the respect for their life, respecting their beauty, cleanliness, discipline and respect for work; fostering these things and respect for spirituality; respect for the future; for their creativity and their indigenous talent; respect for dignity.

You will understand that the process of development includes working for our culture and society; not corruption and squandermania; taking care of family security, community security, food security, history and the culture of our people; coming up with politics that are really meaningful to our people; respecting the environment. [*Desk thumping*] If you had understood, you would have used the money for proper education; not miseducation as Bob Marley would say: "Brainwash education to make us the fools".

Let us hear what Paulo Freire said in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—you should read that some time—[*Interruption*] It definitely was not based on liberating people.

“Education either functions as an instrument...to facilitate...integration or domination of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity...or it becomes ‘the practice of freedom’, the means

by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.”

Mr. Speaker: I know the night is becoming a little long, but I would like to hear the hon. Minister and I would also like you to facilitate the *Hansard* reporters who, at this time, would need your undivided attention so that they can do their work.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decision, do not organize the people; they manipulate them. They do not liberate nor are they liberated. They oppress and are oppressors. Education designed to make people your little playthings, so that they will always vote for you or carry your ideas is not real education. That is domination and oppression. That is what Paulo Freire is saying. Read his book!

Education must be for self development. It must help us fulfil a sense of being, sense of calling in the world. It must help us to develop our culture and ourselves; not teach us how to follow other people's ideas and become invaded by other people's ideas. This is what we are talking about. If you understood the value and resources that you had and if you were committed to produce a kind of education that would make us leaders and innovators; not have us down at 138 out of 139; community development, proper education, lead us into proper economic development and proper wealth creation; create a culture of wealth and respect for work; good use of our natural resources, we would be able to create products, real meaningful products that we could sell to the world.

This budget is now pointing us in that direction; not just to take all the gas and oil money and spend it wildly. We would teach our people how to create products, provide services, how to come up with courageous associations so that we could do meaningful things. Knowledge creation and knowledge industry are what this budget is pointing to. Proper use of our resources would develop our health system and take care of our environment.

9.45 p.m.

Do you want to see something? Take a flight over the Northern Range and you will see how the Northern Range is being destroyed. All our natural water is being destroyed. "Ah wonder why? Ah hear people getting water contracts and desalination plant and all kind ah ting." At any rate, take a drive over the Northern Range, I live in Maracas Valley, and you would see the kinds of destruction to our environment and hillsides and all our rivers are being clogged and our waterways are being destroyed. Take a drive or a fly over the Northern Range and you will see the respect for the environment. This is what proper development is about.

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This is what you should be spending the money on; developing our community for peace, safety, cleanliness and participation. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: You are off track again.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: I am making the connection because "alyuh ah lil slow"; how you use money to develop our people, as opposed to investing it with things that cannot help with the long term development of our people.

This budget and its programmes demonstrate the State's role, shifting from state control to being a catalyst and a partner in the development of our country. That is what the Minister of Finance said. We are talking about breaking the cycle of poverty. How does the budget contribute to that? When we talk about the cycle of poverty we are talking about a seamless endless continuation of poverty.

Once I was in the Town Hall and we were talking about poverty reduction and a woman came from the hill and said: "meh granmudda was poor, meh mudda was poor and now I poor." That is the cycle of poverty we are talking about and any meaningful poverty reduction or poverty alleviation strategy should find a way to break that cycle. People should not have to go through that. It is a chain of events that starts to occur and tends to perpetuate the situation. Progressively lower levels of education and training leads to lack of employment opportunities, leading to criminal activities such as the sale of illegal drugs for survival, leading to addiction; shattered health; early death; and the breakup of family, leading to even a bleaker future for the next generation and so on. This cycle continues until someone intervenes by providing worthwhile meaning, not handouts to people, to climb out of destitution and by ensuring children's health and education, et cetera.

