APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2012) BILL, 2011
[Second Day]

Question proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (Diego Martin West): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I want to begin as a Member of the accommodation committee, by joining you and my other colleagues gathered here, in expressing my sincerest gratitude to all those who have contributed to the smooth relocation of the Red House to a temporary accommodation at this venue; a subject to which I will return a little later.

I particularly want to single out the parliamentary staff for a special commendation, as they once again demonstrated that they are among the most professional and reliable officers in the public service. [Desk thumping] This, Mr. Speaker, is a badge of honour which they must continue to wear with pride, as they follow the excellent leadership of our Clerk of the House, Mrs. Jacqui Sampson-Meiguel.

[Inaudible] [There is a problem with the microphone]

Mr. Speaker, do I have the clearance to wait? The mike is off. [Crosstalk] [The system is being tested]

Mr. Speaker: Could you just let Hansard personnel address that for a moment?

Hon. Members, it seems as if we are experiencing a little technical challenge with the microphone system. In those circumstances until we are able to rectify that matter, I would like to suspend this sitting for a few moments. I would say that we will resume in the next 10 minutes.

10.06 a.m.: Sitting suspended.
11.18 a.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I, on behalf of the entire secretariat and on my own behalf, apologize, first of all, to the Leader of the Opposition, of course, all Members of Parliament for the technical glitch which we experienced earlier on in the proceedings. I suspect it is all part of the work in progress we talked about in progress and we wish to sincerely apologize for this technical glitch. I may have to give some consideration to offering the Leader of the Opposition some injury time for this inconvenience that you have experienced, and I will exercise some discretion in that regard.

At this moment I call on the hon. Leader of the Opposition and Member for Diego Martin West to begin his contribution. [Desk thumping]

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems to have gone again! [Inaudible]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like this technical glitch to be addressed completely, comprehensively and finally. Let us not come back and have to suspend a second time. I would like, in the interest of everyone here, to suspend until 11.00 a.m., and please have this matter resolved.

11.20 a.m.: Sitting suspended.

11.30 a.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let us hope this time the technical challenge has been overcome and we would not have to interrupt our proceedings any further. I now call on the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, to deliver his contribution.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as is customary after the budget statement is read, the Leader of the Opposition is required to respond to the Minister of Finance and the Government, in the context of their proposals as advanced. On this occasion, Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence to direct my response solely to you and the wider public of Trinidad and Tobago, whose business has been so trivialized by the group of 29, which is leading us over a cliff whilst pretending it is a trip to the promised land.

It is my intention to leave the Government to continue to ascribe blame to others, to evade its own responsibility, to hide and misrepresent facts, to propagandize and engage in self-praise as the national crisis looms larger and larger. In the words of the Minister of Finance himself, this is the only
Government which finds itself approaching a cliff and chooses to look up with resolve and vision. Maybe it is their intention that the inevitable loud thud at the bottom of the pit will wake them up to the reality of our deteriorating circumstances, but by then it may be too late for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is against this background that I choose to speak directly to the people of Trinidad and Tobago about the real threatening circumstances which the Minister of Finance has studiously evaded.

One year ago, Mr. Speaker, a new Government presented a budget to this Parliament and something unusual happened; this Government received the support of the Opposition in the passage of that budget. Even though we were critical of a few of the issues and strongly warned against the negative potential of some actions, we voted for the budget and wished the five-month-old Government well as it embarked upon the business of improving the condition of the people of Trinidad and Tobago on a foundation built by its predecessor, and that predecessor was the PNM. It has come to pass that all that the Minister of Finance can claim as an accomplishment in this budget statement is that he stabilized the economy. It behooves me to remind you, Mr. Speaker, of the state of the economy as it was when this Government took office.

This is best summed up in a press release from the reputable Standard & Poor’s Rating Service, which issued this statement on September 14, 2009 in New York. At that time this so-called partnership was not even formed, and I quote:

“Standard & Poor’s Rating Services said today that it affirmed its ‘A/A-…’ foreign-currency, and ‘A+/A-…’ local-currency…credit ratings on the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Standard & Poor’s also said that it removed these ratings from CreditWatch, where they were placed on February 3, 2009, with negative implications.

The outlook is stable.”

The budget speech delivered by the Finance Minister was an elaborate exercise in obfuscation, self-praise and deceit. At times the speech bordered on delusional or was of such extreme vagueness that one had to struggle to follow exactly what the Minister of Finance was really saying. The Minister of Finance has presented budget estimates of $54 billion, the largest in the country’s history. This is without identifying any clear revenue generating activities other than increasing fines for certain offences. The Minister is actually congratulating himself for planning to run huge budget deficits without articulating any plan as
to how he will raise revenue in the future and when he will return to a balanced budget. The disastrous outcome of this should be clear to all right-thinking people in Trinidad and Tobago.

There is a saying on Wall Street that if you are jumping out of a building 100 storeys high, for the first 99 floors you can really believe that you are flying. I think that is what the Minister of Finance is doing. This is the perfect metaphor for what this UNC Government is doing to our economy. They are leading us down a path to economic ruin while believing their hollow rhetoric about—and if I quote them: “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”. Who are they trying to fool, Mr. Speaker? What foundation did they lay? The Minister of Finance said by the first quarter of 2011, and I will quote him: “…by the first quarter of 2011, we envisaged a somewhat smooth sailing, with a certain gentle economic wind on our backs.” Well in that quarter, growth turned out to be 1.7 per cent decline and in the previous quarter it was a decline of 3.5 per cent. So what was he talking about?

Furthermore, after painting a gloomy picture of the developments in the United States and Europe, the Minister of Finance then tried to pretend that somehow these were responsible for the recession that he was presiding over. Listen to him again, Mr. Speaker, and I quote him:

“…these uncertainties were transmitted to our economy through the impact on oil and gas prices...”

Well, the average oil and gas price was well above the budget price of last year to the extent that greater than expected revenue was derived from the energy sector. This even allowed them to run a smaller deficit than was planned. In fact, the Central Bank reported—and this was in June 2011—as the energy markets picked up in 2011; and I am quoting the Central Bank: the energy commodity price index increased by 42.4 per cent on a year-on-year basis, June 2011, after peaking in April 2011. The average price of crude petroleum, West Texas Intermediate, peaked at US$113 a barrel, in April 2011, before falling back slightly to $96.3 per barrel in June 2011.

Let me remind the Minister of Finance that his budgeted price last fiscal year was $65, so do not come and tell us about any oil price affecting your performance, you got more than you budgeted for. If that is not deceit, Mr. Speaker, you tell me what is.

More importantly, what was the real state of our economy when this Government came into office? The fact is that all macroeconomic indicators were
very good when this gang of 29 took office in 2010. [Desk thumping] And I want to repeat that for those who care to listen. When this gang of 29 came into office all our macroeconomic indices were strong.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I think it is very unparliamentary to describe Members of Parliament as a gang. I think that is unparliamentary and I would ask you to withdraw that, and do not go down that path, please.

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when this crew of 29—this motley crew of 29—when they took over the country, notwithstanding what they had to say, our macroeconomic indices were strong. [Desk thumping]

Unemployment was at 4.8 per cent at that time, one of the lowest in the Caricom. Our foreign reserves and foreign exchange were over US $9 billion when this crew took over on May 24, 2010. There was also already $3 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. So they met the country with a combined US $12 billion in savings and reserves—fact.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, that is what the PNM left in office notwithstanding what they had to say. [Desk thumping] Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, on the matter of the public debt to GDP ratio, that was 38.5 per cent. [Desk thumping] It was way below panic point, notwithstanding what the Minister of Finance had to say on his way into his job, that the country was in a debt trap—it was 38.5 per cent. It was one of the lowest to be found anywhere in the world.

Additionally, notwithstanding the Minister of Finance taking credit for preserving our “A” rating, that is what it was. In 2005, Standards & Poor’s, our rating was A+: 2006, A+ all the way to 2009; A+ all the way to [Inaudible] [Desk thumping] We moved from A+ to AAA; it had nothing to do with him. [Desk thumping] And in Moody’s rating we had moved from BAA2 to BAA1, it had nothing to do with him.

Yet incredibly, Mr. Speaker, they set about bad-mouthing the country’s economic situation and in the process destroyed the very business confidence that they are now struggling to revive. We warned them about what they were doing, yet they kept on crying wolf, playing cheap politics, trying to convince the country that we were on the brink of some sort of economic calamity when they came into office. Mr. Speaker, the real disaster started on May 24, 2010 and it was called the UNC Partnership.
Mr. Speaker, there has been no real GDP growth—undisputed fact. The economy was expected to grow at 2.5 per cent in 2010 when the UNC came into office.

Hon. Member: That’s right.

Dr. K. Rowley: But after claiming in September that his budget job was to turn around the economy, the Minister of Finance presided over a 3.6 per cent economic decline in the last quarter of 2010 and then a further contraction of 1.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2011, in other words, a recession.

The only area of growth, Mr. Speaker, in this Government was in the Ministry of the Attorney General. [Desk thumping] and the Minister of Finance seems to be blissfully unaware of that, because he did not even seem to know what he was reading.

Well, let me read for you what he has approved in this budget for the Ministry of the Attorney General, an office that had, when they came into office, an allocation of $33 million for lawyer work—fees—an allocation of $33 million and we queried that.

They came back to the Parliament mid-year and got an additional $8 million for the Attorney General. So that the budget documents would show that last fiscal year, this rampaging Attorney General had $41 million to pay lawyers. You know what the budget is for this year, Mr. Speaker—$94.5 million.

Miss McDonald: Say it again.

Dr. K. Rowley: The Minister of Finance has budgeted for the Attorney General to spend $94 million on external lawyers.

Miss McDonald: Scandalous!

Dr. K. Rowley: Let me break it down for you, Mr. Speaker: $50 million for forensic investigation.

Miss McDonald: Shame!

Dr. K. Rowley: And I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to listen. The Minister of Finance has budgeted $50 million for the Attorney General to spend on forensic investigation.

Miss Cox: My God!

Miss McDonald: When they could buy beds!
Dr. K. Rowley: He has budgeted an additional—Mr. Speaker, please—

Mr. Speaker: I will appeal to both sides. I am appealing to both sides, particularly those persons who are nearest the Leader of the Opposition [Laughter] to allow him to speak in silence, please. And the Members on the other side, I will ask you to simply listen in silence. You may continue, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I hope you will keep a little note of the—thank you.

Yes, let me start over because I do not want this to be lost in the mirth. We are moving from $33 million when they arrived on the scene to $41 million mid-year to budget now for $94.5 million of which $50 million—

Miss Cox: Explain that!

Dr. K. Rowley:—$50 million is for forensic investigation. An additional $33 million—additional eh!—for foreign and local lawyers and $8.5 million for an unknown activity called “other”, and $3 million for expenses for overseas counsels—$94.5 million. This is the only area of growth in the Government, over 100 per cent increase. So all indications are that the rest of the year—

Hon. Member: Shame!

Dr. K. Rowley: Apparently, he is disowning it, Mr. Speaker. I knew that the Minister of Finance did not know what he was reading, I knew that. [Desk thumping] So all indications are for the rest of this year economic growth will continue to be negative. The Minister of Finance himself has confirmed that.

Therefore, from the point of view of the most important economic indicator, the UNC Government has been an absolute failure, an unmitigated disaster for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

I mentioned unemployment fell to 4.8 per cent when they were coming into office last year at election time. Since then, all evidence points to steady increase in the unemployment rate. Again, all indicators suggest that the employment rate could be significantly higher than any numbers that they are trying to tell us about, all because of their backward policies.

Mr. Speaker, business confidence—lack of that—the UNC has failed miserably to convince anyone in the private sector that they have a clue that they know what they are doing. Their flip-flopping and mean-spirited actions have
appropriation bill 2011

[dr. rowley]

destroyed business confidence in our economy. as a matter of fact, one guardian writer asha javeed wrote recently and i quote:

“budget 2011 did not turn the economy around. an ambitious $50 million plan, by an even more ambitious newly-minted coalition government struggled with a confidence crisis for most of the financial year.”

that is the guardian writer’s opinion of the government. i could not have put it better myself, mr. speaker. and, of course, the central bank points out that business lending continues to decline under this government, falling by 5.7 per cent at the beginning of the year.

public debt—what is the story there? the country is in its third year of deficit financing. and there is no inherent problem, contrary to the prime minister’s fulmination, nobody is arguing with the concept of deficit financing but you have to have an exit plan.

the unc is now in its second year of deficit financing. they insist on bringing larger budgets than the pnm ever did, while boasting about their ability to borrow. so if they actually borrow and spend all that they claim they would in the budget, they would significantly increase our national debt. in fact, it can go from a manageable 50 per cent of gdp to about 70 per cent if they carry out the plans that they are talking about in this budget and their other discussions, and that appears to be their ambition. and they are proud of it.

and this they referred to as “prudent economic management”. while sitting comfortably on the imp train they are proudly boasting that they are not taking the country down that road. utterly delusional! who is so crazy in this country to take any assurance given by this unc government? two consecutive quarters of increasing unemployment and more pain to the people suffering under the modern policing of the 21st century unc government.

state of emergency—growth area. super-low core inflation in 2011 and the reason for that, mr. speaker, anybody will tell you, is because of weak activity in the economy. inflation is low not because of any management strategy but it is because nothing “ain’t” going on, nothing going on. [desk thumping]

this unc government has presided over taking the country from weak, positive economic growth into a recession, rising unemployment, increased national debt and they have destroyed any semblance of business confidence. if this is not economic mismanagement then you tell me what is. for them this is good economic management—pp style.
So when this Minister of Finance and his coalition—his crew members—speak and they seek your praise for stabilizing the economy, I want to tell them the Minister of Finance did not stabilize anything, he met it stable in May 2010. [Desk thumping] And it had been declared stable since September 2009. What he has done by destroying confidence in the economy is to unravel what he met. He promised last year to turn the economy around. We pointed out then that if he were successful it would mean that the economy will reverse its direction from growth to recession. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, this is what has happened—so said, so done. He has turned the economy around to recession. [Desk thumping]

After the initial surprise of the economic shock emanating from the Wall Street collapse of early 2009, the assignment of the new Government was to maintain that stability and bring about further growth in the weakened economy. On this score, the Government has failed and failed miserably.

Mr. Speaker, all the challenges of 2009—international, regional and local—against that, the performance of Trinidad and Tobago in 2010, the very year of the Government’s handover and transition saw negative growth of 0.6 per cent, and a better than anticipated fiscal deficit. It was on this foundation that the current Minister of Finance and his Government solicited and obtained Opposition support from which it projected economic growth of 2 per cent, and what has been the result? Not only did we not achieve the 2 per cent nor did we remain at the initial level, we are now talking and accepting 1.4 per cent fiscal decline in 2010/2011.

And all this whilst throughout the year, the Government resolutely denied that the economy was stalled, and that we were experiencing recessionary conditions. It is reasonable to assume that when the full effects of the current economic disruptions occasioned by that state of emergency are fully factored into the end of the fourth quarter, the real decline could be about 2 per cent or even more.

Instead of facing reality and taking the necessary actions as they were required to do, using the tools of expenditure provided by the Parliament, the Government spent the year engaging in vacuous propaganda about blue skies and rosy forecast of non-existent recovery and growth. While the economy was collapsing and all knowledgeable right-thinking people were beseeching the Government over the effects of this recession, and what it was doing to their lives and their businesses, the Government chose to ignore the reality, to engage in deceit, misrepresentations as they executively travelled, partied heartily and conducted guerrilla warfare against all contract officers in the Public Service. They revelled
in inter-ministerial “janjat” in the state enterprise sector where, even as I speak, Mr. Speaker, chairmen and lesser functionaries are still coming and going like Paddington Station.

The net effect of all this has been tardy and ineffectual decision-making, stifling the economic activity with significant job losses in the private sector.

12 noon

It is against this background that this deceitful Government has not published the quarterly unemployment figures since the second quarter of 2010. As unemployment continues to rise alarmingly, there is no longer any official published statistics of the unemployment situation, because the Government wants it to be so. With no published statistics available, it is interesting to hear the Minister of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring quoting the latest unemployment figures known only to him. This is a figure which is lower than the quoted figure used by the IMF, all of which are lower than the real situation. What we do know, Mr. Speaker, is that during the last year thousands of persons have lost their jobs and very few new job opportunities have been created as the economy continues to contract.

With this experience, Mr. Speaker, we demand that the Central Statistical Office, the CSO, be revamped immediately and we call for and support the establishment of an independent statistical institute gathering data of national interest and making it available in a useable and timely fashion, away from and free from Government interference and manipulation. This institute should be headed by a director appointed by the President with proper security of tenure away from central government’s ability to interfere with its output. [Desk thumping] Reliable statistical data are key ingredients in government and private sector decision-making and policy formulation. The collapse and suppression of the CSO, as we are seeing with the unemployment figures, is intolerable and should be cause for great concern with respect to the outcome of the ongoing national census.

In a budget statement in which the Minister of Finance offers disclosures and decisions, the exact opposite has been the fabric of his presentation. For approximately three hours the Minister laboured haltingly over the text in a manner as though he was seeing its contents for the first time. [Laughter] You just saw his reaction to the AG’s money—so unconvinced was he that he could not bring himself to speak with any enthusiasm or conviction. We knew he was simply going through the motions.
What is abundantly clear, Mr. Speaker, is that the Minister of Finance in October 2011, one and a half years into his tenure, has deliberately refused to report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on the performance of the last budget provisions. \[Desk thumping\] He has deliberately refused to report on the current economic conditions and the outlook as they stand under his watch. He accepts no responsibility for his stewardship and he and his marauding colleagues did everything possible to destroy confidence in the economy, he now makes the preposterous statement that the admitted failure of the last fiscal package, the contraction of the economy, this UNC-led recession is the fault of the private sector and the Opposition.

**Hon. Member:** Yes! Yes! \[Desk thumping\]

**Dr. K. Rowley:** Clearly, Mr. Speaker, this is what his handlers have advised him to say. When this current budget before us fails to deliver we expect that it would be blamed on Osama Bin Laden and the man in the moon. \[Laughter\]

No two Ministers, Mr. Speaker, speak with the same voice on any issue as they jostle for attention in front any available camera. Not even the Prime Minister is immune from this scourge. Only last week we heard of an airport in Couva and five hospital certainties in the 2012 budget—the development programme of that budget—and that every Ministry would have an identifiably-gender component. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, nobody bothered to advise the Minister of Finance about that. \[Laughter\]

The Central Bank reports that business lending continues to contract. This protracted loss of confidence has everything to do with the behaviour of the Government as much as it has to do with any circumstances beyond our control. As of today there is no commitment to any time frame for a return to economic growth. The Government is clear that it is taking on no such responsibility. If this shirking of leadership responsibility continues for much longer, the World Bank, the IMF and public servants would do it for us when we turn up to borrow their money, because that seems to be the panacea for the situation.

The 2011/2012 budget forecast shows a best-case scenario of 1.7 per cent growth. How then will next year be better than the last year? By what mechanism and by what magic? The IMF World Economic Outlook warns that the world economy has entered a dangerous phase and that the prospect of lower world economic growth and the recession has increased significantly. The Minister indicated that he appreciated the risks and then proceeded to ignore them. Expenses outstripped revenue yet another year in 2011. Where are the growth poles which drew so much desk thumping last year? They nearly deafened us last
year when they announced five growth poles. How has the private sector responded to the initiatives that were hailed in last year’s budget? [Laughter] Where is the big bang of cumulated series of small steps that would carry us from no growth to the stability of which he spoke in the first budget of last year?

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the approach set out in the budget is akin to the encounter of Alice in Wonderland when she met the Cheshire cat and she asked the cat for directions and the cat replied that “If you don’t know where you are going Alice, any road will take you there.” [Laughter] “If you don’t know where you are going Dooks, any road will take us there.” [Desk thumping and laughter]

Mr. Speaker, joke is joke, but treating monkey bad “eh” no joke. Where is the Minister of Finance taking us? This is a serious matter. [Interruption] He paints a gloomy world economic outlook. He speaks of uncertainty and the need to navigate uncertain waters. This is the same Minister, who, just four weeks ago, was talking about blue skies and green shoots; perhaps his head was in the clouds. He and his budget are there in the clouds.

Last year’s budget PR talk was stabilization; this year the buzz is transformation; next year, I predict, the following budget would be trepidation. [Laughter] The reality is, nothing significant has happened. There has been no growth poles, no growth. In his last budget speech, the Minister of Finance based his budget on an oil price of $65. This year he uses a price of $75, whilst telling us that the oil production has continued to fall. So if the oil production is falling and you raise the price of oil, the production will increase automatically, by magic. What he did not tell the country is that oil production is at its lowest level since the 50s—

Miss McDonald: 1958.

Dr. K. Rowley:—and, in the main, that oil production consists of heavy crudes which do not attract the best price like West Texas Intermediate, which is the quoted price you hear on the news most frequently.

We export a lower quality of oil, so our realized price will always be a bit lower, 15 to 20 per cent. Our LNG may be sold increasingly to other destinations which are achieving a better price for the moment—in Europe and in the Far East—but the market is tending towards softening. Yet the Minister of Finance keeps the price constant at a net back price of US $2.75. The question you have to ask yourself is, will that be realized over the period coming ahead of us?

In the 2011 review notes there are reports of problems with supply and several plants complained of low output, another concern. It is, therefore, highly unlikely
that we will achieve the prices on which the budget is predicated. The year 2010 was a good year and we did well with revenues of $42.3 billion. The 2011 tax revenue is estimated at $43.4 billion and is projected to grow to $47 billion in 2012 with no new revenue streams and a weak energy market.

Mr. Speaker, under your better situation you got $42 billion; in your troubled difficult situation you are forecasting $47 billion. You are looking for $5 billion more by magic. Mr. Speaker, is this not wishful thinking? Are these numbers as projected on the revenue side realistic? Did he just increase the prices of energy to get a bigger revenue number so that expenditure could continue to increase? But there might be even a more sinister interpretation. The Heritage and Stabilization Fund Act requires that money be transferred to this fund when realized prices are higher than budgeted prices. The Minister has ensured that there will be no such transfer by budgeting a higher price than can be realized, thereby ensuring that every cent available is for spending. [Desk thumping]

But surprisingly, these are my colleagues on the other side, the same people who advocated that the country should never budget above $50 per barrel, so that we will always be having a savings component from the energy sector revenues. That was their mantra. They cast the budget at $50 and anything else must go to savings, but now they are budgeting above projected highlights; [Interruption] above projecting maxima to make sure that whatever we earn, under the law, not one cent is due and payable into the savings fund. Today is today; yesterday was yesterday. This is new politics; you are learning well from your partner next to you.

Mr. Speaker, so we have a weak and uncertain revenue outlook, falling revenue prices and an increasing possibility that we may have a double dip recession. However, for the second year running budgeted expenditures are increased, so this year we will go from $51 billion to $54.6 billion. How long are we going to continue with this? Are we the Caribbean Greeks? The Minister of Finance spoke about the Greek situation and the need to learn from it. Are we the Greeks?

This Government came into office saying that the Treasury was empty, that the economy was in a mess and that Government debt was out of control, and what have they done? Increased the borrowing limit and thus increased uncertainty about the future and they have destroyed investor and consumer confidence. They have killed the capital expenditure budget and they have slowed down the economy. If that was not bad enough, they have come with this hare-brained idea to develop a bank for Jack; something called a National
Appropriation Bill 2011

[DR. ROWLEY]

Infrastructure Bank. These people in the Government are the same people who say that they want to restrict what Government does and leave room for the private sector, but the Minister of Finance wants to develop another bank, the primary client of which, directly or indirectly, will be the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Just imagine the Member for Chaguanas West with his very own bank? [Laughter] Take that in your pooch, Blazer! [Laughter] “Take that in your pwefm, FIFA; have meh own bank and am Prime Minister too.” [Desk thumping and laughter]

Hon. Member: “Ooooh.”

Dr. K. Rowley: “If I eh like yuh ah dead.” [Laughter] My only problem with you is that you are so central to our future. [Laughter]

Mr. Warner: [Inaudible]

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, you heard that; he threatened to kill me? He is joking, right?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: He has to be joking too?

Dr. K. Rowley: But he said that I would die soon. He said that I would die soon.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: How can you say that the Minister has the Prime Minister?

Dr. K. Rowley: Has what?

Hon. Member: What? He did not say that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Totally irrelevant!

Dr. K. Rowley: You—look!

Hon. Member: I did not hear that.

Dr. K. Rowley: I said, he said “I am Prime Minister too.” You did not hear when he said that?

Is the Minister aware of the robust capital provisions that are included in the Basel III Accord to increase requirements of banks worldwide and to ensure that banks have enough capital to deal with operational risks and the other risks that come from lending? Surely, the Minister of Finance has learned something from the crises of 2008 and 2009. Who will supervise this infrastructure bank—Central Bank?—supervise this government bank that you are going to create?
Hon. Member: Rahael.

Dr. K. Rowley: Is this the same Minister who said that there are too many special purpose enterprises and that they are inherently badly run? His answer to too many state enterprises is to create another one. Where else in the similar world does something like this exist?

12.15 p.m.

I want to advise the Minister that a national budget speech is not the time and place to send up trial balloons to appease an overambitious and disgruntled Minister. It is time to deal soberly with the real issues, with workable solutions not pretence.

How are we going to get the economy moving again? By increasing our recurrent expenditures and not improving our productive base, by unlimited borrowing to finance recurrent expenditure, is that the plan? It is against this backdrop that we must review the Government’s inadvertent abolition of the lands and buildings taxes. The requirement to pay some level of lands and buildings taxes is and has been a settled issue in Trinidad and Tobago for a very long time.

When Finance Minister Gerald Yetming of the UNC, I may remind you, when he announced the introduction of phase I of the property tax which he renamed, it was lands and buildings tax, he renamed it property tax. The only issue was what level would the revised tax be pitched at. The PNM continued the process and set levels of taxation which met with widespread public condemnation in a charged political environment. This emotive issue became the sustenance of the COP and this coalition promised to repeal the property tax and reinstate the lands and buildings tax at the old rate. It is now the second year that lands and buildings taxes have not been collected because those who “axe the tax” now realized that property taxation is rooted in valuation of the property, and it is not feasible to value property now and establish ancient values that are below current market values. This Government attempted earlier to reintroduce lands and buildings taxes at the old rates, but could not treat with the valuation issue without applying egg to their “axe the tax” faces, so they allowed the Bill to lapse and disowned it. Even at the old rates the country would now have foregone approximately half a billion dollars in desperately needed revenue. When confronted with this situation the Minister of Finance realizing that a proper explanation was required produced the oddity, he said “There is some unidentified legal challenge” and he ruffled and brambled those who put the question to him, because they went away with no answer.
The Government has not identified the legal challenge, has not said how they are going to fix it and has given no commitment to fixing it. We are now into the third fiscal year where this matter is there. The truth is that they have painted themselves into a political corner during the last election and now the price of saving their political faces is approximately $250 million a year in amnesty, which we all enjoy, whilst they continue to try and figure out something.

Criticizing a tax is one thing, demonizing the principle is quite another. Citizens must now monitor this matter closely to ensure that whenever this issue is eventually resolved, as it must, the Government does not enact retroactive legislation to place an inordinate and unfair burden on property owners as a result of Government’s political expediency, deceit and incompetence.

The Minister of Finance was ominously silent about his failure to realize the level of VAT collections projected in the last budget. In September 2010, the Minister of Finance told us that to support its expenditure for 2011, the Government expected to collect $6.41 billion in VAT. However, the Government collected only $4.7 billion in VAT in 2011, a shortfall of $1,740 million or 27 per cent reduction. Would you believe that this Government collected less tax on VAT in 2011, when oil prices boomed in 2009 [Interruption] when oil prices crashed? VAT is a tax on consumption of goods and services; it is probably the most accurate indicator of economic activity in our country. For VAT collections to fall by 27 per cent, that is a $1.74 billion in one year it tells us that our economy is in serious trouble and we are, in fact, looking at a dangerous, downward spiral. The Minister has hidden this fact from us VAT collections are now at the lowest level for three years and this notwithstanding the tax amnesty of 2011. In the face of actual VAT collections of $4.67 billion in 2011, the Minister has once again optimistically estimated to collect $6.5 billion in 2012, almost $2 billion more. Reminds me of Shadow’s calypso “Yuh workin’? No. Yuh jokin’. Yuh ah magician? A madman?” You remember that tune? [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker, it is smoke and mirrors these optimistic revenue figures will more than likely not be realized in 2012. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, in the [Interruption]—I am just quoting what he talked about to us my happiness is private.

In the Review of the Economy 2011, the one he just gave us, page 46, where the Minister of Finance attempts to report on the out-turn for the last fiscal year, it is stated that the contributions to the Heritage and Stabilization Fund totalled US $2.89 billion. This is trying to tell us that the value of the fund almost doubled in the year of mismanagement and economic collapse. This clearly cannot be
correct, since all other indicators point to the fact that this figure is really TT$2.8 billion. If this record is not corrected now, the Minister of Finance himself will quote this wrong figure in the next two to three years as the true outcome of his performance in 2011. Correct it now. It is not US$2.89 billion; it is TT$2.89 billion, big difference.

The development programme. Mr. Speaker, of all the shortcomings in the out–turn of the last national budget both from the standpoint of performance as well as reporting, the most glaring is that which has to do with the development programme. Given the confluence of negative activities which combined to threaten our economic well-being last year, it was clear to the Parliament that the major objective of the new Government should be to stimulate the economy by instilling confidence and executing the programme of works outlined in the development programme.

It was in appreciation of this that Parliament approved a budget with a deficit of $7.5 billion with development spending in the order of $3.5 billion which should have been carried out between the period October 2010 and September 2011.

In his presentation last Monday, the Minister of Finance had virtually nothing to say about the performance of the development programme. The main reason for this was that the Government’s performance in this, like in so many other things, has been nothing short of scandalously woeful. Of the $3.5 billion allocated, the Government was only able to utilize about $1.5 billion. This is the development work spending which should have been done with dispatch to fuel the economy, an economy that was showing weak but positive movement that has been allowed to stall and go into recession as a result of the Government’s general incompetence and a lack of appreciation of the nation’s urgent priorities. So when the Minister of Finance talks now about the need for economic stimulus, he is just being evasive and facetious. He had a stimulus programme last year, he blew it, he failed to stimulate the economy last year. The development programme was not put to work.

Mr. Speaker, the Government’s inability to perform in the development programme is inexcusable given the unnecessary, deleterious effects that this failure has had on the economy and on the lives of tens of thousands of our citizens. The Government had no real funding difficulty during the last fiscal year, they had the leeway to borrow as approved and they got the $1.7 billion windfall from the tax amnesty; they just did not care. It was only when the end of the fiscal
year began to stare them in the face, that they hurriedly tried and attempted to make something do in the last quarter. Even so, the final out-turn remained dismal.

By way of example, in the Ministry of Local Government with only one month to go there was a mad scramble to award a series of contracts across the country on a constituency basis. As a parliamentary representative, I am quite happy to liaise with any Minister or any of my colleagues for the service of my constituents, but I am very uncomfortable with being asked to name contractors for construction job awards particularly in a questionable system, where competitive pricing and transparency seem to be clear casualties. It is the view of the PNM that contracts are to be determined by approved public service processes directed and controlled by public servants. It is a dangerous development for parliamentarians to be invited to select and name contractors for awards, especially when the value of these awards is arrived at in a crash programme without reference to the necessary appropriate technical input. Politicians and contractors gathering in a hotel to divvy up the construction budgets is not an acceptable process and this must be frowned upon by all right-thinking citizens. This new development has all the ingredients of mismanagement, waste and corruption which should form no part of the execution of the development programme.

Payment to contractors. Once again, this issue of payment to contractors is before us as a matter to be disputed. It was this Minister of Finance who in September 2010—or thereabout—quite erroneously attempted to convince us that contractors’ liabilities had largely been discharged since he had made a payment of more than $2 billion to them. When challenged by the Opposition, the Minister had to admit that it was one of the misses—this was to be a mispayment. Subsequently, there had been many public announcements of contractors having been paid, yet the issue does not go away. Now, when confronted with the inaccuracies of these statements from Government, their spokespersons deflect the concerns of contractors by saying that they have intractable documentation issues. One state enterprise is now saying that non-payment has to do with forestalling massive fraud on the part of contractors. According to them, if contractors are owed $2 million they are seeking to claim $50 million or thereabout.

Whatever explanation or spin the Government puts on it, the naked facts are that there are many contractors with overdue certified claims in their possession for which payments are not forthcoming. The real cause of the problem can be found in Appendix 4 of the Ministry of Finance’s Draft Estimates for 2012, under
the current account tables you will see the 2011 Estimates of Revenue. These are listed at $40.8 billion with a projected deficit of $607 million. The revised figure for that same period 2011, is $41.8 billion, but with a surplus of $1.62 billion that is in the current account. What that means is that the Government is simply not paying its bills. All of this is continuing to have a crippling effect on the economy, and they want to know why the economy has declined. In a deficit budget with $7.5 billion you are showing off a $1.62 billion deficit and not paying people.

I want to turn to the area of greatest concern and that is the decline of the energy sector and that may very well be a disaster in the making. In the late 70s, Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago witnessed the birth of the national gas industry with the launching of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. I remember this classic phrase of the Rt. Hon. Dr. Eric Williams, “Father of the Nation”, as he turned the sod in Couva, he had this to say—[ Interruption] “nah, this is my tie, don’t worry, no lie.” He said, Mr. Speaker, “Sugar has divided us; wire rods will bring us back together”. Those words, forgotten by many, remained paramount in the minds of the party which I now have the privilege and honour to lead.

A review of the birth and growth of the energy sector during the past 25 years in Trinidad and Tobago will show the establishment of eight ammonia plants, seven methanol plants; an iron and steel complex; four trains of LNG; the growth of electricity from 300 megawatts to 1,500 megawatts; the production and utilization of natural gas from 3,500 to 33,000 mmcf in the first nine months of 2010/2011. It also shows an establishment of one of the most successful gas processing plants, and we have a per capita income that has grown from US $5,669 in 1980 to US $17,000 by 2010; that is the estimated per capita GDP.

We have heard it said, Mr. Speaker, that this only became possible because the PNM Government give away the natural gas. What are the facts? The NGC is probably the most profitable company in the Caribbean with after tax profits of $2.1 billion in 2006; $2.9 billion in 2007; $3 billion in 2008, and for the first half of 2010, a profit, after tax, of $1.6 billion. Is this the result of giving away? Or is it not that the policy and strategy in the monetization of our natural gas was the correct one?

The Trinidad and Tobago model of the gas sector is now known and admired throughout the world. Many developing countries with new found natural gas are now trying to follow that model. Some are seeking technical help from us and others are asking us to partner with them. But, where are we in Trinidad and Tobago today?
We are witnessing the rapid decline and fall of the energy sector, not resulting from any international economic conditions but clearly from decisions or lack of decisions over the past 15 months when the UNC Government came into power. The decisions taken without explanations had led to the following—whether you like them or not, these are the facts. The decisions taken without proper explanation to this country are:

1. the cancellation of the Alutrint project;
2. the abandonment of the Alutech R&D programmes;
3. the withdrawal of Essar Steel.
4. the withdrawal of the gas to propylene project; project;
5. the indefinite deferring of the AUM2 Complex;
6. the abandonment of the extension of the East Point Lisas site and the proposed marine facilities;
7. the abandonment of the Union Estate Industrial Site at La Brea;
8. the abandonment of the completion of the marine facilities at La Brea.

Let us more carefully examine those decisions of cancellation and abandonment.

The energy sector was on the verge of creating a buoyant and sustainable downstream subsector based on the natural gas industry. This has been an elusive goal to which a great deal of effort was dedicated over the period 2003—2009, and the goal included: production of aluminium, production of plastic; production of flat steel products; production of urea ammonium nitrate and melamine—we had UAM1—a PNM project; we were looking for UAM2; the creation of a new petro pole in the south-western region—that is Palo Seco, La Brea, Point Fortin; increasing revenues from the LNG plants; that was our goal; a new fiscal regime to encourage more exploration and production effort; that was our goal. These efforts have now all gone to naught, thanks largely to the actions or inactions of the current Government.

I must remind this House, Mr. Speaker, that Trinidad and Tobago has had changes in government since 1986 but—and this is an important ‘but’—contracts approved by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and signed off by agencies of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago have always been considered sacrosanct. And I want to repeat that for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Contracts approved by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and signed off by agencies of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago have always been considered sacrosanct and fully respected until now. [Desk thumping]
By example, the PNM Government in 1992 respected the commitment and contract given and entered into by the NAR Government. A classic example was the upgrade of the Petrotrin refinery—an NAR project, we had difficulty with it, we had some difficulties with some of it but the contractual arrangements were respected.

The Panday-UNC, not this PP, the Panday-UNC in 1995, respected and honoured the agreement of the LNG project reached by the PNM Government. Today, we have Train 1, Train 2, Train 3, Train 4, as our country’s economic lifeline and saviour. [Desk thumping]

12.30 p.m.

I just want to ask the country, whether you agree with LNG or not, suppose the “Panday Government” had cancelled the LNG project—just think on those things. The reputation of this country has always been very high, but it is now sadly eroded. This UN coalition Government, without receiving explanations or consultation with contracted parties, has cancelled or abandoned major investments and other contracts. Our latest count reveals that at least US $5 billion of foreign investments have been lost through the behaviour of this Government’s abandonment and cancellations. What is more in the long term is that potential foreign investors no longer have the feeling of comfort that changes in Government will not affect any previous final agreements—that is dangerous for any country. What has been the result? No new projects. [Desk thumping] No increase in gas market. [Desk thumping] No drilling and exploring for gas to meet expected demand. In simple words, Mr. Speaker, the energy sector at this time is facing a rapid decline that will prompt a national disaster if fortune does not favour us in the short to medium term.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the issues which need to be put squarely before the national community so that they can understand and appreciate where we are now, and how we are going to treat with the industrial sector.

The recent Ryder Scott Report shows that at current consumption rate we have nine years of proven gas left for our mature gas fields and industries. This is cause for concern, Mr. Speaker, in view of the slew of issues surrounding rectification of this challenge. The situation becomes even less comforting when one considers that the last bid rounds were anything but successful. In one instance, 11 blocks were put up for auction and only three were found to attract bids which are suitable. In the case of the deeper environment the outcome was no better resulting in the Ministry having to revisit and reopen a bid which, initially, was
thought to be unsuitable. The numbers in the current budget documents are also a little scary, since they demonstrate how far behind we are with our national drilling programme, something that is necessary to give us the comfort of moving probable reserves to proven reserves in a timely manner.

The review of the economy documents indicate that, whereas in the 2005/2006 period we were drilling 40,000 metres in exploratory activity and this increased to 45,000 metres in the period 2008/2009, we were down to 11,000 metres in 2010, and now in 2011 we are down to 2,700 metres of exploratory drilling. These are the facts, Mr. Speaker: from 40,000 metres a few years ago to 2,700 metres of exploratory drilling.

Mr. Speaker, whereas we were drilling an annual average of 10 to 12 exploratory wells in 2006—2008, in the period October 2010 to September 2011, the number of exploratory wells is zero. Even as this is the situation, Government spokespersons persist in talking about how successful the bid rounds were, and how rosy the situation is. Last year we heard a lot about cross-border gas from Trinidad and Tobago/Venezuela Loran-Manatee Field spoken of in such a way that we were led to believe that an agreement was imminent. This is of such importance to Trinidad and Tobago that any significant advance, if it had been made, should have attracted the attention of the Minister of Finance. His silence on this matter causes one to think that like most other things UNC, nothing has been achieved and the talk was just more public relations overstatement.

Having damaged the investment climate, having created political instability in the Cabinet arrangements, the Minister of Finance comes once again trotting out projects’ names with no real information about the likelihood of any of these coming on stream in the fiscal year. Reliance, will ship to Asia. Company Investor, Reliance—glad to hear that—where are the facts? What exactly is that? Who are the principal investors? Is there an investment decision on this? What is the size of the investment? When will it come to fruition and where would it be located? These are all relevant and straightforward questions. They are not trick questions.

Methanol to propylene: is this the same methanol to propylene project that was on the horizon when I was in the energy subcommittee years ago? Is this the same BASF/Lurgi that you announced as if it was something new? Mr. Speaker, if so, I am advised that the prospective investors have long since withdrawn their interest, and the Government knows that.
Methanol to Acetic Acid: this technology is owned and zealously guarded by multinationals. Can the Government provide confirmation that these companies that are coming to invest in this methanol to acetic acid plant that they have in their possession or in the agreement the licences to produce that?

Maleic anhydride: who is the investor? What is the size of the investment? When will it break ground? Given the situation with the gas supply at this time, Mr. Speaker, is gas available for these plants? And if so, is it available at competitive prices? If so, what is that price? The Government should have no difficulty in stating the gas price here, since for decades these colleagues of mine on the other side, when in opposition, demanded that gas prices should not be a commercial secret and insofar as it was not provided to them, they accused everybody of corruption.

Over to you now. What is the gas price you are operating on now? We are waiting for you to comply with your own recommendation. Tell us the gas price, because gas pricing now between new finds and new plants and old expiring contracts and old plants, that is an issue of serious concern for the future of downstreaming in Trinidad and Tobago. Tell us now! [Desk thumping]

The last Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs announced AUM2 with so much aplomb that we confidently expected a ground breaking during their tenure. Sadly, nothing has happened so far and through no fault of her own. Instead of the Minister reporting to us as to why this major expectation is stalled, he simply comes and remakes the same announcement as his very own as if it is a new project of imminent foreign investment.

Mr. Speaker, what is the real story with AUM2? This is a $1.9 billion follow-up to AUM1 of the previous administration’s initiative. So we had AUM1, which was commissioned October 2010. The expected principals in AUM2 are the same people with whom the Government is currently locked horns over MHTL, Clico plant. This matter is souring rapidly and is more likely than not to end, inexorably, moving towards a bitter arbitration. This Government, none the less, expects that these people—their MHTL partners with whom they are heading to arbitration over MHTL—will proceed towards a major new investment while they are fighting a loss of trust issue elsewhere. Unless this Government could fix its behaviour, its attitude and express its policy and get back with its partners of MHTL, AUM2 may not be realized. That is only logical—to resume. Under the circumstances the Government must tell us now if an investment decision has actually been entered into between the investing partners in the AUM2. If you cannot tell us that now, then of course, Mr. Speaker, we know how to take that. Is
the Government going to be a partner? Who are the other partners? And what is the exact date of the commencement of the project? Without this information, if the Government cannot tell us now, the Government is simply, on AUM2, blowing bubbles.

While all these mirages are advanced as imminent activity, this Government is sitting on US $20 million worth of industrial equipment which was procured for Alutech and the Alutech projects. This equipment is lying in a warehouse somewhere out in the east, apparently abandoned and forgotten. The programme involved the intended use of SANGS proprietary technology which Alutech acquired to develop high value motor car parts from aluminium. May I point out the absence of the smelter project is immaterial to this initiative since the raw materials could be sourced from elsewhere as a commercial product. A building under construction to facilitate this industry was 30 to 40 per cent complete when this Government came into office. This project has apparently been abandoned and left to rust and the equipment is incurring storage cost as it deteriorates. E TecK appears to be heading for the chopping block to meet its projects and its vision guilty of no other crime than being PNM initiatives.

12.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, given our very successful and long experience in operating state and private sector businesses in the areas of exploration, production and refining of oil, as well as our more recent breakthroughs in monetizing gas reserves through power generation and down streaming from the well heads, coupled with the impressive profile of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and our national pool of highly trained technical people now have the opportunity to move out into those areas where we have skills to market and interest to invest. This should be particularly important to us now, especially that our own hydrocarbon province is maturing, depleting and appearing to be less than attractive to the kind of investments which are directed to the new hot spots, and these hot spots are to be found in West Africa, East Africa and northern South America.

Much diplomatic work was done by the previous government in Africa to pave the way for a meaningful participation by Trinidad and Tobago in these new initiatives; probably helping to find new acreages and even boldly probably investing in the finds that are made, but certainly growing our economy by selling our technical skills. There are those with less credentials than us who are forging
ahead because they see these as being more attractive to their purpose, while Trinidad and Tobago is languishing in the corridors of this Government, which seems not to know what to do.

We were the first in line with the Ghanaian initiative, but the last tumultuous year of the UNC bacchanalian mismanagement has severely hampered our thrust here and the original options might have been diminished or sadly, even lost. The Minister or his colleagues owe a duty to report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to tell us what happened in Ghana. Are we still interested? Are we still in? Is any work going on? What is the Government’s view of our involvement in ventures such as the ones you are pursuing in Ghana? These are what we want to hear about from the Government.

Previously, the PNM had indicated a willingness to put energy policy under parliamentary review by a Standing Committee on Energy. The purpose of this was to ensure that there be some measure of informed agreement and certainty of policy, which would be immune to changes of government. Given what has happened recently, what is happening now, and the need to wade into deeper waters with ensuing strong currents swirling all around us, and we the small fish, our best prospects are still to connect with the hydrocarbon industry and to take careful note of doing the best we can with this notion of creating a firmer energy policy, something which is definitely confronting all of us now. The Opposition will support it and make it work for the people of Trinidad and Tobago if the Government puts it before us in the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, these issues have long gone past the stages of dream. We need to act and to act promptly and wisely. An objective appreciation of our role and place in the hydrocarbon market sees our competitiveness on the wane and whatever opportunities beckon us locally, and on the outside, require our best thoroughbreds and not ox carts. We need to discuss the idea of the creation of a properly structured national energy company, with the skills and backing to enter and make room for Trinidad and Tobago, to market our expertise in the relevant areas of interest. This is the only way we can realistically sustain and advance our development and grow our wealth in the coming decades of the 21st Century. This is 2011, not 1962. Time is not on our side.

Economic diversification: it has been said with some conviction that efforts should be directed towards expanding the non-energy sector. The PNM government took a decision to attract investments, local and foreign, in the non-energy sector. Using the success of models used elsewhere, and the near shore geographic advantage of Trinidad and Tobago, the Tamana InTech Park was
conceived, planned and under construction. The key to this park was communication, excellent infrastructure and very importantly, the presence of a university; the technologically based University of Trinidad and Tobago.

While not fully abandoned by the Government, the Government’s treatment of this institution leaves us in no doubt as to the planned future that the current administration has for a University of Trinidad and Tobago. Perhaps, the Minister of Trade and Industry will determine the plans for the completion and the strategy for populating the park with the high-tech, high-value employment opportunities that we anticipated Trinidad and Tobago could acquire. We are faced with a major crisis in these critical areas and total silence from the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, I want to warn my colleagues in Government, and I want to alert the population of Trinidad and Tobago, especially those who jump on their bandwagon bawling “waylay-waylay”, cancellation and abandonment are easy and instant, sometimes even politically popular. Rebuilding and restoring confidence could take years. I call on the UNC Government to promptly inform the national community how it plans to restore the confidence, trust and excellent interpretation of Trinidad and Tobago, the one that we enjoyed over the past years, a reputation which has been so sadly diminished in less than 18 months.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that you are not the only one who is fed up of hearing about the need to diversify the economy, from people who cannot convince you of any tangible and believable pathway which could really contribute in the context, if not on the scale of the energy sector. Talk is cheap. We think we have found a good way.

The first real possibility of this happening was the creation of Tamana InTech Park. The efforts of e-TecK and the spawning of the University of Trinidad and Tobago was that choice of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. These institutions targeted national development in the information age. In today’s world, any country vying to become a developed nation must be able to not only have the trappings of a technology-driven economy but also compete effectively in the new global economy. Further, no nation can claim to be developed without a truly diversified economy. The Tamana InTech Park at UTT, that objective is to evolve towards a knowledge-based economy and then to leverage the attributes of this economy. In this quest, the education system is critical in developing the calibre of human resources required to create and innovate, as well as produce pertinent information and knowledge, and subsequently utilize this for the creation of wealth.
Mr. Speaker, if I digress, it was President Max Richards himself, in addressing this Parliament, who pointed the parliamentarians to the need to do just this. This system is required for the development of skills in areas of entrepreneurship and innovation that could foster research and development. This is what Tamana Park, e-TecK and UTT are all about. The UNC Government’s cold-shoulder to all these efforts is very worrying. Indeed, since their record of cancellation and creeping abandonment aimed at these initiatives will see us with no platform for real diversification in an increasingly uncertain hydrocarbon future, today I appeal to the UNC Government to change course on this particular matter. It is too important to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Political spite is one thing, suicide, hara-kiri, is different, another thing.

