Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 10, 2011]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Dr. Fuad Khan):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Before I start, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance. [Desk thumping] I need to congratulate him because, in his budget presentation, he has done something different where small and medium enterprises are able to be located on the stock exchange. People can invest and certain customer-centric movements were done in the budget.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. The Minister of Finance has shown that he is taking the bull by the horns and changing the paradigm of budget movement in this country.

Recently, I was reading a book called *Crisis Economics* by Nouriel Roubini and he predicted the crash of 2007 because of the housing bubble. He indicated that stringent regulations, when the indication of a bubble—effect is appearing, one has to be very careful financially.

I commend the Minister of Finance for the last year, let us say 16 months, for having a stringent financial decision. However, it has also been indicated that when a bubble bursts, as occurred in 2007, the banks contract because of fear and they push the economy into another recession based on contraction of the economy, and the way out of that is to spend and give private and public enterprises the necessity to spend to bring it out of the recession. I have noticed that the Minister of Finance has indicated that also, trying to instigate the banks themselves to spend to bring us out of the recession that possibly may hit, the double dip recession.
I commend the budget. It is a budget that is worth noting and looking at. Unfortunately, when I heard the Member for Laventille West on Friday night, I was amazed because, between sleep and wake, he was able to put me further to sleep because the Member indicated the number of roads and drains, and if I stand here and call out the number of roads and drains in my constituency, I definitely will take 45 minutes as he has done. One would also wonder where was the People’s National Movement, not only eight years ago, but 40 years ago because they have never lost the constituency of Laventille.

It is sad to note that after having been there for such a long time, the Member for Laventille West now stands in this House—and Members on the other side—and complain that our People’s Partnership Government has not delivered to their constituencies in a mere 18 months. So we will try to do that in the coming years.

This is my first debate as Minister of Health and the Ministry of Health is responsible for the management of health care systems in Trinidad and Tobago. It provides leadership and direction for the sector by focusing on policy making, planning, assessing of the population’s health needs, mobilizing funding for the delivery of health services, regulating the sector and ensuring that services provided by public and private providers are delivered in accordance with internationally-accepted quality standards.

To this end, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health developed a strategic plan for fiscal 2012 and continuing. This strategic plan supports government’s national development, which is a people-centred development and provides a framework for the Ministry to improve the nation’s health services and facilitate improvements in the health services of the nation.

The Ministry’s strategic plan identifies 12 core strategies as well as five enabling strategic priorities that are to guide the work of our Ministry over the next five years. The core strategies target improvement in four priority health areas for Trinidad and Tobago and address eight areas that will facilitate the requisite health system strengthening. The enabling strategies address specific areas for the operation of the Ministry of Health that will improve the Ministry’s overall management of the health sector.

The core strategies, Mr. Speaker, are:

1. prevention, care and treatment of chronic, non-communicable diseases;
2. prevention, care and treatment of communicable diseases;
3. maternal and child health;
Our enabling strategies are:

(1) the institutional development of the Ministry of Health for operational efficiency and effectiveness;
(2) human resource management and development;
(3) mainstreaming quality and change management;
(4) strengthening internal and external communication;
(5) strengthening the Performance Management System and institutionalizing the RBM System.

**Hon. Member:** Things they have never done before.

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, in order for the strengthening of the institutional framework for monitoring and evaluating the health sector and in upholding the constitutional responsibilities for the health affairs of the nation, the Ministry of Health, as the purchaser of health care services, signed the Annual Service Agreement for the fiscal year 2012 with the four RHAs.

The Annual Service Agreement is a service level contract that outlines, for the global budget provided by the Ministry of Health, the performance targets to be achieved and a series of development initiatives that would be pursued. In the next fiscal year, the Ministry of Health will sign similar service agreements with the regional health authorities.

There will be implementation of accreditation standards linked to the introduction of a national accreditation system for the health sector and it is an important element of the regulatory framework required to support health systems
strengthening, improve accountability and improve the quality of health care delivery. The major objective of the accreditation standard is its ability to strengthen the framework for quality and accountability.

Over the next fiscal year, it is hoped that the proposal will be presented and the consultants engaged. The Ministry will be working towards the completion of the consultancy and the establishment of the Accreditation Council in 2012.

Added to this, the Ministry will also:

- establish a Health Intelligence System in the Ministry of Health as a repository for data and information from across the health sector;
- implement programmes to strengthen the Drug Inventory Management System;
- provide guidelines for the development of necessary surveillance capacity at the RHAs;
- provide guidance on the establishment of regional surveillance units;
- incorporate surveillance deliverables into the Annual Services Agreement; and
- provide templates for data collection/analysis.

We, on this side, recognize that an Act of Parliament for the patient’s rights and obligation charter and the staff rights will offer an exceedingly better method to recognize and enforce patient’s rights. The charter itself will form a part of the Act where it may be entitled a Bill of Patients’ Rights, where the present patient obligation found in this charter will be dealt with in another part of the Act.

We are continuously faced with situations where staff members are abused by the very same patients they serve. With the Patients’ Rights and Obligations Act, an authority will be established to review, to administer, to research and have oversight of the Act in addition to developing policies and regulations with respect to patients’ and staff’s rights.

The authority will be authorized by the Act to establish a tribunal that hears and adjudicates on breaches of the Act by any relevant parties. These breaches will include breaches of the Bill of Patients’ Rights and make rulings and issue an order which either compensates the aggrieved or penalizes the infringer or both.

Even in the absence of a specialized tribunal, a breach of a patient’s or staff’s rights under the proposed Act, an action may be instituted by patient or staff just as
they would institute an action for breach of constitutional rights in the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago.

Regulations and orders which increase and clearly defines the boundaries in specific incidents of the patient’s rights may be made under the proposed parent Act with all the attendant weight of enforcement that these pieces of legislation carry.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to pause and indicate that the United States of America—I was speaking to the ambassador of the United States and she introduced me to a Dr. Grossman from New York University. While I was indicating to him what I had in mind for the patients’ rights and charter staff rights, he pointed me to what they do in the United States of America. It is called the HCAHPS Fact Sheet, which I hope to introduce in Trinidad. It is a questionnaire that will assist in the consumer assessment of health care providers and systems.

Mr. Speaker, this is a survey, a standardized publicly reported survey of a patient’s perspective of hospital care. It is a survey, instrument and data collection methodology for measuring patients’ perception of their hospital experience.

While many hospitals have collected information of patients’ satisfaction for their own use—this HCAHPS—there is no national standard for collecting and publicly reporting information about a patient’s experience of care that will allow valid comparisons to be made across hospitals locally, regionally and nationally.

This questionnaire is designed firstly to produce data about patients’ perspective of care that allow objective and meaningful comparison of hospitals and topics that are important to consumers. It is customer centric. Secondly, it allows public reporting of the survey results, creating new incentives for hospitals to improve quality of care; and thirdly, public reporting services to enhance accountability in health care by increasing transparency of the quality of hospital care provided in return for the public investment.

This survey will ask patients, who are discharged, questions about their recent hospital experience. The survey will contain core questions about critical aspects of patients’ hospital experiences, their communication with nurses and doctors, the responsiveness of hospital staff, the cleanliness and quietness of the hospital environment, the paid management, communication about medicines, discharge information, overall rating of the hospital and would they recommend the hospital.

Just last night, I had a phone call from a gentleman who went into priority care at the Eric Williams Medical Services Complex. He indicated to me that his
mother, an elderly lady, was admitted for abdominal pains. No one was allowed to go in with the patient while she was being attended to. That is a policy which I have since changed to allow one family member to accompany each ill patient. [Desk thumping]

That is not all. The gentleman indicated, when he went in, after a long discussion with the doctors—he said the doctors were very good—he was able to go in to see his mother who was in a room with three or four elderly ladies; all of them sitting on the bed. Some of them had defecated on themselves, and when he indicated to the nurse that his mother was soiled, the nurse indicated to him that at least she “ain’t” dead yet.

I am saying this in this Parliament to put it on record. It shows the need for data rather than anecdotal data of the experience of patients in public and private hospitals.

The gentleman eventually asked the nurse for a bedpan. She came in handed the patient, who was ill, the bedpan and “steups”. Now, it is a graphic representation of an incident. Mind you, there are many incidents that are good, but this where the HCAHPS intervention will take place.

This is a copy of the survey, so I want to read some of the questions that will be asked of the hospital experience of the patients who attend the public and private institutions. It will be placed online at the Ministry of Health. You can go online and do it anonymously or, if you want to put your name, you can determine exactly where you want to go.

Question 1 will ask what is your care from nurses:

“During this hospital stay, how often did nurses treat you with courtesy and respect?”

And you answer: never, sometimes, usually, always.

“2. During this hospital stay, how often did nurses listen carefully to you?”

You go again: never, sometimes, usually, always.

“3. During this hospital stay, how often did nurses explain things to you?”

“4. During this hospital stay, after you pressed the call button, how long did it take before you got an answer?”

About the doctors:

“5. During this hospital stay, how often did doctors treat you with courtesy and respect?”
7. During this hospital stay, how often did doctors explain things in a way you could understand?”

About the hospital environment.

“8. During this hospital stay, how often were your room and bathroom kept clean?
9. During this hospital stay, how often was the area around your room kept quiet at night?
10. During this hospital stay, how often did you get help from nurses or other hospital staff in getting to the bathroom or using a bedpan?
11. How often did you get help in getting to the bathroom or in using a bedpan as soon as you wanted?
12. During this hospital stay, did you need medicine for pain?
13. During this hospital stay, how often was your pain well controlled?
14. During this hospital stay, how often did the hospital staff do everything they could to help you with your pain?”

It goes on:

“During this hospital stay, were you given any medicine…?”

And when you left the hospital, who took care of you? Did you go directly to someone else’s home, a convalescent home, et cetera? The last part is the overall rating of the hospital. Would you rate it as the best hospital experience and why?

In the Ministry of Health, we have decided to have a customer-centric approach. Having a customer-centric approach will determine exactly how services are delivered and where they will be delivered. The only way we can get that delivery is by having data.

That is one aspect of it: Data planning, data procurement and data obtaining. I am quite certain there is a lot of data in the public domain. Is the data being used properly and is it being used in a manner that will benefit the population in keeping with international standards of quality.

To do that and to put things in place, we have to have a proper legislative agenda. Permit me to read some of the things we hope to do in the coming year. As you understand, Mr. Speaker, a budget is a document that puts certain policies in place with revenue expenditure and what we hope to do over a period of time. Both
the Opposition and the Government who have been in the public service long enough will understand that it takes time to do things in the public service, unlike in the private sector.

In the private sector, one can go—because one owns the company—and do things very fast. In the public service, one takes time. You have to be transparent; you have to be accountable and you have to be answerable to the general population. It takes time.

So a budget dictates exactly where you hope to go. It is a road map of what you intend to do for that year. So when we say to ourselves that we have a legislative agenda for the year, we are hoping to do some of it, possibly leave some of it and continue with some of it.

Mr. Speaker, we have a Regional Health Authority (Amdt.) Bill, which will be laid in the Parliament—if not laid already. I am not anticipating; it is just an undertaking that I have been given, where one authority will purchase for all authorities. In doing so, we can benefit from volume discounts and volume activities.

That may be done with security service. Presently, each regional health authority obtains its own security service and if you have ever been to the regional health authorities, you will understand that there is a discrepancy in each one of the regional health authorities where security services often are being done. It will also be for ambulance services, human resource services and project management services.

The Mental Health Bill will free up the St. Ann’s Hospital and bring the mental health movement—as we are in Mental Health Week at this point in time—it is in keeping with the current thinking of mental health patients. The Bill will seek to repeal the Mental Health Act. It is a new Act where there will be a change of treatment of patients with mental illness by providing for the promotion of mental health in Trinidad and Tobago.

This Bill will allow mentally-ill people to be treated in communities. Right now, the St. Ann’s Hospital is the only place that mental health admissions are taking place. At one time, at each one of the regions, there was a mental health ward. That will be coming to this Parliament.

In the present environment, there is no legal framework to facilitate the assessment of quality of services being provided by local or foreign suppliers or demand compliance. However, there is a limited capacity to assess private hospitals.
In this regard, there will be no doubt that the delayed ability to give the population assurances of standards and improvement in the quality of care and services offered at local health institutions impact on the life of all citizens as well as productively and on economic growth.

In keeping with the Government’s policy paper on health services accreditation, the National Health Services Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago Bill is prepared. The objection of this Bill is to provide the legal framework for improving quality, maintaining competence and introducing accountability through the establishment of a Health Services Accreditation Council, which will have the responsibility of setting standards and conducting evaluations of all health care systems and services at the ambulatory primary, secondary and tertiary care levels.

It is expected that this body will have a symbiotic relationship with the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago and focus on the accreditation of health care services and health care delivery to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago develop some modern, responsive, high-quality health care systems. That is where the questionnaire will come into play. It will assess the quality of care at our nation’s hospitals, both private and public.

Another Bill we hope to see here is the National Blood Transfusion Service Bill. It will give rise to accountability and management issues and inconsistencies in the availability of blood and blood products. We hope to establish a statutory authority which will be solely responsible for collecting, storage, transfer and delivery of blood and its products.

Mr. Speaker, we have recognized that there is a need for practitioners and nursing practitioners and continuing education of all nursing personnel. These aspects are not provided for in the existing Nurses and Midwives Registration Act. The Nurses and Midwives (Amdt.) Bill has been prepared and seeks to create a specialist register for nurses.

It will establish standards for mandatory continuing education and training of nurses/midwives. It will determine whether or not a person is a specialist nurse for the requirements of the Act. It will determine the qualification and training necessary to qualify as a specialist nurse. It will allow for noting of additional qualifications of all persons registered.

Mr. Speaker, we have been slowly losing our nursing personnel to areas abroad. After meeting with the nurses, we have decided that the nurses’ needs are very simple. They need simple things, which are being provided in the regional health
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authorities. This should have been done for a very long time. We are putting into each regional health authority area, a changing room for nurses, an area and a cafeteria for nurses; a place to stay at nights and security for nurses.

I hope to introduce a daycare centre for nurses [Desk thumping] as well an area to breastfeed their babies and/or an express breastfeeder for that. What the nurses want in this country is not so much money, but upward mobility, specialist training as well as a comfortable area to work. I hope to be able to deliver most of that in the coming year.

The Tobacco Control Act and Regulations need to be fully implemented. The Emergency Ambulance Services and Emergency Personnel Medical Act and Regulations will be done. It has not yet been proclaimed by the President. In this regard, the regulations related to the procurement, the equipment on board the ambulance and licence requirements for services provided are presently being finalized and we hope to lay them in this House.

We have spoken about Patents’ Rights and Obligations Bill. Mr. Speaker, in addition, over this period, policy-related initiatives will be undertaken. A revised infection and control manual will be finalized for circulation when the review of the document is completed by PAHO.

When complete, implementation of the manual will provide patient safety. There is an adverse events policy for the health sector. It will be disseminated by the end of—

Mr. Speaker: A Member has his cell on. I have asked Members to put their cell on silent mode and do not keep it near the microphones because we are getting a feedback. Kindly cooperate.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Mr. Speaker, there will be an adverse events policy for the health sector which, hopefully, will be assembled by the end of the month or early December. This policy will establish a framework for monitoring the incidence of adverse events in hospitals and more public and private and health offices and will include guidelines for addressing the events.

There has been procurement of software for the introduction of an adverse events management system to support implementation of the policy.

There is a safe surgery list which at present has been monitoring the sector to minimize surgical errors. The maternal health policy has been drafted and a radiation policy.
Let me say a little about the radiation policy. Over the last couple months, there has been a problem with radiation at the Brian Lara Cancer Centre. That has been addressed and the Ministry of Health has asked the International Atomic Energy Agency to assist us with guidelines as well as investigation of that problem. To become a member of that agency—it is a lot of money—we hope to do so by the beginning of 2012 and, in doing so, we will be getting from that agency patient assistance as well as the assessment of the radiation that has occurred over the last couple months.

The Ministry of Health is adopting a comprehensive and strategic approach towards the development of human resources in the health sector. In this regard, the Ministry of Health has established a health sector human resource planning and development unit. The aim of this unit is to facilitate human resource development for the public and private health sectors in Trinidad and Tobago. Over the next year, this unit will be addressing the human resource issues in a strategic way by developing a 10-year manpower plan for the health sector, conducting research applicable to building a—sustained cadre of human resources, building a supply of human resources and the involvement of stakeholders in finding solutions to human resource challenges.

We will develop policies to guide the attraction and retention of human resource personnel. We will engage in the recruitment of foreign specialist nurses and doctors with strategically placed advertisements in medical and community media to attract foreign-based nationals. We will facilitate the attendance of staff at training courses. We are going to train with what we call the virtual library access. In other words, every member of the Ministry of Health, as well as those in the health offices and those in training will be given a password to access the medical library facilities of NALIS and the medical library.

Additionally, we have developed a three-year strategic training plan to strengthen the capacity of the workforce for sound management of the health sector.

For fiscal 2012, the Ministry will provide training in the following units:

- Human resource management;
- Project management;
- Information technology;
- Health services quality management;
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- Change management;
- Finance and accounts;
- Internal audit;
- Health policy research and planning;
- Legal units;
- Health education division;
- Health programmes and technical support services;
- the Trinidad Public Health lab;
- the National HIV/AIDS Coordinating Unit;
- National Tuberculosis Control Programme leadership.

We continue to work toward strengthening the legal and policy framework of the health sector. There has been a shortage of nurses. Many nurses are being trained at present, however, we need to have some form of nursing care now as illustrated by the example that I initially indicated.

I propose to have what they call a Patient Care Assistance (PCA) Programme. The Patient Care Assistance Programme will regulate health care workers who perform non-clinical functions under the direct supervision of a registered nurse. This category of worker assists in looking after patients at hospitals, health centres, homes for the aged, nurseries, children’s homes, homes for persons with disabilities and private homes.

The patient care programme will be introduced to partially address the shortage of nurses and enroll nursing assistants in Trinidad and Tobago. However, following an assessment of the PCA programme, it was found that the patient care assistant found difficulty in finding employment at the end of their tenure, which is six months.

The schools attended by the PCAs are not accredited teaching and training institutions and the training curricula were deficient in the development of attitudinal and interpersonal skills.

Over the next fiscal year, the Ministry of Health will introduce a restructured programme aimed at addressing the weaknesses of the programme. Under the restructured programme, 600 participants will be trained in three batches of 300 over the next three years. The duration of training will be six months over which
time a minimum of 1,000 hours of training will be completed. This will comprise 650 hours of supervised training and 350 hours of classroom instruction.

Training will be facilitated by the National Training Agency through accredited community care facilities. As part of the restructured programme, there will be a career path to the PCAs to allow for upward mobility in the other areas of nursing that will be developed.

The Patient Care Assistant who attains academic requirements and clinical experience, will be eligible to participate in the next level of their enrolled nurses training programme and, on completion, the registered nursing programme. These PCAs will be given priority for entry into the programme and if the PCA has the attitude and aptitude for upward mobility, they will be supported in their pursuit of academic requirements for a nursing programme. The successful participant will be bonded to serve the regional health authority for a period of two to five years.

It is expected that this initiative will significantly support the efforts of our nurses in the public health sector and contribute to the improved quality of care to our patients in our health institutions. It will maintain the flow of the volume of nurses. It will obtain the assistance of the Nursing Council. We may re-energize by accepting retired nurses to train. We may be able to provide a cadre of specialized technical scrub techs, nursing assistants and, as I said before, develop the nursing practitioners’ physical assistance programme.

The Ministry of Health is committed to ensuring that every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago has access to first-class health care regardless of where they live. In this regard, the Ministry has adopted a two-pronged approach to health infrastructure development. Firstly, there is the construction of new facilities to meet the demand of a previously underserved population. Secondly, the continuous upgrade and, in some instances, an expansion of existing health facilities.

We will facilitate service delivery improvement and access to a wider range of health services. As I speak, the Chancery Lane Complex, which will be done by UDeCott personnel, has had its memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed and the Austrian government will be assisting us in preparing that complex. We hope to get it by early to late December. That will increase the amount of bed space in San Fernando. There will be a decanting area for the San Fernando General Hospital and there will be a children’s ward; a number of beds, an administration unit and will allow an increase in the accident and emergency area in the San Fernando Hospital, which itself will be upgraded.
In addition to that, we heard about the university entrance into teaching our young doctors and nurses in that area as well as a specialist area. For the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, Cabinet has passed a $61 million upgrade. It will consist of a two-storey clinic/administrative wing connected to the main building, refurbishment of the hospital with state-of-the-art operating theatres, examination centres, clinics with proper waiting rooms, proper wards, refurbishment of the antenatal delivery, postnatal and gynaecological wards, an enhanced neonatal unit and a colposcopy unit, et cetera.

I turn to the Scarborough General Hospital. This hospital is a comprehensive hospital with 103 beds in total, which are used to provide services for local residents and tourists in Tobago. The central area of the hospital includes an outpatient, emergency, medical technology and operating theatres. There are four departments and auxiliary services.

The new hospital is designed to eliminate the current problems of congestion and overcrowding. This new hospital on Signal Hill will provide suitable care for the chronically ill and elderly while supporting the integration of primary care and community service into a holistic system. This handover is expected to be scheduled for December 2011.

I want to indicate to this honourable House about the assistance that I obtained from the Tobago Regional Health Authority and the THA in creating a process of commissioning/decommissioning the hospital and the assistance of the Secretary for Health. A commissioning/decommissioning unit was established with the Ministry of Health as well as the Tobago Regional Health Authority and they have promised that they should be able to commission that hospital by the end of December.

I must say, and I need to indicate to this honourable House, remember the Scarborough Hospital began at an initial cost of $135 million and now costs the country over $700 million. This full reason for this massive overrun will be unearthed by the audit of National Insurance Property Development Company (NIPDEC). NH International was awarded a contract to undertake the project in January 2003 at a cost $136 million. This project was to be completed in two years. Between March 20, 2003 and 2005, there have been so many variations leading to disputes and delays that only 55 per cent of the work has been completed, but NHIC has been paid approximately $156 million.

May I report to this honourable House that the arbitration—and I will read it:

The contractor, NHIC (Caribbean) Limited, having suspended works on the Scarborough Hospital project in September 2005 initiated arbitration proceedings through the ICC International Court of Arbitration in respect of issues such as procurement or mechanical issues such as the extent of variation and claims, the issue of the final construction cost and, most importantly, the contractors claim that NIPDEC and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago have failed to provide reasonable evidence that financials [Inaudible] may have been made and are being maintained which will enable the employer to pay the contract price.

The decision: NIPDEC wishes to inform that the sole arbitrator issued its final award on September 14, 2011. The effect of the arbitrator’s decision is that the contractor NHIC (Caribbean) Limited owes NIPDEC a net sum of $17,500,000 VAT exclusive, effectively eliminating the contractor’s net claim of $211,000,719.71 VAT inclusive at the start of the July 2007 hearing. The final award is comprised as follows:

The arbitrator ruled that the contractor owed NIPDEC the sum of $2,300,730.59 in Trinidad and Tobago currency on the claims and counterclaims, plus VAT in the sum of TT $300,559.58. The arbitrator awarded National Insurance Property Development Company (NIPDEC) interest of 12 per cent per annum, simple interest on the award sum to run from the date of this decision, September 14, 2011. This is equivalent to $658.76 per day.

Having regard to the cost and expenses relating to the arbitration, the arbitrator’s decision on the amounts payable by the contract to NIPDEC is $15,493,824.22. NIPDEC is pleased to have worked on this matter and it is a victory for the Ministry of Health and has vindicated the decision to have aggressively defended the public purse.

I read that into the records and I see the Member for Diego Martin North/East smiling. [Crosstalk] I notice the Member for Diego Martin West not smiling.

Your client brief to inform the request for the proposal of the Point Fortin Hospital has been completed and also for the central hospital.

These projects were originally approved by Cabinet as part of the Ministry of Health’s infrastructural strategy. The Point Fortin Hospital, when completed, will be a 100-bed hospital that will bring secondary health care services to the doorsteps to a sizeable population. The Point Fortin Hospital is expected to reduce the excess
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demand for patient care at the San Fernando General Hospital, a demand which has contributed to overcrowding in the external waiting room of the hospital. The tentative completion date is 2013. We should start this year. We hope to start in this period. [Crosstalk] That is one of the hospitals earmarked to be started this year. We hope to start this year.

Mr. Speaker, there is the refurbishment of the Arima Hospital and possibly of the construction of a state-of-the art hospital for primary care and secondary care in Arima.

I must say a word on the dialysis centre. The agreement has been for the establishment of two renal dialysis centres using the design/build operating methods. [Desk thumping] The NCRHA is presently coordinating the required survey works for the parcel of land that the NCRHA and South West Regional Health Authority to facilitate the lease arrangement. Each of these centres will accommodate 200 patients with a maximum three sessions per week at each centre.

Mr. Speaker, I would say a little on the construction and commission of the National Oncology Centre, which we hope to begin very soon.

Hon. Member: What was their record on that?

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Currently, cancer and malignant neoplasms is the second leading cause of death in Trinidad and Tobago with an estimated prevalence of 11 per cent. We at the Ministry of Health propose to begin the construction of the National Oncology Centre by 2012 and estimate a 13-month period for a successful completion and commissioning from the start of the construction.

We have already begun discussing with UDeCott, who have been identified as the project managers and we will be signing a memorandum of understanding shortly to initiate construction works. The National Oncology Centre at its core state is premised on the successful implementation of sustainable, equitable comprehensive state-of-the-art system of cancer control, with priority placed on radiation oncology, a new focus on preventative and screening to reduce cancer incidence, quality assurance and patient-centred system of treatment and palliation that would be integrated into the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

The Ministry of Health proposes in addition to introduce into the National Oncology Centre a world class modern cancer treatment and diagnostic technology such as what is called the Cyber Knife Technology, the PET/CT and nuclear imaging to aid in diagnosis treatment of cancer in Trinidad and Tobago to attract and build a first-class cancer treatment, to be the model of health tourism.
Mr. Speaker, I want to say a little about Cyber Knife technology. Not many places in the United States of America and developed countries have this technology. However, this is similar to linear accelerator; this machine moves while the patient’s organ moves and the accuracy is really immense.

Cyber Knife technology is a frameless robotic radio surgery system used to treat tumours as well as other medical conditions. The two main elements of the Cyber Knife are:

1. radiation produced by a small linear particle accelerator; and
2. a robotic arm which allows the energy to be directed specifically at any part of the body and any direction.

The Cyber Knife system is a method of delivering radiotherapy with the intent of targeting treatment more accurately than the standard radiotherapy. We will have positive emission tomography or PET/CT, a medical imaging device which combines in a single gantry system both the PET/CT and the X-ray computed tomography so that images acquired from both devices can be taken sequentially in the same session from a patient and combined into a single image.

This functional image obtained by PET which depicts the spatial distribution of the activity of the body can be precisely aligned or correlated with anatomic imaging to obtain accuracy.

Utilizing the PET technology and the Cyber Knife, we should be able to focus—and the Minister of Tourism will assist me here with the health tourism procedure that we are doing in our country—on bringing patients to our soil together with that level of cancer treatment. It is in separate areas of the United States of America to bring one or two centres. We will be the first in the Caribbean to have it and hopefully that will pull patients for medical tourism.

There is going to be a performance management system for the regional health authorities. As part of the monitoring evaluation standards setting role, we will be introducing a new brand of performance management report in real time. At present, you get reports, three months, six months a year when the incidents have occurred. This new performance management system and reporting metric will ensure the full accountability of RHA board and CEO for the services delivered within the respective RHA. Initially, the reporting framework will target hospital services addressing four indicators, parameters of performance:

1. hospital clinical operations; hospital plant and infrastructure operations; hospital human resource and hospital financial.
This intent is to strengthen the hospital review system—

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

*Motion made:* That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. Dr. F. Khan:** Thank you Mr. Speaker, and thanks to Members on both sides of the House.

I turn to the bed utilization review that has been conducted and will be continuous in the RHA. Overcrowding continues to be a major problem in all of the nation’s hospitals at one time or another with the problem more endemic in some hospitals than others.

Mr. Speaker, we at the Ministry have recognized this as a major problem and an obstacle for the effective delivery of safe, quality health care and has to be immediately addressed and resolved. Towards that end, we have initiated a significant bed expansion programme across the length and breadth of Trinidad. However, in addition to this significant construction programme, which will see the creation of a lot of beds in the next few years, the Ministry has proposed to introduce what they call a bed utilization review system across the RHAs. This bed utilization review will see the conduct or regular bed audits in all major hospitals across Trinidad and Tobago. It will be randomly done. That will address:

1. the patient’s length of stay;

2. the discharge practices of patients;

3. the average length of stay with respect to the bed occupancy as well as analyzing the root cause of delays in care and treatment and the delays in the system.

Mr. Speaker, the admission, discharge and transfer of our patients in our hospitals is of vital importance because that will determine if patients are being kept on acute beds too long unnecessarily and blocking beds for other acute patients when they can be sent to convalescent care.

There have been incidents when patients have been cared for one or two weeks for a simple investigational item. In doing so, there are a finite number of beds and it has caused a serious problem of suspected overcrowding.
At present, this bed audit has shown that 34 patients in the Eric Williams Medical Science Complex are long-term patients occupying beds for about a year or more and these beds are acute beds and the cost factor of an acute bed is great compared to that of a convalescent bed.

We are partnering with the Ministry of the People and it has been done by a Cabinet Note where we can get these social cases who have nowhere to go and no family to go to, to be given into the homes and be taken care of in community centres in the region, thus freeing up the acute beds.

This is occurring in the Port of Spain Hospital and in every single hospital in this country where you will find a group of patients occupying beds when they do not need to be there.

When there is a bed shortage and someone does not need to be there, this bed audit was done to assess the data to see whether these beds are being occupied by people who are not supposed to be on a acute bed.

Mr. Speaker, I am hoping to establish a child psychiatric unit at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. It is the intention of this Ministry, in the coming months, to develop and introduce a long overdue and much needed Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Unit at the Paediatric Hospital, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. This Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Unit will serve as a pilot project at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex for eventual replication at other RHAs as the specialists in the capacity develop and become available.

This initiative is consistent with the Ministry’s new mental health strategy and plan. It speaks to our focus on the development of child and adolescent psychiatry service in Trinidad and Tobago.

We tend to forgot that children suffer abuse and they are mentally and emotionally scarred. There needs to be—and I will be discussing that with the Ministry of the People and the Ministry of Gender Affairs—a focus on child psychiatry. In doing so we will be able to strengthen the resolve of what will occur later on.

The Insect Vector Control Department: dengue has been a problem over the last couple months and this project is managed by NIPDEC and will involve the construction of a new warehouse and head office for the Insect Vector Control Department. The project is presently out on tender for the selection of a contractor.

With the construction of the new warehouses and head office, the Insect Vector Control Division will be in a better position to achieve its mission in the reduction and control of the spread of vector borne diseases in Trinidad and Tobago.
The new warehouse will be able to accommodate all the necessary medical and auxiliary equipment and supplies in sufficient quantities to better manage epidemic level diseases that may pose a threat to the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

There will be an integrated management strategy for dengue prevention. In the past, outbreak of dengue has occurred in a cyclical base with a period of at least six years, but it has occurred with increasing frequency in more recent times culminating in outbreaks. The Ministry of Health has noted this trend towards an increasing number of cases in Trinidad and Tobago and the general trend of increasing dengue occurrence in Latin America and the Caribbean region. As a consequence, the Ministry has moved to adopt the integrated dengue management strategy to protect the population of Trinidad and Tobago from future epidemics or at least to mitigate the impact.

Over the next fiscal year, the Ministry will establish the Trinidad and Tobago Dengue Monitoring and Evaluation Committee. This will perform an analysis to determine the availability of resources for implementation of dengue and address the deficiencies.

The activities will be:

1. training of personnel in collaboration with Pan American Health Organization (PAHO);
2. updating and adapting information on the approaches, techniques and products applicable to insect vector management.

Mr. Speaker, there has been a problem with maternal and child health. There has been a cluster of cases in the South West Regional Health Authority that is being investigated. I need not say more, but we have found out that it seems to be systemic, which is a problem with the system and an approach of maternal management, child management and neonatal management and it is going to be addressed by a committee that will be put in place.

The strategic goal for maternal and child care is to reduce the maternal and child mortality morbidity. To this end, the Ministry has identified strategic objectives that will not only meet but surpass the millennium development goals (MDGs) of the United Nations. We hope to reduce infant mortality as well as maternal mortality.

The surgical optimization programme: the Cabinet has approved the introduction of a strategy to optimize the use of surgical capacity in the public
health sector to improve the quality and timely delivery of diagnostics and surgical services by utilizing both public and private sector health human resources; a private/public management unit.

This initiative will begin in 2012 and will involve the Ministry partnering with the private health sector to improve the quality of surgical care provided at our hospitals. It is to be noted that the existing suite of surgical theatres in the public health sector is currently under-utilized as they generally operate between 8.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. and are vacant for the remaining 16 hours a day except for the emergency services of specific operating theatres. Added to this, the Ministry of Health is in the process of upgrading and expanding the existing suite of theatres in order to increase the level and range of surgeries available to the population.

In order to achieve this, the operating hours must be extended; the clinic time must be extended and the requisite surgical staff must be in place. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health is currently addressing the shortage of human health resources through expansion of training programmes at the technical and tertiary levels; government sponsored bursaries and scholarships that target specific health disciplines; improvements in recruitment and retention strategies and strengthening of the human resource planning and development capacities.

However, in order to immediately increase the theatre use at public hospitals and to improve the timely delivery of surgical services to the population, the Ministry of Health is now seeking to maximize the country’s health human resources and to optimize the use of public hospital theatres. Moreover, this strategy is expected to increase the number of surgical outcomes, expand the range of surgeries, reduce the waiting time for surgeries and address the need for surgeries that exist in the population at present.

Mr. Speaker, in implementing the strategy to reduce the backlog of surgeries, etcetera, there are approximately 10,000 MRI CT scans that are on the backlog, 2000 echocardiogram scans, ultrasound scans, pathology readings of about a couple thousands. You cannot treat somebody for cancer if you do not know what the pathology specimen and histology are.

When you have thousands of pathology specimens not being read, people die of cancer in this country as a result of cancer spread because they cannot obtain treatment because of the lack of the pathology advice.

Mr. Speaker, I propose to utilize the public sector staff, working over time and on weekends, to undertake surgeries and to decrease the backlog when they are not
rostered for duty. [Desk thumping] I hope to contract the private sector staff to the RHAs to undertake surgeries in the public sector surgical theatres.

In doing so, specialists who work in the private sector and are not given to the public sector because of the policies that are entailed—if I am going to tie a specialist to a unit doing specialist surgeries as well as training the young doctors instead of outsourcing surgeries to the private sector. There will be an ongoing improvement in the organization management of Ministry of Health.

I turn to cataract surgeries. It is estimated that the number of new cases at the public hospitals is 3,000 to 3,500 annually. Of these, an average of 2,500 cataract operations are done annually, resulting in a deficiency of between 500 and 1,000 cataract surgeries in the public sector per year.

It is estimated that approximately 5,000 persons are waiting for cataract surgery. This is higher than any of the surgeries under the surgical optimization programme. In an attempt to reduce the waiting list in the last fiscal year, Government engaged the private sector to conduct approximately 500 cataract surgeries. This did not work.

10.00 a.m.

In addition, a small incision cataract surgery was introduced in 2011 through an arrangement with the US army and General Chang. This procedure is now being done at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and the San Fernando General Hospital and other ophthalmologists have been trained in this technique.

The Ministry of Health is also in the process of upgrading and expanding the existing suite of theatres in order to increase the level and range of services available to the population. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, the public hospitals throughout Trinidad and Tobago will benefit from upgrade. The upgraded works will continue to the next fiscal year with instrument upgrade and expansion planned for the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, the Port of Spain General Hospital, San Fernando General Hospital and eastern regional hospital.

Under the Surgical Optimization Programme, the aim is to significantly reduce the backlog of 5,000 cataract surgeries in the next fiscal year. A decision has also been taken to open a dedicated eye ward, a dedicated eye theatre and to open a vitreo-retinal service and a national corneal graft bank at Eric Medical Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Adult Cardiac Surgery Programme, I have brought on board a cardiac interventional specialist to give me a situation analysis, and also the way forward for implementation of the cardiac surgery programme.
Mr. Speaker, the financial assistance to necessary patients, it is the Medical Aid Committee, and this is for patients who cannot afford the medical procedures and medication that they require. These cases arise where the medical treatment is not available in the public care system. Over the next fiscal year, the Ministry will review this programme with the aim of expanding its reach to the vulnerable groups in our society.

Mr. Speaker, the Children’s Life Fund—close to my heart. We are committed to providing quality health care to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago through our public health institutions. However, it is recognized that there are a number of specialist medical conditions for which local treatment options are not available. Some of these specialist services would be accommodated through the planned upgrade and expansion of services at public health facilities, and we may need to change the legislation to allow the Children’s Life Fund to be used for local surgeries. So, at present, the legislation indicates for foreign surgeries.

I hope to bring specialists to Trinidad to train our young doctors utilizing the Children’s Life Fund and, as a result the legislation needs to be changed to allow the moneys to be used for local surgery. The Children’s Life Fund offices are being upgraded and they would be ready in the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have?

Mr. Speaker: You have 16 more minutes.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Mr. Speaker, I have spent a lot of time talking about the development of the hospitals. I have spent a lot of time speaking about what we are going to do with tertiary care, and tertiary care, Mr. Speaker—I need to put it on record—is the result of—

Dr. Browne: Minister, are you willing to give way?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Are you proud of it? Are you proud of that?

[Interruption]—Dr. Browne: Thank you for giving way, Member for Baratara/San Juan, just a question on the Children’s Life Fund with regard to, who is the chairman of the fund and who is the director of the fund after about a year. Thank you.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Member for Diego Martin Central, I would be happy to accommodate you, but file it as a question, please. [Laughter] That is names. I would give you all the answers. Just file it as a question and I would give you a full breakdown. I have 16 minutes to finish.

Mr. Speaker, we have been speaking worldwide about tertiary care, the complications of tertiary care, how you manage tertiary care and the expenses
related to tertiary care—the development of hospitals, the development of chronic diseases, kidney diseases, cardiovascular diseases, strokes, cancers, respiratory diseases are the result of problems that occur—and the World Health Assembly has done a very good job in the last 10 years of pointing the way to the complications of non-communicable diseases. The non-communicable diseases are where the action lies. Now, if we do not attack the development of non-communicable diseases, then we will spend a lot of money on the complications of these diseases. If you take the major killers like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cardiac disease, renal diseases and strokes, they account for the majority of the population’s expenses. They also account for the majority of moneys spent on hospitals’ infrastructure, as a result, I want to take some time to mention where we need to go.

Mr. Speaker, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, on August 28, 2007 on the Caribbean Unity to Fight Chronic Disease Epidemic: Obesity a Major Target states:

“A major regional assault is about to be launched against chronic non-communicable life-style diseases. The historic first step will be made on 15 September when the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) meet in Port-of-Spain...

Life-style diseases have emerged as the principal public-health challenge in recent decades since great inroads were made in tackling infectious diseases that plagued the region…”

such as AIDS/HIV, tuberculosis, dengue, et cetera, those are communicable diseases.

“The chronic diseases result largely from bad food choices and low levels of physical activity. They come at a high cost to individuals and to the region’s nation states in terms of human suffering, expensive treatment and loss of production.

...the combined economic burden of diabetes and high blood pressure, in US dollar terms—if the diseases were properly treated—would be…”

Millions of dollars, such as $500 million in Jamaica, more so in Trinidad and Tobago, which has the highest rate of diabetes in the Caribbean and cardiac diseases, more so than the United States of America—“…corresponding burden to the Bahamas…”

“These figures are very significant when compared with the health budgets and gross domestic product of the respective countries, and the economic burden of diabetes and high blood pressure is relatively high on the list...Even more
agonizing is the realisation that most cases of chronic non-communicable
diseases are avoidable, resulting as they do from poor lifestyle choices.
At the same time, there is an increasing awareness in the region that while
individual responsibility and choice are crucial factors affecting the incidence
of chronic diseases, public policy, public education, qualitative regulation of
food imports, licensing laws to protect consumers and gearing the
environment to support prevention of chronic diseases are also pre-requisites
for combating this 21st century epidemic.”

Mr. Speaker, obesity:

“They zeroed in on obesity—extreme fatness—which they identified as a
leading cause of chronic non-communicable diseases. This results from such
factors as the consumption of too much food, the consumption of too much of
the wrong kinds of food, bad timing of food intake, and too little physical
activity.”

Obese women account for 25 per cent of the adult female population. At present,
we have the STEPS Programme that assesses this and a partners firm which looks at
their food problems.

“Although obesity is generally associated with ageing, when the body has
slowed down and stores more calories as fat than in younger days, there is an
alarming trend in the region in a high incidence of obesity among young
children and adolescents. Data compiled by the Caribbean Food & Nutrition
Institute (CFNI) show that fat and obese children account for as much as 15 per
cent of their population…”

Mr. Speaker, it is more so now in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, in the ages 15—64,
we have close to about 50—60 per cent increase in BMI.

“Research has linked the rising obesity rates to corresponding increases in
consumption of fatty foods, snacks, soft drinks and high-energy foods and
drinks. Sugar and fat are implicated in this worrying trend.”

Mr. Speaker, if you mix the combination of salt, sugar and fats in a correct
proportion then what you create is food addiction. It sends a message from the
tongue to the brain and releases what is called encephalin to the brain that makes
you feel good, and it is simple. It is similar to when you take addictive drugs or
alcohol or nicotine. When you mix these three combinations—salt, sugar together
with fats—with flavour enhancers and food derivatives such as MSG and hydrolyte
vegetable protein, et cetera, what you have is a concoction there of an item that is
going to produce serious food addiction, and also an addiction to the problem.
Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: How do you avoid it?

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: By not eating it. [Interruption] The Member for Point Fortin has asked a very good question, how do you avoid it? By not eating it. The Member for San Fernando East would understand what I am saying. You see, Mr. Speaker, I am going with this trend for a reason.

When I was doing some form of the research, at the recent PAHO assembly in Washington, we were speaking about non-communicable diseases and the effects of sugars and fats, et cetera on communicable diseases, and it was found that Pepsi—[Interruption] Mr. Speaker, what we were told was that there is a thrust to attract the non-communicable diseases and the causes such as bad eating habits, poor lifestyles as well as exercise that are sedentary lifestyle and, fortunately, Trinidad and Tobago refused to accept US $10,000 from Pepsi and Coke to replace some exercise equipment. However, some other of the Caribbean countries did.