If we want to understand why certain communities keep going around in circle and circle, throwing money and money and money after them, it is because they are into the culture of poverty. The people in the culture of poverty have a strong feeling of marginality and hopelessness. "Ah want alyuh tuh listen tuh this and understand why certain communities in the hardcore PNM areas continue to struggle like this." They have a strong feeling of marginality, helplessness, dependability and not belonging. They feel like aliens living in their own country, convinced that the existing institution do not serve their interests and needs. They feel like the police are against them. They refer to the Government as "de government, like it is ah foreign ting to dem"; something over there and here, as long as the feeling of powerlessness is a widespread feeling of inferiority, of personal and unworthiness. This is true of people who live in slums like Mexico, the slums of Chicago, Robert Taylor Homes or Cabrini Green or something like that, or in Trinidad, you can pick your community if you want.

They feel that they are discriminated against, because of where they live or because of their ethnicity or something like that. They feel people culture is a culture of poverty, have very little sense of history, they are marginal and are people who know only their own troubles, local conditions, neighbourhood and way of life. Usually they have neither the knowledge, vision nor the ideology to see the similarities between their own problems and those of others like themselves, elsewhere in the world. In other words, they are not class conscious, although they are very sensitive indeed to status distinctions. In other words, they feel like "we is we up here or we is we down here". We in La Horquetta, Maloney or the Congo or wherever it is, feel like this is our own little world and everything else is against us. You are beginning to see where the gangs came from. This is the culture of poverty. This is not my definition. Talk to the sociologist. Talk to Oscar Lewis and his book on the culture of poverty.

Our budget, presented by the Minister of Finance and the People's Partnership, is designed to address this culture of poverty. That is what the Minister of Finance said; it is to break into that cycle and the Government act as a catalyst, not as one who facilitates this ongoing cycle, where people come to you and say that they want \$50 or they have to get something and you take it out of your pocket and give it to them. That is not what we are about. We are about teaching this nation the value of work, the value of participation, co-operation, of being part of a country, of being a citizen, of learning to be self empowered, of taking charge of your life, of working hard and success. That is what this budget is. We are fulfilling the mandate of the people as outlined in their own Constitution, to respect the principles of social justice.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Mr. Speaker, these in this line here are begging to go home. They refuse to be educated properly. I would outline at least 40 measures in this budget. [*Interruption*] Well, I would cut it down, because you guys seem to be wary of truth; saturated.

1. We are reviewing the social programmes to reduce the number of poor by 2 per cent. We have made that a declaration.
2. To complement this, we have established a Ministry of the People to ensure that our citizens' needs are better analyzed and are meaningfully catered for. Keep counting.

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3. We are implementing the National Poverty Reduction strategy. These things exist but, these people never, never thought about implementing them. We are going to implement the National Poverty Reduction Strategy to establish what is poverty, where are they located, what are the elements of poverty and how are they going to address this.
4. In the coming year, the Government's social development objectives include transforming the social welfare system. You are counting four.
5. Establishing a mechanism for effective collaboration and partnership between the Government and the non-governmental sector. "Yuh call dat" collaboration as a strategy.
Implement and monitoring an evaluation policy for social development.
We would make a concerted effort to ensure that spending or rehabilitative and development programme is balanced with significant investment to build social capital.
6. We are examining proposals to reintegrate ex-prisoners, deportees and delinquent youths into the fabric of mainstream society.
7. The Government will establish a youth mentoring programme. Grants would be provided to community-based organizations, which can run successful mentoring programmes for youth deemed to be at risk, away from crime.
8. We now propose to this honourable House a monthly special duty allowance, police officers would get \$1,000. "Take meh time?"
9. We are introducing the Milk Feeding programme.
10. The proclamation of homes for older persons legislation will come in the new fiscal year. Under this legislation, homes for the aged will be required to meet and maintain minimum criteria and standards for the care of residents.
11. The Government will also launch elderly mobile shuttle service in 2011, which will provide a shuttle service for the elderly.
12. The expansion of the GATE Programme.
13. Minimum pension of \$3,000.
14. Senior Citizens' Grant replaced by Senior Citizens Pension and increased to \$3,000.
15. Amnesty on tax penalties and interest for late filing of income tax.