The economic and institutional framework, which these units provide are the right environment for development by addressing many issues such as the protection of intellectual property, promoting the development and use of technology, facilitating foreign investment and improving the quality of life by addressing social issues. The part-built physical structures appear to be abandoned by the budgeting process. The human resource base is being terrorized by the stress of uncertainty in these organizations. No country like ours can progress in a meaningful way in today’s information age without a developed communication infrastructure.

ICT has transformed and revolutionized many businesses and economies. The national imperative, therefore, should be to expand and enhance access to an adoption of state-of-the-art ICT infrastructure, while developing our people to exploit those capabilities of this vehicle. The primary strategic intent in developing Tamana InTech Park is to progress the agenda of sustainable diversification of the local economy, which would be realized through returns to the GDP by fostering the development of new industries and job creation from business activities on and off the park. The defined roles of Tamana InTech Park, in progressing the country’s economic development agenda include:

1. to be the first science and technology park in the Caribbean. So we are ahead of the game;
2. to be the premier institution for academic research, as well as development facilities that are critical for diversifying the non-energy export base and facilitating industrial expansion;
3. to house the main campus of the University of Trinidad and Tobago for our young people;
4. to accommodate national and international organizations and institutions;

5. to be the main platform and model for our knowledge driven economy, through the capture of viable industries and the creation of job opportunities for highly-skilled citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

While it is recognized that this project has a pivotal role to play in the country’s development, it is but one aspect of other efforts that are required to achieve the much sought-after sustainable diversification. It would be a tragedy of immense proportion if this vision and effort, as well as the investment already made, is sacrificed on the altar of political pettiness, if only because it had a gestation under the PNM.

It is our fear and the country should also fear that the silence of the Minister of Finance, coupled with the expressed hostility of some of his colleagues; this escape hatch into real diversification is about to be closed through a lack of understanding on the part of the Government. These fears can only be allayed if the Minister of Finance identifies the relevant support for the effort, and makes the necessary comforting statements of commitment to Tamana InTech Park and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) initiative. The substantive Ministers just do not understand. They do not get it, Minister of Finance. It falls to you to save the day.

The people of Trinidad and Tobago should take note of the fact that this Government has embarked on a programme to build an extension of the UWI in Debe; a programme which is either absent or very difficult to find in the national budget of 2012. Even while this is so, the Government announces in this budget another university programme in Tobago, without the necessary visible financial allocation. Mr. Speaker, we know how to take that. Criticism is always going to be necessary. It is always going to be an ingredient of public scrutiny if we are to get the best out of ourselves and even at the personal and national level. However, sometimes in the political arena, we can become overly critical and replace the need for balanced criticism with outright demonization. When this happens, such practitioners find themselves not being able to turn back even though disaster beckons. They then find themselves having to slavishly defend for the sake of saving face or disowning their own progeny through naked untruths or stilted revisionism. Such is the situation that the current Government has found itself in, as it seeks to grapple with a number of important public policy issues facing the people of Trinidad and Tobago at this time. One of the biggest problems the people of Trinidad and Tobago faced today is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.
This phenomenon is best demonstrated by our very presence in this building this afternoon. I am sure that it will surprise you and will surprise most people in Trinidad and Tobago, to know that after all that has been said and is being said about the construction of these tall buildings, that they are symbolic of the worst of Trinidad and Tobago and symbolic of the worst of PNM governance, that this waterfront project was, in fact, a UNC initiative. In fact, this project of the waterfront development was a UNC initiative; almost signed, sealed and delivered to RGM in 2001. As Minister of Planning and Development in early 2002, I had the project reviewed by Kamal Mankee, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and a report was presented, which showed, by analysis, that whilst the project was worthy of support, the structure and shareholding and the inputs left the State with the short end of the stick. On the basis of this report, the PNM Cabinet was advised and RGM was advised that the gift was withdrawn.

Cabinet placed the project in the hands of UDeCott with a mandate to manage this UNC concept project, which was the high-rise hotel, the car park, the superior office tower—not this one. The only significant change the PNM made to the concept was the addition of this Tower D, in which we now reside. This came about when the PNM took steps to pursue the idea of establishing an International Financial Centre (IFC). This was supposed to have been housed in here, and that is why this tower was built. Here was a Government, after review, executing a project initiated by its predecessor for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago. The UNC coalition will do well to learn something from this, if they are to serve the people as they profess that they want to do.

If you listen to PNM detractors in the Government, you would not believe what I have just told you, but the documents are there to prove. They are at the Ministry of Finance and at the Cabinet Secretariat. As far as political expediency goes, these buildings were labelled as extravagant, ego massages of demented minds in the PNM; their own UNC project. From my own standpoint, there is no fundamental difficulty reconverting a moribund waterfront with its grimy galvanize sheds being transformed into economic infrastructure and usable, saleable office space. The difficulty most people had was the demand for necessary accountability within the state enterprise and that should be manifested through efficiency in construction and through proper procurement practices, which are to be geared to eliminate favouritism and opportunities for corruption. Where such conditions appear to be lacking, I make no apologies for demanding it.
Where does that leave us as a people? Have we learnt anything? When the Minister of Finance spoke about the land for development at Invaders Bay he went out of his way to mention that this is prime real estate, that just happened to be prime real estate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, at this point in time we want to suspend for lunch. Before we do so, may I advise all Members that during the luncheon period, we are going to be conducting further tests to ensure that the technical glitches that we experienced earlier on today never repeat themselves. So, to facilitate this exercise, we are going to be removing all the drawers attached to your respective desks. I ask if you have any personal items, you can remove them, so that during our luncheon period, we would be able to conduct further tests to ensure that everything is all right when we resume later this afternoon. I just wanted to alert hon. Members that we would be conducting further tests.

This sitting is now suspended until 2.30 p.m.

1.00 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

2.30 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before we took the lunch break I was just about to make a few comments on the Minister of Finance’s reference to the real estate asset at Invaders Bay. And I did mention that he went out of his way to add this to his budget presentation, against the background of an absence of information on a number of other pertinent things. He did not mention the origin of that project, he simply mentioned it in the context of its value and some outlook for development. This is prime real estate which did not just happen, or which was not there, it is in fact reclaimed land, reclaimed and built at great expense to the taxpayers; a project of the PNM though it was not mentioned as such on Monday. This project created a property worth billions of dollars for the State, executed against objections of some persons; not surprisingly.

As of today, the development authority for that land resides in a Cabinet minute which gives UdeCott the go-ahead to proceed with the installation of roads and utility services. The intention was to make fully serviced plots of high value and variable sizes available to a wide entrepreneurial market. This property ranks among the most valuable piece of real estate in Trinidad and Tobago. Recently, without any announcement from the Government that a new Cabinet position had been arrived at for the disposal and or development of this land, we saw in the media a developer indicating that he had procured $2 million of development plans for this property which he hopes to procure. It was also stated that 19
Ministers not 29 had reviewed the plan and they all liked the project which involved the development of the whole area by one investor. It was not long after this publication that the Ministry of Planning and Development put out a request, for proposals, an RFP, requiring proper detailed outlined plans, financing arrangements and other pertinent information from experienced developers, but were given six weeks to respond. Notwithstanding reasonable objections to this narrow window of opportunity provided to the wider public, the Government proceeded to ignore all such concerns. We await the final outcome of this one.

I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, the last time a UNC Minister gave the foreshore to a favoured developer who also spent $2 million preparing a plan for development of the Cocorite to Maraval River seafront, the PNM government stopped it and today that section of coastline remains open to the public and is to remain so until another Cabinet decision reverses the existing PNM position. We anticipate that when the Cabinet takes such a decision, if it is taken, that the national community would be appropriately advised.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a few comments on the economic initiatives. The argument here is that there is too much talk and no action, or too little action. The development of the TTBizlink and the single electronic window, e-tendering and e-auction as they are called, modification of the Insurance Act; these are all initiatives that predated this Government and formed part of the last government’s programme of development of the public service and other aspects of national concern. They were well advanced when this Government came into office.

So notwithstanding the Minister’s glee in mentioning them, we can simply accept them and support them as nothing new. TTBizlink should have been completed in December 2010, here we are looking at 2012 and still talking about rolling out this project, and computerizing the Customs and Excise Division. This is central to making Trinidad and Tobago a better place to do business by easing the cost of doing business. Harmonizing TTBizlink with Asycuda is not a forward looking step nor does it carry Trinidad and Tobago very far; e-tendering and e-auction were experiments which were well advanced under the PNM. So once again, as announced by the Minister in case you did not know, it is nothing new, it is underway.

How many auctions were held in the last 16 months that this Government has been in office? Where is the committee which was established to advise on this project? Where is the Electronic Transactions Bill and associated legislation brought to this Parliament by a previous government? But I will leave that, Mr. Speaker.
Appropriation Bill 2011  
Friday, October 14, 2011

[DR. ROWLEY]

I want to take a few moments to touch on the Minister’s other highlight, NIS pension. The announcement by the Minister of Finance that the Government intends to increase pensions will be welcome news to the thousands of persons who felt betrayed by the Government’s misprint of its campaign promise to raise senior citizens’ grant to $3,000 per month. We are very happy for those who would receive their increases for heaven knows many families desperately need the extra dollars.

This having been said, Mr. Speaker, we have a few questions for the Minister of Finance on how he intends to proceed to deliver on these promises. The first question we have for the Minister of Finance is this, when you misprinted the promise of $3,000 per month for everybody over 60 in Trinidad and Tobago during the election campaign, was it your understanding then that the central government would have been relieved of its liabilities then, and you would have passed a severe piece of the burden onto the fund of the national insurance service, in such a way as to imperil the national insurance service if serious increases in contribution rates are not affected? We would like an answer to that when the Minister replies.

Hon. Member: That was not relevant.

Dr. K. Rowley: When was the last government—[Laughter]

Miss Cox: He is trying to throw you off.

Dr. K. Rowley:—as a result of which I will have to read over that question. [Laughter]

When you misprinted the promise of $3,000 per month for everybody over 60, a promise you made during the election campaign, was it your understanding then that the central government would have been relieved of its liabilities then and you would have passed a severe piece of the burden onto the fund of the national insurance service in such a way as to imperil the national insurance service if serious increases in contribution rates are not affected? Thank you!

When the last government passed legislation in 2007 by an amendment to the Finance Act, to, among other things, increase the minimum pension under the NIS to $2,000 a month, it did so with the agreement and recommendation of the NIB to buttress this. It also increased the rates of all NIS benefits at the same time.

When this was done, the NIB had complied with the requirements of section 56 of the National Insurance Act. This section of law makes it mandatory that an actuarial review of the system must be conducted before any changes can be made
to the benefit and contribution rates of the NIS. [Interruption] Ask him, he did not tell us. I am asking him. The changes made in 2007 included increasing the contribution rate to 11.4 per cent, but implementing this increase over years 2008, 2010 and 2012 in order to cushion the impact of this increase on both employers and employed persons. All benefit improvements were, however, implemented in full from January 2008.

Increasing the income which is to be subject to NIS contribution to $10,000 and increasing the minimum pension to $3,000 per month, represent changes to the contribution and benefit structure which require an actuarial review to be conducted. The following questions, therefore, arise for the attention and answer by the Minister of Finance before the debate is over. Was an actuarial review of the NIS done since the seventh review was laid in Parliament, August 2007? Was this review laid in Parliament as required by section 70 of the National Insurance Act? Did this review recommend a $3,000 pension or any other figure? Did this review recommend a new ceiling of $10,000 per month? If no, how was this figure arrived at? Did this review recommend an increase in the rates of several other benefits paid by the NIS?

2.45 p.m.

What new contribution rate was recommended by the actuary or the National Insurance Board based on the advice of the actuary to support these benefit increases? What investment return on the fund was required to support the new benefit structure?

The key issue is whether this level of $3,000 per month is sustainable in an aging population and at what cost to the current and future contributors to this scheme. It should be noted that the Minister of Finance should be aware that the seventh actuarial review which was implemented on January 08, actually recommended a minimum pension of $1,500 per month—that was in 2009. However, the NIB decided to implement the $2,000 per month pension in an environment where the board had the benefit of the actuary’s advice and his technical report. In order to do this the board gave management a stretch target in terms of return on the investment portfolio. A Minister of Finance who loves to talk about contingent liability will be aware of section 58 of the National Insurance Act, which provides that any temporary insufficiency in the assets of the fund of the NIS shall be met by moneys advanced by Parliament, and such advances are to be paid promptly as is feasible.
Appropriation Bill 2011  
Friday, October 14, 2011

[DR. ROWLEY]

Mr. Speaker, the Minister said that a marginal increase in NIS contributions would fund the new $3,000-plus pension that beneficiaries have been promised in the budget presentation. The Oxford Dictionary defines—at least my copy—defines “marginal” to mean: minor, borderline, not important. So the Minister of Finance is going to implement a marginal increase so as to fund what he has promised. What are the facts?

Mr. Speaker, currently the NIS has approximately 70,000 persons who are receiving long-term retirement benefits at $2,000 per month. The hon. Minister of Finance proposes to increase this benefit by 50 per cent to $3,000 per month. This means that the monthly payout in pension benefit would be increased by $70 million per month, for an annual total of $840 million. That is the increase that the Minister of Finance says is marginal and would be funded by an increase in the NIS contributions for the narrow bracket of contributing persons who earn above $10,000 per month. Mr. Speaker, when is $.84 billion in additional tax a marginal sum of money?

Mr. Speaker, of the 500,000 persons currently on the NIS portfolio of contributors exactly how many are earning greater than $10,000 per month and are therefore qualified to be taxed as proposed to support this $840 million increase? And is the Minister still prepared to say to all citizens that in this budget he has not introduced a tax for anybody? Is he still prepared to say that?

The Minister introduced far-reaching proposals like this with all kinds of implications but deliberately stayed away from using numbers to present the true picture. What then is the true picture? It is very unlikely that this $840 million increase could be obtained from the band of earners greater than $10,000 per month, without a hefty increase above what prevails now. Is it not that only about 5 to 10 per cent of the contributors are in that category of $10,000 per month and over?

Currently, the NIS pays out approximately $1.5 billion per year in retirement pension benefit, with the new proposal adding another $840 million, this brings the annual payout to about $2.34 billion. Juxtapose that with the current income of $2.65 billion, this would leave less than $300 million per month for investment after operational costs are factored into the equation. At present, the NIS is investing about $950 million a year to meet its current commitments. It follows that the minimum increase to be levied on the targeted group of contributors will have to supply approximately $600 million in tax for investment purposes if stability is to be retained to support this $840 million additional payout. That is a whopping $1.4 billion marginal need.
I see the Minister of Finance laughing. I hope what he is saying is that he has another way of computing these numbers. Notwithstanding, whatever the Minister says, it is more than likely that any actuarial studies applied to the total NIB portfolio as required by law will see significant increases in NIS contributions being recommended in order to keep the NIS sustainably afloat. Much as I would like to see the beneficiaries receive their increases as quickly as possible, the Minister’s promise of doing this within a month or so is very optimistic. Does the Minister have the actuarial studies in hand and an immediate slot on the parliamentary timetable? I suspect that that is required.

Mr. Speaker, the language that the Minister used to introduce the incorporation of self-employed into the NIS, in the way that he described, could be confusing to some. The Minister said and I quote: we are seeking to include the self-employed in the benefits under the NIS. Given what else the Minister said the following questions arise:

1. Will 115,000 self-employed persons immediately qualify for the $3,000 per month or similar benefit despite having made significantly fewer contributions than current contributors? I am asking—he did not tell us.

2. Is the principle of payout related to contributions to be replaced by equal payment for all contributors in each category?

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues across there are telling me I should assume it is not so. I am assuming nothing where the UNC Government is concerned. [Desk thumping] If it is not so you must tell us it is not so because you did not tell us how it was. If the UNC is a team of chameleons, then Clico and their Clico position is their mascot.

Position one: when Clico collapsed in 2009, and the country was confronted with the need to intervene to prevent systemic risk and collapse of our total financial system and economy, the UNC had no objection to the bailout. So I could assume, to take their advice, that they supported.

Position two: when the Central Bank intervened and the Government committed through a number of statements that it would stand behind the institutions to ensure that they do not collapse, some depositors who got some confidence in that even began to roll over their deposits, and of course the methanol market started to improve and the shareholding of Republic Bank started to turn up, in other words conditions of revenue started to look better. The
UNC in Opposition had no problem with that because we had an election campaign and I cannot remember on one occasion that one UNC spokesperson during the campaign spoke about dismantling what was in place for the Clico bailout.

Position three: the UNC is in Government. They got into Government immediately, immediately—“no way we supporting this; depositors are greedy and they must stand by their greed; take your licks;”—confidence destroyed and has not been restored since.

Position four: the EFPA is a “Ponzi” scheme. Depositors have no protection because it was not an insurance policy under the Act, so they have nothing to get. PNM government wasted taxpayers’ money to bail out fat cats. This further eroded confidence.

Position five: we are doing you a favour, you should not really get anything, but we are going to give you 40 cents on the dollar, and we will give you 20 years for the rest of it with no interest, and of course you must praise me because I have now solved the Clico problem. That was last year September, one year ago; take it or leave it. That was one year ago. Court—UNC Government ruled wrong.

Position six: we are going to give you the opportunity to get back 92 cents on the dollar—praise me, it was supposed to be 40 cents, it is now going to be 92 cents, so I am worthy of praise. And more than that, I am going to give you NEL 2, and you will then have bonds and you can trade your bonds above market rates and so on.

Mr. Speaker, total cost of the bailout after one year of UNC toing and froing, and the six positions that I have just described, the total cost is projected at $10 billion, which is about the same as the PNM’s bailout. You see, Mr. Speaker, after all the UNC’s unnecessary attempts to redo what they met on the Clico issue, their final situation is as described: approximately a $10 billion injection to solve that problem.

That is what Standard & Poor’s who reaffirmed our AA rating had to say about the plan that was in place in 2009. Let me quote for you, Mr. Speaker, what Standard & Poor’s said about the Trinidad and Tobago situation in dealing with the Clico issue under the PNM’s approach, and I quote:

“We removed these ratings from CreditWatch after evaluating the possible consequences and the cost associated with the government bailout of one of Trinidad’s largest conglomerate: the CL Financial Group...Assuming no
recovery from any asset sales, we estimate a potential gross loss for the
government (of Trinidad and Tobago) of about TT $9 billion, which is 6% of
expected 2009 GDP.”

So that was the position of the independent assessors in 2009.

The UNC came into office and they carried on in all kinds of ways trying to get
praise for fixing Clico, and in the end they settled on a $10 billion programme that
changes virtually nothing, because even though they said that the PNM should not
have spent any money on it, they are now agreeing to spend what is required to
fix the problem. I leave that for the public to answer. And the answer is—what
this means is that all the confusion created by the UNC Government in trying to
change the paradigm, we ended up in the same place as far as cost is concerned.

The report further stated that:

“…Trinidad and Tobago’s solid fiscal”—position—“which has resulted from
high energy prices, gives government the fiscal and external flexibility
needed to manage this potential debt burden, as well as the current
international financial crisis without materially weakening public finances.”

That is contrary to everything our own Minister of Finance was telling us, that
we were about to fall over a cliff. This being so, what was all this about from the
Minister of Finance who spent a year destroying the country’s confidence in our
finances and the overall economy? What was it all about? Mr. Speaker, an attempt
to take praise for doing something that did not need doing.

Mr. Speaker, following upon the collapse of the NCB and Workers’ Bank, we
little people of this young nation almost lost faith in ourselves and in our ability to
manage the basic building blocks of a modern Trinidad and Tobago economy.
Thankfully, a few good men and women came to the fore, picked up pieces and
ran with them to the finishing line. Some of these people now run the FCB, a
success story in this country if ever there was one.

It is my recollection that when we assembled FCB out of the failed banks of
NCB and Workers’ Bank with Central Bank’s support, there were those around the
table who felt that if we got the recapitalization money back we would have done
well and if the new bank could reach a stage of development where it could be
acceptable enough to be readied for divestment then we would have scored a
winning goal. We have done better than that, Mr Speaker.

Today, if the Government takes a decision to divest some portion of the
shareholding of FCB, the PNM would not find it necessary to oppose this move.
What we will demand is that the Government, in divesting the shares of FCB, do so against the background that ensures that these shares are distributed to the widest possible shareholding, thereby spreading whatever wealth that has been created in the process of nurturing this bank.

It is from here that we must express our deepest disappointment and concern over the silence of the Minister of Finance who did not commit to a policy which would have clearly signalled that for a divestment of FCB shares special arrangements will be put in place for pension funds, the National Insurance Board, trade unions, FCB employees, credit unions and individuals to have a fair shot at accessing and owning affordable blocks of shares in the FCB.

Mr. Speaker, it is not too late to do this and we call on the Government to commit to such a policy before it embarks on the divestment of the shares of FCB.

Revenue Authority: the Minister of Finance has spoken long and loud in his budget on matters of compliance and penalties. We had no problem with the proposals here, but how could we take the Minister seriously on this subject matter when the most critical area of non-compliance is left unattended by the Government’s stubborn refusal to unlock its self-afflicted political shackles and humbly accept that the Revenue Authority is a necessary ingredient in this compliance menu which the Minister desperately wants to activate.

As a matter of fact they could make a day of it, they could call it the “day of atonement” and do all their “backing-back” on the same day and get it over and done with. That would take care of lands and buildings taxes constipation, it could take care of the Revenue Authority assassination and who knows, it could even take care of the stillborn Alutrint. After all, we are a warm and gentle fete loving people. After they have done that, they will survive and we could even hold a fete at the Centre of Excellence or at Vessigny Beach. But at the end of that we would have done some important things that need to be done. You can run from these things but you cannot hide from them—[Desk thumping]—if I may quote from my friend, the late Ken Valley.

Mr Speaker, housing—I am reminded about housing; my friend from Oropouche East. We of the PNM are happy to see that, finally, our colleagues on the other side have come around to agree that there is a significant role for the State in the housing construction if the country is to meaningfully attempt to meet the chronic shortage of affordable housing units. Up until now, this absence of a housing policy of this kind on their part is probably the starkest difference between the PNM and other political entities which ran the affairs of state. This is
clearly demonstrated by the fact that whereas it is possible to find PNM-built housing units and whole communities all over the country, from Charlotteville to Carenage, from Chaguanas to San Fernando, from Bon Accord to Arima, from Sangre Grande to Couva and Mayaro—[Crosstalk]

**Mr. Speaker:** Allow the Member to speak in silence, please.

**Dr. K. Rowley:**—it is almost impossible to find a single housing development in this country that one can point to that was built by another government. Not one! On behalf of all the beneficiaries who will now benefit from the new acceptance, we say to our colleagues on the other side, “Welcome aboard, welcome aboard; you have seen the light in public sector housing.” We have come a long way from the announcement by a **UNC** Minister that the Government has no place in housing construction and further that there is no need for a housing Ministry. In case you want to dispute that, I have just quoted John Humphrey.

That having been said, Mr. Speaker, prior to 2008, it was a feature of the work of the **HDC** that blocks of housing units of various types and standards were being built and distributed to qualified, excited, and satisfied beneficiaries virtually on a weekly basis. This changed dramatically, immediately thereafter, when the last Minister spent two and a half years ostensibly repairing units while delivering few of them. This new Minister seems to be continuing the same vacuous talk so now, one and half years into his tenure, we are still hearing that 80 per cent of the **HDC** units which are under construction are under repair. Together, across two administrations, this would amount to a period of four years of repairs to a programme which contains approximately 10,000 units at varying stages of completion which were built over a two-year period. So it took two years to put them in place at varying levels of completion and four years to repair them. Apparently, after 4 years, we are now promised 4,450 houses completed from the stock of 2007. So what was there initiated in 2000, after four years we are now hearing, with great fanfare, that 4,450 houses will be ready for delivery in December.

While I am sure that there are instances of shoddy workmanship that can be found within the housing programme, an 80 per cent figure warranting four years of repairs is clearly overstating the problem and is not a serious situation. Any person who had the opportunity to build his or her own home will know challenges of ensuring adequate quality from even reputable contractors is a challenge, a real challenge. One could therefore, appreciate the performance criteria in a mass housing programme. It would be instructive to learn if these
same quality control issues are affecting the many Ministers who have cornered keys to their recreational dens at HDC-built Federal Villas in Federation Park—[Desk thumping]—or whether these same quality control issues are affecting the senior Government Minister who operates from an air-conditioned “batchie” in south Trinidad. I want to know if those quality controls are affecting those occupants.

Now that the UNC is on board with some element of a national housing programme and are bulldozing farmers left, right and centre, and are earmarking large chunks of agricultural land for housing, the population is now in a better position to judge the PNM on these issues. The same can be said about the mass housing to be constructed at Fairfield in Princes Town. When the PNM initiated this project, our colleagues on the other side described it as unacceptable social engineering and the basis for PNM voter-padding; now that it is to be funded by the Minister of Finance’s allocation to the Housing Ministry all is forgotten, all is forgiven. [Interruption] You may proceed.

Hon. Member: You support that?

Dr. K. Rowley: It is my project.

Hon. Member: What about Wellington, where you turned the sod five years ago?

Dr. K. Rowley: And when you spoke with great glee.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to turn my attention to Tobago and the allocation by the UNC-led Government to the Tobago House of Assembly to manage the affairs of Tobago, in the next fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, as we all are aware, I am a Tobagonian, and I must say, a proud Tobagonian. [Desk thumping] But before I am accused of bias towards the land of my birth—as we say in Tobago, where my navel string is buried—my comments this afternoon are based on the needs for all citizens, whether they reside in Trinidad or in Tobago, as well as on the need to allocate financial resources in an equitable and transparent manner for the development of all of Trinidad and Tobago.

In that context, Mr. Speaker, I wish to put on record that the allocation of $2.2 billion, contrary to what the Minister of Finance and his desk-thumping cheerleaders will want us to believe, was not done out of any generosity or
benevolence of the so-called caring Government. It was the minimum allowed under the Dispute Resolution Commission ruling of 4.03 per cent. So, as the total national allocation increases, so does Tobago’s.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it was only a human thought I entertained that this part of the UNC’s newly-found love for Tobago, the share of the national budget would have increased. Indeed, in the light of the recommendation by the Attorney General in his Green Paper on his own Tobago Constitution, I thought that Tobago would have received at least 6 per cent of the national budget. That is what he is recommending in the Green Paper. But just as the eyes of the Trinidad people have opened to the disrespect, the deception and the subterfuge and betrayal of the People’s Partnership Government as they call themselves, Tobagonians too have seen through the fiscal sleight of hand and the attempt of course, to deceive.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is history to all of this: Let me refresh the Minister’s memory. He will recall that formerly, on June 30, the Tobago House of Assembly dutifully and responsibly submitted its document to the central government on time and in accordance with the law. What was disheartening—and I want to repeat disheartening, if not shameful—was the fact that in the month of September, the Chief Secretary and Secretary for Finance met with the Minister of Finance and his team, which included my colleague, the MP for Tobago West and Minister in the Ministry of Finance, and my other colleague, MP for Tobago East, the Minister for Tobago Development, and that meeting was to discuss allocations to Tobago.

To the surprise of the Tobago delegation, the Minister had not read the Tobago statement submitted almost three months earlier. I want to repeat that, Mr. Speaker. When the Tobago House of Assembly met with the Minister of Finance and his team, which included two Tobago MPs, the Minister of Finance had not read the Tobago statement submitted almost three months earlier as required by law, and was totally unaware of the comprehensive economic development plan for Tobago, and that plan was supposed to provide the underpinnings for Tobago’s development since 2005.

The sad part of all this is that while the THA representatives vigorously defended Tobago’s interest, the two TOP Members—Parliamentarians—perhaps on instruction of their leader sat in total silence, mystified and hypnotized in the presence of their UNC masters.
Mr. Speaker, the theme of the THA’s 2012 budget sent to the Minister, the one he did not read, is “Protecting Tobago’s Heritage”. The statement by the Secretary of the Minister of Finance highlighted several sub-themes and they are:

- Embracing Higher Education;
- Marketing Tobago’s Tourism;
- Monetizing Tobago’s Culture and the Arts;
- Resolving Land Issues;
- Strengthening Indigenous Entrepreneurship;
- Reform of arrangements for the Constitution.

Among the various proposals the Assembly outlined in the document that it wished to discuss with central government were:

- the offer of loan guarantees by central government to special tourism sector entities depending on their circumstances;
- the removal of the 10 per cent hotel tax in Tobago;
- enhance tax credit for renovations of the tourism plant for new structures;
- the removal of VAT on certain purchases;
- the introduction of special incentives for property owners;
- the creation of duty free shopping—

This is a Tobago shopping list that they wanted the Minister to think about as he goes forward. But, Mr. Speaker, as fate would have it they were not interested.

Mr. Speaker, now that these proposals and others have been contentiously ignored by central government, the Minister sought to impose various solutions on Tobago without consultation. The Tobago East growth pole announced in last year’s budget comes to mind immediately but there were others of recent vintage. And of course, the Tobago House of Assembly will deal with that at the appropriate time.

The fact is that the central government has sought to sideline Tobago and punish the people of Tobago for their continued support for a PNM administration in Tobago. We simply have to look at what they have done with key aspects of the development programme.
Consider the following allocations: in a $54 billion budget—$54 billion budget—Tobago’s needs for the Scarborough library which includes furnishing is $80 million, they got $5 million allocated. For the Shaw Park Cultural Complex completion, $130 million needed, they got $5 million. Cove Eco-Industrial Estate and Business Park, they require $40 million to operationalize it, they got $3 million. For housing in Tobago they requested $50 million of a half billion dollar programme, they got $5 million. For the Tourism Rolling Plan—Tobago’s economic backbone and foundation—a request of $250 million, they got $60 million. For the Windward Road Special Development Programme that is underway, they asked for $450 million, they got $3 million. Road resurfacing—well, they did a bit better there—they asked for $75 million, they got $60 million. And of course, for the malls in Plymouth and in Signal Hill—the mini malls and economic infrastructure development, they asked for $40 million; they got $3 million.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the intention here is to ensure that the development programme in Tobago does not bring about any economic advancement in Tobago as we approach the next THA election. This is deliberately done by the Government to starve the Executive in Tobago to prevent them from delivering in Tobago. That is what that meant. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: Shame, shame!

Dr. K. Rowley: The plan is clearly to starve the Assembly of needed development resources, and divert resources for the exclusive use of the Minister of Tobago Development who will claim ownership of whatever she manages to get done in Tobago. And in the usual condescending way of the UNC Government, the Minister of Finance recommends to the Tobago House of Assembly that it spend its resources expeditiously, but Tobagonians were quick to see the thinly disguised trap. What the Minister really wants is for Tobago to spend out the little that they have given them before time, then come a-begging, cap in hand, as Hochoy Charles did 10 years ago, only to be humiliated by his government with the resulting financial pain and anguish for Tobago.

So the plans, Mr. Speaker, they give you little money, ask you to spend it expeditiously, then you run out of money, then you have to come to central government and when you come they can humiliate you in the eyes of Tobagonians and that is supposed to affect you politically in Tobago. That is the plan that is working in Tobago right now.
Mr. Speaker, my consultation with the Chief Secretary indicates clearly that Tobago will not be ensnared by the wiles of the Minister nor will Tobago be lectured to on fiscal management by the reps from Tobago East or West. Indeed, I think that the Minister of Finance can take a lesson from the THA by providing to Parliament monthly reports of the revenues and expenditure of the central government, just as the THA now does for its area of responsibility. That would be a major step forward towards fiscal transparency and fiscal accountability, which you can learn from Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, let me take this opportunity to mention also the question of social safety nets. Last year, the Minister of Finance allocated for Tobago $8 million for CEPEP and $17 million for URP in the 2011 budget; but Tobago’s URP resources lasted barely three months and not a single penny was received for CEPEP, because the Prime Minister thought that, wearing her “courthouse clothes”, she could walk into Tobago and set up a UNC CEPEP—just so! Well, she will have a chance to wear her courthouse clothes soon as the THA takes the matter to the High Court. As for fiscal 2012, CEPEP and URP workers must now depend solely on the THA scrimping and saving to secure their continued employment in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as the new Tobago House of Assembly celebrates its 30th anniversary, reform of the Constitution and internal self-government are central to Tobago and Tobagonians. I wish to remind this honourable House that over the past three years the people of Tobago participated in a process to achieve consensus on reform of the Constitution for the island. It is therefore disheartening to know that efforts are being made to hijack and to undermine the process by the Prime Minister and her chief lieutenant, the Attorney General, aided and abetted by the two Tobago MPs of the Tobago Organisation of the People.

I have to invite the Prime Minister and her team to follow the progress of the people’s process to culmination, an exercise started in Tobago, by Tobagonians, to complete the struggle for Tobago’s right to internal self-government once and for all. In this regard, I wish to inform Parliament that on Thursday, October 20, 2011, two Bills will be laid in the Assembly’s Chamber for debate. This independent consensus document is the only legitimate expression of the wishes of the people of Tobago and should be adopted for debate in this Parliament, with any amendments deemed necessary arising from the debate in the Tobago House of Assembly.
Mr Speaker, before I leave Tobago, I must raise this. [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, where did this name—I heard the Minister of Finance talk about the Magdalena Hotel. Where did this name “Magdalena” come from to be attached to our premier hotel in Tobago? I gather it was the brainchild of the Minister of Tobago Development.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Dr. K. Rowley: Well, I am surprised, and a little more put out because my colleague from Tobago East—we come from the same era and walk the same road. My recollection of the Magdalena is that it was an old, stinky vessel, riddled with rust and infested with bedbugs. Such was the condition that after a 10—14 hour sailing from Trinidad, we Tobagonians had to sun our grips in the yard to try and eliminate the bugs before they got into the house. The Magdalena did the route with its companion vessel the Blue Star. Even though they were both of a similar standard, I would have much preferred the refurbished hotel to be called the Blue Star. That sounds less like a bedbug name.

Hon. Member: That is your first suggestion after two hours.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to talk about this regional fast ferry that we first heard about from St. Kitts or somewhere up the islands. An effective ferry service between the Caribbean islands is an initiative that any Caribbean person would be delighted to support. As a matter of fact, one can go on to say that in the absence of a proper functioning sea ferry service, the movement of Caribbean people and their goods is firing on one cylinder thereby seriously impairing our potential for development and growth. Our almost total reliance on expensive inter-island air services for the movement of regional and international tourists severely limits the numbers who can be encouraged to visit our islands.

One only has to look back at the yeoman service that was provided to the region by the two Canadian gift vessels the Federal Maple and the Federal Palm as they plied our seas for about two decades during and after the break-up of the Federation. One of the indelible memories of my own experience is sailing on a Federal boat all the way from Jamaica to Trinidad at the end of my first year of study at the Mona Campus, stopping and savouring every major island from Antigua to Grenada on my way home. Such a private sector venture with Government facilitation without too much underwriting will immediately find the support of the Opposition.
Mr Speaker, having said that, it is critical to point out that we, in the PNM, make a clear distinction between a traditional ferry service and a fast ferry service for the inter-island solution for sea transport in the wider region. We acknowledge that a fast ferry service, especially for small populations over long distances, is simply too expensive for the economies from the Caricom to sustain, not to mention that a fast ferry will not be able to effectively and competitively transport the kind of cargos which make up the Caricom trade.

Fast ferries consume huge amounts of fuel and they are very finicky in response to changes in the sea state. Idyllic as the Caribbean may be, there are seasons when the fast ferry will have to defer to Mother Nature or transport patients at high speed to hospital.

The Trinidad and Tobago experience should tell our Government that the $200 million-plus annual subsidy that is required to maintain the Trinidad and Tobago fast ferry link for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, which we must bear as an integral part of our own nation, is something that we are committed to and must be committed to. Any attempt to replicate that service over 1,000 miles with financial exposure for the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago is not on as far as the PNM is concerned.

It is in this context that the Minister of Finance must do more than tell us that this idea of a regional fast ferry, which the Prime Minister announced as a throwaway, done deal, with a $10 fare, “will be a private sector initiative and the Government will encourage proposals to make this happen”. Just what exactly does that mean?

Hon. Member: Just what it says. [Laughter]

Dr. K. Rowley: It is a big joke! It is a joke!

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, given the Prime Minister’s grandstanding and the Minister of Finance’s flippant comment at the last minute on this particular matter, the Minister of Finance must come better and let us know so that we could be in a position to spell out exactly what they are about. Is the Government proposing to be a sponsor or investor in this venture, and if so, by how much? Is the Government going to be a guarantor, then to whom and for how much? Are there any feasibility studies on a fast ferry to show a workable $10 fare? Will there be a subsidy component? If so, how much is Trinidad and Tobago in for? If you have that information tell the population. If you do not have it, get it and come back.
All these are questions which must be answered before we set sail on any regional fast ferry spawned on prime ministerial “vaps” or collective generosity to persons who may be ill prepared or who are prepared to be a little smarter than we are.

Mr. Speaker, national security: the Minister of Finance opened his budget presentation on this issue of national security; I will close mine on it. It is trite that the State has a duty to accord safety and security to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and to those who visit us on these islands. It is equally trite that the phenomenon of crime has presented one of the major challenges that confront this society. In a democracy with a written Constitution it is expected that the State in so doing must do so as citizens go about their lawful, routine everyday affairs, whether this involves the journey to and from school, activities at the workplace and the pursuit of worshiping according to one’s religion. This is the normal life that we expect and we expect to go about these things with security provided by the State. It has never been our understanding or expectation that we all have to be cooped up in our homes, unable to attend to our normal businesses, restricting our social and recreational activities or be called upon to give up our constitutional rights in order to enjoy such protection. The State does not have to put the entire society on pause in order to protect it.

Mr. Speaker, it has never been our understanding that citizens of this country, whether law abiding, lawbreaker or outright criminal should be picked up without evidence and in so doing be denied the usual protections of the law and our Constitution. Parliament, in passing the anti-gang legislation, did so in the full expectation that all laws enacted in this country require the procurement of evidence before any provision can be invoked against any citizen for any offence no matter how trivial or how serious the breach. Mr. Speaker, the current state of emergency has indeed brought some benefits, albeit—

Hon. Member: “Aaah”. [Desk thumping]

Dr. K. Rowley:—for the most part perceived and temporary in the view of the more careful observer. [Laughter and desk thumping] For one thing, it has exposed the fact that the State’s security apparatus, particularly the police service, had tremendous excess capacity and did not previously exert sufficient impact on the lawlessness of our society. [Crosstalk]

Another benefit is the overall reduction in serious criminal activity during the period of emergency. However, it would be foolish and shortsighted to think that this development would be sustained if we do not put sustainable and meaningful measures in place in order to convert this temporary benefit to a long-term trend. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker, the Government has continued along their well-established practice of the allocation of one of the largest chunks of the budget to national security. Yet, apart from the new nomenclature “21st Century Policing” we can discern nothing that is new or that which was not previously implemented in response to crime. Whether it has to do with efforts to make the police service and law enforcement generally more effective by way of training and the provision of requested resources; whether it is by way of improvements in the criminal justice system; whether it has to do with the more widespread application of technology, or the advancement of the programme for the rehabilitation of offenders, or by way of social interventions to direct and keep our youth away from a life of crime, happily, for us in the Opposition, we have virtually seen more of the same.

Mr. Speaker, as an Opposition, we saw it prudent, sensible and in the public interest to provide moral and, where necessary, parliamentary and other support to the Government in its work to relieve the citizens of the fear and other manifestations of crime. It is still our view, however, that there is nothing that was achieved during the state of emergency which was not normal police work and which could not have been done without the avalanche of negatives associated with a state of emergency. [Desk thumping]

We have spent over an extra $100 million in the last six weeks on extra policing; the question is, was this the best way to police the country and at that and other costs? We supported the Bail (Amdt.) Bill, 2011; we supported the so-called wiretapping Bill; we supported the Bill to make firearm offences more severe and we also supported the now misapplied Anti-Gang Act which became law in Trinidad and Tobago on August 15, 2011. We could not prevent the Government from running off to try to use it a week later and making a total and absolute mess of themselves in the process. [Desk thumping]

In so doing, by supporting these pieces of legislation we put at the disposal of the Government an admittedly draconian weapon, the likes of which have never been seen before. This was intended for the Government’s legitimate use in the fight against crime. It was for the Government’s legitimate use in the fight against crime; it was not for the Government to play politics with. And I want to repeat that to the Government, the Anti-Gang Act, was for the legitimate use in the fight against crime, including the use of evidence, it was not to be used for political and other expediencies. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, in the hands of a responsible government, this legislation, along with the wiretapping legislation, was much as was needed to take on the criminals with the full support of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, that is to say,
Government, Opposition, Independents, as well as the army of law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Unfortunately, in their over-exuberance and pursuit of their shortsighted political agenda the Government botched it and landed us in a pickle where in some cases innocent persons may have been arrested, criminals may have been set free, confidence would have been lost in the police service, confidence would have been lost by the police service in itself as well as bringing our criminal justice system into grave disrepute.

Mr. Speaker, when we lent our support in these matters we did so because we fully understood the role that a responsible PNM Opposition must play in bringing about peace, safety and security and the general well-being of our citizens, and indeed, visitors to our shores. But let me, Mr. Speaker, with equal rigour, make it abundantly clear that we, as the parliamentary Opposition, will not sit idly by and do and say nothing if and when the Government seeks to abuse the rights of citizens or otherwise act in an oppressive and unlawful manner. [Desk thumping]

In this regard, Mr. Speaker, we wish to place on the public record our sincere admiration of the independent Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago and the independent Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions [Desk thumping] as both of these institutions stood resolutely between the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago and this rampant Government, supported by a meekly cooperative Commissioner of Police along with his deputies, [ Interruption] when very recently the order of the day seemed to be lock them up and we will get the evidence later. I am very disturbed to hear the Commissioner of Police explain the current debacle, saying that the police is working with new law and they have to get accustomed to knowing the law—in other words, the police has to practise on people with the law to see how to make it work. That is the Commissioner of Police.

Suppose the police decided to practise on me or my children on a murder charge? [ Interruption] That is what he is saying. [Laughter] And you all could laugh, Mr. Speaker. This is Trinidad and Tobago. I am telling you about a Commissioner of Police saying that the Anti-Gang Act was being practised by the police. It was practiced, and they laughed at that. Hundreds of persons arrested and jailed and being relieved from the court every day and they are laughing. [ Interruption] They see no shame in that. [ Interruption] They are seeing no shame in that. Incompetence, malevolence of the worst kind and they laugh. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker, this intervention by these institutions remind us all, not least the Government, that there is indeed a final arbiter in our democracy based under our written Constitution. In light of the recent experience I just spoke about, the Opposition intends to request of the Government an amendment to the anti-gang law, to allow for the intervention of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions before any citizen is to be charged under this very deliberately draconian law that has been passed here in this Parliament. The Government is requested to bring that to the Parliament at the earliest opportunity so that we can prevent abuse and that we can go after the real gang members and gang leaders whom we set about to target when we spoke on August 21. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, public trust and confidence in law enforcement are critical ingredients. If the respective agencies have to interface meaningfully with our citizens and to succeed in the fight against crime, they must be respected; there must be mutual trust and you must have confidence in the police. We in the Opposition hold the distinct fear that this trust and confidence in the law enforcement is one of the first casualties in the recent fiasco of the state of emergency. In this country’s continued response to lawbreakers and other criminals, we would expect to see the Government engage in immediate action to rebuild and regain the public trust. We demand independence and professionalism from the office of the Commissioner of Police. [Desk thumping]

In this regard, professional policing and professional decision making are what we expect and demand. We expect and demand continued investment in the training of law enforcement personnel with a focus on improving detection mechanisms and statistics. We expect and demand further advancement in the CCTV camera programme and police response time. We expect and demand a sustained gun retrieval exercise, not being content as the Government now seems to be with the retrieval of a relatively few firearms over a few weeks, some of which, Mr. Speaker, bear a close resemblance to those used by Sir Henry Morgan and Francis Drake. [Laughter]

If this is achieved, Mr. Speaker, naturally, there will be far less guns in the hands of reckless youngsters who contribute significantly to the mayhem in our society. We expect as well, continued investment in the social programmes that have worked for the benefit of young people, rather than the surreptitious scaling down threatened by the current Government. We expect that these programmes
for young people will continue, the country could afford those programmes even in our straitened circumstance. It is too important not to focus on treating with this problem at the root level.

Finally, on this matter, we expect and demand the advancement of the rehabilitation process that this Government met in train within the prisons of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, we put the Government on notice, we will continue to monitor you as you carry out the critical role of providing security to the people and property in Trinidad and Tobago. As the Government congratulates itself and the targeted public officers express their gratitude for the $1,000 allowance, it is instructive for us to examine how this inequity came about in the first place.

Public officers of the various security services must remember that it was the Government in the form of the Prime Minister herself who in a meeting with the Police Service Second Division decided to override the collective bargaining process and substitute a non-pensionable increase for an allowance which, as it is paid by the Exchequer is the same way as salary allowance is paid, makes no contribution to your pension earnings.

The $1,000 allowance makes no contribution to your pension earnings, and when you most need your pension this Government will not be there to bail you out, they will be long gone. [Desk thumping] To an officer earning $10,000 a month, a $1,000 payment is equivalent to a 10 per cent increase of his earnings, but does not contribute to his pension. If you are earning less than $10,000 it is a much larger increase. The same Government that is saying that they cannot pay you more than 5 per cent could pay you a 10 per cent allowance that does not go to your pension. A word of warning to the wise is sufficient.

Mr. Speaker, there are two points I want to raise before I take my seat. One is, I meant to ask the Minister of Finance in the use of NEL 2, in the creation of NEL 2, where the shares of the Republic Bank will be used to create the portfolio in dealing with the Clico matter, in his winding up or some other person from the Government, we would like to be told what is the nature of those shares insofar as whether they are encumbered or whether they are free of encumbrance. That is useful information which we must have to be able to appreciate the creation of NEL 2.

One last point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, and that point has to do with the Government’s use of the $75 oil price in determining this budget. Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier, that the Government did that to allow itself to spend all the
money, but as I think about it, I see the Government doing something else which is quite sinister and that is this, by budgeting at $75 for no real logical reason—if one looks at the previous budget numbers—by budgeting at $75, any shortfall from there opens a back door to the IMF [Desk thumping] because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago could then claim when they go to the IMF that there has been a shortfall in the budgetary process. [Desk thumping] If they had budgeted at $65 dollars they could not do that, but by budgeting at $75 any time they get into difficulty they could run to the IMF and say that our budgetary provisions have underperformed and we qualify for IMF support. [Desk thumping]

I am putting this Government on notice; I am putting this country on notice, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is paving the way for another IMF intervention in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Once again I would like to apologize to this House and to all Members for the technical glitches that we had earlier on that resulted in the hon. Leader of the Opposition beginning his contribution one hour later. I want to apologize and put on record that particular development, and we are working to ensure that we do not have a repetition of that in the future.

The other point I would like to raise very early, I know it was done maybe in jest, but I want to advise Members the tossing or throwing of paper—we can start off with paper and then we can go to bottle and go to tea cup. So I am advising Members, it is disrespectful to the Chair and it is disrespectful to the House for any Member from any side of the House to be tossing and to be throwing, whether it is paper or whatever it is. So I call upon all Members, do not go down that road. I am not encouraging that and I ask you to desist from doing such in the future.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate, a debate where I thought I would hear some bombshells, and I did not hear the bombshells, but what I did hear, Mr. Speaker, was a voice and a mind that had approached the verge of bankruptcy. In fact, so dangerously was his performance on the brink of bankruptcy that he has given an expired and defeated leader on their side a chance to rise and shine in this debate [Desk thumping] and let us hope that the 12th man—oh, he is gone—will take a hint and discipline the student.