Mr. Speaker, I was a bit shocked when I saw this article in the Woman Express on Sunday, where McDonald’s supports TT children:

“Ronald McDonald, ‘Chief Happiness Officer’ of McDonald’s, stands with a nurse from the Just Because Foundation’s JBF Paediatric Specialty Unit”—I will not call name—“As part of its community focus and corporate citizenship activities, Arcos Dorados, McDonald’s franchise…has donated US$10,000 to the specialty unit located at the Wendy Fitzwilliam Paediatric Hospital in Mt. Hope. The company will also hold its first ‘McHappy Day’…event locally…”

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are very glad for foreign direct investment, but what we are not glad about is when these foreign direct investments go with a clown, which is Ronald McDonald, to a paediatric ward and is accepted inside. Marketing will tell you that these companies like McDonald’s and Burger King and the fast food industry spend billions of dollars on subliminal advertising, advertising that connect. [Interruption] They are allowed to come to Trinidad, but not on a paediatric ward. What I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, is that I will be writing to the foundation saying that no money from these fast food enterprises should reach the hospital.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is right. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: We will send back the money.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No fast food for children!
Hon. Dr. F. Khan: When I see a picture of an advertisement, Mr. Speaker, we have to change the advertisements, because we have to protect our children [Desk thumping] and we have to decide if we want to make sure that our children grow healthy, and they do not have the expense in the future—that is what economics is about—of creating hospitals, heart problems, kidney problems, et cetera. We have to determine now what we are going to do with them. I make this plea because for too long we have allowed people to get away with this, and now we have the knowledge that the experience and the thrust in the World Health General Assembly, the 53rd World Health Assembly.

“URGES Member States:

to develop a national policy framework taking into account several policy instruments such as healthy public policies; creating a conducive environment for healthy lifestyles; fiscal and taxation policies towards healthy and unhealthy goods and services; and public media policies empowering the community;

This is from the United Nations 2008—2013 Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases, and yet we have a fast food—[Interruption] The Member for Caroni East, the Minister of Education, is working together with us to have a proper school nutrition policy and proper diet as we indicated.

The other matter is:

“to establish programmes, at national or any other appropriate level, in the framework of the global strategy for the prevention and control of major and noncommunicable diseases and specifically:

A. to develop a mechanism to provide evidence-based information for policy-making, advocacy, programme monitoring and evaluation;

B. to assess and monitor mortality and morbidity attributable to noncommunicable disease, and the level of exposure to risk factors…”

There are two sets of risk factors; the social determinants which are poverty, et cetera, as well as bad food, bad eating habits and promotion of bad food.

“D. to emphasize the key role of governmental functions—including regulatory functions, when combating noncommunicable diseases such as development of nutrition policy, control of tobacco products, prevention of alcoholic abuse and policies to encourage physical activity.
G. appropriate health promotion strategies to be included in school health programmes and in programmes geared to youth;

Mr. Speaker, this is what the World Health Organization Action Plan says. So when we focus on obesity, Mr. Speaker, what are we going to do? The next fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry will continue to execute the risk factor survey for CNCDs which is chronic non-communicable diseases using the WHO step-wise approach to gather statistical evidence of risks associated with selected CNCDs. The survey will target a population of 3,000 non-institutionalized adults between the ages of 15—64. The results of the survey will be to:

- inform strategies to raise awareness about the prevalence of chronic diseases;
- guide recommendations for disease free healthy life, for example, lifestyle change, dietary modification, increase of exercise.
- provide empirical data for policy formulation and to guide public health policy and interventions to address chronic diseases both within and outside of the health sector.
- assist and inform future health research.

Mr. Speaker, there will be a school health programme and I will be discussing with the Minister of Education where we can focus on putting dieticians in schools [Desk thumping] and by doing that, we would be able to get children who are overweight on a proper programme.

Mr. Speaker, the risk factor reduction strategies that target children will also be implemented through the School Health Programme:

- healthy eating active living campaign to reduce child obesity;
- the implementation of nutrition and dietary guidelines that were developed for schools; and
- the implementation of the chronic disease risk factor screening as part of the School Health Programme.

The other health promotion initiatives would be the national healthy lifestyle, and we can go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say in my last two minutes, there is going to be a programme of outreach on bringing health care closer to the people. [Desk thumping] There will be a development for mini-hospitals that contain X-ray lab
facilities and also pharmaceutical facilities together with small operating theatres and same-day surgery centres in the communities. In doing so, Mr. Speaker, there will be extended hours, some 24 hours and some up until ten o’clock in the night. [Desk thumping] We are marrying it with the public private sector so that we can take the load off the general hospitals, and in these areas by bringing health care closer to the community, we could attack the risk factors for non-communicable diseases and increase the movement of dental care for the elderly in the population and optometry services, because the University of the West Indies has a programme and they would need some place to teach; cataract surgeries will be done locally, and Mr. Speaker we can go on.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you all for listening, and there is much to be done in the health sector.

Hon Member: Very good. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Colm Imbert (Diego Martin North/East): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, [Problem with microphones] Mr. Speaker, the microphones are malfunctioning.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Member, based on what I have been informed by the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, it appears that there is a technical glitch occurring, once again. I would not want the House to pause for any long period of time without the hon. Member being able to make his contribution. I would call on the members who are responsible for addressing this particular technical challenge, to address this matter quickly and, in those circumstances, may I suspend the sitting for 10 minutes until this matter is addressed. This sitting is suspended for 10 minutes and we shall resume at 10.30 a.m.

10.20 a.m.: Sitting suspended.

10.33 a.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hopefully, we would have addressed the matter and, again, let me apologize and, at the same time, let me caution Members. Members have the freedom of speech, and they can make whatever comments they wish, but I think it is very unfair to the professional staff of this Parliament, whom you know has served us well for all these years, for any Member to express the view that what took place a short while ago could amount to sabotage. I really feel that we should be a little more cautious in our —language. It does not go across well. Okay? I will now call on the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East to make his contribution.
Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it is truly ironic that these technical difficulties occurred when the Leader of the Opposition was speaking and when I was about to speak. I understand the problem is associated with the furniture, and I am hoping that it will be permanently resolved quickly.

Now, Mr. Speaker, on Monday of last week, the hon. Minister of Finance presented the budget for the 2012 fiscal year, and I say that a bit facetiously, Mr. Speaker, because when one examine what the Minister of Finance did, it really was not a presentation of the national budget. There was no review of the performance of the economy in the last fiscal year; there was no review of the performance of various important sectors of the economy in the last fiscal year; there was no explanation of the financial situation in the country, and it therefore falls to us on this side—since the Minister was studiously silent on the performance of various sectors of the economy and the performance of the national budgeting exercise, as a whole—to explain what really happened in fiscal 2011 to the national population because, certainly, the Members opposite are not going to do that.

I heard all sorts of praises uttered by Members opposite—praise in different ways; praise of individual Ministers; praise of the performance of the Minister of Finance and so on. Before I go on, I just want to say a little about the last speaker. I really do not have much to say about the Member for Barataria/San Juan. He has a tendency to say the strangest things and do the strangest things from time to time, but I am willing to give the hon. Member the benefit of the doubt, and I assume that he is going to try his best in that Ministry, and I wish him well.

But the Member for Barataria/San Juan, as I said, tends to do and say the strangest things, and this is since he has been in this Parliament, he has had this habit. As he was winding up his contribution, he spoke about the fast food industry. He spoke about McDonald employing a clown, well known by the name of Ronald McDonald, and he declared that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, certainly not this Minister of Health, will not be accepting any funds from McDonald’s with respect to contributions.

Hon. Member: Paediatric!

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, paediatrics, the Children’s Life Fund and so on. Yes, do not be so jumpy. So, Mr. Speaker, he told us that he will not be accepting any fast food donations for paediatrics. Mr. Speaker, this is the Member who held a fete at which there was consumption of alcohol, and attempted to make a donation to the Children’s Life Fund from the proceeds of that fete, and it was refused, because the proceeds came from the sale and consumption of alcohol. So that is what I mean
by—I believe he means well, but he says the strangest things. The first entity in Trinidad and Tobago whose contribution was refused to the Children’s Life Fund was no other than the current Minister of Health. [Desk thumping] “And he geh vexed yuh know.” He get on and he get vexed and so on when they refused to accept the money. So this is just—[Interruption] As I said, Member for St. Joseph, I am of the view that the Member for Barataria/San Juan means well, but he has a tendency to say the oddest things and to do the oddest things.

Now, let me go to the budget which the Minister of Finance did not present. Mr. Speaker, if one goes into the budget numbers, one will see that recurrent expenditure for the 2012 fiscal year is estimated to be $53.7 billion dollars. Capital expenditure is estimated to be $7.6 billion of which $3.3 billion will be appropriated to the Consolidated Fund. The remaining portion of capital expenditure comes from the Infrastructure Development Fund, which will be appropriated from the allocation of the Ministry of Finance, in an approximate sum of some $4.3 billion.

So, in establishing the total projected expenditure by the Government in fiscal 2012, you have to add the recurrent expenditure projection to the appropriation to the Consolidated Fund with respect to the capital programme. So when you add $53.7 billion recurrent to $3.3 billion development programme from the Consolidated Fund, you get a total expenditure in 2012 of $57 billion. I dare say my research has told me, this is the largest appropriation ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

When one looks at the revenue, you have total expenditure in 2012 of $57 billion, but look at the revenue, Mr. Speaker. Tax revenue is estimated at $40 billion dollars; non-tax revenue at $5.7 billion and capital receipts are marginal. So the total revenue from tax and non-tax revenue—and non-tax revenue is primarily royalties on oil—the total revenue excluding borrowing in this fiscal year will be $45.7 billion. So let us do the maths. The Government is going to spend $57 billion and it is going to collect $45.7 billion. The true deficit, therefore, in 2012 will be $11.3 billion. [Desk thumping] You see, the Minister of Finance was studiously silent on these facts. These are facts.

The Minister intends to finance his deficit through borrowing in the amount of $6.6 billion. You can find this in the Draft Estimates of Revenue for the financial year 2012 on page 5, and you will see that the Minister intends to finance the deficit by borrowing $6,616 million or $6.61 billion in fiscal 2012. Just by way of reference, in 2011 our borrowing was $1.3 billion, and in 2010 our borrowing was $1.1 billion, Mr. Speaker. If we go backwards in time and we take a look at what
happened in 2009 and 2008 we see in 2009, $2.5 billion; in 2008, $1.2 billion. So, the Minister is not only going to spend the largest sum of money ever spent by a Government in Trinidad and Tobago in fiscal 2012 which is $57 billion, he is also going to borrow the largest sum of money borrowed by any Government for several years, Mr. Speaker. I have gone back to 2008, and in 2008 it was $1.2 billion; in 2009, $2.5 billion; in 2010, $1.1 billion and in 2011, $1.4 billion; but this year, this prudent, fiscally responsible and conservative Minister of Finance is going to borrow $6.6 billion. [Interruption] Now, I am dealing with actual figures. I am not dealing with pie in the sky theories. [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, I hear the sotto voce comment from the Leader of Government Business. It is clear to me the Members opposite have some difficulties in interpreting these documents. Let me go to the documents.

I go to page 5: the 2011 revised estimate borrowing, $1.4 billion. It is not for pie in the sky theories, it is what is here. So let us go back to what is happening in fiscal 2012. We have a shortfall between expenditure and revenue of $11.3 billion of which the Minister intends to borrow $6.6 billion. Where does this leave us? It leaves us with an unfinanced deficit in fiscal 2012 of $4.7 billion, almost $5 billion in an unfinanced deficit out of a total deficit of $11.3 billion. Where is that money going to come from? That money comes from our overdraft, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

This fiscally prudent, conservative and responsible Minister of Finance is going to go into overdraft in fiscal 2012 to the tune of almost $5 billion. And, you know, for those opposite who do not know, you are only allowed to go into overdraft on a temporary basis, and you are only allowed to go into overdraft up to a limit of 15 per cent of your revenue. Do you know what this means? Because there is an unfinanced deficit in our expenditure in 2012, it means that the Ministry of Finance will have to manage cash on a day-to-day basis.

I am advised, Mr. Speaker, the Consolidated Fund is already in deficit, and when the Ministry starts to draw down on these estimates of expenditure in this document, you are going to hit that 15 per cent maximum overdraft limit that is allowed by law in Trinidad and Tobago and very quickly you are going to have a very tight cash situation in fiscal 2012.

Mr. Speaker, I am of the view that any government that incurs a deficit of $11.3 billion, almost 8 per cent of GDP—any government that does that—any government that is running on unfinanced deficit by going into overdraft in the Central Bank, cannot be described as a fiscally responsible, prudent and conservative
government. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, as far as I am concerned, it is smoke and mirrors, and the Members opposite have no idea of what is going on.

Let us look at what is happening in our economy. They have no idea of what is going on. The Minister of Finance is running a recurrent expenditure in 2012 of $53 billion with revenues of $45 billion. The last time this country came close to recurrent expenditure in that magnitude was in 2008 where our recurrent expenditure was $51 billion and our revenues were $54 billion. We had a surplus on the current account in 2008. [Desk thumping] So, this prudent, fiscally responsible conservative Government is spending money at the same level as the country—in fact, at a higher level, because the recurrent expenditure for 2012 is $53 billion, and in 2008 it was $51 billion. The revenue for 2012, “so dey say”, will be $45 billion, but in 2008 it was $54 billion. We have a surplus on the current account in 2008. This Government is spending money at the rate that the country was spending money in 2008 when we had revenues of $54 billion. We had a $54 billion revenue in 2008; $51 billion recurrent. What do they have? They have $45 billion revenue and $53 billion recurrent expenditure. There is no wonder that the Consolidated Fund is in overdraft already. Before the fiscal year even began, the Consolidated Fund is already dangerously close to a deficit situation.

Let me go back into the smoke and mirrors in this budgeting exercise of this Minister. In 2011 there was an oil windfall of $2.5 billion, because oil prices were significantly higher than anticipated in fiscal 2011; much higher than projected by the Minister in his budget speech of 2011. Mr. Speaker, if I go to the document, the Minister had estimated an oil price significantly lower than what was actually achieved in 2011, because of the boom in oil prices during fiscal 2011. As a result, when you go into the figures of revenue, you see we had an oil windfall in 2011 of $4 billion, which you are not getting this year.

In 2011 as well, we had a tax amnesty of $1.8 billion. Now, you cannot have an amnesty twice—amnesty done. So, there is not going to be a tax amnesty in Trinidad and Tobago for some time to come. So the unbudgeted, unforeseen and unplanned revenue in 2011 was of the amount of $4.3 billion. Now, that will not occur in 2012. That will not occur in this fiscal year. What makes it worse is that the Minister of Finance has now budgeted a much higher oil price in this year, 2012—[Desk thumping]—a much higher oil price in this year 2012. So you have unforeseen, unplanned and unlikely revenue in 2011 of $4 billion, which you are not getting this year.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at VAT. The Leader of the Opposition referred to it. In 2011, the Minister had hoped to generate VAT collections—I go to the document,
Draft Estimates of Revenue, 2012—of $6.4 billion. I go to page 4 of the Draft Estimates of Revenue for the financial year, 2012. What happened? He only collected $4.6 billion, a shortfall of almost $1.8 billion. Look at what he has projected for this year! What has he projected? He has gone right back up, $6.5 billion! Last year, we collected $4.6 billion; he projected that we would collect $6.4 billion in VAT—we got $4.6 billion, almost a $2 billion shortfall—he magically sends the VAT figure back up to $6.5 billion in 2012. How is this going to be realized? How on earth is the Government going to collect this additional $2 billion in VAT in 2012? What is going to be happening in Trinidad and Tobago in 2012 to cause this fantastic increase in VAT collections?

So, if you do the maths, Mr. Speaker, and you take out that $2 billion in VAT that he has put in there—that make-believe VAT figure, you have to take it out—you take out the $2.5 billion oil windfall that we are not going to get this year; and you take out the $1.8 billion tax amnesty which will not occur this year, do you know what you get, Mr. Speaker?—a revenue shortfall in 2012 of some $6 billion. And when you add that to the deficit of $11 billion, the outturn for 2012 may, in fact, be a deficit of $17 billion. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, when a Minister of Finance comes into this Parliament, we expect the Minister of Finance to tell us what is really going on in our economy. Come clean and tell us the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Mr. Speaker, let us look at the revenue of the economy. There is another mysterious thing that was done with the review of the economy, 2011, very mysterious.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall in his budget address last year, the Minister told the Parliament—I have the document in front of me—that there was growth in the economy of the order of 2.5 per cent in fiscal 2010. It is here in this document, where he told us that the economy grew. He said that it was because of an oil windfall; so he said in 2010. He said that the economy grew by 2.5 per cent. Listen to his words: “However after a significant contraction of the economy of 3.5 per cent in 2009”—this is the budget statement of 2010 on page 30—“we have benefited from higher energy prices than expected in 2010, and are registering positive economic growth of 2.5 per cent this year.” That was last year. So, last year the Minister told us that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago grew in a year where the PNM was in power for most of the year, he told us that the economy grew by 2.5 per cent.

What happens this year? This year we are told there is an economy contraction of 1.4 per cent. When you drill down into the figures, Mr. Speaker, do you know what is going on in this document? In order to arrive at economic contraction,
negative growth in fiscal 2011, the first full fiscal year under the new Government, we experienced economic contraction. In order to work his figures so that it will not look so bad, do you know what has happened? The 2.5 per cent economic growth in 2010 that the Minister announced to us in this Parliament last year has evaporated, and it has been converted magically and mysteriously from 2.5 per cent economic growth in 2010 to zero, a flat economy in 2010. Just so! He just changed the numbers. Go and check the documents and you will see them for yourself. Go and look at the Review of the Economy, 2010. I have this document here and in this document they are telling us that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago grew by 2.5 per cent in 2010. They gave the GDP figures, and then they come back now in the next year and the GDP figures have miraculously changed.

Let us look at pages 52 and 53 of the Review of the Economy, 2010 the first review produced by this Government. In that year, we were told in the Parliament by the Minister of Finance, that gross domestic product for 2010 was $90.97 billion at constant prices or $91 billion. This is what this document says. It tells us that economic growth for 2010—as I said, most of that year was under the PNM—was 2.5 per cent. Let us go to this document now. The same people who are supposed to be doing the same numbers, but let us look at what they put for the gross domestic product at constant prices in this document. I go to page 48 of this red document and compare it with page 52 of this blue document. In the blue document 2010, GDP at constant prices, $91 billion; in the red document 2010, GDP at constant prices, $89 billion. So, all of a sudden, $2 billion in GDP disappeared from our economy between this document and the other document prepared by the same Government.

Do you know what the effect of that is? If they had used the figure that they produced last year, and if they had put in this document that our GDP at constant prices was $91 billion, do you know what the economic contraction for this year would really have been?—Mr. Speaker, 4 per cent. So the Minister, in order to demonstrate a lower contraction in the economy in this year has reduced the GDP for last year. They moved the goalpost, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping] So the economy that grew by 2.5 per cent in 2010, suddenly did not grow, and went to zero, so you get a lower figure, so that when you drop down to the even lower figure in 2011, you get a small economic contraction when the real economic contraction in 2011 was actually closer to 4 per cent. That is the real situation in this country. What are they going to do, give us another figure next week? Which document I am supposed to believe? Both of these documents were produced by them, by the same Minister of Finance. Why do they have different figures in them?
Appropriation Bill, 2011

[MR. IMBERT]

[Interruption] Why? I mean, the only conclusion I can come to is that the figures have been adjusted to make our economic situation look better than it really is.

[Desk thumping]

While I am at it, Mr. Speaker, let us look at real outturn of 2011. Recurrent expenditure of $49.4 billion; Consolidated Fund Development Programme, $3.4 billion; total expenditure of $52.8 billion; total revenue, excluding borrowing, $43 billion for a deficit of $9 billion in the last fiscal year of which only $1.4 billion was financed through borrowing. Do you know what was the size of the unfinanced deficit in the fiscal year just ended? Mr. Speaker, $7.6 billion.

They took this country into overdraft at the Central Bank to the tune of $7.6 billion in the last fiscal year, and that is why the Minister was conspicuously silent about the economic outturn, because he could not tell us these figures. He could not tell us that the true deficit for 2012 is $11.3 billion, that the true deficit for 2011 was $9 billion and that for 2010 it was only $3 billion in the year where the PNM was in power for most of the year, the deficit was only $3 billion; $3.6 billion. As soon as they came in, it went to $9 billion, and now it has gone to $11 billion. He did not tell us that the unfinanced deficit last year was $7.6 billion and the unfinanced deficit for this year is $4.7 billion. I mean, I am disappointed. The Member for Tunapuna is supposed to be a distinguished economist, the very least he could do is come and level with us, and tell us what is going on in our economy. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, even with the figures which are suspicious, at best—they are starting from the wrong base figure, they should start from a higher figure, and the declines would be much larger—what do we see? The petroleum industry declined by 0.3 per cent; exploration on production declined by 2.3 per cent in the last fiscal year; agriculture and sugar declined by 4.1 per cent; export agriculture went down by 2.2 per cent; printing and publishing declined by 5.6 per cent; assembly type and related industries went down by 11.3 per cent. Miscellaneous manufacturing, services declined by 1.3 per cent; construction and quarrying went down by 2.6 per cent—actually it is 7.9 per cent; electricity and water declined by 2.6 per cent; construction and quarrying declined by 7.9 per cent; distribution and restaurants declined by 8.5 per cent; hotels and guest houses went down by 6.5 per cent; personal services declined by 3.5 per cent and VAT declined by 18 per cent at constant prices. Why did the Minister of Finance not come clean with this country and confirm that we have had massive declines in all of the productive sectors of the economy? [Desk thumping] I want to emphasize that I have no confidence in these figures, because they are based on a fictitious base year. It should be based on the correct figure from last year; and these declines would be much worse.
Let us go to the actual document itself. I heard a lot of praise over there for all sorts of things, but let us go to the document. Thank goodness public servants have a hand in these documents, and it is not just politicians. Let us look at page 21, cruise ship arrivals. The public servants have done their work and you were not able to get to it before this document was published. A total of 85 cruise ships docked in Trinidad and Tobago during 2010, a decrease of 16.7 per cent when compared to 2009 and 2009 is the year when you had the crash in the global economy, but in 2010 you had a decrease of 16 per cent in cruise ship arrivals. As a result, cruise ship passenger arrivals fell by 17 per cent in the year under review.

Let us move on to the next page. During the January—April 2011 period, a total of 38 cruise ships visited Trinidad and Tobago, 22 fewer than over the same period one year earlier. As a result, cruise passenger arrivals in Trinidad and Tobago fell to 43,000 from 72,000 persons in 2010. Due to dissatisfaction with this country’s marketing efforts, a cruise line withdrew and dropped the Port of Port of Spain—another cruise line dropped the Port of Port of Spain, as a consequence of a negative travel advisory by the British government. Why did the Minister of Finance not tell us about this? This is what has been happening in the tourism sector in the year under review.

Yachting arrivals: a total of 1,080 yachts visited Trinidad and Tobago in 2010, marking a decrease of 21.7 per cent from the 1,379 yachts which visited in 2009. I wish to emphasize the year of reference is 2009 when the world economy collapsed, and yet the performance of the tourism sector, which is driven by people who have disposable income that they can spend on vacation and travel was in our local economy far better in the year when the global economy crashed than in 2010, when you had a recovery in oil prices. These are facts, but they would not tell us about that. They would not tell us anything about that.

Let us go to page 21 in terms of services. The services sector is projected to decline in real terms by 1.3 per cent in 2011, following a decline of 5.2 per cent in 2010. A contraction of 8.5 per cent is expected in the second largest services subsector, distribution and restaurants; a less severe decline when compared to the subsectors, 11.6 per cent contraction in 2010. Contractions are projected in airline services, 5.3 per cent; telecommunications 1.6 per cent; port operations, 0.4 per cent. Lower levels of economic activity are projected in all of the remaining services subsectors, namely construction, 7.9 per cent decline; hotel and guests houses, 6.1 per cent decline; personal services, 3.3 per cent decline; water and electricity, 2.6 per cent decline; government, 1.5 per cent decline; education and cultural services, 0.1 per cent, Mr. Speaker.
Construction: real economic activity in the construction and quarrying subsector is expected to decline for the third consecutive year albeit at a slower rate of 7.9 per cent in 2011. So, what was really happening in the Trinidad and Tobago economy last year? What was really going on?

11.05 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, why all this praise? Why are you praising the Minister of Finance for presiding over this abysmal record for 2011? [Desk thumping] This is not me speaking; it is your document I am reading from. [Interruption] Misinterpret? This is the English language. I will repeat; I am told that I am misinterpreting. [Crosstalk] This is English:

“A contraction of 8.5 per cent is expected in the second largest services subsector, distribution and restaurants.”

Hon. Member: Griffith will deal with you.

Mr. C. Imbert: Griffith will deal with me? “De” man who preside over a 22 per cent decline in tourism arrivals in the last fiscal year? Oh give me a chance. [Laughter]

The other issue I want to deal with is that we have to come into this Parliament and consistently hear about they inherited an economy in shambles. Let us deal with facts.

Mr. Manning: Let us hear what you inherited.

Mr. C. Imbert: When the PNM administration came into office in December 2001, let us look at the facts. In December 2001—[Interruption] Mr. Speaker, I do not know what is happening; some kind of crosstalk is going on down there.

Dr. Moonilal: San Fernando West! [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker: May I appeal to both sides to allow the hon. Member of Diego Martin North/East to speak in silence.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, in the year 2001—[Laughter] [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, please, Member for Point Fortin.

Mr. C. Imbert: I am reading from the Review of the Economy 2001/2002, a Ministry of Finance document which is available on its website. In this document, when you look at the gross domestic product of Trinidad and Tobago in December 2001, or fiscal 2001, at market prices it was $52.5 billion. Let us fast-forward now to 2010. [Interruption]—Mr. Speaker—
Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, a second time, may I appeal to both sides to allow the Member to speak in silence and observe Standing Order 25(40). Do not allow me to go to 43(1) to (14) and allow the hon. Member to speak in silence.

Mr. C. Imbert: “Because you see, dey doh want to hear.”

As I said, our gross domestic product in 2001 was $52.5 billion. Our gross domestic product in 2010 was $133 billion. So the PNM government took the gross domestic product of Trinidad and Tobago from $52 billion in 2001 to $133 billion in 2010; a more than 100 per cent increase in GDP. [Desk thumping]

Let us look at the public debt. What was the public debt in 2001? It was $28.8 billion. What was our debt to GDP ratio in December 2001, when we came into office? It was 55 per cent. You can easily do the mathematics; $28.8 billion in total public debt, and divide it by the GDP at market prices of $52.5 billion, you get a debt to GDP ratio in 2001 of 55 per cent.

Let us go to what happened in 2010. I read from the Review of the Economy 2011. [Interruption]

Mr. Manning: That is how you deal with a budget.

Mr. C. Imbert: As I indicated, our GDP at market prices, $133 million. Our gross public sector debt, as a percentage of GDP, 38 per cent. So between 2001, when the UNC went out and the PNM came in, and 2010, when we had an election, we grew our GDP—under the PNM administration, our GDP grew in excess of 100 per cent. We came in and met a debt to GDP ratio of 55 per cent and we reduced that over the period to 38 per cent. [Desk thumping] No right-thinking person would describe that economic performance as an economy in shambles. No right-thinking person would describe that as an economy in shambles.

Let us look at another indicator; let us look at foreign reserves. What were our foreign reserves, our gross foreign assets in 2001, when the PNM came in. I read from the Review of the Economy 2001/2002, source Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, Appendix 20:3, gross foreign reserves, December 2001, US $2.4 billion, in 2001, when the PNM came in.

What was it in the election year of 2010? What was it? I read from Review of the Economy 2011, Appendix 26, page 72, in May of 2010 when we had that election, our gross foreign assets stood at US $11.3 billion. So we took our foreign reserves from $2.4 billion under the UNC and we grew it to $11.3 billion under the PNM, a 500 per cent increase during the period of the PNM. We grew GDP by almost 150 per cent, and we grew our foreign assets by 500 per cent.
Let us look at unemployment. What was the unemployment rate in 2001? I read from the Review of the Economy 2001/2002, unemployment rate 2001, 10.8 per cent. What happened to that unemployment rate between 2001 and May 2010? It dropped from almost 11 per cent down to 5 per cent. So we cut the unemployment rate in half over that period and we grew the number of persons employed in our economy, from 514,000 persons in 2001, to almost 600,000 employed persons in 2010. [Desk thumping] So GDP gone up by 150 per cent; debt to GDP ratio gone from 55 per cent down to 38 per cent; foreign reserves gone from 2.4 per cent to 11.3 per cent; unemployment rate dropped from 11 per cent to 5 per cent; Heritage and Stabilization Fund was about $300 million in 2001 or thereabouts. What was the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund in 2010?—$22 billion. [Desk thumping] So we took the Heritage and Stabilization Fund under the UNC, from $300 million or $400 million to $22 billion in May 2010. As I said, we doubled the GDP; we halved the unemployment rate and we increased our foreign reserves by fivefold.

But I have to come in this Parliament and hear how “the economy was in shambles” and “we had a debt burden” and that we “were not prudent” and we “were fiscally irresponsible”. Under the PNM, as I pointed out to you, we had a surplus on our current account. We were spending less than we earned. We were putting surpluses into the current account at the Central Bank. [Desk thumping] Those surpluses built up by the PNM have run this country for the last three years. [Desk thumping] Without those surpluses, which exceeded $11 billion—the PNM government deposited current account surpluses into the Central Bank, in excess of $10 billion over that period. That is how this country has survived over the last two years under this irresponsible Government, which as I said has run an unfinanced deficit in 2011 of $7.6 billion and is now running an unfinanced deficit in 2012 of $4.7 billion. The Minister of Finance did not tell you any of these things; and they pounded the table when he spoke about the wonderful economic performance of the UNC.

This country is in problems. It is in problems. If you want to see what the facts are, you only have to go—these documents are available on the Internet. They are not secret documents. You only have to go to the draft estimates of recurrent expenditure and see that in 2010—[Interruption]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.
Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, for those who have eyes to see, for those who do not have blinkers on, go to the Estimates of Expenditure, Recurrent Expenditure for the Financial Year 2012, page xvIII, you would see that recurrent expenditure in 2010, $43 billion, recurrent expenditure in 2012, $53 billion. This responsible Government has increased the expenditure on recurrent expenditure, not capital—not to build the productive sectors of this economy, not to develop industries, not to generate employment, but just to pay recurrent expenditure; they have increased recurrent expenditure over the last two years by $10 billion, from $43 to $53 billion, while the revenue has remained flat. The revenue the Government is collecting has remained constant, but they have increased expenditure by $10 billion. This is entirely unsustainable. It is entirely unsustainable. [Crosstalk]

The Consolidated Fund is either at zero or it is in deficit. It cannot sustain this unfinanced deficit of $4.7 billion. The way they are going, they came to the Parliament a few months ago—[Interuption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members of the Opposition if for some reason you do not want to hear the hon. Member, I would like to hear him. I am getting a lot of crosstalk coming from the Opposition Bench also from the Government Benches. I would ask the last few Members on both sides to just allow the hon. Member to speak in silence. I am appealing. I am—appealing.

I want to warn Members that if they continue to ignore the ruling of the Speaker, I would like Members to refer to Standing Order 43(1) to (14). I will invoke those Standing Orders in an effort to bring about discipline in this House. Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, you may continue. [Desk thumping]

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I hope I will get a bit of injury time.

The point is this country cannot continue like this. We cannot continue to spend $53 billion and collect $43 billion, which is what they are hiding from us. All we are collecting is $43 billion, but we are spending $53 billion, and “de way dey going dey go spend $63 billion next year, and $73 billion de next year”, because I heard the Member for Baratia/San Juan say that is how you deal with the problems in the country, you spend, spend, spend.

I understand; you were not reading the documents, you did not realize how much they were spending. So we are running this economy on revenues that cannot sustain the expenditure by the Government. That is why when the Member for Diego Martin West made the point that we may soon be looking at the IMF, I heard you laugh, but you did not understand the expenditure and income patterns in this country. You just did not understand.
The other problem I have with this budget presentation is that the Government Members believes they could just come and talk. They could say anything and nobody would read, nobody would check to see what they said last year. I am looking at last year’s budget statement, and I go to page 11. This was the lofty pronouncement from the Minister of Finance last — year:

“Public servants wage negotiations

Mr. Speaker, public servants terms of employment have remained unsettled for 2008, 2009 and 2010. This affects some 83,000 persons. This is another part of the previous administration’s legacy of neglect that we must deal with.”—and hear this big declaration—“It is our intention to settle this matter as quickly as possible. We expect to settle this issue, these wage negotiations by the end of 2010.”

And they thumped the desks. That was last year. So by December 2010, all wage negotiations were to be settled. That was the lofty declaration of the Minister of Finance last year. What did he say this year?

Mr. Manning: State of emergency!

Mr. C. Imbert: No, no, no; let us go and see what he tells us this year. This year he is not so brave. He said last year that he was going to settle the wage negotiations by the end of 2010. What does he tell us this year? He tells us that he hopes to finish the negotiations quickly. He is hoping that we would be able to resolve the problems in terms of wage negotiations, as soon as possible. That is what he tells is in 2011. You see, 2010 has come and gone and they have not settled the wage negotiations with the public service. They have not settled them. Instead, what do you have? You have unions calling for a national strike. Here it is, page 9. What does he tell us on page 11 in 2010?

“We expect to settle public service wage negotiations by the end of 2010.”

Listen to what he says in 2011, a year later:

“For those negotiations which are yet to be concluded for the period 2008 to 2010, it is our hope that they will be finalized shortly, given that the negotiations are in respect of a past period. We have already entered the 2011 to 2013 bargaining period and a new approach will be required if the parties are to arrive at a mutually acceptable settlement within the economic realities.”

“So what he say last year?” “Last year he say he go settle it in three months.” One year later what “he say”? We did not settle it; we need to find a new way
because these unions are getting on bad. They do not want to dialogue with us. They do not want to settle the matter. What did they do, Mr. Speaker? “State of emergency in dey tail”. [Desk thumping] So they cannot strike anymore; “dey cyar march; they cyar protest; they cyar hold meetings.”

Let us look at what he said in terms of security and justice in 2010; page 13:

“We will implement a national security operations centre. This special unit will focus on intelligence gathering through a comprehensive electronic data base of all criminal related activities. Officers on mobile patrols, problem patrols will be able to link to the National Security Operation Centre, log on to the information network to ascertain all relevant data on vehicle and individuals through licence plates and driving permit numbers. This centre is expect to lead a response time of less than 10 minutes to emergency calls.”

That is what “he say” last year. “What he say dis year?” Well he did not tell us what happened, because nothing happened. No longer are they talking about the National Security Operation Centre; it has evaporated. No longer are they talking about the National Security Operation Centre Information Network—gone. “It gone up in smoke.” No longer are they talking about a response time of less than 10 minutes to emergency calls. “What you get instead?” “Take state of emergency in yuh pwefm”, as the Member for Diego Martin West would say. [Desk thumping] Forget National Operation Centre; forget database; forget motor vehicle registration, all of that. Just forget that; that gone.

Look at what he said again in 2010:

“There has been much talk, but little action in the past with regard to the return of bike patrols. It is the view of this Government that the introduction of bicycles for the police to conduct patrols in some communities is a sound one and it is our intention to deploy bicycles into the police service for this purpose. Too many times police are station bound. The introduction of bicycle patrols will go a long way to create a stronger police presence.”

“Dat is what he say last year.” Where “de” bicycles? Gone. [Laughter] [Desk thumping] Hear “de” next bold declaration, Mr. Speaker. Page 15:

“We will establish a special criminal court to provide swift justice. The court will treat with firearm, kidnapping and narcotic offences. It is meant to relieve the case burden on the Magistrates’ Court.”

Where is this special criminal court? Is it in space? The only criminal court I know about is a state of emergency. “Take dat!” No criminal court; no National Operation Centre; no database. State of emergency; “take dat!”
What else did he tell us he would do last year?

“For the elderly, the Government will launch the elderly mobile shoppers service in 2011.”

Member for Diego Martin Central, do you know about any elderly mobile shoppers service? Figment of somebody’s imagination. Well they said all kinds of things about housing; they would consolidate the TTMF and the Home Mortgage Bank and create a new holding company, the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Bank, all that “côté ci côté la”; nothing; nothing.

Hon. Member: State of emergency.

Mr. C. Imbert: Let us move on, Mr. Speaker. Tourism:

“The Government will promote sport tourism in Trinidad and Tobago via the introduction of off season training camps targeting foreign national teams.”

The only sport we have in Trinidad and Tobago—“dey making sport, dat is what happen”. [Laughter] None of that happened. You know, Mr. Speaker, you reprimanded me during the Minister’s speech, and correctly so. Correctly, he reprimanded me. [ Interruption] The same way he had to reprimand you. Let us go to page 19 of the Minister’s speech last year:

“We shall explore the development of alternative energy such as solar and wind energy.”

When the Minister was talking this year, it sounded so familiar, some of the things he was saying. I could not help myself and I had to say, “But I heard that last year,” and of course I was reprimanded, correctly for disturbing the Minister. But what did he say?

“Tax allowances with respect to the use of alternative energy sources such as compressed natural gas, solar powered water heaters, photovoltaic systems on wind energy systems...”

That was what he said we would do this year. “Look wha’ he say last year.” Mr. Speaker, when you read the tax measures for alternative energy, word for word. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: Oh no!
Mr. C. Imbert: Measures to support alternative energy use 2010:

“To ensure that CNG gains momentum, the Government proposes the following:

To grant wear and tear allowances on 130 per cent off the cost to include the acquisition of plant machinery equipment for the construction of the conversion centres.”

“To grant wear and tear allowances on 130 per cent on the cost of kits and cylinders.

He tells us that all of these measures will take effect from January 2011.

Look at what is happening in 2012?

“With effect from January 01, 2012...”—in this speech last year, he said all these things would take place—“These measures will take effect from January 01, 2011 and will require amendments to the Customs Act.”

“Dat is wha he say last year. Wha he say dis year?”

“With effect from January 01, 2012 a wear and tear allowance of 130 per cent of expenditure incurred on the acquisition of plant, machinery and equipment. [Desk thumping] excluding installation costs and for the acquisition and installation in a motor vehicle of compressed natural gas.”

Let me read what he said last year:

“To grant a wear and tear allowance of 130 per cent on the cost incurred in the acquisition of plant, machinery and equipment, excluding installation cost.”

—Let me see what he said this year:

“To grant a wear and tear allowance of 130 per cent of expenditure incurred in the acquisition of plant, machinery and equipment...”

Mr. Speaker, that is why I had to say, “I heard that before.” He lifted it directly from his speech last year.

Last year the Minister said that all these incentives for renewable energy would be become effective from January 01, 2011. He listed out all of them. This year, “he say he list out” all of them again and say they would become effective from January 01, 2012.

Mr. Manning: Next year what would he say?
Mr. C. Imbert: Next year is 2013. [Laughter] Listen to what he tells us about projects, because I went through what they told us about projects. [Crosstalk] I heard the new Minister of Health and, as I said, I cannot blame him, he was not around all the time. [Crosstalk] “I cyar blame him; health hard yuh know.” But I heard the Minister of Health tell us about his lofty plans for the National Oncology Centre. But let us see what the Minister of Finance told us would happen in fiscal year 2011. What did he tell us, Mr. Speaker?

He tells us in 2011—listen to this, page 22:

“The Point Fortin Hospital is scheduled for completion in 2013.” It start yet?

Hon. Member: Not yet.

Mr. C. Imbert: I guess they are going to use some kind of accelerated construction:

“Other major projects scheduled for the next fiscal year includes a new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital.”—Start yet?

Mr. Manning: No.

Mr. C. Imbert: This is the one that really struck me:

“Next year 2011 we will finally build the oft promised and long awaited National Oncology Centre.”

That is what he said last year. “You eh move a blade of grass.” [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, as you go through, look at what he tells us. Page 24, Competitive Environment:

“The World Competitive Report has exposed Trinidad and Tobago’s ranking on the Competitive Index as extremely low. In 2006 we were 55; in 2007, 59; in 2008, 78; in 2009 we were an astonishingly low, 81. Now is the time for action to reverse these trends.”—“He like dat phrase, you know”, “now is the time for action...” [Laughter] Where are we now? I downloaded this from the World Bank. We are now at 97.

Hon. Member: What? [Laughter]

Mr. C. Imbert: This is the page: Doing Business 2011 for Trinidad and Tobago. “Doing Business 2011” rank, 97. This is where I have issues with the Minister’s use of the English language. He said, “Now is the time for action to reverse these trends.” We were 81 in 2009, now we are 97. What trend is he reversing there, Mr. Speaker?
It is just words, just words. How many more minutes do I have, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: You have 12 more minutes.

Mr. C. Imbert: Lots of time. And for those who do not believe, just go on the Internet and check this article:

“Trinidad and Tobago a long way to go before becoming a choice —outsourcing destination”.

This is very current, October 07, 2011. They give you all the information about the disaster that has occurred in terms of industry and business in Trinidad and Tobago, in the last fiscal year. That is what led me to this, to examine our ranking in terms of the Doing Business 2011.

I will read:

“October 07, 2011”—this was just a couple days ago—“according to Doing Business 2011 published by the International Financial Corporation of the World Bank, Trinidad and Tobago ranked 97th in the world for ease of doing business in a study of 183 economies, a decrease over the 2010 figures.”

Go and read it yourself, if you do not believe me.

I heard Minister after Minister, MP after MP, get up and praise my good friend, the Member for Chaguanas West. They praised him. They said he was wonderful, a great man. So I went and checked the records.

Mr. Manning: “How great thou art.” [Laughter]

Mr. C. Imbert: This is what I found. Just for your own edification, Mr. Speaker, you can go and check the following articles: Trinidad Express, $30 million flood plan, August 13, 2010; Trinidad Express, Jack, foreigner in shortlist for expert post; August 14, 2010; Trinidad Express, August 17, 2010; Upset Warner slams selfish, messy Trinis. He was talking about flooding.

What did we have here, August 17?


We heard every one of them praise my good friend, the Member for Chaguanas West, so I did an analysis.
In June 2010, shortly after the Member for Chaguanas West was sworn in as Minister of Works and Transport, he said that flooding in Trinidad and Tobago was PNM’s fault. It was not caused by rain; it was the PNM that caused flooding in Trinidad and Tobago. He also said—and I looked at the video myself last night—after a post-Cabinet press conference, that he had all the answers. He would dredge the rivers; he would clear the watercourses; he would clean the drains; he would dust off and implement a drainage plan he found in his office. He would bring in foreign experts and foreign equipment. He would build retention ponds; he would make the river beds so clean, you could eat lunch on them. [Laughter] I remember seeing him on television saying that he could eat lunch on the bed of the Maraval River. “Dis time I watching de river and all I seeing is trees and mountains of dirt, but he eating lunch in there.” [Laughter] But that was in June 2010.

Two months after that, at the swearing in of local government councillors in the Borough of Chaguanas, on August 04, 2010, the Minister of Works gave us an assurance, “Under my watch, flooding will become a thing of the past, a memory.” That was August 04, 2010. Less than two weeks later, on August 13, the Minister announced that Cabinet had approved a $30 million flood relief programme and that within three months, by November 2010, all rivers and watercourses in Trinidad, from north to south, would be dredged and cleared. Two weeks later, on August 29, 2010, the Minister said that if he could not solve the problem of flooding, he would quit and bow out of politics.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. C. Imbert: “So all of allyuh who really want him to go, do worry with that FIFA ting.” [Crosstalk] “All allyuh on that side, you cyar fool me, I know allyuh want him to go. Doh worry with this FIFA business; you could use this promise he made. [Laughter] He said on August 29 that if he could not solve the problem of flooding, he would quit and bow out of politics. So there we have it, June 2010, August 2010.