16. \$18,000 credit to first-time home owners.
17. Payments of debts to contractors. You left \$4 billion.
18. Maintenance of property taxes at the old rates and the old values.
19. Repayment to small depositors \$74,000.
20. \$4.3 billion in health care.
21. Completion of the Point Fortin Hospital.
22. \$8.3 billion in education and training.
23. Removal of taxes on machinery to promote and enhance agriculture.
24. Settlement of outstanding issue of the review of public servants terms of employment. All of this contributing to the alleviation of poverty and the reinstatement of social justice in our system.
25. Expediting of VAT refunds to contractors to the tune of \$2.8 million.
26. Victims of crime support programme to rehabilitate and ensure continued productivity from victims.
27. Laptop distribution to the schools.
28. Decentralization; moving things out. The Minister of Finance talked about growth poles in Couva, Charlieville, Carapichaima, Chaguanas and the southwestern peninsular of Trinidad, the East Port of Spain area, the north coast and Northeast Tobago. If you followed the survey of living conditions booklet, you would realize that this plan touches the areas that are most poor in Trinidad and Tobago.
29. Integrated campus in Tobago incorporating UWI and COSTAATT.
30. Expansion of free trade zones. This is how this budget is impacting on poverty alleviation.
31. A loan default plan for farmers unable to meet capital and interest payments to the ADB.
32. A reduction of the ADB interest rate between 3 to 5 per cent encouraging food production and reduction on the cost of food. Somebody wanted to know how the budget will contribute to the cost of food, there is.
33. Significant concession to owners and uses of CNG outfitted vehicles.
34. \$10 million in innovation financing facility.

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35. Increase of the limit from \$1,000 to \$20,000 for the importation of goods not requiring formal customs entry.
36. The Children's Life Fund, caring for our nation's children. Our Prime Minister so beautifully introduced this into the nation. Those who are in urgent need of medical care are financed. Too often our children have been left and it has been too little too late. Encourage contributions to the fund. Once established, we will provide tax incentive to both companies and private individuals who make donations to the fund.
37. The main feature of this plan is the allocation of shares in the employer company to employee members of the ESOP. This is an attractive vehicle for the promotion of widespread share ownership by employees and for encouraging savings generally. It also results in greater productivity, as it enhances the relationship between employees and provides tax advantage methods for employees who opt for benefits in company shares in lieu of cash remuneration.
38. 6,400 persons who have sought regularization—things that this past administration refused to do; regularization of people's lands and so forth; the very basis upon which people articulate their life, their land and where they live. Stay quiet Member for Diego Martin Central, you might learn something. During this fiscal year 6,400 persons have sought regularization.

Dr. Browne: You are encouraging squatting again.

39. The Land Settlement Agency will profile squatter sites and study land use plans in pursuit of more equitable land ownership patterns and the simultaneous eradication of informal settlements. "Yuh eh listening man."
40. We will intensify, relocation and other measures to curb illegal squatting. "Yuh talking too fast man? Listen, yuh might learn something." Follow legislative amendments to the Land Settlements Agency.

My area is Lopinot/Bonair West and this Government continues to demonstrate a capacity to deliver to the people. Take for example the Mausica River, "I know dat river for years, (growing up from small) washing away people house." Recently it has become very bad. It washed away a man's backyard and took away his shed. On Friday evening I called the Minister of Works and Transport and said: "we have ah river here dat causing major problems from the old road straight across to the highway, passing through Samaroo Village to the Eastern Main Road, all down to the highway, causing major problems." That very

same evening, engineers were on site. I met them there. They looked at the spot. The next week, there were people putting up a wall. It took the man four days to put up a retaining wall. I do not know how that happened. All I know is that in the past, in the last regime, a wall took years. The Minister of Works and Transport called the engineers and they showed and I showed up. I looked at the spot and there were contractors there putting up a wall protecting people's property.

10.00 p.m.

They did the same thing with a retention pond in La Resource to prevent the water from taking over people's place. Lopinot which is in my constituency, and we had a team of Ministers there a few weeks ago; the Minister of Tourism; the Minister of Local Government; the Minister of Public Utilities; the Minister of Works and Transport; and other representatives. All of us were there demonstrating to the people that we really care. That is what I call caring. [*Desk thumping*] The people said that they have never seen anything like that where Ministers have showed up instantly. That is what we are talking about.