Miss McDonald: Mr. Speaker, no 12th man in here. No East, Mr. Speaker. [Laughter] [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Port of Spain South is absolutely right. There is no 12th man in this House. We refer to all Members of Parliament by their electoral district or their constituencies or by their ministerial portfolio. So please, hon. Member, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications, please no 12th man in this match. Please, continue.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I will take your advice, Mr. Speaker. What I heard from the hon. Leader of the Opposition—I congratulate him for his contribution—is that I heard him wanting to be a prophet of gloom and doom, to make this country and the people of this country feel fearful of the future. It is a tradition of the PNM in Opposition to be doing this over the last 16 months. And I will remind the hon. Leader of the Opposition that he also attempted this on January 10, 2011. In the Newsday headline:

“Rowley warns of devaluation.”

So it is a pattern where he tries to warn that this Government is not capable of managing the affairs of this country when in fact the evidence is quite to the contrary that the Government has managed the affairs of this country very well. [Desk thumping] Because, Mr. Speaker, just on the matter of his threat about the foreign currency being devalued, or Trinidad and Tobago currency being devalued, I ask, what is the evidence? The dollar has not deteriorated. In any country a floating dollar always moves within a margin based upon demand and supply. But what the Opposition Leader wanted to do was to scare people into major capital flight. But the people disappointed him. People love this country and people are staying in this country to build this country with the People’s Partnership Government. [Desk thumping] Because of the faith they have in the People’s Partnership Government, and the faith that they have in the Leader of the People’s Partnership Government and the Leader of the UNC, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, they are standing firm behind this Government as their hope for the future. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, instead of that, what have we seen? We have seen where the Heritage and Stabilization Fund has grown to US $4.1 billion, and where according to the Review of the Economy we now have $9 billion which represents 13.1 months of cover for imports and what have you. If you add the two, you get US $13.1 billion which amounts to just about TT $88.4 billion just between the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and the Foreign Reserve—which shows how well we have begun to manage the finances of this country.
The prophet of gloom and doom, who wants to paint this picture, who wants to scare people in this country, even went on to suggest that there is a recession that is taking place in the country. Mr. Speaker, he even used that to claim that there is a lack of confidence in the economy. I just want to refer him to today’s *Guardian* page A12:

“Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association President Dominic Hadeed, budget has created confidence” [*Desk thumping*]

What Mr. Hadeed went on to say is that this budget in fact would allow the manufacturers to begin to invest again in Trinidad. He said there will be some investment by the manufacturing sector as a result of the budget. He said manufacturers were very happy to see much of what they requested appear in the budget, like VAT refunds.

You know what he is saying? He is saying also that, this is a Government that listens to the people and that we base our budget and we base our policies not just in terms of what the Government thinks is right, but in relation to what all the stakeholders of this country think of what is right for the benefit of the country.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for O’Meara/D’Abadie and Member for Port of Spain South, I am appealing to both of you. I know that you all have a very close friendship, [*Laughter*] and therefore I would like you to continue your friendship behind the Speaker’s Chair, but not in his presence. Please, you are disturbing the Hansard reporters and also Members of this honourable House. And we would like to hear the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications in silence. So could you kindly continue, hon. Minister?

**Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to continue my point about the prophet of gloom and doom trying to scare this country. I just want to remind that the deterioration in the GDP per capita did not start under the People’s Partnership Government. From a high of 12.2 per cent growth in 2006 it went down to 5.5 per cent in 2007, to 2.3 per cent in 2008, to minus 3.5 per cent in 2009, to minus 0.02 per cent in 2010. Mr. Speaker, according to the CSO figures, there is negative growth of 1.4 per cent, but at the same time that is a forecasted position and when all the figures come in we will see what is the real position of the country, the actual position. If you look at today’s newspaper there is a report in which the IMF is predicting a 2.6 per cent growth for Trinidad and Tobago in 2012. They are predicting a growth of 2.6 per cent for Trinidad and Tobago in 2012. So in my view, the jury is still out on this matter of this minus 1.4 per cent, but that is what the CSO said and as a Government of integrity those are the figures that have been presented here this afternoon.
Mr. Speaker, you see I wanted to tell the hon. Leader of the Opposition that a change of tie—and taking fellowship from the leadership of the Prime Minister, in insisting that people of Trinidad and Tobago show their commitment to this country by wearing the flag of Trinidad and Tobago on their left side, does not mean that is going to excuse the PNM of the kind of squandermania that they had over the last few years. But what is even more interesting, I thought that a leader was supposed to inspire his followers to follow him, but although he has changed his tie, when I look here today all I see is a set of PNM ties across from me here. [Desk thumping]

So I wonder whether it is they are really following the Member for San Fernando East who wore his PNM tie today and they did not follow the Member, the Leader of the Opposition. [Desk thumping]

**Miss McDonald:** Mr. Speaker, 36(1), relevance of the balisier tie to economic growth, to this budget, please.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am giving the hon. Minister an opportunity to link those points. [Laughter]

**Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:** Mr. Speaker, some people can give but they cannot take. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition—and before I go there, I really want to take a moment to warmly congratulate the hon. Minister of Housing and the Environment as well as you and your parliamentary team for the smooth transition from the Red House to this venue. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I make this point in a very special way, because this achievement gives lie to the common belief that we as Trinidadians and Tobagonians are unproductive people. Indeed, this achievement demonstrates that we are capable, professional, goal-focused and achievement-driven people, and that with the right leadership, excellence will always be the outcome. And further, Mr. Speaker, this was done on time, was done within budget and with the highest levels of transparency, and openness in Government. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we are a Government who are committed to open government. It represents the new culture by which the People’s Partnership Government intends to conduct the business of the country and to govern. Further, this culture will be strengthened—do not thank the PNM because you will hear what I have to say right now, Member for Point Fortin—which culture will be strengthened by what you have not done and what we will do, which is very soon we will bring procurement legislation, to this honourable House to strengthen transparency in government, openness in government and a culture of integrity and honesty.
Mr. Speaker, when the people voted on May 24, 2010, they voted for change. There was no doubt about it. Our critics have scoffed at us. They have accused us of not implementing change. The efficient parliamentary location is one good example of that change, that they voted for; it is visible, it is factual. Similarly, Mr. Speaker, the budgets presented by the hon. Minister of Finance last year for 2011 and this year for 2012 will engineer future change in the country, the kind of change which will create economic growth and will ensure that the basic needs of people are also addressed.

3.45 p.m.

And so, I am sure on behalf of all my colleagues on this side, I thank and I congratulate the Minister of Finance for his dedication to country; his courage in taking and making decisions during the last year which have caused us to avoid slipping down the financial precipice, and which decisions have now put us on the road to further stability and economic progress, the likelihood of which now has greater probability for success. And I say that to you because the hon. Leader of the Opposition talked about the Moody’s report and the Standard & Poor’s Report and so on. I want to say to you that this Government inherited a situation, yes, where we were on the precipice. If you look at the Moody’s Report 2011— and the Opposition Leader quoted the report for 2009, but did not quote the report for 2010—that is deception. If you read the report, it says here “Moody’s Investor Service”. Moody’s stable outlook for the economy was also predicated on comparable low levels of debt, however, the agency cautioned that future positive outlook would be dependent on stabilization of Government debt and speedy resolutions to the Clico matter—which we have done. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we closed the gap between promise and delivery by paying at this stage the people who had $75,000 left to be paid. And we have already prepared bonds to pay those who want to come to get their bonds. [Desk thumping] I think that it is important to note, because this very Moody’s Report tells you why we had to take the kind of action to stabilize the economy, and stabilize the finances in the country. Because it said here, while the overall fiscal situation is positive, there are two concerns that currently limit upward rating pressure, one of which is the bailout cost of Clico, a financial services firm that went bankrupt in 2009, still remains unclear. And the recent increase in debt does not appear to be over and we expect continued fiscal deficits for 2011 and 2012. That is because we are going through a business circle and the business cycle
seems to be coming to an end and will probably end in about 2012. And that is why the hon. Minister of Finance has been doing his budget with a number of years in concern, as he brings us out of this particular business cycle.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say a word here now about leadership because we must give due where it is due. I want to say that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, has led her Cabinet and her Government over the last 16 months in a manner that has created a unified team. Today, you heard the Leader of the Opposition referring to the United National Congress. You know why? Because it hurts him to see the unity of the People’s Partnership Government on this side. [Desk thumping] But he cannot divide this side and he will not divide this side; this side will remain the most unified Government that this country has ever seen. [Desk thumping] They thought that the hon. Prime Minister would not be able to hold together a coalition but she has held together this coalition because she has led by consensus building, and she has shown a vision to the people on this side that the people of the country also share, and that is why we are going to go forward. Because you see the hon. Prime Minister has been able to create great interest in Trinidad and Tobago from all quarters.

Mr. Speaker, because of the way that politics is viewed by the People’s Partnership Government, as a means of improving the lives of people, and because of the social conscience that accompanies decision-making by the Government—and let me say, where was the social conscience of the Opposition when they wanted to impose the draconian property revenue authority upon people and raise their taxes by how much per cent? Where was it? Today, we heard from the Leader of the Opposition that he wants to come back and he is encouraging taxation. The only way that you know to raise money is by taxation, by making poor people poorer, by going down on their backs, by going and picking their pockets of the little that they have to feed themselves in this country. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, we are showing in this Budget that we know how to raise revenue but we do not have to pick the pockets of the ordinary citizens of this country. [Desk thumping] It is a new kind of economics, it is a new kind of management which they are unaccustomed to, and it is a paradigm, it is a shift in the way the country is, in fact, being managed. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has presented a budget, therefore, with everybody in mind, but particularly, the budget has a conscience, a social conscience, and the poor and disadvantaged have been kept at the forefront of the
Minister’s presentation. This is why in the Budget, the social services sector has not been cut, and in fact, we will continue to help people to transmit from where they are into a better quality of life and higher standard of living. The intent, therefore, is to ensure that the poor will be helped to come out of poverty and to be self-sufficient. Those who do not have a home will be able to have the hope that they can own a home through the reduced mortgage interest rates, through the land for the landless programme, and the subsidy of $50,000 for homes under $200,000.

This Budget has the intent that those who need to empower themselves to compete in the knowledge-driven society of the future will have the opportunity to do so through the $8 billion that has been allocated to education and human capital development.

This Budget has the intent that those who protect us, the members of the protective services, will receive $12,000 more per year, non-taxable, representing in the words of the President of the prison service, Mr. Rajkumar Ramroop—a 10 per cent increase in salary. Why deny them? These are the people who put their lives down for us. These are the people who put their lives down for us, and one wonders what price can you pay; you can put on someone for that kind of diligence to duty. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, this Budget has the intent that those who are entrepreneurial, those who wish to be self-employed, to develop their own business and contribute to generating employment, will benefit from the good work of the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, the hon. Errol McLeod, in the launch of the National Integrated Business Incubator System. I am sure that the hon. Minister will speak about this programme, but to quote him, it is an integral complement of this Government’s economic diversification strategy, and brings those who are outside of the economic net and gives them a chance to become part of the economy of the country; and the Minister ought to be congratulated for this out-of-the-box thinking and this innovation and creativity that he is bringing to the country. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, I say all of this to make the point that this is how power should be used. If the most disadvantaged in a society is not secure, then the entire country will not be secure.

Mr. Speaker, when I heard the Leader of the Opposition talking about the Revenue Authority and so on, we never said that we are not going to reintroduce the property tax, we never said that, but we said there were some problems with it, and we indicated that it would be along the old lines. But we went to an election and in that election, the people voted against the draconian Revenue Authority,
they voted against that, and they made faith with us, they made a psychological contract with us. And therefore, having won, we cannot, in a democracy, then go and turn against what they voted for, they voted for us to do something, and we will stand with them and we will not enforce that level of taxes upon them. [Inaudible][Crosstalk]

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** You rather put the country at risk!

**Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:** Mr. Speaker, instead of that, what we are doing is broadening the net in terms of the people, the number of people from whom taxes could be collected, and also increasing the efficiency with which taxes are to be collected in the country. Mr. Speaker, that is what we are doing. You see, they still cannot understand that you can increase revenue without putting pain upon people. [*Desk thumping*] They still cannot understand that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** They never did that!

**Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:** Mr. Speaker, while the Members opposite speak a language of criticism and gloom and doom, we on this side are hearing something far differently. We are hearing the joyous laughter of the people; we are hearing the music of celebration from the people as they sit at the banquet table of opportunities. [*Laughter*] [Crosstalk] We have seen under the last administration how power was used by—

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister. Member for Point Fortin—

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** It was not me. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Speaker:**—Member from Arouca/Maloney, I am asking both of you in particular and anyone else, please, please, please, allow the hon. Minister to speak in silence. Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications, you may continue.

**Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition attacked the Attorney General for the amount of money he is spending in his Ministry. He referred to the fact that the Attorney General was spending money on forensic investigation. I want to ask the Members on the opposite side: are you not committed to morality in public affairs? Are you not committed to ethical conduct and honesty and integrity in public affairs? Is the Leader of the Opposition saying that those who rape the Treasury, those who engage in corruption must be allowed to go scot-free? Is that what you are saying? Is that why Mr. Hart is still in Miami? What about the millions of dollars in cost overruns? [Crosstalk]
Mr. Manning: Lock him up, and lock me up too. Look me here, lock me up!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, public morality, good governance demand that the public be allowed to know the truth, and if there is a price that we have to find that truth in the interest of public morality and transparent Government, we will find that truth. [Desk thumping] I will simply say that revelations at the commission of enquiry have already begun to stun the nation, stunned the nation as to what has gone on in this country, and the manner in which people have taken from this country, and taken and filled their pockets and moved on. This is why in the Budget statement, the hon. Minister of Finance, in talking about accountability, had to say as follows on page 5:

“People must be held accountable for the past recklessness in our financial sector and the harm they have caused to many vulnerable people.”

Is it that you do not want these people, who have been reckless and who have brought pain to vulnerable people who have taken away their dollars that they saved so that when they wanted surgery, they could not get it and they died before getting their surgery, that you do not want them to be hauled before the courts of this land? Is that what you are saying? Is that what you want to preside over?

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, he attacked—let us just remember, he attacked the Government and he talked about a weak energy market, and again, tried to paint pictures of doom and gloom. What is the reality? There was a time when most of our LNG used to go to the United States, Member for San Fernando East, only 25 per cent is going to the US at the moment. Do you know why? Because there are better markets and there are better yields for us in other markets, and we are diverting in order to get those better yields; that means higher income for the country. [ Interruption] You see, one of the questions that you all are asking is: where is the money coming from?

Mr. Manning: Who started that? That started long before you come into office. Foolish talk!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: They talked about crude oil production. Let us go to the Review of the Economy and let me just quote from section “The Real Economy” on page 12 and page 13.

It says here:

“Overall, the non-petroleum sector is expected to contract by 1.0 percent in 2011, following on the successive declines in 2009 and 2010 of 6.7 percent and 3.8 percent respectively.”
When did that decline start from?

**Dr. Gopeesingh**: Repeat it again, Minister.

**Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan**: The petroleum sector is expected to contract by 1.0 per cent in 2011 having contracted in 2009 by 6.7 per cent and 2010 by 3.8 per cent respectively. Where did that come from? The hon. Members on the other side should ask when was the last time that they had awarded a block for drilling.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I will read for you from the *Review of the Economy*, page 13.

“During the period October 2010 to June 2011”—listen to the time—“October 10 to June 2011, drilling increased by 4.5 percent, to 58.1 thousand metres, as compared to 55.6 thousand meters for the comparative period of the previous year. Contributing to this outcome was a 251.9 percent increase in onshore drilling that outweighed a 52.1 percent decrease in offshore drilling. A total of 56 wells were drilled during the first nine months of fiscal 2011, marking a 166.7 percent increase from the 21 wells drilled in the previous corresponding period.”

All 56 wells drilled were for development, reflecting a 194.7 per cent increase from the 19 development wells drilled during October 2009 to June 2007.

[Cross talk] Mr. Speaker, I ask the question—

**Mr. Speaker**: Hon. Member, I would not want to ask the Member for San Fernando East—well, I know that the Member for Point Fortin apparently has taken note of my ruling. But, the Member for San Fernando East, I would like to seek your cooperation and I know as a senior Member of this honourable House, you would know that when a Member is speaking on the other side, you need to give him the courtesy of silence. I would like you to observe the rule, section 40(a), (b) and (c).

**Mr. Manning**: I wish to cooperate with you, but please advise him to speak the truth, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker**: Hon. Member for San Fernando East, I think that was a very unfortunate statement. I call on you to withdraw it. You cannot ask a Member to speak the truth. All Members are supposed to speak the truth here and if anyone has a problem, you would file the appropriate Motion, but do not accuse a Member of not speaking the truth. [Cross talk] So, I would like you to withdraw that remark, Member for San Fernando East, please. Member for San Fernando East, could you withdraw that remark?
Mr. Manning: What am I being asked to do? I am sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Withdraw the remark you just made.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the statement if you consider it offensive but, of course, I hold my view.

Mr. Speaker: No, Member for San Fernando East, I want an unconditional withdrawal.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the statement is withdrawn.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say the truth and it comes from the Review of the Economy which I have been reading. [Desk thumping] It is there in this document. It is in black and white.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to tell the Member for San Fernando East, through you, that the fiscal regime was changed by this Government and that started to spur activity in the oil sector.

Mr. Speaker: In what month was it changed?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: When last did the PNM administration award blocks for exploration? I am advised that was November 30, 2006. They signed for four blocks of which the total was one company that withdrew and ONGC Mittal also withdrew. In comparison to that, the People’s Partnership Government awarded seven blocks in one year. [Desk thumping] Four were for shallow water and three blocks for deep water; the first time deep water wells were awarded. What does that say? They talk about lack of confidence? If there was lack of confidence, people would not have picked up those blocks and therefore there is investor confidence in this country because of how we are managing this country.

In addition to that, we have arrested the decline in crude oil production. We have arrested the decline and that is something that has happened under this particular Government. For example, Trinmar, which you are familiar with, they are now up from 19,000 to about 22,000 to 23,000 barrels per day. There has been production, and because of what we are doing in the sector, it is going to improve. [Crosstalk]

The hon. Leader of the Opposition also talked about paying bills, “and dis Government eh pay its bills.” They do not like you to go back to the past, but maybe it is nice to just go back and see what we inherited and the legacy they left. At the end of September 2010, the cash balance in the country was $5.742 billion, that was September, compared to $9.782 billion as at September 30, 2009. If you
think that is not interesting enough, in one year, at the end of September 2008, it was $10,789.3 million that came down in one year from $10 billion to $9 billion, at 2009, and then to $5.7 billion at the end of September 2009. Where it went? You would tell us where it went. You left us with all kinds of legacies. That was one. You left us with a police service that was short of 2,000 officers. You left us with an economy that was in negative growth. The decline did not start with the People’s Partnership Government. We have been working instead to halt the decline. That is the difference.

Mr. Speaker, why Moody’s said what they said and why Moody’s talked about bringing the finance back to stability is that the public debt was at its highest then, threatening the international financial ratings of the country. And because we were able to pursue the management of the finances and management of the country in a particular way, we halted the decline and we restored the confidence of the international financial agencies in Trinidad and Tobago. This is not to say that they did not have confidence before, but on the brink, on the precipice, which we talked about, we were able to bring it back and, therefore we got a stable rating.

There are so many things that we inherited. I do not want to forget the abandoned housing estates, which we now have to go back and spend money to fix when we should be building new houses in the first place. If it was done properly in the first place we would not have to double spend on all of this. There was one case of $156 million in Egypt Trace, Chaguanas where there were many faulty homes. Houses at Harmony Hall were built on the river bank. Some of them are about to collapse. What are we doing? We have to fix all this. Money that should now be used for further development has to be used to do over work for which contractors got money. When you talk about paying the contractors and the contractors bring their bills and we say let us now justify and verify as to whether you have really done this work and whether you deserve to be paid, that is because we are acting on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we have every right to so do. So, yes, the Government is paying its bills.

I am advised by the Minister of Finance that 60 per cent of the bills to contractors have been paid, but, it is the people’s money and we are not going to give away, again, the people's money. We have every right to be sure, that what we paid for is value that we have received.

Then, the hon. Leader of the Opposition brought back the old story of the Alutrint plant and the smelter. Again, we live in a democracy. The smelter was a key issue, along with crime and corruption and the Revenue Authority, in the
election campaign of 2010, and people said no to the smelter. We campaigned on that. That was an issue. People said no to the smelter. We live in a democracy where the majority vote goes, and you cannot live in a democracy and claim to live in a democracy and when people vote one way go back on the people. You cannot do that. But, if you look carefully at what that Minister of Housing and the Environment is doing, you would notice that over the last couple of months he has been presenting very progressive policies on the environment and climate change and greening policies that are in line with international best practice. And this is what we have been doing in this country; we have been moving forward.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition also questioned the Minister of Finance about the different projects that he named as part of the economic transformation, which is section 3 of the budget document. He talked about two in particular. He talked about the methanol to petrochemicals plant and the methanol to olefins project. In the case of the methanol to petrochemicals plant, which will give rise, of course, to the pharmaceutical industry, the Government has received 14 expressions of interest. Do not say that we are not doing anything—and these have come from international investors. So, do not say there is no confidence in this country. There is confidence in this country. Fourteen international investors have presented proposals and these are currently being evaluated. In the methanol to olefins project, which will generate the plastics industry, 13 expressions of interest have come forward. In terms of the bitumen project, which he referred to by Reliance of India, Reliance has signed an MOU with the National Energy Corporation. And that project, for the benefit of the Member for La Brea, will be located in La Brea. All of these matters can be easily answered in my contribution.

In addition to all of this, we are interested as I have said, in ensuring that power is used by the Government to enhance the quality of life of our people. In that regard—and I am happy to hear the Leader of the Opposition say the Opposition will support the divestment of a portion of shares of First Citizens Bank. It gives the ordinary man in the society an opportunity to invest and gain long-term financial returns in an institution to which he has contributed. One way he has contributed is by putting his savings there and by borrowing in the past. So, we should give him an opportunity so that, in the evening of his years he can invest, he will be able to have financial returns. This is how we intend to share the patrimony, so that everybody benefits from the patrimony of the country, while we keep the assets of the country in the hands of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.
One of the words that have been used by the Leader of the Opposition is the word “deceit”. From the very first day, he kept saying that the budget is deceit and even implied that the Minister of Finance was being deceitful. What is deceit? Deceit, according to the dictionary, is the deliberate distortion or denial of the truth, with an intent to trick or to fool another. That is what deceit means; the art or practice of deceiving, concealment or distortion of the truth for the purpose of misleading, duplicity, fraud and cheating. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: People’s National Movement (PNM).

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It is still high on my mind where someone tried to award his family from a foreign country—[Interruption]

Dr. Moonilal: a “sarubhai”.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: A “sarubhai”, a job; big job, I think it was $400 million or $300 and something million and still trying to deny whether that is not his family. I wonder if that is not deceit. The hon. Leader of the Opposition, when he spoke of deceit, he could not be referring to the hon. Minister of Finance. He could not be, because if it is one gentleman in this country, if there is one person in this country, one politician in this country, whose reputation for integrity, whose reputation for honesty, whose reputation for faithfulness to national duty and whose reputation for responsibility and personal accountability it is the hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Dookeran. He could not be talking about him. He could not be referring to the leader of this party, the hon. Prime Minister, into whose hands the leadership of this nation has been entrusted and on whom several attempts were made to tarnish her, even in this House, but she stood the test of time and she continues to stand as a beacon of the quality of honesty that must accompany the Office of Prime Minister. So, he could not be talking about the Prime Minister as leader and he could not be talking about the Minister of Finance.

But it is a strategy of the Opposition. The Opposition hopes that by claiming deceitfulness they will help to promote a kind of belief system or various belief systems with the public about the People’s Partnership Government in order to advance their own propaganda about a Government that has excelled in terms of its achievements. But I want to remind them about George Orwell who said, I quote: “Do remember that dishonesty and cowardice always have to be paid for. Do not imagine for years on end you can make yourself the bootlicking propagandist of any regime and then suddenly return to mental decency.”
Out of respect for the Chair, I would not read the other six words, because it would not be parliamentary what George Orwell said. Mr. Speaker, no doubt, the deceit of the PNM was paid for by them on May 24, 2010. What is deceitful? Let us pursue it. You claim it is deceitful. Let us look at the evidence in the budget. Was it deceitful when the Minister of Finance said in the budget that the CSO figures showed that the economy was estimated to decline by 1.4 per cent? Was that deceitful? He came with what the CSO said. He did not try to hide anything. He was transparent. That could not be deceit. That is honesty. Was he deceitful or dishonest when he said that the rate of unemployment amongst youth is distressingly high?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Honesty.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: He said it. He was not afraid to say it. I give you these two examples just to debunk the idea that we are deceitful. We are not. We are open and transparent. We are honest. There is integrity that goes with this Government. Mr. Speaker, this is why and I invite the Members on the opposite side to go back to the budget presentation by the Minister of Finance. Go back to it. On page 5 he did not refer to other people alone being responsible. He said we must hold ourselves accountable as individuals, families, institutions, as civil society and as a Government. He did not call for accountability and responsibility on the part of others. He also included the Government.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Dr. T. Gopeesingh]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: At this time, I would like us to pause to have some tea. It is now 4.30 p.m. This sitting is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I never believed that 45 minutes could have gone that fast. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, when we took the break I was giving two examples to demonstrate the openness, transparency and truthfulness with which the Government approaches governance, and I was reminding people that the Government is a Government which holds itself also responsible and accountable.
Mr. Speaker, an examination of the Government’s performance has shown that it has made extraordinary efforts to close the gap between promise and delivery. I want to quote to you from a document produced by Ernst & Young: “Focus on Trinidad and Tobago Budget 2012”, which shows you how much we have been closing the gap between what we promised and what we deliver. The section of this document, this little booklet which they produced just after the budget: Status of Fiscal Measures 2011. To show you how what we promise we deliver; for example, they said tax amnesty:

- proposed measures 2011, tax amnesty; status, enacted in the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2010;
- repeal of investment ceiling for free zone companies, enacted in the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2010;
- increase in senior citizens pension to pay $3,000, enacted in Senior Citizens Grant (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010;
- minimum public servants pension where we implemented the minimum pension of $3,000 for retired public servants, enacted in the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2010;
- energy tax regime reform, this is where it all started in terms of the increased attention of the oil sector in Trinidad and Tobago; and measures announced in the budget last year were reduction in the rate of petroleum profit starting from 50 per cent to 35 per cent for deep water blocks, which led to three deep water blocks being picked up, and that was enacted in the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2010;
- the Children’s Life Fund, enacted in the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2010;
- first time home allowance; $18,000 deduction for five years for the first time acquisition of a house, that too was done, enacted in legislation;
- environmental incentives; incentives were proposed concerning the use of CNG, compressed natural gas; solar water heating; wind energy and for energy audits; enacted in the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2010;
- Green Fund Levy; amendment to the legislation to allow organizations and community groups which are engaged in the remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment to qualify for assistance in the Green Fund, enacted again in the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2010;
HON. DR. S. RAMBACHAN

- penalties under the Litter Act, 100 per cent increase in various penalties under the Litter Act; Minister of Local Government enacted in the Finance (No. 2) Act, 2010;
- the increase in the minimum wage increased from $9.00 to $12.50 enacted by Legal Notice No. 291 of 2010. [Desk thumping]

The reason I quote this, and quoted from this booklet is that we are not saying it again, people are saying it, because they have seen the veracity or the truth of what we have done. [Desk thumping]

So what we have promised, we delivered. When you talk about deceit, deceit would have meant that we went and promised and we never delivered, but we have delivered. So do not come with this question of deceit.

Mr. Speaker, you know more than that, I will give copies of this document to hon. Members of the Opposition. The People’s Partnership Government, the first 365 days, Pillars of National Development. In this document you will see the work of the Government over the last year, and how much this Government has been able to deliver under the seven pillars of development in each area. If you read the last page you will see the significant 24 achievements that were achieved by this Government over the last year.

In particular, one which stands out in my mind is the 28 kilometre water main from Navet to San Fernando which improved the supply of water to 300,000 persons—and it is good just to go back, because it shows you the new efficiency of the People’s Partnership Government. It was a project which was costed in 2006 by the previous administration for $306 million, but under this administration it was done totally with local labour, totally with the help of Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) workers, and it was done, I believe, at 38 per cent of the budgeted cost, leaving a 62 per cent saving; [Desk thumping] a tribute to the Minister of Public Utilities and Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) in terms of how efficient they did that, to bring relief to 300,000 persons with that 28 kilometre waterline from Navet to San Fernando. Twenty-eight kilometres at a cost of $117 million, I believe it was, saving—but we saved 62 per cent of the budget cost.

Mr. Roberts: How many persons benefited?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Three hundred thousand persons! [Desk thumping] What I do know also is that it increased the supply of water by one billion gallons a year, because of the leaks which have been tapped as a result of that. So the significant 24, you could go back to this document and you will see this.
One of the significant things we did, Mr. Speaker, and it is important to note this; the People’s National Movement administration refused to hold local government elections, because they were always fearful of going back to the people. Within six weeks of us coming into office, we held local government elections and coloured this country yellow as a result of that. The people have rejected the quality of governance, administration and management of our worthy friends on the other side, because they never acted in the interest of the people, dealing with the basic needs of the people. This is what we have been doing here.

Mr. Speaker, in that regard let me also remind that it is this Government which is now raising the pension from National Insurance Board (NIB) from $2,000 to $3,000; a 50 per cent increase; or $12,000 more per year. The Scarborough Hospital will be delivered by December, a Christmas gift to people of Tobago. [Desk thumping] The hon. Minister of Housing and the Environment and the Minister of Health have promised that by Christmas also you will have the hospital extension in San Fernando done. [Desk thumping]

I keep making the point: they are concerned about taxes, we are concerned about the welfare of the people; [Desk thumping] which is a difference in philosophy, a complete difference in philosophy, and if you want to know where we are getting the money to do it, we are being more efficient, we are collecting money better, we are using money better, and we are cutting out the corruption in the middle. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, and if that was not enough, in the budget the people of Tabaquite will be very happy to know that now the mortgage rates have been reduced from 6 to 8 per cent, to 5 to 7 per cent, and at least 13,000 homeowners will benefit; thanks to the Minister of Housing and the Environment. The year 2007 was the last time they dealt with deposit insurance, but this Government has announced that it is increasing the deposit insurance from $75,000 to $125,000, a $50,000 increase in DIC; give people confidence, give people a feeling of security for their money.

What if we really had been deceitful in the country? What has really been deceitful? Taradale Housing: defective houses in Taradale and elsewhere, where houses have been described as having feet, houses are walking; house are walking in Taradale. And down in Diamond, the back of Diamond, houses are walking. [Crosstalk] The Member for Point Fortin would be happy to know that this People’s Partnership Government is going to effect the economic fortunes of her constituency by delivering the highway to Point.
Mr. Speaker, they have not delivered the oncology centre, we are working on the oncology centre. What has been deceitful? They told us that the Brian Lara Stadium would cost $250 million; it is like an albatross around their necks now with a projected cost of four times that. [Crosstalk] So what has been deceitful? It is deceitful to have the population believe that you are in support of—you are against criminals and crime, but when the crunch came, you ducked the vote, you ducked the vote on the matter of the death penalty. That was deceitful and the population is not going to forget you about it. There is a whole section in the budget which refers to crime, and to citizen security.

Mr. Speaker, crime is the number one issue in the country, and we promise to deal with crime. For those of you who would like to read it, section 2 of the budget describes the intent of the Government on making this country safe and secure. We, as a Government, the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Security, the Members of the Cabinet, we took on—we took action against lawlessness in this country, yes, by introducing the state of emergency, but let us not forget the package of crime legislation which was also brought before this House; and we must not forget that.

Mr. Speaker, the leadership, the worthy Leader of the Opposition talks about crime and so on, then he talks about, we could have used the laws, we did not have to use the state of emergency, but the question does arise; why is it that you did not do it? Why did you not use the laws? [Crosstalk] The state of emergency has made a difference. Permit me to just show you what has happened between August 22 and October 07 murders—in the corresponding period between August 22 and October 07, 2010 and 2011—murders went done from 43 to 21, a 51 per cent decrease; woundings and shootings from 68 to 27, a 60 per cent decrease; rapes, incest and other sexual offences, from 80 to 50, a 38 per cent increase; serious indecency, from 10 to 4, 60 per cent decrease—decreases, all of these are decreases. Kidnapping from 15 to 9, a 40 per cent decrease; kidnapping for ransom, 100 per cent decrease to nothing; burglaries and break-ins, from 606 to 349, a 42 per cent decrease; robberies, from 564 to 206, a 64 per cent decrease; fraud offences, from 41 to 15 a 63 per cent decrease; general larceny, from 534 to 212 a 60 per cent decrease, all decrease; larceny of motor vehicles, listen to this one—150 in 2010 corresponding period to this we have 30, an 80 per cent decrease; larceny of dwelling houses, from 69 to 48, a 30 per cent decrease; narcotic offences, 74 to 63, only a 15 per cent decrease; other serious crimes, 118 to 83, a 30 per cent decrease. Overall in terms of serious crimes, a decrease in the corresponding period last year from 2,373 to this year, 1,117, an overall decrease
of 53 per cent. Half! Cut it by more than half. [Desk thumping] That is the raw statistical evidence and we have not put in the psychological benefits of the population who now sleep better, and who are able to feel more secure.

Central Statistical Office (CSO) forecasts the 1.4 per cent negative growth. What this shows yes, projected—what this shows, by the 8.2 per cent growth, in nominal terms of 135 to 143, is that there continues to be significant economic activity; some sectors might have declined, but some sectors have increased their performance.

Mr. Speaker, Government is investing in infrastructure, roads are being built, bridges are being built, Government is investing in health, hospitals are going to be constructed, they are investing in agriculture. This is why because of the reduction in food prices, inflation has gone down and it has gone down to the lowest level in 42 years, below 1 per cent. Access roads, yes, all of this is happening in the country.

I want to turn to the situation in my own Ministry. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications continues to be an important partner with the other Ministries in the economic transformation of the country. In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications we have appointed and reorganized the Ministry in order to achieve results, therefore, there is an ambassador for trade, Ambassador Mervyn Assam, an ambassador for Caricom, because we believe that Caricom is important, and our role in Caricom is important and, therefore, we will use the best knowledge and skills in order to ensure that Caricom grows, and Caricom survives, because regionalism is important and integration of the region is important. And we have an ambassador for culture in Ambassador Makandal Daaga.

Mr. Speaker, in order to boost the contribution of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications to the image of Trinidad and Tobago and for its international reputation, we have hired 16 new iROs, International Relation Officers, we have engaged in training with the UWI Institute of International Relations and we have been sending persons on scholarships granted to Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, India, Japan, China and Australia. Persons have been going on scholarships to those diplomatic institutions there, so they can get a wider international experience and bring that to bear upon our own development in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications.

We have been facilitating high level meetings geared to trade and investment, the Caribbean Investment forum. The visit of the Vice-Premier of China, for the China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Forum where 80 business persons from
China came here to investigate opportunities for business. The Cuba-Caricom Summit, Member for Point Fortin, is being held in December. There is an investment mission due from Japan at the end of November following my visit to Japan earlier this year. There is an investment mission coming from Korea in November, and in November also a mission is coming from South Korea for a conference on renewable energy supported by the government of the Republic of Korea. All of these things are happening as we create a new image for Trinidad and Tobago and a new place and global space for Trinidad and Tobago in the international environment. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we have also improved our facilities in Canada where we opened the new consulate building, where we have refurbished it. It was closed for a while. Yes, Member for Point Fortin, you bought the building, but you left it to deteriorate until I came into office and spent money [Crosstalk] [Desk thumping] and reopened it. For two years it was locked up, Member, and we refurbished it. [Crosstalk] And to date persons are enjoying a better facility.

Mr. Speaker, we are strengthening our relations with the BRIC countries, with China, with Brazil. Petrobras is due here in November for a major meeting with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs. The India-Trinidad and Tobago Joint Commission meeting is going to be held at the end of November, and Nigeria has requested their joint commission meeting also in December. More than that, our efforts in pointing Trinidad and Tobago as a place which can sell services, the result of that is 100 persons from Nigeria are coming to Trinidad for training in skills related to the oil industry, which means that we have now opened Trinidad and Tobago as a market where people can come to be empowered and to be trained.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to tell you that I am happy that I have now received support from all the EU countries in the Schengen visa matter, where persons will be able to go to Europe without having to get this visa. [Desk thumping]

Today, in the Guardian newspapers, I believe it is, Mr. Brooks, the head of ANSA McAL, he is saying: “The huge challenge is how our government partners with manufacturers to find new markets like Cuba, Central America and South America”.

We have just completed the Partial Scope Agreement with Panama, we are working on one with Guatemala. The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Energy of Panama are due in Trinidad for further discussions. As I said, the Cuba-Caricom Summit is taking place in Trinidad because Cuba is going to open the market.
am having talks with some of these manufacturers now like the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry is doing. He will tell you, when he contributes, the extent to which Trinidad and Tobago is beginning to penetrate and open new markets in Central America for our manufacturers, because we have to go beyond Caricom; this is what we are doing in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communication.

Mr. Speaker, beyond that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications has also gone into the community. If you want continuity, and you want to attract people, you have to do things which will attract persons to your Ministry when they are young, and we have invented ways to do this. For example, we have an essay competition which is annual, called “Future Diplomats”, and in the first essay competition 125 submissions were made, and you know what type of essays they wrote; they wrote an essay—one topic was: “If you had to write a speech for the Prime Minister to deliver at CHOGM 2011, what should she say?” And they wrote essays on that, bringing the students of the country directly into the realm of foreign affairs. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we recently held an art competition: “Bridging Borders through Art”, 226 students in the country participated. We held another programme: “Excellence in Foreign Affairs Journalism” where the first submissions are to be evaluated. And we are launching on Sunday a television series entitled: “Diplomatic Encounters: Relations with the States” in an effort to bring the embassies in Trinidad and Tobago closer to Trinidad and Tobago. All of these are new aspects of the new thinking which exists in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications.

Let us not forget the assistance we gave to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago to leave Egypt and Japan. And let me also say, very quietly, and without much fanfare that for the second year, the Saudi Arabian officials came here and they gave their hajj visas to all the persons travelling to hajj. [Desk thumping] This is the new service culture of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communication without having to go to Venezuela, or go to the United States or what have you.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that we inherited the position of Chairman of the Foreign Ministers Meeting of the Commonwealth, which was held by former Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Member for Point Fortin, and also the Vice-Chairmanship position of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (SEMAL). During this year, I also became Chairman of the Ministerial Committee of the Association of Caribbean States, and Trinidad and Tobago also got co-President of the joint European Union Parliament EPA Committee on implementation of the EPA. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker, all of these mark a new profiling for Trinidad and Tobago. I have not even spoken yet of what the Prime Minister has done to lift the Commonwealth into a new domain which is something recently acknowledged by the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, as well as the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom when we met at the UNGA.

Mr. Speaker, before the UN next year will be a motion for debate: Women Disarmament, Nonproliferation and Arms Control that has been placed on the agenda by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. We debated the motion on NCDs which was a very successful debate. There is a motion on which Trinidad and Tobago is playing a big role, the Arms Trade Treaty. The crowning experience of all of this was little Trinidad and Tobago on the margins of UNGA 66 was able to mount, through the hon. Prime Minister’s efforts, a major meeting of women leaders of the world—[Desk thumping] women leaders of the world under the rubric of the Commonwealth Women as Agents of Change.

5.15 p.m.

The President of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, Hillary Clinton, Michelle Bachelet, Head of UN Women; Helen Clark, Head of UNDP; Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the EU, and other foreign Ministers who were women of various parts of the world participated in that meeting, and a declaration in women’s participation in political affairs was signed which was referred to by President Obama in his contribution at the United Nations General Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, only yesterday I received the High Representative from the United Nations, and she came to see me to deal with the matter of South-South Cooperation, and made the offer to Trinidad and Tobago to host a major training event involving about 100 persons in the UNDP Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, where Trinidad and Tobago will be the centre for this particular training and development. Trinidad and Tobago, through the Prime Minister, we are pushing heavy South-South Cooperation, and we hope that this is going to happen. Colombia is also going to reopen its embassy in Trinidad and Tobago, which is another Latin American thrust.

So, Mr. Speaker, the South-South Cooperation is very important, 100 executive practitioners from 25 countries to attend a 10-day intensive executive workshop here some time in 2012, and they have approached us in order to work side by side with them. It would be a great day when this happens in Trinidad and Tobago because we would have led again in the whole effort at South-South Cooperation, something that has been talked about a lot but has not really been achieved.
Mr. Speaker, as I come to the end of my contribution, let me say that my constituents of the constituency of Tabaquite have benefited from the People’s Partnership Government. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all my colleagues who have what you call “delivery ministries” for what they have done in order to improve the lives of people in my constituency. When the floods took place there last year, 296 of my constituents were affected and within three months they were all able to get $4,500 each in order to replace their appliances which had been flooded out. Since then, for the first time in 40 years, the Marie Douleir River and the Guaracara River are being dredged, thanks to the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure, Mr. Jack Warner. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I do not have the time to go through the pages and pages of achievements on behalf of my constituents, but I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that one area that affected my constituents was landslips and in fact in any constituency, 11 landslips have been repaired in 16 months. Some of those landslips are as deep as 60 feet by 100 feet, so those places would have been cut off completely.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of houses where people did not have electricity, in my constituency through the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP), 14 constituents; from Vitis Helene of Guaracara, Tabaquite Road to Deonarine Roopnarine of Ramdass Street, 14 of my constituents have been able to get their houses wired.

In terms of schools in my constituency, children never had buses to carry them to school. Now 11 areas are helped by maxi-taxis to take these children from school and bring them back home, all because of the People’s Partnership Government. [Desk thumping]

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in this and many ways I could go on and tell you how we are improving the lives of the community of Tabaquite, and I thank my constituents for their patience and I thank them for their faith in the People’s Partnership Government.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity. It has been a pleasure for me to participate in this debate and I want to say that I am a proud Member of this Government because I believe in the vision of this Government, which is essentially the happiness of the people, and to that I am committed, along with all my colleagues on this side. I want, in the spirit of the season also to wish all my colleagues a very happy Divali. [Desk thumping]
**Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (Point Fortin):** Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to join in this debate and I will deal with the matters of foreign affairs when I come to that segment. I must thank the Minister of Finance and his team of public servants who have worked assiduously on presenting the budget for fiscal year 2012, which he has named, “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”. I must say to the Minister that I found that to be a very good theme as it could only be referring to the steady foundation which was laid by the successive administrations of the People’s National Movement. [Desk thumping]

But, Minister of Finance, whilst complimenting you on the preparation, I want to say that I am equally disappointed in the outcome, because here we are, the scenario of a global economic crisis almost about to make a U-turn from the likes of which we will be affected in some measure, for we are not insulated despite our still somewhat stable economy, and you have come here and you have not laid the groundwork for true economic transformation to meet the times of the future.

Let us agree that we are existing in different times, perilous times. It is almost as if the world has gone full circle, almost a depression, in some cases recession, yet you have come here and you have avoided and you have shirked the responsibility in which you and your Government ought to have been engaged at a time like this.

In some measure, I have to say that the Minister of Finance and his Government were somewhat irresponsible and careless in the presentation of this year’s budget, and what we expected was a very formal approach to transforming the economy, and we expected that he would have tackled revenue reform, expenses reform, taxation reform, subsidies reform and pave a way for how we go forward from there. But in true political style, or should I say, political struggle, they came here in some measure attempting to distribute goodies, seemingly justified, but in an attempt to, if I can use their style, please the people, please the people, please the people. And that seems to be a type of syndrome on their side where, it is a sort of a “sugar plum, take a sweetie, mamie-nice-child” syndrome; “Composer-style” thing.

But the Minister does not understand that the matter of the economy is a serious business which calls for very bold decisions, and that the approach which the Minister took in this budget is to the peril of the people at the end of it all, and all that he continues to do is to throw corn to the people. But the people of Trinidad and Tobago are not fools; [Desk thumping] they are people who have been educated under the People’s National Movement administrations: primary
education; secondary education; tertiary education; adult education; technical education. So you cannot come here throwing corn. This is a very responsible and intelligent public, and they as well know that you have not attended to the fundamentals as it relates to the future. [Desk thumping]

The point about it is, somebody will have to pay for this in the future. The country will have to pay the price for this inaction later on, but I believe that you all do not care because you realize that you are here for one term. [Desk thumping]

Miss Hospedales: Less than a term, less than a term.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: So what you are doing is you are leaving the dirty work for some successive government to deal with, [Desk thumping] and I could tell you who that government will be. It will be the People’s National Movement to form the next government. [Desk thumping]

What was presented here was not a budget—it may have been just a budget for today, it could have been probably a budget for tomorrow, but it is certainly not a budget for time to come, and therein lies my disappointment.

I would like to say that there are some very deliberate questions which I would expect my colleagues on the other side to answer, and these are: what are your very realistic, realizable, revenue-generating measures to complement the current revenues which, if as expected, will decline, given that we are a gas-based economy? And I am saying, realizable, given all your pie-in-the-sky projects which you spoke of last year and you repeated again this year.

I ask you the question: how do you plan to pave your way out of this deficit, and how are you going to approach lowering expenses?

Miss Hospedales: Yes, tell us.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: What will be your responsible approaches to taxation?

Miss Hospedales: Tell us, tell us.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: And tell me, what is the case for subsidies reform?

I take this straight from the Review of the Economy that subsidies and transfers, the largest components of recurrent expenditure, increased to $26.9 billion. Yes, I am referring to GATE and petrol prices, electricity, ferry services, and so on, and I am not at all advocating that you immediately raise prices on everything, but what I am saying is that governments must, at the same time—certainly act in the interest of the poorer, but also governments must act responsibly in the best interest of the nation in what is right. [Desk thumping]
This is what this Government does not do. This Government does not act in the best interest of the nation, it is all about throwing corn, preparing for elections; preparing for elections. That is what it is—deceiving, you talk about deceit, deceiving the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I will give you an example of a decision taken by the government of India in June of this year and this is what Petroleum Secretary Sundareshan had to say:

“We are fully aware of the sentiments of the people. We are fully aware of some difficulty it may cause. But, in the larger interest of the Indian economy, it is absolutely essential that consumers share the burden of rising prices of crude…”

Mr. Speaker, you know the situation in India. India has exhibited considerable growth and it is an economy that is really performing despite the global economic crisis, but yet still the government has seen it necessary to take the harsh decisions that will put the country on the right footing.

And Prime Minister Manmohan Singh spoke to the much needed reforms and I want to quote him:

“…subsidies on petroleum (products) have reached a level which is not connected to sound financial management of our economy.”

That is what it is about and I mean the Indian landscape is surely different to that in Trinidad and Tobago. The point I am making is it is about sound financial management of our economy. And I call on the Minister of Finance to answer the question, if what he presented last Monday was any indication of any amount of sound financial management of the economy.

At the end of the day, Minister, I really would like you to address this whole question of reform because at the end of day what we must have is a win-win situation for the country, a win-win situation for Trinidad and Tobago. Let me say, that I think we have the proper platform for discussing reform—all of the reform—revenue, expenditure and taxation because our debt levels are still acceptable, we are in a very comfortable position still. The economy has had solid economic performance for years. Up until May 24, 2010, there has been a firm commitment to saving through the HSF with a strong external position.

Our credit ratings have been constantly sound, we have had strong, consistent, macaroni [Laughter]—macroeconomic policy up until May 24. This is the silliness of the other side and we still have a vibrant energy sector.
So that the economy, yes, has been resilient up until May 24, 2010. Let us say that it is time to act now in the interest of the people of the nation that we must structure the fundamentals of the economy now for future generations.

Miss Hospedales: That is right.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: And of course I must mention the absurdity of no lands and buildings taxes once again, which I consider to be careless and imprudent on the part of the Government. And I want you to know that on the CNC poll earlier this week, it revealed that more than 80 per cent of the persons favoured the return of the lands and buildings taxes. And that is what I said about a disciplined population, they understand their commitment to nation-building, but it is you, the other side, the Government, that does not have the nation at heart. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, yes we have had no growth under the last fiscal period—that we admit—but the economic fundamentals are still there and it is time I say to get things right in order to ensure that we have continuing stability in Trinidad and Tobago.