Yesterday, after half the country was under three feet of water from one day’s rain, with the Met office telling us that the weather patterns are not unusual, the Minister said the following:

“Everywhere I go I see destruction. Years of neglect full in the face of the people who are bearing losses, all their furniture and equipment. I shed a tear because it is wrong; it is unconscionable. We have this amount of money.”

Now, is this Minister for real, Mr. Speaker? In June of last year he said that flooding was the PNM’s fault. In August of last year, in the euphoria of the local
government elections, he triumphantly declared that flooding would soon be just a
memory. In that same month, he got $30 million to alleviate flooding. He said that
within three months he would clean every river in Trinidad and Tobago. Now, one
year later, the whole of Trinidad and Tobago is under water and “is de PNM fault
again,” a complete cycle.

In June 2010 it was the PNM’s fault. Between June 2010 and June 2011 “he get
money, he hire expert, he get equipment, he dredge de river, he clear de
watercourse, he dust off de drainage plan. October 2010, rain falls, it is the PNM’s
fault again”. [Desk thumping]

I have sympathy for the Minister, because flooding is a very difficult issue to
deal with, but he has now learned that. He did not know that in June 2010 when he
was making all his pronouncements about how flooding would be a thing of the
past and a memory. That was why I was surprised when I heard Minister after
Minister praising the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, about how he is the
greatest Minister and the best Minister and he dredged all the rivers. He actually
said that he dredged and cleared all the rivers in the constituency. St. Augustine had
five feet of water yesterday. [Interuption]

Miss Ramdial: Couva had none.

Mr. C. Imbert: Couva had no water? Do not talk too fast.

Mr. Speaker: Please do not engage in crosstalk, Member for Couva North.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is okay, Mr. Speaker, they talk again. Mr. Speaker, my
analysis of what is happening in this country is that this Government is living in a
cloud somewhere in the sky. As they used to say long ago, they are living in “cloud
cuckoo land”. You have a Minister of Finance running a deficit of $11 billion,
with an unfinanced deficit in 2012 of almost $5 billion. You have Ministers
praising each other and then the country goes into disaster the following day. You
have the Minister of Finance telling us last year about all their great plans for the
police: a national operations centre; a database; a 10-minute response time;
bicycles for the police; refurbishment of police stations; an integrated attack on
crime. What happened during the year? They throw their hands up in the air and
say, “We have to declare a state of emergency.”

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance cannot in his quiet moments think that he
is doing a good job. He cannot. He could come into this Parliament and say all
kinds of things, but he cannot in his quiet moments—I saw an article either today or
yesterday, where a columnist who is certainly not a supporter of the PNM,
Mr. Harris, said that there are two Dookerans, one is the politician and one is the economist. He said that as the politician throws his hands up in the air and says what a wonderful job he is doing, the economist cringes in horror. In other words, politician Dookeran says, “You are great man”; economist Dookeran says, “What is going on in this country? What have I done?”

I urge all right-thinking people, do not take my word for it. Drill down into the figures yourselves. You would see that the Minister is spending $10 million more than he is earning. You will see he is running an unfinanced deficit. He is running us into overdraft; he is almost at the edge in terms of the statutory limit in terms of borrowing from the Central Bank. You will see it. You would see that what he is doing is completely unsustainable. You would see that the figures in the documents between 2010 and 2011 have been adjusted and changed to give a funny picture of what is happening in this country.

I urge all right-thinking economists, accountants, financial experts, do not take my word for it. Check the figures yourself. But what I would say is, “Do not believe a word they have to say”, because they are hiding the truth from the population of this country.—I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Jack Warner): Mr. Speaker, I would have loved to reply to all the speakers who spoke on that side, between the Leader of the Opposition and the last speaker, but time would not allow it. In any event, there was not much substance in what was said by those in between. In fact, I do not even think there was much substance in what the last speaker said, but I will come to him just now.

Before I forget, let me just say, and I will come back to him later, I pride myself and my Ministry on the fact that with all the rain which fell over the last weekend, there was no flooding in Woodland; there was no flooding in Oropouche; there was no flooding in Barrackpore; there was no flooding in Couva, and the list goes on and on. Those were areas which had been neglected for years and where a drizzle would have caused a flood. Those are areas which were neglected and where my Ministry concentrated. I make no apologies for that.

I listened to you. I did not say a word to you. I did not say “boo”, though I was tempted, I listened to you. Listen and learn, “nuh”, right.

I was saying, I would come back to that. The fact is I would have thought that the very first thing the last speaker would have done was to stand in this Chamber and apologize to this country for having neglected the
infrastructure for all those years he was Minister of Works and Transport. *Crosstalk* I would have thought that the flooding that took place over the last 24 hours, if I were the last minister, who has the best “tabanca” I ever seen in my life as a minister, would have risen here and said, “I am sorry, I have neglected this country in ways unimaginable.” That was not done.

Listen to a report by Winston Riley, the President of the JCC at one time. Hear what he said:

“When we look at our infrastructure, particularly in roads and drainage we see a systemic lack of long-term planning and investment from successive administrations. Flooding and traffic congestion are now perennial problems without any sign of relief.”

But, of course, that was during his term.

I would have thought therefore that he would rise here and say, “I am sorry,” but I will come back to you before I am finished.

Let me just deal, in the first case, with the contribution from the Leader of the Opposition; a contribution that promised us some bombshells we read from an article in the *Newsday*, I believe. Mr. Speaker, I sat here transfixed, and what did we get? We have since gotten the shells, but not the bomb. What is the bomb? I want to commend the Leader of the Opposition for disposing of his Balisier tie. I want to commend him for having seen the light, that as a leader he represents Trinidad and Tobago and not those who are Balisier wearers, supporters or members. I commend him also for the national pin which he is now wearing on his collar, having learned from us. I commend him. *[Desk thumping]* But I ask: where are the bombshells?

The Member for Diego Martin West said:

“A national crisis looms larger and larger.”

I made a note here, “prophet of doom and gloom”, as my Member for Tabaquite had said earlier. That is all the PNM knows at this time. Look at them, six of one, half a dozen of the other. *[Laughter]* Look at them, doom and gloom. Therefore I was not surprised in any way.

The Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, described the budget presentation by the Minister of Finance as obfuscation, self-praise, deceit. A deficit budget he said. He said, and I quote:

“Nothing about revenue nor how soon we shall return to a balanced budget...”
Appropriation Bill, 2011  

Monday, October 17, 2011

[Hon. J. Warner]

And the criticisms went on and on. I wish to ask: when did we have the first deficit budget? That was four years ago under them. When did we have the second deficit budget? Three years ago under them. All this fancy stable economy we heard just now, which I will come to in a while, was at a time when they had deficit budgets. Why was he not concerned then, as he is concerned now? Do you know why, because what is good for the goose is not good for the gander. It was good for them when they had plenty, but it is bad for us when we have a little “cacada” and have to do much with little.

Today I am saying, thank God we have a progressive Government on this side, and we can move this country from this prophecy of doom and gloom. Doom and gloom is hypocrisy personified, as far as I am concerned.

Mr. Speaker, I have no intention of pretending I am an economist; no intention. I stick to my limitations, if others do not do that. I would leave the arithmetic for the economist, for the Minister of Finance. I will deal with the politics of the budget, as far as I am concerned. The Minister of Finance is most competent to do that. In fact, in this Chamber, I do not know anybody who is more competent than he.

Having said that, suffice it to say, that the debt to GDP, to which the Leader of the Opposition referred on Friday, is no more debt today than it was under the PNM. Therefore I am not unduly worried about that comment.

More importantly, on Friday the Leader of the Opposition spoke about our inheriting a stable economy when we came into office, and this morning again we heard that, a stable economy. Yes, we did inherit a stable economy. Do you know why? Because when we came in at the time the economy was at risk, because the PNM did not deal in resolving the several problems which appeared. They did not deal with Clico, they did not deal with HCU, they did not deal with salaries for workers, they did not deal with crime, and the list continued. Therefore it is quite easy to talk about a stable economy when you dealt with nothing. What they did was demit office, which I will come to just now, and left the bill and the matters for us to resolve. That is why we are where we are today.

The Leader of the Opposition said, and I quote again:

“One of the biggest problems the people of Trinidad and Tobago face is the present Government of Trinidad and Tobago.”

I said “jees”. Let me say it again:

“One of the biggest problems the people of Trinidad and Tobago face is the present Government of Trinidad and Tobago.”
Mr. Speaker, well I have news for them. I would put a different spin on it. I would say that the only problem the people of Trinidad and Tobago would face is if the PNM ever got back into government. [Desk thumping] That I cannot see in our collective lifetimes. I cannot see it. [Crosstalk] I do not have vision? I do have vision; people in this country have common sense.

The Leader of the Opposition in his contribution last Friday regaled us with PNM successes. This morning if you heard it, so many things the PNM did. They were so successful in housing units; they were successful in the economy; they were successful in health. Mr. Speaker, they were successful in this and in that. I sat here and I asked myself, “If they were so successful in the implementation and execution of so many initiatives, why then did they call an early election?” You were so successful, then why did you call an early election, two years ahead of schedule? Successful too bad, but two years before time you call an election. What logic is that? The Member for San Fernando East, if you want me to give you—he is not here—[ Interruption]

**Hon. Member:** He is coming.

**Hon. J. Warner:** If you want me to give you the floor to answer this, I will give you the floor. Why two years ahead of schedule, if you were so successful? And then having called it two years before time, so successful, why are you on that side and we are on this side? I can give you the cause to answer. You are so successful, from 26 seats to 12; that is success. Good economy, good this, good that, good everything, six of one, half a dozen of the other. That is what you are, so I do not know who is fooling whom.

The Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, said that our plan is to starve Tobago of resources, which is a year and a little more ahead. Our plan this year is to starve the THA of resources for the elections of the THA which are due about 14 months from now. We have to be very good. I am saying this morning, that nothing could be further from the truth. We do not have to do that for the THA to lose. The THA is doing it for itself. Therefore it is wrong to come to this House to make that kind of statement.

Simply put, we simply cannot give Tobago any more, as we cannot give any other Ministry. You cannot give what you do not have. I know this is the “zaboca” season, but the budget is not a “zaboca” that you could slice and say, “Take this piece and that piece and that piece.” You have to sit and do some prudent management of the economy and you have to allocate to Ministries, including Tobago, what you can.
I will come back to that just now, because I have some outrage on this budget. I will tell you why I have outrage in a few minutes. I am making the point that everyone has to take a cut, and the THA is no different from any other Ministry. Everyone has to account for the allocation given to it, including the THA.

As I am on this, Mr. Speaker, I want to make the point that I think it is time the Members of the THA and the various departments of Tobago be placed under the Integrity Commission. It is time. You cannot have all of us here spending less than Tobago and facing the Integrity Commission, and Tobago Members free. It does not make sense. It is time for us to consider that, and that is what I will propose to the Minister in due course.

Then last Friday when the Leader of the Opposition returned from lunch he ended his contribution by warning all of us of an IMF plot. That was the big bombshell. You know what I said? When I heard him talk about an IMF plot immediately after lunch, I said to myself that he must have eaten “chataigne”. [Laughter] I said so, because it made no sense. Therefore if that was his menu, I forgive him, I understand.

By the way, before I forget, he criticized me personally and even attacked the hon. Prime Minister, trying to trivialize the matter of a national infrastructure bank, “a bank for Jack Warner”. Serious matter, you know, “a bank for Jack Warner”. “A bank for Jack,” he said. First of all, let me tell you, for my dollar a month I do not need a bank. At the end of the day, I have made a conscious decision to take $1 a month salary. I do not need a bank for that.

But more importantly, one would have expected that anyone aspiring to lead this country would have investigated this initiative by the Minister of Finance to see why it came about. This innovation is today sweeping Europe. In France, Great Britain and so on, he could go on Google and see for himself. But he comes here, the Member for Diego Martin West, and trivializes the matter. He tried to trivialize it with the hon. Prime Minister and did not understand at all what was the purpose of this bank.

I go back to a draft paper issued by Winston Riley, at the time the President of the JCC, not Jack Warner, Riley. Mr. Speaker, hear what he says about the bank.

Mr. Manning: Is he a financial expert?

Hon. Jack Warner: The JCC proposes on page 5 of the draft paper, that:

“In utilizing the private sector for funding the contractor, the construction manager and consultant and project manager, these should be the link from the
funding source by the establishment of a national infrastructure bank for Trinidad and Tobago.”

He called it the NIBTT. Mr. Speaker, he said:

“This will allow for proper sustained national development of skilled labour, contractors, consultants and manufacturers.”

Then he gives a lot of reasons why this bank should be adopted. He said:

It would provide government with a mechanism for easing budgetary constraints. Projects can be developed without increasing debt exposure or over extending the national budget. It provides government with a mechanism for transferring of a significant part of the risk associated with infrastructure projects. It provides government with a mechanism for controlling and evaluating costs. It provides government with a number of economic and social benefits.

And the list goes on and on. The Leader of the Opposition, a person who I imagine, would not become Prime Minister until 3011, comes here to trivialize this. [Laughter] Any leader worth his salt would go on Google and see what is the whole purpose of this bank and learn about it. That is what we are here for.

Dr. Rowley: I do not agree.

Hon. J. Warner: You do not agree; you do not know. It is a difference. [Crosstalk] All I am saying to you is that this for me was shocking. At the end of the day, let me quickly pass across to the last speaker.

He said that it fell on him to really explain what happened in fiscal 2011. I would have thought that would have fallen on the Member for San Fernando East. I would have thought the Member for San Fernando East would have explained what happened in fiscal 2011 and, in any event, all the years before that. But since he assumed that role, since he arrogated that role unto himself, so to speak, I want to tell the Member for Diego Martin North/East that he has a lot of other things to explain as well.

He has to explain to us here in this House about the MV Su. [Desk thumping] Up to now, after one year, we still do not know about the MV Su. Mr. Speaker, $52 million for a boat that never sailed for a day, taxpayers’ money. [Crosstalk] The boat never sailed for a day. He has to explain why he spent $565 million on a study for the rapid rail. That study is in two cardboard boxes under my table. Every morning I watch before me $565 million, taxpayers’ money; half a billion dollars. [Crosstalk] Every morning I see that. And he is coming to explain? Tell us about that.
He has to explain the $1 million fete he threw just to open an overpass. Bungi Garlin coming out of the sky in a helicopter, talk about that. Tell us about that, and the list goes on and on. [Crosstalk]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Bring us some good news and some new things.

Hon. J. Warner: Member for Point Fortin, I will come to you just now. I know you are anxious.

He has to do that and tell us about those things. He said that this was the largest sum of money spent by any Minister of Finance. He talked about borrowing $6.6 billion, a deficit of $11.3 billion and that we are living on overdraft in the Central Bank, and he “gallery” and so on and so on, before the television this morning.

Mr. Speaker, the arithmetic, I repeat, I will leave to the Minister of Finance who, I repeat, is more competent than anybody here to talk about that, including the Member for Diego Martin North/East. I just want to remind the Member that it was his government, under the Member for San Fernando East, who spent the largest amount ever this country has seen in eight years. Over eight years they spent over $400 billion, largest ever, and he was not concerned. He was not worried. All the histrionics he could do this morning, does not take that away. We want to know, tell us how that was spent.

12.10 p.m.

He talked about the $6 billion overdraft. And I am saying to him, $6 billion overdraft to run this country to improve the lives of the people is, for me, far, far better spent than the $5 billion his government put in a sinking hole in Clico with no approval, and not even knowing, of course, when they will be paid. That did not cause him any worry, but to put $6 billion in overdraft to improve the people’s lives, that is cause for worry.

I want to say that I read somewhere where the Member for San Fernando East had said, when he appointed the last Minister of Finance, the one who went to the Central Bank with her curlers on Old Year’s night to take out her money—

Dr. Moonilal: In her duster.

Hon. J. Warner: In her duster. She had on a duster. [Laughter] When she was appointed, the Member for San Fernando East said, you do not have to know economics to be a Minister of Finance, or words to the effect. And, of course, again, an attempt was made this morning here, earlier—the last speaker proved that. Then
he said that sugar has declined by 4 per cent, and X per cent declined, and Y declined and so. I sat here and I said to myself, you know, this is the government that abolished the sugar industry in 2006. Shut it down! They did not even give the workers their lands and so on, and he is telling us here that last year sugar declined by 4 per cent. Which sugar? Where? The sugar estate—since 2006 it was closed down. Closed down! Right?

So therefore, I am asking—[Interruption]—I do not care what you are talking about; that is what he said. If this Chamber had a choice to choose the figures given by the last speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and those given by the Minister of Finance, whose you think they would choose? They will choose, of course, the words and advice from the Member for Diego Martin North/East against the Member for Tunapuna?

He gave several examples of debt to GDP ratio. He said, of course, gross foreign assets were increased from $2.4 billion to US $11.3 billion. Unemployment rate had the stabilization fund, from $2 billion to X billion. He made the point that, of course, that surplus for these years, and he went on and on and raved and ranted, and he did not tell; would not tell this Chamber that at the peak, 2008, the price of oil per barrel was $148.

**Dr. Moonilal:** They would not say that.

**Hon. J. Warner:** Would not say that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** A $55 billion budget they had.

**Hon. J. Warner:** That is correct. He would not say that! That is the level of dishonesty. Oil at the time was $140. [Interruption] Thank you very much; I appreciate it.

Oil, I was saying, the price per barrel of oil was $148 at the peak in 2008. The gas price was $13.50 per mmbtu. Today it is $2.75 or thereabouts.

**Dr. Moonilal:** They do not say that.

**Hon. J. Warner:** Why does he not say so? The point I am making, therefore, is at the time they had money going through them like a dose of salts; they had money like “gobar”. Nobody, of course, complained. The point is, it was badly spent. And he ended by talking about the state of emergency.

I want to just say quickly that the crime rate today is 70 per cent down, [Desk thumping] And we on this side make no apologies whatsoever for that decline.
Appropriation Bill, 2011

[HON. J. WARNER]

[Desk thumping] And it could only have been done based on the quality of leadership we have here in this administration. [Desk thumping] But I will come to that just now.

Even our courts, we are told about no courts as yet. We have no courts as yet because we have to consult with the Judiciary. That is a normal thing to do. In any event, they did not build any courts. Let them name one court they built in the last 10 years. None!

Mr. Roberts: They build a tennis court.

Hon. J. Warner: A tennis court, yes. But not a tennis court; a real court. Name one! Then too, as far as the courts are concerned, the Minister of Justice has to ensure that the procurement process is above board, is unimpeachable, is impeccable. And, of course, I am saying, to do so, we would have to be doing it differently from the PNM.

So I am not too bothered by the last speaker. And to try to talk and say how I promised that I will resign if there are floods and so on; I am hearing this very often, about Jack will resign. Mr. Speaker, I was born in Rio Claro. I went to school there as a boy and I left there and went to live in Todds Road. From Todds Road, I went to live in Longdenville and from there I walked to school in “Prez”, Chaguanas, and the “sapat” I had in Rio Claro, I had in Todds Road; the “sapat” I had in Todds Road, I had in Longdenville; the “sapat” I had in Longdenville I had in Chaguanas. Therefore, I can go back to my “sapat” tomorrow. I have no ties here. So do not even believe that I must resign because of flooding. Because of flooding I say again that the areas where we worked upon—[Interruption]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What is the matter with those people?

Hon. J. Warner: It is all right. [Crosstalk] The areas we worked upon, we were able to curtail the flooding and we shall do the same throughout the country. And why I shed a tear, I shed a tear for those areas. Yesterday, I was there with the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara. Look him here! It is unbelievable! And those are areas, I said before, which voted consistently for the PNM. The only thing that the PNM did not discriminate about is that they, of course, had neglected throughout—everybody; whether it was Laventille, Diego Martin, throughout! And they sent to me, after one year in office, 117 roads to fix. Why did you not send it to the last Minister of Works and Transport? [Laughter] [Desk thumping]

For two years the Member for Laventille West was the Minister in the Ministry of Works and Transport. So why did he not fix them? [Desk thumping]
Mr. Roberts: “Oh goood!” He was there?

Hon. J. Warner: How “yuh” mean if he was there?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: And he did not complain.

Hon. J. Warner: But after 17 months, he sent to me 117 roads. He had to be a joker. But the whole aim is, of course, to try to make us look bad. But that “cyar” work! The people’s eyes are open. You see? I tell you, people’s homes were destroyed. I saw the Minister—he called me six o’clock yesterday morning. Throughout the day, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, the officials, everybody, out. I have never seen such a level of cooperation at all levels as yesterday. Ask him! And where were they? Not one of them I saw. Where were they? Not one!

Hon. Member: In our constituency.

Hon. J. Warner: You were in your constituency. You do not even know where your constituency is. [Laughter] [Desk thumping]

Mr. Roberts: “Is bess yuh had stay quiet.” [Crosstalk]

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, we live in a time when a lot is being demanded of us. The demands are many and our resources are few and shrinking, but what is remarkable about the People’s Partnership Government is that we are delivering far more now than the PNM ever did, and we are doing it with much less. We are delivering much more with much less. [Desk thumping] And one of the reasons for that is leadership. They will say, Oh, how Jack Warner is singing for his supper. But let me tell you quickly, Member for Laventille East, Jack Warner does not eat. I do not have a meal. So the difference between this side and that side is leadership. That is all. [Desk thumping] Leadership, in its simplest form, Member for Arouca/Maloney, is the ability to lead, to guide, to direct and to manage effectively. That is what we are doing here.

I am making the point that we on this side work long hours. We contribute ideas. When we meet, you will never hear our Prime Minister say, “The Prime Minister has spoken.” We sit, we discuss, we debate and we come to a consensus, and whatever we achieve is achieved based on the collective efforts of all of us. [Desk thumping]

In the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, I light my torch, my candle from the torches from the employees in the Ministry. My candle is lit from there, and we do not even discriminate at the level of the elevator. [Laughter] [Desk thumping]
All the elevators in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure are for use by anyone. We have no elevator for the Minister alone. We do not have that! The Member for Diego Martin North/East had his own elevator. We do not have that!

**Dr. Moonilal:** A car park in the airport.

**Hon. J. Warner:** That is correct. We do not have that! The difference between that side and this side is that when they were there they allowed the problems to fester until they became toxic and incurable, because the fact is, they did not have the will to act. They could not even pass a state of emergency, even when they were begged to do it. No guts! I am saying the years of neglect have caused discomfort, loss and frustration. Therefore, I am making the point, it is the little things we do that make a difference.

With regard to the budget, I must confess that I am, in some ways, a bit outraged. I am angry and outraged because, in a real sense, I am saying that we are where we are because of the fact that we inherited an empty Treasury. I am outraged. I cannot agree that the money given to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is the amount I desired. I will be telling an untruth. I cannot be happy. I am sure also, the money given to education, the Minister of Education cannot be happy. The money given to agriculture, housing, we cannot be happy. But do you know what it is? I am not angry with the Minister of Finance. I am not angry with the Prime Minister. My anger is directed against that side, because if we had the $400 billion which they frittered away, today we would never have been in this position—$400 billion! And today we are where we are because of them.

And many a time they made the point that Jack Warner, is either in the doghouse or not, depending on whether he gets the money for his Ministry. If he does not get it, he is in the doghouse; if he gets it, he is not in the doghouse. If he sits next to the Prime Minister, he is not in the doghouse; if he is far from her, he is in the doghouse. So they judge me by how much money is given to me, to say whether I am in the doghouse or not; how close I sit to the Prime Minister or not, to say I am in the doghouse. Let me tell you something. My name is not “Rin-Tin-Tin”.

[Laughter] I am no “Lassie.” The fact is—

**Dr. Rowley:** Talk to them.

**Hon. J. Warner:** No, I am talking to you now, because that is what you all believe.

**Hon. Members:** We are your friends.
Hon. J. Warner: My friends? Well, boy, if you all are my friends, I do not want to have enemies. I will tell you this, I will repeat, I am no “Rin-Tin-Tin”, my friend.

Dr. Rowley: Talk to them.

Hon. J. Warner: I am no “Lassie”, I will tell you again, and I am telling you again also, the hon. Prime Minister is not a dog catcher and, I will tell you something, I don’t even know if she is a dog lover. But what I know, however, is, she loves Trinidad and Tobago; she loves people; she loves humanity and that is why we shall survive. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Rowley: Sing Jack, sing!

Hon. J. Warner: Sing? I “doh” have to sing for supper. My supper was taken—[Crosstalk]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Do not take him on.

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, let me make it clear again. Mr. Speaker, let me correct a misconception here, about “singing for your supper”. When I came here, I came with my meals already taken care of. I did not come here for a meal; I came here to give people meals, therefore I do not have to sing for my supper.

Mr. Roberts: “Yuh not hungry.”

Hon. J. Warner: That is what I want to say. [Laughter] I am saying, therefore, that we have to agree that the priorities which have been placed in the various fields were the best that the Minister of Finance could have done at —the time, and we have to appreciate that.

Briefly and quickly, I come here today to tell this Parliament and the nation where the money went over the past year in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. In a very brief moment, I have come here to give an account of my stewardship at the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. When the Ministry had been divided around June/July and Transport was made separately, I want to speak on transport, because transport, in the fullness of time, must pay for itself. But let me quickly give this nation an account of my stewardship as Minister of Works and Infrastructure, and if other people cannot do that, do not blame me.

Mr. Imbert: Woodland—


Mr. Imbert: It just flood.
Hon. J. Warner: Yes. Maraval flood too.

Mr. Roberts: You celebrating flood?

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, in the last fiscal year—

Mr. Roberts: You celebrating flood? God!

Hon. J. Warner: Yes, that is what he is doing. Let him go ahead, “nah man”. In the last fiscal year—

Mr. Roberts: Knock off that; do not do that.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, Members. Allow the Minister of Works and Infrastructure to speak in silence, please.

Hon. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last fiscal year the sum of $2.8 billion was allocated to the Ministry of Works and Transport. Some of the major events, or I should say, highlights, of how the money was allocated to that Ministry, you will see that we spent $28.3 million to date on a national traffic management system on the East-West Corridor. We also spent $3.9 million to bring in the traffic warden system and the first batch is out and the second batch is about to enter. The aim is that at the end of the day to have between 400 to 500 traffic wardens to relieve the police again, of traffic duties so that they could fight more crime and to bring some order into our roads and our highways.

We have installed six kilometres of cable barriers on the Solomon Hochoy Highway. We have conducted some emergency works to reconstruct culvert crossings on the Solomon Hochoy Highway. We widened and are widening the Uriah Butler Highway and the CR Highway.

Mr. Speaker, I keep saying again, you remember when we used to drive to go up in the East—I want to tell people again, you know, and I will say it as often as necessary, you used to see mounds and mounds of aggregate by O’Meara up there, for years. Not one, not two, not three; four/five years. You remember that used to take you hours to go up the road? Under our former Minister of Works and Transport you had more aggregate than your eyes could see, mounds of it. We have also some cases in court. The first one we lost, again that same Minister of Works and Transport—about $40 million.

Mr. Imbert: The Attorney General.

Hon. J. Warner: It is the AG? Okay, not you. Forty million dollars! Today that—is a thing of the past. So you have that finished; it is done. The Aranguez interchange—done, and not only done, but done for $25 million less. [Desk
thumping] We fixed over 55 landslips in the country, and when you hear the Member for Princes Town talk, she was not pandering to the Minister; she knows more than anybody else; she and the Member for Naparima. They are living in the landslide capital and they know about that.

As I speak to you here now, Hindustan—

Hon. Member: Flood.


Mr. Roberts: He is celebrating flood.

Hon. J. Warner: Yes, all right, you laugh; celebrate flood and laugh at the people under flood. That is your PNM style. Your PNM style is to celebrate flood and laugh.

Mr. Roberts: People suffering, he laughing.

Hon. J. Warner: In Hindustan, as we speak, the road is collapsing; 200 persons, in a sense, are marooned. We had to fix it. So we fixed 57 and this morning before I came here, I spoke to my technical team and said, “Go out there and fix that.” [Desk thumping]

Under the PURE Programme, work was done at over 434 sites at a cost of $1.4 billion. Box drain, culverts, road construction, paving; you name it, we did it. I am saying to you in so many words, that was money well spent. We, of course, had a drainage programme to the tune of over $122 million, and this, of course, involved 292 projects.

Therefore, I am saying all of this to you to tell you that we, in a sense, did our work and we did our work without discrimination. I want to tell you that we did our work and we did not discriminate because we did work in all areas. Some needed more than others, but we have been accused sometimes of discrimination. I want to put on the record of this House that in St. Barbs—you know where St. Barbs is?

Hon. Member: Where that is?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. J. Warner: In St. Barb’s we spent $2.924 million to pave roads. The Minister before me did not spend a nickel in Siparia, in Oropouche, in Penal, in Naparima, to pave roads. We paved Laventille Road at a cost to $3.5 million and the Member for Port of Spain South was ecstatic.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.
Motion made; That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. A. Roberts]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Before you speak, I have been advised that lunch has just arrived but they need another 15 minutes, so we will break for lunch at approximately 12.45 p.m. You may continue, hon. Member.

Hon. J. Warner: [Desk thumping] Thank you, Mr. Speaker; thank you, colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, whereas before the previous government practised a policy of deliberate discrimination—and you know what is bad? He was able to even discriminate against his own Members. There are Members there who told me that, of course, he refused to fix their roads.

Dr. Moonilal: He would not talk to them.

Hon. J. Warner: “He not talking to them.” He told them, of course, “what yuh want money for?—yuh go still win.” “I ain’t calling no names, but if yuh talk hard ah go whistle.”

Mr. Roberts: Arima. Penny Beckles.

Hon. J. Warner: He refused to fix her road. Wicked! Vindictive! He will not help them.

Hon. Member: Under pressure.

Hon. J. Warner: Under pressure? You under pressure? Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat, in St. Barb’s, we spent $2.924 million to pave roads. Laventille Road was paved at a cost of $3.541 million. McIntosh Street—not you—Pelican Extension, paved at a cost of $436,000. Coconut Drive—do you know where that is?—$1.324 million. We paved from Point Fortin roundabout to the Guapo Police Station at a cost of $15.1 million. We paved from Point D’Or Junction to the Pitch Lake at a cost of $2.9 million. Not true? You come at night; we shook hands; we “hug up and thing” and so on, and I say I will help you. Mr. Speaker, I repeat, the best “thank you” card I ever got from any parliamentarian came from the Member for La Brea. [Desk thumping]

St. Lucien Road, Diego Martin, again, $1.27 million in road repairs. And the list goes on and on. Diego Martin North/East, one would have thought that I would have deliberately left there for last, but I wanted to show the Member for Diego
Martin North/East that we on this side are not vindictive. [Desk thumping] We will treat him how he did not treat us. We spent over $4 million there. We desilted the Morne Coco ravine.

Mr. Imbert: Where?

Hon. J. Warner: We reinforced concrete wall construction along the Andalusia River, Ravine Trace at Upper Bournes Road and Debe River. You “doh” know about those places! [Desk thumping] We rehabilitated the invert at the Maraval River, and these are areas where, of course, the Member of Parliament does not even go.

In Diego Martin West—I am coming to you now—Rich Plain ravine, phase 2, $17.55 million. [Desk thumping] For the whole of five years you did not do anything in all the opposition constituencies for $17 million. One job in Diego Martin West, we spent $17.55 million. Camacho drain, improvement works—you know where that is?—$2.1 million. Works on the Diego Martin River and the La Horqueta River, were also done. L’Anse Mitan Road was also rehabilitated. Do you know where that is? You remember?

Therefore, I am saying, throughout the country—

Dr. Rowley: L’Anse Mitan Road? That is not true.

Hon. J. Warner: Okay, fine. Bring a Motion against me. [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you something. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Members of the Opposition, allow the Member to speak, please. Bring a Motion.

Dr. Rowley: He challenged me.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but, please—

Dr. Rowley: Nothing was done—

Mr. Speaker: Yes, all right, but you took note of that, but do not disturb the Member whilst he is speaking.

Dr. Rowley: But he is making up stories.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, could you remain silent and allow the Member to speak, please. Hon. Member, could you continue?

Hon. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping] I want to throw your mind back to 2006 when Barrackpore in Naparima was complaining about the poor roads. They were complaining because the PNM had been—[Crosstalk]
Mr. Speaker: Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara and Member for Diego Martin North/East, I would not want to repeat myself again. Would you remain quiet and allow the Member to speak in silence and observe Standing Orders 25, 35 as well as 40, please? Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. J. Warner: In 2006, the residents along the entire Valley Line in Barrackpore, after the PNM had been there for five years in government, were frustrated because of bad roads and poor drains, perennial flooding, landslips and so on. Their pleas were falling on deaf ears, and they protested. What was the PNM’s response then?

Hon. Member: Regiment.

Hon. J. Warner: Correct. They sent out the army and five people were locked up. The Member for Siparia, now the hon. Prime Minister, had to put on her court clothes and rush in front of a magistrate to represent these distressed villagers and to beg for bail. They were even denied bail. That is how the PNM treated the people—

Dr. Moonilal: Brutalized the people.

Hon. J. Warner:—in the opposition constituencies. I know you were not there, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, but that is how they behaved. Sent in the army! Locked them up and so on! And, of course, I repeat, the Member for Siparia went to beg for them. What were they asking for?—roads, drains, bridges.

Now compare that—in fact, before I say that, the Member for Diego Martin North/East said at the time, September 08, 2006: “It was the UNC’s fault that Barrackpore had bad roads and drains.” The UNC’s fault! Today I say is it yours, “you vex”. Five years after the UNC were out of office and they were in, it was our fault. It cannot be our fault. But watch the difference. When the people of Point Fortin decided to block the roads, light tyres and protest the condition of the roads, what was this People’s Partnership approach? The army did not go in. Nobody got locked up. We went in and we told them we shall fix it, and we were able to allocate some fund immediately to fix the road in Point Fortin. Had you been in power then and had it been another constituency for the UNC, they would have been locked up. So when you were putting jail for us on this side, we gave you amelioration; we gave you comfort; we gave you better roads.

I am saying to you, in other words, that we did not play tit for tat. We did not tell Point Fortin or La Brea, “Why you calling us for? You vote for PNM.” We did not tell them that. We came forward and we helped.
Let us fast-forward now to 2011. We have been here for 17 months in Government and according to the Member for Diego Martin West and the Member for Diego Martin North/East, in the 17 months we have been here, it is our fault that Diego Martin has a traffic nightmare. Seventeen months we are here, you know, and it is our fault that Diego Martin has a traffic nightmare, and when we try to put a little temporary relief, the Member with the biggest political “tabanca” ever—

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Hon. J. Warner:—the Member for Diego Martin North/East. He, of course, says, “foolish! It would not work!” Nothing will work in that Ministry of Works and Infrastructure unless he is in charge. Nothing will work! For eight years they were in government; we just “reach”! I say that we helped them. The Member for Diego Martin North/East said that we are neglecting our base constituency, but while he was saying so, he was doing worse to his own. We do not neglect our base. We think of Trinidad and Tobago and I am saying some places need more attention than others. That is all I am saying.

I want to tell you that in some ways different ministries and different constituencies have different needs. Some areas need bridges where others do not, and, therefore, we have to prioritize what it is you give and do in the various constituencies. You also have to make sure that you work in conjunction with WASA, because sometimes you have to make sure that you have to pave the road twice so as to avoid WASA having to dig it up. Sometimes they do, but we are trying to have a system whereby the Minister of Public Utilities and Works and Infrastructure can work in sync so as to save money for the country and to prevent inconvenience to the travelling public.

In other words, I am saying that our approach to development is different from theirs, and that is what makes us different from them, and that is why, in many ways, they have been rejected by the population. When they had money, they chose to build tall buildings, which remain up to today very empty. Every morning I go to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and I look out the window; I see the legal towers rising up in the sky—cannot be occupied. Tall building, money spent, cannot be occupied because, incomplete! Houses have been built. All you have are those houses in some pretty paint colours. Inside, nothing! Nothing! It is the first time in my life I have seen and heard houses walk. Houses are walking! They built houses on land and these houses are now moving. That is the legacy of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have 18 more minutes to go. We shall now suspend for lunch and we shall resume at 1.45 and you will go until three minutes past two.
Hon. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we took the lunch break, I was on my legs giving an account of my stewardship as Minister of Works and Infrastructure and by extension the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. Let me fast-track in view of time. I am saying that during the last year we identified 62 bridges which were in a state of disrepair, dilapidation; bridges which required very urgent attention and these bridges will cost us $404 million to fix over a six-year period and, therefore, this fiscal year Minister Roopnarine and I are sitting down to prioritize the bridges which we shall fix, based on this six-year plan that we have.

Over the years we have faced neglect in traffic management. There are over 34,000 accidents per year in this country. In this country we experience over 34,000 accidents per year and in 2010 we had some 206 road fatalities. Some of this happened because of a lack of traffic management and we intend to improve upon this in this new fiscal year. We intend to bring the decades of neglect up to a relative and manageable standard that could make our people comfortable once again.

Why did the country come to all of this? Why did we reach where we are here? Not only because of neglect, but because sometimes of a disinterest, as if nobody was interested. All they were concerned about were the grandiose plans: rapid rail, tall buildings, CHOGM, and so on. But what affected the small man, the poor man, the man in the street, these things were overlooked. If you go to Chaguanas West and you ask anybody what they want—box drains. I was there yesterday. It is box drains, box drains, box drains. That is all they ask for. And how could we have neglected these people in Felicity, in Munroe Road? I mean, it is incomprehensible.

Therefore, we have to reactivate our central planning unit in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and to make it, as it were, more relevant again. In June 2011, we informed Cabinet that there were 98 roads in the country which required immediate traffic management and this would cost us $48 million. I had also been asked where is our plan. I keep asking them; you ask me about my plan; you ask me about our plan; you ask me about the plan for the People’s Partnership, and I want to repeat for the umpteenth time, they had no plan when they spent half a billion dollars and put in two cardboard boxes under my table. No plan!

Therefore, I would not allow myself to be bogged down by this question, but more important, I want to say that we are working with a plan and this plan would
attack the critical backlog of bridges which need repair; landslips and traffic management issues. We will do hydrological studies in the Ortoire River Basin and the North Oropouche River Basin, all this, in an attempt to find flood mitigation measures. Even the Caroni Basin will, of course, have our attention.

We have to improve the infrastructure throughout the country, because we know that bad infrastructure keeps the poor in poverty. We know that the people who suffer—and you know something? They treat bad infrastructure as a joke. They believe that they could make fun of the people because they do not have roads, bridges and so on. Bad roads damage cars. It is the poor man who suffers. We have to address that.

Bad roads affect the economy. I would not go into all the details, except to say—and if I say so they might believe me—that President Obama said that infrastructure was holding back the US economic growth. That is what he said. So you could imagine, therefore, what it is doing for us here as a small country. A study was done to get the cost of being in a traffic jam from Chaguanas to Port of Spain. Conservatively, it is said that for every hour spent in a traffic jam from Chaguanas to Port of Spain, the cost to the country is $400,000. It means, therefore, that if you are in a jam for three hours on a morning, it is $1.2 million. It would mean, in a real sense, that is about $25 million to $30 million per month this country is losing by a simple traffic jam from Chaguanas to Port of Spain.

What about Diego Martin to Port of Spain? What about Arima to Port of Spain? Therefore, we have to look at these things in the fiscal year. This is why putting money in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is not about Jack Warner. Jack Warner is totally irrelevant. It is about the people and how we improve their lives.

In any event, I am making the point that there are benefits to this country from looking after our infrastructure. Most importantly, we also have to maintain it. We have to maintain our infrastructure and help to create jobs and so on. I would not go into all the details because time is against me. Therefore I believe that we are on the right track even though the funds we have are limited.

If I had the time I would give you the proposed projects for 2012 and tell you the kind of money for what we have to do. In fact, again, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, for flood mitigation measures in the country, all I have is $7 million, and yesterday when I told the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs in D’Abadie/O’Meara, he said, “But my constituency needs 10 times seven.” He said so to me yesterday. But that is the reality. Therefore we have to cut our cloth to
suit our clothes. So I would not go into all the details of the projects which are due for 2012, but let me say that one of the things I would have loved to talk about is Mamoral Dam, but at another time.

I want to deal with two issues here: the highway to Point Fortin, one. I cannot understand how the Member for Point Fortin could sit here in Parliament—she is not here—represent Point Fortin and call the highway to Point Fortin “the highway to nowhere”. Is Point Fortin nowhere? Is she the MP of nowhere? She sits here and she says to the public, “the highway to nowhere”. So the “MP for nowhere” is critical of the highway that goes to her constituency to build for the people. I just do not understand it. Where is the logic?

The other one is the Diego Martin Highway. I cannot go into all the details, but I am told by the Member for Diego Martin North/East that the Diego Martin Highway is a nonstarter.

Hon. Member: He is a non-performer. What do you expect him to say?

Hon. J. Warner: That is true. The highway has not been stopped. For the highway, the process of acquisition is underway and there are three persons remaining with whom we have to settle, hopefully through private treaty, as against compulsory acquisition. The designs are there and we have served three notices, one in May 2010 and the others, of course, in May 2011. They have been served already, and, therefore, to say that that would not happen, is not a serious discussion. It would be completed and would have been completed a long time ago had it been for the intervention of the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

With some eight minutes to go, I want to end by saying I have a great difficulty when I listen to the Members opposite. I urge my colleagues opposite to be very thoughtful in what they say during this debate. I cannot understand, for the life of me, how you could have a Member on the opposite side, the Member for San Fernando East, the former Prime Minister, the man under whom our patrimony has been frittered away—$400 billion—how we could sit here, day in, day out, and the Member for San Fernando East not saying boo to the people of this country. He did not take part in last year's debate; most probably he would not take part in this debate this year, and he sits in a corner and only plots against his colleague from Diego Martin West, hoping to regroup and telling people that he will be the Prime Minister. But two things he would not see: that and God’s face.

At the end of the day I would have thought that since he has been here for 40 years he would lend us his wisdom and guidance, and so on. If not us, then he would lend his colleagues. But he comes here and mimics, and he believes that is serving the people. I wish them well.
I want to say today that they are treading on very thin ice for what they have done to this country in the last eight years. Nobody in this country has forgotten that they are the architects of the crisis this country faces today. Nobody has forgotten Calder Hart and nobody ever will. Nobody has forgotten Juliana Pena and nobody ever will. Nobody has forgotten Utharo Rao, and nobody ever will. Nobody has forgotten the billions of dollars which have been wasted in this country through UDeCott and corruption, and nobody ever will. Nobody has forgotten that one of the architects of the unconscionable acts that led to the demise of Clico was a member of the PNM hierarchy, their treasurer, so to speak. Nobody has forgotten how Karen Nunez, again in her duster with her curlers, rushed to Clico, to the bank, to draw out her money—with flat slippers. Nobody will ever forget that. Nobody has forgotten the images of pregnant women and children lying on the hospital floor while the Member for San Fernando East was hugging up the drug dealers, gang leaders and campaigning with them.