I agree with the Minister of Finance when he says that this budget lays the foundation for a major shift in our developmental approach:

- from dependency to interdependence and freedom;
- from an emphasis on state control to people control; and
- from political party driven and party owned—as if to say, we own this country, from that kind of thinking—to country driven and country owned.

These are the requirements of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This is how you develop a country and move people out of poverty from a focus on big and shiny pie in the sky ideas of development, to an on the ground development delivering to the poorest segments of society and tapping into the indigenous talents and creativity of the people. The Minister of Tourism talked about that; indigenous tourism and community tourism.

The budget addresses and attacks poverty and delivers social justice at a variety of levels rather than the corruption of the past regime. The People's Partnership budget is clear in an approach that includes collaboration with all stakeholders and civil society. We have a Minister here who is appointed directly to deal with civil society, as opposed to the highhandedness, arrogance and lack of dialogue in the past. This budget is determined in its intent and demonstrates long-term planning for reducing poverty rather than a shot in the dark, handouts and breeding the cycle of poverty.

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This budget focuses and adopts a fiscal stance that is stable, people-centred and responsible. It brings us from the edge of a financial collapse to a courageous and steady return to fiscal consolidation and economic progress. It brings us from the edge of the precipice of cultural implosion and explosion toward one of discipline and production. Our nation can breathe a sigh of relief and, once again, rest assured that we are on an even keel and a proper stewardship for a more secure and confident future for our nation. This represents the steady hand of the People's Partnership Government. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Rodger Samuel): Mr. Speaker, the first thing I want to do is really bid God's blessings upon everybody in this House. I also want to congratulate you on the grace and the honour with which you carry out your job in this honourable House. [*Desk thumping*]

I also want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for placing her trust in me so that I could be part of this People's Partnership Government; for placing a trust in me so that I could be part of this wonderful work to lift this nation again and to fulfil a mandate that this country shall rise. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to thank our leader for the humble way that she approaches leadership. I want to declare to this House that for far too long, we have experienced leadership that was filled with arrogance, and now like a smell of fresh air, there is a leader in this nation whose feet are on the ground; a leader who with regard to any individual is approachable, and there is no sense of arrogance when we speak with her. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Prime Minister, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

I also want to thank my colleagues, this being my maiden speech, being a first time Member of this House, but I want to thank them for the wonderful camaraderie. I want to thank them for the way they help me in having a smooth adjustment to this House. It has been really a wonderful experience thus far.

Mr. Speaker, it will be remiss of me if I hesitate or neglect to congratulate the Minister of Finance, the Member for Tunapuna, for his budget presentation, a presentation to this nation that demanded tremendous wisdom; a presentation to this nation that demanded honesty and truth. In order for us to face the issues, it demands us being truthful; in order for us to take this country further and do something and change this economy and turn it around, it demands great wisdom and insight, so I want to thank the Member for Tunapuna for his budget presentation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as I journey on a daily basis throughout this land, there is a sense of lightness that has overtaken the society. There is an ease that has overwhelmed

us, and that old feeling of despair; that old feeling of frustration; that old feeling of disregard and disrespect is no more. As a matter of fact, that old feeling that was brought about by the former government, is no longer visible in Trinidad and Tobago. Since May 24, 2010 and July 26, 2010 this nation has lightened up, and the heavy weight of the past regime has been removed, and now there is a sense of hope that has overwhelmed this beautiful nation of ours. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the insanity of arrogance of the previous regime stood in the way and blinded the eyes of the past regime from recognizing how deep the struggles were in this nation for the citizens of this nation. As a matter of fact, they felt that it was far more important to build big buildings; that it was far more important to crave for private jets; that it was more important to crave for jet set lifestyles rather than build the moral and social fabric of our society. A government that for far too long, had attempted to blind the eyes of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, but that also became so blinded themselves, that in their quest to keep this nation in bondage, they thought that they could do anything and get away with everything, but this nation proved them wrong. [*Desk thumping*]

They mistook a \$2 million flag for national pride; [*Laughter and desk thumping*] they mistook good management for the financial fiasco of UDeCott and Calder Hart; they squandered the God-given blessings in corrupt practices while they continued to chant throughout the nation, "great is the PNM, it shall prevail", but they did not realize that great is Almighty God and only God that shall prevail. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is common knowledge that the moral and social fabric of our nation is at its lowest. We continue as adults to talk and reminisce about the days when there were pleasantries, when we said good morning and good evening as a form of greeting, respect and goodwill to each other; and when there was mutual respect for each other in our communities. As the song writer, the deceased Richard "Nappy" Mayers would have said in his song *Old Time Days*, "It used to be when every one cared for each other like brother and sister loving one another". Children then respected adults and their teachers.