There will always remain the burning issue of about why there is no investor confidence both at the local and external levels, when again all indicators are right—because there have been no foreign visitors, no foreign companies coming into Trinidad and Tobago in the last year and a half, not one. Banks are awash with money, and even the local businesses are holding their hands, they have not been investing.

But the fundamentals are still there because the economy is still sound. The infrastructure is okay, the history of doing business with Trinidad and Tobago, there is evidence of that in the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, and there is the presence of foreign companies. The society—expatriates love it, they do not want to leave.

5.45 p.m.

Crime, that seems to be more of a disincentive to the local investors rather than the foreign, because not one of the foreign companies has packed up and left Trinidad and Tobago. All of the incentives to doing business I would say that they are there as well. I would admit that the state of the global crisis is a bit of a deterrent, but notwithstanding, Mr. Speaker, the real reason is that there is something called competition. That is one of the things, there is something called competition and foreign investors can choose to take their business elsewhere, but what it comes down to in the final analysis is confidence.
What I want you to consider are the issues of governance, transparency—these are the things that matter to foreign investors—political stability, the decisions which you take, which the Government takes, your public officials and corruption, and I need not say anymore. And I am saying that there is a perception how this Government conducts its affairs and I am putting it to you that this UNC-led coalition lacks credibility and therein lies the reason why we have not been getting any new foreign investors. [Desk thumping] I could give you one little example, you do not believe in the sanctity of contracts, but I would say no more on that.

Mr. Speaker, big business requires big money and there is no confidence for persons and businesses putting themselves at risk under this Government. [Interruption]

I come from Point Fortin and therefore I represent Point Fortin, I therefore must say something about energy, and let me say I want to commend the work of previous PNM administrations [Interruption] which had the vision and the foresight to manage the energy policy [Desk thumping] of Trinidad and Tobago so that today we can benefit from the investment in Petrotrin. [Crosstalk] The fiscal provisions that allowed for the independence, all of our gas producers: Repsol, bpTT, British Gas, and included, Atlantic Energy; they all came here under the PNM. [Desk thumping] The methanol, the urea, the ammonia producers, all of these producers without whom, the future of this country would not be in the state of development that it is in now that allows us to continue with our development agenda. [Desk thumping]

So that it is on the backs of this very energy policy that our country continues to survive and this Government is relying on the benefits of the energy policy of yesterday. It comes back to the foundation and the infrastructure laid by the People’s National Movement. One citizen who contributed in no small measure was the recently departed Barry Barnes, a former Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who contributed immensely to the development of the energy industry, and in particular, the monetization of our gas reserves. [Interruption]

I wish to pay our respects to Barry Barnes and to warn this Government that the energy sector is way too crucial to our future for us to ignore the experts who are the repositories of information on the development and management of the energy sector. These are the men and women who understand the industry and I suggest that you find a way to use their expertise. [Interruption] There is no politics, there is absolutely no politics when it comes to knowledge and
professionalism. These persons acted and continue to work in the interest of our nation. [Desk thumping] I also want to thank Oscar Prietro, the CEO of Atlantic LNG, he was the CEO for the past five years, for his enormous and sterling contribution to Atlantic and for the standards which he exhibited, in particular, in corporate social responsibility, which today, resonates throughout Point Fortin.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to return briefly to Petrotrin: in this UNC-led coalition that use much of its time to talk about the things that needed to be addressed in Petrotrin, and quite frankly nothing is wrong with that, it is the responsibility of any government to ask those questions. What is your plan for dealing with decreasing oil production? What is your plan for higher operating cost? What is the situation of the crisis of confidence that you have created? I am talking about including your lack of negotiating with the OWTU and so on.

But I want to let you know, Mr. Speaker, that the PNM government, indeed, had a plan, because after we lost volumes based on the PetroCaribe strategy, we took action and today these decisions have caused Petrotrin to continue to survive in the international marketplace. The much understood gas optimization programme and the ultra low diesel sulphur plant in particular, these were investments made by a PNM government, designed to improve Petrotrin’s ability to earn revenue based on new environmental and international standards. The GOP is to bring cleaner and more environmentally-friendly transport fuels to the regional and international markets.

Quite simply, we consume only 20 per cent of Petrotrin’s products and the rest of it goes to export for which we must conform to international standards, so therefore without these plants there would be no hope for our exports. These goods are all available elsewhere and Petrotrin is forced to be competitive if it is to survive at all. Sure enough there were increased project costs, but this was explained due to higher capital cost occasioned by a higher oil price, a shortage of steel and generally short supply of capital goods. The point about it is the PNM took the difficult decisions, sometimes I would admit, they did not work out and the GTL is one example of that.

But, Mr. Speaker, the ultra low sulphur diesel for which start-up is expected in 2012, was required to meet stringent quality specifications for diesel and this is required for the local, regional and international markets. Those of you with SUVs will know, of course, that with the diesel that we have now you have to continually be changing or cleaning your fuel injectors, but what it means now is that you will soon have, in July next year, an improved diesel product with
substantially reduced sulphur content. Thanks to the PNM, very expensive projects but absolutely necessary if you have to be competitive on the international market. [Desk thumping]

Another petrochemical matter, Mr. Speaker, the Government is expected to continue with the development drilling programme, and also all of the work-over activities at Trinmar and also all of the joint venture arrangements that are associated with Petrotrin and Trinmar and how it does its business and so on. I have to say though that I am particularly pleased about the investments in the Soldado West Development Plan—obviously, it is close to Point Fortin and that translates to jobs for the people of Point Fortin, but that plan is intended to fully exploit the reserves in that area.

There is almost $700 million allocated to upgrading that infrastructure which is required in order to stimulate activity and to contribute to the Government’s so-called economic plan, but the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs at the recent IEC Conference, said that he believes Trinmar will underpin a crude output revival and said that Trinmar is critical—and I was very happy to hear that—and that over the next four years Petrotrin plans to spend US $1.2 billion and most of that would go to Trinmar, so, naturally, we will be holding the Government to account for these promises to the people of this country. [Interruption] We will be asking questions about that and we will be monitoring what is going on at Trinmar.

I want to just put a plug for the independents—the contributions of the independents to onshore development has been for the most part successful. With stable production levels, which are important to the local economy, they pay millions of dollars in direct taxes and royalties as well and, they provide thousands of jobs, but of course there are continuing challenges which they face for which solutions could be found and should be found. It is therefore required of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs to look into the sharing of knowledge and information and best practice as is done in other ways in the USA, in Norway, in Calgary, because, they too, the independents, need well and reservoir development expertise; they need access to technical data; they need a “re-look” at the incentives as well; all in their favour, but again, with good intent to produce more and of course contribute more to Trinidad and Tobago. It is Government’s policy today that must respond to these new market realities and it is only with greater collaboration and, of course, transparency between the regulators and private companies that any success could really be achieved, so we look forward to assistance to the independents as well.
Mr. Speaker, Point Fortin is home to the Atlantic LNG plant and it is a project that I am very, very proud of. Trinidad and Tobago is very proud of it, in particular, we, the PNM administration, must be proud of it as well. [Desk thumping] In fact, Train 4 is currently the world’s largest liquefaction facility in operation. Atlantic is a safe and reliable energy producer and certainly it is a top rated one. I can go on to say in very broad terms that Trinidad and Tobago’s energy-driven sovereignty is recognized worldwide and it is built on a PNM vision. [Desk thumping]

I now wish to spend a few minutes on natural gas. It remains that our energy revenues are primarily generated from natural gas and LNG sales. The Ryder Scott Report simply identifies our position at a time and is an indication that Government needs to intervene either by fiscal policy or acreage policy. Government therefore needs to consider how the commitment to a Train X will stimulate new economic activity and they must therefore tell us whether or not they intend to pursue this policy, because, indeed, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, threw out the question of a Train X at a recent forum at which he spoke, so Minister we want to hear from you—I see you are in the House—we want to hear from you, we want to hear about the possibilities of a Train X.

Indeed, there are some optimists out there—bpTT for instance which was recently awarded two deep-water contracts, two deep-water exploration blocks, that means exploration continues and as seismic work continues as well, I think that company intends to spend something like US $500 million on activities, and that is good. The CEO of Atlantic LNG on the eve of his departure as well, he spoke of, something of a 20—30-year possibility of gas availability, but he was also speaking in the context of the already discovered gas fields, the Kapok-Dorado and the Loran-Manatee and there is another one—I do not quite remember the name—between Venezuela and ourselves, which need to be monetized and, certainly, Atlantic’s infrastructure is close by.

So, these gas fields which we share with Venezuela, Mr. Speaker, are very, very important to the continuing development of Trinidad and Tobago. We really do hope, in the best interest of Trinidad, to monetize these gas reserves that are out there, but it falls on the Government of the day to get these agreements signed; these agreements with regard to monetization and energy cooperation. I mean, last year, the then Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs spoke of strained relations between the last government and the government of Venezuela, hence the reason why we could not move forward, but, really, they have not been able to
do anything and the only agreement they have been able to sign is the unitization agreement, which, of course, Venezuela just wanted to know what was theirs and what was ours and that is it.

I want to put on the Table for the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs as well the tar sands resource that is found in the Guapo and Parrylands fields and which contains a substantial quantity of bituminous hydrocarbons. The preliminary reserves estimates are approximately two billion barrels of oil and in 2009 the PNM government approved the grant of a licence to Petrotrin to explore the tar sands deposits to quantify the recoverable reserves of bitumen and to determine the appropriate process plant technology for the production of synthetic crude. So the views of the Government are welcome on the tar sands project.

In speaking to the energy downstream prospects, which are to come on stream in 2012—Mr. Speaker, I do not want to waste much time on that—the first being the AUM 2 melamine project, well that has been on the table for a long time and we really want to get the true status of that. The Carisal Project as well, which is to produce calcium chloride as caustic soda, again that has been around, give us the true status of that as well.

You spoke of the Reliance Bitumen Upgrader project which is, as you said, planned for La Brea and, of course, I think that is a very sound company, the RIL, Reliance RDA group, a very highly successful and reputable, and of course we would welcome them to Trinidad and Tobago, but that memorandum which they have signed, all that amounts to is just an expression of interest. It is no more than that. Of course, there are environmental concerns for this type of project as well as—[Interuption]—yes, there are environmental concerns so that you could expect significant public consultation, involvement; CEC approvals would be required and that is a concern that has already been raised by the Energy Chamber. So unless these aspects are addressed, this particular proposal will remain doubtful.

6.00 p.m.

The other energy projects envisaged, including the methanol to polypropylene, melamine derivatives and so on, I do not think that those will be realized until of course, the Government can really and truly attract suitable investors and inspire confidence in the country and we are not very optimistic about that. Our experience with this Government is as follows, as it relates to energy: aggressive exploration—just talk to date; [Desk thumping] accelerated oil production, more talk; an integrated downstream ammonia project with nine
proposals received in August 2010, we are still waiting; [Desk thumping] potential downstream industries for establishment at Union Estate, RFPs were going out for a number of projects, we are still waiting; alternative energy, you spoke about photovoltaic, you spoke about solar energy, et cetera, just a lot of talk.

One and a half years later, what do we have? What progress do we have under this UNC-led Government with regard to energy? The Minister of Planning and the Economy now speaks to a renewable energy policy. Well, Mr. Minister, we left one there, so please do not waste the country’s resources on doing another. Again, one and a half years later it remains good old faithful Petrotrin, Point Lisas Industrial Estate, Atlantic LNG, all of the foreign investors that came in under successive PNM administrations that have kept this country going. [Desk thumping] Really, there has been no meaningful contribution to the energy sector from this coalition Government. There has been no monetary value added to the industry by virtue of your presence here since May 25, 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to start off by saying that it is now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications; and to start off by saying that I simply do not agree with the grouping of those two Ministries. Wake him up, he is sleeping.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications—he is tired from his last trip and he has another one to go on to tomorrow, probably. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications certainly has a business of its own. In fact, it is everybody else’s business because it attends to all Ministries. The Ministry is not in the business of fishing, but still it deals with fishing agreements and so on. It is not in the business of building roads and bridges but still it attends to arrangements for technical assistance and so on. The Ministry is engaged with all Ministries and governments. And previous Governments in Trinidad and Tobago have generally thought that the image and effectiveness of the Ministry are best achieved as a stand-alone Ministry. It has its work to do with the rest of Ministries. [Desk thumping] It is a view that is shared by all countries—almost all governments in the world today.

So that the experiments by the NAR administration and the UNC administration with mega ministries in which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications—the matters of foreign affairs is subsumed within those ministries, it just has not worked. And what this Government has done it tacked an inward looking domestic communications division onto the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is outward looking in nature. So that there is nothing positive that is being done to the image of the Ministry and the dilution of its
focus and functions. In fact, I think it only impairs the effectiveness of the Ministry in its delivery of services. And really there is no connection with the division of communications as against the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It is obvious that the Ministry then will be engaged in information coming from all Ministries, and I question whether or not this would interrupt the implementation of the country’s foreign policy and its effectiveness and how it does its work, because I am concerned about the types of releases which come from these Ministries. Many of them are at variance with the dispatches of other Ministries and so on and we have seen this with the state of emergency where communication was woefully bungled. And that, Minister, is what you had to sort out when, in fact, you should have been trying to improve investor confidence, you were spending your time sorting out the communication issues between the various ministries. And I have to ask you the question—in fact, I have to say that I think that this is impeding your role as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I think it is impeding the integrity of the Ministry and of you, Minister, in the conduct of your work, and I do not really think that there are any clear objectives in putting these two Ministries together and the public deserves an answer and you in fact need to do an evaluation on it.

For instance, Mr. Speaker, it only came to my attention in the *Express* of Monday 10, the issue of the Campus Chronicle investigation into the bloggers project, the T and T good blogs they are called, where students are required to post comments in the daily newspaper websites praising the Prime Minister and the Government and they also post comments—yes they also post comments on the Opposition. The preposterousness of this is that they are paid to do it and they are given Blackberries with unlimited Internet access to do this work, to do their misdeeds while class is going on at the university. When you answer the application to—because you are paid you have to do an application—when you answer the application somebody called Marsha answers the phone. I do not know if she is family to Janice [Laughter] but Marsha answers the phone and Marsha then gets very explicit and Marsha then says you are being hired by the People’s Partnership. This is really craziness. What is laughable about the situation is that it is being used to sort out, allegedly, because I do not know the true results of this, it is being used to sort out their internal matters because I understand that concerns are now being expressed as to whether the Minister of Works should retain his Cabinet position. So they are not only dealing with the Opposition they are dealing with internal matters as well.
I do not really want to waste any more time on this kind of matter, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications; I leave it to you to sort this out. I do not think you are at the heart of it, but I think I want you to get to the heart of it. I also call on the Minister of Science Technology and Tertiary Education; the Principal of UWI, Mr. Clement Sankat, the President of the Guild of Undergraduates, maybe TSTT can help us as well, but we need to get to the root of this matter. Really, it is an act of desperation on the part of the UNC-led coalition Government and you really should come to the public with that one.

Minister, I have another view about what is going on in your Ministry as well. You may say it is passé and happens with all governments, but I still have to express an opinion on it. It is the whole question of political appointees monopolizing diplomatic postings. I know that all government tend to do that. My concern though is the extent to which you have done it. As it is, and I agree that Trinidad is small and so on and we have to try to make a big impact on the world and we have done that. For instance, we have done that in terms of energy security with regard to the Americas and we certainly have done that with regard to the International Criminal Court and so on. Small as we are, we have made a great impact on the rest of the world; certainly on the law of the sea as well. But all we really have are 12 missions out there; high commissions and missions and so on, and four consulate generals. That is all we have. So that the opportunities to lead one of these missions, the opportunity is really very limited, but despite all of these limitations we still have to aspire to be a big player and to be a recognized player on the international stage, because we have work to do. We have to influence events and decisions in furtherance of Trinidad and Tobago’s national interest.

So small size will come with its challenges, but it is certainly not in a handicap if we set our goals and we are able to deploy our very qualified and knowledgeable personnel who are able to work and are willing to do hard work that is necessary to achieve those goals. So I am saying, you would need to utilize your available human resources in the field of international relations and foreign policy formulation and execute what we need to do in a very informed an effective manner. But what we see happening, as I said, is that the tentacles of the Government have really extended abroad to the missions and in a really very insidious effort to monopolize for politicians who have either failed or found wanting, Minister, and senior public positions of course are now being filled by solely unqualified persons for the positions. As I said, all governments are
engaged in this. But you have taken it above and beyond. Because now I believe 10 of these missions and all four of the consulate generals, Member for Tabaquite, are being filled by political appointees as consul generals as well.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very uncomfortable situation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications and certainly it will have an impact on our image abroad and how we do our business because the people are very, very concerned about their future in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications. If you look for instance, at the posting in Geneva. Now Geneva is accredited to the United Nations and also to several agencies within Geneva and in Vienna. For instance, they would conduct work with the WTO as well. Now the WTO for instance, is really a very highly technical and critical operation—very important for trade relations—and therefore, it requires persons with a very professional background to deal with this. A career diplomatic officer will be the person who is more appropriate to attend to matters of the WTO, because these persons will be very much acquainted and familiar with all of the UN-wide systems and so on, and they would have worked on those very same issues in headquarters. They would be aware of all the sensitive issues. They would be aware of the relationships with other countries that they need to influence, what they need to do and so on. All of the UN protocols and systems and so on because of their years of exposure and interaction with UN personnel will certainly help in how they carry out their functions.

So I do not believe, in fact it is my view that the recent appointment which you have made is not a healthy one and I am really dissatisfied that this will do anything to help the country the way things have been done before. I can see us having a changed effect in Geneva, as I say, because Trinidad and Tobago really had a very good representative in Geneva before—a “fella” with tremendous experience. But the point about it as well is that past governments also recognized that there were very few opportunities for foreign services, officers and therefore what they did was to reserve the positions of consul generals for foreign service officers. And these persons were really very familiar with these foreign policy objectives, the laws and the regulations and traditions associated with consular functions, immigration laws and so on. What you have done since you have come into office is that you have taken away these positions and you have given them all to political appointees.

Mr. Speaker, there are two things that I wish to say about it. One is that there is value in having a judicious blend of career officers and political appointees as heads of mission. And the other thing, Mr. Speaker, is that we really should leave
an opportunity for career advancement to public servants who have chosen to
make a career in the field of foreign service. I expect the Minister of Foreign
Affairs and Communications and the Prime Minister will actually look at the
developments which have taken place and perhaps think about some changed
circumstances which will be in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago. Minister
I really look forward to your view on that.

Mr. Speaker, despite all of the very outward signs which we have seen and the
negative statements and the nuances about Caricom and its member states from
this Government, all of a sudden this Government has begun to sing the praises of
Carcicom and integration; and all of a sudden there is talk about an inter-island fast
ferry service to the eastern Caribbean. And in the budget statement—
schizophrenic behavior, that is right—and in the budget statement, Mr. Speaker, it
gets very hilarious now, they began to speak about the Caribbean integration
process and that I find very hypocritical indeed.

At least, the Minister was able to clear the air in the statement that it was
supposed to be a private sector project and that the Government was only going to
lend its support. But after all of the statements by this Government about Trinidad
and Tobago not being an ATM, after they refused at first to support the radar
assistance programme and then after the islands had begged for it they then
change their minds on it. After this Government took back the 10 scholarships
which had been given to the Grenadian Government for students tenable at UWI
and UTT; after this Government Mr. Speaker, went to assist St. Vincent after
hurricane Tomas and took with them all of TT $53,000 worth of materials, which
is poor; here they are—another thing, they have not been diligently attending all
of Caricom meetings or their attendance would have been shortened; yet still they
are frequently flying the globe. And here we are now they are talking about
identifying a new integration framework and this, Mr. Speaker, seems to be pure
madness on their part. I will tell you, what they have come to realize is that
Caricom is important to Trinidad and Tobago; that it is important for jobs, that it
is important for manufacturers because the Caribbean is truly their biggest export
market.

Another important factor, of course, is that many of the larger nations, even
though they are accredited to us and they have representation in Trinidad and
Tobago, they prefer to deal with Caricom as a unit, and you would have seen that
in the China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum. So they cannot
get away from Caricom. They must engage with Caricom. This is what they
realized. The Member for Chaguanas East acknowledged just a few days ago that
the relationship with Caricom was not at its best. He said so and he spoke of making attempts to fix it. So here we are, Mr. Speaker, all of a sudden with these platitudes about Caricom.

Mr. Speaker, quite to the contrary, the People’s National Movement has always been a strong pillar in the Caribbean integration process and I go back to even pre-Independence days. I have a copy of a document here, which cost 25 cents in those days, it is *The Economics of Nationhood*, which speaks to the administration and operation of the then proposed Federal Government, and that came out from the office of—

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

**6.15 p.m.**

*Motion made:* That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Miss M. McDonald]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:** So even before Independence the PNM was expressing an interest in Caricom, that is what I meant to say. And I go even to the constitution of the People’s National Movement which was established on January 24, 1956 Article 2, Aims and Objectives and I refer to Objective 12 and 13.

Economic integration of and cultural collaboration among the various countries of the Caribbean, in the interest of the political dignity, economic development and social well-being of its people. That was an objective of the PNM laid down in our constitution. Collaboration with the international community in the world as we struggle for an environmentally sustainable earth, and the establishment of a just society, and the achievement of lasting peace; from the constitution of the People’s National Movement. And then there was the Manning Initiative as well, and even after that of course, there was in 2009, the work which was put down as well by Prof. Vaughn Lewis and Dr. Cuthbert Joseph, and a task force which was appointed on the Eastern Caribbean States Integration Initiative, which is documented in two volumes. Apart from that, our interest in Caricom has always been there. We are a founding member of Carifta and of course, we are an important member of the successor organization Caricom.
When these people were in Opposition, they opposed absolutely everything that had to do with Caricom and any move towards integration. So it is very surprising to hear them come now and speak of integration. I cannot speak about integration without attending to the matter of the Caribbean Court of Justice.

**Miss Hospedales:** Yes, you need to talk about that; talk about that.

**Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:** There seems to be some difficulty in accepting the appellate jurisdiction of the CCJ as its final court of civil and criminal matters in Trinidad and Tobago. And what we are talking about is bringing justice closer to the Caribbean people. Eminent jurists, politicians, members of the public and members of the media have all spoken and more recently the former secretary-general of Caricom, Sir Shridath Ramphal, of the distinguished jurist lecture series, when he spoke on creating regional jurisprudence. All these persons have made a strong call on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this UNC Government, to honour its obligations made to adopt the CCJ as its final court.

Some of those on the other side, including the hon. Prime Minister, showed wisdom and good sense when as members of the UNC Cabinet in 2001, they agreed with their then leader, Mr. Basdeo Panday, that they should not only sign the agreement establishing the CCJ, but that they should also make a bid for it and lobby to be the host country to be the seat of the Court of the CCJ. They assured their Caribbean colleagues of their dedication—of Trinidad and Tobago’s dedication—to the Court and to the Caribbean Single Market and Economy. They said that they intended to do something for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Prime Minister was so exuberant in his quest and his commitment that he gave an unqualified assurance to the Heads of Government, and it is recorded that he said that Heads of Government, they noted the offer and the continued willingness of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to host the seat of the court and the undertaking of the Government to withdraw its offer in the event of the inability to secure the required parliamentary approval for full participation of Trinidad and Tobago in the court.

So the Government then, Mr. Basdeo Panday, gave a moral obligation that it would fulfil its obligation with regard to the CCJ. The only stumbling block at that time for implementation would have been political support from the Opposition, and I understand that he spoke with the then Leader of the Opposition and there was unwavering support. Elections came however, and the tables turned, there was no support from the UNC in Opposition for our Government’s advocacy of the court. After one time is another with the UNC–led Government.
Miss Hospedales: Sanctimonious hypocrisy.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Then, of course, I asked the question what did the Government have to say about all of this, the present Government. They said that they had no time for it, and that there were more important things to focus on. But it is becoming almost embarrassing, because there are just 13 countries in the world which still rely on the UK. Eight of them are Caribbean territories. Two of the five that are still hanging on to the Privy Council are Tuvalu and Vanuatu; those countries have very miniscule populations, and of the other Caribbean territories, six of the OECS countries have populations that also are insignificant. And I will tell you that those OECS countries have also signed a reservation. So in other words they did not have a legal obligation to adopt the court as well in all of its capacities. So that the largest number of persons in the world who are still dependent on the Privy Council, really there are two countries: Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica. What I understand is that the Jamaicans are talking, and perhaps before they go to the polls next year they may in fact sign on to the appellate jurisdiction of the court. And Trinidad and Tobago could find itself in an exposed position. I understand Grenada, as well, is likely to get on board sooner than later. So it is really shameful on the part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. As I said, we have a legal obligation, and of course, your then Prime Minister gave a moral obligation. But yesterday is yesterday, and today is today with you all.

The point that I am making is that this Government is again, in continuing breach of international law, as it was recently with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as well. Another point is that the Law Lords themselves are making pronouncements on the fact that these countries are still hanging on. More recently it was Lord Phillips, the President of the new Supreme Court of Britain, who is reported to have said in an ideal world former Commonwealth countries including those in the Caribbean should stop using the Privy Council and set up their own final courts. What he is saying in short order is that we must leave. What they are saying is that they are about to evict us. So I really call on the Prime Minister and Members of the Government, the country calls on you to do whatever is required whether it is legislative, whether it is executive, whether it is administrative, whatever action is required we are calling on you to give effect to the agreement to adopt the CCJ in all of its capacities. If you believe in freedom of choice, if you believe in the fundamentals of independence, if you believe in integration and regionalism you would act now and you would stop the foolishness.
I want to speak to two UN matters, and one of them is very important, that was the opening statement—the Member for Tabaquite referred to that—by the Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the United Nations side event on women’s political participation. There she spoke about her many firsts. Of course, first Prime Minister, et cetera, and including first woman chairperson of the Commonwealth, but I have to say and with the greatest respect, I say it, that with all of these “firsts” one would have expected from day one a firm plan of action for gender equality coming from the Prime Minister of this country, but no such thing has happened.

So that whilst the Prime Minister as a woman should have been a hero to Trinidad and Tobago, to the women of Trinidad and Tobago and their development, this is not so, because your gender policy has been very late in blooming, and it has almost been non-existent for the last year and a half, and that is shameful.

As the Prime Minister hands over the chair of the Commonwealth to another woman, the Prime Minister of Australia, and indeed the theme of that conference—Mr. Speaker, could I have your protection? The theme of that conference is “Women as Agents of Change”, I do not know what the Prime Minister is going to be able to say about her performance as an agent of change, in the interest of the women of Trinidad and Tobago, I do not know what she can say.

Hon. Member: Plenty positive things.

Mrs. P. Gopie-Scoon: In that speech she spoke to her vision of women as transformational leaders, and I want to quote: “I would like to see women comprising half our legislators, half our local governments, half our state boards ending up with the Chinese proverb: “women hold up half the sky.” Well I want to say that that is not the piece of the sky that is over Trinidad and Tobago.

For instance, let us just examine this Lower House, where of the 29 members only three of the women of the UNC-led coalition—are in Cabinet. The other three women are in the back here and they hold junior positions. Just under 10 per cent of the Lower House are female Members of the Cabinet and just four of your Cabinet Members—your expanded Cabinet, at that—are women. So that in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, excluding the Independents the 44 Members connected with your party; Lower and Upper Houses, only nine are women, amounting to only 20 per cent. Where
did the Prime Minister get those statistics from? On our side of the 18 Members, Lower and Upper Houses eight are women, 45 per cent of the Members of the PNM are women. [Desk thumping] So I would say it is quite a poor showing on the part of the Government and your party, and that does not say much for your influence on women.

I want you to look at the numbers for the previous administration when in Government. Fifteen of us in Parliament against your nine, eight of whom were in Cabinet as against your four, a hundred per cent more.

Then the Prime Minister spoke at that conference as well. She spoke about appointing women to strategic Ministries, and I really would like to know who are these women and what are their ministerial postings, because none of them are in strategic postings. What is notable is that under the leadership of the Prime Minister, and I am certainly not condoning non-performance and wrongdoing, but what I would like to say is that the Prime Minister chose to make examples of four of her Ministers and they could have been any number of persons because many of them have committed wrongdoings, I think so.

Hon. Member: What! Oh my Lord!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Minister of Planning, fired! Minister of Public Administration, sacked! Minister of Health, dumped! Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—all women; all kinds of platitudes as to her intelligence and performance, and then what, to downgrade her from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, one of the most important Ministries to the Ministry of Public Administration and then further, the portfolio was further decapitated, because the ICT portfolio was taken away from that Minister. Then the Ministry was further emaciated by moving the property management portfolio from the Minister as well, but Minister, I think you are quite lucky not to have that portfolio, because that portfolio is about keeping friends and family and well-wishers happy. Right! So I do not know what strategic positions the Prime Minister is talking about apart from her position, and I will agree her position is important.

So I do not know what the Prime Minister is going to be able to say to the women in Australia about her role as a change agent.

6.30 p.m.

Let me remind you of the positions held by women in the last administration: Attorney General; Minister of Finance; Minister of Planning and Development; Minister of Education; Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender
Affairs; [Continuous desk thumping] Minister of Education; Minister of Local Government; Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Affairs; Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of—[Interruption] Really? [Laughter] The question that you should be asking yourself is why have women not come forward and offered themselves to be on your boards, to be in your Senate, to represent your constituencies. You have to ask yourself why they have not been attracted to your party or parties. Yes, they have somewhat supported, they have probably voted for you all, but they have not bought into you totally and they have not offered themselves.

Then the Prime Minister went on to talk about “I have implemented social protection programmes to alleviate poverty”. And really, I want the Government to check to see how many women have fallen below the poverty line since they have come into office. All of those women who are sole breadwinners in their homes, some of them deprived of their jobs under URP, CEPEP, all their contract work and so on. So I do not know of any social programmes, any novel, substantial, innovative programmes that have been unveiled under the stewardship of the Prime Minister which favour women in particular; I do not know any of those.

I have even said to the Minister of Food Production that there was a programme in Baha, India where 30,000 women were provided lands—only women—and 14,000 acres of agricultural lands were distributed among them over a three-year period. The decision, just given to strengthen their position in society, to supplement their incomes, create incomes and so on—a very highly, successful programme.

So I want to challenge the Government, the Minister of Food Production, that the 4,000 lots that he is about to distribute or he has distributed—I think he is about to do it—I challenge the Minister that half must go to women and with equal access to loans, credit for agriculture and technology and so on. I want to see you truly start some meaningful dialogue with government departments, with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, planning, civil society and so on, because marginalised women must be allowed to participate effectively in this economic environment. So, Prime Minister, I want you to walk the talk.

She also spoke about gender responsive budgeting but I am going to leave that for another colleague to handle because this Government—gender responsive budgeting is not in their manifesto, it was not in last year’s budget, it is not in this year’s budget as well; [Desk thumping] and the Prime Minister spoke about that at
that women’s meeting as well, and that is very, very disappointing. You were talking about deception earlier, Member for Tabaquite; there you have it.

I think I will just divert and speak a little bit about my constituents, they are so important, because really, I want to challenge this Government. The Member for Tabaquite spoke about new efficiencies of the PP Government, well, I want you to apply those new efficiencies to the constituency of Point Fortin.

Mr. Speaker, water: the desalination plant was purchased by the People’s National Movement, and that is to eliminate our water woes along with the La Fortune Water Treatment Plant, and the fact that that plant has issues of sedimentation and so on, notwithstanding, we want to get the deadline date on that. I cannot understand why this desalination plant cannot yet be commissioned; it is long overdue.

The extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin, that is already over budget; it is already delayed. The Minister really should come back to us and give us its revised cost and its revised deadlines, and until such time, I cannot see it on the horizon that this highway will ever get to Point Fortin; and until such time as you come back to us with some realistic projections, Minister, I would prefer that you call it the “highway to nowhere”, because I do not ever see it coming to Point Fortin.

Mr. Speaker, the Point Fortin Hospital: I was not happy to see that it is not in the budget and that concerns me. What instead I heard of, it was in last year’s budget, but, of course, we read about the children’s hospital and the central hospital. The people of Point Fortin are anxious—yes, you may say that the PNM ought to have done it but the point about it, it is beyond politics, it is a priority; it matters not which Government is in power. You need to get this hospital built, the Minister had promised me, and I want to hear some projections as to when, where and how and so on. Also, the expansion of the Point Fortin Health Centre which is bursting at its seams. I am also concerned about how the dengue situation has been handled in my constituency as well, but I will expect someone else to handle that.

The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) campus in Point Fortin: you were talking public/private sector initiatives and there is an agreement on file, a Cabinet agreement, a note is in place for the erection of a UTT campus in Point Fortin. The land had already been chosen, wells had been capped on it and so on. So if you are talking industrialization in the south-western peninsula, why not place a campus in Point Fortin? That campus is also intended to do tech/voc subjects as well; it is not just about tertiary education.
I heard the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education saying, of course, that the people in Cedros could use the SS Erin Road and go to the UWI campus in Debe. You are talking about at least an hour and three quarters on the road, so I really do not think that it makes any sense; I do not know if you know how far Cedros is. But, what I have noted with interest in an article in the newspaper by Radhica Sookraj, it really puts it all together about the number of projects that are scheduled for the Debe/Siparia area.

There is to be the new law faculty of the University of the West Indies. There is also to be the new Penal Workforce and Development Centre; there is also to be the Debe Technology Centre as well to be reopened; there is also to be the campus in Chaguanas for College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) and so on, but really, if you are planning industrialization for the south-west peninsula, there is the best place for the UTT campus. The point about it is Atlantic LNG had, in fact, agreed on contributing quite substantial sums towards that project. So really and truly, we should not lose this opportunity, and the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education should really look at this as well.

Minister of Sports, I would love to hear something about the Coronation Park facility because we had agreed on a $30 million upgrade. The water taxi service to Point Fortin, we need an update on that as well. The housing situation in Point Fortin—I am tired of writing about it. There are eight houses in Southern Gardens that are unoccupied which is overgrown with grass; we really need to put these houses to better use. The 422 at La Fortune as well, people are crying out for these so we really want to know when these houses will, in fact, be released.

I sat with the Minister of Food Production as well, to discuss a programme for the revival of a sub economy in Cedros and its environs—I am talking about Chatham, Iscaos and so on. If you are serious about cutting off the drug trade and so on, you will realize that we must start some work in Cedros to create jobs, et cetera. I had a long chat with him so I am expecting—he had promised a revival of the coconut industry as well. There is a group there that is interested in chicken farming and sheep, goat and pig rearing—the Cedros community group—I hope that their demands could be met. We are looking towards the revival of the mill processing plant at Chatham and the entire PSAEL farm—the former PSAEL farm as well.

So, in short order, I would like to see a definite focus on Cedros and to include as well, I forgot, some sort of seafood processing. I know that Fullerton which is a village there, it is expected to have one of the new fish landing sites. We also need
some improvement in the Bonasse, in the Cedros fish landing site, and I am also looking forward to some improvements there so that we can have domestic tourism.

Whilst we are on that, the Chatham Cemetery, Minister of Local Government, is in a deplorable state and people now have to bury their dead in Cap-de-Ville, and that is not good.

How much more time do I have? [Interruption] I did not realize I have a few minutes left so let me just go back to a few matters of foreign affairs that I would expect follow up on.

The Trinidad and Tobago/Grenada delimitation which was done, signed—your Government, when they were in opposition, they were not pleased about that and when they came in, they sought to embarrass that government by taking away the 10 scholarships which were allotted to them and they had to go cap in hand and ask back for them and then they gave them. But with regard,—[Crosstalk] yes, it happened—but, what I am looking forward to coming out of this agreement which was signed, I would like the Government to look at Articles 6 and 7 which speak to cooperation regarding oil and gas and mineral deposits which cross the delimitation line. I am really hoping that there would be talks to make progress to both our advantage because as it is, the block 21 which had already been cordoned off but nothing had been done with block 21—65 per cent of it is now on our side and 35 per cent on their side. So I think that we could really do some exploration to both our advantage and I am looking forward to your cooperation on that.

There was a note as well for the negotiation with St. Vincent and the Grenadines with regard to a maritime boundary delimitation treaty. Minister, once you get that signed you should really work on it. Once it is signed, it means that all of Trinidad and Tobago’s sovereignty would be intact; all our borders would be cordoned off. So I really hope that you will do that and make enquiries as to what has happened with the initiative to Ghana by NGC; we will need to have an answer on that as well.

[Interruption] No, no, no.

6.45 p.m.

I want to correct you, Minister, you said something about the office building in Canada and that we had left it idle for two years. That was not so. That sale was only settled in 2009, and you had to to give the tenants time to leave as well. I believe they only vacated very early in 2009 or early 2010. The statement you have made is deceptive. In fact, it is erroneous. You also spoke about the Schengen visa. I too am very interested in that, because as you know that proposal was made by the PNM as well.
I am also concerned about your failing responsibilities, with regard to the CSME. All of the discussions and the decisions had been reached on the free movement of teachers, nurses, domestic servants, and you have not brought this legislation to the Parliament, so that you are keeping back the free movement of teachers and domestic servants. In fact, you have brought very, very little legislation. The only thing you have brought was the IMPACS Order, which is a run-of-the-mill order; nothing untoward. In short, no legislative work came from the Ministry and I am little bit concerned about that.

With regard to the relationship with Venezuela, I look forward to that being improved. You have to settle the fishing agreement, which is long overdue and we need to protect our fishermen who are suffering out there. As it is, there are fishermen who are incarcerated in Venezuela and, therefore, we need to try to have that agreement settled; the monetization agreement settled as well and the air services agreement.

Minister, I am concerned about the number of trips you are making and I noticed there is a 65 per cent increase in your budget for travel as well. We really want to know what the fruits of these trips are. This is very revealing about you. It is not everything that you were invited to you could attend. You need to understand that as well.

We look forward to information on where we are with the extended continental shelf. Yes, I know that it is before the court, but at the same time it is very important for us, in terms of our capacity, to extend our boundaries and have in fact something like an 150 extra nautical miles which we could use for exploration of mineral deposits. It is very, very important to us. I really want you to bring that forward when next you speak.

Generally, those are the things I wanted to bring to the attention of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications. I would have liked to say a few things about the Ministry of Public Administration. How much time do I have?

**Miss Hospedales:** One minute.

**Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:** One minute? I am really concerned that this Government is truly interested in putting proper systems in place, via the Ministry of Public Administration. I only want to look at the sort of human resource practices that have taken place under this Government and I really question whether they have an interest in putting proper systems in for human resource management. It is known of the number of instances of people being fired carte
blanche, right through, all through the Ministries and we are really looking towards a proper system, with regard to things like financial management, et cetera.

I do not think I have very much time really, but I am sorry for the Minister of Public Administration that the IT 2 portfolio had been taken away from her, because I think it would have done great justice to her being able to modernize the public service system, and I think she really could do great justice to the whole portfolio. I am really disappointed that was taken away as well.

I do not think I have anything—time. There are probably 30 seconds left. In closing, I want to say that, yes, I congratulate the Minister of Finance on the work he has done, but I really am disappointed in the outcome and I do not think—in fact this is my view—it is in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I expected more depth. We want to hear about reform. Those are things that are important to this country at this time and at this stage, with the global economic crisis.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise here this evening with immense pride in support of the fiscal measures proposed in the 2011/2012 budget by my esteemed colleague, the Member for Tunapuna and hon. Minister of Finance, I recall the words of the great American President, Thomas Jefferson who once said: “…a wise and frugal government, which leaves its citizens free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement and shall not take from the mouth of labour the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government...” This is the work of the People’s Partnership Government.

Those words, in essence, aptly sum up this year’s fiscal package. The hon. Minister of Finance had to prepare a budget that caters to the needs of each and every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, a budget that seeks to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the differently abled, young, old, public and private sector, while eschewing any measures that would negatively impact on the ordinary citizen’s standard of living, in terms of a global financial decline. That was a tough task that our hon. Minister of Finance had to deal with, but he did it for a second time in a row, for the People’s Partnership Government. He did it.

We, the People’s Partnership Government, have proven once again that we have that well-balanced inclusive approach set in quality standards and the most laudable ideals, which are essential to the proper governance of any country. But,
more than that, what the hon. Minister has done in the 2011/2012 fiscal package—as Minister of Education, I must speak about this—is to incorporate in the very economic foundation of our country, the fact that, to quote the words of the great South American freedom fighter, Simon Bolivar: “The first duty of a government is to give education to the people.” No other investment yields as great a return as the investment in education. An educated citizenry is the foundation of every community and the future of every economy. Mr. Speaker, this is why our hon. Prime Minister, in the first year of our budget in September 2010, ensured that education got the largest slice of the budget beyond $8 billion. This year again, the hon. Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the People’s Partnership Government, ensured that education got more than $8 billion again out of the funding, which comes up to close to 20 per cent of the annual expenditure and close to 6 per cent of the GDP.

In developed countries of the United States and Great Britain, about 16 to 18 per cent of the annual expenditure is on education and the hon. Prime Minister has ensured that we have more than that for education, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. The amount that they give to education in those developed countries range from 4 per cent to 5 per cent of GDP. Ours is 6 per cent of the GDP.

Mr. Speaker, before I make anymore contribution on the education aspect of it, I believe that I must expand on some of those points a little later. But, I must pause now for a few minutes to take into minor consideration some of the issues raised by the Members on the other side.

First of all, I want to respond to the Member for Point Fortin. She spoke about the Minister of Finance being irresponsible and what are our expected revenues and expenses and taxes and she wanted to know about our reform and that the matter of the economy is very serious business, it is to the peril of the people. I want to remind the hon. Member for Point Fortin that facts are facts and they do not go away. They have been told this, time and again, but we must reinforce that, so that they do not have the audacity to come and speak talk about anything financial and the requirements by us to tell them how we manage the economy and they want to know how we are managing. Sure, we are managing and we will tell them more about it. But, let me remind them of how they managed.

[Interruption]

Mr. De Coteau: Mismanaged!
Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mismanaged. I want to draw an example from the Auditor General’s report that would bring you back to this; the report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts for the financial year October 2009 to September 2010. It is important. They talk about our deficit financing. In 2006, the deficit was $4.7 billion under them. In 2007, $5.757 billion; 2008, $5.683 billion; 2009, the deficit went down to $10.789 billion; and in 2010, we only had a little slice from June to September. It was $13.194 billion in the negative, in this country. That is the amount of deficit financing that was under their control. So, when they speak about our deficit financing in the budget of $7 billion, we just want to give them an example of what they did coming out of a boom when the price of oil was $140 per barrel at one time.

We must remind them how they threw this economy into pure chaos. We have told them already that they borrowed and borrowed and borrowed. Letters of guarantees and letters of comfort and letters of credit and promissory notes in direct and foreign loans came close to $25 billion. Guarantees, $18 billion; letters of comfort, $16 billion; and promissory notes, another $5 billion. They carried this country close to about $17 billion which we are owing today. The Minister of Finance has now to struggle to see how he could balance the books to make sure that we stay below that mark and we pay off some of the debts they incurred over a number of years.

When they talk about financial responsibility, we are now inheriting their years of financial irresponsibility and the Minister of Finance now has to grapple with it and deal with it daily. He has been successful. He was able to manage a financial situation that brought stability to the country and now we are in an expansionary mode to move forward. [Desk thumping]

7.00 p.m.

She said that people will have to pay for this; we will be here for one term. Mr. Speaker, that has to be the big joke. The question is 450-something thousand people voted for us; the polls are showing—the MORI polls have shown that we are a performing Government, the MORI polls show that the people have confidence. MORI poll is an independent poll; I am sorry I did not bring the report, but everyone knows what the MORI poll has shown. They have confidence in the hon. Prime Minister and they have confidence in the People’s Partnership Government and when you look at almost all the Ministries, you would see a rise in performance of all the Ministries in the MORI poll.
The Member asked about how we are going to generate revenues and so on. There is the chart inside here which shows how revenues are generated and I will—actual revenue collected for the financial year 2010 by classification; tax revenue 81.89 per cent; non-tax revenue 15 per cent; capital receipt 0.53 per cent; and financing 2.61 per cent. The biggest slice of the income or the revenue for the country comes from taxation, 81.89 per cent. We have not altered that at all, so that 82 per cent, in fact, the Minister of Finance ensured that we did not increase any taxation whatsoever. Under this Government we have not increased taxation last year and we have not increased taxation this year. [Desk thumping] As far as the revenue is concerned 82 per cent of it comes from taxation and we have not changed that. So the gross amount still stays intact from the taxation aspect of it.

She spoke about lands and buildings taxes. It is important for us to remind the Members on the other side, when they were in government they wanted to increase the lands and buildings taxes to such an extent that it was punitive and then when persons were not going to be able to pay their taxes they were going to lose their homes and this is why there was a clamour by the people of Trinidad and Tobago to “axe the tax” which they were going to put in.

Mr. Speaker, for two consecutive years we have not increased any taxation for property, or for land and the people have breathed a sigh of relief because this is a Government which cares for the people and this we ensured that the people were not going to be penalized as that administration, the PNM administration was going to do if they had continued. Persons were going to lose their homes, persons were crying out and persons were worried; and they have the audacity to talk about we do not have the nation at heart, when they were going to sink the people of Trinidad and Tobago, take away their homes, confiscate their homes with the lands and buildings taxes.

I am happy that the Member for Point Fortin alluded—and this is what she said, she said the economic fundamentals are still there, this is what the Member for Point Fortin—thanks for praising the Government. She said all indicators are right—[Interruption] sit down—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Excuse me!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—she said the economy is still sound, she is admitting that this Government is doing a fantastic job [Desk thumping] she said the infrastructure is okay, thank you for being honest, Member for Point Fortin. She went on to say that the expatriates love it they do not want to leave and incentives for doing business are still here. Thank you very much Member for Point Fortin
for complimenting the Government in your own way and it is good that you are honest and admit that the Government is doing a fantastic job. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: “I will give you yuh hospital for that.” [Crosstalk]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, they speak about governance, transparency and so on, but they are the last persons to speak about transparency. I mean everybody knows that that administration lacked any issue, or any iota of transparency, accountability, probity, and we have said time and time again that over $30 billion spent—out of the $300 billion under that administration between 2000 and 2010 has been corruptly spent, $30 billion without any form of transparency and accountability. This is why the people said that when we go into Government—and we promised under the manifesto, that we would lay in Parliament a procurement Bill within 30 days of coming into office.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister made sure that we laid that procurement Bill within 30 days, and we went on to ensure that a joint select committee of Parliament was set up to look into the question of procurement and Members on that side sat on that joint select committee, they included the Member for Diego Martin North-East, it included the Member for Diego Martin West, and I believe it included one other Member from their side. We had around 15 meetings in the joint select committee of Parliament and presented two reports and we were just close to making sure that a Bill was going to be brought in, but time ran out. We had seven meetings within the last two to three months of the joint select committee.

So here it is the People’s Partnership Government was strong in the pursuit of ensuring that there is legislation to guide the conduct and practice of the Government, and future governments by ensuring that this procurement Bill was completed. Time ran out and we look forward to continuing this in this fiscal term, so that we will complete this Bill as quickly as possible. This is the responsibility of the People’s Partnership Government.

Mr. Speaker, Petrotrin. The Member for Point Fortin obviously has become an expert on the energy sector by virtue of living in Point Fortin or being the representative for Point Fortin.

Mrs. Gopiee-Scoon: You have now evicted me.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, no, no we have not.

Mrs. Gopiee-Scoon: You have!
Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We will never evict you. “Yuh move out of Point Fortin”?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You took the house from me.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: What house are you—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You evicted me! [Crosstalk] [Inaudible]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, well, the Member began to speak about Petrotrin with authority and she said that they managed the energy sector—they had a strong energy policy. Petrotrin is a company which brought on World GTL, they borrowed almost $12 billion for World GTL. The first set of money they borrowed at 6 per cent interest and the next set they borrowed at 9 per cent, Petrotrin still owes close to $10 billion for World GTL.