Nobody will forget how they “fete” gangsters at fancy hotels and gave them hefty government contracts. That is why I urge them today to be thoughtful in what they say, because people are smarter than they believe.

Today our people recognize that the PNM is the epitome of irresponsibility. They have wasted our resources; they have wasted our patrimony; they have neglected this country; they have presided over naked and rampant corruption and they were arrogant and highhanded about it.

The PNM has demonstrated that they are everything bad for this country and that is what they have done to us, and do not come here, as my colleague from Caroni East would say, with any kind of sanctimonious hypocrisy to explain. That is why they have to be very thoughtful in their approach. Do not come here and criticize for criticizing sake. Do not shift the blame from you to us, because nobody will be fooled. I have no problem, you know, with constructive criticism, but the fact is, it must bring value and meaning to the debate.

As I close, I want to go on record and publicly thank my Minister in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, [Desk thumping] Miss Stacy Roopnarine, the Member for Oropouche West. We are a team, which team is determined to find the solutions to the problems facing our nation. [Desk thumping] And we are led by our indefatigable Prime Minister. We are led by our Prime Minister who, of course, in many ways, has demonstrated what leadership really means.

As I close, I want to make the point that we work tirelessly to find the remedies and the formulae for this country and, thank God, we have been led by a Prime
Minister whose heart is in the right place. As I close, let me say in 1956 when the PNM came to governance of this country, there was tremendous hope. There was hope in 1956. By the time they left at the end of the first term in 1986, there was tremendous despair, abysmal despair. They came back in 1991, promising a second spring, but they left in 1995 prematurely, and there was not a second spring. It was just a drought, a famine. They came back again for a third time, 2002, promising the best of times for this country, and by May 24, 2010 when they left, we were in the worst of times.

I say all of these things so as to say that there must never be a fourth time, because at the end of the day, when you have a fourth time, you will have such things like the Mount Pleasant Bridge, which they could not fix for 29 years—29 years they could not fix it—and we fixed it in our first year of office for $15 million less.

As I conclude, let me urge our colleagues on the other side and let me tell them that at the end of the day, whether we do it or whether you do it—which, of course, will not happen again—what is primary, what is important, is the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. Patricia McIntosh (Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution to the debate on the budget 2012. I listened to the Member for Chaguanas West. I was very interested in what he had to say, but I really felt just some moments ago that it was my first experience in Parliament, because I heard him rehash those statements time and time again, and I hear it from all the Members on the—other side. We know the mistakes we made; the public knows the mistakes that we made, and that is why we are here. We accept that we are here and we are here to help, and we are here to make constructive criticism. Not everything we say you must take it that personally.

Sometimes I feel that we are prisoners of the past; that we cannot move on, and I feel that is why we cannot make real progress, because we keep going back and going back. What I want to hear from the ruling party, I want to hear new things, innovative things. I want to hear what they are doing. I want to help them and I want to hear what they have for our country. I do not want to go back. We have gone back time and time again, and, really, sometimes it is painful for me to come to this Parliament to sit through this again.

Mr. Warner: “Doh come.”
Mrs. P. McIntosh: I must come, because my constituents elected me to come here, [Desk thumping] and to represent them, and that I shall do until such time.

Let me get back to the debate under review. I sat in these hallowed Chambers for the past week and I heard the presentation from the hon. Minister of Finance and the contribution of Members on both sides of the House, and what I can say, I was struck by the confidence and buoyancy that the hon. Minister of Finance and his colleagues reposed in the proposed projects and plans in the budget statement. I really wish I could mirror those very sentiments. But I received the Minister’s report with mixed emotions and I would only forecast that the Government’s plan for our economy could, at best, have mixed blessings for our economy and our country.

I would not go so far to say that the budget is all that negative. It certainly does possess its positives, in that I feel the positives were inspired by several projects, plans and programmes that were already successfully implemented or that were on the drawing board for implementation under the PNM administration. It behooved this Government to do very little in terms of programmes and projects, but follow in the footsteps of its predecessor that left a manifold or blueprint for governance that would take our beloved country into first world status by the year 2020. I am referring here to our Vision 2020, and, indeed, I feel that it forms the steady foundation on which this Government has chosen to lay its economic transformation.

The People’s National Movement left a rich legacy in education and I am pleased to note that this Government has decided to continue the PNM’s concept of seamless education from nursery to tertiary. I would also like to highlight the social programmes planned for 2012 that cater to the differently-abled and underprivileged and I certainly welcome this Government’s increased benefits in this regard.

The People’s National Movement also left a strong legacy in the development of the country’s energy sector, having attracted and supported the exploits of multinational corporations such as, BP, British Gas, BHP Billiton, Repsol, GDF Suez, EOG Resources and the establishment of the Atlantic LNG facility in Point Fortin and the development of the Point Lisas estate which accommodates companies such as Methanex, Atlas Methanol, PCS Nitrogen, New Iron, MHTL, PLNI, PLNL, Yara, et cetera.

On the one hand the Minister's attempt to encourage entrepreneurism is commendable. As a matter of fact, entrepreneurship is of great concern to me as an
educator and I truly believe that it is an area that must be properly addressed in our education system. Entrepreneurship must be properly integrated in the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools, and, of course, aptly addressed at the tertiary level. Changing our culture to one of entrepreneurship will inevitably result in job creation so critical as unemployment rates seem to rise.

On the one hand, I was slightly disappointed that the budget statement failed to focus on the opportunities in the agricultural sector for the expansion of small, micro enterprises as a gateway for income generation. I cannot help agreeing with the sentiments expressed by the former Finance Minister, Christine Sahadeo in an article dated, Friday, October 14, in the *Guardian* newspapers, and I quote:

Agriculture provides one of the most fertile grounds for the development of the SMEs in the age of agri-processing. ‘Farmers must be encouraged and supported in moving along the value chain…the farmers’ market, food processing activities and the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Agri-Processing Association’ introduced by the last administration already established a platform for enhancing the agriculture sector, creating jobs, entrepreneurship, adding value, food security and valuable foreign exchange.

It is an opportunity missed in the budget. I am hopeful that it is not too late for the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, to explore these areas. As I speak of agriculture, I must also commend the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, who despite having initially denounced the mega farm concept of the PNM, is now vigourously promoting this initiative.

Even as these positives appear to me to have their genesis in PNM initiatives—and imitation is the best form of flattery and we, on this side, do feel flattered—they are not sufficient to serve to allay my deep concerns.

2.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot help harbouring a certain degree of trepidation about the sizable deficit under which our economy is operating. The last fiscal year the deficit was $7.7 billion, this fiscal year it is projected at $7.6 billion, a very slight decrease, but what will it be in the coming years? To make matters worse, this Government obtained from this Parliament approval to raise the debt ceiling from $38 billion to TT $70 billion, an increase of $32 billion or approximately 22 per cent of our nominal GDP. So here we have a deficit of $7.6 billion and a debt ceiling of $70 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I am a layman, but what this tells me in layman terms is that we are overspending and borrowing to finance that spending. That does not make me
very happy as a citizen of this country. I must be concerned, because when I survey
the global economy I note that it appears to be sliding into a rather deep recession
similar to the economic downturn in 2008.

Mr. Speaker, Greece is on the verge of bankruptcy. The confidence contagion
has now spread to Italy, the third largest economy in Europe. France and Germany
have seen their economies slowed to a standstill as the crisis widened and even the
mighty America is being questioned about its debts. Who are we? The IMF’s
Managing Director, Christine Leagarde, said in her Washington speech last
Thursday, and I quote:

““The world economy has entered a dangerous new phase.”

She added that the euro zone is in crisis, the downward economic spiral has
strapped many of Europe’s weaker economies starting with Greece that is burdened
by a debt load that exceeds its gross domestic product. Thank God we have not
reached to that as yet. Our debt ceiling has not surpassed our gross domestic
product. She goes on:

“The threat to the world economy is as serious today as it was in 2008 when
world recession loomed.”

Mr. Speaker, we have to pinch ourselves, and we in Trinidad and Tobago are not
insulated, and therefore, inevitably we will feel the repercussions, we will feel the
backlash from the global economic fallout. I am definitely not convinced that we
are paying sufficient attention to what is taking place around us. Once more, I am
afraid I must quote Christine Sahadeo when she said: “…persistent large budget
deficits can result in a major problem for the economy and for the Government.”
With successive years of negative growth and given the current world trends we
can expect a flat or negative performance in the current year. The present crisis in
Greece and other European countries clearly signals that sustainable deficit
spending and increasingly high levels of debt will result in yet another financial
crisis. The budget deficit which now persist for four consecutive years should be
of great concern. Increasing debt and a shrinking GDP will have a rapid to negative
impact on the debt to GDP ratio.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot fault that opinion. I truly believe that we have been
overspending and no one seems to want to stop it. What do we have to show for it
after 18 months of this UNC-led Government administration? A jail in Santa Rosa to
lock away disadvantaged people. [Interruption] Despite the accurate criticisms of
this Government about PNM spending at least we have very concrete and iconic
examples to show for it, and this Government is taking full advantage of these
provisions: NAPA North, NAPA South, oh, well used, well utilized; the diplomatic centre, the public service campus that is intended to house all the Government Ministries and save taxpayers billions of dollars in rent, the beautiful waterfront project with the Hyatt Hotel, well used and the Financial Towers where this Parliament is currently situated.

As I talk about that it would be remiss of me as late as it is now not to say thank you to you, Mr. Speaker, and the parliamentary staff or the staff of Parliament for making sure that we are comfortable and well accommodated in these wonderful surrounds.

Mr. Speaker, everyone is happy about the increased NIS benefits for pensioners. May I say I am happy too. I am one of them; I should be 61 in a couple days.

Hon. Member: You are looking good. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. P. McIntosh: I am very happy—[Interruption] [Desk thumping]—thank you, Prime Minister. [Laughter] So we are all happy about the increased NIS benefits for pensioners, but the question is, is it fair that the financial burden of increased contributions should be visited upon the younger citizens who are still employed? Traditionally, the Government would absorb the cost of the increased benefits, which are really grants, through the Consolidated Fund, but in this instance the Government has chosen to place this burden on the people through increased NIS benefits. This will only bring additional hardships on the present and future generations: on our children, our grandchildren, our great-grandchildren and our great-great-grandchildren. Is this the legacy we want to leave for them, for our progeny? Is this what some of us voted for?

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance was happy to announce that there will be no increases in personal taxation and that there will be no property tax. Everyone is very happy about this; who wants to pay taxes? No one! But we are unmindful that we are moving from one large deficit to another. In 2009 the PNM government closed the fiscal year with a deficit of just under $1 billion, having started out with a deficit of $7 billion, which demonstrated that the PNM administration undertook the necessary steps to bring expenditure in line with revenue and so avoided subjecting the people of this country, the citizenry, to the perils of a recession. Now we are commencing the fiscal year 2012 with a deficit of $7.6 billion, despite a major bonanza in unanticipated revenues due to increased oil prices between March and May in 2011. Oil prices that were pegged at $65 a barrel rose to over $113 a barrel, and we must not forget the $1.5 billion extra revenue which the Government collected from the tax amnesty. Despite this windfall the
Government was not even able to close the deficit which stood at $7.5 billion at the end of the fiscal year 2011 and now we are facing 2012, as I said, with a $7.6 billion deficit.

Mr. Speaker, we ought to be mindful that the world seems to be heading for a recession in 2012. What would happen if our revenues do not increase dramatically? The Government has predicated the 2012 budget on oil prices at $75 per barrel and gas prices at $2.75 per mmbtu, is this a realistic assumption? I do not know, I am not an economist. I am just asking. I am seeking answers to these questions and concerns; not only my concerns but the concerns of my constituents and indeed, I am sure of all the citizenry. If these prices do not materialize what will be our position next year if, once again, we have an increased deficit? A shortfall in revenue will make this budget meaningless, totally meaningless. What will expenditure then be? What assurances do we have that control of expenditure against budget will be actively monitored as per the requisite controls? There is nothing in the budget that explains how the Government will achieve increased productivity in the state sector. What new performance management measures will be implemented? It is a fundamental of prudent financial management, especially in an environment of falling revenue and an uncertain economic outlook that effective cost control and performance management be non-negotiable aspects of governance. Yet the presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance is curiously silent in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, last year the Government promised that there would be developmental programmes to stimulate economic growth—that did not happen. In last year’s budget the Government promised an integrated campus model for Tobago comprising UWI, UTT, COSTAATT; it was in the budget, exactly how it came this year it was there last year. That did not happen. They brought back this proposal once again, but I have to ask, will it ever happen? It was really ironical and insightful when the hon. Minister of Finance made, what I would call, a freudian slip when he said in his Budget Statement, “What we said last year we doing this year.” We shall see, but we shall not be holding our breath. What confidence can we have in a Government that reneges on its own commitments?

The Government is talking about public-sector-led economic growth, but where is the confidence that will generate this growth when we have a Government that reneges, not only on its own commitments, but worse even, on contracts that are legally binding between the State and suppliers? Take for example the case of the OPVs and the Alutrint contracts. When a Government breaks legally binding agreements it is taking a reputational risk which does not augur well for the
economic future of this country or any country. How are investors going to trust this Government? If this Government cannot attract adequate investment, especially foreign direct investment, we are simply not going to achieve that economic growth that we are hoping for. On what basis should anyone believe this Government? Furthermore, one must consider how investors will respond to the crime situation which currently exists in our country and the current state of emergency that exists, that this Government has imposed on our population.

I want to advise this Government that the state of emergency is a measure you are trying; you are trying to implement a strategy to reduce the crime level, but it is just a lid on the pressure cooker and we must be alerted that in 2012 life is going to be much more difficult for everyone, for everyone; [Interruption] not only for me, Sir, for everyone. Unemployment is going to rise. Remember my words. Remember my words, Member for Oropouche East: unemployment is going to rise; food prices are going to soar and cost of living, on the whole, is going to rise.

Mr. Warner: We shall rise.

Mrs. P. McIntosh: Mr. Speaker, I hope you could rise above it. I really hope you could rise above it for the sake of our country. [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, for the sake of our beloved country, it is my hope that that blue light that the hon. Minister of Finance and his Government are seeing at the end of the tunnel is not that of a train coming towards us at supersonic speed. [Laughter]

2.25p.m.

Mr. Speaker, let me talk about education. Education and training—I would like to ask the hon. Minister—he is not here.

Hon. Member: [Inaudible]

Mrs. P. McIntosh: No. The hon. Minister of Finance, sorry—education and training: We are used to education, science and technology. What is training? Anyway, education training, I take that, Mr. Speaker, as science and technology—received $8.7 billion in this year’s budget allocation—$700 million more than it received last year. Of this amount, the Ministry of Education will receive $4.6 billion. I have that here in the draft estimates and I see that the Ministry of Education will receive—I know my figures are right—$4.6 billion and the Ministry of Science and Technology will receive $2.8 billion. When I add those two figures I get $7.4 billion. That leaves a difference of $1.3 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I am a layman and I will just like to ask some questions. I wish the Minister of Finance were here. Is this $1.3 billion to be spent on training per se?
And I say that because I see this as education training. I know it is not in the science and technology allocation, because I saw it there, science and technology is $2.8. So is it training, as the word really means?

Mr. Speaker, if this figure is not included in the $2.8 billion budget for science and technology—and it is not—then should there not have been a particular heading for training? I am quite aware that training is not included in the Infrastructure Development Fund. So, Mr. Speaker, I have to ask, where is it? If I had to go through all these books—and I have gone through all of them, Mr. Speaker, to identify every single item classified as training, it will be like looking for a needle in a haystack. When I tried to tie back this figure to the estimates of expenditure, there is nothing to guide me to identify what exactly this $1.3 billion is being spent on, nothing. I tried, Mr. Speaker, and I tried with assistance also to go back and identify. Is this how budgets are compiled?

Budgets ought to be very clear, precise, concise, cogent and logical; and most of all, highly transparent documents. Some of these numbers just do not add up. I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Finance, how did we arrive at these figures? I am specifically speaking to these figures in education, what do they mean in real terms? What do they mean for education, for the students and the teachers and how do they advance the business of the people especially in respect of education? I want the Minister of Finance to humour me. I am a layperson. Explain to me. Explain to me so that I could explain to my constituents. Tell me; and I feel that a budget should be so clear that one should not have to beg for such explanations.

Mr. Speaker, when I was a principal, there was no way I could have submitted to the Ministry of Education such a hash of figures and call it a budget. It would not have been accepted. Many questions would have been asked and my project would not have been approved. The hon. Minister was exceedingly brief when he spoke on the topic of education. He did make reference to two main areas, to GATE and to the seamless education system, and I shall address these as I go along.

Budgets are predicated on a vision and represent the means whereby moneys are allocated in order to ensure that the goals and objectives defined in the vision are realized.

I would like to refer to the Government’s vision for education and I would like to make reference to the Government’s Medium Term Policy Framework 2011—2014 and the goals defined therein. I would like to refer to page 12, Education for Opportunity and Freedom. Mr. Speaker, I would like to read from this, the goals. The Government is proposing to develop a strong education
system by way of a seamless education system relevant to our developmental needs, by way of improving the success rate at secondary schools, by diversifying the curriculum. The Government will also seek to increase the number of workforce assessment centres, develop a labour market information system, strengthen and refocus its training strategy as well as review its scholarship programme.

Mr. Speaker, the article: Education for Opportunity and Freedom goes on to talk about curricula reform, teacher training, the adoption of new teaching methodologies and the infusion of ICT technology in the learning process—that is the Government’s laptop programme—and incorporate new ways of learning and also instill some of the required values and attitudes necessary for national development. That is in this article.

I would like to speak about the seamless system, the first goal relevant to the development needs. I am happy that this Government is continuing the PNM’s nursery to tertiary concept. It is the PNM that started this initiative and thirty early childhood centres were completed and opened under its administration. [Desk thumping] Not a single new early childhood centre was constructed under this current Government. They have just been opening those we have commissioned. To date several early childhood centres built under the PNM and commissioned under the PNM are yet to be opened. I could cite at least four of them. We have two in Tunapuna, one in Goya and one in St. Augustine—one in Movant. Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to see that in the public sector investment programme—I have it here—document 2012, that Belmont Boys RC School and Rose Hill Government School in my colleague’s constituency Port of Spain South, that they will be finally constructed. I hope that this is not just writing I am looking at. I have seen nothing for them in the draft estimates and I hope that they will be built. I have seen no allocation, but probably I have missed that and I am hopeful that they will be built, Mr. Speaker. These are two schools that I enquired after on two occasions in Parliament. The first time was on Friday May 13, 2011 and the second time was on Wednesday September 7 and I am happy that those enquiries have borne good fruit and I could only hope for the best.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Could you give way?

Mrs. P. McIntosh: Not yet, Sir. We will have a discussion after. Mr. Speaker, I would now like to talk about improving the success rate at secondary school. The hon. Minister of Education has been exclaiming in the media that more than 10,000 students—I think he said 10,500 students—have been lost in the system. I must
admit that there is some degree of attrition and we must investigate this in the interest of our students, for if we adhere to the education philosophy that no child must be left behind, we have to investigate.

But, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister needs to do a little more research because I feel he will find three quarters of those students that he is talking about there. Is the hon. Minister aware that approximately 8,500 non secondary school students—they are out of school—write CXC annually and this began through a provision initiated under the last administration? The hon. Minister also spoke of the low number of students writing CAPE. Under a PNM administration more avenues or options were created for students to access tertiary education. Apart from the traditional A level, which CAPE stands for, students could access various pathways to tertiary education through ACCA—some leave to do ACCA—Roytec, NHIERST, SBCS, SAM, Institute of Tertiary Education and there are several others that I have not mentioned here, Mr. Speaker. If the hon. Minister looks hard enough he is likely to find three quarters of the students he is looking for, right in the system, right under his nose and those students are trying hard to improve themselves.

In 1998, under the UNC, only 8 per cent of students progressed to tertiary education. In 2009, under a PNM administration, 42 per cent advanced to tertiary education. The PNM was moving steadily towards improving that figure to 60 per cent which is one of the hallmarks of developed nation status and we would have achieved that. And hon. Minister, what about students who chose professions such as, construction workers; mechanics; electricians; plumbers; craftsmen and tradesmen? Not everyone desires to go on to tertiary education. Not everyone could be a graduate of a university. Did the hon. Minister not consider them also or is he just focused on those who are pursuing academic lines? And yet he is speaking about increasing opportunities for students for tech voc areas, and he is speaking about diversification and realignment of the curriculum to address market needs. All of these areas are addressing market needs and some people are not going along the academic lines, but they are going along other lines which are very good to supply the needs in our market.

To make matters worse, when the hon. Minister of Education spoke on this, his latest pet subject, in his budget response he admitted that investigations were ongoing in respect of all of those students who might have opted to pursue different pathways available to them.

So I find, Mr. Speaker, that it was a bit irresponsible for the hon. Minister to make such highly disturbing statements publicly that 10,500 students are missing in
the system—lost. Lost and missing—if I lost my cell phone I am missing it. I am missing and lost. [Desk thumping] Worse again, Sir, you said lost, lost worse than missing. Missing I might find it, but lost is gone forever. [Cross talk] No they are not gone, they are right there. Those lovely little children are right there.

I would like to advise the hon. Minister that secondary education rates have increased steadily over the past five years and that Trinidad and Tobago remains the highest performing jurisdiction in the Caribbean. That is a fact. [Desk thumping] I would like to refer to the Social Sector Investment Programme 2012, page 29. I would like to go to table four which refers to education indicators received from the Global Competitiveness Report for 2009-2010, 2010-2011 already we have 2011-2012 and I would like to talk about the data that has been collated for quality of education system.

You see, Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Education or his officials or agents compiled data this is sometimes—I am not saying it is done on purpose, but sometimes there are misrepresentations in that, in the report for quality of the education system, our education system, in the report for 2009-2010, they have registered that we came 35th; for 2010-2011, that we came 30th, Trinidad and Tobago and for 2011-2012 that we came 37th.

And the Minister is saying that things are bad with us. But what they did not say, is that the number of countries that Trinidad was compared with they differed over the years. What they did not say is that while we might have been placed 35th, we surpassed 98 countries, because we were pegged against 133 countries, and we surpassed 98 of them. That is nothing to sneeze at; that is not bad.

2.40 p.m.

In 2010—2011, while the report here says that we were placed 30th, it did not say 30th out of 139 countries, and we surpassed 109 countries. [Interruption] There is always room for improvement, always room for improvement. In 2011-2012 we surpassed 105 countries. That is a slight decline, and the hon. Minister must be concerned, but it is not that we are doing badly. When we look at the quality in this same book—[Cross talk]—certainly, always room for improvement. We always aim for 100 per cent—and in the quality of maths and science it was noted that Trinidad and Tobago for the years that I just called surpassed 106, 107 and 109, that is in maths and science—109, countries respectively. [Desk thumping] In primary education they surpassed 94, 96, and 104 countries respectively. I have a note here that there is always room for improvement. As an educator I know we always aim for 100 per cent.
Our Prime Minister said that we are following the Singaporean model; she said that is the way to go, and I believe her. I visited Singapore as part of a team, part of an initiative between the Trinidad and Tobago Government and the IDB, and I was fortunate to spend almost three weeks there observing the Singaporean model. But when I looked at the draft estimates, I do not know, sometimes I feel it is talk and we are not putting our money where our mouth is, because I was disappointed that no moneys were allocated in the Draft Estimates for professional development. Singapore is very, very high on professional development and institutional strengthening. How are we going to create this 100 per cent mark that we are aiming for, if we are not allocating moneys for professional development and institutional strengthening? I do not understand that. [ Interruption] Yes, but SEMPCU has been disbanded. [ Interruption] Well, probably you are trying to revive it. Probably he is trying to revive it.

I want to speak briefly about decentralization. In the budget contribution of the Minister in the Ministry of Education, the hon. Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland, spoke about decentralization. I should say a little bit about decentralization. It was a PNM initiative, a plan to restructure and decentralize the administration of the Ministry of Education to facilitate a devolution of authority or to divest authority from head office to the regional education district offices.

What this would do? It would place more autonomy in the hands of the districts. The districts are really the point of contact with the schools, you know, they are nearer to the schools, so it would result in greater supervision of the districts and better decision-making at district level. And they would enjoy closer contacts with the schools. But I would like to quote a little bit from the hon. Minister when he spoke about it, he said that “the Ministry of Education has identified the restructuring and decentralization of its operation as a key strategy to improve organizational performance and improve efficiency and effectiveness at schools and districts. As we transfer national responsibilities from the centre to districts, in schools we will expect to see the following:

Improved effectiveness and success of schools; improved student achievement; more efficient delivery of service and resourcing of schools; improved supervision and evaluation; democratization of the system, thereby allowing for greater stakeholder and community involvement in the decision-making process;… greater efficiency in management and governance of the system.”

Then he went on to speak: “The People’s Partnership Government will ensure a more decentralized and participatory quality education system by establishing…” and doing all these things. He said “This Government has been left with the task of
completing the decentralization thrust commenced”—under the last regime—“since 2003… As you are aware the way to hell is paved with good intentions and while the former regime articulated a lot of things for the education system, like many aspects of national life, they did not deliver.”

He went on to say what they will do; they will do this and this, and this.

“Mr. Speaker, it gives me no pleasure in saying that none of these were achieved under the last regime”—“Therefore, this fiscal year 2011”—he was speaking in the last budget—“administration will outfit staff and operationalize three of the seven education district offices…we will continue works to ensure the establishment of all district offices by 2012 and the operationalization of four full accounting units…develop and implement a performance management framework…and he went on to say all that they would do.

First, I have to say that, I have not found—probably I am not looking in the right place, probably my colleagues could help me—any funds allocated for restructuring and decentralization and this was said by the hon. Minister in last year’s budget. What has happened to date? Since this Government assumed office, they have outfitted only one district; and that is South Eastern, they have discontinued the project in the South Eastern Education District Office. An office was located but it was used to house a primary school in Tunapuna; the school-based management, nothing has happened since they assumed office.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. McIntosh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I feel I need 60 minutes but I will go swiftly. I have to end here with decentralization. Hon. Minister, nothing was done that they said they would do. I suppose what they said they would do today they are going to do tomorrow—this year, they will do next year.

I want to talk about my favourite programme, the laptop programme. I know this is the Prime Minister’s baby, and the Minister’s baby. I would like to speak on it. But before I begin my discourse, I want to emphasize again, that I am and have always been a keen advocate of the integration of information and communication technology in the curriculum as an integral part of smart pedagogical practice. My track record as an educational administrator will attest to this; there is a living
example of this at St. Francois Girls College where I was the principal for ten years. My interest in the Government’s one laptop per child programme is solely to ensure that the students to whom the laptops are given and the taxpayers whose moneys pay for these laptops receive value for money. That is my interest. And what I mean by value, I must define value and I define value in terms of positive and enhanced learning outcomes for my students. I really would like to see this laptop programme succeed because when it does the people who will benefit most are the students, and of course by extension the country will benefit in the long run. Before I go any further, I should like to read from the Social Sector Investor Programme 2012, where the goals—I will be very brief, I realize time will run out on me—the goals of the Government’s laptop programmes are clearly defined. And they state:

“To improve the teaching and learning environment for students in an ever-changing information age; To improve the quality of instruction and support the infusion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching and learning and the development of 21st Century skills in students,—to reduce the inequity in access to computers and information among the student population; To raise student achievement through specific interventions such as the use of education software to improve students understanding; To facilitate the development of collaboration between peers within the schools, among schools and among teachers and students.” So those are the goals for the laptop programme.

Last year, the Government claimed that it spent approximately $83 million in the laptop for SEA students with a unit cost of TT$4,000 per laptop. It is my understanding—but it is not only my understanding, I found it; I found the difference here—that the figure might be closer to $100 million, given all the services and peripherals that were not included in the original specification of $83 million. And I see here in this draft estimate of expenditure that we have $18,732 million for laptop repayment of loan and interest procurement of laptops, et cetera. So I do not know, but if we add that we will certainly find the money spent last year amounted to $100 million. [Interruption] Well, if that is included in the total, I will take it back that—Mr. Speaker, I am here as a Member of Parliament and to represent my people, and I really do not appreciate anybody bringing my family who has nothing to do with this, into this debate. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker: I will appeal to Members that it is out of order to mention Members’ family’s names during debates in this honourable Chamber. So I would advise Members do not go down that road. It is out of order. [Desk thumping]
Mrs. P. McIntosh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I expect injury time, through your leave. If you say that that money is included, Minister of Education, I will take it it was $83 million. Although, I understand with peripherals it was more than that, but I will take it at $83 million—[Interrupt] peripherals came with it, all right. But this year the Minister stated the machines will be purchased at a total cost of $53 million and I am happy to hear that, because last year I found it was exorbitant, and I felt that you could look for a better deal. They are now $3000 per unit or $1000 less than last year. So I commend you, Mr Speaker.

Last year you stated that they were so expensive—the machines, because they were very sophisticated and outfitted with the highest specifications but yet they did not possess a CD or DVD burner, neither did they possess important software packages for example, the Adobe Acrobat Reader through which the students could save their word documents as a PDF. Very important when they have to submit, you do not want anybody to interfere with that. Well, the hon. Minister stated in the Guardian of Friday, August 12, that the machines would have more specifications and more software packages, and I did examine a few of the machines that were delivered to schools recently, and they were outfitted with the Adobe Acrobat Reader but they still do not possess a CD or DVD burner.

The Member for Oropouche East is very personal and wants to know if I am still a teacher but I would like to remind him, that for over thirty-odd years I was a member of the teaching service. I was an administrator, I should say for 15 years and a principal for 10, and I belong to the Association of Principals of Secondary Schools better known as APS, and my network is strong and lives on. I know everything that is going on in schools, everything. [Desk thumping] Once a member of the fraternity for that long and having served that hard, and that faithfully, and that well, always a member. [Desk thumping] You all must not try to fool me on what is going on in schools; I visit schools.

2.55 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, since there is no CD or DVD burner and since most texts, any reputable text is accompanied by CD or DVD, parents are forced to buy CD or DVD external drives to facilitate their children’s learning. If there were reservations that information could be burnt and lead to infringement of copyright laws, there could have been controls to put in place so that the burner could only be used for reading only purposes.

Mr. Speaker, last year in my contribution to the debate, I made several recommendations to the hon. Minister of Education in terms of the Government’s
one laptop per child project. I advised them that the intemperate rush to implement this particular campaign promise could result in a waste of taxpayers’ money. They did not want to hear me. I particularly advised that an effective project management approach to implementation of the programme should have been adopted before the procurement of the laptops to ensure, one; that the necessary IT infrastructure is put in place as soon as possible. This is required to optimize the potential of laptops in the delivery of the pedagogical process. I also—[Interruption] yes, in the teachering and learning process. I also recommended that teachers should receive a requisite amount of appropriate training well ahead of the delivery of the laptops to the children to ensure that the delivery of the curriculum using the technology will be effectively and efficiently executed so that learning will take place.

Mr. Speaker, the five hours they got—two hours one day and two hours the other day—that could never do. The hon. Prime Minister said she is following the Singapore model. Hon. Prime Minister, have you sent a delegation? Have you sent them to see? People are being taken out of schools and immersed in training for almost a year before they are put back to teach. Anybody could be with a laptop in front of the students, and it is very, very difficult for teachers to coordinate 30-something and 40-something children in front of them with laptops. I am telling you, they do not know what they are doing. They report to me; principals report to me, they tell the children leave the laptops at home. Mr. Speaker, let me go on. [Crosstalk] I ask—no, no, I will go on.

I asked the Minister to ensure the availability of the requisite technical expertise to support the programme. Mr. Speaker, anyone who has experience in effective project delivery will recognize the above as a blueprint for the success of this project. But, of course, I know that this project management approach was never adopted. Mr. Speaker, it was a case of putting the cart before the horse; a campaign promise that just had to be fulfilled and I foresaw the problems that are currently plaguing the programme.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member came to this House and he cited the example of an isolated case of a teacher in a denominational school, and sometimes in a denominational school, the principal has more anatomy, and oftentimes, more money to improve their situation. But, he did not speak about the Government Secondary Schools; that is what I am speaking about. And I will tell you about St. François—the Government Secondary Schools.

This teacher whom the Ministry described as having had tremendous success in competitions in Latin America and moving on to a competition in the United States
must be a highly technologically literate individual, and I take my hat off to her and I commend her for her success and for flying the flag of Trinidad and Tobago high in the field of technology. But the Minister used this teacher’s success as a yardstick to measure the success of the one laptop per child programme. And went on to explain to the hon. Members present and indeed the public at large, how the curriculum is being effectively and efficiently delivered to students using the laptops. Mr. Speaker, I will take your hand and walk you through the schools. I have been there. [Desk thumping] I will go with him.

Mr. Speaker, I am embarrassed to advise the hon. Minister that my experience in the schools and my check with certain schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago revealed quite a different story, and they have confirmed my worst fears. There is little or no evidence of successful integration of the use of students’ laptops in the curriculum as the Minister related. The hon. Minister must remember that I am firmly connected to the system and I know what is going on in the schools throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, let us actually reflect on what is going on in the schools. I want to begin with electrical and technical installation but before I do, I want to inform this honourable House that networking of computers and Internet connectivity are critical factors for the successful integration of ICT in the curriculum. You talked about St Francios—I walked that way painfully. I had to do electrical upgrade; I had to do technical upgrade; I had to raise funds; it was not easy. I went to Singapore and I saw; I lived it; it is not easy it cannot be done like that. Mr. Speaker, [Interruption] He wants to know when was that—about 10 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, the electrical installation—yes, St. François has been using ICT as an integral part of smart pedagogical practice since 2005, and it is the only government secondary school, and I dare say, might be the only school in Trinidad and Tobago who is using it effectively because their principal bought the technology back and handed it to them painfully and trained them. They were trained at UWI through the Ministry and they were trained for hours and hours, you need 120 hours of training at least. These people got a little five hours and they can deliver the curriculum; no way! The electrical installation had not been adequately upgraded in most schools and the existing infrastructure is incapable of supporting the increased usage.

Mr. Speaker, the original system designed under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme did not cater for this increased usage. The technical infrastructure in practically all the government secondary schools, the Internet connectivity is limited to administration and the staffroom. All computers
including the students’ laptops must be connected to the school’s network in order for users to access the Internet. In most cases, [Crosstalk] you do not even understand, that is bandwidth. You could have a zillion megabits of bandwidth, hon. Minister, but if you do not have the connectivity to the network, you cannot get on the Internet. He does not understand the technicalities. [Desk thumping] The reason why the children cannot get onto the Internet is because of spatial issues. The wireless range is not available to those laptops situated in classrooms remote from the server, and the appropriate technical infrastructure, for example, routers have not been installed to facilitate this process. So, they cannot use the Internet. You can have a zillion megabits—not megabytes, megabits—but if you do not have the connectivity to the network, you cannot get on.

Schools have an increased number of laptops; you have Form 1s and now Form 2s, you have the teacher’s laptop, you have administration, and the technical system is highly inadequate. Mr. Speaker, yes, the Minister is trying to increase the Internet capacity and I am glad but he has to look at the networking, the connectivity or else, it would not happen.

I want to talk about the IT technicians, the technical expertise.

Dr. Gopeesingh: They have 152.

Mrs. P. McIntosh: They have been appointed to schools. You heard what he said—they have 152. This Government or the Minister is concerned about the figures but he is not concerned about what is happening. Yes, I know you have 152, I am not arguing with you on that, that is true. But the low level of technical competence—I was on the interviewing panel, I interviewed probably 100 and something—probably 150. The low level of technical competency is incapable of lending the necessary technical support to schools.

Mr. Speaker, I want the hon. Prime Minister to hear because it is her programme. Hon. Prime Minister, I want you to hear. Many laptops are no longer functional; many have malfunctioned over nine months now. [Desk thumping] They were sent to the technicians to be fixed and they are yet to be returned to the students. They are piled up in a corner because they cannot fix them. The technicians are unable to cope with the complexity and quantity of repairs. There is no clear line of supervision for the IT technicians. The ball passes from the principal to the IT department and vice versa in many schools and I will call some schools—South East Secondary and Mayaro Secondary—the servers and the networks are down for over a year. What Internet are they getting onto? The IT department does not possess the technical capacity to manage the technical issues in schools. [Crosstalk]
Mr. Speaker, most of the senior personnel have departed from the IT department and currently there is no IT director. In the absence of technical assistance,—[Interruption] You had advertised, yes but there is none; there is no supervision. In the absence of technical assistance, the Ministry does not grant approvals to any school who might try to use their own funds to rectify the system. So, once a school’s IT system goes down technically—no pun intended—it is down. The Ministry of Education is not dealing with technical issues in government schools and the Ministry cannot cope with the technical issues due to technical deficiencies.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the Minister of Education to tell us what happened to the three-year repair contract with Hewlett Packard. I understand in some schools, there is an agent now and then, they have not seen the agent for God knows how long, and what happened to the warranty clause he told us about with Hewlett Packard. I want to ask what is supposed to happen to the textbook rental programme, top-ups or replacement laptops. I want to know if they will be provided for students whose laptops are no longer functional.

Mr. Speaker, the teachers’ training, as I said, is totally inadequate. They need at least 120 hours to effectively be able to deliver the curriculum so that learning takes place, not teaching, but learning takes place. There is a difference between teaching for the sake of teaching and teaching so that learning takes place. Mr. Speaker, with the exception, as I said, of St. François Girls College, take me and show me, Sir, a school where ICT is being used effectively and efficiently as an integral part of smart pedagogical practice.

Hon. Member: One hundred and thirty-four schools.

Mrs. P. McIntosh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many principals and teachers advise students to leave their laptops at home because they are not using them to teach and they do not want all the security problems. As a result, the laptops are not being used for the purpose for which they were intended, that is, for teaching and learning. There is minimal or zero impact on the delivery of the curriculum, especially in the government schools, and they are used for personal use by the families of students. Now, that is fine because I heard them say, well, the families are using them; that is very good. Mr. Speaker, I am not against any family using the laptops, but better we had done like Guyana and say, “one laptop per family” not “one laptop per student” Guyana is wise; they know the technicalities of going to the school. I am not saying it should not be done but it should have been planned,
and a project management approach should have been adopted in the implementation. So, Guyana has one laptop per family and probably, we should have done that. [Desk Thumping]

I am just asking for students, they have asked me—students who are in Form 5 and 6 who are in dire need of laptops, of the technology for research on project work at a much higher level; they have been clamouring for laptops, and they feel very cheated because Form 1 students have the laptops and they, who need them very badly, do not have any. What is certain, however, is that a campaign pledge has been delivered and will continue to be delivered over the next three years. [Interruption] Nothing is wrong, but it is not being used for what you told us, what I read in this book—your goals—not being used for that. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker, the implementation of the laptop programme is of great concern to me and many of my colleagues. Mr. Speaker, I noticed that I have five minutes left, no, I have two—. I noticed there was deafening silence from the textbook rental programme—deafening silence. In 2004, the textbook rental programme was introduced under the PNM administration to ensure that all students possess the basic tools for learning in accordance with the philosophy: “no child will be left behind”. [Desk thumping] Historically, principals are requesting selected texts from a list of texts and I am not going to go through it because I have to get through. But, this year, they were asked by the hon. Minister—and I have the document here. We are well into the seventh week of the term. The children have no books. No textbooks have been delivered.

3.10 p.m.

A circular memorandum was sent out to the schools. Let me read:

Hon. Tim Gopeesingh, Minister of Education, has instructed that principals of primary and secondary schools can select textbooks that they deem most suitable for their students…

He asked them to select textbooks.

at the different levels, primary and secondary.

“Yuh right, what yuh say this year, yuh go do next year.” [Desk thumping]

These texts would be supplied by the Ministry of Education. The selected texts in each subject area must be used in the academic years 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 and 2013/2014. Principals are asked to consult with the teachers in departments before completing the requisition forms.
There are the requisition forms behind there. When I asked, in this Parliament, on Wednesday 07, what will happen, he said the next week everything will be arranged. However, to date, nothing has been done. The teachers were never told that they would not receive the texts. On the list for the parents they put the corresponding workbooks, because the Ministry does not supply workbooks. So, the children have their workbooks and they do not have the texts. [Interruption]

**Dr. Gopeseingh:** Wrong again.

**Mrs. P. McIntosh:** No, no, no. I am not wrong at all. The books for the last two years, not every child is in possession of books. Children use books and books have to be topped up and replaced. The Minister said he found a warehouse of books and he is topping up. Up to now, a book has not reached the schools and I know why. Because, the texts are in the warehouse—[[Interruption]

**Dr. Gopeseingh:** You have the wrong information.

**Mrs. P. McIntosh:** You told me you got a warehouse of texts. You said so. Check the Hansard. You said that there are warehouses of texts. When texts are left in the warehouse they are dated, they are old editions, they are totally irrelevant to the current curriculum and they cannot be used. Due to continuing educational research and evolving curriculum, authors are constantly revising, revisiting and upgrading their textbooks and printing new editions. Sometimes whole chapters are changed. Sometimes there are completely new editions and a host of new information. Information is dynamic and evolving. It is a perpetual state of flux and renewal. It is anything but static. It is neither stationary nor stagnant. Those books in the warehouse cannot be used. That is why to date I have done a check of over 40 secondary and primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Up to this morning I was ringing principals, ringing principals, ringing principals. Not one has received a top-up.

Mr. Speaker, also I have checked all of the suppliers and not one single requisition book order has been received by authors, publishers or suppliers. It is an untenable aberration that has adversely affected the efficient and effective delivery of the curriculum. And this is a Government that says it cares about children? The seventh week into school and children do not have books.

**Dr. Gopeseingh:** “Yuh wrong!” [Interruption]

**Mrs. P. McIntosh:** They do not have books. You can say I am wrong all you want. That is your only defence; that I am wrong. The principals and teachers are struggling to implement a plan B, in respect of the delivery of the curriculum to the students in the affected areas.
Authors and publishers have a glut of thousands of textbooks on their hands because they were told that these books will be ordered and that the Ministry will purchase these books. To date—[crosstalk]—you told them in that circular memorandum. You told the principals to select and they went ahead and printed and ordered their books and they have a glut of books on their hands. It is a total catastrophe that has undoubtedly compromised the delivery of the curriculum to students in primary and secondary schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago. What a shame on this caring Government that is supposed to be so concerned about our student development.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say so much more, but I realize that I have to wind up. I would like to say, that without collective resolve, the situation that we are in is not about partisan politics. We should realize that, the economic situation that we are in, but it is about, if we do not really engender a collective resolve in looking at the problems that we have, we will never gain the confidence we so badly need.

I would end by saying, as a friend told me: none of us is getting out of this alive. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Interruption]

Hon. Members: What?

Mrs. P. McIntosh:—of this world.

Mr. Speaker: Misrepresentation? Just a minute.

Dr. Gopessingh: Under Standing Order 33.

Mr. Speaker: Just a minute and just tightly—

Dr. Gopessingh: I want to, first of all—on the laptop issue we have over 4,000 teachers trained. [Interruption and crosstalk] At least—[Interruption]

Mrs. P. McIntosh: Do not say the word “trained”! [crosstalk]

Dr. Gopessingh: One minute.

Mr. Speaker: The Member is claiming that there was some misrepresentation on your part. Under the Standing Order, I am giving him a minute to respond. Continue.