The village played an important part and integral role in the development of each child, but since then, under the past regime, this nation has fallen away from the ideals that kept us the way we were years before. Indeed, we have to revisit the idea of the old time days in this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

It is no news that families are being destroyed, and that the divorce rate is high in our land; that more and more people including our youth are casual smokers and consumers of all kinds of alcoholic beverages.

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Mr. Speaker, years ago, as a young man, the people who would sit on the block or on the culverts with the petit quart and a chaser were old men, but now what we find is that kind of practice has overwhelmed our young people, and the consumption of alcohol is high on the agenda of our youths and citizens. Why? In many instances, the past regime has brought a catastrophe upon the minds of the citizens of this nation and has moved them into indulgences that we were never accustomed to; that together with foreign music and foreign lifestyles have taken over our land and has brought in the vices of the day. We were not the ones who encouraged that, but we inherited the bad situations of the past regime.

Theodore Roosevelt said that the man who loves other countries as much as his own, stands on a level with the man who loves other women as much as he loves his own wife. Now, Theodore Roosevelt said that because in so many instances our country—we as a nation are losing our sense of—I will use the word "usness"—we are losing our national character; we are losing the sense of who we really are and we are being overtaken by foreign things, foreign beliefs, foreign ideas and foreign lifestyles and that erodes who we are and it causes a great strain, not only on our economy, but on the social and moral fabric of our nation. Now we are plagued with criminal activities to the highest. Mr. Speaker, though it has been emphasized before, I must emphasize it again; the People's Partnership Government, inherited the criminal situation from the past regime, we inherited it. [*Desk thumping*]

It is a good thing that every time we begin to talk about criminal elements and activities, the question from the other side seems to be obvious; "So what all yuh going to do about it?" It says to me that they knew that they could not do anything about it, and they are hoping like a child with anticipation that we have the answers, which we have, to deal with the criminal situation in Trinidad and Tobago. Just let them wait and see.

Mr. Speaker, not only are we plagued with criminal activities to the highest, but we are also plagued with poor work ethics—we inherited that—in our national labour force; we are plagued with corruption and inefficiencies in government bureaucracy which have caused us as a nation to drop to No. 84 in the Global Competitive Index.

10.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in a book entitled "Liberating the Nation", the author said and I quote:

“That no nation can survive for long without virtue or morality in its people. A loss of principles and manners is the greatest threat to a free people and it causes its downfall more surely than any foreign enemy.”

It was Samuel Abraham, the father of American Revolution who said:

“While the people are virtuous, they cannot be subdued. But when once they lose their virtue, they will be ready to surrender their liberties to the first external or internal invader.”

He further reiterated that the greatest security from enslavement in a country is virtue or morality among its people.

Mr. Speaker, because of the wealth that we have been so blessed with, one of the failures of the past regime is to forget to build, or neglect to build the moral and social fabric with the thought that money can build a nation, that money can save a nation, but what saves a nation is the social and moral development of a society.

Mr. Sharma: And now the People's Partnership.

Hon. R. Samuel: Now, Mr. Speaker, the People's Partnership Government will pursue the ideas and ideals, not only of wealth of an economy, but wealth in the hearts of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, because of criminal elements, everyone's fundamental rights are threatened and this threat comes as a result of a lack of morality in people. We need to take heed to the fact that the past regime failed miserably in developing the morality and social fabric of this nation.

Mr. Sharma: Well said.

Hon. R. Samuel: The past regime never realized the fact that if you have to build more jails, if you have to enact more laws, if you have to build more police stations, if you have to purchase more sophisticated weapons to protect the citizens, that this speaks emphatically of the extent of moral decadence in a society. That is what it says, but they were not brilliant enough, they were not wise enough, to realize that on their own and we will have to teach them the truth about this as the People's Partnership Government.