In addition to that there is the legal matter now pending before the court in arbitration, the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development will know that; where Petrotrin is being sued for almost another $10 billion to $12 billion. So, Mr. Speaker, Petrotrin now owes about $10 million and if that case is adjudicated against them, Petrotrin will have to pay another $10 million to $12 million. All they are doing—what they did to Petrotrin under their administration, the country now has to suffer the possible loss of about $20 billion, which they have caused, and which we have to inherit and they want to talk about they have managed the energy sector well, and they are questioning our emergency policy. They had no emergency policy for nine years. It was the Member for San Fernando West who started the work on bringing about a Green Paper for the energy policy and this work is still continuing—and most likely, shortly we will bring out the Green Paper, and then a White Paper on the energy policy.

Another issue, they said that we had done no work at all in the energy sector, and we were losing production, but it is a good thing that the Member for Point Fortin indicated that Trinmar was doing better. In fact, it is this People’s Partnership Government which did the revitalization of Trinmar to bring the production from 19,000 to 22,000 barrels per day, and still going, 23,000, and going well. She indicated that Trinmar is critical and this is what the People’s Partnership Government is doing about Trinmar. [Desk thumping] And you know what, that money which was spent in World GTL could have gone to assist in Trinmar for the increased recovery.

Mr. Speaker, she spoke about the fiscal regime and encouraging more independent producers. It was a former United National Congress government which signed on—which brought on LNG 1, and before they demitted office, they
had signatories to LNG 2 and 3. So 1, 2 and 3 were done by a previous government not the PNM; all they can claim is that they brought on to some extent Atlantic LNG 4. But 1, 2, and 3 were brought on by a previous UNC government.

[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: When were those decisions taken?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, they speak about transparency in the energy sector. [Crosstalk] [Interruption]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Those decisions were not taken by you all!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: All of us know the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The Member for Point Fortin stated that there is no transparency and openness to boost investors’ confidence. PNM was against this policy and stated that publicly, they did not want the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. You have to ask yourself the question, why? Because they wanted to hide the secrets of their dealings in the energy sector: who was making the money, who was corrupt and what kickbacks they were getting. That was the conduct of the PNM, they did not want the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. It is the People’s Partnership Government now which has regained this status with the extractive industries in February of this year—if I am to be corrected—by the Member for San Fernando West. It was in February we signed back into it. So here it is a Government which is very responsible, very open, very transparent, allowing for transparency and with investors confidence in the energy sector.

You know, sometimes they sit and wonder why people make statements, for instance, they have the audacity to ask for the Point Fortin Hospital from the Minister of Health. From 2001 when they came into government, the Member for La Brea at that time started talking about a Point Fortin Hospital and every year in the budget statement you will see it appearing, the construction of Point Fortin Hospital, the Mamoral Dam, the Scarborough Hospital, for nine years they were talking about that, the Point Fortin Hospital. They remained in government for nine years, they did not do it, but our Minister of Health and the People’s Partnership Government will build the Point Fortin Hospital, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping] He will say more about it later.

These were the issues raised by the Member for Point Fortin, and I think we have dealt with them conclusively and have negated most of the things that she has in fact said.
Now, I want to speak a bit about the contribution made by the Member for Diego Martin West and Leader of the Opposition. What he spoke about: we did nothing of significance, obfuscation, self-praise, lack of business confidence, we are shirking responsibility, et cetera. In continuing my contribution, I will deal with some of these matters about self-praise, significant work and so on.

I just want to move on to some of the things which relate to my field in education and as Minister of Education expand a bit more on it. First of all, before I do so in terms of the performance and we did nothing of significance. Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership Government is proud that after one year we could write a book on our performance. [Desk thumping] And we will be pleased to give them the book for them to examine and to show them the performance and to admire the work that we have done in just one year.

7.15 p.m.

From June last year when it was our anniversary, the People’s Partnership produced a book. It is too numerous for me to mention, but we will give them copies of it and we would like to show them—this is the book and how many pages?—28 pages with at least about 15 areas of performance on each page, and major significant performance. It is not for me now at this time to go through any one of these in detail, but the record will speak, they could get the book. An era of caring has begun, the People’s Partnership reported to you and we can lay it on the Table of Parliament for consideration by the other side.

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that we as a Government in less than 17 months we knew we met a Treasury that was virtually bereft of billions of dollars having passed through this country. [Interruption] Yes, because it is stuck in my mind because you all destroyed the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. You destroyed the economy, you left the Treasury empty. You left the Treasury with you owing almost $70 billion.

Mr. Speaker: I would like to hear the Member’s contribution and the Hansard reporters would like absolute silence so that they can accurately record what the Minister is saying. So could I ask for your co-operation, both on the Opposition Bench and, of course, on the Government Bench. Continue, hon. Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will not do like the Member for Diego Martin North/East and keep asking you for protection, I know you will give me protection. So I find it strange that in this session of Parliament when the Member for Diego Martin North/East was on this side and
we were on that side, he was confident and he was buoyant and cocky. All right, I withdraw that word. He is a nice person when he goes into joint select committee meetings, but when he was in Parliament I do not know what used to happen to him, but I found it strange that he kept asking for protection.

Mr. Speaker, we met billions outstanding, the Minister of Finance had difficulty in determining how much money the country actually owed, and bills and bills were coming every month, and it took a little while for us to understand the true financial situation we were in. It is not millions, it was billions of dollars—billions—and we met unfinished mega projects. And we met a crime problem that was left to fester and grow; it was not just a serious social threat but a major economic one as well. And under whose watch all those things happened, Mr. Speaker? And they all sit there—forgive me for making this statement—in sanctimonious righteousness, and say, well we are in Government and we should not dwell on the many cases of PNM mismanagement and corruption—we must. The fact that you and you alone due to your corruption and mismanagement nearly destroyed everything our country stood for. We will never forget it; we will never let you forget; and we will never let you forget.

You all know the Tarouba Stadium, over $1.15 billion spent; NAPA, over $1.2 billion spent; Chancery Lane project; the Waterfront project—where we are this is costing us $4.2 billion. For 17 years the lives of children are mortgaged in this country to pay $256 million a year for 17 years for this waterfront project. It would have cost far less if it were not for their corruption and mismanagement in this project. The oncology centre they spent $100 million and grass is growing. The Scarborough Hospital which was supposed to cost $120 million has gone close to $1 billion. So when they want to talk about economic management, theirs is economic mismanagement, and they must know it; they must hear it all the time.

You know, I sincerely think that when Simon Bolivar said something to the effect of an ignorant and corrupt government is the blind instrument of its own destruction—he said an ignorant and corrupt government is the blind instrument of its own destruction—he was talking about the former PNM government. There was an ignorant and corrupt government which led to their own destruction.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move a bit into some of the things related to education. One of the areas and an innovative area that the hon. Prime Minister put forward in her manifesto was the question of the introduction of the laptop, and we are proud that the hon. Prime Minister had the vision to move this country in that direction. Mr. Speaker, and one of the things that Members opposite frequently
harp on is our ground-breaking internationally recognized, laptop for all Form I students programme, eConnect and Learn. Mr. Speaker, last year I recall how we on this side and the country as a whole sat in amazement and disgust when the hon. Member for Diego Martin West said that we were giving laptops to “duncey head” first formers. You remember that? Insulting and embarrassing and slandering the young children of our country.

Miss McDonald: Mr. Speaker, 36(5), imputing improper motives. The Member is not here; he never said that.

Mr. Speaker: Well, the Member is not here to dispute that point, but hon. Member, Minister of Education, if you have records that you can quote, it would be more accurate for our purposes, failing which I would ask you not to go there. Thank you.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: All right, Mr. Speaker. Well the country knows what he said at that time. I do not have the Hansard here, but the country knows exactly what was said. They were basically insulting and embarrassing and slandering statements made about the young children of our country, the future of our nation. All that did was to prove to this country that the Opposition PNM has a separate talent for character assassination that must never be confused with a talent for governance; it must never be confused. Mr. Speaker, I want to advise the Member for Diego Margin West to meditate on the wise musings of Buddha, who once said a dog is not considered a good dog because he is a good barker, and similarly, a man is not considered a good man because he is a good talker.

So, Mr. Speaker, those on the opposite side had everything under the sun to say about our laptop policy. Well let me tell you something as we are proven to sit there the Prime Minister said it is here to stay. She intends to give laptops to all her students for the next three years while we are in our first term of Government. So at the end of five years the students of this country, almost 85,000 students, would have received laptops to the benefit of not only themselves but their families and siblings as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell this honourable House today, and by extension the citizens of this country, that the People’s Partnership Government policy of a free laptop for every child entering secondary school is a properly thought out policy with definitive purpose and impact for the overall development of Trinidad and Tobago. It has far-reaching benefits for a developing country like ours, for not just the education system but also the social system, as a means of ensuring upward social mobility and improving the status of women and girls socio-
appropriation bill 2011  
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]  
Friday, October 14, 2011

economically, and that was one of the ideas that the hon. Prime Minister had in lifting the status of women through education of the young girls in schools; that is just one.

Our laptop policy, entitled the eConnect and Learn, distributes a free laptop and necessary paraphernalia and access to the Internet to all students entering secondary schools, which is compulsory and universal in Trinidad and Tobago and free of charge. Teachers are also equipped with the necessary computers to enable them to teach their curriculum to the students with the Ministry of Education developing an entire eConnect and Learn package, which provides teachers with hands-on training in instructional materials, classroom routines and manuals. The package’s digital resources allow for more diversified instruction and access to more materials which will considerably help schools with information and communications technology. On that note I am proud to announce that our teachers have more than come on board with this programme and are already excelling in it.

This year Trinidad and Tobago entered the Microsoft Innovative Education Forum, Latin America, which is a global programme in which teachers are encouraged to present their best practices, integrated technology into their education process. The best presenters from each country move on to represent their respective nations in their Latin American Innovative Education Forum held in Santiago, Chile. This year’s competitors included countries from the region such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela, with Trinidad and Tobago being the only English-speaking country among them. There was a total of 176 attendees from cross educational and technical disciplines and of the 64 teachers who competed Trinidad and Tobago had four representatives, Argentina had five, Venezuela had five, Mexico had six and Chile had eight.

It is my immense pleasure to announce that Ms. Anushka Ishmael, a teacher of ASJA Girls Secondary School placed second in the extending learning beyond the classroom category for her project entitled “Educated Girls Empowered Women”. This is what our hon. Prime Minister is doing for our country. Her project was entitled “Educated Girls Empowered Women”. Through the ICT, Ms. Anushka Ishmael’s project included learning areas such as ICT skills, technology education, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity literacy, journalism principles and language skills. She created the website that connected the three
sister ASJA Girls’ High School, where students are able to guide each other with homework and projects, download lessons to follow on their own, share projects and ideas and collaborate by writing articles on the latest technology and school news.

Ms. Ishmael was able to utilize SharePoint, Active Directory, Window Server, Live@edu, Microsoft Office, Microsoft OneNote, Windows Live Movie Maker and Adobe Photoshop, all of which were key to her success. Mr. Speaker, that is the work of our teachers now in our schools through the initiative of the Prime Minister, an innovative initiative that is redounding to the benefit that one teacher from Trinidad and Tobago can cup the second prize amongst all these countries in the world, and it is a woman. In a few weeks that same person moves ahead to represent us on the international stage in Washington DC, from November 7-10, and we wish her the very best and express our gratitude for making Trinidad and Tobago proud with the ICT. [Desk thumping]

Like all the teachers of this nation she continues to do our country proud. That is a success of the hon. Prime Minister’s laptop policy, and it goes further. Mr. Speaker, do you know that Argentina is now moving to give three million of their students laptops; Russia is going to give 2,000 of their schools their laptops; Uruguay has given out one million laptops; and India is now moving to that, and that was the foresight and that was the innovative aspect of the Prime Minister coming into government and she has successfully ensured that two years straight the students have received their laptops. In fact, the last distribution was supposed to be finished on the 20th of this month; Mr. Speaker, it was successfully competed yesterday, I believe. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, they talk about transparency and accountability. For two years, the first year we purchased laptops for $83 million and this second year for $50-plus million, and not one of them on that side and not one person in this country could ever question the transparency and the accountability that went into the purchase of those laptops, and this is the way that the People’s Partnership governs.

It is our aim under this programme, teachers and school administrators will ultimately also be able to use technology to participate in professional development, engage in peer dialogue, enhanced classroom teaching and more efficiently manage school information. This policy is based on international research which shows that state funding policies aimed at achieving equity in technological distribution for boys and girls at a secondary school level is indeed
a key method of closing the gap in achievement between boys and girls. The systematic approach to improving access to the Internet is also geared at ensuring that families in all areas of Trinidad and Tobago, especially the rural areas have access to the Internet, and the wide berth of knowledge and resources it brings since the laptops are, by extension, used not only by the students but by each family member in the students’ households. Mr. Speaker, at the end of these five years when the hon. Prime Minister would have ensured the distribution of 85,000 laptops to students, 17,000 per year, and by extension four members of the family, over 340,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would have been exposed to information communication technology technique. You know what that is doing to our country as far as technology expertise is concerned? Mr. Speaker, we are building a resource, a finite resource of human capital development and whole villages that would be coming—so that industries from outside on the software thing can come.

7.30 p.m.

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. W. Peters]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you colleagues on both sides for allowing me to continue for another—

Mr. Warner: To educate us.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Minister Warner. Not only the students have benefited but approximately 3,000 teachers from Forms 1, 2, and 3; some schools were provided with laptops as well. Over 2,000 Form 1 teachers, over 80 per cent of schools have ICT units or departments, ICT plants, ICT implementation or ICT Coordinator for infusing and integrating ICT into the curriculum. Almost 4,400 teachers in the secondary schools now are ICT trained; amongst these 900 heads of department and 250 principals and vice-principals, almost 2,000 with level one expertise, 1,600 with level two expertise at the stronger level and 800 with level three expertise. Laptops are now being used by teachers in technical education, Science and Mathematics, Social Studies and Language Arts.
All 152 schools in Trinidad, 134 government and government-assisted and 18 private, have Internet connectivity and we have increased the bandwidth from 2 megabytes to 5 megabytes and we are now increasing from 5 to 10 megabytes.

Some schools have one to six labs and some schools have up to 70 computers in their laboratory. Over 300 primary schools have computer labs in our country now, and the remaining 173 are being assessed for introduction of computer labs. And the process of implementing Wi-Fi for all students so all students can have Internet connectivity in their classroom is being undertaken.

We have over 150 ICT technicians working in the schools to provide support and service hardware improving and keeping standards of ICT.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come to the pledges of the manifesto made by the People’s Partnership Government, and we are proud to be owners of this and to be working with this manifesto “Prosperity For All Manifesto 2010.” And I come to the part of human development, inclusivity, diversity, wellness and competitiveness.

Mr. Speaker, “Education and Human Development, Building the Foundation for an Intelligent Nation and a Creative Economy”, the first is early childhood education—this is what the manifesto says and we want to show how we are moving in sync and delivering according to the manifesto:

“Education is one of the major pillars of our economic development given that knowledge, information and human capital are the main economic assets of advanced nations. We will change our approach to ensure that our young people are literate, numerate and possess critical thinking skills. We will embark on curriculum reform to address the needs of 21st century development and the labour market needs of the society.”

We on this side are very proud that the national primary school curriculum stakeholders consultation has been completed, with two days at Cascadia Hotel and eight consultations which took place in seven districts and one in Tobago on the primary school curriculum. The recommendations are made; the recommendations are on our website moe.gov.tt, and we are now implementing the recommendations of that national consultation on the primary school curriculum.

At the preschool level—so exactly what the manifesto has been stating we are in the process of doing, and the primary school curriculum is completed already.
“At the pre-school level, self-confident, creative, enterprising children must be the goal. As they learn and play, work independently and with others to make progress, we must build the foundation for personal achievement, as well as co-operation and collaboration with others to achieve mutually satisfying goals.”

Mr. Speaker, there are over 700-plus kindergartens and nurseries in Trinidad and Tobago registered with the Ministry. They are in need of assistance. We want to bring on universal early childhood education, the Prime Minister has mandated the country to bring on that—the Ministry of Education—where 34,000 students must be within the formal system. At the moment we take care of only about 6,000 of these 34,000, so we need to bring on 28,000.

The last administration had a different philosophical approach to it, and we have deviated from that approach and we will tell you how. Mr. Speaker, there are over 700 kindergartens and nurseries, we have visited more than 200 so far, and over 95 of them are willing to come forward and work with the Government and the Ministry of Education to ensure that they can come up to the level for good standards in early childhood education.

So, we hope that by extending the public sector/private sector partnership, improving the infrastructure, training their teachers, giving them things in their schools, we will be able to bring on at least 200 of those kindergartens and nurseries into the fold of the formal system.

In addition, there are over 200 primary schools which are under-populated by 70 per cent. We are looking to see if we can establish early childhood education centres in these primary schools. We have spoken to the denominational boards already and they are in agreement with it.

So, by that process we hope to be able to have at least 400 early childhood education centres coming on board within a two-year period that will take care of 60 students per school—another 24,000 children. So, pretty shortly we will have all 34,000 children housed under the formal system of early childhood education. And everyone knows that the human development capacity of a child 70 per cent of that takes place within the first seven years, and, therefore, if we are able to take these children between ages three to five, and deal with them properly, we will make a significant dent on the social transformation that is needed in this country.

The work of the Ministry of Education will not be realized in the short term, but in the medium term, so that when we educate these children at ages three to
five with early childhood education you will see the difference of this population in seven to ten years down the line.

Then we also have to train almost 3,000 early childhood education teachers because one teacher to ten students—if we have 34,000 students we have to have 3,400 teachers. At the moment we have 200 schools under the formal system, about 120 by the Government and Government assisted, and 80 by Servol—Servol is doing a fantastic job for which we congratulate them.

I have spoken to the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, and we are working together to train these teachers, probably 1,000 per year for the next two years and three years so that we can train them at UWI, UTT University of the Southern Caribbean, Roytec, CREDI Institute and Servol. So, hopefully we will be able to train 1,000 per year. That is the work of this Government.

The primary school must ensure that our children are literate, numerate and aware of e-learning and Internet-based opportunities—I have spoken about that through the eConnect and Learn. We also ensure that there will be a focus on all learners just not the academically gifted.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education has already produced a Ministry of Education Strategy Report—a final report—on November 15, 2010 which guides the process of education for our country over the next five years, and hopefully, over the next three and a half, and hopefully, over the next eight and a half years when we have a second term.

The strategy report has within it a table of contents, the purpose, strategic assessment, visioning strategies, critical success factors, some models now available and immediate next steps.

Mr. Speaker, we have a model for educational development of our children that speaks about leadership and governance, children, the services, the institutions of delivery, the resources, the promotion and awareness, the understanding of the children and their needs, leadership and governments and so on, vision for the children, and it is all here in our document, it is on the Ministry of Education’s website.

Mr. Speaker, in the pursuit of a transformation in the education system where we know that we can no longer continue the way we were going, because successive Ministers of Education knew that there was something wrong with just being able to train students for just academic performance—
Hon. Member: Kamla was a Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, by the hon. Prime Minister who worked assiduously for three years, and that is how she was able to bring universal secondary education. And she has challenged this—[Crosstalk] Yes, yes. Whom do you think brought on the universal secondary education? It was the work of the hon. Prime Minister at that time who was the Minister of Education. She has mandated us now to ensure that there is universal early childhood education. So, we will have universal early childhood education, universal primary, universal secondary, and we have universal tertiary education with the GATE programme.

In the pursuit of our education reform and social transformation that the education reform will give to the society and for the social mobility of our population, the Ministry of Education has adopted 17 strategies, and has aligned 17 strategies, and I am proud to say that we are in pursuit of all of these at the moment and we are working on all of them. Permit me to go through some of these one by one.

I have spoken about the laptop initiative already, and I have spoken a little bit about the universal early childhood education. Our policy is different from yours. You said that you wanted to build 600 early childhood education centres by 2015, right, each one costing $5 million. So, that would have cost the country $3 billion. By the public sector/private sector partnership, and our moving into the primary schools we would not spend more than $1 billion to do that and we will save this country $2 billion just on infrastructure alone in the early childhood education.

You know that it is not a reality to build 600 early childhood education centres, and when the former Ministers of Education—I have come after them—I want to thank them for the work that they have done, I am carrying the baton but we are changing the direction of the Ministry of Education.

And so we are not going with your methodology for introducing universal early childhood education. We will save this country about $2 billion and we will be able to achieve that within a three-year period.

7.45 p.m.

Literacy and numeracy is the third area that we had been challenged on. According to the PIRLS study, we ranked number 62 out of 82 countries in the PIRLS study, the Programme for International Reading and Literacy Study; 62 out of 82 for Standard III students. Mr. Speaker, this could no longer continue, this cannot. It continued like that for the last seven to 10 years and numeracy is not far
behind, 40 per cent of our students who write CXC fail to get a pass—sorry, 40 per cent pass and 60 per cent fail to get a pass in CXC mathematics, and that is untenable and unacceptable.

We have decided that we will now move into ensuring that in Infant Year I and II and Standard 1, the implementation of strong literacy reading and Arithmetic is done in those forms, so that by the time the students reach later into the primary education they would have already become strengthened, so the intervention is taking place at Infant Year 1 and 2 and Standard 1. We have 90 teachers already trained with a masters in reading and we are utilizing them for the 473 primary schools.

Mr. Speaker, expansion of CVQ at the secondary level: what do we want for education for our children? Do we just want academic performance? No. We must have a child who must be socially and culturally integrated; we must have a child who must be mature and happy; a child who must be physically fit and well nutritioned and a child that must realize his or her own full potential. Academic performance does not allow a child to realize his or her full potential, so we have discussed this with our stakeholders and we are now moving to continuous base-assessment programmes so that students would be able to do things like physical education, visual and performing arts, music, dance, theatre, drama, health and family life, moral, values, ethics; all of these will be taught up to Standard 5, compulsory up to Standard 5, so we are beginning to get a more all-rounded child rather than just academic performance. CXC is working with us, TTUTA has agreed to it and all the stakeholders have agreed that we are going to implement a continuous base-assessment programme for marking so that eventually in about three years’ time 40 per cent of the marks of the SEA will go through that system of continuous base assessment.

Technical vocational: not everybody is academically gifted, some people need to go into a different direction, so we are strengthening the technical/vocational education programmes by providing the schools now with the material and the teachers. We are going to be training more teachers in technical/vocational education so that they would be able to complete their skills up to Level I at CXC level and then Level II at CAPE level and then move on to the wider world of work. They can then move into UTT which is supposed to be the technology university.

Mr. Speaker, parents engagement, involvement and support are actually needed and we want to make the parents much more involved and we will use the local school boards together with the NPTA representatives and TTUTA
representatives at school board management, with student representatives, principals, vice-principals and so on to get the parents much more involved in engagement.

Is it the time now for us to consider whether this is something that we have to think about? Is there a necessity now for when students commit criminal activities in schools that the parents must be held responsible for them? Have we reached that situation? Is it something to think about? I challenge the Opposition, give us your ideas on that and let us know how you think about it. We have changed the date of the SEA exam. We are giving the students five more weeks and we have engaged the country in stakeholder consultation for months and more than 70—75 per cent of the people who took part in the consultations agreed to move the exams from the end of March to early May.

Hon. Member: Take the pressure off the students.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, take the pressure off the students.

Improving academic performance: we are moving towards doing that. I want to tell the nation, the Members opposite and my own colleagues here, that every year 17,000 students go through the primary schools; 17,000 go through to the secondary schools from the primary schools, minus about 300 or 400 who will repeat. Of the 17,000 by Form IV, CXC, only 12,500 write five subjects or more, so out of the 17,000, 4,500 have dropped out already.

When those 12,500 write five subjects or more, not including Maths and English, sometimes, 6,500 pass five subjects or more. So, from 17,000; 6,500 leave out 10,500, dropped. And out of the 6,500 that finish, 3,500 go into CAPE and about 2,100 finish with Grades I to III in three subjects. This has been happening for years. How long can we allow this to continue? When 17,000 entered the system in primary schools and secondary schools and 2,000 finish with CAPE with Grades I to III. Fifteen thousand dropped through the system, and I am working with the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, to see how many of those with possibly five subjects or more go to COSTAATT and UTT and so on to see really what is the number dropping out. Therefore, we cannot continue to allow this to happen and this is where the Ministry of Education is working assiduously to put systems in place to improve this academic performance.

Mr. Speaker, infrastructure is an important thing and we have 126,000 primary school students, about 90,000 secondary school students, but 8,000 to 10,000 in early childhood education. Close to quarter of a million children. We
have about 900 schools and 16,000 teachers. Out of these 900 schools a lot were dilapidated and I am proud to say, Mr. Speaker, this folder, this folder here [Shows document] contains the deliverables of the Ministry of Education and the People’s Partnership Government over the last 15 months.

We constructed 23 Early Childhood Education Centres in 15 months and by December/January we would have constructed another 24, so 47 in 15 months. I am sorry to make this comparison but it has to be said, you built 23 in nine years—

Hon. Member: What!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—or 30, and by January we would have completed 47.

Hon. Member: January 2010?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: January next year. Five primary schools have been constructed and 11 primary schools are now being completed, by the end of this year we would have probably completed the next 11. [ Interruption ]

We have completed one secondary school, that is Marabella and we have opened the Biche High School. The Biche High School has been opened as promised by the People’s Partnership Government. [Desk thumping] [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, I will come back to that in just a few minutes. [Interruption] This is the book of the deliverables of work that the Ministry of Education has done. We have done over 392 projects in the vacation-repair programmes since June last year to September this year. Three hundred and ninety two projects we have completed. We have built some primary schools by the pre-engineered, pre-fabricated manner; in 28 days we have done this. [Desk thumping] Twenty eight days! Riverdales was done in 28 days. To build a primary school in 28 days, Mr. Speaker, is unheard of, and a primary school used to cost $40 million under their watch and we built it for less than $5 million that would last 50 years. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk] Yes, eight primary schools could be built for the price of one of their schools and $170 million for a secondary school.

Mr. Speaker, we inherited almost $250 million that was owed to contractors when we took office last year. Two hundred and fifty million dollars! Educational Facilities Company Limited owed $1.360 billion for the schools that they had started in 2007 and that have been left to us now to complete.

Hon. Member: How many?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Eight secondary schools—
Hon. Member: Shame!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—$1.36 billion, they abandoned them. Schools were started in 2007 and we now have to complete these at exorbitant cost. [Interruption] The Ministry of Planning and Development was doing these schools without any sort of empirical data to substantiate where they are putting up these schools and why they are putting up these schools. [Crosstalk] An example was the Marabella school that was put up at the side of the school. The school that they had there in Marabella housed about 1,500 students and the school is still in a good condition but they built another school costing $170 million at the side of it and that school is still good. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, so here it is and they want to talk about non-performance and they want to talk as—what they said? We do not have any ability and we have not performed. [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, we are now going on to do a number of primary schools by ourselves. In fact, Minister McLeod—Mount Pleasant Primary—he asked me, “Minister when are we completing the school?” And he thinks that the school is going to be completed in October. The school was completed on September 24th and it was handed over on September 26th. [Desk thumping] [Interruption] I must talk about the Biche High School, Mr. Speaker, I must. There was nothing in the commission of enquiry on the Biche High School, on the recommendations for the Biche High School to be closed. They punished about 1,000 students and 3,000 parents for children living in that area to have to go 24 miles away for 10 years. Shame on them! There is criminal activity on their part to deprive these students about the ability—[Interruption]—and there is nothing on the recommendation of the Biche Commission of Enquiry. All the Biche Commission of Enquiry said on page 71:

“There must be proper staff provided, SEPMU.”

SEPMU is the Seamless Education Project Management Unit. That is a recommendation.

“There should be greater consultation between the project manager, CMA and SEPMU.”

Should that keep the school closed?

“Construction time should be more realistic.”

Biche High School was completed, so they say a little patience may save lives and money. If the Biche High School is to be opened the following must be done: monitoring and so on. Mr. Speaker, they could have done the monitoring in six months and opened the school even one year later—
Hon. Member: Spite!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—but the spite and malice, and Member for Diego Martin North/East, I do not have the Hansard here, but it said he spoke about “douens” and “lagahoos” and so on in that time [Interuption] for these children. The children were probably called “douens” and “lagahoos”.

Here is the report. We are proud to have the report of the Ambient Quality Control done by Rose Environmental Limited, Cariri and the other one done by the Environmental Management Agency and Table 1 shows the Ambient air monitoring for volatile organic compounds and toxic gases at Biche High School during the period May 11—12. There were different test points: nitroxide, carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide, hydrogen sulphuride, volatile organic compound, BDL (below detectable levels) and this is what—

Hon. Member: “Oooh”.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—they could not have done—and suffered the children for 10 years.

Mr. Speaker: You have four more minutes.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would have liked to say a few things about—as the Member for Caroni East—how my people have had some patience in Caroni East waiting for things, but, publicly I would like to thank the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, Mr. Jack Warner, [Desk thumping] for assisting my constituency to a significant extent.

My constituency has benefited close to over $120 million in works by a road from Kelly Village to the airport and which has been needed for a long, long time and this is what is being done now. The Caroni Bridge, the bridge at St. Helena is also going to be done, for years—and that bridge is over 60 years old and the bridge is breaking down and it will be done. Mr. Speaker, road paving has been done on about 11 different roads, lighting of recreation grounds, pipe-laying projects, pavement and box drains about 2,000 metres, about 50 water leaks repaired, street lights installed on about 15 streets and so on. I am very happy and there is a lot more we can do for our people in the constituency, but I thank them for their gracious way that they have waited to have things done.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I just want to reiterate like the rest of the budget policies, our plans for the education sector reflect this Government’s realization, that education is a long-term investment and in order to make true,
positive, systematic and lasting change in our society and economy we continue
to lay a steady foundation for positive, economic and social transformation.

[Crossstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Minister, I just want to tell my colleagues on both sides again, I
think my patience is wearing thin in terms of the consistent stream of
interjections. The Minister is about to wind up; please allow him to do it in peace.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So if anything,
the dismal failure of the past PNM administration taught us that Trinidad and
Tobago’s downgrade in every sector while they were in power served as a wake-
up call for all of us. Its new policymakers, we are the new policymakers and
rendered the urgent need for us to regain a more sound, social and economic
foundation through better economic policymaking and more coherent governance
as is being done by the Minister of Finance and the People’s Partnership
Government. It is said that good governance is ensuring respect for human rights
and the rule of law, strengthening, democratizing and promoting transparency and
capability in public administration, and now more than ever at this critical
juncture of our local, regional and global history, it is the primary condition for
the success of both prosperity and development.

I dare say, Mr. Speaker, that this 2011/2012 budget fulfils these requirements
and demonstrates that Trinidad and Tobago’s potential to become a truly
developed, progressive and advanced State where its citizens are guaranteed their
constitutional rights of safety, education and prosperity, is not only possible, but
well within our reach because we are a Government which is able and willing to
improve the lives of our citizens; we are a Government which holds a firm belief
in the words of Abraham Lincoln who said:

“Determine that the thing can and shall be done, and then we shall find the
way.”

The People’s Partnership Government has found the way. [Desk thumping]

Budget 2011/2012, Mr. Speaker, I say that we are applying the formula to
provide the steady foundation—through the Minister of Finance and through our
hon. Prime Minister’s distinguished leadership—that this country needs, not only
through economic transformation, but social progress to achieve long-term
national prosperity and stability.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I inform you that dinner has arrived; we are not going to suspend the sitting. I will invite Members at the appropriate time to stream into the lounge and you can have your dinner and return. Member for Point Fortin, you wanted to raise a point?

8.00 p.m.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, 33(4) I just want to clarify something which the hon. Minister had raised during his contribution. [Interrupt]

Mr. Speaker: One minute please, nothing more.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yes. He said that I had congratulated the Government on having—on being responsible for a stable economy. I want to just clarify that I never congratulated the Government. The economy is stable because of what the PNM government did. [Desk thumping] It is almost impossible for a government in one year to entirely reverse the trend. For clarification then, I would say that this Government has certainly bruised the economy, but it is not that I ever congratulated the Government because they are not deserving of it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I cannot respond to everything the Member for Caroni East said, because I have only 75 minutes. But suffice it to say we will have to take the last contribution with a pinch of salt. We are told of a fiscal deficit in this country in 2006, how it increased in 2007, how it increased in 2008, it increased in 2009 and a bit in 2010. How inaccurate could that be?

Mr. Speaker, I have a document here, “Report on the Nation’s Business, the State of our finances and initiatives for future action by the hon. Winston Dookeran, Minister of Finance, June 11, 2010” and this is what he said:

“Over the 2009 fiscal year Trinidad and Tobago recorded its first deficit in seven years.”

In 2009, the first deficit in seven years, but we are told by the hon. Minister, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009 and a bit in 2010. How could we believe, Mr. Speaker, more of this statistical information? [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member mentioned that in the secondary school system 17,000 enter the secondary school system, fine—12,500 wrote five or more subjects; 4,500 drop out. I ask the question: the number of students who wrote
between one and four subjects is zero? That could never be correct. As a former principal, that is inaccurate. [Inaudible] You dropped out of that school. You were one of the dropouts. [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker, the third matter that was raised that I have to talk about is this whole question of universal secondary education and our hon. Prime Minister. Universal secondary education is the sole preserve of the father of the nation, the Rt. Hon. Dr. Eric Eustace Williams. [Desk thumping] That is a fact. Mr. Speaker, it is always wholesome to give thanks and praise for what is good. “All men have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.” We all make mistakes because we are human and we will continue to make mistakes. Member for Chaguanaas West, you are no different. When good is done we must acknowledge good things.

I remember as a little child, “if you have a doo-doos mango and it sweet, a hundred persons could say it sour, it still sweet.” We have to say thanks to the People’s National Movement that we have this magnificent building that has enough space to accommodate Parliament [Desk thumping] and several Ministries while extensive renovation is being done at the Red House. “Yuh cyar change dat.” [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we all know that this building was supposed to be the International Finance Centre, as part of our diversification thrust, and it is just because of the global meltdown that the situation has eased, but we know, good times shall return and this building shall be fully occupied.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the People’s National Movement government that our gross official reserve is in excess of 11 months. In fact, it is 13 months. How many countries around the world, developed or developing, can boast of such a large import cover? I listened to the Minister of Finance and I quote on page 9:

“...I am pleased to report that at the end of September this year the Gross Official Reserves stood at US $9.7 billion the equivalent of thirteen months imports.”

Mr. Speaker, if you were not in Trinidad you would have believed that in the short time the UNC-led coalition—[Interruption]

Mr. Sharma: What subject you taught? [Desk thumping]

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—[Inaudible]—that they would have had this US $9.7 billion. The bulk of that money was due to the efficient operational management of the People’s National Movement. [Desk thumping]
Thanks to the PNM government the Heritage and Stabilization Fund is in the excess of US $3 billion. [Desk thumping] The country’s total debt stock as a percentage of the GDP in 2001, when we took over from the UNC, was 60 per cent. At the end of 2009 it was reduced to 39 per cent; thanks to the prudent management of a People’s National Movement government. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, thanks to the PNM government our country has established an international reputation that this UNC-led coalition is doing everything to tarnish.

Let us look at the state of emergency coupled with the restrictive hours. Only one thing could happen; we are scaring away foreign direct investments. The poor governance model of this Government has implications for the rising level of unemployment. This is deception at its best.

We on this side and respectable commentators were in shock to witness the deception in the budget, which says “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”. I ask the question, Mr. Speaker, which foundation are they talking about? It has to be the foundation of excellent economic and financial legacy left by the People’s National Movement. That is undisputable. I enquire: under whose government were the foreign reserves and high level—[Interruption] Mr. Speaker, I am asking for your protection.

Mr. Speaker: I will give you my full support and protection. Members on the Back Bench, I appeal to you, do not disturb the hon. Member for La Brea whilst he is speaking. Observe Standing Order 40(a), (b) and (c). This is my final appeal. Could you continue, hon. Member?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: [Desk thumping] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under the People’s National Movement, unemployment declined from 16 per cent in 2001 to 0.5 per cent in 2009 when we had full employment—another achievement of the People’s National Movement.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when you compare that with what has happened over the last 18 months, we saw the escalation of unemployment in the country. Over the past 55 days, Trinidad and Tobago’s Labour Market condition took a disastrous plunge. This led to greater levels of unemployment in the hospitality and service industries. The working class felt the brunt of the blunt instrument of this administration.

Employees from restaurants and hotels have become their brothers’ and sisters’ keepers. They were forced to work shorter hours due to the curfew. They were agreeing to work even less hours so that some of their colleagues would not be sent home—shorter work days and nights, fewer hours mean less income; less food on the table for working class families. [Interruption]
Mr. Speaker, I am asking for your protection. I stayed quiet when people were making their contribution and I am being disturbed at the back here. I am asking for your protection.

Mr. Speaker: I offer you my full protection once again and if I am getting any disturbance from in the back I would ask the particular Member to exit the Chamber.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I stay quiet when people are talking.

While this is taking place, on the other hand, we have Ministers and their colleagues enjoying frequent flyers from Central America to New York, from Toronto to Washington, from Seoul in South Korea to even China. This is taking place while people are experiencing low levels, Mr. Speaker.

I and my colleagues on this side of the House listened attentively to the 2012 Budget Statement by the hon. Minister of Finance. I myself read this document three times, word for word, line by line, searching, to find out what was in the statement for my constituents who hail from Erin to Quarry, from Salazar Trace to Aripero. Mr. Speaker, I could find nothing.

In looking at the budget documents, I looked at 2010 when the PNM was in administration, I looked at 2011 and 2012 and I saw a remarkable similarity in all three documents. I would just take one example to illustrate my point. In 2010, under Agriculture:

“To support the ADB’s credit facility initiatives, we propose to allocate $75 million to the Bank and an additional sum of up to $75 million will be made available if needed.”

That was in 2010, PNM. In 2011, I will just take one example.

“The Agricultural Development Bank will be allocated $75 million for the year 2010/2011 with a potential of a further allocation of $75 million.”

That tells you the story. The only problem is that from time to time they mix up the language, but, by and large, it is really a continuation of the PNM policies.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister told us that this budget builds on the measures enunciated in the 2011 budget and makes a quantum leap once again in confronting the challenges for transformation and change. That frightens me, because in 2011 there was nothing in the budget for the constituents in La Brea; no investment—remember no smelter—increased unemployment. As I looked at
the Union Estate, what I saw was that “the razor grass grow taller and black sage and kooze maho was competing with the razor grass”, Mr. Speaker, on the estate, while my people are suffering. [Crosstalk]

This is serious. We cannot afford to sit idly by and see people unemployed, nothing on their table and nothing being done to create employment. Mr. Speaker, you may not have wanted the smelter, but why could we have not imported the ingots, the aluminium ingots, and made the same wheels so that the people of La Brea could have gotten employment? But no, La Brea is PNM country, so nothing for La Brea.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance spoke very gingerly about a 6.3 per cent unemployment figure as at December 2010; a nice twist of the language and an anticipation of an upward movement of the 6.3 per cent. We know that that figure is much higher than the 6.3 per cent. It does not take a rocket scientist to tell us that unemployment has skyrocketed to well above 10 per cent, and the country knows that.

8.15 p.m.

The highly respected and straight-talking Dr. Dhaneshwar Mahabir spoke of the need for the Minister of Finance and I quote “to stabilize unemployment which rose from 8 per cent last year 2010 to 10 per cent in 2011”. Guardian newspaper October 02, 2011, page 6.

Dr. Browne: Respected economist.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: He said that.

Hon. Member: I cannot believe that [Inaudible]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: 10 per cent. [Interruption]

Dr. Browne: Where you get that from? [Interruption]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: CS what? “Come nah man!”

Miss Hospedales: What CSO?

Dr. Browne: CSO has not released unemployment figures since you came to power. [Interruption] Excellent contribution.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Trinidad Express—let me read this:

“The Government in particular, the Ministry of the People need to start putting measures in place for a 10 per cent unemployment scenario, which works out to well over 60,000 persons without jobs”.

Hon. Member: He said that last year.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Yes, but he was telling us in advance and now we see here Dr. Dhaneshwar Mahabir confirmed from 8 per cent it went to 10 per cent [Inaudible]

Another respected economist, Indera Sagewan-Ali, says there has been large-scale unemployment and economic activity has ground to a grinding halt.

Dr. Browne: That was a UNC Senator.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That is a UNC Senator.

Dr. Browne: Former UNC Senator.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Large-scale unemployment—the situation is serious. I take no joy in those figures because I live here, and we must be concerned about those figures. Mr. Speaker, Robin Rajack, President of the Sub-contractors Association of Trinidad and Tobago—

Dr. Browne: Good guy.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: He is a member of the United National Congress.

Hon. Member: No

Hon. Member: That is wrong.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: He mentions that in 2010, the construction industry employed over 300,000 persons and the number now is only 80,000. Compare these figures; it is a 74 per cent decline in the construction trade alone. Many economists, including former Sen. Sagewan-Ali, have been at pains to tell the Government that there is a continued deterioration in business confidence, as well as willingness to borrow and engage in investment activity. So we could understand why we cannot get investment in this country, they have lost confidence. Under the People’s National Movement that was not a problem. [Desk thumping] We had Sural, Votorantim and a whole section of them who came; they wanted to invest. Now we are having problems, the problems have manifested themselves, while the country has unemployment of 10 per cent, in the township of La Brea it is in the order of 35 per cent.

Dr. Browne: This is serious business.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: In Rancho Quemado, which is another part, the unemployment figure is as high as 40 per cent.
Dr. Browne: “Blue skies” according to Dookeran “blue skies”.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: One could understand that the senseless cancellation of the Alutrint Smelter hurts.

Dr. Browne: It is a human cost.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: And it hurts, you know why? The Government reneged on a Government to Government arrangement in March 2005—

Dr. Browne: That Panday had signed.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: No, March 2005 was us—for a US loan of $400 million, TT $2.5 billion to help with the financing of the smelter. Another broken project agreement with Votorantim Metais, the world’s largest vertical integrated aluminium smelter from Brazil, and we cancelled that. We refused to honour it. So I could not understand why we ran down to Brazil recently to try to woo investors, the whole question is Votorantim Metais is a large corporation in Brazil, and after you turned your back on them, who wants to come to Trinidad?

Dr. Browne: They cannot keep their word.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The Minister of Finance again mentioned that youth unemployment is distressingly high, exceeding 55 per cent at June 2010—55 per cent, and right now it is more like 60 per cent—things bad.

Dr. Browne: Sixty five.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Recently they had recruiting exercises at various stadia for employment as fire officers. I understand at Skinner Park the crowd was so large it came close to rivalling Calypso Fiesta in Skinner Park—large crowd, and that tells you the seriousness in our country. I pray, and I pray every day and hope that the rising unemployment levels do not become a curse on this UNC—led administration. Under the UNC-led coalition unemployment has gotten worse.

The sub theme of the 2011 budget was turning the economy around, and I said what a good or an apt description.

Dr. Browne: They turned it upside down.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Our citizens have been turning around for a long time, from the $3,000 pension, to Resmi, to Julie Browne, to Sasha Mohammed, to the $2 million dollar cash price for Carnival, to the ownership of the 5 per cent cap, to the state of emergency and curfew, to the minimum wage. It is a whole set of confusion, that people’s mind just going around in circles.
I just want to take one example, in the changing story of the 5 per cent cap to illustrate the confusion, the giddiness that is taking place in this country. The hon. Prime Minister had said that she does not know of any 5 per cent cap in negotiations, but in this very Parliament, on April 08, this year she was quoted as saying “the agreement remains with the 5 per cent, 2 per cent by 1 per cent by 2 per cent, and we wish we could give more but the economy cannot permit at this time”.

The Minister in the Ministry of Local Government, Couva South, hon. Rudy Indarsingh, said to the media and I quote: “We cannot offer outside the five per cent, taking into consideration what is available in the coffers of the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago”. It goes on that the Member for Oropouche East, my good friend, Minister of Housing and the Environment, tells workers within the bargaining units to take and I quote “take the five per cent and wine to the side”.

Dr. Browne: Shame!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Serious bread and butter issues and they are trivializing that. It seems that people have more than butter in their bread. Very noticeable in the 2012 budget presentation—I find it strange, in 2011, we heard about serve the people, serve the people, serve the people. Not once, in the 2012 budget we hear that phrase. At least some shame has set in, because with that serve the people, not even the COP people or MSJ people were being served. So shame take them and they take out that. I ask the question, when will we rise?

Hon. Member: PNM? Never![Interruption]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: For your sake, I hope and pray for you. Mr. Speaker, what we have in fact, is rising unemployment, and rising poverty. Last year after the passing of the 2011 budget and the implementation of policies and programmes citizens began to ask the question, serve which people? Because we see the concentration of Government services and projects were highly skewed to UNC-controlled constituencies. Not even COP, not even MSJ—TOP only get a little thing in Tobago because they have the upcoming Tobago House of Assembly election but when that gone, we will see what will happen in Tobago.

That could never be right. We expect in the thrust of politics and in government you try to help your supporters, and we understand that, but not to discriminate to the extent whereby you are not giving the other areas anything. Right now we know that there is big concentration to expand Point Lisas and you want an industrial estate in Debe. What is happening in Union Estate? Last year in the budget presentation we had a statement by the Minister of Finance which was
really instructive, he said that the area already has a power generation plant and port facilities, right. So that means “aye yuh done get that already all yuh cool all yuh self”. While building on these advantages we will construct a new industrial estate which will create jobs. Which new industrial estate? Debe. Mr. Speaker, my grandmother, God rest her soul, used to tell us “long rope for magga goat” and Martin Luther King when asked about the discrimination—how long? He said: “Not long”. I tell my people, my constituents from Salazar Trace to Aripero from Quarry to Erin, not long, [Desk thumping] PNM shall return to governance.

Dr. Browne: Very inspiring.

8.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if this budget is built on the measures enunciated in the 2011 budget, heaven help us all. Let us look at two examples to demonstrate—you see, earlier tonight, we heard about how united across there is. I want to take two examples to, not only show you how the problem is across there but also to let you know the unequal treatment, how we have “to wine to the side.”

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre indicated that he was informed that Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) people were given marching orders in 2002 when the People’s National Movement (PNM) came in after the General Election but hear what he said and I quote:

“I have colleagues who feel that the same thing should happen with a People’s Partnership victory and I said ‘I am not for that’.’’

It is now history that the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) was taken away shortly after from the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and sent to the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

Mr. Speaker, it is established as well, that the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara had openly castigated the very distinguished former Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and Member of Parliament for San Fernando West for retaining two of the best LNG technocrats in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs; he had indicated that they were PNM. Mr. Speaker, the truth is that neither Andrew Jupiter nor Frank Look Kin had ever applied for membership in the PNM far less to be members. She did not bother with the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara. But what happened? She was unceremoniously transferred to a junior Ministry. Is that
not a strange coincidence? Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Member for San Fernando West for her strength; that could never be right. [Desk thumping] It means that, “listen, you better serve the UNC people or else.”

**Dr. Browne:** And discriminate against others.

**Mr. F. Jeffrey:** So in one breath, they talk openly, serve the people, serve the people and down below, in the other breath, strangle PNM people, strangle PNM people, discriminate against them and so on. That is what has happened and that is, indeed, a sad story.

**Dr. Browne:** What a wicked Government!

**Mr. F. Jeffrey:** Mr. Speaker, citizens were told that La Brea would get a number of things. [Crosstalk] When the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre told us that something coming to La Brea, I told them, listen, I do not believe a single word, because in the past, we were told about a shipbuilding or ship repair plant, but nothing came. They told us about an iron ore transhipment plant bringing ore from Venezuela; nothing came. They told us about a polypropylene to plastic plant in La Brea; nothing came. They told us about photovoltaic plant; nothing came; and now they want to mamaguy us and tell us about Syncrude plant; I am not holding my breath. Mr. Speaker, they knew full well that nothing was coming—no agreement, no contract was signed. There were no environmental impact assessments done or any certificate of environmental clearance obtained, so how “dem” thing happening?