Dr. Gopessingh: Mr. Speaker and colleagues, there are over 4,000 teachers trained within 152 schools between levels 1 to 3. Eight hundred principals, assistant deans and heads of departments have been trained as well. We have 152 schools wired with Internet connectivity of up to five megabits. We are now introducing
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HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH

Wi-Fi in the schools. We have 152 schools with computer labs ranging from one to six labs and some schools have up to six laboratories in them with 70 students. [Interruption and continuous crosstalk]

Mr. Manning: You spoke already. What is that?

Dr. Gopeesingh: In terms of the—we built 24 early childhood education centres up to this time. You took nine years to build 23. The professional development and decentralization, those issues are incorporated in the SEMCU of $65 million. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: All right.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is not a minute yet. The social sector—I am advised that the Rose Hill and Belmont Schools—[Interruption and crosstalk]

Hon. Member: Time is up.

Dr. Gopeesingh: --the contracts have been awarded and mobilization is to take place.

Mr. Speaker: All right. [Desk thumping]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It has been said that a dream that you dream alone is only a dream. However, a dream you dream together becomes reality. Sixteen months ago, when our Government came into office, we came on the wings of a national dream, caressed by the winds of hope and change. We came with a dream for a better life; a better way of life, with a dream for a safe and secure country; a dream for a stable and viable economy; a dream for the protection of our environment; a dream for equality of treatment and a more just society, a dream for accountability and transparency in governance; a dream for better opportunities to develop and grow; a dream for a better future for our children. These dreams were shared by the majority of our citizens. We were welded together by a common desire and a fighting spirit, which has made us the envy of the world.

Today I say look at the success of our cricket team as we congratulate them on the world stage. Look at how our tiny nation is boldly seeking a place in the next football World Cup finals in Brazil in 2014.

Look—27 member states of the European Union have unanimously voted to confer the award of the World’s Best Tourist Destination 2012, on Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] I am advised that they had been surveying countries around the world for the past year. When they voted, on October 09, it would have
been a year within the People’s Partnership Government. In coming to that decision, it is noteworthy to all the naysayers and the prophets of doom and gloom that the decision was taken October 09, 2011, in the midst of the state of emergency. For those of who you say that people have lost confidence in us, certainly 27 member states of the European Union have not lost any confidence in Trinidad and Tobago. Here is the proof by the conferring of that award.

As the Chief Executive of our Government, I am responsible for translating the dreams and aspirations of our people into the vision and mission for our administration and charting a course for us to get there. So, our medium-term policy framework—this document. They say we have no plan. This is our medium-term plan which we have shared with the nation and this Parliament. In this, it embraces the theme of “Innovation for Lasting Prosperity”. This has been prepared by the hon. Minister of Planning, Economic and Social Restructuring, Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, and his officials. What it does is to outline our Government’s perspective and intent on the socio-economic transformation which needs to take place in order to achieve our commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; the commitment of lasting prosperity for all.

Our vision is one which says: “With true creativity and innovation and collaboration we shall prosper together.”. I will return to this theme in my conversation in this debate, in a little while; the whole issue of prospering together and the whole issue of sharing the resources of the State, not just in the north, the south, the east or the west, but throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. We will see also that our vision and our mission, as outlined in our plan is one that says that there must be equity in the distribution of resources. That is different from saying that there must be equality. There must be equity and there must be transparency and openness in the distribution of those resources. In my conversation I will share with you how the people of this country were betrayed by the inequitable distribution of resources. It is not just Kamla say so or the People’s Partnership Government, COP, UNC, MSJ or TOP, it comes from one of the most independent bodies in our nation. I will share that report with you shortly.

Our medium-term policy framework—in this our mission is to achieve economic inclusiveness. I come back to that again. It is not about some, it is about all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in an innovation-driven growth economy, with greater equity, more meaningful participation, and a rising tide of prosperity for all in Trinidad and Tobago. In order to achieve this mission and vision, we
have identified, as we did in our manifesto, which has now become the policy document of our Government, the seven interconnected pillars for sustainable development. These are:

- Pillar 1, which focuses on people-centred development.

In order to achieve our mission for prosperity for all we need everyone, and all can contribute to the achievement of that mission.

- Pillar 2, poverty eradication and social justice.

We cannot move forward as a nation unless we bring everyone with us to the promised land.

- Pillar 3, national and personal security.

  Human security is essential to peace and prosperity. We have made this our number one priority this year, given the crime situation that has been plaguing us.

- Pillar 4, information and communication technologies.

We are living in a tech world. We need to connect Trinidad and Tobago and build a technology-based economy.

- Pillar 5, a more diversified knowledge-intensive economy.

We have to build on the native genius of our people everywhere.

- Pillar 6, good governance is key to sustainable prosperity for all.

We have seen time and time again how corruption has eaten away our patrimony in the past. People participation in good governance must be a cornerstone in our administration.

- Pillar 7, foreign policy such as to secure our place in the world.

These are the seven pillars we have articulated in our medium-term policy framework, which guides our budgeting process for 2011, down to 2012, 2013 and 2014.

One of the priority areas for us has been the recalibration of what is acceptable in the proper governance of our resources. In far too many instances, people have been shortchanged and I know many of you would be frustrated with the extent of corruption we have unearthed in this one year. Unless we eradicate the bogie of corruption in our society we cannot achieve our vision of prosperity for all. We will remain stagnated in the old ways of prosperity for some only.
Before we embark on the journey to reaching our vision, we are forced to look back and take stock of where we are. And in this exercise, I need to share with you some of the reality checks so that you will know where we are coming from. I have heard others saying we should not go backwards; many on the other side, because they want us to forget, but we must never ever forget. We must never ever forget how we arrived where we were last year, May 2010. It has been said those who forget the mistakes of the past are doomed to repeat them. And so, we must never forget. We must not forget what we inherited. We found a wounded Treasury and an economy that was hurting. There was internal bleeding and we had to act quickly to stop the haemorrhaging. We had to plug several leaks in order to stabilize the ship, lest it sank amidst the choppy economic waters.

3.25 p.m.

And so I am proud to be able to say that this budget and this budget statement by the hon. Minister of Finance, I am very proud to say, that it will go a long way in stabilizing our economy. The theme is most appropriate, “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”. I recall my colleague, hon. Min. Dr. Douglas, talking about those who build their homes on solid rock, on solid foundation. That is what we have been doing, Mr. Speaker. And so I wish to commend the hon. Minister of Finance for his very visionary budget and to thank him, and to thank those in your Ministry and those of your colleagues, all your colleagues, who have contributed to this document, and all your officials and your team at the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that long gone are the days when on budget day, on budget morning you would see lines at the gas stations; people lined up at the grocery stores trying to buy out everything, because they did not know where taxes were going to drop. People were anxious; they anticipated those increases. Long gone are those days. Also, you will recall there was a time when the day of the budget was a secret. They would never tell you when it was. It was a top secret in the world. We are talking about the days when you were in office, when the PNM was in office. Those days are gone. [Desk thumping] Thank God!

So despite the woeful mess in which the former government left the nation, this Government has been delivering on the dreams of the people. We have been able in our 16 months, to provide goods and services to every corner of this country regardless of race, regardless of class, regardless of geographic location, political affiliation or any other distinguishing characteristics. In the last 16 months we have delivered, and we will continue to deliver.
Again, I say, let us take a few moments, Mr. Speaker, to reflect on what lay behind, the tidal wave which swept the PNM out of office May 24, 2010. I am aware that there are some who believe we should have kept every manifesto promise within the first fiscal year, within one year, but we all know, those of us who are rational, that it is impossible to deliver all manifesto promises within one fiscal year.

I can understand the anxiety, though, having been denied access to government services for so long, having been forgotten by the former administration for so long, persons are beginning to feel the taste of the fruits of good governance and so they are anxious for delivery. And as we deliver on our promises, we heighten these expectations. Mr. Speaker, I am not surprised about that—of the anxieties of some of our citizens for the delivery of goods and services. But what I am surprised and I find amazing is what—I do not know if it is parliamentary to say it, the shamelessness of some of those in the Opposition who come and complain, their roads in their constituency have not been fixed in years; to complain that bridges have not been dealt with, or there is flooding in their area, when they were in government, and went through over $300 billion [Desk thumping] and have the gall to come here to chastise and castigate a government that has only gone through one fiscal year.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I am saying regardless of where you are, even Point Fortin, an opposition constituency, had their roads done. They are so fixated in opposing and opposing for opposing sake. Imagine, the iconic veteran, marathon veteran, Granny Luces, she suffered for decades without a road until we paved the trace leading to her home a few months ago. [Desk thumping] We had to change the socio-economic template upon which our society was constructed by the last regime. That was characterized by the inequitable distribution of resources and mega projects which catered for one man’s delusions of grandeur whilst it ignored the plight of the man in the street. Our objective was and is to ensure that we reformatted the approach to economic growth and development to ensure that the gains will no longer be enjoyed by a favoured few, but should be enjoyed by the deserving masses.

When I was Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, I stressed the importance of people-centred development. I spoke of the need for people-centred budgeting, a process whereby the needs and aspirations of people are placed at the forefront. Indeed, I said I do not believe in politics of the right or of the left; I am in politics of
the centre with people at the centre of development. Many times in my budget contributions I talked about people-centred development, people-centred budgeting.

Mr. Speaker, that is manifested in the budget 2011 presented by the hon. Minister of Finance [Desk thumping] people-centred development. And those opposite are anxious to have people forget how we got here. I have heard PNM MPs and PNM talk show hosts saying that this Government needs to realize that they have been in office for the past 16 months. Yes, we know we have been there for 16 months. And they say we must stop blaming the PNM for the problems of the country. I said before, and I repeat, we must never forget what we escaped from. We must never forget! [Desk thumping] We must not forget the gross mismanagement, the wastage of funds, the corruption they presided over which denied citizens improvement in the quality of their lives, which we should have seen from the $302 billion which went through this country under their watch during the energy boom. Every cent lost in corruption is one cent less for laptops, for textbooks, for beds in the hospitals, for medications, for sporting facilities. Every corrupt cent, Mr. Speaker, is a betrayal of the trust of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

They want you to forget they were responsible for constructing buildings, but then allowing these buildings to deteriorate, because they did not outfit them, and did not make them places to be occupied nor did they put maintenance programmes in place. They want you to forget that there was no quality control, little project management, massive cost overruns, and the vast majority of these mega-construction jobs went to foreign contractors.

They want you to forget they left this country owing contractors hundreds of millions of dollars. Piously wringing their arms, wailing and gnashing their teeth about contractors not being paid. Well, who left them unpaid, and for how long were they left unpaid? We inherited those debts to the contractors to the tune of billions of dollars. So then it is hypocritical on your part, on the part of the Opposition to come to this Parliament to complain about whether contractors were paid or not paid; to come and talk about wage negotiations and who did not get their payments and their settlements. You never began those! They were under your watch; two years under your watch, you never began those. Thank God, that Minister Dookeran was able to hold the economy steady that we have been able to settle several of those, and we are very proud. We will settle all of them through the CPO’s office. [Desk thumping] They will be done.
Mr. Speaker, they want you to forget the abuse they hurled on the domestic contractors while they sought the foreigner. Nothing is wrong with foreigners, but you do not do it at the expense of your local contractors. You go local as far as you can. They did that because they had a blatant disregard for the will of the people in their haste for these big projects. They want you to forget they left this country owing, as I said, the contractors. They want you to forget that while money flowed like water as the energy boom revenues flooded in the Treasury, the social fabric of this country was left abandoned and nothing was done to create permanent, well-paying jobs, sustainable jobs.

They want us to forget their multiple promises to deal with crime and their absolute failure to do so. I recall the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the then Prime Minister, coming to this Parliament on numerous occasions promising to deal with crime.

Hansard, Monday October 17, 2005, hon. Mr. Patrick Manning, he says and I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, I draw no conclusions. What I am doing is laying the scenario as it exists today and existed then. May I also say that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago at this time—and listen carefully to what I am about to say—has a good idea who Mr. Big is in this matter.”

Someone said, “Mr. Who?”, and Mr. Manning said:

“Mr. ‘Big’. The Government has a good idea who Mr. ‘Big’ is in this matter”—and I continue to quote—And let me say, there is a difference between information and evidence.”

Of course, we know that. He continued.

“Under our Constitution you need much more than information to be able to bring people to justice. What the State is doing now is collecting our information and we are bringing to bear the best technical expertise available to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago,…very shortly we will supplement our resources with expertise both from Scotland Yard and the FBI...”

Then we found out; this was 2005, Scotland Yard? Those persons were not from Scotland Yard. They were retired; retirees. You brought pensioners, and you were paying them $100 million a month; geriatrics—$100 million a month in that illegal SAUTT programme, you were paying them when we could have taken that money, which is what we have done. We shut the SAUTT down, we took the $100 million. What did we do? We divided it up so every police officer could get $1,000.
So they were going to bring FBI and Scotland Yard and bring the perpetrators to justice and so on; and did nothing. Did absolutely nothing! That was 2005, and what happened? Six, seven, eight, nine, crime continued on the uprise. Crime continued unabated, Mr. Speaker.

In the last year of governance it just kept getting worse. In the last year that you all were in government, the PNM was in government, 500 murders in one year. That works out to 45 per month. In one month under a state of emergency, what has happened?—70 per cent decrease in homicides in Trinidad and Tobago. It means that for every one of these days in the state of emergency more than one life is being saved. And you come here, those of you on the other side to say that the state of emergency is not worth it, we are abusing people. That is what you are saying. But you do not consider and do not remember that every life that is saved in this land is a valuable life. Every single life that we can manage to save is a life well worth living. And, therefore, I have no regrets, Mr. Speaker, I say it unabashedly, I have absolutely no regrets that we took the decision, based on the advice of the security forces to put a state of emergency in Trinidad and Tobago.

Never have our people felt safer, Mr. Speaker, and never has crime been down to where it is today!

And so they want us to forget, as I say, their multiple promises to deal with crime and failure so to do. They want us to forget that they recognized, but they refused to deal with bed shortages in the hospitals, and bed shortage does not just mean a physical bed, it also means space. That is why we have committed to build five hospitals in our term in office.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have been promised; I have been advised that UDeCott will deliver a 300-bed facility in the Chancery Lane building that we are converting into a hospital, so we can get 300 more bed spaces. The San Fernando Regional Health Authority services over 650,000 persons and, therefore, they most certainly need that space. So whilst we build, we took this mega complex which was there, the Chancery Building, that they were going to use for offices and we said, no, let us put hospital facilities there. And that is what we will do.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, they want us to forget the corruption the Auditor General discovered in CEPEP. They want you to forget the wall of shame that they built so that their high-profile guests passing by the Beetham would not see the conditions of the persons living there. They want you to forget the victimization of an entire region; when they shut down the sugar industry they put tens of thousands on the
breadline with promises of land that never materialized. Even when they were instructed by the court to deliver the lands, they were in breach of the court order, and that would not be the first time that they are in breach of court orders. It took this Government, Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs—we have begun, we have been delivering and will deliver the parcels of lands promised.

Mr. Speaker, they want us to forget the victimization of generations of our children. Where? At Biche, of course elsewhere, but at Biche out of spite and malice they refused to open the Biche High School, and these children had to get up at four o’clock and three o’clock in the morning to travel to Sangre Grande and Mayaro to other areas outlying, when they had a full state—of—the—art school in their own district. You want us to forget that? Those children who had to travel every morning with their parents—hours of the morning and late hours of the evening, they will not forget that punishment. That is a whole ten years, that means ten groups of children who lost time that they could have kept for other purposes to spend with their families, to read their lessons and to enjoy some of that time. We will not forget that.

It took this Government, this People’s Partnership Government, to open the school that was originally built under my watch as Minister of Education, and I am very proud, Minister of Education, that we got it up and running and the children are in school. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, they want you to forget the Stone Street deal undertaken by the former PNM treasurer. They want you to forget the Clico nightmare which happened under their watch. Minister Dookeran—when we were listening to the Leader of the Opposition talking about the Minister of Finance was dismantling Clico, the arrangements with Clico, I said to Minister: what arrangements? He said there was nothing. So therefore, if there was nothing the Leader of the Opposition is saying you were dismantling nothing. Nothing from nothing still leaves nothing. And so there is so much they want us to forget. Minister Warner spoke today about the rapid rail and transport—how many millions it cost?

Mr. Warner: Five hundred and seventy-five million dollars.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Almost half a billion dollars, to care for what? Not for the rail but for the study, a piece of paper sitting in a box somewhere. They want us to forget the corruption in UDeCott. The PNM’s blue-eyed boy, Calder Hart. We can go on and on about the things they do not want us to forget, but I say, Mr. Speaker, this nation must never forget, we are where we are as a country and a people because of the actions of the last regime. They continued to borrow locally
and internationally building the national debt even when they had vastly superior higher revenues than budgeted for. Rather than paying off accumulated debts, they continued to borrow and borrow whilst they had high streams of revenue.

Virtually every problem that we confront when we came into government has its genesis in PNM’s wastage, corruption and discrimination, from the crime wave to the flooding.

Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/ East was talking about flood. Do you remember what he said? Does anyone remember what he said when the country was flooding? I wonder if he even remembers what he said. He said do not worry about that, that is an act of God, he had nothing to do with it.

**Mr. Imbert:** Oh! It is not true.

**Hon. Member:** Stationary cloud.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Not true? Well what did you say? [Crosstalk]—environmental and climatic changes, all of that. So when we have flooding today, in one fiscal year, every rational person knows we could not have dealt with all of the flooding in one fiscal year, but we are continuing to work on the problem and we will do as much as we can.

And now let us turn to the heart of our fiscal policy, having as I say reminded ourselves of some of the things we must not forget, let us look at what this Government is doing. At the heart of our fiscal policy and the pledge to serve the people—and not a few; not to serve a few people, but to serve all the people of the country—we have adopted a policy approach which seeks to protect the fiscally vulnerable and that is why today I rise in support, as I say, of the Minister of Finance and in support of the budget of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

You see, if you did not know it before the directions and intent of those in Opposition became clearer from their words. Amazingly, I heard them actually complaining that we should have taken the easy way out—which is, they complained that we did not raise taxes. They complained that we did not reduce the fuel subsidy and therefore increased the cost of fuel. They complained that we did not impose the property tax.

**Dr. Moonilal:** That is what they would have done.

**Hon. Member:** Who said that?

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, those were the complaints. Because where are the revenues? Where are the revenues? The only way they could make
revenue is what?—tax upon tax upon tax. That is what they were—a tax, a tax on the population. I want you to pay attention, Mr. Speaker, because if you had put God out of your thoughts, not you but the majority of the population, and put them in government—excuse me.

Dr. Moonilal: They would have taxed. They would have raised licence, they would have raised everything.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: If May 24, 2010 last year, people had put God out of their thoughts and put the PNM into government what we would have had today is a higher fuel price and tax after tax after tax, but that would have been the easy way out for a government, to impose taxes—easy way, get your revenue, but that would not have been the easy way out for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The tax would have been on them. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I have listened to 17 budget presentations in my life as a parliamentarian, and I have listened to Leaders of the Opposition deliver their replies, indeed as Leader of the Opposition, I have delivered three budget replies, and every Leader of the Opposition I have heard in the past 17 years they would come—including the Member for San Fernando East by the way was Leader of the Opposition for some time as well.

Hon. Member: He still is. [Desk thumping and laughter]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I cannot say anything else except what my eyes see. I can make an observation with respect to the comments off the floor, and this is the only time I see a leader who has cut ties with his colleagues. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Warner: Literally! Literally!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I congratulate him. I congratulate him whilst I observe he is now wearing a normal tie, all his colleagues continue to wear, and with a very good Trinidad and Tobago pin and I congratulate him for it. But the others have cut ties or he has cut ties with them. There is not one other Member.

So I am saying in the past 16/17 budgets, listening to Leaders of the Opposition, this is the first time, whilst I would have heard before of the complaints about the budget and the budgets’ provisions, I would have heard the complaints, Opposition Leaders would normally offer alternative solutions and programmes. And this is the first time I have heard none, and if I were to take out of all that 2 hours and 45 minutes contribution by the Leader of the Opposition, if there was one that you could try to fashion into a possible alternative, it was that you should put the property tax, you should tax the people—2 hours and 45 minutes. What have you said?
Mr. Warner: He said nothing!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: What have you said that we could do different; that we could have done X or we could have done Y? [Crosstalk]

Mr. Warner: Magdalena.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Oh! Change the name of the hotel. None whatsoever! Mr. Speaker, the primary concerns raised regarding the budget include the sufficiency of funds dedicated to specific Ministries, the billion-dollar deficit, and whether the implementation of various mentioned programmes and projects will be in the best interest of the people. Financially, this Government is attempting to make the most of a bad situation. The UNCTAD Trade and Development Report 2011 warns and I quote:

“…that fiscal tightening only addresses the symptoms of the problem, leaving…the causes unchanged…public…”-is a-“consequence of the crisis, not”-a-“cause”. 

It also states and I quote again:

“…reduction in growth-promoting fiscal expenditure may lead to a decline in future government revenues that will be larger than the fiscal savings”–made with-“retrenchment…”

And so this year’s budget outlines, in my respectful view, a very wise strategy to tackle the causes of our situation instead of attempting quick fixes using curtailed funds. Since this is the largest budget in our history, this is also the largest investment in our country and in our people, and it has come at extremely opportune time.

Minister Dookeran’s budget signals a seismic shift in the political ideology of governance from the PNM’s paternalistic concepts, now to one of a vision which invites citizens to become individual share owners in government business entities. The proposed financial plan will serve the double purpose of stimulating the economy as well as improving the standard of living of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Permit me to mention a few of the bold initiatives we have undertaken. The 21st Century policing project, the health information management system, alternative transit systems, the tourism action plan, the land for the landless programme, the life sport programme, and so on. The list goes on.

I know there is a concerted effort by those in Opposition to claim that investor confidence in the country is very low, but what they fails to tell us also is that
investor confidence around the world is low due to the economic crisis many countries face. But if we see what is happening here, is that despite what is happening abroad we are weathering the storm and our economy has begun to show signs of recovery. And take a good example, the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange. This is a leading indicator of economic activity, and where we will see one year ago, the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange composite index stood at 817.98, on Friday last, it closed at 992.91; this is more than 17 per cent increase in the index in one year. Sixteen of the 39 stocks in the composite index increased in value over the past one year—the increase ranging from 13.26 to 92 per cent. The average increase of these 16 stocks is around 35 per cent. The market capitalization, total value of the stock market, increased from around $70 billion to more than $90 billion in this past year, and it should be noted that this performance of our stock market is of great significance given that elsewhere in the world they are posting negative returns.

This would have come from the prudent economic strategies employed and of keeping interest rates low, removing uncertainty in the environment and stimulating growth is working. We acknowledge more needs to be done and therefore the proposal from the Minister of Finance to give a tax break to the small and medium sized companies to list on the stock exchange is precisely one such measure that would help stimulate entrepreneurship, to seek listing on the stock exchange and raising cheaper capital from that market.

We have other diversification initiatives: alternative renewable energy, maritime energy, creative industries, amongst others, and of course, our own resource pool of 100 years in the oil industry, a tremendous human resource pool that would make it feasible to explore our energy options and to help stimulate the economy and position us in a global competitive position with future energy trends.

Mr. Speaker, there is much more I would say. How much time do I have, please?

Mr. Speaker: Original time you have until 4.03 p.m.

Mr. Volney: Ten minutes.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Ten minutes. Okay. Mr. Speaker, there are some other areas that I could share with us here but I really want to get to some matters that are very troubling for us and which show a flagrant disregard for our Constitution and the rule of law. So I would go to those and leave these other points, others in the budget can deal with those.
Mr. Speaker our constitutional framework reposes in a government a formidable power. The government wields a formidable power, not just in terms of financial expenditure and fiscal measures, but that overreaching power that a government holds over the daily lives and activities of its citizens. The Preamble to our Constitution says to us:

“Whereas the People of Trinidad and Tobago—
b. respect the principles of social justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being so distributed as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all...”—and that—“there should be an opportunity for advancement on the basis of merit, ability and integrity.”

3.55 p.m.

That is the cornerstone of our constitutional framework which in turn sets the parameters for good governance and for the democracy in our land, and this same Constitution section 4(b) states:

“It is hereby recognized and declared that in Trinidad and Tobago there have existed and shall continue to exist without discrimination by reason of race, origin, colour, religion or sex the following fundamental human rights and freedoms namely—

(b) the right of the individual to equality before the law and the protection of the law; and

(d) the right of the individual to equality of treatment from any public authority in the exercise of his functions;”

We all know this, Mr. Speaker; we now have evidence that the former administration, in many ways—but I am going to deal with one area—has been in flagrant breach of these very fundamental concepts of our Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that the right to equality of treatment assumes greater significance in a society such as ours.

Mr. Warner: “Listen nah boy, listen”.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Our political evolution and history has been characterized by cries of unequal treatment by the State. Apart from the courts, Parliament created a specialist legal commission and tribunal to focus on certain areas which warrant special treatment. The need to guard against discrimination was one such area hence the enactment of the Equal Opportunity Act.
Remember that, Mr. Speaker, the Equal Opportunity Act. I am very proud that in the short stint of my 10 days as Attorney General when the UNC government came into power—my first 10 days—that within that period I commissioned the Law Reform Commission to prepare a Green Paper on the establishment of an Equal Opportunity Commission. [Desk thumping] That was in 1995.

Thereafter, that Green Paper was done, went through its stages, became an Act of Parliament—Equal Opportunity Act, 2000. You will recall however, that for seven years the PNM government refused to implement that Act. In fact, it was a group of disabled persons who took the matter all the way to Privy Council, and the Privy Council ordered the PNM government to implement that Act, the Equal Opportunity Act.

Even with that court order from the Privy Council, the PNM government continued to deny our citizens access to the protection from discrimination for a further seven months.

The Commission was then set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. John La Guerre. It was almost as if the PNM when in government was afraid of allowing citizens the security of protection from discrimination by government.

The cases of discrimination against that government are very well known: the Maha Sabha Radio licence, Feroza Ramjohn, Ganga Persad Kissoon, Devant Maharaj, Marlene Coudray and others are shameful indictments against the PNM in government. Several of the PNM MPs sitting here now and pontificating were part of that government.

**Mr. Warner:** Yes, yes!

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** They sat and quietly acquiesced while citizens were denied their constitutional rights and their rights to appeal the denial of these rights.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask the Member of Diego Martin West, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, but he seems to have stepped out.

**Hon. Member:** He fled.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:** But perhaps one of his colleagues will tell him. I wanted to ask him, where was his voice when these rights were being breached? Where was his voice when the Cabinet voted to give Louis Lee Sing the Citadel Limited licence, and bypassed the Maha Sabha? Where was his voice, and the others of you who were in the Cabinet?
Mr. Speaker, recently the Opposition has taken up this mantra of discrimination; they also attempt to say, this is not a partnership, this is a UNC Partnership, UNC-led, UNC—well, if you have a problem with the UNC, none of us on this side have any problem with UNC. [Desk thumping] None of us here! And the majority of the citizens of this land voted for this coalition, for this partnership—

Hon. Member: Take that!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: —and we are holding strong. I remember when we came into office last year, every time they got up to speak was, “you are not going to last; they will not last, 10 days, one month, two months, three months, four months”, well now, Mr. Speaker, within one month they were the ones who were not lasting. [Desk thumping] They were the ones who were in disarray and 16 months later, we are still going strong, and stronger and stronger. And so, that is political mischief.

I want to clear up today, Mr. Speaker, the misconception that seems to have taken roots in the minds of those opposite. We are not the PNM, stop judging us by your own PNM standards. [Desk thumping] There are those of you, you see smoke and mirrors at every turn; you see ghosts behind every post, why?— because that is how the PNM government operated.

Let me repeat the words of the famous Ken Valley: “You can run but you cannot hide from your past!”. The discrimination ghosts continues to haunt the PNM, and let me give you, as I said, the most stunning example of this.

In 2009 this country was rocked by a scandal which erupted when it was discovered that over $45 million was spent in secret scholarships by the PNM.

Mr. Roberts: Oh, oh!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Forty-five million dollars. The Minister who presided over that debacle had already hidden in another post, far from prying eyes of the media and investigators. Her replacement, who is the current Member for Port of Spain South came to this Chamber and denied every wrongdoing, and promised an investigation. Of course that investigation did not happen, but I do want to say this, the hon. Minister then, Member for Port of Spain South was misled because everything she claimed in her statement on that fateful day, Friday, December 4th 2009, all the statements here have subsequently been proven to be not accurate.

Hon. Member: False!
Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: And therefore I do believe the hon. Member was misled. I do not believe that the Member for Port of Spain South would have engaged in such deceit; I do believe that she was misled. And in being misled herself she inadvertently therefore also misled this Parliament when she spoke in 2009.

Mr. Speaker, I will share the information with you. This was a list of the persons who received the scholarships. Remember when the Minister brought it and laid it after we forced a question to get it. And I am saying that it is not this Minister of Community Development, it was the person who preceded you, who presided over this $45 million slush fund. And that person also acted as Prime Minister, former Senator. These are the things here, Mr. Speaker. Friday, December 4, 2009 the Minister spoke about a number of things that were happening—

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. J. Warner]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: So, the then Minister answered the question in Parliament, laid the list of the persons who received the scholarships and spoke about the way in which the fund was to be administered—that particular scholarship fund. She said that in 2002 Cabinet agreed to introduce this programme. Cabinet also agreed that the Ministry in consultation with CEOs and NGOs identified the criteria for the award but then the Minister spoke about a means test, the criteria to be used to give them. The Minister spoke about a committee—yes there was a committee but as I will share with you shortly, there were never any minutes that committee met. There was a ceiling—$25,000 for local programmes, £2,500 for programmes in the UK. Again, we will come and see that was far from what was given, it was far in excess of these amounts that were given.

So, what I have here is a report from the Equal Opportunity Commission and indeed it is a ruling given by the Equal Opportunity Commission dated July 19, 2011 signed by the Chairman—Prof. John La Guerre and we did not appoint him there, he was appointed by the former administration.
This was a complaint made by Devant Maharaj, now Minister of Transport, as complainant and the respondent, the Ministry of Community Development and this is the decision of the commission’s findings.

What had happened, Devant had filed—now Minister Maharaj—had filed a complaint with the Equal Opportunity Commission somewhere in 2007, I believe, when he would have been an ordinary citizen—

Hon. Member: Two thousand and nine.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:—2009, I am sorry. When the decision was given on July 19, he filed a complaint alleging that he was being discriminated against because people were getting the scholarship and had been deprived because of several reasons and of course he will talk a little more on it in his contribution. I am more interested here in the findings in terms of the ruling and decision which—the comments made in here are really damaging and damning on any government far less on the PNM government.

Mr. Warner: Listen good.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: So here is the report and in this report the Ministry breaches as identified in the report itself. At page 18 of this report, it says:

“No record of selection committee meetings: the EOC was informed that there are no copies of minutes of ANY meetings of the Selection Committee or ANY information regarding what would have taken place during the evaluation of applications.”

Hon. Member: What!

Mr. Sharma: How big was that scholarship?

Mr. Warner: Government for so.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: So, if there was no committee, there are no minutes, how did you give out $45 million worth of taxpayers money?

Hon. Member: Shame!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: So, how did you award these scholarships? [Inaudible] In its conclusion the Equal Opportunity Commission cast doubt that there was even a Scholarship Selection Committee where it said at page 39 of this very said report:

“In fact the existence or operation of a Scholarship Selection Committee is uncertain.”
The report continues and I quote; this is on page 19 of the report:

“Review of Application Forms. Based on a review of the applications of persons requesting grants for the year 2002—2007, several claims of financial need and subsequent awards of financial assistant were identified as suspicious.”

Mr. Warner: Huh, suspicious!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The investigators found that there was no completed application forms for almost half the persons.” [Interruption] “47% … No application forms! The Minister talks about application forms—the then Minister. No forms.

Mr. Warner: Government of PNM.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The investigators found that there was no completed application forms for 47 per cent of the awardees, under this secret scheme. Of those who filled out the form 36 had no addresses on the form.

Dr. Moonilal: Balisier House was the address.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: I am not saying this, this is coming from the Equal Opportunity Commission, an independent body.

Mr. Warner: Address, in care of Balisier House.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The Equal Opportunity Commission found that more than 50 per cent of those who had filled out the form came from the following constituencies.

Mr. Warner: Listen good.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:—San Fernando, Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, Diego Martin West—

Mr. Warner: PNM.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Arima.

Mr. Warner: PNM.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar:—Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Warner: PNM.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, the criteria for award of financial assistance was not adhered to. So, when the Minister read the criteria, the truth and
the fact is, no such criteria was ever followed, this is according to the Equal Opportunity Commission.

The Ministry of Community Development provided to the Equal Opportunity Commission upon request—there was a brochure, guidelines for the award of financial assistance studies programme. And those were guidelines that the Minister read out. But listen to what happened, the guidelines specified—and the Minister did too here—that the awards would be approved to a maximum of $25,000 for locals, maximum of £2,500 for England, and US $5,000 for programmes in other countries, very much. That is what you said Minister, that is exactly what you said in 2009.

Mr. Roberts: You were misled.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: But what actually happened? Again they said awards above these amounts only in really exceptional circumstances. What was the truth? What was the reality?

The EOC discovered more than half the awards for local study exceeded the $25,000.

Hon. Member: Shameless people!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Exceeded the limit, set by the Ministry, and that 94 per cent of the awards for the foreign programmes exceeded the foreign limit.

Mr. Roberts: Great is the PNM.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: In other words, Mr. Speaker, there was absolutely no attempt to control the value of awards given.

Mr. Roberts: No wonder he took off the Balisier tie.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: According to the Equal Opportunity Commission report and I quote at page 19:

“The figures therefore raised the question of what constituted exceptional as referred to in the guidelines that would have influenced the Ministry to award sums over the maximum amounts quoted.”

The terms now, Mr. Speaker:

“Although the Ministry’s guidelines stated that beneficiaries may be required to enter into an agreement with the government to serve within your respective communities for a period of time, in fact this was never done.”
Instead the Ministry claimed and I quote:

“Given the low level of financial assistance the matter of an agreement was not pursued.

So they never entered into an agreement to serve the country, the community, even though we were giving them this money. Because why—given the low level of financial assistance.”

**4.10 p.m.**

But, Mr. Speaker, investigators found, when inspecting the vote books that the allocated fund was used to:

*Pay every imaginable expense from scholarship grants to the following:*

- Community wardens;
- Salaries;
- Catering services;
- Gardening services;
- Rental of retained properties;
- Rental of sound equipment;
- Rental of stages;
- Printing fees;
- Publication fees; and
- Communication fees, TSTT, et cetera.

The truth of the matter is that this was a PNM slush fund. [Crosstalk]

I quote again:

“No agreement signed.

The Ministry’s assertion that the manner of an agreement between the Ministry and successful applicants was not pursued because of the ‘low level financial assistance’ is misleading at best.

An analysis of the list of recipients provided by the Ministry shows that over 400 persons received more than TT $31,000.

There were also hundreds of persons receiving funding amounting to more than TT $100,000. In most cases, the entire tuition fee of the applicant was awarded either in British pounds or US dollars.”
In comparison to GATE, even for the smallest amounts of money for the GATE programme, you had to enter an agreement. PNM slush fund.

Local versus foreign programmes. The Ministry indicated that preference was given to local study, rather than foreign. However, more than 68 per cent were granted awards for foreign studies. Unbelievable! Only one-third of them going for foreign study.

I quote again from page 20:

“No method to monitor successful applicants.

There were no methods of monitoring applicants to ensure that they successfully completed their listed programme study or that on completion of their programme, they returned to benefit their community. The commission requested information related to the policies and procedures to monitor. To date the commission has not received a response.”

The PNM government simply gave away money, $45.3 million of taxpayers’ dollars, without a shred of follow-up or justification.

I quote again:

“No connection to NGOs or CBOs”

Remember I read about the connection with the NGOs and CBOs. You said there must be written evidence, Member for Port of Spain South, of involvement in community-based organizations/NGOs. From the very inception of the programme, it was determined that no funds will be paid to individuals, but must be sent to these institutions.

They said in the guidelines, it must be accompanied by a written recommendation and assessment from an NGO/CBO.

Further the guidelines said that an indication of the area in which the applicant has made a contribution in the committee must be specified. An NGO or CBO must confirm an applicant’s involvement. However, none of the copies of the applications received and reviewed by the commission contain any such recommendations from any NGOs or CBOs...Furthermore”,—at pages 20 and 21—“there was no evidence to suggest that any NGOs or CBOs were involved in any aspect of...”—this programme.

In other words, none of the applicants should have qualified if they did not have that CBO/NGO recognition and no evidence was seen of any.
Further, and I quote from page 22 of the report:

No advertisement of financial assistance to this programme.

No evidence was provided to substantiate the Ministry’s assertion that the awards were sufficiently advertised and made available to all nationals during the period in question.

Secret slush fund; that is what it was.

For instance, the Ministry maintained that it sent guidelines to eight community development administration offices, but has been unable to locate any correspondence that would have been sent to provide information to those said offices responsible for distributing the brochures.

In other words, while they say they did, they could not prove that any form of advertisement was done; not in any newspaper; not in any magazine; not in any internal memo, radio ad, TV ad; not in any public statements.

This exploded like a bomb here in 2009 when we sought the information about the secret session. These scholarships, $45.3 million worth, were a private affair. The explanation why there was so much inconsistency, inaccurate data, misdirection, secrecy and deliberate and absolute financial and fiduciary breaches in the award of these scholarships come from the following—I quote again from a report under the heading, “Awards based on financial need”. The EOC investigators reveal:

“The criteria set out by the Ministry stated that applicants must provide evidence of financial need. However, the information obtained showed that there were instances where applicants were awarded grants, not based on financial needs, but based on recommendations from their Ministers of Government and even from the Prime Minister himself…”

I have here a copy of a request for financial assistance. I will not name the child concerned because that was not his problem. I am happy for the children who were able to further their education. I have nothing against those children who benefitted. It is the process. It is the transparency, accountability; that there was corruption and fraud in the distribution of these moneys.

This application, under the coat-of-arms, was addressed to Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams, in handwriting:

Please handle this quietly.

Member for San Fernando East signed this one directly to the then Minister, Joan Yuille-Williams.
Mr. Speaker, I am saying there was no advertising. People did not know. The sum of $43.5 million and nobody knew to apply; how and when to apply, but you know what you had to do. Handle it quietly. A secret slush fund.

In 2004, $25,600 was given to someone, to the daughter of Brigadier Peter Joseph. A note attached to the minute sheet of the Ministry stated the following:

“Does not qualify under needy, however, some assistance is recommended.”

So you breach your own criteria. Additionally, attached to this application form was a note from the then Prime Minister Manning.

“Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams,

Please assist.”

It included what purports to be the signature of Mr. Manning. The date is 10.24.

In another one, the sheet said:

“Family is really not financially stressed. Father is Commissioner of Prisons; mother is a teacher. Does not qualify under needy. However, assistance…recommended.”

Mr. Speaker, now we see, and I will share this report because it is a public document, given by the Equal Opportunity Commission. We put out that the entire sordid affair will come to public attention.

Hon. Member for Port of Spain South, you were being misled at the time when you took over. You misled this Parliament big time. The Parliament was misled in 2009.

Now we see why the hon. Leader of the Opposition was ranting and raving and talking about moneys for forensic audits given to the AG. They do not want forensic audits. The recommendation from UNC to the EOC said that a forensic audit should be conducted and I so advise that the hon. Attorney General will be instructed to have a forensic audit conducted into this matter. In addition, I intend to pass to the Director of Public Prosecutions, through the Attorney General, this report and also to the Integrity Commission. [Desk thumping]

The Commissioner, on page 35 of its report, revealed, and I quote:

“The Commission, on reviewing application forms, obtained from the Ministry found that most of the persons who applied for the scholarships did so with a recommendation of a Government Minister or other politician or known supporter of the Government at that time.”
I continue to quote:

“An inference can therefore be made that persons who obtained scholarships did so on the basis of their affiliations and or relations with the governing party at the time.”

Let us just make it short. The governing party at the time was the PNM.

Of course, 11 per cent of them came from Diego Martin West. I wonder who recommended them. Since they did not qualify, how did they manage to get picked? The Leader of the Opposition will tell us. This travesty of justice did not end there.

What the Equal Opportunity Commission’s investigation uncovered was that under the PNM, the Ministry operated in such a manner to discriminate against the applicants and the vast majority of Trinidad and Tobago.

I quote again:

“The complainant in this matter did provide enough evidence for an inference of discrimination to be made out against the Ministry…”

Specifically, the report also revealed that the award of scholarships by the Ministry under the PNM was politically biased, heavily in favour of PNM and persons recommended by the PNM, officials and Ministers.

The report also highlighted what appears to be racial discrimination. When you come here to cry about discrimination, look at yourselves first. Look in the mirror. Look at this.

Private, secret slush fund. This is evidence in black and white of what people have known and so I quote again. Under the heading “Distribution of Financial Assistance”, the report stated that “7 per cent of persons who received this funding, this $45.3 million funding, were of East Indian descent, while 93 per cent were of non-Indo Trinidadian origin”.

That this kind of discrimination took place in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and so on is particularly vexing because that is the Ministry that we should be promoting. One wonders. This is where the black and white has come. We can see it. Where else did your discrimination fester? Where else was it happening? You knew. You, the Members sitting on the other side. Ten of the 12 of you were in that government. You knew of this and you stood idly by and did nothing. So do not come here pious, washing your hands when you were part and parcel of that discrimination.
Take this further. I challenge any one of them who was there to disprove the findings of the Equal Opportunity Commission; that the PNM was engaged in blatant discrimination in flagrant violation of our Constitution in every regard. You took an oath to uphold the Constitution and the law, but you violated that oath. You violated the rule of law. You violated this Constitution. You have absolutely no authority to sit here and pontificate in this Parliament. You must first atone for your sins. [Desk thumping]

Not only must you atone, but those involved in that scam, fraud and breach of the Constitution will have to face the courts of the land. [Desk thumping] As the Member for San Fernando East always says, “Jail ain’t nice”.

Mr. Manning: Ask Ben Hammond.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: So, Mr. Speaker, this was not just political discrimination or ethnic discrimination, this was discrimination against every race, against every gender, every ethnic background. Do you know why? Because it was a secret. The entire population could not benefit. Even their own supporters, if they were not close to a PNM high roller, could not get this either. You discriminated across the length and breadth of the land. So forensic audit; we will wait for those.

4.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, time is against me, there are three other issues I think we should handle, and I will summarize them: the misuse of funds at Clico and UDeCott. Today, I am advised—we know that the law—we know the historical DNA of the PNM which is corruption, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: And so you have the Leader of the Opposition in this very Parliament talking and saying: “Right now I am saying to my colleagues, what this commission of enquiry is looking at, is 10 times worse than what happened at Piarco Airport.” Do you remember that? He said, why people should be made to sacrifice for other wrongdoers to prosper. Did you all, the rest of you when your hon. Leader of the Opposition was talking then about the corruption in UDeCott and elsewhere, did you all say anything? No! You ostracized him! You put him out the Cabinet, every one of you, and you left him all on his own. The Member for Diego Martin North/East would not talk to the man. They would not even extend his time to speak in the Parliament. No wonder why you have cut ties with him; no wonder why. And, so, Mr. Speaker, we have had a relentless fight to uncover corruption, because and I have said why—every cent and every dollar can bring goods and services to our people.
So, let us say, for example, we have made some dents into it. The DPP is doing his work for the criminal charges, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is annoyed about these forensic audits, but, what have we done? Mr. Speaker, we have issued pro-action protocol letters in pursuit of civil remedies based on the probes done by the hon. Attorney General.