It is said that a body of people are a lengthened shadow of its leaders. I want to say this clearly. It is said that a body of people is a lengthened shadow of those who lead. If this nation is where it is at this point in time, it says to us that the problem has not been so much the people of the nation, but the problem has been the leaders of the nation. [*Desk thumping*] As human nature is corrupted, the foundation of freedom is easily destroyed. Just for education, Mr. Speaker, one writer as he defines politics and I would love—Mr. Speaker, bear with me. Sometimes I may start to preach and after I preach as a preacher, I may have an altar call and ask those on the other side to repent. [*Desk thumping*] We will not take an offering.

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Mr. Speaker, one writer in defining politics, defined politics as the science of government, that part of moral principles or ethics; that form of values or codes which consist in the regulations and government of a nation or state for the preservation of its safety; for the preservation of its peace; for the preservation of prosperity; comprehending the defence of its existence and rights against foreign control or conquest; the augmentation or expansion of its strength and resources; and the protection of its citizens in their rights with the preservation and improvement of their morals. If this is so, then the last regime has failed miserably in fulfilling this role of politics.

It has been said that men and nations are not great by the virtue of their wealth, but by the wealth of their virtues. The real wealth of a nation is the moral fabric and the value system of its people. I am saying all of this because so often on the other side we talk and they criticize the idea of restructuring the economy and diversifying the economy, and they laughed and said all kinds of things when the statement was made about the curse of oil. It is a big scene if the oil was cursed. But it is how we use the thing that can bring a curse upon a nation.

Mr. Speaker, it is said that in a virtuous nation, leaders are moral exemplars. This produces more freedom because the rulers will not usurp an individual's right through bad legislation; they will not steal from people through excessive and graduate taxes like property taxes; they will do the things and steal from the citizens by all other meanings; people will not as a result live in fear as so many of our citizens live in fear today; people will not live having no regard for civil Government, as some people in our nation have no regard for law and order, this is part of the vision of the People's Partnership Government to restore Trinidad and Tobago in a holistic manner and a holistic way. It is not a one-sided thing.

Mr. Speaker, it is said that to determine the quality of a nation, you must discover what the people cherish. I want us to take heed of this. To determine the quality of life of a nation, you must discover what the people or the citizens cherish. How much do we cherish our culture; how much do we cherish our heritage; how much do we cherish our country, how much do we cherish our flag, our anthem; how much do we cherish each other, how much do we cherish our history? If you were to question citizens at random about the things that are indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago, you too will realize that there is limited knowledge of our history, and people that do not know their history are doomed to not have a secured future.

Our youths as well as so many of our adults are completely unaware of the things that make us who we are as a nation. If we continue along this road, much

of our history will be lost, and if they are not included in our basic educational curriculum, we will find ourselves in total disarray in years to come. The citizens tend to know more about every other nation than our own, and that is why when we talk about patriotism it is so spasmodic, and survey upon survey have revealed that we are only patriotic in times of football matches and on special occasions, but after that we are not really patriotic and there is no sense of belonging in Trinidad and Tobago.

Do we remember the kind of pride that we felt in 1962—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Speak for yourself. I am proud of my country.

Hon. R. Samuel: That is why you have it the way it is. There is no longer this sense of pride. We have so easily forgotten, that on August 31, 1962, we pulled down the Union Jack and we raised our own national flag, the red, white and black. We must understand and I quote Mr. David C. Mc Cullough who says a nation that forgets its past can function no better than individual anaemia. It is important for us to know this because this People's Partnership Government intends to rebuild the moral and social fabric of this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