Mr. Speaker, we also had the desalination plant that under the PNM, we know that by November of this year, the whole south-western peninsula would have gotten water 24/7. But, in the south-western peninsula in particular, it is PNM in Point and PNM in La Brea, so they are trying to frustrate the process. If that desalination plant was completed, [Interruption] well, if you think Oropouche East is in that vein, that is you.

**Dr. Moonilal:** We are scared of the PNM.

**Mr. F. Jeffrey:** Parrylands, Lot Ten, Vance River, Sobo, Santa Flora, Palo Seco Settlement, Palo Seco, Los Bajos, and Rancho Quemado would have benefited because right now these areas have problems with water, and I cannot understand why they do not want to complete the desalination plant so that the people could get water.

Mr. Speaker, you know, there is a well-known lesson. They say lesson one, from their guru who had told them, lesson one, to win votes from simple people, you do not have to give them anything. You must know what they want and
dangle it before their eyes making them feel they would get it. Mr. Speaker, that is, indeed, what they are trying to do with La Brea. You are going to get shipbuilding plant, photovoltaic plant; you are going to get iron ore, but I want them to know tonight that La Brea people—they might be simple but they are not stupid. The La Brea seat is one seat that we are sure that this People’s Partnership will never ever get. Never ever get! Continue to starve and to strangle the people of La Brea; we are strong.

Mr. Speaker, I always tell people that in La Brea—you notice we have no hot spots in La Brea. We are loving, God-fearing people, and no matter what you do, we will never be a hot spot but we will stay strong because we know that not long, the PNM shall return. [Desk thumping]

The hon. Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Keith Rowley, who on or before the year 2015, will be our next Prime Minister, he asked the hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan about the plans for La Brea and this is what she said. Mr. Speaker, the projects—[Interruption] Member for Chaguanas West, I want you to listen to this.

Mr. Warner: All right. Sorry.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “The projects that replace the smelter will not provide a promise of jobs—it will provide actual jobs, permanent jobs, well-paying jobs and actually contribute to the developments, not to the deterioration of the southwestern peninsula.” I felt glad when I heard that.

In the context of polypropylene to plastics, 5,000 jobs during construction, 500 jobs for operations and between 1,500 to 2,000 jobs as a result of the downstream. As Member of Parliament, I am happy. Integrated glass and photovoltaic cell plant, for silicon, 500 permanent jobs, 800 jobs during the construction; float glass, 1,000 permanent jobs, 500 jobs during construction; PV wafers, 1,750 permanent jobs and 3,000 jobs in construction; PV, 2,000 permanent jobs and 2,000 jobs in construction phase.

Mr. Speaker, now I am hearing that Syncrude will create employment, and you want me to believe that? Mr. Speaker, no agreement “ain’t” sign; no EIA was done; no CEC obtained, “how come we get dem things?” Stop fooling the people; come out straight; get your agreement signed and so on and then tell the people. No pie in the sky things. You are frustrating young people, people who are going to school who are expecting at the end of their education, I am coming on the estate to work. You are frustrating them; that is not right. That is not right.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2012 budget, mention is made for a whole series of plants—the same photovoltaic plant and so on—this year they did not mention
Union Estate and LABIDCO Estate at all. Do you know what that means? Nothing for us! Nothing for us! When I say that this budget is deceptively treacherous, dangerous, deceitful and bad, I mean that. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, do you know that the wages and salaries as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) have fallen below 20 per cent for the first time in five years? What this simply means is that despite the increase in GDP, the working class has not fared any better under the UNC-led administration.

8.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, under the guise of an integrated approach to crime fighting is a plan for a street and community patrol in partnership with private security firms. On the surface, it looks nice. [Interruption and crosstalk]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Friends and well-wishers.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: They said that the crime will be under control and more employment will be created. But, we know that the UNC and the COP were well supported financially and otherwise by persons who own security firms. And it was really a pay back—that emission. They are not fooling anybody.

I want to talk a bit about the smelter. One of the early arguments against the Alutrint smelter was the availability of gas. “Dey say: ‘listen nah, de gas running out, and even though de smelter eh go be using much gas, we have tuh kind ah hole up ah little bit, so no smelter.’” Recently, we had the Scott Rider Report that gave us a very grim picture about our gas reserves. One would have expected that we would have seen more emphasis on agriculture which, incidentally, in 2011, was $1.8 billion and 2012, $1.9 billion, so it is nothing much taking place in agriculture. We thought we would have seen heavier emphasis on ICT, et cetera, but no, they continued down into the energy-based industries, and I would talk about that in a little while.

I want to place on record that it was the People’s National Movement that took diversification seriously. We had the International Financial Centre here for international finance. We had the Hyatt Hotel for tourism and e-TeK for ICT and communications. In the case of agriculture, we had the mega farms and with Alutrint we have the aluminium industry. We have iron and steel. That is under the People’s National Movement. Under the UNC-led coalition, show us the evidence of involvement in diversification.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance told us that there would be an AUM plant, project 2, which will produce melamine, plastic, adhesives and laminates, it
would cost $1.9 billion and create 3,000 jobs during construction and 450 permanent jobs on completion. We know that plant “eh coming La Brea at all”. It is either Point Lisas, or Debe.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Or it might not come at all.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Or it might not come at all.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is the reality.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The same thing could be applied to the Carissal Project which they said is going to start in 2012. We “eh hear nothing about no EIA. We eh hear nothing about no CEC, but dey going and start” in 2012 at a cost of US $430 million, with a potential for 200 jobs during construction.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. They promised jobs and investments for the Reliance bitumen upgrader; the methanol to polypropylene project, methanol to acetic acid project, maleic anhydride, melamine derivatives projects are not going to the Union Estate. Again, as I have said, Point Lisas or Debe.

One of the things—for La Brea—it was difficult, when the PNM was in office, for any industry that they wanted to come to La Brea to get a CEC or an EIA done. Right now, we have a problem even with the same smelter. It cannot be resolved after two years.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: They are controlling the ports, too.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Of course, but in other areas, it is not a problem. We are watching that. The people in La Brea are looking at those things. We are seeing how easy it is. All the problems about pollution and so on, Point Lisas congested as it is, is expanding. More projects are going to Point Lisas “and we eh hear nothing about environment.” What? That is UNC stronghold. La Brea is PNM. So, nothing.

They talked about the eco-system. That is the first thing they came with. “Yuh eyah destroy the forest and so on.” When that went away, because we showed them that it is secondary forests in La Brea, that went aside. They started to talk
about the water table getting polluted. When we showed them that there is no water table where they are putting down the smelter, they put that aside. They then talked about the animals, the monkeys and the “gootees”. “I live dey all meh life.” I have never seen a monkey or a “gootee up dey.” [Laughter] That went away.

They talked about the gas. When we showed them that the gas was minimal, they went to cancer. Now, we know everybody is afraid of cancer. And as much as we tried to get the information across, we wrote the television station, we wrote the newspapers and we had the radio, and so on, to get our message across, “we geh blank.” The UNC, the COP and company were able to control the media and stifle the information. So, it could not come out. “People hear ’bout de cancer and people ‘fraid cancer” so some people had trepidation about the smelter. It was on; only after the die was cast I got the opportunity in the Parliament, in a budget debate and I explained to the population about the smelter. I showed them pictures of smelters around the world. A poll was carried out, I think on 95.5 or TV6 which showed that the majority of people wanted the smelter; at the time, in the early part, about 25 per cent, when they carried the poll. After that experience when I spoke, about 75 per cent to 80 per cent of the people wanted the smelter. That tells you a story. It is a way to strangle La Brea from getting things.

Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of the budget document I found it very interesting, the Minister of Finance mentioned the inspirational words of the hon. Prime Minister as she justified the need for the current state of emergency. She tried to use crime. But, this is 2011, I would like to borrow something from one of the talk show hosts, and not 1962. All intelligent “Trinbagonians” and even foreigners living here know that the calling of the state of emergency had very little to do with the unprecedented spike in crime, and more so to do with the impending national strike by the unified trade unions.

The Governor of the Central Bank, Mr. Ewart Williams, had pleaded with the trade unions that a national strike would hurt the country. There was a massive trade union meeting in Arima a few days before the state of emergency. “People like rain,” including PSA members. Remember PSA had signed the agreement for the 5 per cent. But, there were thousands of PSA members at that meeting in Arima. Knowing full well that the next meeting was coming to the militancy capital of Trinidad, Point Fortin, the following week, they “strike” the panic button and called for the state of emergency.

Let us reason. The Prime Minister made an announcement at 8.00 p.m. in the night, that a state of emergency would take effect from midnight. The bandit had
four hours to hide away his stuff. Do you know what is nice about it? At eight o’clock, when she made the announcement, the coast guard, the army and the police did not know anything. They did not know anything. So which bandit—

[Interruption]

**Dr. Rowley:**—and the Commissioner of Police.

**Mr. F. Jeffrey:** They know full well what is happening in the Middle East and North Africa; the uprising. And we know as well, half of the problem in Canada Hall in 1969, when we had the Black Power Revolution in Trinidad and knowing how unpopular this Government is, “dey eh taking no chance.” When they talk about the support when they won the election, I want to advise them that the NAR also had tremendous support too. Tremendous support! And by the next election, it was the worst “cut tail” they have ever seen in this country. Take warning. [Interruption]

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** Tsunami.

**Mr. F. Jeffrey:** Member for Chaguanas West, I know you are trying, but I do not think you could stem that tide. [Interruption]

**Mr. Warner:** Time will tell.

**Mr. F. Jeffrey:** Well, it all depends on what you are talking about. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance, I thought would have asked the nation: are you better off now than you were early in 2010? I thought that was the question he was going to ask in the budget. The unemployed would have answered a resounding no. The rest of the lower and middle classes would have answered a resounding no. The business community would also have said no. The PNM would have said no. Do you know what I want to say as well? I am of the belief that some members of the COP would have said no, because I know some of them are not happy.

9.00 p.m.

Everything we heard in Couva: we heard about an international airport for Couva; an aviation school, for Couva; a COSTAATT in Carapichaima; a UTT campus for Penal. And I understand, Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the Member for Chaguanas West, you might not know that, I understand the highway from Golconda would be stopping in Debe by the UWI campus. That is the reason they did not start the highway at both ends, because it would have made sense, start in Golconda and start in Point Fortin, but they have no intention of reaching Point Fortin “dey stopping in Debe”. So the people of Point Fortin, I hope—they must not hold their breath because “it eh coming”.

Mr. Speaker, this is serious business this is not a joking matter and I think—
Let us look at agriculture a little bit.

The Member for Oropouche East speaking on the Appropriation Bill on
Friday, September 17, 2010, said and I quote:

“Looking at sites where we do not encroach on agricultural lands, agricultural
lands must be for agriculture.”

But what this did his Ministry do? They bulldozed over 40 acres of sweet
potatoes, acres of pineapple and cassava, acres of bodi and pumpkin at Dass
Trace, Egypt Village in Chaguanas, 50 acres of food crops in Pineapple Smith
Lands off Crescent Gardens Mausica, Cashew Gardens and Chaguanas. Are not
these lands agricultural lands? Without a heart they bulldozed crops which were
almost ready for harvesting.

Mr. Speaker, hear the cry of a farmer: Tuesday, April 26, 2011, page 3: farmer
Caron Kabisingh was brought to tears as the bodi and pumpkin in which he
invested more than $100,000 were destroyed within minutes. Kabisingh said:

My crop was ready to reap before my eye, and I could not do anything. That is
for a man to kill, not only to cry and somebody has to be responsible for this.
And you know what is so hurtful, after speaking to the Minister of Food
Production, Land and Marine Affairs, Mr. Vasant Bharath and Mr. Fletcher
who walked through there with us and saw everything and gave us the
assurance that nothing will be interfered with, and today this is what we see
crops destroyed, crops destroyed. They say one thing and you do something
else.

Indeed, the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Sheep and Goat Farmers
Association, President Shiraz Khan and I quote:

The Prime Minister was the one saying on the election platform that
agricultural lands would stay in agriculture.

The Minister of Finance spoke about boosting agricultural output through an
agricultural incentive programme. I want to say those programmes were going
on a long time under People’s National Movement. Indeed, in pillar four of
our Vision 2020 strategic plan, I want to quote:

Investing in sound infrastructure and the environment. Success was achieved
in the development of and maintenance of access roads providing distribution
and marketing support as well as improved storage and packaging facilities to
farmers.
Access to financing: at the commencement of regularization of land for farmers so that they can have access to agricultural incentives and credit facilities, reducing the cost of agricultural inputs.

Mr. Speaker, those measures resulted in the employment in the agricultural sector increasing by 30.7 per cent in the quarter ending March 2009 to reach 21,300. So under the People’s National Movement there was a dramatic increase in employment in the agricultural sector.

Then we tried to encourage youths into agriculture under YAPA, the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, despite the numerous objections by the then Opposition to the mega farms when it was introduced, it is wonderful to see the present Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs embracing the mega farm project. As a matter of fact, on one of those radio talk shows he sang praises for the mega farm projects, thanks to the People’s National Movement.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM administration initiated the programme with the commissioning of two large farms: PCS Nitrogen in Point Lisas and the public sector involvement in Tucker Valley. The UNC-led coalition, now nor never in its previous incarnation had a vision for the mega farms, and while they were engaged in subsistence agriculture, we were seeing a bigger picture and looking at the mega farm projects.

Mr. Speaker, when you are going to have a megafarm, there are a series of steps which you must take which would take some time. The first thing, you must have a vision which must be well articulated. So you have the idea, you must think about it carefully; then you must identify and develop the lands; then you must look at the lands and see, for example, what type of farming you are going to introduce. After that, you will invite bids; you will evaluate the bids and then make a recommendation to Cabinet; after its deliberations then the awards are made.

Under the PNM, 15 sites were identified for the mega farm projects, 3,100 acres for large farm programmes. Of these, two were in production mode when the PNM left office 18 months ago, Tucker Valley and PCS Nitrogen in Point Lisas; nine sites however, were approved and allocated to investors. The three mega farms which were recently commissioned by Minister Vasant Bharath are from the nine sites allocated by the PNM government.
Mr. Speaker, could you believe that a party whose traditional base is in agriculture heartland, could not have vision for entrepreneurship? Under the PNM we had farms, the Edinburgh farm, 100 acres; Orange Grove, 100 acres; Warren Road, 100 acres; Jerningham Junction off Marshal Road, 100 acres; two sites at La Gloria; Caroni, 100 acres; and 141 acres outside San Fernando.

The Minister of Finance spoke about the rebate for purchasing irrigation equipment, but in 2009, the water management and flood control project was launched to reduce flooding by dredging channels, building embankments, installing pumps, culverts and overpasses. The role of the Agricultural Development Bank was to help in the creation of credit and other financing.

Mr. Speaker, despite all this, I ask, how come the numerous appeals made by farmers for the resuscitation of the Carapal Road and the Rancho Quemado Road, to resurface the road and to repair two serious landslips in Carapal.

Mr. Warner: Done! Done!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank you, Minister of Works and Infrastructure. The farmers cannot get their vehicles to their farms, neither can they bring out their crops because of the serious landslips. We have to try to address that and ease the plight, because I will tell you, unemployment down there is in the region of 40 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the incentive for fishing: you could have the best storage facilities for engines, for nets; you could have credit facilities for the fishermen to purchase engines and other necessities for fishing, but, if they do not feel very safe out in the Gulf they would not go. Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the offshore patrol vessels would have served a very useful purpose in protecting our fishermen out in the Gulf.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me just quote for you from an article written by Ariti Jankie in the Express of August 17, 2010:

The President of the Morne Diablo Fishermen Association, Kevin Deonarine as well told Minister Mr. Bharath: Bandits are out there and each time we go out to fish we are unsure to return to our homes.

He said that he had been fishing for over 30 years and things have grown from bad to worse under the United National Congress-led Government. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Deputy Speaker, fishermen told Minister Vasant Bharath:

We take our chances and sometimes when we are at sea boats pull up with sea bandits whom we have to avoid at all costs, the bandits steal our nets and terrorize us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we had the OPVs that would not have been a problem. Do you know that for those OPVs we had paid 85 per cent of the cost of the OPVs to BAE? Fifteen per cent to pay and we cancel that contract, I am sure when we get judgment next year it will be heavy on the State for reneging on that arrangement. [Crosstalk]

I have a notice from the Siparia Regional Corporation. I have heard the Member for Fyzabad on numerous occasions talk about discrimination. In the Siparia Regional Corporation nine projects were available in the electoral districts. All nine projects are in UNC controlled areas not one in a PNM controlled area. I have it here, all registered contractors of the Siparia Regional Corporation, and you know what is worse, this notice was not given to all registered contractors, it was given selectively to contractors who are sympathetic to the United National Congress.

Mr. Sharma: Call them out, let me hear.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Belview Chatham Phase 2.

Mr. Sharma: PNM!

Mr. Jeffrey: You telling me PNM? Belview? Sundarsingh Trace.

[Crosstalk] [ Interruption]

Hon. Member: UNC!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “He eh go fool me”. Pablito Trace.

Hon. Member: PNM!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Union Road.

Hon. Member: PNM!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Anita Drive.

Hon. Member: PNM!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Murray Trace.

Hon. Member: PNM!
Mr. F. Jeffrey: Seukeran Trace.

Hon. Member: PNM!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Standard Road, Jocan Trace.

Hon. Member: PNM!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Deputy Speaker, all those are in UNC-controlled areas. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to ask the question. I have no problem in you giving some of your projects to your supporters, but you cannot tell me not one road in La Brea, not one place in that regional corporation which belongs to the PNM needs attention too? That cannot be right!

And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to come back a little bit, because I can see the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara; hereafter what he told the Member for San Fernando West, oh, boy, I know we have problems in La Brea; I know we are going to have real problems, because—I am sorry the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is not here oh, the Member for Caroni Central is here. Those two Ministers live in one area in my constituency, Aripero; Aripero does not have a proper recreation ground. I wonder if the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara would spite Pointe-a-Pierre and Caroni East and not develop a recreation ground in Aripero. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to see—\[\textit{Interruption}\]

9.15 p.m.

Miss McDonald: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 40(a), (b) and (c)—Member for D’Abadie O’Meara. [\textit{Crosstalk}]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have a few minutes again, please.

Hon. Member: No, no—\[\textit{Crosstalk}]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed please.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I have a number of areas in my constituency with recreational facilities that need urgent attention: Point D’Or La Brea, Chinese Village, Sobo, Vessigny, Vance River, Cochrane, Lot Ten, ParryLands, Santa Flora, Los Bajos, Palo Seco Settlement, Los Charos, Rancho Quemado—all these areas, Waddle Village, all those areas need upgrade in their recreational facilities. And I am hoping that what has happened—that the Member for D’Abadie/ O’Meara would abandon his attitude in the way in which he treats San Fernando West and recognize that the La Brea constituency is part of Trinidad and Tobago.
You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is this feeling that Trinidad and Tobago starts from Couva and ends in Siparia. As a geography teacher I would like people to know in this House that Trinidad extends from Toco to Chaguaramas, from Guayaguayare to Icacos, and you are charged with the responsibility while in office to see about the whole of Trinidad and the whole of Tobago. I thank you.

The Minister of Justice (Hon. Herbert Volney): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I find it very difficult to stand after hearing 75 minutes of absolute nothing from the Member for La Brea. You know what baffles me, is that after 17 months—after May 24—the hon. Member has failed to come to terms with the fact that after nine years of absolute neglect of this country by his own government that the people of this country turned them out of office. And during that nine-year period, the PNM government presided over billions of dollars of revenue and have very little to show for it. During that period of time, all those areas that the hon. Member for La Brea spoke of got absolutely nothing, it would seem judging, from what he said tonight, from his own government, why then should he think that La Brea as a constituency should be treated any better than St. Joseph or any other constituency? Port of Spain South included—Diego Martin West. Why does he think that La Brea should get any better treatment than anywhere else? You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, La Brea will have to wait its turn just as St. Joseph will wait its turn. The national pie is challenged because of all the debt that has been left over by the last government, and we have to deal not only with stabilizing the economy, but we also have to deal with billions of dollars of unpaid debts, while at the same time find the wherewithal to attend to the needs of the population of Trinidad and Tobago in 2011/2012.

So I am afraid, my friend from La Brea, the people of La Brea will have to wait their turn. Minister Warner, the Member for Chaguanas West, has just told you: “done”, in other words you can expect the same way he has helped the Member for Port of Spain South by repaving some roads in her constituency for her that had been abandoned by the PNM. I am afraid Member you will have to wait your turn. Everybody will get their roads paved, but Rome was not built overnight, and the same way that other constituencies over the last nine years were neglected and all the other constituencies were neglected have to wait their turn, I am afraid you and La Brea, likewise, will have to do the same. And where does the blame for this lie? With your own government the PNM government. [Desk thumping] So do not seek to put the blame on this side of the House. Do not seek to do that because that blame is totally misplaced.
I have sat here and I have listened for a very long time to the contribution of the Member for La Brea. The Member spoke in so many areas of what has been debated in this House. The Member spoke of the five per cent. You must understand that while I am not the spokesman on labour—because the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development will deal with these issues—it seems to me that with the support of this Government through the Ministry of the People and Social Development, with the support of the Government through the Ministry of Community Development, with the support of this People’s Partnership Government through the Ministry of Housing, through the Ministry of Education, through the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, through the Ministry of Health, when you add all that up you get plenty more than five per cent. Five per cent is just the icing on the cake of what every citizen gets. And bear that in mind, when the pie is not big, when the pie is not large, we all have to settle for a little less and that is the state of affairs. And bear in mind that this period of public sector wage negotiations is what you all left over. You did not deal with it during your time; the time when the PNM was in the government, and we are left to deal with it, and we are dealing with it in a way that is acceptable to the vast majority of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Member, you speak about discrimination on the part of this Government. There is no discrimination. I just spoke of the efforts of the Ministry of Works. The Minister of Works paves roads everywhere. I have to stand in line like everyone else. I asked him for Mount D’Or Road in Champs Fleurs, my constituency that has not been paved—no pavements—pavements broken up, nothing had been done during all the years when it is that this constituency was in the hands of the United National Congress. Nothing had been done because the UNC was in Opposition and the people of the constituency of St. Joseph were punished. And even when the PNM had the constituency squatting on the seat in a minority vote situation from 2007, what did you do for Mount D’Or? Nothing! Absolutely nothing! It is now that our Government, our People’s Partnership Government has come into office that Mount D’Or—I brought the Minister of Works and Infrastructure to Mount D’Or and within two weeks I had a total transformation of Mount D’Or in Champs Fleurs. That is just one area and I can speak of numerous others, but I did not come tonight to seek to defend this Government on anything that the hon. Member had stated.

You also spoke of La Brea Industrial Park. Come to understand hon. Member for La Brea that we on this side are in Government, we decide what the priority of the people is. We are the Government, not the PNM. [Desk thumping] And if we
decide that LABIDCO Industrial Park will wait its turn for development then you must accept it, because we were elected by the people to make choices. We came on a platform to the people and they elected us, they gave us 29 on this side—convincingly. Look at St. Joseph, St. Joseph has moved out of marginal to safe. 

[Desk thumping] And it will remain safe under this People’s Partnership Government. But I did not come here tonight—I am the Minister of Justice—to fight any war with you, Member for La Brea or with the PNM. Elections are over and we will rule for many years to come.

So let me speak now about my Ministry, the Ministry of Justice. First of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to congratulate the Minister of Finance on his second budget presentation. [Desk thumping] It is a budget which I am sure that all hon. Members will agree it is one of hope and bold vision for the future of Trinidad and Tobago and for future economic prosperity. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, I would like to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Tunapuna for his hard work, steady hand and vision as he, ably led by the hon. Prime Minister, takes the country safety through the choppy international waters that threaten many a more developed country than ours.

I also wish to pay tribute to all the public officers who worked late into the night in order to assist the Minister in producing this people’s budget. We can almost say it is an election budget but there is no election. There were so many goodies for everybody that the country is happy with this budget. The only people who are unhappy are the 12 people sitting on the other side. Those are the only people. On behalf of the citizens who live in my great constituency of St. Joseph, I would also like to thank the Minister of Finance for being able in this budget to protect the most vulnerable, protect our economy and provide a platform for future growth and development.

Mr. Speaker, it has been about 17 months ago that the hon. Prime Minister in her wisdom decided to establish a Ministry of Justice, and to ask this humble servant to lead it. In fact, in our solemn contract with the people of Trinidad and Tobago we undertook to transform our society by creating a just and fair environment. We understand that lawlessness and disorder create an atmosphere in which criminal activity can thrive. Therefore we gave the commitment in our manifesto to rethink the prison system, reorganize the justice system and make interventions of a proactive and preventative nature.

9.30 p.m.

Later on in my contribution I will show hon. Members how much progress we have made in keeping this promise in the Ministry of Justice, and indeed that
progress can be seen across all aspects of this Government. We promise to reengineer the criminal justice system in consultation with all stakeholders to ensure that it is swift in its delivery from the point of arrest to the final determination of all criminal matters.

We said that we would introduce and implement legislation which would serve to rebalance in favour of victims with emphasis on protection for the rights of victims, witnesses and jurors. We also promise to restructure to ensure that criminal and civil matters are separately addressed, and that there are appropriate resources and linkages between the Ministry of National Security and the relevant legal ministries to ensure effective management of criminal causes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as hon. Members may be aware the Ministry was set up at a time when the levels of criminal activity were wholly unacceptable to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and most certainly to our People’s Partnership Government.

It was at a time when our Government had been voted into office by the vast majority of the citizens who were tired of acts of misfeasance spawned by gang warfare and the emerging culture of killing. It was a time when the country was tired of the former regime and its policy of appeasement of gangs and criminal behaviour and the ability of some elements to control parts of this country as if they had sovereignty over those areas.

It was also a time when our prisons were bursting at the seams, crime was rampant, levels of detection low, and criminals walked the streets with impunity. The culture of homicidal and gang activity meant that the criminal justice system, already under pressure, was overwhelmed by backlog and the timely delivery of justice was stymied for want of ideas on the part of the last administration and certainly a want of resources.

In other words, there was abject neglect of the criminal justice system by those on that side when they were in government. I say that so that hon. Members will understand that our Government came into office after the previous administration had led us out of perdition and to Hell’s gate. And it is from whence we in this People’s Partnership Government will have to lead this country to the Promise Land in which there will be milk and honey, and all tears will be wiped away. While we admit we are not there yet, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at least we are in a position to see the mountaintop and with the astute leadership of our hon. Prime Minister and with the love and co-operation of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we will get there. We will rise. We will rise.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, the central purpose of the criminal justice system is the delivery of an efficient, effective, accountable and fair justice process for the public. Put another way, it is designed to deliver justice for all by convicting and punishing the guilty and helping them to stop offending while at the same time protecting the innocent.

While this Ministry is not responsible for the prosecution of offences, we offer a vision of speedier criminal justice delivery in all communities without compromising the rule of law and the protection offered by due process.

The clear mission of the Ministry of Justice is to achieve this objective in the short to midterm so that continued injustices, both real and perceived, engendered by delay will be a thing of the past.

I think all hon. Members will be aware that the pace at which justice proceeds in Trinidad and Tobago is way, way too slow. We have been faced with the reality that in the last 25 years not a single new assize court building was constructed, the last one being in Scarborough. This has resulted in the number of criminal assize courts remaining stuck at nine in Trinidad and one in Tobago.

What is more scandalous is that as crime escalated under the nine-year rule of the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East and his supporters there on the other side, the former government did not do what was required. That is to say, they did not work with the Judiciary to increase the capacity of the Bench to hear criminal matters except at the very end of their sojourn, as an act of desperation, to hoodwink the population. Unfortunately, the damage has already been done.

Meanwhile, the people of Trinidad and Tobago cried out for swifter justice. In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they frittered away the country’s money on projects that were not priority for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and of course it is public record or, should I say, the history of Trinidad and Tobago, that under their watch—that is under the watch of the People’s National Movement—during the period of remit the volume of cases being added to a criminal cause list in the assizes more than doubled.

We were faced with the situation where there were hundreds or cases stacked up, literally hundreds of cases stacked up, and stacking up awaiting trial at the criminal assizes with an overburdened Judiciary and criminal justice system crying out for help. I was there and because of that neglect that is why I am here in this House today in another court, the highest court of this land.

Let us take a look at the numbers, I refer to page 82 of the 2010-2011 Annual Report of the Judiciary. Shown is that while in the last three years there has been
an increase in the number of criminal cases being filed for trial at the assizes, the rate at which those cases are determined has in fact declined. For example, in 2008-2009, 116 indictments were filed and, 111 were disposed of.

In 2009-2010, 132 indictments filed and 70 were determined. While in the period 2010-2011, as this Government relentlessly attacked the crime problem, the number of indictments filed more than doubled to 279 of which 97 were determined.

What has happened is that while on the face of it there appears to be progress in the number of matters being disposed of or determined, that is increasing from 70 to 97 because of the rapidly increasing number of indictments being filed, any progress in the rate of determination is outstripped by sheer volume of indictments being filed to such an extent that the overall ratio or criminal cases at the assizes being determined decreased from .53 to .35.

In short, the criminal justice system was found in shambles, in crisis. So, how are we going to deal with this issue? Well the Ministry has settled upon a blueprint for strategic statutory interventions and the construction of new courts.

The Ministry of Justice has recognized that systemic overhaul cannot by itself manifest a speedier delivery of the criminal justice as it will shift the bottleneck that now obtains from the Magistrates’ Court to the High Court with further interventions.

The Ministry of Justice has obtained the approval by the Cabinet of a template for the construction of purpose-built judicial centres in disparate communities in Trinidad and Tobago based upon an architectural prototype. The location of these structures will initially be informed by the needs of four regions in the East-West Corridor, central and south Trinidad.

We, this Government, will construct state-of-the-art magnificent buildings to house four courtrooms each of the High and the Magistrates’ Courts. They will serve communities as the Ministry moves to carry out its injunction to bring the criminal justice to the people, thereby encouraging communal participation in the process.

Jurors and witnesses alike will enjoy geographic convenience, anonymity and dedicated circulation with smart in-house configurations to courtrooms designed to protect personal identity and to restore a sense of security now sadly missing as citizens lend themselves to civic duty.
While it may not appear on the balance sheets of the estimates, hon. Members will want to know that local capital will be used together in an open and transparent method of procurement to construct these buildings.

The approved architectural template is based upon the design brief of the Judiciary. I repeat that, Mr. Deputy Speaker: the approved architectural template is based upon the design brief of the Judiciary and will inform invitations for proposals to tender for design, finance, construct and outfit to be publicly offered shortly.

In this respect, I am pleased to advise this Parliament that in this fiscal year we will be going out for open and transparent tenders for the design, build and finance of these four judicial centres. During the incubation period of construction and legislative enactment, the Ministry of Justice will work in confluence with the Judiciary and the Ministries of the Attorney General, Legal Affairs and National Security to provide the Judiciary with its required human resource needs and other logistic support requested in order to be prepared for this major intervention by the People’s Partnership Government.

This will make a tremendous difference to the administration of criminal justice, and it will assist in this Government’s goal of bringing true justice to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] When constructed these judicial centres are expected to significantly assist in reducing the wait for matters to be determined in the High Court. But that is not all.

During the period of construction it is well anticipated that hundreds of artisans, of workers, of local workers, Trinidadians and Tobagonians, will work in the construction of these judicial centres. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Warner: Any Chinese?

Hon. H. Volney: No Chinese.

9.45 p.m.

Our Magistrates’ Courts are also under significant pressure, many of them not up to the standard required of a modern well-functioning judicial system. In those circumstances a special projects unit has also been established in the Ministry of Justice to oversee the construction of new Magistrates’ Courts all over the country and a procurement specialist appointed to work with the Ministry in ensuring that we get it right; the first of those Magistrates’ Courts that would be constructed, provided of course that the Cabinet provides the necessary consent and approval,
will be in the Arima area. This is because the hon. Chief Justice has approached the Minister of Justice with a view to constructing at long last a Magistrates’ Court Complex in Arima to deal with all those matters in that part of the island.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the speedier justice initiative of the Ministry I head, the process of fingering the malaise in the system as obtains and finding creative and focused solutions has begun. In this regard, the perennial complaint of never ending and costly preliminary procedures set in a Victorian era mould is being addressed and a Bill to repeal the archaic Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Act is set to be laid in Parliament following widespread consultation which the Ministry held with stakeholders. Hon. Members, I think it is fair to say that there is now universal stakeholder support for this intended parliamentary measure which will cut the time for our committal for trial by a judge and jury down to a targeted three-month period of time. As it now obtains it takes up to five years. That is a significant difference.

With systemic changes that will entirely eliminate the old time preliminary enquiry and bring on simple sufficiency hearings before a Master of the High Court in a structured way, the criminal justice system will be able to breathe once more. So when the legislation is brought to Parliament and should this August House agree to pass the legislation, and it is agreed in the Senate, then it is expected that for indictable offences a sufficiency hearing by the Master of the High Court will replace the burdensome preliminary enquiry.

The intention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the Master shall review only documentary evidence to determine whether there is a prima facie case against an accused. If the Master finds that, then the accused shall be put on trial. This paradigm shift in the hearing of indictable matters will now ensure that a criminal trial will begin in less than one year from the time an accused person is charged with the commission of an offence. We have also made provision for the historic cases, in that the State or the defence could opt to have the case heard under the new system. This shift in the justice system will ensure swift justice. Also witnesses previously afraid for one reason or the other to come forward and give evidence will now only have to do so once at the trial. In addition, the configuration of the new courts will seek to ensure that the identity of witnesses is kept anonymous.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the benefit to the public of this measure is significant cost savings to the citizens and State alike and the very attractive mandatory certainties of shortened systemic timelines. The obvious offshoot of the introduction of
the new sufficiency hearing before a Master of the Supreme Court will be a
restoration of public confidence in the administration of criminal justice. It will
further serve to reduce the workload of magistrates, thereby allowing for a
focused effort in summary trial of criminal cases and the hearing of civil matters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, by freeing up the workload of our magistrates summary
trials will now proceed unhindered by long lists to be adjourned by the presiding
officer. In other words, the plan is that when a magistrate comes to court his time
will be spent on the day trying matters and not in adjourning them. It will also
mean that police complainants will not waste their day waiting on inevitable
adjournments allowing them more time to be in the field fighting crime as the
police service tries to use its resources as efficiently as possible. As it now
obtains, magistrates spend almost the whole of a productive day adjourning their
trial list. Those of us who have worked or work or have visited the Magistrates’
Court during the day would notice the number of police officers literally standing
doing nothing in the corridors waiting upon magistrates to get through their long
lists to call their matter so that it could be inevitably, as it would be, adjourned.
That is a waste of productive—what could be, productive police time.

What is another matter that I should mention is that under the system as now
obtains citizens will not have to face having to pay out large sums of money to
defend their loved ones twice—first at the preliminary enquiry as now obtains,
and again, at the High Court; they would no longer have to pay money each time
that the matter is called and there is an adjournment. Many of these matters are
called and adjourned thirty, forty, fifty times [ Interruption] on each occasion and
the people of this country who have had to go to court with their loved ones,
whether it be their sons, their father, their mother, whoever, would know what I
am speaking about, that every time they go to court and the matter is adjourned
they have to pay the lawyer for going to court on that day. That is something that
will be a matter of the past. And this measure in this way alone will serve the
people of this country, and if for that reason only, I expect that the parliamentary
Opposition will support the measure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have so far indicated to you that we would build new
courts and also increase the capacity to hear cases. I have shared with hon.
Members our intention to adopt measures to increase efficiency in the criminal
justice system so as to reduce the wait time for trials to take place and justice to
be served. Hon. Members would be aware that earlier this year we were able to
pass Act No. 4 of 2011 that allowed the extension of the remand period. That was
done so that we reduce the frequency with which prisoners have to be transported
to and from court, reduce the cost of having to transport and secure prisoners when they are away from penal institutions. It also had the effect of freeing up the magistrate’s time so that less time and energy is spent on adjourning cases. From all reports this has had the desirable effect of improving the administration of the criminal justice. In fact, in its annual report for 2010/2011 the Judiciary notes and I quote:

“By Act No. 4 of 2011, both the Summary Courts Act and the Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Act were amended to increase the remand period from 10 to 28 days respectively. The extension in time for remand hearings is reported to have significantly eased the court’s workload, thereby freeing up the magistrates and staff to work on other cases in a timely manner.”

This comes from the Judiciary. I think Members present on both sides of the House who brought the measure and who supported the measure really should be very proud of this strategic intervention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will go even further and will construct Electronic Facilitated Remand Courts (EFRC) and state prisons will see unprecedented collaboration between the Judiciary and the Ministries of Justice and National Security. These facilities are to be constructed on lands adjacent to prisons in order to enable persons in remand to enter pleas in private before a magistrate in the out-district court by microwave link established by the latest close-circuit technology, and to allow for pretrial case management. This would obviate the need to transport the inmate outside of the secured alley way from the remand facility into the EFRC. This facility will ensure security and cut the cost and inconvenience associated with the transportation of remand inmates to district courts unnecessarily.

The days of “Justice on Time” vans turning corners on two wheels in the glare of the public are over. The money that was used to spend to transport prisoners will now be used to build courthouses. [Desk thumping] In fact, last year, what is called the “Remand via Video Conferencing Project”, a project of the Judiciary was launched at the Scarborough Magistrates’ Court. According to the Judiciary, it has begun to make an impact on the length of time for remand hearings and to have people in remand have their matters heard without having to be transported to court.

I now turn my attention to the issue of penal reform: one of the challenges that Trinidad and Tobago faces, like many other societies, is the issue of recidivism. As I am sure you may know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, recidivism is the relapse of
persons previously incarcerated back into criminal activity and is generally measured by a form of prisoners return to prison for a new offence. Rates of recidivism reflect the degree to which released inmates have been rehabilitated and the role that correctional programmes play in reintegrating prisoners into society. The rate of recidivism in the United States, for example, is estimated to be about two thirds, which means that two thirds of released inmates will be re-incarcerated within three years. In Trinidad and Tobago the rate is closer to 55 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, high rates of recidivism result in tremendous cost, both in terms of public safety and in tax dollars spent to arrest, prosecute and incarcerate re-offenders. High rates of recidivism lead to devastating social cost to the communities and families of offenders as well as the personal cost to the offenders themselves and their families. Due to these severe costs, programmes for inmates and released inmates that reduced recidivism can be considered cost effective, even those that have modest rates of success. That is why we have placed in the Ministry a priority on penal reform.

On page 33 of our medium term policy framework entitled “Innovation for lasting Prosperity”, we have made it clear that our intention is to reduce the prevalence of persistent re-offending inmates by giving them more opportunities to excel and become productive members of our society. Programmes will be implemented to help inmates learn new skills, life skills, and develop good habits and attitudes to facilitate reintegration into society. Among the actions to be taken would be the increase of inmate basic skills and providing them with the opportunity to work towards educational qualifications and vocational and industry recognized certification in order to improve their future employment prospects.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one example of this is the innovative measure that this Government is seeking to put in place, something called “Prison Radio”. What does it mean? It means that it allows inmates who are interested in learning various aspects of radio inclusive of technical and broadcasting to get an opportunity to be trained. It does not stop there. What the project would also do is allow for dissemination of information to inmates via the prison radio, informative programmes that can be a part of the rehabilitative training tools being used in the prisons. A licence will, of course, have to be obtained and a frequency established, but it will allow for prisoners to show their imagination by creating programmes that will be interesting and meaningful. We all know that people, including those who are incarcerated, need to feel good about themselves.
and this venture will give inmates an opportunity to do that by learning new things which will be certifiable and can be used when they eventually exit the prison walls.

As I have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the idea is to reduce the rate of recidivism and to work with inmates so that they are in a better position to be reintegrated into our society. This prison radio idea is not unique to Trinidad and Tobago and has in fact been used very successfully in the United Kingdom and even regionally in Jamaica where the frequency of the prison radio project there can be picked up by the non-incarcerated population in Kingston.

10.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, whatever your views on the prison rights at the end of a sentence it must surely be better to release someone who has been working on a positive and productive scheme for someone who has mostly sat in a cell for the course of his sentence. Our rehabilitation programme will also seek to ensure that inmates serve their sentences and engage in constructive and commercial activities that provide support to victims and/or victims’ groups. We will also provide for training of inmates to assist them in resolving disputes responsibly.

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. H. Volney: Thank you much, Members present on both sides of the House as well as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The long awaited introduction of parole and community supervision will decidedly address the risk factors and needs of each offender and ensure that inmates who pose the greatest threats to public safety are effectively managed. On that note I respectfully suggest to this august Chamber and the national community that the introduction of parole is critical to the success in this paradigm shift.

I can say today that a parole policy to inform the proposed Bill to introduce this progressive measure in offender management has been developed and has been approved by the Cabinet. It is expected that the Ministry of Justice will continue its work on the establishment of a parole board to consider reports generated out of the prisons to inform the future management of an offender under its purview.
A parole board will be established in the first quarter of 2012. This board will make determinations as to the suitability of offenders for supervised early release from prison after serving at least a minimum portion of their sentence as ordered by the sentencing judge. This initiative will aid in an offender’s re-entry into society thus reducing recidivism and promoting rehabilitation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this will require the appointment of a parole board which is expected to comprise of members from a sufficiently diverse background to be able to collectively represent community values and views in the work of the board. For the purpose of expediting the determination of proceedings before the board, the board will be allowed to establish subcommittees which will be referred to as parole board panels. The decision to grant or deny parole to an offender will be made by a specially composed parole board panel which will draw from those members of the board possessing specific expertise relative to the offender appearing before it.

The Ministry of Justice appreciates that adults and juveniles both have specific and different needs. As such, when the offender appearing before a parole board is a juvenile, the panel will be specifically equipped and tailored to fit the needs of the juvenile and will ensure that adequate mechanisms for the parole process are put in place to facilitate the juvenile’s release at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, parole supervision is used as both a surveillance tool and a social service mechanism and ideally serves as a deterrent in preventing new crimes from occurring. Parole supervision can also act as a social service mechanism by using rules and incentives to engage ex-prisoners in positive activities such as work and drug treatment and to place ex-prisoners in programmes that may help re-entry transitions.

It is less expensive to supervise a parolee than to incarcerate a prisoner. A person on parole has an opportunity to contribute to society. At the same time, society still receives some protection because the parolee is supervised and his parole can be revoked for the most minor of transgressions. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are concerned that once someone has committed an offence and has served some of the time, that person can be successfully reintegrated into the society. A parole system will assist in this effort in restoring convicted persons to a sense of goodness.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is also our intention to make greater use of probation services as an alternative to imprisonment for persons convicted of criminal offences. An offender sentenced to probation would be closely supervised by a
probation officer to make sure that there are no violations of the terms of probation. Generally speaking, this person will meet regularly with a probation officer to report on his or her life’s details and will be required to maintain such things as a residence and a job.

Most jurisdictions have systems in place for dealing with young offenders, in an attempt to divert them from the more formalized systems of courts and to develop criminal justice policies that seek to prevent further offending. Such systems have typically been based on a balance between the need to punish or control young offenders and to encourage them to take responsibility for their actions. In keeping with these practices, the Ministry of Justice will establish a juvenile offender unit within the offender management division that will be staffed by competent professionals who will be responsible for the management of all issues pertaining to juvenile offenders.

In terms of imprisonment, there is a distinction made internationally as to what applies for adults versus juveniles. The prevailing view is that juveniles are to be housed separate from adults and this is consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child where, in Article 37(c), there is a requirement that every child deprived of liberty shall be treated with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. In particular, every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child’s best interest not to do so.

Additionally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry will, in recognition of the fact that young offenders have developmental needs that require programmes and services than those of adults, strive to protect their well-being and safety through the policy and programmes it will enact.

Our Government intends also to establish a probation hostel that will be used to provide temporary housing, assistance for and greater supervision of ex-offenders. The issue of housing is a problem for many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, including former inmates. It is something that the people at Vision on Mission talk about all the time. When people are released from prison, they simply have nowhere to go because their relatives often do not want them back at their homes, and often the only people who would accept them are people who they may have known in prison whom may themselves be involved in crime. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what happens? Well, as hon. Members will know, the lack of housing or anywhere to go can lead to people reoffending and returning to prison and so the recycle resumes.
Our Government will work towards the provision of temporary housing and assistance to the newly released inmates. Notice I said temporary housing, until they can start to get their lives on track, and we know that this approach leads to a reduction in recidivism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is envisioned that the consequences of violating either probation or parole will be similar in that the result of a violation of either condition will, in most cases, result in re-imprisonment. This consequence can arise in several ways, including the serving of a sentence that was suspended in lieu of probation or serving the remainder of a prison sentence if a person is released on parole.

We will also provide greater support for former inmates who genuinely wish to renounce their gang membership and assume a law-abiding lifestyle. We know that despite the protestation of those on the other side, one of the major reasons for the rise of criminal activity in our beloved country has been the rise in gang activity. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure that the country knows that the approach to gangs, their activities and their members is significantly different with this Government than those on the other side. [Desk thumping]

We have shown that we are not prepared to appease the criminal elements by having dinner with them at one of the country’s leading hotels, or is it “breakfasses”. We have said if you break the law you will face the full brunt of it, and so we have taken strong measures to deal with it. This Parliament has played its role in that effort and while we have had some challenges the gang members and leaders know we are after them and we will deal with them. In this regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must rise in defence of the Anti-Gang Act of 2011, which was enacted in this Chamber with our House voting unanimously for the measure.

It is clear, that the hon. Leader of the Opposition in one of his moments unworthy of repeat, and in one of his manic moments suggested that innocent persons were being picked up under the provisions of the Anti-Gang Act and later freed. Nothing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, could be further from worthy assumption. It takes a Member of this honourable House with some practice in the criminal law to know the fallacy of that statement. It is the constitutional prerogative of the Director of Public Prosecutions that any prosecution might be had or stymied by his instrument. His is a power that is above all, unbridled and not liable to scrutiny. Even the work of our judges may be the subject of the scrutiny of the man on the Tunapuna bus as justice is said not to be a cloistered virtue and must be allowed to suffer the scrutiny and respectful, even the outspoken, comments of ordinary men. (See Ambard v The Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago)
Be noted, hon. Member and Leader of the Opposition, dismissal for want of prosecution whether by act of discontinuance or a stubborn failure to act is no measure of a man’s innocence. The jury of public opinion is unforgiving and time will tell. All I wish to say at this time is that all the polls say that over 90 per cent of the people of Trinidad and Tobago want those who have escaped the law at this time that they must surely come to see the face of justice eventually. The victory is not for the one first out of the block or the jail cell, but for those who endure to the end—nine days for them, one day for the police. Remember that expression. The suggestion that the DPP endorsed the performance of a charge under the Anti-Gang Act is not the way to go and the Leader of the Opposition is clearly out of his depth to so submit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are also people who may honestly wish to leave that life of gangsterism and move away from that that life of crime and we are prepared to work with them. So, we will develop a programme for incarcerated gang members when they are convicted to encourage them to renounce their gang membership. For such gang members we would have and implement follow-up programmes and tracer studies to determine the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes and improve accordingly.

10.15 p.m.

In carrying out its mandate to transform the criminal justice system, the Ministry recognizes the logistic significance of penal reform as a tool of realignment, in its holistic approach to the desired paradigm shift. The penal reform remit of the Ministry of Justice is being strengthened and equipped further to give effect to the People’s Partnership Government’s portal on restorative justice, as a philosophical shift away from retributive punishment of offenders.

A critical component of rehabilitation is the provision of alternatives to custody, and the desirable separation of inmates by category, especially in the case of first-time offenders. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is the intention of the Government to bring to this august Chamber new prison rules. Some of the intentions of the new rules are to focus on the management and treatment of prisoners are as follows: to ensure the custody of all inmates at all prisons across the country are under conditions of human dignity. This would also apply to persons who are detained, employed or are visiting the facility; to provide for adequate medical services which cater for prisoners and special needs as well. The rules will also outline the procedures to be adopted for the compulsory testing of HIV and AIDS. There are many new facilities of these new prison rules that will be shortly brought to Parliament.
We also have early limited release to enable people outside work with mandatory attachment to low security facilities. Furloughs on an incremental basis and monitoring by electronic bracelet devices are options being developed by the Ministry of Justice. On that note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, electronic monitoring systems are additional tools used in the management of offenders and specifically to more intensely supervise offenders who are serving their sentences in the community.