There was a bold statement in Parliament on the last day by the Member for San Fernando East saying, “Lock me up and lock up Calder Hart, lock me up.” It is very interesting when you have a former Prime Minister challenging people to “Lock him up”. This is most interesting. He has done so even when this Prime Minister was washed away by public outcry last year, because of the excesses. I trust that he would recall his words to another former Prime Minister, which I just said to him already. You told the former Prime Minister before you, “Jail eh nice”. So, it is interesting when he says, “Lock me up! Lock up Calder Hart.”

This is not to say that none of them will face the full brunt of the law, but the DPP is the person with the constitutional authority to determine whether charges are to be brought. I will not be provoked, and none of us would be provoked in breaching the constitutional framework and the law to intervene in the work of the DPP. So we will leave you in the hands of the DPP and the Commissioner of Police.

Whatever we can do, Mr. Speaker, because we did promise the people that we would pursue those who have raped our Treasury and committed acts of corruption. Whilst the criminal arena is the domain for the DPP, and the police and so on, we in the Cabinet agreed that the AG would launch his legal and forensic audits into a number of companies with a view to pursuing civil fraud cases. Now, we want to remember that the notorious Chicago gangster who murdered all these people Al Capone and so on, they could not capture him on those criminal charges, and do you know how they caught him?—on civil charges, tax evasion.

OJ Simpson was freed of the murder charge because of the niceties of the criminal law and evidence, but he did not escape in civil law for wrongfully causing the death of his wife and friend. And so it must be alert to the possibility of white-collar crime. They talked about “big fish” and white-collar crime, well let us talk about white-collar crime in this country.

The Attorney General has issued pre-action protocol letters to Calder Hart with respect to the Sunway Company—the $368 million contract for the Ministry of Legal Affairs Tower to Sunway Construction and, I think we know the background to that. I have it here, but time will not permit me.

The board of UDeCott, by resolution, has authorized the commencement of legal action against former chairman, Calder Hart, for fraud, negligence, breach of
I am pleased to announce that Bob Lindquist has also completed his investigations and that report has been handed over to the head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau. So we will go on both limbs on the civil remedy side, which we can do, and on the criminal side, we will leave it in the hands of the DPP and the police.

Secondly, with respect to the contract to Hafeez Karamath for the Brian Lara Cricket Academy, this is also included for legal action against Calder Hart for his part in that corruption package.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, pre-action protocol letters on behalf of Petrotrin have been authorized for commencement of legal proceedings against several members of the Ken Julien board for negligence, breach of statutory duty.

Mr. Roberts: Big fish!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: —including Mr. Malcolm Jones—or this issue is e TecK. Okay? This is Petrotrin with GTL and Credit Suisse whereby Petrotrin undertook to pay part of the cost overruns on the GTL projects. So, this is the Gas-to-Liquids project and we shall be seeking civil remedies.

Fourthly, pre-action protocol letters have gone already to the board of e Teck, Mr. Malcolm Jones—sorry, Mr. Ulric McNichol, Eugene Tiah, Dr. Copeland, Ken Julien and so on for fraud, breach of statutory duty, negligence and so on. Pre-action letters went out for US $5 million payout that has been made by e Teck, filed against the former board to recover the sum of $30 million for Trinidad and Tobago. This matter has reached the stage where statement of the case has been filed, so it is already in court. So, those are some of the matters and, of course, there are many others, but time will not permit me.

As I close—I have two minutes or one?

Hon. Members: Two minutes!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Two minutes. I can speak very fast. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In two minutes, I want to say, the waste of money on the purchase of the Austal ships, the coast guard ships—I have this which I will provide, Mr. Speaker, because I will not be able to go into all of them, but I could show this document, which is saying that these ships have broken down almost every single day and month. We spent $400 million. CG 11 has had main engine and gearbox problems on 10 instances; CG 12 on 18 instances; CG 13 on 14 instances; CG 15 on 24 instances and CG 16, 29 instances.
Hon. Member: Who bought those ships?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: They were commissioned by your then Prime Minister, last year, early last year. So, in less than one year, $400 million. These vessels are like lemons, Mr. Speaker. And this is it! [Shows diagram] This diagram, I have sought your leave, this shows the incidents. Every “X” is where they broke down.

Hon. Members: “Oh Gooood!”

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: It had more Xs than white space.

Mr. Roberts: That is worse than the PNM!

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Every one of these Xs represents a breakdown.

I would now like to just say, as I listened to the contribution of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I was disappointed as I said, at the paucity of preparation, the dearth of research, the absence of vision and the general lack of quality in the presentation with his response to the budget. All I could hear, as I said, was just “gripe, gripe, gripe”, and no solutions being presented.

Finally, when the people put us in, Mr. Speaker, on May 24th, they placed their faith and trust in us; their confidence that we would do the right thing; we would use the resources of the country for the benefit of the nation. We must not treat the national patrimony as our entitlement. This is our second budget and like the first, it is set in the context of an overall plan to generate and develop an era.

As a people, we need to fashion together a common vision, a shared goal. We cannot do it alone, Mr. Speaker, we cannot do it by ourselves. The true development of a nation requires we place our trust in each other but trust is earned. To be certain, there had been instances under former governments, where ministers and public figures breached the sacred trust that was placed in them. This Government, Mr. Speaker, is determined to weed them out. Challenges remain to be sure, but our children and their children have placed their futures in our hands and they expect us to succeed.

I close with the famous words of Winston Churchill which I endorse and accept:

“Sure I am that this day we are masters of our fate that the tasks which have been set before us are not above our strengths that their pangs and toils are not beyond”—my—“endurance. As long as we have faith in our own cause and an unconquerable will to win, victory will not be denied us.”
As I wind up, I pay tribute to the members of the protective services who continue to work tirelessly to protect our nation. I want to tell you, as your Prime Minister, I am very proud of the way our nation has responded to the Government’s calls to arms. The support we have received from the citizenry in the current state of emergency has contributed to its success in reducing the level of crime.

Finally, as befitting the birth month of one of the greatest symbols of humanity, Mahatma Gandhi, I end with some words from this great man, I quote: “If I have the belief that I can do it, I should surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.”

I assure this nation, that we believe we can do, and with every step of this journey, we will continue to acquire more capacity to do, and when the time is there for us to pass the baton to the next generation of leaders, we can assure you, we would have done what is necessary to ensure a future much different from our past.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon Members, we will now pause and take tea at this time. This sitting is now suspended until 5.15 p.m.

4.36 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.15 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

**Miss Donna Cox (Laventille East/Morvant):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind this honourable House that we are here to discuss the budget. I realize that when the Government cannot defend a position or cannot—as a matter of fact a failed budget—[Desk thumping]. When a budget cannot stand scrutiny, then the Prime Minister comes to “buss a mark” or to drop a bombshell. [Crosstalk] Dropping a bombshell is not a shield to be used politically, when you cannot explain the budget.

I am still waiting on someone from the other side to talk about the budget, so I will get into the budget. Before I move on, I just want to say that the Prime Minister mentioned Trinidad and Tobago being voted the world’s best tourist destination and, of course, they tried to pat themselves on the back about it.

**Dr. Rowley:** As usual.

**Miss D. Cox:** But in today’s *Express* on page 7, the reasons this took place is quoted:

“In offering to tourists a possibility to participate in impressive paraphernalia festivals such as Holi, Hosay, Divali, Corpus Christi, Eid-ul-Fitr, Tobago Heritage Festival, Tobago Fest and Trinidad’s greatest show on earth...”
These are the main reasons. Now tell me, the greatest show on earth, of course, is Carnival. Tell me, what does the UNC-led coalition have to do with it, that the Prime Minister has to come here and pat herself on the back, take credit for Trinidad and Tobago being voted the world’s best tourist destination, based on this criteria? Please, please. The Government has nothing to do with that. [Crosstalk] Because you are patting yourselves on — your backs, as if it is because of the UNC-led coalition this took place. That is not so at all.

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** Dreaming as usual.

**Miss D. Cox:** Mr. Speaker, I move into the budget debate. I want to talk a bit about the budget. I consider a budget to be a policy document, a planning document, an intent document. It could be any of these, but most fundamentally it is supposed to be a financial document.

In any corporation, even a sports club or cultural group, a budget document is perhaps the anticipated document in the life of the organization. The document, among other things, must be so structured to provide the members of the organization with information as to what is the financial state of affairs of that organization.

If the presenter fails to do this, he would not have presented a budget document, as the Minister of Finance has done. He would have presented something else, but certainly not a budget. I make this statement to underscore the fact that what was presented by the Minister of Finance as the nation’s national budget for 2011/2012 was a statement of intent, a statement of medium to long-term hopes and aspirations. It is a statement of wishes, it is even a statement of distribution of gifts, but it is not a national budget.

Let me state that I am a strict observer of the conventional approach to budgeting, an approach which is adopted by every corporate entity worth its salt in this land. Every treasurer, financial officer, chief financial officer or CEO knows that when you are presenting a budget, you must do the following. Even before you outline the budgetary plans and programmes for the current year or period, you need to review the previous period.

In your review of the previous period, you would indicate to the audience the summary form, the performance of your prior year’s budget in respect of the achievements of the budgetary targets of the prior year.

We did not expect you to do this because it was your first budget after the election last year, but having provided the information about the attainment or
otherwise of the prior year’s budget, you can make an assessment of why and how targets were achieved or not achieved, which would serve to inform policies, programmes and strategies for the current period.

The information provided would be in the form of performance variables which would not only inform the projections and estimates for the current year, but also inform the audience who would have an interest in making their own assessments and about the likelihood or otherwise of the attainment of the budgetary targets.

I underscore these issues because in the Minister of Finance’s three-hour statement, nowhere did he indicate to the national community what was the extent of the Government’s revenue position estimated for fiscal 2011/2012. Nowhere in his statement did the Minister of Finance indicate to the national community the Government’s expenditure position, as alluded to by the Member for Diego Martin North/East. Nowhere in the Minister’s statement did he indicate the size of the deficit for the fiscal 2011/2012. If it is one major performance variable he mentioned in passing, and I guess he just could not have excluded it, it was the decline of the 1.4 per cent that the economy suffered, which all of us on this side cautioned him about last year, and quite disingenuously tried to qualify the decline by talking about per capita GDP.

Fundamentally, however, whereas the Minister was so willing to discuss all the other negative issues, for example, what was happening in other parts of the world, nothing was said about the reason we in Trinidad and Tobago experienced economic decline in fiscal 2011. If anything at all, the decline of the Trinidad and Tobago economy and the reasons for same should have occupied a prominent place in the budget statement.

I move on to arts and multiculturalism. I am sorry the Minister is not here. Last year, the national budget of 35 pages, allocated one sentence to arts and culture. This year, the Minister of Finance has done slightly better. I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, we will further develop our human capital in the arts and culture by developing projects that enhance the link between our panyards and our local communities.”

By reading this strong statement, I really thought that at last the Government had gotten the message after the standoff between the Minister responsible for arts and multiculturalism and the steelband movement during the 2011 panorama Carnival season. You see, the most powerful and most popular musical instrument in Trinidad and Tobago is the steelpan and any minister charged with the responsibility for culture must, by definition, understand the special place that the steelpan and the steelband movement occupy in Trinidad and Tobago.
Mr. Speaker, the heated exchange between the Minister and members of the steelband fraternity, was not only an embarrassment to lovers of the art form in Trinidad and Tobago, but it was a national disgrace. Mr. Speaker, you should have seen the angry comments which flooded the social network emanating from all parts of the world which had been exposed to steelband music. I thought the Minister would have learned his lesson, but you know what? I understand, having been humiliated in round one, the Minister has already come out with his guns blazing again, all aimed at the steelband fraternity for Panorama Carnival 2012.

I understand further that the Minister has already informed the steelband movement that for 2012 unsponsored steel orchestras will no longer be receiving financial assistance from the Government in their preparation for Panorama. I do not know if the other Ministers are aware of this, but just for your information there are approximately 180 steelbands registered with Pan Trinbago, of which only 12 are sponsored, and 168, over 90 per cent, are unsponsored. So when you exclude the unsponsored bands from any source of funding, approximately 6,700 players would be affected. In effect, it seems as if the Minister wants to kill Panorama.

Mr. Speaker, if the Minister had any interest in the steelband movement in the 2011 Carnival celebrations, he could have sourced the funding. Let me tell you how. If the Minister did not embark on those half-baked jaunts like the People’s Band, where taxpayers’ money was just squandered, he would have been able to pay the pannists the additional $200 and have a surplus. In fact, I want the Minister to tell us what was the cost of producing this People’s Band. I understand that the cost exceeded $2 million, and the number of revellers did not exceed 50. Fortunately, a few Ministers made their appearance in one of the bands, but there were People’s Band music trucks in standstill positions in other parts of the country, but no revellers. This would mean that the Minister would have established a record per capita cost per masquerader. Why could these resources not have been allocated to the pannists?

Moreover, the security fence to stage the Panorama event in Arima I understand cost the Treasury over $2 million, and you know what? The gate receipts were less than $20,000. What sense did that make? Why could these resources not have been used to fund the activities of the steelband movement?

As you know, Panorama is the primary competition and forum for all steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago. This has been so for decades, and the shows from preliminaries to finals attract the largest attendance for any show during the Carnival season.
Panorama as a Carnival event is being copied around the world such that there are panorama competitions in no fewer than six cities around the world. Panorama therefore is an event which must be preserved in Trinidad and Tobago. However, we now have for the first time in recent history a Minister responsible for culture who sees it as his mission to fight down the steelband movement, represented by Pan Trinbago, and is attempting to impose new terms and conditions geared to inflicting a severe blow to this event and, by extension, the cultural art form of Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition to insisting that unsponsored steelbands will not be provided with any financial assistance from the Government, for the first time in over three decades, I was informed that the Minister is again threatening not to pay pannists the $1,000 for playing at the preliminary round of the competition.

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that this issue was a bone of contention late last year into this year, and was only resolved when the hon. Prime Minister intervened. It appears that the Prime Minister would have to intervene again. I hope, Madam Prime Minister, you will do so, sooner rather than later.

If this matter is not resolved as soon as possible, this country may very well have a Carnival 2012 without any Panorama for the first time since 1979. This is a disconnect I see between the words of the budget and what is happening on the ground.

The Minister of Finance indicated that one of his priorities on which the policy platform will focus is security, and in all the crime-fighting initiatives outlined, he did not recognize the contribution that cultural pursuits can make to the reduction and elimination of criminal activities in this country.

It is my view, that to the extent steelband attracts the largest components of players among all musical instruments, the Government should see it as a matter of policy to inject additional resources into the steelband movement to assist in crime-fighting strategies being undertaken.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. Minister of Culture and Multiculturalism to give the people of Trinidad and Tobago a comprehensive update on the Grand Stand which the Government was boasting before, during and after the Carnival season. While they criticized the PNM government for putting up modern buildings, that Grand Stand appears to be from the early 20th Century.

5.30 p.m.

They criticized NAPA so much, now they are living in it. They criticized these waterfront buildings. Where are we today? They criticized the Hyatt and I cannot
even get a park there anymore. The spots are all allocated to Government Ministers.

I am informed that the cost of the Grand Stand is said to be around $55 million of taxpayers’ money. The problems with the Grand Stand were brought to my attention when the Emancipation Support Committee sought to use it in August this year, less than six months after Carnival and was told that there was need for serious repairs. After spending close to $55 million, less than six months later, the Grand Stand could not have been used without repairs. [Desk thumping] At that cost, the Grand Stand’s problems are many. I list some of them: improper drainage system; problems with the plumbing system; flooding of the electrical panel. Anyone could have been electrocuted. And there were serious problems with the sewer system.

These are just some of the problems with the Grand Stand. What I want to know is who got this contract. I want to know if it was a tailor. A tailor was given this contract? It cannot be somebody who knows about building. [Desk thumping] My understanding is that no tendering process took place for this $55 million project, and they want to talk about the PNM. I repeat: no tendering took place for this $55 million project, and they want to talk about the PNM.

The person who was awarded this contract is known to be a supplier of chairs, tents and tables, so you can call him, in short, the tent man. This is the man who got the contract. [Desk thumping] I want the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism to inform this honourable House whether the claim that was eventually settled with this contractor with regard to the building of the Grand Stand was the same amount originally claimed. I would like that question answered. And if not, what accounted for the difference?

No wonder there are so many problems with the Grand Stand, because, of course, another UNC financier is laughing all the way to the bank at the expense of the hard-working people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] So that is art and “multimillionairism”. The people wanted to go back to the stage, they say, so advantage was taken with a spending spree.

I move to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. You should know by now I am not afraid of anyone. Right? [Desk thumping] It is Laventille East/Morvant I represent, you know; you have to be strong. A perusal of the PSIP document shows that with regard to sport there is a continuation of PNM policy by the implementation of an international 250-metre cycling track, an international
standard aquatic centre, an international standard tennis centre and three indoor youth facilities. However, under the PNM the three youth indoor facilities were sited in what is termed as high-risk communities and in state of emergency terms, hot spot areas.

The PNM understood that there can be positive social intervention through sport which can lead to a reduction in youth involvement in crime. For that reason, under the PNM, the youth indoor facilities were to be constructed in Bagatelle, Diego Martin; Malabar, Arima and Sangre Grande. The UNC-led coalition has now decided that the youth indoor facilities will now be constructed in Charlieville, Couva and Fyzabad—cool spots. Is it by chance—because we are talking about discrimination—that these three indoor centres which were supposed to be placed somewhere else, are now to be in Fyzabad, Charlieville and Couva? Are they really looking for a lasting solution to crime? Are they serious about crime?

The Minister in his budget presentation stated, and I quote from page 22:

“We will upgrade the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres to increase the intake of students as well as to further engender the shift from welfare practices to one of self-reliance and empowerment. Three centres will benefit from this ongoing initiative in the coming year - Persto Presto, Chatham and El Dorado.”

In the PSIP 2012 document it states that the construction of these multipurpose sport and indoor facilities come at a total cost of $165 million. This is conflicting with the fact that the El Dorado Youth Camp which is stated here as one of the centres, was closed by this UNC-led coalition to train nurses. The camp was shut down and taken over by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, which is supposed to benefit girls at risk.

So I do not understand how in this document El Dorado is still cited as one of the centres for the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre. So something is wrong here. I am just wondering if this is just another scenario of cut and paste. Is it that this initiative was taken from a past PNM budget document without editing? In the Trinidad Guardian dated August 08, 2012, I quote:

“To further develop and expand the country's public health sector, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (STTE) is moving to establish a multi-million dollar revolutionary nursing training academy in El Dorado.”

This is the same place here:

“In an effort to establish the academy, Government will transform the under-utilized El Dorado Girls’ Youth Camp into the training facility to be
managed and supervised by the University of the West Indies, College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of T&T (Costaatt) and the Faculty of Medical Sciences.”

I would like the hon. Minister of Finance to tell me what is the real story with this El Dorado Youth Camp. Has it been closed down? From the PSIP document it is not stating that. I am still seeing that it is still a camp here with Praesto Praesto and Chatham.

There has been no mention on the continuation of existing community recreation facilities that were in the process of upgrade under the PNM. There were 32 such grounds that they met under construction, and I want to mention a few: Yolande Pompey in Princes Town; Northern Recreation Ground in Bagatelle, Diego Martin; the Brian Lara Grounds in Santa Cruz, the Marabella Recreation grounds, and many more throughout Trinidad and Tobago. I would like to know from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, what is the status of these 33 recreation grounds that he would have found in some state of development. I would like to know the present status of these grounds, because I understand that there are sport development officers in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs who are on the job with no funding for community sport.

I continue to remind the Members opposite of the importance and the priority that must be placed on community sport to foster positive and harmonious relationships in all communities of Trinidad and Tobago, especially the at-risk areas, because I was informed that a sporting organization is receiving regular assistance from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs—special attention. I understand that this club is from the constituency of D'Abadie/O'Meara, a community football club called Malabar FC. So I would like to know; what about Morvant Jets? What about Caledonia AIA? I would like to know what is the status of this arrangement with Malabar FC? What about Joe Public? I would like to know the situation; what is this arrangement with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and Malabar FC.

The Minister of Finance stated the intention of the Ministry of National Security, to initiate street and community control in partnership with the private security sector. I do not know, but what is the obsession with this private security sector? Why is there such an obsession? Is it because of the interest of some members in the Government in security firms?

I mentioned last year that many of the security personnel are unfit to hold the positions of security officers. Not all of them. [Desk thumping] I mean, I have
friends who are security officers, but unless this whole situation with the security firms is regularized, why are we still talking about incorporating them to work with our security services? I do not understand that at all. I mean, there are persons there who are illegal immigrants. I meet people who could hardly speak English. I do not know where they are from, but they are security. You are telling me to park; I do not understand what you are telling me. Go here, go there; I do not understand. [ Interruption] “Yuh telling meh go and ‘pork’”, when it is “park”. You know? I do not understand. So, Mr. Speaker, I think that this whole security industry needs to be regularized, and I see in the budget again, under National Security there is this talk about the use of private security firms. I am not sure what the obsession is, but I do not understand that at all and something must be done here. They must be regularized.

I observe that under the Ministry of National Security two helicopters were delivered to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and commissioned in June 2011, while they are awaiting two more. I want to raise something that is of concern to me and to the Ministry of National Security. I hope that these helicopters would really be for the use of the Ministry of National Security and not for the Prime Minister to travel all over Trinidad and Tobago. These helicopters are not for Cabinet transport. The members of the defence force are now calling the helicopters, the new Government taxis. The helicopters are for the use of the Ministry of National Security and I urge the Government to stay out of them, because the cost of operating these helicopters is very expensive. The cost to operate a helicopter for one hour is between $1,000—$5,000 per hour. It is very expensive.

It is observed that the Prime Minister lands here, there and everywhere in a helicopter: Trincity, Arima, Diego Martin, all over south. Because of the cost I would have urged the Prime Minister to come and land in Laventille, because I know that they would not be able to land in Laventille until they fix all those bumpy grounds I have there. Okay?

Mr. Warner: Done.

Miss D. Cox: Done? Okay, good. In the budget presentation the Minister of Finance stated that initiatives to stem illegal activity must be complemented by action that reduces security threats in our air space and maritime domain. You know, once I hear maritime, I remember the OPVs. This Government cancelled the purchase of the offshore patrol vessels and now you are wondering; it is simply
because it was the brainchild of a PNM government, because there is no real proper explanation for it. These would have greatly assisted in stemming the flow of guns and drugs in the country.

I would like to be informed of the litigation cost involved due to the cancellation of these vessels, because, again, taxpayers’ money is going to jump up in this.

I observed some tiny advertisements in the newspaper, asking for interested parties. I do not know if they are afraid to make the advertisements big; they probably thought we would not have seen it. But these tiny advertisements in the newspaper were asking for interested parties to submit information about patrol boats.

They advertised for similar boats. Can you imagine that? At the expense of the people of Trinidad and Tobago! It is important to remember, though, with regard to the OPVs that relevant officers were trained; tests were conducted and, of course, it cost Trinidad and Tobago a lot of money to send the coast guard officers and so on, abroad for training, yet the contract was cancelled. The Government is now going to start the acquisition all over again from scratch, and, of course, will have to expend large sums of money as a result.

The Minister of Finance prides himself in saying that prudence in spending is necessary, and I would like to know this renewed interest in the patrol vessels and the fact that they are going to acquire them, if that is prudent spending. Or is it just another one of the Government’s missteps?

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we spoke about air space and I will speak about the airship commonly known as the blimp. The airship provided a continuous eight to 12-hour air surveillance platform and was able to provide pertinent information, not just to the police service or to SAUTT but to all the law enforcement agencies. After the locals were then capable of maintaining the blimp, that would have drastically reduced the maintenance cost, the Government decided to get rid of it as a crime-fighting tool, and again, Trinidad and Tobago, taxpayers’ dollars would be jumping up.

In this budget the allocation for national security, has seen a reduction of $79.4 million; less than what was allocated last year. I am just wondering if crime is one of our country’s formidable challenges, what is the rationale behind the less allocation for our nation’s security? The Minister outlined a multipronged approach to crime which involves more effective law enforcement and policing, social
interventions aimed at discouraging a lifestyle of crime and violence, reform of the justice system, rehabilitation of offenders—and you know I look at this, this multipronged approach and I see nothing new. [Interruption] I see nothing new here with this multipronged approach. Nothing new! What is new in all of this?

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has conveniently omitted the declaration of the state of emergency in this multipronged approach, but I leave it to history to record that this was indeed an ineffective crime-fighting measure used by the UNC-led coalition. With regard to the adoption of an effective law enforcement and policing method, this initiative also is not new. The PNM government recognized that effective and sustainable law enforcement and policing was not something to be achieved by the wave of a magic wand or the imposition of a state of emergency and that is why we implemented the Crime and Problem Analysis Unit which is called CAPA to provide police with spatial and temporal data to allow them to know where and when to deploy mobile and foot patrols. We could only hope that the current commissioner continues to implement and strengthen the utilization of this data-driven approach as a critical feed into intelligence-led policing that was introduced by the PNM government.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM government hired a provost to ensure new recruits receive proper induction and specialized training, modernized the Police Training Academy, built five new police stations and designed 19, instituted the policing for people model-station programme which the current government has renamed, Policing for the 21st Century. I understand that 21st Century policing being banded about is just a number of initiatives from the past being put together with a proposed change of uniforms for the police to give the impression that things have changed and that it is indeed a new initiative. Well, let me tell you something it is not. It is important to note that even in the PNM government’s design of the new police stations we incorporated areas for community meeting rooms to foster a deeper relationship between the police and the community, and this relationship is a key aspect of policing for people model-station initiative. It is also modelled on the Newcastle public safety building, Delaware.

I am also concerned about the migration of the police service to a fully inter-operable digital radio system which was omitted. I have not seen that information when I checked through the documents. This network is very much needed to further enhance the security of our officers and to ensure that each officer on patrol has a radio unit. The Minister of National Security should provide us with an update as to the status of this programme. With regard to the approach of social
intervention, I am happy to note that MILAT and MYPART programmes for youths which focus on attitudes, academia and technological developments are not being removed again from the ambit of the Ministry of National Security. [Desk thumping] In the budget presentation—I believe it was state of emergency—I pleaded with the Minister because they were moving it over to science and technology and the parents were very upset and I am happy to state that they have now reversed that decision. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, with regard to social intervention, the budget speaks of social interventions aimed at discouraging a lifestyle of crime and violence. I am sure one such initiative is the Morvant/Laventille Initiative of the PNM which they are claiming as their own. I support any programme geared at improving the lives of the people of Laventille East/Morvant. I am sure I can say the same for the Member of Parliament for Laventille West. Imagine they came into the constituency of Laventille to launch that programme and did not even invite any of the MPs to speak. We were not even on the programme.

Mr. Warner: But you were there.

Miss D. Cox: I was not there because of you all; I was there because it is Laventille. [Desk thumping] I was there to support the people of Laventille and any initiative I will support.

Mr. Warner: You were invited.

Miss D. Cox: Invited is not enough. We are Members of Parliament for Laventille and a programme, a long programme that you all had we were not placed on the programme. That was disrespectful. It was not just disrespectful to us it was also disrespectful to the people of Laventille East/Morvant and the people of Laventille West. [Desk thumping]

How can you expect to have social intervention in a programme in a constituency dealing with crime and so on and not have the MPs for the area involved in it? [Interruption] When disrespect starts at the top it filters down to society. How do they expect the youths to look up to them?

Mr. Warner: It was an error.

Miss D. Cox: It was an error, stand up and apologize.

Mr. Warner: I apologize.

Hon. Member: Stand up. [Laughter]
Miss D. Cox: How do they expect the youths, for whom the programme is geared, to look up to them when they could come into the constituency, work this programme—Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact they thanked everybody, all who were on the committee. I was the chair of that committee and not even one word of thanks, but you know, I get my thanks from God. [ Interruption ]

Mr. Speaker, it is the same way they disrespected the Eric Williams 100th anniversary celebrations. No regard whatsoever for such a significant occasion. The Government did nothing, 100th anniversary of Eric Williams’ death, nothing, but respect was paid to the founder of Apple, a foreigner; the founder of Apple with advertisements paid for by taxpayers’ money. [ Interruption ] But, you know what, at the end of the day Dr. Eric Williams brought us from internal self-government to Independence to republican state, so they can do what they want they cannot change the fact that he would always be the “Father of the Nation”. [ Desk thumping ]

As this Government continues to look after its financiers, friends, families and supporters; regardless of all that was said before, as they continue to look after their financiers, their friends, their families, supporters; it is indeed a concern to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago about the briefs of certain lawyers; certain lawyers are receiving briefs from the Government. I name four main lawyers: Alan Newman, Gerald Ramdeen, Jagdeo Singh and Larry Lalla. How can they represent properly in every case? The taxpayers are paying these persons a substantial amount of money, [ Interruption ] millions of dollars and they are the main ones being given briefs in Trinidad and Tobago. We are talking about corruption. This is another case of mismanagement of the funds of people of Trinidad and Tobago. [ Desk thumping ]

Mr. Speaker, there are many other legal, brilliant legal minds in Trinidad and Tobago who could be given briefs, many others, but no, we have the chosen four: Alan Newman, Gerald Ramdeen, Jagdeo Singh and Larry Lalla. I am not bashing these persons who are favoured by the Government, my concern is the number of briefs they are getting and with so much to digest, can the four learned legal minds deliver the highest quality work? Because, if this is on behalf of the Government it is indeed on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, can they eat so much without getting sick?

This brings me to the recent case involving the chairman of the Port Authority. When a company changes lawyers or law firms in the midst of a case a new lawyer
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[MISS COX]

has to re-examine all the previous proceedings and documents, and this is indeed expensive to the Government because you have to pay the original lawyer and, of course, the new lawyer.

The Government needs to consider the cost to taxpayers when we choose to make such expensive decisions of that nature to satisfy party hacks. We all must make decisions that are in the best interest of the country.

With regard to the reformation of the justice system and legal framework spoken about by the Minister of Finance, the Attorney General, as well as the Minister of Finance, has made it clear to the country that the right to have redress in court is determined by the whims and fancies of the Government, as the Attorney General stated in the Trinidad Express, October 6th and I quote:

“The idea that is being bandied about that everybody will suddenly become a multimillionaire because they get arrested and they are freed; that ain’t happening.”

The Attorney General has assumed the role of the new sheriff in town, shooting from the legs first and asking questions after. He has retained the services of four senior counsels to advise the police of charging persons arrested under the state of emergency. At what cost is this? At what cost is this to the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Because it would seem as though they are seeking to usurp the function of the DPP whose office is responsible for advising the policing on charging and it has transpired that the DPP has since had to release a number of those detained under the state of emergency.

6.00 p.m.

What then is the purpose of these highly paid attorneys, Mr. Speaker? I ask again, what is the cost to the people Trinidad and Tobago? [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on the dismantling of SAUTT, the cost that will be incurred as a result. By now the Members opposite would have realized that SAUTT was a very effective, intelligence-led law enforcement body used to augment crime-fighting initiatives in Trinidad and Tobago. However, as of last year, the UNC-led Government dismantled an entity which made an impact on professional law enforcement in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, with the dismantling of SAUTT, I wish to pose the following questions for Members opposite to consider and provide answers. What costs are associated with the closing of SAUTT as the investigation and intelligence training
has been shut down over the past nine months? What is the cost in shutting down the Homicide Investigative Task-Force since September? With regard to the 70 gang Members who were held in custody for homicide and who were under the ambit of the homicide investigative task force on the SAUTT, what is the current cost in maintaining those cases and if they are to be released what cost will be incurred to the people of Trinidad and Tobago? I would like to get these questions answered, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I observed the Minister’s budget is based on the premise of an ostensible steady foundation which now amounts to nothing but economic misinformation. The one good thing I can refer to in this budget with regard to national security, is that the Minister of Finance took my suggestion from last year’s budget debate to compensate—and actually it is the Prime Minister—all members of the protective services with a special allowance to recognize their efforts. Mr. Speaker, in last year’s budget debate I highlighted the significant contribution that the defence force, fire fighters and prison officers make on a daily basis in the country’s crime fighting initiative. I did that. I stated that they were all deserving, including SRPs, of the $1,000 allowance.

In this same light, Mr. Speaker, I wish to query the compensation package for police officers and to ask when they will be paid in keeping with international standards. Concerning the police compensation package, this is an issue I spoke about at length in last year’s budget debate whereby I outlined the processes involved and the compensation package which was agreed to by the then Commissioner of Police, the Police Social and Welfare Association and the Ministry of National Security. So I assume that the results of these negotiations have been thrown out. I understand someone mentioned—I think it was the Prime Minister—that we were not involved in negotiations. Well, Mr. Speaker, in last year’s budget I spoke about how far the police compensation package reached and actually it was at the CPO. So I do not understand where the information about salary negotiations came from and that we were not involved. That is totally untrue. That is not true at all because I know for sure, I could speak about the police, and I knew that negotiations were taking place and that they had reached the CPO.

Mr. Speaker, according to the President of the Police Social and Welfare Association, the municipal police and SRPs perform the same duties on a daily basis and should therefore be treated equally. I notice in this year’s budget presentation there is a stark omission of these members of the municipal police and SRPs. The record will show that these officers perform the same duties of the protective services on a daily basis. Not on a weekly or monthly, but on a daily basis. And
many of the SRPs work side by side with the police service, side by side. I do not understand now, why they were omitted from getting this $1,000 allowance. I therefore, question the Minister again as to why the SRPs and municipal police were left out of the $1,000 allowance. This cannot be fair.

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

**Motion made:** That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. E. McLeod]

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Miss D. Cox:** Thank you hon. Member. A special thank you to the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Thank you very much. You know you have a special place and thanks to all my colleagues in this honourable Chamber. Mr. Speaker, the dedicated men and women of the various security branches are required to maintain a rigorous tempo in support of the state of the emergency. And, Mr. Speaker, I am increasingly concerned about the impact that it is having on the emotional health and well-being of our officers and their families. So one can only hope that this Government and the Commissioner of Police have measures in place to address the psychological health and well-being of these officers.

I move to the million-dollar man, Mr. Dwayne Gibbs, Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Speaker, as stated in the *Trinidad Guardian* published on Tuesday October 11, I quote, Mr. Gibbs: [Interrupt]

**Mr. McLeod:** Can I take back my motion? [Laughter]

**Miss D. Cox:** “Yuh name is Gibbs?” [Laughter]

“…The Anti-Gang Legislation came in on August 15 and state of emergency was declared on August 20 so there was very little time to get an appreciation of the full understanding of it. ‘As we move forward we’re learning, however…”

Mr. Speaker, this is a quote from the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Dwayne Gibbs. I cannot believe that the Commissioner of Police is saying that they did not have time to fully appreciate and understand the anti-gang legislation and as we move forward we are learning however—so he is learning. So now tell me, innocent people have to spend time in jail while police learn the legislation? Well Gibbs and the rest of them, based on the results where they have to release all these gangs members—innocent people—[Crosstalk] no, well, if you are learning the legislation then you do not know what you are holding persons for, you have no
evidence. You are innocent until proven guilty, innocent. Mr. Speaker, could Mr. Gibbs, where he came from, do that? Could he do this in Canada?

_Hon. Member:_ Nah!

_MISS D. COX:_ So then they are trying out the law on the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. If the excuse is that, as we move forward we are learning however, and that the legislation came in on August 15 and the state of emergency was declared on the August 20, there was little time to get an appreciation and the full understanding of it. I cannot understand that at all.

So it is clear to us now that they have been trying out the law on citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Since I was a child I would hear that ignorance of the law is no excuse. Since when ignorance of the law is an excuse? Why is the Commissioner of Police not interested in those persons who were unlawfully arrested? Does he not know the law?

Mr. Speaker, a lot of persons are being released because of no evidence. Why is it that the police is waiting on the DPP to release them. The police should be the first to act, because it will reduce the legal cost involved. We are dealing with the cost here. I am concerned because the Commissioner of Police is indeed earning a lot of money and I would like to know what he is doing. It is clear that he is operating in a vacuum. So why was there no increase in police patrols in the so-called hot spots, seeing that they knew where the hot spots were? Why was it necessary to target certain areas and identify them for special treatment as a result of the state of emergency? The simple way was to focus policing on these areas without announcing to the outside world that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago cannot control crime. It is clear that Commissioner Gibbs is prepared to act in the interest of the Government. So I know—I realize that he will do nothing to upset them. It is an established fact that a police service ought to be an independent body and this is now questionable.

Mr. Speaker, the police service right now is like an aeroplane on auto pilot. And you know what you tell the pilot, go in the back and sit down. That is Gibbs. There is a new trend with this Government concerning police officers and I was informed, and I would like to get that cleared up about the record number of police officers who are operating as security and drivers for a number of Ministers. Mr. Speaker, why is this? Were these Ministers threatened? We would like a report from the Minister of National Security on the number of Ministers who are using police officers as drivers and as security. We would like to know if there is a threat. Because as a former Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security, my
understanding is, that for anyone to be protected by the police there must be a threat assessment done to verify their status. Mr. Speaker, why is there the need for this record number of police officers being used as security and drivers for Ministers when they are needed on the streets? I would like to know what the costs involved are, Mr. Commissioner of Police. [Desk thumping]

I would like to see the figures with regard to the implementation of the state of emergency and what is the cost for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I would like to know what is the overtime cost to the police and I heard recently that regardless of their role in the state of emergency, police officers are being paid 24 hours a day. I do not know if that is true. So I am asking a question here. I would like to know if that is correct and what are the costs involved? Mr. Speaker, hundreds were arrested under the anti-gang legislation and now they are being released because there is no evidence. As a matter of fact in today’s Guardian newspaper page 6, we see here, “Arrests under Anti-Gang Act halted.” So they quietly, for about a month—and I see here Assistant Police Superintendent Joanne Archie confirmed yesterday that this is indeed so. So this was quietly halted because of the fact that all these persons are being arrested and then they are being released because of lack of evidence, and took all this time, three weeks, to tell the country because that is a secret. Hundreds were arrested, now they are being released because there is no evidence.

To date most persons who were charged have been freed. Why were they arrested without evidence? And if evidence was needed, the PNM invested millions on Mercury, on SAUTT’s intelligence collection systems. Why were these avenues not used in order to gather evidence? What is the cost to the State of all those persons who were unlawfully rounded up and charged by the police? Some were kept as long as a month in jail before they were discharged, because of lack of evidence. What is the cost of compensation when all these persons sue the State? I hope money was allocated for this purpose in the budget, because it is taxpayers who will have to bear the burden of this Government’s inefficient management of crime just to play a numbers game with the population, to say that there were less murders in 2011 as compared to 2010 at the expense of many innocent persons.

The Member for Chaguanas West has already quoted figures that crime is down 70 per cent all because—well, let us hear—of the state of emergency. Mr. Speaker, under the state of emergency there are still crimes—as a woman—a lot of crimes against women. As a matter of fact there was a claim of rape around the savannah during broad daylight recently under this state of emergency. Where were the security forces? They were probably in Laventille and Morvant I am sure looking for people who look like me.
Hon. Member: Noooo!

Miss D. Cox: I am informed by many police officers that they were instructed—Mr. Speaker, I am just quoting the Minister of National Security, people who look like him or look like me. [Desk thumping] Why you did not do that when he said it? That is when the noise should have been made. I am informed by many police officers that they were instructed by the senior officers of the police service to charge persons under the Anti-Gang Act and that they had four months to gather evidence.

Mr. Speaker, that was a deliberate act instructed by the senior officers who were under instructions themselves. The Attorney General stated that jail “doh make to ripe fig”. The police got instructions and they did it with the assurance that they had the backing of the State. I am speaking about this because I am dealing with the compensation part with persons who were charged and released without evidence; when they sue the State “is my money will be jumping up”. [Desk thumping] The state of emergency was used to charge persons for many unlawful reasons. Anyone who is giving someone problem, a neighbour, someone whom they do not like, who looks like a criminal and lives in certain areas. Any attempt by the State to charge persons without evidence could never be right. It is the duty of the State to prove crimes before an independent judicial system.

Mr. Speaker, it sad to say that police officers are being used as weapons of the State against its citizens. I hope that a large part of the money given to the police will be placed in training because this is definitely needed. The police service needs to become more efficient and effective in the performance of its duties. It seems that the Government may always have to declare a state of emergency to cause police officers to be effective or is it that they seem to work better when there is little accountability? I do not know. Nobody is to tell a police officer whom to charge. He is supposed to know the law and know what is right and what is wrong. So if the superior were to tell him to go up Lady Young Road, when you reach there, drive off. Are you going to do that? No! But I am not surprised that at this point the police officers, the senior officers and the junior officers are at variance with each other concerning the instructions that were given to them. The senior officers are now denying that they gave these instructions. This is in keeping with the conflicting reasons given for the implementation of the state of emergency by the Prime Minister and another reason by the Minister of National Security. So we are still awaiting the real reason. And let this be a learning experience for all who tend to follow bad advice.
This Government whilst in opposition, criticized the PNM’s crime initiatives and plans. Well at least we had a plan. What is their crime plan? The declaration of a state of emergency to do normal work the police should have been doing all the time. The state of emergency alienated sections of the population, traumatized families, placed many persons on the breadline, negatively impacted on the income of small business persons as well as big businesses and maligned and labelled law-abiding citizens. The state of emergency has destroyed any relationship that was built up by the police and the communities and that is a very important thing. Could anyone put a cost to all the hard work put in by the law enforcement authority to build relationships with members of the community? No way, you cannot put a cost to it.

Mr. Speaker, it is now clear that the imposition of the state of emergency which the Government has been misusing as a crime-fighting tool is definitely not a crime-fighting initiative. It is their crime plan.

Mr. Speaker, the popular belief is that the Government does not know how to stop the state of emergency. Well, I would like to tell you, put aside your shame and just end it. I need to remind this Government that Jamaica had a 40 per cent reduction in crime over the past 15 months and a 25 per cent reduction over the past nine months of this year without the implementation of a state of emergency. Recent policing success in Jamaica is the result of an increased focus on gangs. This is one critical item that I must talk about. Reduction in crime throughout North America has been brought about by the fundamental level of intelligence-led policing supported by boots on the streets. We need a Commissioner of Police who will insist on proper policing that is visible, diligent and supportive of our citizens’ right to safety and security. Mr. Speaker, as is being done in Jamaica, there is a need to focus on gangs. Imagine in Trinidad and Tobago one of the first acts of this Government was to dismantle this country’s gang unit, the Repeat Offenders Programme Task Force.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I stand here today and call for some type of investigation into the reason behind the dismantling of this unit, because if there were incidents of wrongdoing in the unit, there was no need to dismantle the unit unless their work was in conflict with someone’s well-being.