History is a guide to navigating in perilous times. History is who we are, and why we are the way we are. If we know our history then we would know that there is nothing as a self-made individual, but we are shaped by the history of a nation. We are shaped by our own history. It is with this in mind, that this Government intends to develop and to re-introduce studies of civics, to reintroduce what we call citizenship education, and it is going to begin within the school curriculum. So that our children, as well as the citizens and the adults of this nation, and those wanting to become citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can connect to our past and a sense of usness in the present. This will be part of our national patriotism drive framework to be brought to Cabinet in the not too distant future, and all these initiatives will obviously be under the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, all of us, all the citizens of this nation, will have the opportunity to learn much more about Trinidad and Tobago. Yes, the history of Trinidad and Tobago. Those are things that make us who we are. Those are things that share with us why we are the way we are. In the mist of all of this, citizens and children of this nation will learn our national songs and sing them with pride. They will understand what our flag means and respect it. They will know our heroes and be proud of them. They will learn our national motto and love it. They will say our national pledge and they will live it. They will visit our national sites and they will appreciate them. They will sing our National Anthem and they will stand by it. [*Desk thumping*]

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It was, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: One love.

Hon. R. Samuel:—the founding father of this nation who urged the thousands of young people on August 30th, 1962, to translate the ideals of our National Anthem into a code of their behaviour and to make our nation one in which every creed and race find an equal place. He went on to tell them do not allow anyone to disrespect our national flag; do not allow anyone to destroy one single national bird; do not allow anyone to desecrate our nation's anthem; they are your flag, your birds, your anthem.

Mr. Speaker, how far have we drifted from these statements of 1962? This nation has fallen way below, and this nation has been led by PNM for most of that season. [*Desk thumping*] Too long, too long!

This People's Partnership Government, this Government of Trinidad and Tobago will protect who we are. This People's Partnership Government will protect our heritage. I quote the Finance Minister in his budget presentation and I know that Minister of Tourism would have touched on this, but it is necessary for me to reiterate it because in our drive to be a patriotic people and a patriotic nation, this budget presentation presents to us ideas and ideals for preservation of our heritage.

10.30 p.m.

"Trinidad and Tobago's tourism product is very diverse", the Finance Minister said. It contributes to our strength as a destination. The Government will upgrade our sites and attractions to maximize their potential, and attracting it to both local and foreign visitors. We also intend to establish what is called the "Sugar Heritage Village" and a museum at Sevilla House in Caroni. I am sure that the Minister of Tourism and the Ministry of Tourism would be proud to be part of something that will bring back this sense of patriotism and heritage in our nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Speaker, the diversity of our culture, the Minister said, is our strength. We must leverage our cultural energy to develop a culture-based industry for both local and export market. We need to place emphasis on the talents and the skills and abilities of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We will partner with the Artists Coalition of Trinidad and Tobago, and other interest groups, to act on a number of projects. Some of these include additional funding for the music industry, creating a national heroes policy, and publishing a book of heroes; restoring and recognizing heritage sites to promote destination

tourism, as well as creating a national hall of fame and a house of music, among other policies. With these projects, Mr. Speaker, we will reflect the rich heritage of a multicultural society.

Mr. Speaker, this People's Partnership Government is intent on building the moral and social fabric—and I have to keep reiterating that—a fabric that has been lost over the years, and under the bondage of the People's National Movement. "Some men change their principles," one writer says, "and morals for the sake of party." We in the People's Partnership Government prefer to change the image of our party, to enhance, and for the sake of principles and morals.

Mr. Speaker, this response will not be made complete if I fail in this address to deal with the issue of HIV/AIDS in this country. And I have to deal with it, Mr. Speaker, because under the initiative of the Office of the Prime Minister, HIV/AIDS is high on the agenda. This country must never take for granted or adopt a kind of laid back or lackadaisical attitude, or even take its eyes off from the fact that HIV/AIDS is still a threat to the world. It is still a threat to the world, and we in Trinidad and Tobago are not shielded from its devastation.

Mr. Speaker, even though there are retroviral drugs that if used correctly can prolong the lives of people who are infected, the campaign against the virus must not lighten up or lessen in any way. We in the People's Partnership Government intend to take the battle against HIV to its full max. It is with this in mind that in the People's Partnership Manifesto of 2010 that we intend to strengthen the national HIV/AIDS policy.