Electronic monitoring has been found to be particularly useful for early detection of flight when granting early release to offenders. Use of this type of monitoring instead of imprisonment, has also been found to reduce custody populations, and serves to verify that the offender will obey the conditions of release from custody.

A unit will be established under the auspices of the Ministry and shall provide electronic monitoring assistance to any state agency or Ministry which is responsible for any part of the criminal justice system. These are but part of the Ministry’s strategic systemic interventions to restore offenders to goodness in the shortest acceptable time after serving out the initial one-third period of mandatory incarceration.

It is the intention of the Government to broaden and clarify the scope of the DNA Act. As you are aware, the DNA samples are increasingly important in the fight against crime and the prosecution of offenders. Deoxyribonucleic [Desk thumping] evidence can pinpoint with a high level of accuracy the perpetrators of crime and it can also assist in the identification of victims.

The Government intends to bring legislation to the House that would seek to extend the categories of persons from whom intimate and non-intimate DNA samples can be procured, such as inmates at the National Youth Training Centre, deportees to Trinidad and Tobago and illegal immigrants detained at our Immigration Detention Centre. The plan is to establish a national forensic DNA bank, as well as a national DNA registry. At this time of transnational crimes and terrorism we would want to have the ability to share information with other governments while always protecting the rights of our citizens.

The Ministry of Justice has a blueprint, as it were, for the delivery of a speedier system for justice in all communities. As I indicated earlier, we intend to deliver an improved and transformed system of justice, without compromising either the rule of law, or due process. I have already shared with this august
House our initiatives, as they relate to the construction of new court plans, and on the philosophical shift leading to realignment of the Government’s methodologies and programmes, as they relate to the management of offenders.

There are many other things that I can touch on; for example, the increase in legal aid fees. That is a Bill that is being prepared and will shortly be tabled in this august Chamber. The introduction of duty Counsel, so many other things are under progress in the Ministry of Justice but time, regrettably, does not permit me to lay it out for the national community and for the Members here present.

The Ministry of Justice was in an incubation period and now the eggs are hatching, and this country will see the number of initiatives that will make a difference to the administration of criminal justice in Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Ramona Ramdial): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before I delve into my budget 2012 contribution, I would first like to congratulate the Minister of Finance and by extension the People’s Partnership Government for yet again a very forward-thinking budget 2012. I must say that the theme for this budget for this year “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation” shows that we are laying the groundwork for a very sustainable prosperity growing nation.

Now, I have sat here all day and I listened to the Opposition speak about the unequal distribution of resources, for example, Member of Parliament for La Brea, and of course, St. Ann’s East, Point Fortin, et cetera. I want to say that the PNM, more than any other political party that has held the Government in Trinidad and Tobago, has been renowned over the years for the unequal distribution of resources in this country. They are famous for that and we have seen that perpetuated over the years, whether it was Dr. Eric Williams, Prime Minister Manning; and now of course, the Leader of the Opposition keeps perpetuating that the People’s Partnership is once more hoarding resources from the PNM constituencies, but I want to let them know here, that that is not so. The PNM has always had a motive in behaving the way that it did, by its unequal distribution of resources to rural communities and, of course, to non-PNM constituencies.

Today, as I stand here and as Member for of Parliament for Couva North, there are roads in my constituency, areas and regions in my constituency and, if not for the Minister of Works, the hon. Mr. Jack Warner—there were roads that were not paved for 25 years, 30 years—Sanacy Street, that was recently opened. There are areas in Carli Bay where there was no water for 25 years, and what is
going on here, and I mean I want to say we are a very small country and the reality is there. So when the Member for La Brea gets up and speaks about the unequal distribution of resources, and we are ignoring La Brea and all these other PNM held constituencies, what happened to the other constituencies over the past nine years?

When we were in Opposition and we were suffering for the said resources, what was going on there at that point in time? [Desk thumping] And I am sure that the Members of Parliament would have come to this Chamber and complained and begged for resources and still not get them. I must say in defence of my Government we are equally distributing the resources. [Desk thumping] You are seeing the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Resources going to the PNM constituencies and opening bridges and roads and paving; opening community centres, et cetera. So we are here, of course, on a different mandate. Our mandate by our hon. Prime Minister is to equally share the resources, to develop all of the population of Trinidad and Tobago, because we believe in the human development aspect of our people first and foremost, and we do not believe in segregating or discriminating to such an extent as the PNM did over their years of reign in government.

The PNM boasts of its energy initiatives over the years and takes credit for generating the revenues of the country, but where did all that money go over the years? In human development? In roads? In bridges? In education? Where did all that money go? And of course, again the previous government is well known for being one of the most corrupted governments ever in Trinidad and Tobago. We can tell from the stories from the Calder Harts, Monteils and all these other people—where did all of our resources and all of our money go?

The Leader of the Opposition spoke of all of his revenue-generating projects all of which are energy driven, which were shelved by the People’s Partnership Government as we came into power. I want to ask if these projects, like the smelter, were allowed to go on what would happen to all of the high energy consuming industries? And the Opposition Leader himself mentioned it, from the Scott Ryder Report, that we have 9 to 12 years of our natural gas and our oil before they run out.

So I want to know, if we had built the smelter and had gone on to heavily industrialize Trinidad and Tobago, what was going to happen to those industries when our natural resources ran out? What was going to happen? [ Interruption] How can the Member for Diego Martin North/East say that—build new
industries? So you would now look to diversify the economy at that point! What would have happened, we would have employed hundreds and thousands of people in these industries and then after our natural resources ran out, what was going to happen? We were going to have high unemployment; high crime levels and all of the negative effects of all of these things would have been perpetuated then.

For this reason mainly, the People’s Partnership Government decided to abandon these projects. It was not feasible to do so considering the limited supply of these natural resources and we need to conserve our precious natural resources and use our deposits wisely to generate revenues.

And of course, there are deposits which are being explored currently, however, we really need to hoard what we have right now and use it wisely, hence we are looking to diversify the economy. Our thrust into agriculture, our thrust into the manufacturing industry, which will arise out of—and of course, you are aware of the aluminium smelter and our Government is going to share the initiative of the downstream industry with respect to manufacturing products from the smelter, which I think is going to be located in Suriname. Agriculture—and this Government’s investment is heavy and ongoing. Food production is most important, and so we have our very hard-working Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs building access roads, leasing land to farmers, building and repairing fishing facilities, offering financial incentives for crop cultivation, and again, I want to publicly commend him for constructing a new fishing facility at Carli Bay in Couva North, where for 20 years or so, the fishermen of that area never had facilities, and now they have facilities to improve that primary industry which we depend on.

10.30 p.m.

With respect to the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, I just want to summarize some of our plans for 2012. We are going to heavily invest in youth development and entrepreneurship. The sum of $32.5 million has been allocated for the development of youth facilities and the advancement of youth programmes by our Ministry.

The newly reconstructed St. James Youth Centre cost $34.4 million in 2011, is to be outfitted at an estimated cost of $16.2 million. This activity will commence in the fiscal year of 2012 with an allocation of $10 million for furnishings, for offices, gymnasiums and auditoriums for the centre. Of course, we are going to be refurbishing and upgrading the youth training facilities, which will be carried out at several locations with an allocation of $2 million.
The main activities planned for the fiscal year include upgrading of the computer laboratory and the roof refurbishment at Laventille; preparation of designs for the construction of a kitchen and installation of a fire alarm system. [Interruption] Yes, that is very true and we are equally distributing the resources. The construction of toilet facilities and the completion of roof works at Malick; construction of a computer room and replacement of the air-conditioning unit at Basilon Street; construction of fencing, car park, security booth and roof replacement at California.

So, all these youth training facilities will be upgraded within the next year in order to facilitate our youth programmes. The sum of $5 million is also allocated for the refurbishment of three out of the five existing youth development and apprenticeship centres in Trinidad. It will include the installation of security cameras and air-conditioning in the classrooms; the refurbishment of dormitories and classrooms; the construction of a gym and a music room at Chatham; the upgrade of the electrical system and construction of a multipurpose music room at the Praesto Presto Youth Facility.

A key initiative of the Government is also to involve the implementation of development programmes for the empowerment of the youth to enable them to make a meaningful contribution to society. A total allocation of $9.5 million will be provided for programmes that advance this initiative including the provision of financial assistance to the national youth non-governmental organizations, including the Arima District Scout Headquarters and the walk-in centres.

We will also review the national youth policy and development of national standards on youth work. We will conduct peer education programmes and youth health caravans of the youth health programmes nationwide. We will be restructuring and realigning the National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago, and we will have a continuation of the community youth needs assessment project for the areas of Covigne Road, Diego Martin and Datsunville, Enterprise, under the Save the Youth in Marginalized Communities project. Of course, we are going to implement youth rise in six new communities whereby at-risk youth will receive training, mentoring and loan funding for the setting up of new businesses.

With respect to gender issues, within the period 2011 to 2012, the Gender Affairs Division, in addition to the foregoing, will continue to address critical gender equality issues through targeted research, recommendations on policy and legislation in support of gender equality, monitoring and evaluation of sectoral efforts, and the provision of overall technical support for all gender mainstreaming initiatives within the Government and the wider society.
The Gender Unit will finalize the national policy on gender and development and its five-year action plan to systematically advance gender equity in the work of government and the wider society. It will improve its human and financial resources and the Ministry will soon fill key—at the managerial and other levels that will result in enhanced training, research programmes and policy analysis.

We will continue to implement a comprehensive plan and programme of gender mainstreaming in the governmental agencies that have been initiated, and will continue through the strengthening of focal points. This will promote greater levels of understanding of the relevance of gender concerns at all levels of development and in all sectors of Government. We will continue our thrust towards public education through sensitization programmes promoting wider understanding of gender and development issues. The division will also engage in a major public education campaign on gender-based violence.

We will also advance the legislative agenda in partnership with the relevant Government agency including sexual harassment, equal pay for work of equal value and paternity leave based on mandates emerging from the soon to be approved national policy on gender and development. We will also increase outreach, collaboration and partnership with NGOs/CBOs and other actors towards the further promotion of gender equality and equity in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Gender Affairs Division will continue its mandate to advance the status and rights of women, men, boys and girls, and promote their equitable development, safe in the knowledge that the furthering of gender equality will facilitate the realization of Trinidad and Tobago’s development goals. And, of course, I listened to the Member for Point Fortin earlier on when she said that the Prime Minister at her recent UN meet, where she mentioned certain things in her speech, and she was not seeing the results of that in Trinidad and Tobago, and she was saying that we were being deceptive.

I want to just tell her that she was talking especially about women in leadership, women in politics and how we are going to encourage and foster such activities. And I want to say that in Trinidad and Tobago, the Government of the day cannot really initiate an overall national plan or programme to accommodate such. And therefore, it depends on the will of the political parties to encourage their youths and their women into the political field.

I want to say, and very proudly so, that our hon. Prime Minister and leader of the United National Congress gave its executive the mandate to come up with a programme or a tool or a method whereby we can encourage our youths and our women to come into the field of politics. And so, we have established something
called the UNC Academy or The Party School where we are going to our various regions and encouraging the young people to come out, especially where we are training and educating our people on the ground in order to accommodate them for future prospects in politics. I must say that this is not just a Trinidad and Tobago initiative.

When we went to the United Nations General Assembly—and we have gone to other meetings, the Commonwealth meetings and so forth—and all the countries gathered around and we came up with a decision that was the only way possible in which to increase women’s participation in politics and which will then lead to a rise in the percentage of women in Parliament. So the political will needs to be there and under our esteemed Prime Minister, we have such. So, we are using the political parties as a method or a tool whereby we can bring our youths and women into that field of politics, and I challenge the PNM to do the same with their people. Because I think they do not have the political will to accommodate and so will not see this as being very beneficial.

Again, I want to also say that the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development recognizes the need to work together and to partner with other ministries to bring about real change for youths especially. So, through working strategies with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Sport, the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and the Ministry of Community Development—we are all going to embark on programmes and policies that are going to be able to see that culture shift, that mindset, that shift in thinking and the mindset within our youth population, especially where we need them to become more proactive, for there to be more youth participation within this country; and we think that our Ministry will not be able to stand alone to achieve such goals. So we need to partner with all the other Ministries in order to achieve those goals in the future.

We are not going to see rapid results or direct results; it is a work in progress. I want to say that the People’s Partnership is very committed to seeing the progress and the development and the improvement of our youth in all areas and in all regions; and we intend to equally distribute the resources to achieve such.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to budget 2012, of course, we have seen that public opinion is very favourable towards this Government, towards the Partnership. We have seen the Chamber of Commerce, all the different businesses, organizations—DOMA, Mr. Hadeed and everybody coming out in the support of the budget. They are very excited by the turn and the twist that we have
taken as a Government and our brave foray into new ground, new territory in order to diversify the economy. I think we have the population behind us all the way and I think we will see that all through for a second term also. I think that the younger population of Trinidad and Tobago very much recognizes the efforts and the attempts by this Government to really transform society and transform the economics of this country in such a way that it will be very sustainable.

Again, I want to say to the Opposition that heavy industrialization was not the way to go to grow this economy. Of course, it is by diversifying rather than by heavy industrialization. I will always disagree with the Member of Parliament for La Brea and his smelter rantings but as an environmentalist—I understand he is a Geography teacher and so was I.

I just want to say to him that when you look at the impacts of the smelter on a small island, it is very negative and it is not very conducive to our environment. Of course, we do not have the raw material for smelting, and therefore, it would be better suited for our economy to go to the downstream industry rather than set up a primary sort of industry where we would still have to ship the raw material in. Our primary industries are fishing, agriculture, oil and gas. Oil and gas are going to run out soon.

Let us focus on agriculture and the fishing industry and try to develop those primary industries first and foremost as the Minister of Finance has been saying. And, of course, from the primary industry, we will have the manufacturing industries resulting. From agriculture, we will have agro-processing; from fishing, we will have seafood processing or fish processing, as we call it. So, these are the things that we have to look forward to in the future. We are really looking to diversify the economy.

We also have the Minister of Tourism and he has some great plans in store for this country with respect to tourism. We are also looking at cultural tourism which is very popular now in Trinidad and Tobago. As you know, we are very rich in culture and we are looking to monopolize this cultural tourism and attract other regions and other countries to our beautiful country to experience our culture here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that, I would like to conclude my budget 2012 contribution and say that this Government is committed to the overall development of its people, and we stand by whatever decisions we make collectively as a Government. I thank you. [Desk thumping]
Mrs. Joanne Thomas (St. Ann’s East): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Let me first congratulate all the persons involved in the preparation of this building to house the Parliament for the next three-plus years. It is evident that the amount of work that has been done to have it completed in a timely manner is more than exceptional. I cannot, however, exempt the masterminds and brains of the People’s National Movement for having the foresight to erect such a building. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to commend the Member for Diego Martin West and Leader of the Opposition for his in-depth analysis of the 2011/2012 budget. The Member exposed the underlying deception and gave a true picture of the economics. [Desk thumping]

10.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I refer to some of the comments by some of the Members. I refer to the Members for Tabaquite and Caroni East, they all boasted about all that has been done in their constituencies. Of course, I refer also to the Member for Mayaro. He has boldly voiced, publicly, that he has no problem in only servicing and helping persons whom he is assured voted the PP.

Mrs. J. Thomas: The Minister of Finance made a statement when he said—

Dr. Browne: “Gypsy” you have too much experience to carry on like that.

Mrs. J. Thomas: The Minister of Finance made a statement when he said—

Dr. Browne: You were live on the radio when you said that.

Mrs. J. Thomas:—things that were said last year are now being done this year. I am a little concerned. What is he justifying? Nothing was done to create opportunities for local business people. Look, right here in Parliament, where is this water from, when we have several water plants right here in this country.
Another impact is the reduction in the VAT intake; a true sign of businesses underperforming. For one and one-half years there has been no stimulation of the economy. Very few contracts were extended. Where did the $50 billion go? No money has trickled down to the man in the street. Therefore, there was no buying power, and this is one of the main reasons businesses have been underperforming.

Why did the Government not, at least, continue work in the construction industry and small projects such as community centres? At least there would have been some money in circulation.

We reviewed the budget statement by the hon. Minister of Finance. I want to focus a bit on tourism and I link it to my constituency, with particular emphasis on the north coast, which is viewed by many as the tourist hub of Trinidad and Tobago.

Tourism plays a critical role in any diversification and development efforts of our country. Tourism has the potential to contribute significantly to the nation’s gross domestic product, to generate employment, to earn foreign exchange, to alleviate poverty and to stimulate other industries and sectors within the national economy. In the Minister’s budget statement, he mentioned that the Government’s tourism action plan will focus on five areas: product development, marketing and public awareness, competitiveness investment, safety, security and access and quality assurance. He further went on to state that this comprehensive tourism thrust will generate high quality jobs in the industry. The people in my constituency are waiting with great anticipation.

In the Ministry of Tourism’s administrative report for 2009, eight goals were identified towards achievement of the vision for tourism, only three of which I will mention:

1. to position Port of Spain as the meetings and conventions capital of the southern Caribbean;
2. to build a service culture and position Trinidad and Tobago as the country that provides the warmest welcome and highest level of international quality service in the Caribbean; and
3. to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago is marketed as a recognized tourism destination in every principal market.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Public Sector Investment Programme Report it states that there was an overall investment of $58.7 million in the tourism sector in fiscal year 2011. It further stated that these funds were utilized on initiatives to
assist in fostering economic growth and diversification, generating revenue and employment. Could the Minister give us some details on this revenue and employment of which he speaks? In the said report, it states that the tourism action programme continued with an allocation of $3 million. It continued infrastructure upgrades and renovations at all beach facilities.

I want to zero in on Maracas and Las Cuevas. Visitors coming into this country—and everyone knows that Maracas Bay is always the first choice destination for most tourists. Let us look at the state of the Maracas Bay facilities and the car park facilities. I do not know if Members have ever gone to Maracas Bay on a Sunday and seen the traffic that is experienced up there. As soon as you pass the Maracas Bay car park traffic smooths out because of getting to park in Maracas Bay. Yet you see $3 million has been spent in fixing all beach facilities. The word is “all”.

I look at Las Cuevas Bay and the fishing depot. Just recently, there was some serious flood damage in Las Cuevas. Many people’s boats were damaged. The actual fishing area, persons could not get into that area, and this is Las Cuevas. This is a regularly visited place. Tell me, where was that $3 million spent? Because I am looking at the north coast area, a very populated area for visitors and yet they are saying moneys were spent on all the beaches.

I also refer to Fort Abercromby. I personally invited the Minister to visit for development. I use this opportunity to remind the Minister of his promise to give that area some attention. [Interruption]

Dr. Griffith: Thank you for giving way. You would hear all about Maracas, Las Cuevas and the rest of Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of beach development, but to answer the question, when you invited me, there was a reason and my PS gave you the reason I could not be there, but I sent a full team. They visited Fort Abercromby and we gave the assurance that work will start soon. I am not sure if it has been started. It was just recently we did that. But that whole area will be completely refurbished, and we will keep in touch with you as we start the development.

Mrs. J. Thomas: I thank you hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande and Minister of Tourism and I look forward to when this project would start. As you would know, from visiting that area, this would help a lot with the unemployment in that area. I wish other Members of your Government would think like you and a few other Ministers. I wish—[Crosstalk]
Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the last year, the hon. Minister of Tourism, together with a contingent, visited India to seek opportunities, as they say, to sell Trinidad and Tobago. In a report, the Indian High Commissioner commented that it is highly unlikely that tourists from India would come to Trinidad. Tell me, what was the reason for the visit to India? [Crosstalk]

These are the words from the commissioner, what he said is that it made no sense and visitors would not—it is highly unlikely that visitors would come to Trinidad. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism boasted about 2011 being the best Carnival ever for visitors. All I ask the Minister is to tell us what the economic results of this statement are. I want to know how much money was generated from this Carnival and how much foreign exchange was received as a result of this best ever Carnival.

I also refer to an article in the Daily Express of Monday, October 10 and it reads:

“Griffith: SoE a boost to local tourism”

Dr. Browne: What? Read that headline again!

Mrs. J. Thomas: This is what it said:

“Griffith: SoE a boost to local tourism”

He also admitted that there was a decline in international visitors comprising leisure and business visitors. Right there you see it is not speaking together. Something is wrong there. You are seeing a division there. It is a boost to tourism but yet there is a decline in international leisure and business visitors.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, recently the Ministry of Tourism contracted six international firms to sell Trinidad and Tobago as a new tourism destination. All I want to ask the Minister is: what is the cost associated with these contracts? I also ask: what about our diplomatic missions? What role do they play in all of this?

Let us look at the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The Ministry of Trade and Industry seems to have been engrossed in consultation, training, workshops and so-called re-engineering. There have been no diversification projects brought to the fore. If so, please tell us. The only thing listed is those projected by the PNM, but yet there is no action to date.
11.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I refer to the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) document 2012 and this is what is said about economic diversification and sustainable development.

Efforts continued with a focus on developing industries in the non-energy sector.

Hon. Member: What?

Mrs. J. Thomas: That is what it says:

Efforts continued with a focus on developing industries in the non-energy sector.

The only major activities which came out of the ministry—

Dr. Browne: So this is their document?

Mrs. J. Thomas: This is their document—the China-Caricom Trade Economic Forum, and all we know, this was agreed to by the PNM, right? [Desk thumping] And then we look at the Caribbean Investment Forum, and this was piggybacking on the Commonwealth Business Forum held by the PNM during the last Commonwealth meeting. [Desk thumping]

We look at trading services. This sector declined and lower levels of economic activity are projected. We look at 7.9 per cent reduction in construction and quarrying; 6.1 per cent in hotels and guest houses; 3.3 per cent in personal services. Restaurant activity has also been slow and has now been made worse by the state of emergency. Some small restaurants have had to close and, of course, some persons have had to work minimum shifts.

Is this the caring Government? Is this what the Government considers care? Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my own assumption, you know, I heard someone say you cannot put primary schoolchildren to do a big man’s job. That is totally unfair, and this applies throughout the various ministries.

A lot has been said by some of my colleagues to prove this and this budget has in no way helped the members of my constituency and has not impacted in any way and I need to let the Minister and the Government know we are disappointed in what has been stated in the budget. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Clifton De Coteau): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am afraid that it is unfortunate that I have to follow such a lovely person as the Member for St. Ann’s East. The
humane person in me would just have to prevent me from making an analysis of what she has said. [Laughter] However, copyright, I know that the Leader of the Opposition made some statements and I want to summarize what has been said collectively across there when he said “absolute failure, unmitigated disaster” and that is what we were exposed to throughout the night on that side. What came across, as he said as well, is “utterly delusional”, “preposterous”, and as the learned Member for Diego Martin Central said “political schizophrenia”. [ Interruption] It was an aside.

In complimenting the Minister of Finance on his budget presentation, which fittingly demonstrated our national vision to achieve economic inclusiveness in an innovation driven growth economy with greater equity, more meaningful participation and a tide of prosperity for all in Trinidad and Tobago, the budget, which focuses on the elderly, the physically challenged and the homeless is, deserving of acknowledgement. This Government cares. We are concerned for the people, all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it pains me when I listen to the plea from some of my parliamentary colleagues on the other side, the representative for La Brea, St. Ann’s East, when they are literally asking for help and they were in power. They were in power for eight years. They did not care for their own people. It is the same way, in the constituency that I represent, Moruga/Tableland, the areas that support that side are the most neglected. The area, Marac where, since 1956, they were promised a deepwater harbour, and every five years for election they will go back and fool the people and say, “You are getting the deepwater harbour.” We are happy to state that the People’s Partnership Government—we are not getting the deepwater harbour in Moruga but we are going to get two upgraded facilities for the fishermen of the area; one in Gran Chemin and one in La Rufin [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we regard the people of Trinidad and Tobago as the foundation of the seven interconnected pillars for sustainable development—people-centred development, poverty eradication and social justice, national and personal security, information and communication technologies, a more diversified knowledge-intensive economy, good governance and foreign policy.

The budget presented by the hon. Minister of Finance more than aptly demonstrates these. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I consider it an honour as the Minister in the Ministry of Education and the representative for Moruga/Tableland, the Government has wisely and strategically placed education and training as top
priority as evidenced by the $8.7 billion allocated. The figure should not be regarded as just public expenditure but public investment in the future of our nation, our youth, prosperity for all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in our journey of sustainable development, education is the key. I am sure my colleagues on the other side would agree when Dr. Eric Williams said that the future of the country is in the children’s schoolbags. [Desk thumping] I am not a political hypocrite and I am not deceitful. The point is, this Government has adopted a mind frame for the future, a mind frame towards legacy. We upheld the conviction that our purpose here is to ensure that the future generation can lead a life worth living, a life of dominion of wisdom, a life in turn for others, not a life where you are not certain as to what would happen tomorrow.

In 2007 the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, said, and I quote: “We hold the future in our hands. Together, we must ensure that our grandchildren will not have to ask why we failed to do the right thing, and let them suffer the consequences”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the People’s Partnership has embraced the true meaning of life which, according to Nelson Henderson, is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit.

I was tempted to say in this time of Divali, to show we—in the same way how they removed some of the evil, but I will refrain from that. I might offend the sensitivity of some people. I was tempted to say, in the same way, how Narakasura was removed, and in the same way how Bali was destroyed, but I will not go that way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with education and training on the forefront, we as a nation can arm ourselves against global uncertainty and challenges which may exist. The Ministry of Education holds a vision to be a high performing, dynamic and vibrant organization responsive to the needs of stakeholders and which works collaboratively, efficiently and effectively to educate and develop an intelligent, versatile, productive and well-rounded child, working around a mission which encompasses educating and developing children who are able to fulfil their potential, academically balanced, healthy and growing normally, well-adjusted socially and culturally, emotionally mature and happy. This is the type of child you want. So says the PNM? Fine.

Our strategic objective includes designing and developing a quality education system, understanding and satisfying the needs of key stakeholders such as
teachers, principals, students, parents, examination bodies, denominational boards, employees, TTUTA and post-secondary and tertiary institutions, developing a high performing and dynamic organization.

When the People’s Partnership came into power in 2010, initiatives were put in place to develop the education system. Twenty-eleven saw the continuation of these efforts: the implementation of the eConnect that my colleague would have spoken about earlier, moving toward universal early childhood care and education, efforts towards attaining higher literacy and numeracy rates among students, expanding Caribbean Vocational Qualification at the secondary level, providing testing and neurodiagnostic services for children, restructuring the SEA examination, institutionalizing the Continuous Assessment Programme at primary level, improving overall academic performances of students, and improving infrastructure in schools.

11.15 p.m.

The schools were in a totally dilapidated state, and it did not happen in the 15 months, it was because of an accumulation of neglect that they deteriorated. Providing opportunities for our teachers, training and development, reforming the curricula at all levels, strengthening the human resource management capacity of the Ministry with full computerization, restructuring the organization and providing support for institutional strengthening, developing a communication strategy and providing career guidance and counselling.

As was pointed out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, since the introduction of the eCAL programme, we have distributed to date 36,753 laptops. Mr. Deputy Speaker, imagine, 33,000 homes would have benefited in this nation and are equipped with computer technology. And today, our digital nationals, our children, are welcoming the appearance; the digital nationals. The digital immigrants on the other side are of the great digital divide.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will soon be one of the first nations of this world to have universal early childhood education—one of the first. No longer does our society regard education as an option for the three-year-old. This Government has acknowledged the importance of a solid foundation, and as such, we are appealing to the school administrators to ensure that they have their capable teachers working at that foundation level to build that solid foundation during those crucial years.
The former administration created a type of environment where the private sector struggled to compete with the State for labour and capital. The budget presentation expresses the change in ideology, and this Government, the people’s Government, the People’s Partnership, regards private sector as champions on our journey to sustainable development. We recognize the role of the private sector, and thus, are committed to creating and providing an environment that encourages private enterprises to succeed and meet investment targets.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a point of interest is that at the Ministry of Education we are responsible for nurturing the minds of our nation’s children, and through the school nutrition programme we nurture their bodies. This programme currently provides 155 breakfast and lunch meals to students in the education system. The programme has assisted children and their parents financially and otherwise.

An area that we have to concentrate on too, that we are concentrating on, is the school-based management. Mr. Deputy Speaker, something of interest is the school indiscipline. I have always said that our schools are a microcosm of the society, and what you find outside you find in the school setting. So what do we have going there now, Mr. Deputy Speaker? What are some the challenges we face in the school? The type of infractions, assault, attacks on students and our teachers causing bodily harm, breaking classes, tardiness, students staying away from classes during school hours without official approval, destruction of school property and vandalism, which refer to the malicious acts by students to the schools and their contents therein, disrespect to authority, the use of obscene language towards teachers, security personnel and students, disobeying of instructions given by teachers—and by the Speaker—causing disruptions in classrooms and generally defying authority, extortion taxing, the obtaining of money and valuables through intimidation or threats of violence, fighting, physical confrontations among students, gambling, playing cards for money on the school compound.

Miscellaneous those suspension notices that did not specify the offence committed and those not elsewhere listed: possession of marijuana, drug and alcohol abuse, which includes the smoking and possession of marijuana for trafficking, possession of cocaine, possession of hemp and cigarettes, and also the possession of alcohol, possession of weapons, knives, cutlasses, ice picks and guns found on students, robbery, the taking of other persons’ property without their consent, with or without the use of force, sexual misconduct, illicit sexual activity, indecent assault, sexual harassment, indecent exposure and possession of
pornographic literature and pictures. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had cause to suspend some of these students, and we plan to reclaim our children who have wandered astray.

Our view on the national security is obvious especially during this national state of emergency. We have a national task force on violence and indiscipline; dealt with the policy and legislation where there will be the implementation and enforcement of the national school code of conduct, we have seen that as a priority.

The national school code of conduct comprises of principles, standards of behaviour, responsibilities, student and staff expectations, roles of school personnel, consequences for violation as well as prevention—intervention strategies. In a country that is pleading for standards to encourage discipline as a culture, we sought to ensure the distribution of this code of conduct by means of printed versions, uploads on the laptops, distribution to Form 1 students. And I feel too, that this august body, we could be exemplars for those young people out there as well. So that sometimes when we get bona fide instruction from the Speaker, our body language should not be insulting and disrespectful.

Our young people are looking at us and sometimes our behaviour is not very exemplary. So that tonight in a contribution one person will bawl: “Lock me up! Lock me up!” And sometimes people are speaking and some “steupsing”: “Nonsense! Nonsense!” What are you expecting our young people in the schools to do? Is that good? We are supposed to be exemplars. The “steupsing”, the crosstalk, the disrespect—it is supposed to start with us; we are supposed to behave.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the mentorship programme was launched in the primary and secondary schools with phase one involving 120 mentees. There has been the implementation of 20 violence reduction programmes targeting specific student groupings implemented for the 2011/2012 year in selected schools from the 22 certain security programme communities, after school study centres have been increased from 20 to 30, each providing a safe and functioning area for students.

There has been the continuation of implementation of the national student hotline. As measures of prevention, support has been extended in the area of programmes geared toward reducing school violence and indiscipline such as peer mediation, conflict resolution and parent education. Reports have shown that 30 per cent of secondary schools and 10 per cent of primary schools have implemented clearly defined programmes within their school development plans.
Partnered with the National Parent-Teacher Association, there has been success in the implementation of the parent education programmes which offer guidance to parents on bringing up their children. From last month’s introduction we have a 50 per cent implementation rate for both primary and secondary schools. Programmes geared at behavioural and learning difficulties have been implemented to target identified students in all education districts. A five-day programme during terms one and two has been organized for these at-risk students to have group counselling sessions every term which would target at least 60 students from each of the seven education districts.

In an effort to enhance school governance through the full establishment of the student councils, all secondary schools will have support of the principals—has been provided. Today, 90 per cent of the secondary schools have functioning student councils. Additional training programmes for heads of departments and deans of discipline have been implemented to deal with emerging adolescence. We have 75 per cent of the deans so far already trained.

A development of the Ministry of Education is the establishment of behavioural or suspension centres for students who demonstrate deviant and violent behaviour and indiscipline, and who require counselling and rehabilitation by professional psychologists. The Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education is expected to expand with the hiring of more officers trained in clinical and behavioural psychology.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the investment allocated to education and training demonstrates the Government’s philosophy to our children’s future. The initiatives detailed must be supported and due to the ongoing nature as time passes, they must be monitored and maintained. We realize too that we have to increase the number of supervisors we have at the moment. They are totally insufficient and as such we aim to have one supervisor to supervise no more than 10 schools, which in fact would be a good management practice. At the moment we have 10 School Supervisors II, 35 School Supervisors I, 17 School Supervisors III, and with the increase of supervisors we know that this would improve the situation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the area that I represent, Moruga/Tableland, has 14 primary schools Marac Baptist, La Lune R.C., Moruga RC, Moruga AC, Basse Terre RC, Santa Maria RC, Rock River RC, Sixth Company AC, New Grant Government, Hindustan Baptist known as William Webb Memorial Baptist, Fifth
Company AC, Nipal Presbyterian, North Trace Government; we also have three secondary schools, Moruga Secondary, Tableland Secondary, Cowen Hamilton Secondary.

11.30 p.m.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the catchment area that has supported the other side continuously for many years, Sixth Company—I have to repeat it, again, yes, I will repeat it; repetition leads to retention. For over 14 years New Grant Government School was under a house. They “aint” like the children? Under a house. The good news is, New Grant Government will get a new school. They will get a new school. They have to get a new school. [Desk thumping] Khani Government will get a new school.

Hon. Member: When?

Hon. C. De Coteau: When? You will see for yourself. This year, this fiscal year.

Mr. Indarsingh: Do not try to tie him up.

Hon. C. De Coteau: The Early Childhood Centre in La Rufin, there is going to be one in Fort George and we are going to have two others again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we know that sports is important, recreational facilities are important, but, regrettably I listened to the other side’s contributions and they talked about discrimination, this, that and the other. What did they do for sports in Moruga/Tableland, when you consider that we have the captain of the West Indies ladies team, Merrisa Aguillera in Marac? Nothing.

Mr. Indarsingh: They refused to sponsor Trinidad and Tobago in the 20/20.

Hon. C. De Coteau: The only time there was an upgrade of the Marac Recreation Ground is through my representation. Nothing, absolutely nothing! The primary schools in my constituency, eight of these primary schools are currently under academic watch. Although there seems to be a general increasing trend in performance, the levels of SEA examination for 2010, the marks were mostly average. Analysis of the secondary schools revealed, in the CSEC examination 2011, only Cowen Hamilton Secondary had greater than 60 per cent of students obtaining five or more subjects with English A and Mathematics.

The percentage of the other secondary schools ranged from 2.78 to 13.92. This meant, for instance, in a school where 160 registered for CSEC, of the 72 who attempted five or more subjects including Maths and English A, only two attained
the benchmark—two out of 72. So, that numeracy and literacy require stern attention, and through the strategy being enforced by the Ministry of Education, my constituency, I am certain, would improve.

I would like to thank BGTT, the Toco Foundation and other organizations which have committed to improving the quality of life of the residents of Moruga/Tableland; we are now more than ever able to envision a brighter future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we plan to have some new home study programmes, as you would have seen in the budget presentation, the completion of repairs to 4,450 HDC homes before distribution. We have a challenge on Gomez Street, St. Mary’s—homes built by the former administration. If you see them. New homes that are supposed to be—they are dilapidated, poor workmanship. Rain falling; house flooded. People inhabit the homes—man looking to buy awning windows and all these things, and then they boast.

Regularization of tenure of long-standing squatters on state lands; especially again, the people in Sixth Company area. This is the “Year for People of African Descent” and the people in Sixth Company who were given 15 acres of land, they cannot do anything with it. It cannot go on to the next generation, because they have no kind of deed.

These are the people who have supported for a long time the last administration. For years they have been asking the former administration because in that area they were given 15 acres for the development of a recreational site.

Mr. Indarsingh: Tears of pain.

Hon. C. De Coteau: They got nothing! I am happy to announce that it was accepted and that dream of a recreational site there would become a reality. [Desk thumping]

So that when someone on the other side talks in terms of the deceit and the political deception, and the now-and-again kind of relationship that you would have in a domestic relationship—“ah come now, and ah come back next five years”—and that is why I really want to thank the Minister of Works and Infrastructure for coming now and doing something about that neglect that we have had for a number of years. We consider Moruga/Tableland—it is a fact—the landslip capital. Every two steps, landslip, no [Interruption] no, you coming a close second. [Laughter] The point is we have at least 15 landslips being addressed at the moment, and 40 roads where paving is being undertaken, and I am grateful for that.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, Tableland area: I am happy to hear that the buffalypso programme would get going again. I am happy that the Minister of Tourism, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, would be looking at the area because we have a lot of tourist sites, Punta de la Playa—Devil’s Woodyard; possibility of eco-tourism, one of the three spring bridges, Marac for pitch, and all these things; areas that remain in a state of doldrums Buenos Aires? No, no, no.

Hon. Member: Buenos Aires?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, it is far from Moruga.

Hon. C. De Coteau: We of the area of Moruga/Tableland we see a brighter tomorrow, thanks to the People’s Partnership. Thanks to the People’s Partnership. The deep water harbour? That reminds me that some person on that side spoke in terms of the desalination plant. The Member for Point Fortin spoke in terms of the desalination plant.

You go to La Lune in Moruga and see the total waste of the people’s money. A desalination plant, I think that worked for three days, a monstrosity. They built the plant in such a way that the pipe to go to the water is too short.

Hon. Member: What!

Hon. C. De Coteau: When it is low tide the pipe is out there dangling hoping to get water, sucking air and sand.

Hon. Member: Sucking something. [Laughter]

Hon. C. De Coteau: Whose dream was that? Whose dream was that, to fool the people? That was a pipe dream, a short lived pipe dream to fool the people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a matter of fact, I have been reliably informed that this thing would be abandoned, it would be abandoned, and there will be a booster pump from the Trinity Hills area with another in Gran Chemin and another where that monstrosity is at present so, that we will be able to get water straight into Marac for the people who have been suffering for too long.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a budget of hope. This is a budget that would bring a brighter tomorrow for every community in Trinidad and Tobago. This is a budget of the People’s Partnership and I want to graciously thank the Minister of Finance for his vision, for his wisdom. I want to thank Members on the other side for seeing that light and hope they will give that support.

Hon. Member: Thanking them for what?
Hon. C. De Coteau:—will give the support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government (Mrs. Nela Khan): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to thank you for the privilege of allowing me to debate on 2012 Appropriation Bill.

I support the intelligent and well-thought-out presentation of my colleague, the Minister of Finance, and also give full support to the fiscal measures and other associated policy prescriptions outlined in the budget presentation. So much has been said here tonight but allow me to speak a bit on the Ministry of Local Government where my heart and soul is.

The Minister of Local Government and Member for Fyzabad spoke on the performance of the Ministry of Local Government in fiscal 2011. In that presentation, the Minister defined the achievements and highlighted the challenges that we are in the process of overcoming at the Ministry of Local Government. I would like to focus my contribution on the vision of the future of local government. I wish to speak about the policies and programmes already underway and those on stream for the coming fiscal year that aim to achieve the vision of the People’s Partnership for local government—local government transformation and modernization. The previous administration spoke of reforming the Ministry of Local Government during their tenure. They went from local government reform Green Paper, to local government reform White Paper, and ended up again to local government reform Green Paper in which the people of Trinidad and Tobago had no confidence. They intended back then to close down or to shut down two local government corporations south of the Caroni bridge and to put hundreds of employees on the breadline.

Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership Government understands that society has grown and has come into the 21st Century. In order to address these changes and the needs of the society now, the People’s Partnership is focused on the modernization and transformation of local government.

11.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in fiscal 2011, we began this process through a thorough examination of the Municipal Corporations Act known as Act 21 of 1990 and its attendant amendments. This present Government has been diligently and tirelessly working to fill vacancies within the system as it is. The Act in itself has never been given a chance to function as it was intended due to the multitude of
vacancies that existed. Through filling the vacancies the current administration has started to address full implementation, and only in doing so can we determine what the real challenges are.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government proposes:

- full implementation of provisions of the existing Municipal Corporations Act, 21 of 1990;
- seeking constitutional guarantee for the existence of local government bodies;
- reviewing the legislative framework, inclusive of by-laws and regulations;
- defining and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of institutional stakeholders between the Ministry of Local Government and the municipal corporations;
- building capacity in both monthly and daily-rated staff;
- updating human resource policies and systems;
- strengthening the regional coordinating committee mechanism;
- establishing mechanisms for sustained and effective participatory democracy;
- increasing local government services through the devolution of authority from the Ministry to the municipalities;
- developing mechanisms to strengthen and modernize the accounting and accountability systems and practices with regard to the financial due diligence;
- establishing quality management and base-resource management systems and standards, as well as mechanisms for effective monitoring and evolution that will increase efficiency and impact projects;
- developing mechanisms to improve programme and project management and boost productivity;
- building institutional capacity to enable the delivery of quality services by accelerating training and development plans within the Ministry of Local Government;
- establishing a programme execution and monetary unit to monitor projects to ensure timely implementation within the budgetary framework.
The Ministry proposes to bring prompt closure to employees’ relation issues to increase motivation and productivity.

People’s participation: pillar six of the People’s Partnership Manifesto speaks of good governance and people’s participation. Three key elements of these pillars are:

- Strengthening of existing institutions;
- Enhancing democracy; and
- Strengthening execution and delivery capacity.

The People’s Partnership is committed to genuine democracy in order to improve the lives of people of our communities and enhance the relationship of the people with their Government. In this vein, I am proud to be part of a consultation which was held at Centre Point Mall in Chaguanas in which the response of that consultation was a positive one, illustrating that, as the MORI polls have often informed us, the public is not fully aware of the functions of local government. Many recently knew or found out who their councillors are and what the results are as regards local government elections which were long overdue.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, the consultation illustrated that there is a great need to address the local government system and its delivery of services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It was also an opportunity for the Ministry to get constructive feedback from the public and to inform of the activities of the Ministry. Mr. Speaker, local government is where the people of the country have their power. It is through local government that the voice of the people is heard. The goal of this administration is to make that voice stronger by empowering our people. In fiscal 2011 the projects undertaken by the municipal corporations and the four special purpose state enterprises were all identified through suggestions and recommendations by the Members of Parliament and local government representatives.

These are the representatives of the people, those who are on the ground and understand the needs of the constituents. Mr. Speaker, we have moved away from the ivory tower planning of the previous administration and are listening to the voices of our people. That is local government, Mr. Speaker. As our Prime Minister said when she addressed the Commonwealth Local Government Forum in Cardiff:

“The autocratic driven styles of governance are inconsistent with the values of people living in a freedom driven democratic…based world.”
Local government is not only one of the best examples of democracy, it is an action, but also it has the potential to unite communities around and share vision and mission. For this reason, the Minister of Finance has proposed higher allocations for each municipal corporation. This move has brought a measure of happiness to me, and I say this for those of you who are not aware that I have spent most of my life in local government serving at another house. This means that each municipal corporation will have more funds to provide goods and services directly to the people of this country. An increase in allocations to municipal corporations can translate into more citizens in each municipality being reached by the services of local government and for this I applaud the Minister of Finance for his budget presentation.

This 2012 budget is people oriented and I want to say this again for our friends sitting just in front of me. This 2012 budget is people oriented and as a result is geared to make people’s lives more comfortable. Mr. Speaker, when was the last time you heard of a budget with no taxes?

**Hon. Member:** Very true!

**Dr. Rowley:** What!

**Hon. N. Khan:** Every year—as a mother, Mr. Speaker—I hear women and I hear mothers cry when they go to the supermarket, cheese has gone up, milk has gone up, eggs have gone up, flour has gone up and everything has risen in the supermarket; today, they can rest comfortably by the budget presented by my colleague, the Minister of Finance. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, in order to improve institutional capability and organizational performance the Ministry of Local Government intends to undertake training of staff members at the Ministry and the municipal corporations in areas including: performance management, quality customer service, strategic human resource management, leadership skills, emotional intelligence as well as industrial relations, conflict management and procurement.

When we show an interest in the personal and career development of the staff it is reciprocated in a higher quality of service delivery. When the Ministry’s staff feels empowered through the provision of knowledge and training they can rise above the negative stigma unfairly attached to many public servants and provide efficient and effective services. People have been complaining generally for years of the ugly attitude and behaviour of staff at many government offices, and that is a fact.
While there are many of those who are very warm and receptive, my Government proposes to change that kind of behaviour wherever it exists in the Ministry of Local Government by way of training and performance management, information and communication technologies connecting Trinidad and Tobago and building a new economy. This is the vision of this administration. To enable our citizens to access the services of the Ministry of Local Government and to achieve their vision, we have embarked on a mission to connect all municipal corporations to the world, where all municipal corporations at the very least must have an email address where the public can contact not only their councillors but other officials at the local government corporations.

The Ministry of Local Government itself has a website which contains the contact information for all councillors in all corporations. The website—localgovernment.gov.tt—also contains the facility to submit complaints and queries online. This is making it easier for persons to have a direct outlet to contact their representatives and to become involved in their governance. In addition, it is the intention of the Ministry of Local Government to develop ICT incentive municipal corporations where the public can access a number of local government services online. This will reduce the burden on the physical structures; reduce the time needed for the public to access what they need, to provide a real-time experience for the public.

Mr. Speaker, in this fast-paced and high-tech world today one will understand the need to sit at one’s desk and conduct business as a group or as an organization without having the hassle to beat the traffic and the inclement weather. In the coming year the Ministry of Local Government would install a Voice over IP system which is intended to allow facilities such as videoconferencing and improve the connectivity among all the municipal corporations and with the Ministry at Kent House.

Strategic planning: to achieve Government’s overall goal of prosperity for all, the Ministries have initiated the process towards the development of both three-year and five-year strategic plans built around the seven interconnected development pillars which constitute the cornerstone of the strategy for the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Local Government is in fact so committed to proper planning that a session was held with our CEOs, mayors and chairmen of the municipal corporations and the heads of department of the Ministry of Local Government to establish the techniques and thorough process necessary for the development of a strategic plan. Continuing the commitment to this strategic planning process, another planning session is scheduled to be held in the coming weeks.
Policy development: in an effort to improve service delivery, the Ministry of Local Government is undertaking the development of local government policies on markets and abattoirs, play parks, public baths and conveniences, cemeteries, crematoriums and recreational facilities in fiscal 2012. There currently exists no comprehensive local government policy governing these facilities. It is the view of the People’s Partnership Government that these facilities are essential to the lives of citizens and that there should be some minimum standard to which these facilities should be subject. Mr. Speaker, it is vital that markets and abattoirs maintain the highest level of sanitation to prevent transmission of food-borne illnesses. In addition to all markets we should have proper refrigerated storage facilities as well as adequate and sanitary washrooms. This policy, therefore, will include developing a system of standards for the structures that would be used as markets and abattoirs as well as the management and operation of these facilities.

Subsequently, a programme of action and an implementation plan to achieve the agreed policy will also be designed. The local government policy for cemeteries and crematoriums will review the shortfalls in management and burial grounds, crematorium and cremation sites, burial spaces in urban and suburban areas and the lack of a national plan for upgrading and maintenance of public burial grounds. [Interruption] It is the intention of the Ministry of Local Government to have jurisdiction for a number of recreational facilities to develop a policy for the improvement, maintenance and use of all recreational facilities which would take into consideration the need for attractive appearances and serviceable amenities as well as being comfortable, safe and secure. The objective of the policy at health public baths and conveniences is to provide higher standards for public convenience, delivery and management.

Management of our environment: the management of waste of our country can be integrated within the area of protection of our environment. The Ministry of Local Government is committed to the modernization of the waste-management system in Trinidad and Tobago and achievement of the goal of building a world-class integrated waste-resource management system. Waste products may be used to establish industries which have enormous potential for income creation with added benefits to the environment. While solving important waste-management issues, the Ministry commenced the development of an integrated waste-management policy including a policy on recycling, participating
in a study tour to Nova Scotia with relations to an integrated waste-resource management. In accordance with Government’s green policy, visits were made to a state-of-the-art landfill, recycling collections and processing facilities, composting facilities, tyre-shed facility and Nova Scotia office of emergency management.