Last night, I heard the Member for St. Joseph talking about the PNM administration; we did nothing, and the Member for St. Joseph, before him, did
nothing. It is noteworthy to say that St. Joseph was in the hands of Mr. Carlos John, Mr. Yetming and Mr. Mervyn Assam, not the PNM, for 16 years, and I can—[Interrupt]

Mr. Warner: In Opposition?

Miss D. Cox: Yes, but they were not the MPs, because he was talking about the Member of Parliament. Mr. Yetming was the Minister of Finance; he was not totally in Opposition, okay—for the past 16 years. It is really mindboggling to hear the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph, talking about the fact that the past Member of Parliament did nothing in the constituency, one road was paved and so on. That is not so, Member of Parliament for St. Joseph. I cannot believe that you do not know that.

Under the past Member of Parliament for St. Joseph, a lot of work was done. [Desk thumping] I could not sit and hear that and not respond to that.

Mr. Volney: Name the work.

Miss D. Cox: Let me name the work: a retaining wall from Bangladesh, between WASA all the way to La Joya along the St. Joseph River was done under the past Member of Parliament for St. Joseph; a retaining wall along the San Juan River and into Aranguez; a retaining wall along Mitagual and Upper Bush Street. San Juan was done; Quarry Road was paved; San Antonio Street was paved; and from Ramoutar’s Hardware on the Eastern Main Road up to Mount Lambert was paved. Road paving was also being done. It was started already in the Mount D’or area when you assumed office, Member for St. Joseph. Retaining walls and drainage were done in Spring Valley. A sluice gate was constructed in Aranguez. There was drainage and paving of roads in Aranguez. As a matter of fact, Aranguez got the most amount of work from this PNM government and they do not vote for PNM. That is in St. Joseph. All this took place under the past Member for St. Joseph. [Interrupt]

Mr. Warner: And he still lost?

Miss D. Cox: That is the point. Pioneer Drive was paved. They cannot say they were not served. If anyone from St. Joseph comes to tell you that they were not served and things did not happen, it is not true. And you come in Parliament here and stand up and say that? No. [Interrupt] I am not finished as yet. In Champs Fleurs, there was another major project; a new road was created as residents were using a track. That is in Champs Fleurs. [Interrupt}
Mr. Volney: Where in Champs Fleurs?

Miss D. Cox: I will have to find out exactly, because it was a track. So it is probably named as a road by now, but it was a track. St. Joseph got roads paved and railings installed by the schools. Go and check the schools. In Bamboo Settlement No. 1, roads were paved and drainage put in place all the way to the bypass.

Mr. Volney: That was done the week before the election.

Miss D. Cox: All that was done in the years. So you are telling me all that was done—? With respect to community centres, the Mount Hope and Mount Lambert Community Centres started under the PNM. The Champs Fleurs Community Centre started under the PNM. The early childhood centre in Aranguez had been completed and still waiting to be opened. All of that is in the St. Joseph constituency. [Desk thumping] Lighting projects were done in the Aranguez Savannah. Mount D’or grounds, St. Joseph grounds, St. Joseph Park—[Interruption] He represents St Joseph.

With respect to water: Irvin Street, Mitagual, when you came into office—[Interruption]

Mr. Roberts: “He was Manning boy so he geh all ah dat.”

Miss D. Cox: There were many areas that were done. Two homes were built by the people.

Mr. Warner: Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Roberts: “Yuh see dat, look how much he get because Manning is he pardner. She did not geh nothing.” What they did in Laventille?

Miss D. Cox: A lot of work was done. Homes were built for two families from scratch. So, Member for St. Joseph, I do not want you to come here and not speak the truth. All this work and more was done in St. Joseph, by the past Member for St. Joseph. [Interruption]

Mr. Roberts: Be careful. You go ahead.

Miss D. Cox: No, no this was done during the period. A lot of this was finished. This was done during the period. [Interruption]

Mr. Volney: They paved all around figs trees.

Miss D. Cox: Let me move on. I speak of my constituency now. [Continuous interruption and crosstalk] Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara could I get some of your attention?
Mr. Roberts: Yes, please.

Miss. D. Cox: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I wish to draw to your attention the constant disregard and neglect of various Members opposite, as it concerns the constituency of Laventille/East Morvant—[Interruption]

Dr. Rowley: Disrespect.

Miss. D. Cox:—whilst the constituencies of the Members opposite are receiving numerous aids and benefits from the coffers of the Government. Regardless of what has been said here today in the House, the reality exists, and I will show you. It is no secret that while I do my best to effectively service the constituency, the assistance that I request on a daily basis is largely ignored and Members of Parliament are disbursing grants and aids to their constituents on the spot.

I recall last year, when the Minister of the People and Social Development stood here in this august Chamber during the budget debate shouting and reciting the words emboldened in our Constitution, and I quote:

“Whereas the people of Trinidad and Tobago—respect the principles of social justice and therefore believe that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being distributed as to serve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all,…”

He then said: this has been the way we run the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the Minister of the People and Social Development “fuh yuh.” He stood here and pontificated on the intended policies of his Government, but my constituency is yet to see the fruits of his labour. However, I observe on a daily basis that he distributes wheelchairs, boxes of food, helping the evicted to find new homes and so on, but not in Laventille/East Morvant.

Mr. Warner: Not yet.

Miss D. Cox: Not yet? When?

Mr. Warner: Next week.

Miss D. Cox: I wrote numerous letters to him, requesting assistance for my constituents. To date, I am yet to receive even a letter of acknowledgement from the Minister of the People and Social Development.

Dr. Rowley: Diego Martin West too.
Miss D. Cox: “So, when yuh come here and talk, talk about yuhself too.” [Desk thumping] He came into my constituency twice, without having even the decency to inform me. He walked through my constituency twice. I just heard he was in the area. What level of disrespect! He made promises to some constituents. He walked around. “Somebody say: well, yuh know something wrong with meh drain here.” “Okay, that will be fixed.” [Interruption]

Dr. Rowley: Get his picture taken.

Miss D. Cox: Because he is the Minister of Works too, I guess, but he made promises. Any problem the person had, yes, yes, it will be done. We are yet to see those promises. We are yet to see the light of day in Laventille East/Morvant.

Under his Direct Effect Programme, where it was his intent to directly engage openly and candidly with the constituents, he came promising a bag of goodies to my constituents on the spot. In other words, he was trying to tell them your Member of Parliament cannot do it, I could do it. [Interruption]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Who is that?

Miss D. Cox: The Minister of the People and Social Development. We are now in October, and the Minister’s promises, of course, are yet to materialize. It is also obvious that only certain areas of the country are getting the full recognition of the Minister, and this is the said unsubstantiated complaint he made against the PNM administration in his budget contribution. [Desk thumping] So, the fact that he felt that was done, is this why he is currently acting in such a manner? I would like to ask the Members of the Government: is it the fact that you feel that you were discriminated by the PNM, this is the reason you are discriminating against us? [Desk thumping] Is that the reason?

The very accusations the Minister of the People and Social Development made are the very said thing he is doing. The daily newspapers make it quite evident in their headlines. For example, according to the Trinidad Guardian of October 26, the Member distributed over 300 food cards to constituents of Penal and Debe at the Prime Minister’s constituency office. I repeat, 300 food cards to constituents of Penal and Debe at the Prime Minister’s constituency office. [Interruption]

Dr. Rowley: Not one in my office.

Miss D. Cox: According to the Newsday of November 04, he gave 350 cards to families in Presyal. Then there is another headline: “Glenn gives evicted man money.” This was done at the Member’s Caroni Central constituency office, Trinidad Guardian, August 08; in the Newsday dated July 20, under the headline
“High Demand for Food Card”. Food cards were distributed at Nandoo’s residence, at Mission Road, Freeport, under the programme Direct Impact. So, I guess my constituents were promised and are yet to see the direct effect of the Minister so proudly championed. He championed the Direct Effect programme also in his walkabout but other persons are receiving the Direct Impact—[Interrupt] Nandoo residence—food cards.

I would love the Minister to explain the difference between these programmes, that of Direct Effect and Direct Impact. Is it that one is reality and the other is not? We talked about discrimination, and so on, but if you feel that you were wrongly treated at some point, does it mean that you now being the Government, have to come and discriminate against others? That could never be fair. I can tell you from experience, during my tenure in government, many Opposition areas got a lot of facilities that I did not get, and that is the reality. So, when people come and talk, you may be talking about a particular area, or you may be talking about certain things that have happened with constituencies, but I am aware that there are constituencies that were not getting the same amount as some Opposition constituencies. For example, Mayaro got four community centres while in Opposition. I got none.

Mr. Warner: “Imbert do he own thing.”

Miss D. Cox: That is the reality. So, when you stand here and you talk and you talk, and give the people of Trinidad and Tobago the impression that the past government of Trinidad and Tobago only used to service their constituencies, it is false. It is really not true. There may be instances that things might have happened, yes. People are human, but I am telling you that I do not know anything about that, and you do not generalize and suffer everybody because of that. That is not what you were placed in Government for. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, with regard to sports, Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, I want you to listen and stop speaking.

Mr. Roberts: “Come man. Come strong.”

Miss D. Cox: Development in my constituency—the Minister also went on a tirade in the budget debate on how he would ensure that the policy of the PNM with regard to sport was not repeated, and so on. I listened. I observed that the annual sports camp was not held this year. And, I saw in a newspaper article dated September 27, that the Minister responded that it was as a result of the Sport Company’s CEO, the fired CEO. I saw something like—yes in the September 26th
Guardian. I want the Minister to know that camp is very, very important and I do not want ever a year to pass again and we do not have that camp. It is a camp—a lot of parents—[Interruption]

Mr. Roberts: I agree with you.

Miss D. Cox:—cannot afford to send their children to camps, so they really look forward to the Ministry of Sport camp. They look forward to it on an annual basis. It is a well-known fact that some parts of my constituencies are considered high risk areas and any positive social activity such as this sports camp aids in the deterrence of youths from crime and social deviance. [Interruption]

Mr. Roberts: “It coming back.”

Miss D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, with respect to Laventille East/Morvant, I am yet to see the visible impact of the Ministry of Sport. The recreation grounds and basketball courts need refurbishing, and I have sent letters to the Minister of Sport, so I am hoping that this year I will see some work being done. We all say that we are in a fight against crime, and if that is the case, recreational grounds—

Mr. Roberts: “And dey getting night sports.”

Miss D. Cox:—are very, very important in constituencies and in certain constituencies even more so.

Mr. Roberts: “Yuh getting night sports too.”

Mrs. D. Cox: Well. Okay, I want it all.

Mr. Roberts: “Yuh getting it all.”

Miss D. Cox: Okay, thank you. Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: One more minute.

6.30 p.m.

Miss. D. Cox: Mr. Speaker, I just to want to speak about the Ministry of Community Development. I am still looking forward to getting some work done in my community. I have a lot of community centres that are yet to be refurbished. I also want to speak particularly on behalf of the Morvant Community Centre that is the first community centre that was built in Trinidad and Tobago, so a history exists, and the mere fact, I think it may even be the first community centre to be built in the Caribbean and to the people of Morvant, that centre is greatly needed; there is no centre.

Hon. Minister: Send me a note.
Miss D. Cox: I will send you note again, Minister of Community Development.

The Minister of Education is not here. The Early Childhood Centre that was built and finished before the September school term, was not opened. We need that to be opened please—the Early Childhood Centre.

As I conclude, I wish to remind Members opposite that when you are elected to Government, you took an oath; you did not just take an oath before me or before man; you took an oath before God to serve everyone fairly and impartially. I want to remind you, if you do not remember, go back and read that oath, and I feel that if you read that oath, you will operate differently. I thank you. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Errol McLeod): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I particularly liked the very incisive, I think, approach of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and also, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West—[Desk thumping]

Mr. Roberts: She was better than her leader.

Hon. E. McLeod:—except [Crosstalk and laughter] that I should like to advise, particularly if we are going to prescribe across the House to the very important fundamental objective of removing discrimination of whatever kind in our approach to representing the interests of all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to suggest that there is in your tenor a level of anger that seems to be coming out all of the time. If we were to reduce that, then perhaps, you would see more clearly and treat with the issues more objectively than we have so far been treating.

Mr. Speaker, I will perhaps be angering the Opposition a little bit more when I place on the record my very deep appreciation and congratulations to the hon. Minister of Finance and his team at the Ministry for an excellent job. This is not that I agree with every single approach, every single thing that is there but that is the democracy that we have. It is evident, Mr. Speaker, that despite the challenging circumstances which have emerged over the past year since the last budget presentation, our country’s fiscal and economic management is in good hands, and I want to congratulate him. We are journeying well from a steady foundation to economic transformation.

More than that, our country’s future is, in fact, in good hands, undoubtedly. Our Prime Minister has proven that she is competent in sailing what would have been a sinking ship under the last administration. And while the turbulent torrents of global economic and financial uncertainties, declining revenues, rising
of things becoming better overnight and false accusations, among other things, have bashed against this ship, thanks to the competence and agility of its captain, it has remained on a steady and focused course with the collective vision of this crew such that we can all say in unionism, “Eureka! Land Ahoy”. Thank you, hon. Prime Minister for proving our opponents and detractors wrong, and to my fellow crew members, to my colleagues on this side, you deserve to be applauded—all of us.

Mr. Sharma: Well said!

Hon. E. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, we cannot afford at this time to see Trinidad and Tobago in isolation from the realities of the international situation affecting us in all corners of the globe.

Since my contribution to the September 2010/2011 budget presentation, the global, regional and local labour market situation has become more challenging. According to a publication by the International Labour Organization and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in September 2011 entitled “Short Term Employment and Labour Market Outlook and Key Challenges in G20 countries”—these are the major countries of the world; these are the leaders of the world—global labour market recovery, according to this publication, appears to be slow and weak. And if the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West would write a note to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, they will not disturb me.

Mrs. McIntosh: Sorry.

Hon. E. McLeod: Accepted. The report notes:

“With economic activity slowing in several major economies and regions, earlier improvements in the labour market are now fading, hiring intentions are softening and there are greater risks that high unemployment and under-employment could become entrenched.”

It is not just here, Mr. Speaker.

“This makes for a highly uncertain outlook as to the timing and strength of a future recovery in employment.”

I travelled to Geneva last June and I attended the 100th Session of the International Labour Organization. I headed this country’s delegation, and there were some special sessions to which important leaders in OECD countries and others addressed those of us attending. Each one of them whom I sat and listened to spoke in terms of
our nurturing the green shoots of recovery that we had begun to see after 2008—the crisis of 2008. Nurturing those green shoots of recovery and engaging in our respective societies in thoroughgoing social dialogue with all sectors of our communities to address the scourge of some serious phenomena that are taking place in the world today.

In my contribution in this debate, I want to keep repeating the importance of our beginning to see our responsibility in a more important, a more fundamental way than we might have taken that responsibility previously. [Interuption] You like it? I know. And those leaders whom I mentioned a while ago, for instance, Her Excellency the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel; the Russian Prime Minister, [Interuption] Mr. Vladimir Putin. Thank you very much. For a moment, I thought you were not in the House. [Crosstalk] No, you have transformed. You do not behave so well, but I saw Mr. Speaker talking to you.

Dr. Browne: I was talking to Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. McLeod: The President of Tanzania; the President of Indonesia; the President of the Swiss Federation—they were all strumming a common thread, Mr. Speaker, that of developing policies and incorporating plans to provide in a more serious way than we may have concentrated before employment for the thousands of young people whom we have been spending good money on educating—and those who refused to take the education too—to stem the growth in crime and to reorganize our approach to building communities and so on—all of them. And I mentioned some names so that we will also have an idea of the ideological differences between those leaders; the political differences that exist between those leaders. But in each case, the problems afflicting the world are common to all. Mr. Speaker, that is why it is important that we begin to see the “us” in all of us rather than the “we” and the “them”.

There is much concern globally about sputtering economic growth and slow recovery in employment; rising unemployment especially among women and young people; increasing rates of long-term unemployment and underemployment; decline in real wages and a fall in labour productivity. This concern is justified when one considers the fact that the ILO has estimated that the number of unemployed globally stood at 205 million in 2010 an increase of 27.6 million persons from 2007 with a slight decline to 203.3 million persons projected for 2011.

The Economist, in its September 10—16, 2011 publication notes that this situation of high joblessness and long-term unemployment will not be fixed quickly and even if growth accelerates, unemployment will remain worrying high for several years to come.
6.43 p.m.: House resumed after Finance Committee.

Question put and agreed to. That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Question put: That the Bill be now read a third time.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the labour market outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean is not so dismal, according to the ILO’s Global Employment Trends 2011, which foresees GDP growth at a rate of 4 per cent, along with a modest decline in the unemployment rate.

What have been some of the policy prescriptions for accelerating labour market recovery? If not all, most of these were issues addressed by Angela Merkel and those other leaders, as they addressed us at the ILO 100th session. Policy prescriptions include promoting a jobs-rich recovery; placing decent work at the heart of strong, balanced and sustainable growth; improving policy coherence, so that the negative impacts on jobs are minimized; stimulating investments, and the Minister of Finance would have spent quite a while as he did his presentation of our budget proposals, dealing with the question of stimulating investment, as so much depends on that. It continues: improving labour productivity; strengthening social protection systems; and enhancing social dialogue. Throughout all that they said, they kept strumming the need for social dialogue.

I am pleased to report that our Government has been following through with some of these recommendations and has been adapting them to our local situation. In a short while, I will share on some of the related measures which have been implemented and which are being undertaken.

The impact of some of these measures may not be felt immediately, but I am optimistic that we will be seeing greater improvements in our employment and labour market situations in Trinidad and Tobago in the short term. Our labour market has not been as severely affected as some other countries; not that we are comfortable with our situation either.

The latest figures released by the Central Statistical Office showed that the unemployment rate stood at 5.9 percent at the end of the third quarter of 2010 and that was up from 4.8 per cent at the end of the second quarter of 2010. This was comparable to the unemployment rate for the same period in 2009, and which stood at 5.8 per cent.
While these figures appear somewhat small, compared to the double digits recorded for some countries, it is our Government’s aim to bring these levels down to lower than the pre-crisis rates. If one paid attention to the Minister of Finance’s delivery and one did not have a fixation on sums of money, whether in surplus or deficit but if one had tried to identify the philosophical underpinnings of what was presented here, then certainly we would have a better appreciation for the extent of the problems that we are experiencing and the importance of our coming up with solutions to deal with those problems. I think so far we have had the best solutions at this time proffered by the Minister of Finance in his presentation.

I might say that a national budget is more than a multiplication of the units in whatever the commodity that you have to trade by so many United States dollars, nor is the addition of sums in your revenue column and the subtraction of your expenditures from your revenue; whether you end up with a surplus or a deficit. A national budget is more than that. A national budget is about plans. It is about policy. It is about direction. It is about meeting the basic needs of your people and there is where you will identify the philosophy of your thinking; where you want to go and how you propose to get there.

I am personally intent on doing all that is possible within my sphere of responsibility and influence to achieve a situation of full employment in the near future, where all persons who are willing and able to work can find jobs.

It is in this regard that, as Minister with the responsibility for labour and small and microenterprise development, I have ensured that the policies, programmes and projects of my Ministry, which are developed in the context of Government’s policy framework for sustainable development, are all aimed at promoting decent work and mainstreaming employment creation.

I will now address some of the major issues arising from the budget presentation 2012, within my portfolio, under the following: social dialogue; decent work; the minimum wage; the legislative agenda; joblessness and retrenchment; micro and small enterprise development; labour inspection and occupational safety and health; discrimination in the workplace; and migrant labour.

Mr. Speaker, the People’s Partnership Government has remained committed to the process of participatory governance. I am about to deal briefly with the question of social dialogue. We recognize that we do not possess all the answers. By ourselves, we cannot solve all the economic, financial and social problems which exist in our country. The real actors of the economy who are in tune with the practical realities and are responsible for implementing decisions, should be integrally involved in defining solutions and we invite that all the time.
With this in mind, one of my first actions as Minister of Labour, and Small and Micro Enterprise Development was to meet with employers and workers’ organizations to understand their issues and challenges and obtain recommendations and solutions in moving forward. Subsequently, in the course of developing my Ministry’s new five-year strategic plan, the social partners played an active role in stakeholders’ assessments and even participated in the management retreat held in March of this year, where the visioning aspect of the plan was elaborated. May I correct myself, I never like to use the word “retreat”. Coming from where I have, it is “forward ever backward never”. I never liked the word “retreat”. What we had was a management workshop.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to announce that over the course of the last financial year, almost all of the boards and committees established under the purview of my Ministry, some of which I learnt were not operational for as much as a year and more, when I assumed office, have been reconstituted and work is well on the way.

These boards and committees, which are all tripartite in nature are in some cases multi-partite and they include the Board of Governors of the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies, they were appointed in 2010; the Board of Directors of the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited, in 2011; the Minimum Wages Board, 2010 and reappointed in 2011; the Registration Recognition and Certification Board, 2011; Occupational Safety and Health Authority, 2010; the Boiler Examiners Board, 2010; and the ILO 144 Tripartite Committee, 2011. Our Government remains committed to using meaningful social dialogue as a developmental process to propel us onto the road of sustainable development.

As Minister and a trade unionist of 37 years standing, I reiterate my firm conviction that there is nothing that cannot be solved by social dialogue, whether it is bipartite dialogue between employers and employees or tripartite dialogue among government, employers and workers.

Let me place on record that the People’s Partnership Government pays the highest respect to the fundamental right of workers to join organizations of their choice to represent them and the right of parties to an employment relationship to engage in free and fair collective bargaining in keeping with the provisions of the ILO Convention No. 87, freedom of association and protection of the right to organize, and Convention No. 98, right to organize and collective bargaining, the Government does not wish to interfere in this process but to encourage and facilitate it.
Talking about collective bargaining, most, if not all of the outstanding agreements that have even gone beyond their three-year duration, are issues that we have inherited from the former administration, when they refused, it would seem, to sit down or have their agency leadership, their management teams, sit down and engage the workers’ representatives in their collective bargaining process. Instead of doing that, they went out and sought to have injunctions against three unions; injunctions which, some of them, have had the same effect that you might find in certain regulations of the state of emergency, and it is hypocritical for them to come today and talk about tardiness, that is not the word they use, in engaging in the collective bargaining process and settling the outstanding issues between employers and workers’ representatives, so that people can be at ease, almost, as they go about their daily responsibilities contributing to building the economy.

7.00 p.m.

As I got into office after having been appointed, I called the legal people in the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and asked to be briefed on actions taken over the previous few months prior to my getting there, to be briefed on such issues as had taken place. I instructed that it is not the policy of this Government to keep in existence those injunctive measures which had been pursued against three unions, very important unions; indeed all of them are important. But I am talking about unions which have the potential to make a greater impact on what is happening in the economy than some others might have.

We lifted those injunctive measures, so that these workers and their organizations could feel a little more freedom in the exercise of their trade unionism but, of course, we must call on them in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago to be responsible in their actions; this is what this Government is about.

The actions by our workers’ organizations, Mr. Speaker, are quite normal, they are a means of bringing benefits to workers in terms of conditions of employment and indeed, there are collective agreements negotiated in Trinidad and Tobago that are far superior in some cases to those in first world countries. And I might say, without beating my chest, I was very instrumental in negotiating some of these enhanced terms and conditions of employment for workers whom I actively represented not too long ago; and whose interest I still bear in my chest.

Our laws, Mr. Speaker, more specifically the Industrial Relations Act, Chap. 88:01, recognizes and entrenches the sanctity of the collective agreement, and cements the legal relationship between a recognized majority union and an
employer. The IRA also recognizes the rights of unions and employers to take industrial action with a few exceptions, of course, in furtherance of their individual aspirations in negotiations for collective agreements.

The Government, therefore, accepts this as a reality and does not frown on industrial actions undertaken within the ambit of the law. The IRA also provides for parties to conduct bilateral discussions and where there is a failure to reach an agreement, either party could refer the matter to the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development for conciliation. Where conciliation fails to bring about a settlement either party may exercise an option of taking industrial action if they so desire; that is in the law.

But let me hasten to mention that there are certain categories, there are certain classes of workers and workers’ organizations that are not permitted in the law to take strike action. And some of those workers and their unions, if there is a failure to reach agreements, like in negotiations with the CPO, then those unions do not report a dispute to the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development they report to the Minister of Finance, and if the matter is not settled there, the Minister of Finance would report the dispute to the Special Tribunal of the Industrial Court. There are some workers who do not understand this up to today and I thought that I might have contributed tremendously to educating them.

The other option, of course, is the referral of the dispute for adjudication, in the case of those disputes that are reported to the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, and if there is failure to settle them in conciliation at that level, and parties decided against—after seven days had elapsed, parties refused to elect the option to engage in industrial action, then such matters are sent to the Industrial Court.

Let me again hasten to say, that the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development does not—what is the word?—does not impose settlements on the parties to any dispute; it is not his authority so to do. The Minister of Labour encourages the parties, the contending parties to dialogue and to allow themselves to be open to considering each other’s position, and developing an appreciation if they could for each other’s position; and to compromise. When they agree theirs is considered as any award that would have been decided upon by the Industrial Court.

It is expected, however, that parties taking industrial action will do so reasonably considering the interest of the workers and the enterprise. Sometimes we fail to see the other interest and then is when we can be walking down the road to destruction. We must see the other interest and see the extent to which we can
establish commonality between the other interest and mine. And it is not difficult to do, Mr. Speaker, it is not difficult to do at all; one needs only to be clear in his thinking; one needs only to be very human.

On this note, I wish to point out that at present there are 13 disputes involving negotiations for wages and other terms and conditions of employment before my Ministry for conciliation. In addition, there are several involving major companies in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, such as Petrotrin, NP, Powergen; T&TEC has been referred to the Industrial Court. I hope there can be some efficiency in dealing with these issues at the bipartite level and if they come to the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development we will do our best to treat with them as efficiently as possible, because it is our intention to have our workers at work comfortable and conscientiously contributing to economic development in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

It is noteworthy that the duration of the vast majority of these agreements, I made that point earlier, has either expired or will expire within 2011. I wish to take this opportunity to encourage parties to bring their respective collective agreements within the current period.

Back pay, Mr. Speaker, is less pay and it is only the education of workers which will have them understand this, and their organizations must be timely on the submission of their proposals. And the employer must also respond expeditiously to inviting the workers’ representatives and they must do the process of negotiations in a manner which will foster trust and commitment, one side and the other, to the success of the organization, the enterprise. If we did not have the enterprises then we would not have the jobs that are provided in those enterprises. Neither should the enterprise operate in a manner which is contrary to the provision in the Constitution which was very ably read to us by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, distributing the wealth in such a way as to satisfy, and these are my own words, as to satisfy the needs and that labour ought not to be exploited.

It is not in the interest of either party to conclude an agreement after the period has elapsed. My dollar that I would have been entitled to in 2008, when you give it to me in 2011, it is 100 minus so many cents. While bipartite social dialogue at the enterprise level is critical, I believe that tripartite dialogue at the national level is equally important. The main goal of social dialogue itself is to promote consensus building and democratic involvement among the main stakeholders in the world of work. Successful social dialogue structures and processes have the potential to resolve important economic and social issues, encourage good governance, advance social and industrial peace and stability and boost economic progress.
Issues of wages, Mr. Speaker, productivity, unemployment, economic growth, inflation and crime can all be addressed comprehensively if Government, employers and workers’ representatives sit together in a non-crisis mode within an institutionalized structure to discuss, debate, agree, disagree, compromise and ultimately find the best solution to our economic, social and labour market challenges. And when one did not quite go the way that is expected, it will not be productive for us to engage in public recrimination of each other. A word to the wise is sufficient.

This model of institutionalized social dialogue through what is referred to as social partnerships has been successfully adopted in countries such as Barbados, Mauritius and Singapore; and has assisted in minimizing the effects of the global economic and financial crisis on the respective economies. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in Singapore, the social partnership has been critical in moving the industrial relations system from an adversarial one to a more synergistic one. And earlier we heard about how well they have done in terms of reorganizing their education system and the kind of curriculum, I think, you meant to tell us, which would have a direct relationship with the economic plans that country has.

What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that there must be some mechanism at the national level to bring about this synergistic relationship among the social partners, to facilitate continuous dialogue, social and economic issues at all levels. And there was an attempt at this, a very important attempt at this in the year 2000, I can recall in October 2000, when an attempt was made by the then UNC government to develop such a mechanism.

7.15 p.m.

But there came a change in administration in that year, and what had been planned and almost decided upon was abandoned, and but for the short period of 18/18 when there was much “skin teeth” in San Fernando, some important platforms for change were dismantled and destroyed. In fact, as the main employer, our predecessors, that is the government, propagated an adversarial approach to collective bargaining, and this adversarial approach became the prevailing culture. So some of what is happening today has its foundation in what happened five years ago, ten years ago, fifteen years ago. The People’s Partnership Government is not about confrontation, neither is it about blackmail or ultimatums, but rather about sitting together with our stakeholders to chart the best course within existing constraints for our people and generations to come.

Returning to the issue of enterprise level dialogue and the Ministry’s role as conciliator, I am pleased to announce to this honourable House that for the first
time in over 20 years the conciliation unit in the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development is operating with its full complement of conciliation and labour relations officers. [Desk thumping] And work has commenced to ensure that the unit is outfitted with adequate facilities.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and Member for Pointe-a-Pierre 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. E. McLeod: Just a word on the minimum wage, Mr. Speaker. Not that I am about to announce a new minimum wage, it does not happen every year, Mr. Minister of Finance. Mr. Speaker, poverty eradication and social justice have been identified as key objectives in our Government’s policy framework for sustainable development. This Government firmly believes that the best route out of poverty is through work, specifically decent work. This simply means that we are committed to ensuring that people earn a just and fair wage that provides for their needs and that of their families.

I am indeed happy that under this People’s Partnership Government we have been able to realize that increase in the national minimum wage that was moved from $9.00 to $12.50 per hour, and that took effect January 01. This was in keeping with our promise to review the existing minimum wage to ensure that workers earn a decent wage in order to meet their basic needs. We are not content with just increasing the minimum wage and leaving it there. We recognize that the impact of the existing minimum wage and any proposed adjustments must be quantitatively and qualitatively measured, and that there must be a model which is developed to econometrically determine what the minimum wage should be, given changes in the economic, social and labour market conditions. To this end, the Minimum Wages Board will be commissioning a consultancy aimed at an assessment of the minimum wage and determination of a suitable model. Given the fluidity of our current economic environment we cannot operate by “vaps”, intuition or feelings, it is time that we get things right, to use a term that is often mouthed by the Minister of Finance.

Additionally, I have commenced the process of meeting one on one with stakeholders in sectors where implementation of the Minimum Wages Order 2010 seems to be problematic and terms and conditions of employment are not properly enforced. Last month I met with stakeholders of the private security industry to
discuss their issues and challenges particularly with respect to clarifying the 40-hour work week, and the prevalent practice in this industry of 12-hour work shifts without overtime pay for workers beyond the first eight hours worked as provided for in the 2010 Order. It was since 1886, Mr. Speaker, and you would be familiar with this.

Mr. Cadiz: The Speaker not that old.

Hon. E. McLeod: It was in 1886 when we had the Haymarket riot—remember that?—and the fight for the eight-hour a day. And the fight was against people like the hon. Member for Chaguanas East and the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

In light of this discussion and the findings of a survey undertaken by my Ministry on terms and conditions of employment in the private security industry, we will be reviewing the Minimum Wage (Security Industry Employees) Order, 1995 to determine the amendments which are required in further consultation with the stakeholders. This initiative is complementary to our Government’s intent to strengthen the capacity of the private security industry as part of an integrated approach to crime.

Setting new standards. For years we have been hearing about the plight of one of the most vulnerable categories of minimum wage earners in our country—domestic employees. In our policy framework we indicated our commitment to address the status of certain classes of workers such as domestic employees who are not recognized as workers under the IRA. Additionally, we have heard of reports of low wages, abuse and exploitation of these employees which cannot be allowed to continue in this era of decent work, and in this regard, this Government has taken the first step in addressing the plight of domestic workers by supporting the international community in June of this year, and I was there at the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva, in the adoption of a holistic set of international labour standards specific to promoting decent work for domestic workers.

And coming out of that 100th Session of the ILO, there is Convention No. 189 on domestic workers and its associated recommendation, both are aimed at improving the working conditions of tens of millions of domestic workers worldwide. The new ILO standards set out that domestic workers around the world who care for families and households must have the same basic labour rights as those available to other workers.

Our second step in this regard is for the convention to be examined by the ILO 144 Tripartite Committee for recommending action with respect to ratification—that is the process. Since the agreement at the ILO’s 100th meeting last June, activists on behalf of
domestic employees are so ecstatic, and sometimes I think they allow their enthusiasm to drive them into realms of indiscretion, they have been running all over asking: Minister this, Minister that, Minister the other: “Get the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development to get this thing ratified for me now please.” It does not just happen like that, there is a process and it is not going to get away. I am committed to ensuring that our domestic employees are treated with dignity in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

While this is being done my Ministry will be proceeding to develop a registry of domestic workers in Trinidad and Tobago—it is all over. They are all over and some of them are being exploited. NIS is not being paid for them, it is when they seem no longer useful they go to the NIS office and realize that no money was paid, no contributions were paid and so on. We want to identify them wherever they are and have a registry of domestic workers in Trinidad and Tobago, and we hope to do this in collaboration with the trade union movement. This will assist in the conduct of a study on domestic employees with a view to gathering information on their situation in Trinidad and Tobago. Further, the Minimum Wages Board will be reviewing the terms and conditions provided in the Minimum Wages (Household Assistants) Order, 1991, and making the necessary recommendations to improve the lot of these people.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the fact that food production and food security is high on our Government’s agenda the Minimum Wages Board is at this time giving consideration to a sectoral wage for the agriculture sector and examining terms and conditions of employment in this sector. Why? This is in keeping with one of the Government’s intent of introducing a wage support mechanism for farmers, hiring labour in specific food production activities that will both encourage and attract youth to this sector.

A word on decent work. Mr. Speaker, in addition to addressing the decent work deficits in various sectors and those specific to certain categories of workers on an individual basis, we recognize that there is need for an overarching policy and programme of action for the promotion of decent work in Trinidad and Tobago. The reality is that while we have undertaken a number of initiatives to create jobs which I will address shortly, we cannot ignore the quality of those jobs. The sweat and toil of our workers have built the foundation for our growth, development and prosperity. Indeed, according to Adam Smith:

“Labour was the first price, the original purchase…that was paid for all things. It was not by gold or by silver, but by labour, that all wealth of the world was originally purchased.”
Labour was the first price and labour will not be allowed to be exploited and thrown in the ditch. It was not by gold or by silver, but it was by labour that all wealth of the world was originally purchased.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the many initiatives pursued by Trinidad and Tobago in support of the goal of decent work, my Ministry has embarked on the process of developing a clear policy framework that promotes decent work for all. Mr. Speaker, following on what Adam Smith, advises we have taken into consideration the invaluable contribution that many who have since gone to the great beyond have contributed to the development of this country.

7.30p.m.

And on this note, I am proud to announce that our Government will be embarking on the establishment of a National Heroes Park and Labour Museum in Fyzabad. [Desk thumping] The will showcase the contributions of our great labour leaders, while enhancing the profile of the community as well as creating employment opportunities for residents, and to spearhead this project, a committee approved by Cabinet will be established to undertake the relevant assessments that go hand in hand with this project and to oversee the planning and implementation process.

Fyzabad is where most of what happened started but Fyzabad today is perhaps one of the most depressed places in Trinidad and Tobago. [Crosstalk] The contributions made by Fyzabad to the oil economy that we have, what Fyzabad has had in return is not sufficiently representative of what Fyzabad really deserves.

Let me hasten to our legislative agenda, Mr. Speaker. One priority area of our decent work policy and programme is that of legislative reform. I cannot overemphasize the need for a proper legislative framework to protect the more than 580,000 persons employed in Trinidad and Tobago and those who will be joining the labour market.

The People’s Partnership Government, in keeping to its word of modernizing our labour laws, has begun the process of making our labour laws more relevant to today’s working people and on par with international labour standards.

To this end we have held consultations and have made recommendations for the amendment of the Maternity Protection Act, 1998 to provide for 14 weeks paid maternity leave as opposed to 13 weeks as it currently stands, and this in keeping with ILO standards.
My Ministry is currently working—as a matter of fact, I received correspondence—you see to deal with this issue, you must also deal with provisions in the National Insurance Scheme of benefits.

I received advice which says:

“Extension of the NIS maternity benefit period in September 2010, hon. Minister Errol McLeod announced that Cabinet had agreed by Cabinet minute No. 7.11 of September 9, 2010, subject to relevant consultations to the amendment of the Maternity Protection Act to provide for a period comprising 14 weeks in lieu of 13 weeks in keeping with ILO Convention.

NIB noted that the aforementioned amendment while affecting employer/employee leave arrangement generally, would also impact maternity benefit provisions that currently exist under the NIA, National Insurance Act.

An actuarial assessment was therefore conducted to determine the financial requirements of the proposed change and a decision was taken by the Board of Directors of the NIB at its meeting of August 5, 2011 to extend the maternity benefit period to 14 weeks.

I wish to thank the board. This decision has been communicated.

My Ministry is currently working with the AG’s office to have the necessary legal instruments prepared to repeal the Masters and Servants Ordinance.

Hon. Member: Ah ha!

Hon. E. McLeod: In addition to these the Ministry’s legislative agenda for the current financial year includes, revision of the Industrial Relations Act Chap. 88:01. The Ministry is in the process of reviewing the Industrial Relations Act to bring it up to date with the ever-changing business and industrial environment, and to address some pertinent issues as outlined in our policy framework.

These include the status of certain classes of employees not categorized as workers. How many a middle-level manager has been dismissed or disciplined in some form or the other, and when such person exercises his or her right to freedom of association, and joins a union of his or her choice, and then the union writes the employer asking for a meeting to discuss the issue, the response, when a response is given, is that that person is not considered a worker within the meaning of the Industrial Relations Act. I do not know, Mr. Speaker, anybody in Trinidad and Tobago who is in receipt of wages or salary who can be considered to be a non-worker.
Mr. Sharma: Except MPs.

Hon. E. McLeod: I am trying to remember the term used to describe one who—it will come to me. So, we are [Interruption] no, it is not the proletariat.

Hon. Member: That is the word you know.

Hon. E. McLeod: No, the word I wanted to remember was sinecure. Do you remember that word? Sinecure? I hope that what you receive at the end of the month is not a sinecure because I understand you to be a worker representing Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

Mr. Sharma: But you are a part-time worker.

Hon. E. McLeod: Ah, yes, so that archaic provision is being worked on. The archaic provision too for the decertification of trade unions, an entrenchment of the right of freedom of association, we are going to work on that too, we are going to work on all of that.

You know a worker, a group of workers, their union even might take action that is contrary to the interest of the employer, and that might well be contrary to the provisions in the Industrial Relations Act, and the employer can move to have that union decertified, get them off the records, prevent them from thereafter representing the workers, but when the employer takes action that is contrary to the workers’ interest, and contrary to the Industrial Relations Act provisions there is nothing that anybody does, there is nothing that anybody can do, except perhaps file a violation in the Industrial Court in which case the employer, if found guilty, is made to pay a maximum of $20,000. You see the unfairness of that? We have a whole lot to do. How much more time do I have, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Sharma: Ten more minutes.

Hon. E. McLeod: Might I go on until midnight?

Mr. Speaker: You have eight more minutes.

Hon. E. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay. The legislative agenda also includes the repeal and replacement of the Workmen’s Compensation Act; it includes a review of the Occupational Safety and Health Act; the amendment of the Co-operative Societies Act; revision of the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies Act. [Interruption]

Now, I congratulated you just now, do not let me reprimand you now, okay. [Laughter]
Mr. Speaker, we all know that Trinidad and Tobago was not spared the effects of the global economic and financial crisis. One of the first labour market effects of the crisis was felt in 2009 with a rise in the unemployment rate to 5.3 per cent from 4.6 in 2008. Some recovery was evident by a reduction in the unemployment rate from 5.1 at the end of the second quarter of 2009 to 4.8 at the end of the second quarter of 2010, as mentioned earlier.

The issue of youth unemployment, very important, continues to be of grave concern. While more than one-half of the persons unemployed are between the ages 15 to 29, we are seeing some promising signs with a steady decline in the youth unemployment rate from 15.5 per cent at the end of the first quarter of 2010, to 13.3 per cent at the end of the third quarter of 2010. However, these double digit figures are unsatisfactory and continue to be troubling and we will be making every effort to facilitate entry and retention of our young people in the labour market.

Too often we see advertisements, so and so skills are required, you must have qualifications so and so, and they are talking paper qualification, so I like to categorize it as certification, as distinct from qualification, and then they ask for five years’ experience. Where does this young man or young woman aged 23, where do they get their experience and what happens with those important skills training programmes? I am talking about the five-year and three-year apprenticeship programmes that we used to have in major industries, and to some extent the private sector was also engaged in that. We abandoned that. The other side when they were in government abandoned that, yes. We are seeing today that we are reaping the whirlwind from the wind we had sown.

Some Ministries are discussing this issue; the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Science and Technology; Ministry of Labour etc, Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Education—Tech Voc. We have to do something about that, and I am certain that this People’s Partnership Government will address this issue head-on and bring relief to our workers.

My Ministry’s approach in addressing the situation of unemployment includes strengthening of the national employment service to facilitate more effective matching of job seekers and employers. And enhancing job creation through micro and small enterprise development. With regard to the NES which assists existing and prospective job seekers in obtaining employment and preparing for the world of work, as well as provides employers with a registry of workers, we are currently reviewing its operations to make it more effective and competitive.
I want to talk about an important programme that employs essentially young people, but it is not a programme that develops the skills and the fullest potential of young people as the Apprenticeship Training Programme would do. I allude to the Commonwealth Caribbean Agricultural Workers Programme. How many of us know of that?

This is commonly referred to as the “farm programme” and it is operated by the National Employment Service (NES), as part of the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. I have been exploring ways of expanding this programme to provide greater short-term employment opportunities abroad for our nationals.

Since my visit last year to Canada to obtain first-hand information on the operations of the farm programme which provided employment to almost 1,000 persons in 2010 on farms in Canada, I have recognized the value to be derived from such an arrangement.

As a consequence, I have started to explore the possibility of exporting our resident skills in the energy sector on a similar type of short-term arrangement as the farm programme, particularly for steel fitters, pipefitters and other skills in oil and gas operations.

To this end, I have commenced discussions with the Human Resources and Skills Development Department of Canada through our consulate and I am optimistic that these discussions will bear fruit and open doors for our people. This initiative is being very actively pursued.

Mr. Speaker: One minute again, hon. Minister.

Hon. E. McLeod: Yes, Mr. Speaker, in the one minute that I have, I just want to draw Members’ attention to the launch a couple days ago, last Thursday, of the Ibis Programme, the Business Incubator Programme, sponsored by the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development as the National Integrated Business Incubator System, using National Entrepreneurial Development Company (NEDCO) as the implementing agency.