We intend to establish the National AIDS Coordinating Committee as a statutory authority. We intend to develop a policy to promote healthier lifestyles. We intend to strengthen legislation relating to the HIV pandemic. Mr. Speaker, we will pursue these initiatives through the Office of the Prime Minister in collaboration with other ministries, as well as civil society participation. That is the initiative, Mr. Speaker, that is under the purview of the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, justice will not be done if in this response I do not make mention of my own constituency, which I represent. During the entire reign of the past regime, Arima has been a neglected constituency. And while those on the other side are begging to go home, I think they need to hear what they have done. Just take a drive through in Arima, Mr. Speaker, and you will experience neglect. Neglect becomes an experience, just by driving through, and these people have governed Arima for years.

Mr. Speaker, this constituency that I serve encompasses what we call the "first royal chartered borough", but it is not royal anymore. You know the song says, "She's Royal"? She is not royal anymore. Because, Mr. Speaker, Arima has been

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neglected by those people. Arima has been rejected by those people. [*Desk thumping*] Arima has been abandoned by those on the other side. Mr. Speaker, this borough, this constituency has suffered neglect for too long, and under the People's Partnership Government, we say neglect for Arima is over. [*Desk thumping*]

Arima is the home of the first people. Arima is the home of parang. Arima has done so much for this nation, and yet is neglected. Mr. Speaker, for 27 years, a road collapsed. They said it could not be done. It could not be done, yet, Mr. Speaker, we made requests to the Ministry of Works and Transport, and it is promised that this road will be completed in its repairs within six months. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, that is something for us to think about. Something that could not happen in 27 years—a collapsed road—is now happening within six months. I am saying, Mr. Speaker, if you want a Government that can perform, then the People's Partnership Government needs to stay in power forever. [*Desk thumping*]

To add insult to injury, take a drive on the Blanchisseuse Road to Blanchisseuse. Arima has been neglected. That is not new news. The former MP for Arima lost and was fired because she admitted that the PNM Government refused to do anything for Arima.

Miss Hospedales: That is not true.

Hon. R. Samuel: She admitted it. I have the tapes of it. She admitted it.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Yes she did.

Hon. R. Samuel: Mr. Speaker, she admitted that over and over, she made requests and was totally rejected. And because she was rejected, Arima has suffered tremendously. Today, I am saying that the time for suffering in Arima is over, because of the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the last Government has now left us with a colossal task, because there has been destruction in Arima; and to lift Arima up again, it will take a colossal task, but we are up to it. This land of ours that was once, as if we would term it from a biblical standpoint, flowing with milk and honey, has lost some of its honey, has lost some of its milk; but this People's Partnership Government will rebuild the warehouses of honey and the warehouses of milk, and ensure that Trinidad and Tobago lifts itself up again and is proud again to stand as a nation of wealth and integrity once more in the world's status. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, before we have an altar call, I say to you that it takes a long time to build a nation, but it takes honesty to face the issues of any nation. It also takes wisdom and vision to turn any economy around, and we in the People's

Partnership will never give up in our quest to do so. We must say thanks to those who have tried before, but we feel pitiful because they have failed, and they have failed miserably. And because they have failed, Mr. Speaker, our task becomes a far more tedious one.

We have restarted—not that we will restart, but we have already begun the building process of this nation. So as we serve this nation, Mr. Speaker, we do so with a new sense of sincerity, something that was lost in the past; a sincerity that had been lost in the politics of this country; a sincerity that we intend to reinstill in the politics and the governance of sweet Trinidad and Tobago; that at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, all of our people, from Cedros to Charlotteville, will be proud to declare, "I am a Trinbagonian," and there is no other place I would rather be, under the People's Partnership Government.

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday 15th September, 2010, tomorrow, at 10.00 a.m., when we will continue the debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2010.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question, may I, on your behalf, extend my congratulations to the following Members who made their maiden contributions today? The Member of Parliament for Cumuto/Manzanilla; the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East; the Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande; the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite; the Member of Parliament for Tobago West; the Member of Parliament for Couva North; the Member of Parliament for Lopinot/Bon Air West; and the Member of Parliament for Arima. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Hospedales: And the Member for St. Ann's East.

Mr. Speaker: St. Ann's East, I am sorry. [*Desk thumping*] The Member of Parliament for St. Ann's East. Please forgive me.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.43 p.m.