Mr. Speaker, you will realize that flooding is a major national issue affecting a number of our communities. I myself was involved in the distribution of hampers and mattresses to persons affected by flooding in my constituency of Princes Town in August 2010. One of the major contributors to the problem of flooding is the indiscriminate littering of the nation’s waterways. To combat this, my Government is committed to the development of the integrated waste management policy, which will include a policy on recycling, an implementation plan for enforcement of the Litter Act, a proposal to facilitate the removal of household bulk waste, Mr. Speaker, promotion of a culture of recycling through demonstration projects and a national clean-up campaign.

12.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, a well-crafted waste management strategy will reap many rewards for citizens of this country, and in addition, will contribute to our ability to withstand and recover from incidents of natural disasters.

Disaster Management: Mr. Speaker, with respect to disaster management, a system of prevention and mitigation of natural disasters will be instituted to increase our capacity and to deal quickly with emergencies and strengthen our ability to reconstruct and rebuild after an event. The Ministry of Local Government will play a vital role by implementing a comprehensive disaster management plan. This plan will include, inter alia, prevention of flooding by a coordinated effort to address water resources management, drainage and irrigation.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government, through the disaster management unit in each municipal corporation, along with my Government, is working to strengthen this country’s capacity, not only to deal with an emergency response and reconstructive measures, but also to increase and improve preventative measures where some disasters can be avoided. In conjunction with other agencies, the Ministry of Local Government is working towards inculcating a culture of safety through public education and awareness in the areas of disaster prevention and risk management.
A comprehensive disaster management policy framework will be used as a guide as we seek to move towards comprehensive disaster management risk and away from other activities.

Local area and regional planning and development: Citizens’ participation has been the utmost importance of our decision-making process as evidenced by continuous consultation and consensus. In keeping with this policy, regional development plans based on community input have been developed for all municipalities. This approach, Mr. Speaker, will recognize the skills and the strengths and the resources that reside within communities, while taking into account the national land use policy currently being drafted. In this regard, the development of an institutional framework for the devolution of local area and regional planning responsibility to municipal corporations, has been proposed.

Planning and Development Land Bill: through the process legislation, the Planning and Development of Land Bill, there will be accountability to Parliament, as well as sustainable delegation of powers. This Bill provides for the establishment of a multi-stakeholder planning commission delegation of development planning and development control through municipal corporations; integration and coordination of planning and building approval at the municipal level; establishment of a statutory chief building inspectorate to provide a technical oversight function to the municipal corporations; provision of a one-stop shop of statutory agencies involved in the development regulatory regime, and the creation of a statutory appeal process to replace the current ad hoc procedures of appeals to the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government, in collaboration with other Ministries will be involved in closely linking Government’s priorities with local plans and community aspirations, development and developing of community planning framework for the 14 local government regions that are all aligned with national goals and priorities:

This framework will help in the elimination of regional disparities and uneven development across the country: instituting a monitoring and evaluation system, to ensure that specific outcomes are being achieved; developing initiatives to realize sustainable planning such as the designation of East Port of Spain as one of five economic growth poles in Trinidad and Tobago; a plan for the construction and upgrade of the Port of Spain city centre to encourage economic growth and development in the surrounding districts.
In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, all that I have said illustrates that this budget does not represent a simple aggregation of projects. It is, in fact, part of this larger outcome of improving the lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that local government is directly involved in the lives of the people. Local government is a quiet, unforeseen force, focused on the provision and maintenance of the basic community infrastructure in an equitable and non-discriminatory manner and an adherence to international engineering and safety standards; the creation of mechanisms and systems at every level of the local governing structure to encourage the public to participate meaningfully in policy formulation and decision-making process; effective municipal management to ensure operational efficiency and quality service delivery; and local capacity development to improve the quality of service and delivery.

Mr. Speaker, what the Ministry of Local Government is trying to achieve in fiscal 2012 and the years to come is the development of a new leadership and a complete overhaul of restoration of the spirit and manifestation of people’s participation in politics. We have put in place policies and programmes, which will, of course, facilitate sustainable economic and social development just as we are committed to citizens’ participation in decisions at community level. Mr. Speaker, this approach utilizes the skills and abilities of all citizens and advocates and maximizes this knowledge as found at all levels of the society and programmes and policies and recognizes they can only be enriched by involving our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, the way forward for enhanced services to the people of this country can well be accomplished by greater collaboration between stakeholders—that of the Ministry of Local Government and all our stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, I now want to turn your attention to my constituency—the most neglected constituency in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago by the former regime. In my humble view, when a government is voted out of office it means that some things are not right. It means that you have not delivered the goods and services to your people. Over the years, the past regime did nothing to improve the lives of the people of the constituency of Princes Town. The network of roads in Princes Town for the first time is seeing a facelift. I had the privilege to serve in another House similar to this where recommendations were made week after week to the then government for roadworks and other infrastructural development as it relates. But blind eyes and deaf ears were the order of the day. It was only sheer frustration by the then government for residents of Princes Town. Mr. Speaker, you cannot imagine the extent of neglect and the utter disrespect to taxpayers and other residents by the past regime.
Mr. Speaker, I may have to ask you to simply close your eyes for two seconds—for a couple of seconds—and imagine one particular roadway with over 31 landslips. I heard my brother say Moruga/Tableland is the landslip capital. Today, I want to tell him 31 landslips on one road, Mr. Speaker. Have you ever heard of such? Hardly anywhere to put your feet, much less to drive your car. I will call Princes Town the landslip capital to my hon. friend of Moruga/Tableland. I do not even believe that the former regime left their offices in north and journeyed to the southern areas so far as to get first-hand information and to see what rural neglect really is: deplorable road conditions, lack of drainage leading into flooding problems, lack of job opportunities. Our present Minister of Works and Infrastructure visited and he can attest to this, Mr. Speaker. That road is called the St. Julien Road and there are many other roads that are similar in nature. Gross disrespect and neglect, to the highest order by the last government, and they claim they care. I ask the question, Mr. Speaker, care for whom and care for what? Had they at least topped up, we would have been in a better situation than we are today in the constituency of Princes Town.

In my humble view, Mr. Speaker, I think that south of the Caroni Bridge was never part of Trinidad. I humbly believe that south of the Caroni Bridge was never part of Trinidad. [Desk thumping] That was in the mind of the past regime. The wealth of the country comes from the southern area, Mr. Speaker, and yet the southern area has been deplorable over the years that the past regime has represented Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the People’s Partnership Government major roadworks and restoration of those landslips have started, after which we will start paving pretty soon. Soon to come in my constituency is the linking of the old Piparo Road to the new Hoseini Dandagie Trace. You may recall—and I feel a chill when I say this—in February 1997, that hot and horrific day when the Piparo volcano reacted and resulted in a disaster to the people of Piparo, that disaster, Mr. Speaker, cut off communications to the upper and lower Piparo Road, causing damages, loss of houses, loss of livestock, vehicles and personal belongings and posed a serious inconvenience to residents. Most of the residents were relocated to the Buen Intento area.

Mr. Speaker, this new link in connecting both ends of the roadway will now enable residents and motorists access from one end to the other in only a matter of a few minutes. I remember the look on the Minister’s face, Minister Warner, when he visited and saw the conditions of these roadways. He looked at me, shook his head and said, “I have never seen any such thing in my entire life. This is neglect to the highest order.”
The trauma experienced by those residents is unexplainable. They still live with fear that one day there could be a recurrence of that horrific day in February, 1997. I can say today, Mr. Speaker, that Sisters Road, Brothers Road, Williamsville, Hardbargain, Poole Village, the entire constituency, infrastructural development works have started under the People’s Partnership Government, road paving has started in many roads and many traces. Hundreds of metres of box drains have started, bridges, road repairs, landslips, et cetera. Residents can now see a new expansion of the bus service. I commend the efforts of the Minister of Works and Infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, residents are overwhelmed by the delivery of our new community facility, the La Gloria Community Centre, the inclusion of people’s participation; soon to come to Sisters Road Community Centre, all of this with input of people’s participation. The former administrative office of the now defunct Caroni (1975) Limited at Brothers Estate, Garth Road, Williamsville, to be used and upgraded for the use of a multipurpose centre for adult education and training, early childhood education, youth development and enhancement programmes, craft and other training, to be used, as well, as a shelter for victims of natural disaster.

Housing: soon to come almost 500 new houses in the Fair Field and Matilda area [Desk thumping] all to satisfy the housing needs of our people. I have in my office, Mr. Speaker, applications of persons who are in waiting and have been waiting for more than 15 years; hundreds of applications. The Minister of Housing understands the housing needs and has given the undertaking to the constituency and to myself of Princes Town to construct and deliver these houses in a timely fashion. That is delivery of the People’s Partnership [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we will open doors for employment in the construction industry—the Buen Intento housing development; you would not want to see what one of those houses looks like today that was built by the past regime. Mr. Speaker, what I am about to say to you is the truth, and I have witnessed it. These houses are falling apart and my understanding is that when you turn the light switch on the light comes off and when you turn the taps on for water to run you shut the water off instead. The steps have left the houses and are standing apart. The steps are separated from the houses in the Buen Intento housing area, built by the past regime.

Recreational Facilities: over the years imagine the gross neglect and total disrespect to our youths and to the sport minded. The Yolande Pompey Recreation Ground: this ground has been sitting bare although it is in full use;
totally abandoned by the past regime. This ground is soon to be outfitted with a multi-purpose court of international standard; football, basketball, cricket, practice pitch, all for the advancement of sports and youth development, to the people of Princes Town. In the very near future, the construction of pavilions and jogging tracks at the Tableland Recreation Ground, and Gangaram Recreation Ground, and of course Johnstone Recreation Ground respectively; an opportunity for job creation, a way of keeping our community and our people together.

12.15 a.m.

Agricultural initiatives: Princes Town can boast of having some of the best farm-produced pineapples and amongst the basket as well—I see my colleague the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, when I speak about pineapples and I know he can attest to the fact that Princes Town produces some of the best pineapples, of course the best food baskets. The organization called (TTABA) Trinidad & Tobago Agri-Business Association with hundreds of farmers is leading the way in building and maximizing the farmer’s full potential in the agricultural sector with the assistance of the Minister of Food Production. Many farmers are already on their way to a more productive food basket. This initiative is to create employment in the agricultural sector. I commend my Prime Minister for this initiative in the saying, in the quote, in the belief, that the nation would of course feed itself.

Public and social services: over the past year with the assistance of the Minister of Community Development and the Minister of Social Services respectively, many deserving citizens have gotten assistance in the various areas of services. Mr. Speaker, it breaks my heart to hear citizens say that never have they ever known that such services existed under the Ministry of Community Development and the Ministry of Social Services. South of the Caroni bridge, again, has always been neglected. House repair grants, NSDP grants, GATE programmes, CDF grants, Self Help grants. South of the Caroni bridge knew very little of these grants that were given by the past regime. They were amazed when they heard of such grants—and people of course who are in dire need of it applied for those grants. “I knew absolutely nothing” they said of such grants, and they were happy to come to our offices to sit and talk to us about these grants, and the way they operate, and whom they are really for.

The constituency of Princes Town is on the way to being transformed to a place where one would be happy to live, play and recreate. Constituents have claimed that they are quite comfortable, and have deemed this budget as the best they have ever heard, and asked me to congratulate, through you, Mr. Speaker,
our Minister of Finance, the hon. Winston Dookeran. Today I stand and I commend our hon. Minister of Finance and give full support to this Bill. Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity. [Desk thumping]

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of the People, Social Development (Hon. Dr. Lincoln Douglas):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a tremendous joy to make my contribution on this 2012 budget. I want to thank the Minister of Finance for giving us the opportunity—for putting out this budget in such a beautiful way. The theme of the budget says “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”. Foundation is important. I hear the Opposition constantly complaining about things not happening or about this, and that, and the other. And usually it takes a while to put down a foundation, because it is the most stable part of your home, or your house, or your building.

There is a story about two men who went to build a house. One “fella” went out quickly and he found a place that looked good and he built a house. The other one took some time, he dug a foundation and it took him a while to put down his house, but then the rains came and the wind started to blow, and the guy who put down his house on the sand, it was completely destroyed. That reminds me of the PNM, why they are not in power today. They built their house on the sand and it fell apart. Today, the Minister of Finance is taking us from a steady foundation to economic transformation.

When I saw the newspaper today, there was an internal headline saying “Rowley Expected to Drop Bombshells Today”. I came to the Parliament expecting to hear some deep analysis, some profound insights, some deep wisdom of the budget, and all I heard was—there was no bombshell really, there were just small shells. As a matter of fact, most of what he said amounted to things like, “They say they are leading us to a promised land, but they are taking us over a cliff”, things like “nothing is going on”, and I am sure that either he was not awake or was under some thing that made him say these statements. So I will just start at the end of my speech by saying in my constituency in particular there has been a lot going on.

When I campaigned for Lopinot/Bon Air West, I promised the people that there would be a lot of infrastructural development, there would be land regularization, we would do work in education and we would help provide jobs
and employment. I want to say today that in all of these areas the People’s Partnership has made a profound contribution to the people of Lopinot/Bon Air West, in each of these areas.

In the areas of land regularization and access to land this Government has embarked upon regularization of most of the squatters in my constituency. Right now in Windy Hill, Bon Air North, in Five Rivers, we are pioneering a collaborative process between the Land Settlement Agency—

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, please, I am trying to hear and I am having some challenges.

Miss Mc Donald: My apologies, Mr. Speaker, but the Member for Fyzabad is interfering with me.

Mr. Speaker: Well do not interfere with him either. [Laughter] Please! Please!

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: I guess that would be easy from quite over there. [Laughter] We have begun the process of land regularization. A collaborative process between the MP’s office and the Land Settlement Agency in my constituency. As you would know, my constituency is on the base of the Northern Range and it has been plagued with constant flooding. Right in the area where I grew up there was a bridge there—the very day we got into office, the next day it flooded. When I got there, I called the Member of Parliament and I called the Local Government representative and said “the bridge is flooded”. The local government representative told me “you will find out nothing can be done with that”. I called the Ministry of Works—well, where is the former Minister of Works? He is not here. He said nothing can be done.

We proceeded. I called the Minister of Works a little after, he came the next day and sent some engineers. That bridge last year flooded three times; the guy who lives on the bridge, his house was flooded three times. Since that bridge has been fixed it has never flooded. One would have thought that this was a terribly complicated process why it was not done by the past administration. I grew up knowing this place flooding. You would have thought that this was something that could not be fixed. It was fixed in two weeks. That is the kind of delivery we are talking about in the People’s Partnership. I am telling you. [Desk thumping]

The Mausica River washed away its bank. I called the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. The Marsican Pan Tent that is on the river itself fell into the river. I called the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, on a holiday, he came the
morning, by the evening engineers were there. In three weeks’ time they built the retaining wall, they shored up the property on either side, they extended the space for the Marsican Pan Tent and so today that is done.

I ask myself, why have not these things been done before? It seems to me, in my mind, growing up I thought that these were impossible things. I just did not know that these people were inept, unable, and lacking the capability to deliver. [Desk thumping] And so today, the nation is facing the People’s Partnership administration that can deliver these things. Roads, rivers, bridges, drains—these things are happening and people are seeing them happening—retaining walls. And it is not only because I am in Government. I was walking through Cleaver and a woman came to me whom I did not even know and she said—I picked up my phone, I called the Minister of Works—this is not somebody that he knew or I knew or anybody knew. He said he was on his way from the country, he stopped in visited the lady, fixed the retaining wall in a couple of weeks. Why were these things not happening before?

Mr. Samuel: Wrong Minister of Works.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: The Minister of Works who was there before he had a curfew in his own office. He put a curfew around an elevator nobody could have gone into except him. He had a state of emergency in his own office. These are people who apparently did not go and visit people. Today we are finding so many things happening: the delivery of goods and services, roads being repaired, people are finding employment, homes are now being built in the community, jobs, and I could go on and on to demonstrate that the People’s Partnership, contrary to what the Leader of Opposition said, has been delivering on the ground [Desk thumping] and the MPs have been there meeting with people [Desk thumping] and that is the kind of Government we are facing.

Establishment of the Children’s Life Fund, providing laptop computers, raising the pension for senior citizens, raising the minimum wage, all of these things demonstrate what? As the Minister of Finance has rightly said economic development goes hand in hand with social development for a country to be developed.

Mr. Samuel: That is right.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: And so far, especially, from the Leader of the Opposition, his analysis about development has completely been in the area talking about finance, and about money, not understanding that the way of life of a people, their ability to enjoy a better life, to walk on the road, like the people in
Spring Road in my constituency, who said for years we were walking in mud and the river kept flooding and right now works are going on there. That is the ability to enjoy a better way of living. That is what development is; it is about a movement towards a better way of living. That is what this Government is addressing, what we call a people-centered development. You know what is people-centered development? For example, if you have $500 in your hand and you are deciding what shall I do with this $500? You could help people or you decide to build a building. Helping people would help to do with their way of life, their access to goods and services, their ability to the take care of themselves, food, et cetera. That is what is happening with the People’s Partnership Government, we are bringing social development alongside economic development. That is what we call people-centered development. Ladies and gentlemen, that is what the People’s Partnership is about. [Desk thumping] And so that brings me—[Interruption] Somebody did not understand it.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Repeat that. [Crosstalk]

**Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:** Stay quiet you might learn something. That is the nexus between economic development and social development. For us in the Ministry of the People and Social Development we are clear about this. We are clear that development is about a movement towards a more meaningful way of living. Hear how it is stated, hear how the Minister of Finance states it: The process of economic transformation, must occur simultaneously, with social transformation

**Mr. Samuel:** That is right.

**Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:** And must not only involve strategic reform measures within the social sector but on a deeper level the transforming of our values and attitudes. Because you cannot change a culture, you cannot develop a society if the values and the attitudes are not changed. So, there are various areas that are targeted for reform: reducing poverty, education and training, developing the health system, regional and community development, housing and community creation, social development—

**Hon. Member:** Sounding like a sermon. [Laughter]

**Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:**—social development, and that is what we are about, that is what the People’s Partnership is about. [Desk thumping] Our commitment to poverty eradication, to social development and social justice, is a perspective on development that requires addressing poverty in all its dimensions, not only
the absence of money, but people’s ability to take care of themselves to re-create, to recreate, to be able to live in a community, to go to school and feel good about themselves.

12.30 a.m.

These are the kinds of issues that the People’s Partnership Government—that is the kind of issues that we are concerned about—how are our people going to live? People-centred approach to poverty eradication; advocating the empowerment of people living in poverty through their full participation in all aspects of political, economic and social life, especially policies that affect the poorest and the most vulnerable groups in society.

Who are these vulnerable groups in society? The vulnerable groups in society are children, single parents, socially displaced people, young people, and it goes on—the people who do not have, in some way, the resources to pull themselves up by the bootstrap. Some people would say, just pull themselves up by the bootstrap, but some people do not even have boots, and the boots they have do not have any straps. So they need the services of a caring Government to provide an enabling environment so that they could move on with their lives.

So that is why the People’s Partnership Government is here to help provide an enabling environment so that people could lift themselves out of a state of poverty. It is too bad that so much of our resources have been wasted on non-people-centred development, and a lot of our resources went that way.

So, today I am happy to identify with this budget. We want to assist in the change of values and attitudes. How did the Minister of Finance put it in the document?—“we want to instill a passion for life.” A passion for life. Civic responsibility; productivity; equitable and an inclusive society, meaning a place where all people can find a way to live out their full potential. All peoples can find a way to full potential. We are out of that idea where everything has to be organized around a tribe, and to be organized around an ethnicity or a race. So much of this conversation in the past has been around “race” and “we people” and “they people” and “up here” and “down there”. I want to disassociate myself, distance myself from that old regime PNM “ol’ talk” about race, ethnicity, across so, back so, et cetera. [Laughter] We are here to create an equitable society. [Desk thumping] We are here to create a society where all people can participate. We are here to fulfil the mandate of our National Anthem where every creed and race can find an equal place.
So that is why we are debunking the idea of cultural dependency. You will find an improvement in CEPEP; you will find an improvement in URP. That is why our Prime Minister took the initiative to say, some will go here in agriculture; some go here in the Ministry of the People and Social Development and some will go in agriculture. The way we are using URP in terms of social is to assist with cultural groups; to assist with building houses for people—

Mr. Speaker: You know, hon. Members. I looked at television whilst I was away for a few moments, and I can tell you that when a Member is on his legs, because of the configuration of this hall, and you get this constant crosstalk, your voices are echoing on the television, and you are confusing the population.

I want to appeal to all Members, because of our new location and the closeness that we are occupying in terms of space, please, speak in undertones; too much overtones. And we are distorting the contributions being made by Members who are on their legs. I wish to appeal to Members, in the interest of a good flow going to the population, please, if you have to converse, keep it in some degree of undertones; and do not be intervening and engaging in unnecessary “ol’ talk.”

If I cannot get your cooperation after guiding and cautioning, I will have to enforce the rules. So, please allow the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West to speak in silence; and if you have to speak, just do it very, very softly. Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In terms of dealing with our culture and a new sense of values and attitudes, we understand that the budget itself is addressing the issue of providing support for family life. Why? Because the family is at the base of our culture. That is our first place of learning our values, our attitudes, our understanding of the world.

Priority will be placed on a range of family-focused initiatives during the year 2011/2012 fiscal year. These will include the development of community outreach programmes that would sensitize citizens about services available to families, and indeed, the Ministry of the People and Social Development has embarked upon that. I am sure the Minister will expound some more on that, reaching out into communities so that they can understand; dealing with issues of domestic violence; implementation of initiatives, focused on rebuilding positive social values with particular attention to healthy family life.

Issues of children: we have been working feverishly on the Children’s Bill; that involves a whole package of legislation to secure and to protect our children. Young people: the Prime Minister has allocated a Ministry that focuses primarily
on youth, and so this demonstrates the compassion of the People’s Partnership Government of what it means to be a caring Government; how to organize a budget so that it not only contributes to an industrial framework of development but also contributes to a people-centred form of development.

There is a form of development that is an industrial form of development which puts human beings against machines, and says, the more technology you have, and the more plant and industry you have, the more developed you are. We have long realized that that is not true, that there has to be an even balance between designing technology that could serve its people and addressing the basic needs of human beings.

So we have continued to emphasize the issue of social integration. How do we get our people to belong and to understand that they are part of a country, part of a culture, part of Trinidad and Tobago? Initiatives will be implemented to ensure that persons who are vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion are socially integrated; continued rehabilitation of socially displaced people and substance abuse. We have been working hard at this issue.

You would realize, Mr. Speaker, that successive past PNM administrations have tried to address the issue of the socially displaced people, and they have failed miserably. Why? Because, as I said earlier, they have built a house on sand. And yet we have a man here in the city who continues to jump up and down, talking about “why not take the people off the streets”, and he does not understand the breadth or the work that is involved in doing something like this. First of all, you have to have proper legislation which we are bringing before the Government within this season to pass proper legislation to move somebody off the street involuntarily.

12.45 a.m.

That has to be done, otherwise what has happened before will continue to happen. You would take people off the streets by the hundreds, take them to the courts, take them to the mental health institutions and then they would be back on the streets the next day. So, we have to have a robust piece of legislation that would give us the power to physically remove somebody off the streets against their will, which is what the Mayor wants, but he does not know that requires some serious thinking and legislation. It requires proper assessment of people, so that you can know what is the situation with them, whether they are mentally ill, whether they are drug addicts or whether they have physical—other kinds of
things such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS. All of these things have to happen. You have to have a proper assessment centre. You need to work with the mental health institution, the Ministry of Health, so that they could have the proper legislative teeth, they could have the proper staffing to go out and evaluate people so that you can bring them in.

You have to work with law enforcement that is responsible if it is you have to arrest somebody on the street. All of these things have to be worked out so that there is a smooth flow. This is what we talked about, building a foundation, so that your house does not fall flat and you end up being rejected by the people. We are dealing with this in a concerted and consistent manner, so that we can address the issue and when it is done, it is done and we would not have two containers sitting by somewhere that you spent millions of dollars that nobody is living in. You know there are hundreds of people up at St. Ann’s. They just live on the compound there because they do not have anywhere to go. All of these things have to be addressed. Yet the man is jumping up every day like a jack in a box or a jack rabbit, talking, talking, talking. No wonder—[Interruption]

Mr. Warner: Not Jack.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Sorry, not this Jack. He is jumping up everyday talking. No wonder why you have to say serious things to him. That is what we are talking about, social integration and public awareness campaign on the issue of disability. You would realize that in this budget, there is a serious address to people with disabilities. They now have immediate access to grants and a whole range of other support services from the Ministry of the People and Social Development. This is what we call the vulnerable in our society. And that is how our society is judged, not by the rich and famous, but by how we treat the most vulnerable.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is right.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: And we are making those efforts. I continue: establishment of day-care centres for persons with disabilities and day-care centres for persons with mental illness so that the strain and the burden are not always on the family. There are places they can go, or they can trust people to take care of them whilst they are away. All of these things have to be worked out. That is what we call building a strong foundation.

The expansion of facilities for ex-prisoners: I am sure the Minister will talk about that as we collaborate with NGOs, et cetera, to make Trinidad and Tobago a much more livable space. This is what we are talking about; a people-centred development.
Poverty eradication—Mr. Speaker, that during the tenure of the last regime, the disparity rate, in terms of rich and poor increased by about 2 per cent. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer. These things have to be carefully thought out, so we can address the needs of our people in Trinidad and Tobago.

We came here today to talk about these pillars of ours: poverty, people-centred development; poverty eradication; a more diversified knowledge-intensive economy; a place where we can use education, agriculture, tourism, sports, all of these things, knowledge and a diversification of our economy, so that we expand the participation of our people and the opportunities for them to use their own natural innate talents and abilities to make their lives better.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of the People and Social Development continues to lead the way in the social development of our culture and confronting family poverty and social exclusion. Our Government endorses this budget as put forward by the Minister of Finance. The social issues that we face are often triggered by poverty. Poverty forms the breeding ground for child abuse and domestic violence, especially against women in our society, and these have other long-standing repercussions such as dysfunctional families that smother the dreams and the aspirations of children who have the potential to lead productive lives, and our women who are the backbone of our society. They are the ones who make our dreams a reality. Our Ministry, the Ministry of the People and Social Development stands behind our people. We focus on the poor and the disadvantaged, the marginalized and the vulnerable members of families. You will find that we are now moving towards what we call the RISE UP Programme. These things existed on paper within the Ministry, but nobody ever thought about implementing them.

Hon. Member: Lies.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: You “hear” about it before? Mr. Speaker, have you heard about this before? RISE UP is a movement towards putting a surround system around the family, where poverty is dealt with as a totality: the whole family, the father, the mother, the parents, if they need counselling, if they need food, if they need education, whatever, to move a whole family out of poverty and focus less—and that is part of the targeted conditional cash transfer programme, so this is the conditional part of the cash; as you get it, you make an agreement that this is how you want to organize your life, so that you can move out of poverty; ongoing ways of developing our people, the development of our community, so that we would have communities that are harmonious.
Harmony, Mr. Speaker, is different from a kind of forced unity or a compartmentalized form of unity. Harmony is like people are allowed to be different but yet they form a mosaic, a nice place and a nice space to live. It is like an instrument, like an orchestra where different people are playing different things; sometimes even at different timing, but when you listen to the whole thing, it makes a beautiful sound. That is what we are trying to create, harmonious communities.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago recognized that leadership encourages improved outcomes, and that is what we are providing for our citizens. So, we are moving forward. Our approach to social development is one which strives to provide all citizens with the opportunity to attain maximum development, ensuring that the needs of the poor and disadvantaged are given priority. As such, the citizens of this country are therefore entitled to a sustainable livelihood. This is supported by social justice, which demands that abject poverty be reduced and ultimately eradicated. Also, providing a safety network for the poor and vulnerable is fundamental to the nation’s approach to development.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to be long again, but I do want to emphasize the issue of a more diversified knowledge-intensive economy. I do want to emphasize that the People’s Partnership Government is committed to changing the thinking and the way of being; that people can participate in their own development.

I have been working on this. I have been trying to get some young people in my community who came to me, probably the first week I was in office and said they want “ah lil wuk”. They always come to me asking for “ah lil wuk”. I “kinda” repeat to them “yuh could get ah big wuk if yuh want, or yuh could get something even bigger than that.” I tried to get them to form a company. After a year, they came back to me and I said: “Do you guys have the company? Dey say: no boss we just want ah lil wuk.” That was after a year. This is the cycle of thinking that we in, the People’s Partnership Government understand that keeps our nation from progressing, from being developed. This is the cycle of dependency that has been perpetuated and ingrained in our society by those who feel that they could win elections and run a country by keeping people subservient and lacking in knowledge. We have gone past that. We are here to bring a new sense of value to the people in Arouca and to the people in Bon Air. [Desk thumping] So, today, we are driving the agenda of a more diversified knowledge-intensive economy.

I do not want to go on anymore, but I just want to say that we are in full support of this budget that demonstrates that we have laid a foundation, we have
taken the time to do that; to create a space that we can build on. And now we are moving forward to economic transformation, and to social transformation of our society. It is in this regard that I commend the Minister of Finance for bringing to us this 2012 budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nileung Hypolite (Laventille West): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. At 12.51 a.m. this Saturday morning of October 15, 2011. This Government continues to promise the heaven and the stars, milk and honey—([Interruption]

Mr. De Coteau: And we will.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—and delivering water and mud; more water and mud every time rain falls. I also wish to echo your sentiments with regard to the team of persons who would have made this Chamber here and the moving of the Parliament possible. I also wish to add to your list of persons whom you would have complimented, the former Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East—([Desk thumping and crosstalk] for having a foresight, for having a vision and for doing a number of things for this country and developing this country to date.

1.00 a.m.

I also wish, Mr. Speaker, to remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because the Members on the other side come to this House and they try to make the people of Trinidad and Tobago believe that under the People’s National Movement between the years 2002 and 2010 nothing was done.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind them of NAPA north and NAPA south. ([Desk thumping] NAPA is the building which they use almost every single day to host functions left, right and centre. ([Desk thumping] Let me also remind them of the Diplomatic Centre. The Diplomatic Centre, just to remind the Members on the other side, the present Prime Minister indicated that she would not be going to the Diplomatic Centre to live, rather she would open it up. That is what she said. ([Interruption] She did—someone in the back there said that is exactly what she did. Yes, she opened it up and she went there to live, and she is living there still. Up to today she is still inside there.

Hon. Member: Happily! Happily!

Mr. N. Hypolite: Let me also—the point is—([Interruption]—no. The point is, she said she was not going and she is there—([Interruption]—and she is there. ([Crosstalk]
Let me also remind the Members of this House of the rapid rail system, a plan which we had, which is a much more advanced and well-thought-out plan than that of the bus rapid rail system that we are hearing in this budget at this point in time. [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker—yeah, the bus transit rapid system, whatever it is you all talked about, [Laughter] because that was what you all came up with; [Desk thumping] [Laughter] the bus rapid transit system. The Minister of Finance made mention of that.

Let me also remind them of the protection of our borders. We had put a plan in place for that. [Crosstalk] Let me also remind them of the education for all from nursery to tertiary, constitutional reform, local government reform, the roads and bridges authority—[Interrupt]

Hon. Member: “That get vote out.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: My dear friend, if you check the same budget document which your Minister of Finance, your good colleague from Tunapuna, would have presented, you would have realized that the roads and bridges authority is inside there, so talk again—page 98.

The Uriah Butler interchange, another project by the People’s National Movement, the Aranguez interchange, houses—[Crosstalk]

Miss McDonald: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40(a), (b) and (c), disturbances from in the back there.

Mr. Speaker: Yes; okay, I hear you. Members, Members, I want to sustain the point that has been raised. If you are not interested, Members on the Government side and even some Members on the Opposition side, if you all are not interested in hearing the Member for Laventille West, I am, and I want to invite every one of you who is not interested to retire to the lounge, and allow me and other Members who are desirous of hearing the Member for Laventille West to do so.

I think I have reached a point where I will really have to invoke the Standing Orders. I have already indicated to Members that the crosstalk is not helping the quality of that flow which is necessary into the various homes of our country. Citizens who are looking at this channel 11, they are getting a distorted view of what is being said by the speaker because of the fact there is too much crosstalk.

I want to appeal to Members; it is late, some of you are sleepy, I would say retire to the lounge but please, allow the Member on his legs to speak in silence.
and I uphold the point made by the Member for Port of Spain South; observe Standing Order 40(a), (b) and (c). Hon. Member for Laventille West, continue. [Desk thumping]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They spoke about—Members on the other side—building strong foundations and it seems as if they, being in Government now, can understand what building strong foundations is all about. The People’s National Movement also had an opportunity to build strong foundations and if we did not do just that, we would not have been where we are today, having this country developed to a point that they can now take and make good use of and move ahead with it. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite made mention of the Government’s 365 day pillars of national development and he told us to go to this document and we can read about all the successful accomplishments and issues pertaining to what the Government of the day would have done. When I go to that same document and I turn to page 34—and I also listened to the Member for Princes Town who spoke about local government issues—two points under the Ministry of Local Government: first point, continued the market programme including the construction of San Juan market after years of inaction. Second point, completed play park at Samaan Drive and Lime Boulevard, Santa Rosa; Emperor Boulevard, Bon Air; Nairn Avenue, and West Park, South Macoya. According to this same document, the Ministry of Local Government would have only accomplished two key projects within their 365 days.

I, however, will want to thank the Minister of Local Government for the San Juan market. I have to acknowledge him for the work that he has put into the San Juan market. [Desk thumping] I also wish to thank the Chairman of the San Juan Regional Corporation, the Council. I also wish to thank the vendors up at that market, and even the customers who would pass through that market and purchase.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas West said he would like to have a stall, then you would need to speak to the Minister of Local Government. The Minister of Local Government visited that market yesterday and we were advised that the first phase of that market will be completed by the end of this October month. I think that one must acknowledge that, because it is a market which the people in that area really and truly need. But more than just that, the San Juan market is probably the only key project that is being done under the Ministry of Local Government.
When you look around you are not seeing any major projects being done under the Ministry of Local Government except, of course, that of the San Juan market.

Mr. Speaker, when you speak to members of various councils throughout the various corporations, you would hear the cry for local government reform. Local government reform is something that we need to bring back on the front burner. The People’s National Movement had a Green Paper and a White Paper on local government reform. The local government reform that we looked at was something very much similar to that of the operation of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) where you would have executive council and the chairman or mayor would be holding down an executive position and the other members of council will hold secretary of finance and secretary of works and it would be a mirrored event to that of central government. I would like to ask the Minister of Local Government to look at bringing local government reform back on the front burner of that particular Ministry.

Then we have a second part of that whole Ministry of Local Government and that is the development plan. Throughout all 14 corporations a development plan was put together to develop the various regions. That plan was in its final draft since April 2010 and I would probably want to ask the Minister: where is that plan to date? The Member for Princes Town would have spoken about wanting to reform and do over and re-plan and all kinds of different “REs”, but there is a document that was put together on every single regional corporation and for each one of those corporations we left a development plan.

This is the development plan for the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. [Holds up document] This plan speaks about heritage and culture, local economic base, infrastructure, land development opportunities; it speaks also of projects and one can identify with six projects coming out of this particular plan. One of the goals of, let us say, Barataria, which is one out of the six projects, is to densify residential use by building 600 new houses and replacing 400 houses upgrading the residential environment and public space. That does two things. It provides housing, for the people who need, so it assists the Ministry of Housing and the Environment and it also develops that particular regional area.

If you look at another project, the Croissee, and we look at the goal for there, you realize it is to develop the area to a modernized, functionally viable and commercial service centre for the metropolitan district. Then, if you look at Las Cuevas, the goal, the recreational function of Las Cuevas can be increased, expand the facilities for day visitors to the beach and also for long-stay tourism.
One can also look at another project, the El Socorro extension. The goal for that particular project is to build 2,000 new houses in a density of 60 dwelling houses with adequate flood prevention measures.

1.15 a.m.

The point is that the People’s National Movement would have done a lot of work with respect to regional development. We would have done a lot of work with respect to local government reform. This Government has gone very, very silent on local government reform. [Desk thumping] Even though the Prime Minister in 2010 would have indicated that any reform of the country’s local government system would have been done after July 26, 2010, it was also stated that the new arrangements to finance local government bodies will be reviewed and implemented. Mr. Speaker, local government reform is one of the most silent policies, one of the most silent events; a very silent plan of this particular Government.

Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry of Local Government you also have a couple of special purpose companies, and these special purpose companies were designed or were formed to assist in the development of certain communities. In fact, the mandate of these special purpose companies was to go into communities, meet with the members of the communities, identify the issues within those communities, fix those issues and move out. One such special purpose company is that of CISL, another is East Port of Spain Development Company Limited.

Mr. Speaker, the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited was formed to look after development of Laventille, East Port of Spain, Morvant, or an area that starts from Piccadilly Street and goes eastward up to Barataria. That company was given a mandate to develop that particular area. It is my understanding that while Members of the Government are speaking about equal distribution, here it is that the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited, responsible for the development of the East Port of Spain area requested in 2011, $27 million to do a couple projects in Laventille, East Port of Spain, in the Morvant areas—$27 million. Some of these projects prepare community centres, prepare community development plans, the upgrade of Laventille Road, and that upgrade was not just to pave the road, but really to look at retaining walls and widening the roads a bit. To look at the upgrade of the Desperadoes pan yard to look at the Beetham drains, Pashley Street, St. Joseph Road and even Belmont Valley Road, to look at the drainage there. To enhance community works, to look
at recreation facilities, Beetham Gardens, Sogren Trace, Point Pleasant Park, the Morvant savannah; those are some of the projects that the particular special purpose company was asked to look at, and they requested $27 million.

Mr. Speaker, again if we are looking at equal distribution and we are looking at the development of Trinidad and Tobago of which East Port of Spain is a part, I ask the Minister of Local Government, why was the East Port of Spain Development Company not given if not the full $27 million, some part of it so that it would look like—it would seem as if the Government was interested in developing all of Trinidad and Tobago including East Port of Spain? That is the question. Why? And if the money was passed then what happened? Because as far as I am aware nothing with respect to that.

Again, Mr. Speaker, the special purpose state companies were responsible for going into communities, meeting with the residents of those communities, identifying projects within those communities, fixing those issues and getting out of those communities. Mr. Speaker, we heard about this growth pole and you have heard about one such growth pole is that of East Port of Spain, and we heard in the budget of going up into Laventille and upgrading Fort Picton and looking at our Lady of Laventille and Desperadoes. I wish to compliment the Member for Tunapuna for looking at such a project, but let me also state that on October 21, 2009—let me go back—on August 02, 2008, the Member of Parliament for Laventille West indicated to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that that was the way to go in Laventille. In fact, he said: I visualized that Laventille will be a tourist hub whereby when those ships dock at Port of Spain there would be a maxi or two that would carry them around the bridge, continue along St. Joseph Road go up Picton, stop off by our Lady of Laventille, by the water tanks, Fort Picton, Desparadoes, journey around to the Lady Young lookout and return to the capital. That was said on August 01, the article came out on August 02, but that was the Member of Parliament for Laventille West speaking at the opening of a foundation.

Mr. Speaker, on October 21, 2009, the Laventille Tourism Company Limited submitted a comprehensive plan to the Tourism Development Company Limited on the same project, and I am also aware that late last year they sent a second copy to the present Ministry or to the present Minister. I am telling you that they sent a copy to the present Minister, whether he received it or not I cannot say but I am aware, I am advised that somewhere around the end of last year a copy was sent to the present Minister of Tourism. [Crosstalk]
Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that we had a plan. Mr. Speaker, it seems that there is a particular Member in this House who just loves attention. He loves attention and I felt that—

Mr. Speaker: Let me handle that one. I will ask the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara to observe some silence and allow the Member for Laventille West to speak. I think we were going very smoothly a short while ago, let us continue how we are going—smoothly.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. The idea—[Crosstalk] I will send you a copy. The thing about it is that it is not about who created the idea or where the idea came from or anything of the sort; that is not it. It is the mere fact that we are thinking along the same lines, and I appreciate that they are moving ahead with programmes and ideas that would have come from us.

Let me also state that coming out of that same article on August 02, a number of persons indicated that the Member of Parliament wants to bring tourists into Laventille to get robbed, so I just want to also put that on the table so that you will be aware of the thinking of individuals outside there. There are some people who are narrow-minded in their thinking, failing to understand that the project as we viewed it would have created employment opportunities for the people in Laventille and surrounding areas, because you would need security officers, you would need drivers, you would need culinary people, even those ornaments, people to make those ornaments, all of those are things that would be needed and tassa to complement the pan side, all of those things would be needed. The fact of the matter is that I believed in 2008, as I believe now, that Laventille can be a tourist hub.

Mr. Speaker, I keep hearing about equal distribution of resources. I hear about equal, that is what that Member across there said—equal. Mr. Speaker, in the constituency of Laventille prior to this Government we were getting a number of things done. We were getting roads paved, we were getting drains fixed, we were getting retaining walls built; I personally attended the opening of an early childhood centre, activities were taking place throughout the constituency. I am also hearing that in—is it Tabaquite or Caroni East where there was $120 million of work on a road. I am hearing about $119 million of road repairs being done in Siparia.

Hon. Member: Why not?

Dr. Gopeesingh: They have not done anything for years.
Mr. N. Hypolite: I have absolutely no problem with those things. But what I am saying is that Laventille is also part of Trinidad and Tobago and I requested some roads for the constituency of Laventille. I sent the Minister of Works and Transport a list of 117 roads. I am not expecting 117 roads to get fixed at all. I got a response from the Minister who earlier on today told me that really and truly Laventille should get zero dollars in road works, but he approved $5.9 million worth of road works in the Laventille community. Mr. Speaker, Second Hamlet Trace.

Mr. Warner: Fixed. [Desk thumping]

Mr. N. Hypolite: First Hamlet.

Mr. Roberts: Fixed. [Desk thumping]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Blondelle Trace.

Mr. Roberts: Fixed. [Desk thumping]

Mr. N. Hypolite: No, Mr. Speaker. The Member indicating “fixed”, is not true, that trace is still untouched. Beecham Cocoa.

Mr. Roberts: Fixed.

Mr. N. Hypolite: You are a waste of time. [Crosstalk] I am talking to the Member for Chaguanas West—waste of time. Mr. Speaker, you heard the Member, he said he does not care about me. I do not want him to care about me, what I want him to do is to care about people of this country. [Desk thumping] That is what he needs to do, to care about the people of this country because under his Ministry nothing is being done in the constituency of Laventille—absolutely nothing!

1.30 a.m.

In fact, they had coming out of that Ministry, a five-a-side football competition throughout constituencies—five-a-side. Members of Parliament—well, I can speak about myself, not aware of this competition but it was supposed to be constituency, five-a-side football competition. First place, what was the first place $150,000?

Mr. Roberts: What!

Mr. N. Hypolite: Second place was how much?

Dr. Rowley: And Diego Martin West—
Mr. N. Hypolite: —$125,000, third place was how much? $100,000—“ah ain’t hearing you”.

Mr. Roberts: “Yuh” want to hear me? You only have mouth!

Mr. N. Hypolite: No, sit. Just like you only have mouth. You only have mouth!

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, please!

Mr. N. Hypolite: But five-a-side football competition and I advised—

Dr. Rowley: First time I am hearing about that.

Mr. N. Hypolite: First time you are hearing about it. First place $150,000—it is more than that?

Hon. Member: I got footballs.

Mr. N. Hypolite: For the August vacation, they had this—coming out of that same Ministry of Sports they had this camp throughout constituencies and I had one in the St. Barb’s area, 75 little ones from the age of three right up to 15 for two weeks—provided those youngsters with equipment and 50 cases of water to last them two weeks, from nine in the morning to two o’clock in the afternoon.

Hon. Member: And is only water he gave them?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Two—I think they are fasting—but then the $150,000 first prize for five men—I think part of that money could have gone towards giving those youngsters something—probably an Orchard to drink.

Mr. Speaker, coming back to works and transport, roads in Laventille—we still need Beecham Cocoa, Minister, to get fixed, we still need to get Macintosh Street fixed.

Hon. Member: Bad name, bad name.

Mr. N. Hypolite: We still need to get the 117 roads fixed and I do not expect to get all of those roads fixed at the same time nor do I expect to get all of them fixed in the same year, but if one constituency is getting $119 million and another one $120 million something is wrong; $5.9 million for Laventille. [Desk thumping]

Drainage—and I also wrote the Minister of Works and Transport asking for some assistance in getting some drains in Laventille fixed, not much, just 58.

Hon. Member: You do not want to prioritize.
Mr. N. Hypolite: Drains such as Gardenia, drains such as St. Barb’s and, as I said before, for those who were not listening, prior to this Government things were being done in Laventille.

Hon. Member: Like what?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Things were being done in Laventille. Mr. Speaker, in February 2010, $300 million was approved by the Cabinet to have an accelerated development programme in the East Port of Spain area.

Mr. Warner: Nothing was done.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Nothing was done is correct because right after came the election and this present Government is supposed to implement but what we are getting in return is absolutely nothing being done in the East Port of Spain area, as per the drains.

I can speak about recreation grounds, the Wharton Street Extension, the Pelican Extension, the Beetham Gardens Extension, Point Pleasant Park Extension, all those are recreation grounds which we in Laventille need to get upgraded.

Now these recreation grounds, roads and drains—

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. C. Sharma]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Roberts: Yes, you are the best advertisement—

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you Member for Fyzabad and all those who would have supported same and again, Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara looking for that attention.

Mr. Roberts: I support “yuh.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: You never used to get attention when you were a little boy?

Mr. Roberts: Never!

Mr. N. Hypolite: It seems that way.
Mr. Speaker: Please, Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, could you maintain some silence? Please, please!

Dr. Rowley: Some decorum.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, did I hear him “steups”?

Mr. Speaker: No, I did not hear that.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, there is something called state of emergency, better known as the SOE, that is correct. Mr. Speaker, the state of emergency—we are about six weeks old going on to seven weeks, somewhere around there—will come to an end one day, it must come to an end one day, unless of course the Government intends to run the state of emergency for the rest of their term in office so as to manage this economy. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Please, please.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, the Beetham is an issue that must be dealt with. It was indicated that some 80,000 gallons of diesel—illegal diesel—were identified, found under some scrap iron in the Beetham. It was said by the Member for Oropouche East and it was also mentioned by the Prime Minister. A couple weeks thereafter, it was discovered that it was nowhere close to the Beetham but rather in Sea Lots, and people of the Beetham have been asking for an apology for bringing their community into such an awkward situation, such an awkward situation, awkward in the sense that the former Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—and Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from the Sunday Express newspaper of October 02, 2011, where the former Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, said that the People’s Partnership Government knew about a billion-dollar diesel fuel racket since it took office last year.

This Government knew about this diesel racket even before the state of emergency was imposed, nonetheless they waited until they removed this large amount of scrap iron from the Beetham, and then came outside there and indicated to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that this diesel was found on the Beetham. Mr. Speaker, all that I am asking for, on behalf of the people of the Beetham, and by extension the people of Laventille, is an apology from the Prime Minister because again, no such diesel was ever identified, found, uprooted on the Beetham, and again I am asking for that.
Mr. Speaker, budget 2012 has more questions than answers. Budget 2012 has no specific information or details of programmes, it is vague. Budget 2012 has not addressed the concerns of many of my constituents who are locked in wage negotiations. Many workers are from Laventille and they are affected by the state of emergency because they also do a lot of evening/night jobs. Climate needs: toning down and negotiations need to be resolved. We cannot succeed in an atmosphere of uncertainty, aggression and confrontation, we can only succeed with a common goal and respect for all, and this is probably for the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, a common goal and respect for all.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday, October 17, 2011, at 9.00 a.m., to continue debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2011 and to serve notice on colleagues on both sides that we intend to also proceed late into the evening/night on Monday, so, Mr. Speaker, at 9.00 a.m. on Monday.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 1.45 a.m.