We plan, over the next three years, to implement 18 incubators, each perhaps employing 10 persons and we anticipate that by 2015 we would realize revenues of $1 billion; all this with the aim to providing opportunities, particularly for our young people and developing entrepreneurs, as has been said by somebody else on that side, so that, on the one hand, we are developing skills and preparing people in
the tech/voc area, welders, carpenters; and, on the other hand, we are developing entrepreneurs who will make a more fundamental contribution to economic development in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in the trade union sphere from which I have come, we would say a luta continua, the “struggle continues”; but we will also say, “forward ever, backward never”.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Hon. Stephen Cadiz): Mr. Speaker, it is, of course, an honour for me to make a contribution to this very important debate on our second budget, the fiscal package for 2012. I take this —opportunity to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for his inspired presentation on Monday.

We have heard from the other side, basically nothing. That is true. That is probably the correct word. Really, I would like to thank Minister Dookeran, the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, on all the effort that went into producing this second budget of the People’s Partnership. It is a continuation and I would think that very soon they would be starting on the third budget. That is the way the People’s Partnership operates. It is not a government by “vaps” but a government about planning.

This year’s budget theme, “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”, is not only timely, but also essential for Trinidad and Tobago’s further growth, development and economic survival. That theme is in sync with my Ministry’s mandate as we work towards the sustainable transformation of the non-energy sector.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry has laid the foundation by expanding market access, strengthening the public/private partnerships, attracting and facilitating investment and commencing institutional realignment of the trade-related institutions under its purview.

In continuing our drive to transform the economy, the Ministry will be focusing on a number of areas, engendering the growth and development of exports, supporting the growth and development of business through various mechanisms, including public/private partnerships, which is very key to the success of any economic growth; supporting the growth and development of domestic and foreign investment, facilitating a fair, transparent and efficient business environment and utilizing internationally benchmarked systems technologies to improve our international competitiveness.
I would like to state further that my Ministry’s theme for fiscal 2012 is “Confidence and Implementation”; something that we have not seen for a while; at least not since 2002 and upwards. Last year was the first time that we saw implementation in a government. As we are all aware, investor confidence is critical to our economy moving forward. Also, in this coming year, we will focus on the implementation, moving beyond plans and policies to actions and results.

I sat here and listened to the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, and a number of speakers from the other side. There is an old saying, “should of, would of and could of”. That to me sums up the other side’s contribution. It is always a case of “we thought of that”. That is a PNM policy. We could have done it if we were still in office. We should have done it when we were in office. It is amazing, in hindsight, how people view things.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition making certain statements about certain issues that are directly related to the Ministry of Trade and Industry. They talked about things they had started and why we are not finishing. The Prime Minister, quite rightly, in her statement today—well I must say that the Prime Minister’s disclosure today was absolutely frightening. Thank the Lord that the people of this country, on May 24th last year, did what they did. It is unbelievable how that side can sit there, and listen to this disclosure and not cringe. They just sat there as though it were an ordinary day. That is how things work in this country.

One thing the Prime Minister did; the statement she made was that you cannot forget and you must never ever forget. I would like to remind the opposite side, especially the Leader of the Opposition, of just a couple things.

He talked about this absolutely beautiful building that we are in; this new Tower D and how this was a PNM creation. Really, when we talk now about the public/private sector partnerships, this entire waterfront could actually have been developed with private equity. Taxpayers did not have to put one cent into this, and here it is, over $2 billion being spent here. They sit there and say, look at where we are. If it were not for the PNM, we would not have had this. If it were not for the PNM, the country would not have been in hock to the tune of an additional $2 billion. This is what we would not have had.

So when they boast about creating these buildings and the waterfront project, it is an idle boast because it could have been done completely different and it would not have cost the taxpayers one single cent.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition talking about Invaders Bay and he was tying it back into this particular facility. Invaders Bay is very simple. We went out
for an RFP for Invaders Bay and I do not know what the hullabaloo is about Invaders Bay. Here you have a transparent, responsible government going out to the general public to get invitations and expressions of interest for Invaders Bay.

It makes me wonder sometimes when you hear them talking as though they are holier than thou, how come places like Shorelands, which had covenants that stipulated the height, size and type of buildings in the area, suddenly, under their watch, I should say—I like that word Member for St. Joseph—covenants and leases start to change where people are allowed to build multistorey buildings in neighbourhoods where there were traditionally single dwelling houses on these properties. And they want to know what about Invaders Bay.

One of the things with the opposite side is that they always feel there is “skeff” in every single thing a government does because that is how they have operated for the 37 years they have been in office. For 37 years, they worked with “ratch”, with “skeff”, with all kinds of “simi-dimi”. They can get it out of their systems that there is actually a government that has been voted in by an overwhelming vote. What happened on May 24th last year was a landslide and they cannot get it into their heads that has happened and there is actually a government which will work towards the real interest of the people; not of the party.

For instance, the Leader of the Opposition talked about Tamana. Tamana is a major problem because Tamana started off at whatever figure. Right now, we have already incurred a cost of $910 million on the ground. The estimated completion will run us another $600 million, so $1.5 billion is what the taxpayers will have to pay.

Do you know what the beauty of Mount Tamana is? It is not the different vegetation and the view of Tamana. They poured concrete to the tune of $910 million before they were even able to discuss with one single tenant if they were prepared to come to Tamana. The way in which they want to do it—if you build it, people will come—does not hold true for Trinidad and Tobago.

Look at the IFC. They created a building for an institution called the IFC and there was no legislation to deal with it. Why did you build the building? Why did you form the IFC if there was no legislation and it is identical with Tamana? Instead of finding a tenant first or a couple anchor tenants that would have taken up the greater part of the 1100 acre estate, they build the full estate, not knowing where the first tenant will come from. So who pays for it?

They have operated as though, I think, Balisier House cheque book and the Treasury cheque book is the same. You hear them saying PNM gave us this. I want
to know how many times a cheque was written from Balisier House to build one single house for HDC. They tell you PNM gave you that. It is the same thing throughout the whole system. The PNM culture is just that.

He talked about biz link and ASYCUDA, the software systems and the portals for customs. ASYCUDA, I think, has been going on for 20 years and cannot finish. How can you be installing a system for 20 years? They do not seem to think that is important; that the tens of millions of dollars that have been sunk into that, that it is somebody else’s money that we are spending. It is not our money, so it is no big deal! So whether or not we go another 20 years at a huge cost, they do not think of it at all; of the importance of having these things installed on time, within budget.

He talked about the fast ferry and he is dismissing this thing about the regional fast ferry as though it could never work. Why? Because the PNM did not implement it and, therefore, anything that is done by anybody else, once it does not have a balisier stamp on it, it is wrong, it is not good. I see one person has started to change that because he has started not wearing a balisier tie. I wonder if he knows that to be the leader of the PNM you must a balisier tie. So I do not know where he is going with that. Anyway, this is PNM’S problem, that is not for us to worry about.

8.00 p.m.

It would seem that every single success—they are scared of success. It seems like the other side cannot handle something actually happening, something actually working. For instance, when we talked about renovating this building to house the Parliament, up to now, they probably cannot figure out: “But how they did that boy? How they did that within budget and within the timeframe that they said they were going to do it in?” They cannot accept that there is a different way to govern, and in the different way to govern gives people value for money and a good quality of life. [Desk thumping] Anyway, they will have to figure out how that is going to work there.

Mr. Speaker, you hear the business community constantly saying, “Yes, we like what we hear, but will it happen?” It dawned on me recently and I said: “What is going on now?” Why is the business community always saying, “Yes we like what we are hearing; yes this work and yes we could work here and we could help you there, but will it happen?” The reason that they do that is that the PNM over the years have beaten this country into submission by making statements and commitments to the population and it does not happen, and it is now in the psyche of Trinidad and Tobago, that when a government tells you that yes we are going to make this happen, they say, “Nah, nah, that could never happen”, because that is the
PNM way—making promises and not keeping a single promise. So when you hear the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure say, “Well the bridge will be ready in the morning”, they cannot imagine—they would never even get out of bed, because they know under the PNM it makes no sense going there, because the bridge will not be opened. [Interuption] The flooding! That is 10 years of mismanagement by the PNM which is causing that flooding.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you look at some of the previous budgets that were presented by the PNM, for instance, and you talk about, “Yes, but will it happen”, you have to go back. Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central, because if you do not know where you came from, you would not know where you are going, so let us understand that. In 2004, amend the anti-dumping legislation and enact legislation relating to fair trading. This was in 2004.

Hon. Members on this side would remember recently in Cabinet there was a note coming about fair trading. [Interuption] No, you will talk soon, do not worry. So, since in 2004 we are talking about the Fair Trading Act and since 2004 we are talking about the Anti-Dumping legislation and they cannot bring it. Why is that? Again, these are commitments being made by a party, and all they can do is make the statement and they have absolutely no idea of how they are going to get it done, but they are making the statement.

In their budget presentation for 2005, they talked about all the different sectors like yachting, merchant marine, music entertainment and the film industry; all of that came out of it. That was in 2005. How come then—that statement was made in 2005 and guess what? In 2007, like they forgot what they wrote in 2005, and I hear them guffawing about what we said last year about what we were going to do which would be carried forward into this year, about how we said that last year, especially, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East, who is constantly interrupting, bawling, “You said that last year, you said that last year!” In 2005 they made the same statement. They identified all the different sectors and here it is now in 2007—well, I am not too sure if the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West was the Minister of Trade at the time. No, that would have been too late, because he was in from November 08, 2007 and out by April 22, 2008. So that would not have been him. But in 2007, they came back and made the identical statement about these are the sectors that the Government is going to pursue. So, again, the other side, all they can do is mouth. All they can do is make these vacuous statements without any backup. Nothing to back it up at all! So we proceed.
Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is working very hard at correcting so many ills that we have met and so many different things, but I am not going to deal with the ills, because we already know what a lot of the ills are, and I would much prefer to deal with the more positive side of the Ministry, because I think this constant doom and gloom that you hear from next door, we are not worrying with that. We are moving ahead. We have our plans and we have everything in place.

Mr. Speaker, as we are all aware, the Trinidad and Tobago economy is projected—listen to the word—“projected” to decline and that is by the end of 2011, and we are only in October. So, I think it is wrong, even though that is the official term. I think it is wrong that to use it, because by the end of December we will know exactly what the figures are, but right now they say it is projected to decline by 1.4 per cent, as a result of flat growth in the petroleum sector, which is attributable to the current international economic environment. However, Mr. Speaker, you may wish to note that despite an overall decline in economic growth nationally, the manufacturing sector for which my Ministry is responsible continues to perform favourably hence the reason we are strengthening our efforts to transform the economy.

Mr. Speaker, the other domestic sub-sectors, performed credibly despite the international shocks and adverse economic conditions, and this was evident in one particular sector, the food and beverage sector, also in the assembly-type and related industries and other sub-sectors. In fact, where we say we were going to record a projected 1.4 per cent negative growth, the manufacturing sector is expected to register an actual 1 per cent growth rate, which in dollar terms mean that the manufacturing sector will actually increase from $7.8 billion in 2010—I know it is a very small increase, but we are taking anything—to a $7.9 billion in 2011, and that is according to the Review of the Economy. So, while this growth in normal times may be seen as small, it shows the resilience of this sector in the face of a challenging industrial environment.

Mr. Speaker, worthy of mention is the fact that manufacturers are operating at a 63.2 per cent capacity, and that was a figure that was quoted by the Central Bank Governor. So, as of June 2010, according to Central Bank, there were 51,900 persons employed by the sector. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that expanding capacity utilization by even a small percentage, thousands of jobs will be generated and imagine how this economy can be transformed when this sector reaches its full potential.
Appropriation Bill, 2011

Mr. Speaker, according to the data from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, this country recorded a 23.3 per cent increase in total exports from 2009 to 2010 and, specifically, total exports increased from TT $57.7 billion in 2009 to $71.1 billion in 2010 and, Mr. Speaker, this achievement should not go unnoticed as it represents an increase in the balance of trade by 1.2 per cent even amidst turbulent economic conditions. So where we have the economy being dubbed as being flat, at least, it is not in the manufacturing sector.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, my Ministry, as I said, has responsibility for the manufacturing sector and data show that this sector continues to exhibit resilience despite adverse economic shocks. Exports of manufactured goods increased by 55 per cent from $2.7 billion in 2009 to $4.2 billion in 2010. This was matched by a decrease in imports of manufactured goods by 17.5 per cent, from $5.7 billion in 2009 to $4.7 billion in 2010. Mr. Speaker, these developments led to a reduction in this country’s manufactured goods trade deficit by 82 per cent. Mr. Speaker, what this means is that the manufacturing trade deficit was significantly reduced over this period which resulted in tremendous foreign exchange savings to this country.

Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me not to revisit the 2010/2011 fiscal package giving an account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on the initiatives undertaken. To this end, permit me briefly to outline the results of the implementation by my Ministry during fiscal 2011.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Trade and Industry in close collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs negotiated a partial scope trade agreement with the Republic of Panama and this agreement, subsequent to receiving clearance by Caricom, is expected to provide access into Panama for 250 products from Trinidad and Tobago while offering reduced tariffs on 270 products from Panama. This agreement also provides for negotiation of a bilateral investment treaty within one year, for future negotiations and services within two years and for negotiation of additional access for products three years after entry into force.

Mr. Speaker, preliminary discussions also commenced in fiscal 2011 on a partial scope trade agreement with the Republic of Chile, and we expect to do the same with the Republic of Guatemala in the near future. It is anticipated that these initiatives within Latin America will expand market access opportunities for exporters to the tune of over 30 million persons.

Mr. Speaker, one thing that we should note with the partial scope agreement with Panama is, I met my counterpart in Singapore last year in September 2010, and we have already completed a partial scope agreement and ready to roll with
Panama within less than 12 months of the initial start, and the actual negotiations only started in December of last year. So we are way ahead than the members of the previous administration who like to tout and shout and make all kinds of noises about how good they are. They have agreements from since 2004 that have not yet been ratified, and in less than 12 months— we started from scratch with Panama and we are about to sights off once we get the Caricom approval.

So when we talk about implementation that is what implementation is. Implementation is setting your sights and going ahead and getting it done and not just saying you are going to do it, and just leaving it alone. That is the difference between this People’s Partnership Government and the previous regime. Implementation without a doubt! When you are good with that, and you carry through with the implementation, that in turn then builds confidence in the business community, because the business community, instead of saying, “Yes, but will it happen?” like what we have done for however many years, they will say, “No, when the People’s Partnership say it is going to do something it is, in fact, done.”

Mr. Speaker, in budget 2010/2011, you would recall that the Government was in the process of reviewing proposals to introduce a programme to establish the single electronic window for trade and business facilitation. This system is intended to revolutionize the way in which business is undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago and has an enormous potential to reduce the cost and time of doing business and to enhance the competitiveness of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, during fiscal 2010/2011, the Ministry of Trade and Industry advanced considerably the implementation of the Single Electronic Window which is now branded ‘TTBiz Link.

In July 2011, 90 per cent of the technical development of the system was completed, and this included the procurement, installation, testing and verification of the infrastructure components of the system. In addition, the development of the application software for the following e-services are to be introduced:

- electronic application for fiscal incentives and import duty concessions which come under the Ministry of Trade and Industry;
- electronic application for work permits under the Ministry of National Security;
- electronic application for business registration and company incorporation under the Ministry of Legal Affairs; and
- electronic applications for import/export permits and licences under the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs.
Mr. Speaker, in April 2011, the Ministry of Trade and Industry also undertook a thorough legal review of all the e-services proposed, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, being cognizant of the need for the highest level of safety and security of the data being transmitted through the system and the security threats of the Internet, also advanced significantly the process of strengthening the TTBiz Link legal framework based on international standards and best practice.

Mr. Speaker, the services of international legal experts in the area of electronic commerce, electronic evidence and electronic signatures were retained to conduct an audit of special aspects of the legal component of the project. As we approach the end of the pre-implementation phase, this audit has been successfully completed and its findings are reviewed so that we are right on track to ensure that the system is commissioned by the end of this year.

8.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, all that is required for the SEW to be commissioned is the partial proclamation of the Electronic Transactions Act and the Data Protection Act which will come before Cabinet very shortly. Again, this is all within our first year of being in office. So here it is you have the ASYCUDA system that has taken them nearly 20 years to get fully implemented and now we have the SEW. Even though we met the SEW being implemented, it was stopped, and by January 01 we will have the system fully operational.

To date all proposed amendments to the research and development facility outlined in the national budget 2010/2011 have been implemented, and that is through the Business Development Corporation. We know the Minister of Finance in last year’s budget announced that the Research and Development Fund was opened to businesses of all sizes, except those with annual sales turnover exceeding $25 million. The research grant has moved from $100,000 to $500,000. Grants for patents have been increased from $50,000 to $300,000. The RDF is now accessible to businesses that have been operating for at least one year, down from a minimum of two years.

The problem is that even with the introduction of these amendments, the uptake on this facility has been less than desirable. It says something about Trinidad and Tobago, where we are not even assessing grants for research and development. That is something we have to consider seriously, because without serious research and development going on in this country I am not too sure how we are going to really and truly diversify this economy, because we need to own the research and development.
Under the Free Trade Zones Act, the removal of the $50 million was already done. This means that investors of an initial investment outlay of $50 million are now eligible to establish their businesses at free trade zones throughout the country.

The refurbishment of the Magdalena Grand Beach Resort in Tobago—you will recall that the People’s Partnership Government in 2010 inherited the $300 million property paid for by taxpayers and abandoned by that side. That is how they work. They write a cheque for $300 million, it is a non-issue, it is not our money, it is somebody else’s money. They wrote the cheque for $300 million and then shut the hotel down. So we inherited the abandoned Vanguard Hotel in Tobago, but owing to the previous government’s neglect, a hotel facility which suffered from poor maintenance practices was forced to close its hotel operations in October 2008, which of course has had a disastrous impact on the Tobago economy.

Mr. Speaker, on account of the proactive action by this Government and, in particular, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, as at September 30, 2011, 80 per cent of the renovation works have been completed at the newly rebranded Magdalena Grand Beach Hotel. I heard the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, also the Leader of the Opposition, making fun of the name of the Magdalena.

Especially the Member for Diego Martin West, a man born in Tobago who supposedly has Tobago’s interest at heart, was making all these statements about the name, not once talking about the advantage this hotel is going to bring to Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 200 quality rooms—not once did it dawn on him to make that statement. Instead, all he could talk about was that the Magdalena was some old ship. Maybe she and the Member for Diego Martin West used to go on the boat in their young days; I do not know. [Laughter] That is how that side looks at it.

Again, when I tell you “dey fraid success”, that is one of the things. Anything we are successful in doing, they have a problem with that. “Dey fraid success.” So instead of being negative, instead of asking the question: when the hotel is opened, what would be the full extent of employment? It would be over 250 persons being employed in Tobago, and he has a problem with that, because he remembers an old boat by the name of The Magdalena and Blue Star. I think those were the two boats he was talking about. That is the attitude of Members on the other side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me just finish with the Magdalena. It will be opened in November, and we will have 200 quality rooms. There has been a deal signed with the tour operators and, therefore, it is not the all-time fix for Tobago, but at least it
will be a great start from November. So we will be ready for this in season. I visited the Magdalena Grand the other day; it is going to be a spectacular hotel. All of Tobago, including the Member for Diego Martin West would be very, very proud when it is finished. I hope he has more positive things to say when it is opened.

I also wish to give an account of the extent to which this administration has facilitated market access and investment missions to further stimulate foreign direct investment into the country. In recognition of the need to expand market access and attract investment, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in collaboration with the major private sector bodies, initiated a series of trade missions as follows: Jamaica—our first port of call was in Jamaica in July 2010. For those of us who follow trade matters in Caricom, we know that there were long-standing issues with Jamaica. These issues have been there; we met those issues there. They have been there for the longest while and, to date, the relationship Trinidad and Tobago has with its Caricom partner, Jamaica, has never ever been better because we worked at it. [Desk thumping] We realized that there was a problem, and we did not say typically like the other side, “Well, we is Trinidad and Tobago, we do not need to talk to you all.” That was never the case. We sat with Jamaica; we discussed the issues and we have the majority of them sorted out.

We also had the Latin/Asia Business Forum in Singapore in September 2010; the Commonwealth Economic Partnership Forum in London in March of 2011. We were in Brazil at the Sixth Regional Meeting of the World Economic Forum in April and the InduExpo in Guatemala in June 2011. We had a number of meetings on opportunities for business, trade and investment between Central America and the Caribbean in El Salvador in 2011, and a competitiveness forum in the Dominican Republic recently in October 2011. These missions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have helped the international marketplace to take further notice of what Trinidad and Tobago has to offer, and the initiatives have begun to bear fruit.

I remember going to Singapore last year, and when you had to explain where Trinidad and Tobago was, it was an embarrassment. The face of Trinidad and Tobago in the international market is a new face, and it is a place to do business.

You would recall the previous government’s folly in hosting the Fifth Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, at a cost of over $2 billion. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you see the budget that we have to operate with, but I know the constraints of the Minister of Finance, and we work with it. You cannot even measure the budget as a percentage of $2 billion, and look at what we have been able to achieve in our short time here.
The Partnership Government’s approach in the area of investment promotion and attraction is firstly, value for money. This is business that we are talking about; this is trade that we are talking about. Again, the People’s Partnership is about value for money. The Ministry of Trade and Industry, in partnership with the Commonwealth Business Council hosted the first ever Caribbean Investment Forum, CIF, at the Trinidad Hilton and Conference Centre from June 13 to 14, 2011 in Port of Spain. Mr. Deputy Speaker, guess what? It was fully funded through private sector sponsorship. While we had $2 billion of taxpayers’ money spent hosting two conferences, the important and critical forums where we are bringing trade and investment to Trinidad and Tobago, is not costing the taxpayers a cent. That is 180 degrees away from the other side.

At the CIF conference, over 350 persons attended the forum of which 85 were from the Caribbean. The Ministry of Trade and Industry co-hosted with the TTMA, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, the 12th Annual Trade and Investment Convention. This is something that is on the calendar every single year, the TIC. The TTMA estimated that this year the TIC did over US $50 million worth of business.

Governments of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the People’s Republic of China, through the Ministry of Trade and Industry, recently hosted the Third China Caribbean Economic and the Trade Corporation Forum; again, it was a huge success. The theme of that forum was “Development, Cooperation and Win for All”; it was a huge success. So Trinidad and Tobago has hosted three major fora in the last couple of months, from January till now, at minimal cost to the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, the growth and diversification of exports are key to the strategy for economic transformation, enunciated in the Budget Statement of 2012. As hon. Members are aware, the PP development plan singled out trade and industry as the lifeblood of the economy, and expanding trade and generating an export-led growth as being fundamental to the achievement of a more diversified knowledge intensive economy, and contributing to the overarching development goal of prosperity for all. That is why we are here, when we talk about prosperity for all.

In this regard, in fiscal 2012, the Ministry of Trade and Industry will be rolling out a number of initiatives aimed at engendering the growth and development of exports. Indeed, in what is becoming an increasingly globalized world, export growth and the integration of trade policy into socioeconomic policy settings, have emerged as key drivers of economic growth. In light of this, my Ministry has commenced work and very soon will complete the drafting of a trade policy and
strategy for Trinidad and Tobago 2012/2016. “Wait nuh, 2016; oh, we will be back, yes, sorry.” I was forgetting which year we were in. No, 2016 we will be right here on this side. By then we will be back in the refurbished Red House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this new trade policy will seek to build on the current foundation, and facilitate a more diversified and sustainable export structure which will ensure broad-based income growth, employment generation and poverty alleviation.

The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the Minister of Labour, Small and MicroEnterprise Development, spoke about that. Both of us have the same issue of poverty alleviation. I wish to remind this honourable House that a strong export sector generates employment, it raises domestic income levels; it increases domestic consumption spending and has a positive effect on poverty reduction. Accordingly, the trade policy of Trinidad and Tobago for the period 2012/2016 will facilitate the expansion and diversification of export of goods as well as services through an aggressive agenda that includes a number of areas:

- Securing broad-based market access through negotiating new bilateral trading arrangements, with strategic partners in the Western Hemisphere and further afield;
- Promoting better utilization of existing market access opportunities;
- Strengthening the institutional and resource capacity to advance Trinidad and Tobago’s trade sector needs in a modern and dynamic trading environment;
- Promoting export of services as a major new area of growth and supporting regional integration initiatives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is where we are going to get the additional business from, creating new export markets.

In delivering the budget statement, the hon. Minister of Finance indicated, and I quote:

“In our strategy for economic transformation, we must look outward to the region and Latin American economies for access to their markets, and for the use of our local services in their own development thrust.”

In this regard, my Ministry has embarked on an aggressive yet measured agenda, and that is the key to it. It is a measured agenda. This is not on a scattershot
operation, like the previous regime. They shoot into the dark and hope “something lash something”, and then you figure you had success. This is a measured agenda to pursue international trade negotiations in Latin American countries, in order to secure favourable market access for Trinidad and Tobago goods and services.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, earlier I spoke about the Trinidad and Tobago/Panama Partial Scope Agreement, which was done collaboratively with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications, which would enable our exporters to gain enhanced market access into Panama. This agreement will allow our exporters to gain a foothold in the Panamanian market which, as you are well aware, is a very strategic trade hub that straddles the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and lies at the crossroads of North, South and Central America, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Next month I will be going to the Caricom Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) for approval of this very important agreement, in keeping with the provisions of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. That is the last hurdle—and I would not call it a hurdle, it is getting Caricom just to stamp and off we go. When this agreement is fully implemented, it would provide our domestic importers with a favourable market access to a population in the vicinity of 3.5 million persons who have a GDP per capita of US $30,000 implying significant purchasing power. So it is a market that Trinidad and Tobago must get involved in.

8.30 p.m.

As part of this aggressive pursuit to establish a foothold in Latin American markets, my Ministry will also be involved in the continuing of negotiations with the Republic of Chile and the commencement of negotiations with the Republic of Guatemala during fiscal 2012. When these agreements are ratified, we would have provided our manufacturers with a market in excess of 30 million persons, and this will lead to the creation of more jobs at home and increased inflows of foreign exchange.

Of interest when you take the Caribbean countries, when you take the Spanish-speaking islands: Cuba, Santo Domingo; you take Haiti, then you take all of Central America, you are now moving from a Caricom market of roughly five million people to a market in excess of 80 million people, and these 80 million people are within a two-hour or two-and-a-half hour flight from Trinidad and Tobago, and that is when we really and truly start seeing serious economic activity.

Let me now turn to the Caribbean—Canada Trade and Development Agreement negotiations. As hon. Members might be aware, the Caribbean—Canada Trade Agreement also known as CaribCan, was due to expire
in 2011. This means that after 2011 your exports to Canada would have faced higher customs duties. By the way, when we talk about PNM promises, since the 2006 budget they spoke about the CaribCan agreement, and that is over five years ago, and they cannot get it done yet. Here it is we started a partial-scope agreement with Panama in serious discussion in December, and we are ready to sign off. And here it is for five years—five years—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You said it already. But you are repeating the same thing.

Mr. S. Cadiz: No. You have to repeat how inefficient the PNM was. That is the sole purpose of this. [Desk thumping] How inefficient you all are. You know, sometimes I wonder if this country did not have the rent from oil and gas, how the PNM would have run this country? Let us not even think about that. [Interruption] Mr. Deputy Speaker, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have my protection. Continue.

Hon. S. Cadiz: In view of this development, Trinidad and Tobago, as part of Caricom, seeks to conclude negotiations of a successor agreement that will lock in existing preferences, garner preferences in additional areas, such as services, and secure expanded developmental cooperation. As we seek to conclude these negotiations in fiscal 2012, the major task will include undertaking extensive national consultations on the proposed agreement and the identification of specific technical assistance projects to support the necessary adjustments arising from a new reciprocal trading arrangement.

In the conduct of these trade negotiations my Ministry does not act alone. Rather, we consult widely with the relevant stakeholders in the public and private sectors, including the Energy Chamber, Point Fortin Chamber, the Greater Tunapuna Chamber, the Greater Chaguaramas Chamber—

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. J. Volney]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, before I sit, dinner has arrived. For those of you interested, please use your discretion to do so. Member, you may continue.

Hon. S. Cadiz: Thank you for the “enlarged” time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is a new one for me. But, basically, this People’s Partnership, we discuss and we
have our stakeholder meetings with every single business organization. We leave none out. Every single time we had a pre-budget discussion and we invited all the various business organizations, whether it was the Point Fortin Chamber, Sangre Grande Chamber, Trinidad and Tobago Chamber, the Energy Chamber, whoever. It is of interest to all of Trinidad and Tobago, including the Chamber in Tobago.

My Ministry has been inundated with glowing reports from business support organizations and executives of conglomerates on the commendable work that our Trade Facilitation Office in Cuba is doing. I mean, these people call. These are unsolicited reports coming in. They call and say what a wonderful experience it was, in dealing with the trade office.

I mean just to give you a very quick figure, because I am going to run out of time. Trinidad and Tobago’s domestic exports to Cuba increased from TT$12.5 million in calendar year 2009; in 2010 we exported $136 million. That is what an efficient, well-run trade facilitation office is going to do. Here it is, we are working very closely with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications to establish new trade facilitation offices in Washington, Ottawa and in London, and that is just the start. So our missions abroad are not going to be just consular missions; they are going to be very heavy duty, aligned to trade. [Desk thumping] That is not something, I believe, that the Member for Point Fortin used to do. In the light of last year’s success and the positive feedback from the private sector, we will be doing these series of different trade offices, our commercial attachés.

Trade finance has been identified by the local business community as a major impediment for existing and potential exporters wishing to exploit foreign markets, including Cuba. We have had problems with that, and through the EXIM Bank we recommended a US $10 million facility which is still to be ratified by the Cuban government, but we hope to have that done very, very soon.

Cooperation agreements and assistance from international development partners will also be leveraged to complement domestic investment in strengthening supply side capacity, and we are working again with support from the IADB, or the IDB as it is now known, the Inter-American Development Bank. We have the Aid-for-Trade initiative, which was introduced by the WTO in December 2005 as a means for supporting developing countries. Again, a lot of these agreements have been signed and a lot of the support is there. And what happened, the support just stayed on a shelf. There was funding available. There were all kinds of programmes available, but the previous administration would just leave it there, maybe because of the rent that we were getting from Galeota. It was of no real interest for them to build it, and we are dusting off all those files. We are
going back to all these various agencies; we are putting in the various trade offices to ensure that we can benefit from all of these, because it deals with all of these developing countries. It is really and truly to teach people—again, the old saying—how to fish as opposed to simply giving them fish. And we do not want any more fish; we want to go and learn how to fish.

When we speak about economic transformation, the Ministry of Trade and Industry places emphasis on nurturing and attracting and enabling the business climate to grow and develop the manufacturing sector as well as the service industries. In the past, the Ministry of Trade and Industry’s efforts have concentrated on developing specific areas of the non-energy sector, and past studies have identified these industries as significant generators of income and employment. We will just go through a couple of them.

The Minister of Finance spoke, for instance, about shipbuilding. When you tell people about shipbuilding in Trinidad, they look at you kind of funny, because they think shipbuilding in Trinidad is going to be about building big super tankers like those built in Korea. What we are talking about, just for the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago, there are among tug boats, crew boats and supply boats, roughly 150 vessels that work the energy sector. Trinidad and Tobago used to produce those crew boats for a long time in the south. I think there were one or two manufacturers of vessels in the south. I do not think that they still do it. And that is what we are looking at. It is being able to build vessels that we can, in fact, build.

So that is something that, without a doubt, can be done. The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprises talked recently about all the new trades and craftsmen and what have you, coming through, so we are working with the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprises in getting that done to ensure that we have those trades available.

We spoke about film and entertainment. Again, these are areas of concern. Why? Because if you have a thriving film industry the dollar goes right down through the system, down to the nuts vendor, down to the taxi driver. That is what the film industry is able to produce. India, for instance, 12—15 years ago, India had no animation business, none whatsoever. It is now a $40 billion business in India. So there is room for a number of other entrants into the market, not only in film but also in animation.

Fashion: people think that fashion is just walking down a catwalk. It is not. Fashion is about costuming; fashion is about the garment industry. Fashion covers the whole thing. Trinidad and Tobago used to have a garment industry many years
ago employing tens of thousands of people and that disappeared. So maybe not the same way that the garment industry operated many years ago, but the fashion industry has huge opportunities available for many, many different people.

So several measures are being implemented to create the environment required for stakeholders in all our sectors to flourish and grow sustainable industries. That is where the Ministry of Trade and Industry is spending its time, in ensuring that these things happen. For those on the other side, who were in government at the time—I cannot remember exactly what year—*Pirates of the Caribbean* was filmed in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and we are very pleased that St. Vincent and the Grenadines was able to benefit from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, but they also looked at Trinidad and Tobago as doing the same film. And you could imagine the hundreds of millions of dollars that were spent on that.

Within recent times the Government has put the necessary instruments in place for Trinidad and Tobago to accede to the—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, especially the Member for Point Fortin, I am having difficulty in listening to the Member who is just six feet away from me. Dinner is here, if you all are so desirous. But, please allow the Member for Chaguanas East to speak in silence; Standing Order 40, the entire thing.

**Hon. S. Cadiz:** Before I go on to that, it is the intention of the Government to formulate a local content policy for promoting the use of local goods and services to further enhance the development and sustainability of local industries. The energy sector has a template for the use of local content, but other industries, such as tourism, have adopted certain elements of a local content approach, and we need to do more to develop a national local content policy that ties into all our sectors. Again, that is going to be a huge boost to the economy, and what we are proposing is that every dollar that the Government spends of taxpayers’ money, that local content is part and parcel of that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another measure in the works is the introduction of an enabling competitive business strategy, the ECB. The ECB strategy is a plan of action that combines all the development initiatives underway to create a competitiveness supporting economic environment. Again, time being against me, I would not go into the whole issue of that but, for instance, with the European Union, the EU is offering budgetary support totalling 16.3 million euros or approximately TT $140 million to help the Government academia and the private sector to implement effectively the initiatives to support the economic transformation of Trinidad and Tobago to a sustainable innovation driven
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economy. It is all there. It has been there for a number of years and yet it just sits there, because people do not know what to do with it. But we know how to go and secure 16 million euros. Have no fear.

Worthy of mention is the fact that all of these initiatives are undertaken through the collaborative efforts of the public/private partnerships. As already mentioned, the development of the ECB strategy was done with the explicit input by, and consent of academia, public and private sector stakeholders.

Also on the business agenda and of great interest to the Member for Tobago East and, of course, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, is the implementation of a Government loan guarantee programme for tourism development projects in both Trinidad and Tobago. This is not only a Tobago initiative; this is for both Trinidad and Tobago and this has already been approved by Cabinet. The GLG, as it is known, the Government Loan Guarantee, will assist in developing public/private partnerships for tourism development projects. I would not go into the criteria, but obviously there is criteria that has to be met.

8.45 p.m.

So, here it is that we would be able to get private equity to invest in these projects rather than Government using taxpayers’ money to constantly be constructing hotels and putting up all of these buildings when there is enough private equity outside there to do it.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What about the $500 million from the Chinese for—[Inaudible]

Hon. S. Cadiz: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now turn to investment which is a catalyst to the future growth and development of our economy. [Interruption] Mr. Deputy Speaker, both of us cannot talk at the same time. [Laughter] Right! Thank you. On this topic, this is on the topic of investment, permit me to mention the impact of crime on the business community in Trinidad and Tobago. Consecutive Global Competitiveness Index reports published by the World Economic Forum have singled out crime as the number one issue when it comes to business activity investment and competitiveness in Trinidad and Tobago.

To this end the People’s Partnership Government has been quite decisive in its approach to handling crime with the decision to enforce a state of emergency. [Desk thumping] While this measure is not an end in itself it is truly a means to an end, but the fact remains that the Government was decisive in making the decision to do it unlike the other side that sat there and watched crime take over this country
in their nine-year stint. [Interruption] With regard to attracting and promoting investment, the Ministry of Trade and Industry will undertake the following initiatives in the new fiscal year: the model agreement for reciprocal promotion and protection of investments. Again, this is something that I cannot go into detail here because I would run out of time, but we have had a model agreement for the reciprocal promotion and protection of investments which has been in existence for approximately 18 years. So we are taking that and we are redoing it, we are bringing it into 2011/2012, and basically what that does, it provides foreign investment with a comfort level for the investments. The amendment to the Trinidad and Tobago Free Zones Act, again we are ensuring that the Free Zones Act covers all aspects of services for people wanting to invest in Trinidad and Tobago in the area of services and not just bricks and mortar businesses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to inform this honourable House that once again the Ministry of Trade and Industry would partner with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association to host the Trade and Investment Convention in 2012, and again we went through the success of that and we will continue with the successes. That is where we are going. We are also going to be hosting the second Caribbean Investment Forum and this forum will have a slight twist to it where we would be having a CEO conference during the forum, and in El Salvador earlier this year with the OAS sponsored forum it was remarkable how CEOs of companies within the region could come together and within hours come up with agreements as to how they would want to proceed with investment, and that is why we are going ahead with the public sector/private sector partnerships.

I heard the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East talking about—

**Hon. Member:** Where is he?

**Hon. S. Cadiz:** He has gone home—competitiveness, where we were and where we were not and what have you.

**Dr. Moonilal:** He was misleading us again.

**Hon. S. Cadiz:** Well, that is a normal thing.

**Hon. Member:** Normal, true to form.

**Hon. S. Cadiz:** When you look at what happened in the—“oh”, look it right here—between 2002 we were ranked on the global competitiveness index, and maybe the Member for Point Fortin, I hope she does not doubt these stats. In 2002 we were ranked 42—[Interruption] global competitiveness index—in 2009 we
went to 92; from 42 in 2002 and I think they had just come into office, so they come into office with those figures, very, very positive, good ranking of 42 and then within seven short years the other side destroyed our competitiveness and put us at 92. Well, the good news, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that for 2009/2010 we dropped to 86, so we are heading back down the road now in the right direction and for 2010/2011 we are down to 81. [Desk thumping] I know small steps but at least we are achieving what we set out to achieve, we are going in the right direction.

So, there are a number of areas again that we have to do work with, for instance the Metrology Act which is the new weights and measures Act which has been hanging around for the longest while and the previous regime did not know what to do with the old weights and measures guys so they could not install the new guys because the old guys were still there and they just left it alone. It seems as though whenever they bounce up a problem the best thing to do was to put it on a shelf and hope nobody ever comes and asks for this thing again, and that is how they operated. So, we have that, that is going to be implemented and we are committed to doing that.

The Cariforum European Union Economic Partnership Bill is coming —to the Parliament and that is going to be finally ratified. That is, of course, the European Union with 27 countries of huge market, and I would like to say that the implementation unit was up and running on Monday gone here, again, something that they could not do and we have been able to do in a short space of time and a number of other pieces of legislation. Again, I know I am going to run out of time, the Investment Promotion Bill, the ensuing legislation is dealing with the foreign used business, again getting that regularized.

An interesting one here was the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Fair Trading Commission under the Fair Trading Act of 2006. Here it is the Act is proclaimed and guess what? The Act is proclaimed and no commissioners are appointed. It makes absolutely no sense, even to me! It makes absolutely no sense! Imagine that! How could you have a Fair Trading Act proclaimed in 2006 and the only way for the Act to really and truly be operational is to have commissioners appointed, but what do they do, “lef” it. Leave it so, and then we cannot do anything under the Fair Trading Act. Okay?

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** Did you do it in the 18 months that you have been here?

**Hon. S. Cadiz:** I am not answering you. [Interruption] Mr. Deputy Speaker, in fiscal 2011/2012 the Ministry of Trade and Industry would proceed with the
establishment of the fair trading commission through the appointment of commissioners, retention of staff, training of commissioners and other members of staff, preparation of guidelines for the conduct of investigations and the development and execution of a comprehensive public awareness public policy. This body would be responsible for the development and maintenance of a fair competitive economy.

The establishment of a fair trading commission is necessary for the full proclamation of the Fair Trading Act and this initiative will facilitate the ongoing trade liberalization and economic reform programmes by mitigating the anti-competitive business practices of firms in the domestic market. In addition, the establishment of this body and the full proclamation of the Act will allow Trinidad and Tobago to remain true to its commitment under the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, but all that augurs well for investment. When people are investing into your country they want to know, does this country operate with rules and regulations? Does it have laws? How does it operate? [Interuption] Therefore, all this can do is add to our arsenal to make this happen.

So, Mr. Speaker, as you know, one of the main legacies of the previous administration was the downward decline in this country’s international competitiveness during their tenure, and again I would not worry to go back there at all, but really and truly we are working very, very hard at ensuring that when it is published next year that we would be right where we expect it to be which is below 50. The use of internationally benchmarked information and communications technologies to improve international competitiveness will be a priority for the Ministry of Trade and Industry in collaboration with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education.

So, we are looking at confidence and implementation, we are looking at building the confidence for the business community, the business community knows they have an open door in the Ministry of Trade and Industry and they have had that since we came into office in May of last year and I think the business community is very pleased with what they see, they have a Government that they can actually talk to, they have a Government to whom they could come and voice their concerns, they have a Government they could come and criticize certain things that maybe are not being done or how we are doing them without the fear of being victimized. So, for the first time in the longest while this is the new way of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago and I think the business community is extremely pleased with that. [Desk thumping]
Just a couple quotes from the TTMA president. Mr. Dominic Hadeed stated and this was published in the Trinidad Guardian on Friday 14, October:

“There…would…be ‘some investment’ by the manufacturing sector as a result of the budget...”

He noted that the manufacturers were very happy to see that much of what they requested appeared in the budget like the VAT refunds. They were pleased overall he said. We saw a lot of things that we did not necessarily request that would be good for the country like in centres for the renewal of the energy industry. One of the things he says, all our engagements with the Ministers were not in vain, it means that we listen. This Government listens to people and we are constantly interacting with the various organizations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one last issue that I am going to deal with—and I saw the Member, she is not here, she has gone—which is these glass bottles in Parliament. [Holds up bottle] Now, when I enquired, because of course the first thing I do with any product that I pick up I look to see where it is made. Okay? The issue here is the Parliament was using too much plastic and here it is they went to glass bottles—[Desk thumping]—environmentally friendly. Now, there are no manufacturers in Trinidad that would produce bottled water with a screw cap like this.

So I have already started speaking to the bottling companies in Trinidad; can they actually produce this? So even though we are using this now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we hope that very soon you will see “Made in Trinidad” or “Produced in Trinidad and Tobago” with one of these things. [Desk thumping]

9.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have come to the end of my contribution. So in conclusion let me assure this honourable House and the national community that this Ministry of Trade and Industry will continue to do all in its power to implement its mandate. And while our main focus in the Ministry of Trade and Industry is not the construction of roads and highways and schools or hospitals, we have been setting the stage for wealth creation, and sustainable development without which little national progress will be made.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to use the last couple seconds that I have to thank the people of Chaguanas East for their support. I know there was a lot more that we would have liked to achieve. I know even up to Saturday with the rains that there was flooding, localized flooding in the area and we are working—I already
spoke to Minister Warner, we already spoke to the Minister of Housing, to find ways and means of alleviating the issue of flooding which again is a major problem in this country. Why? Because it has not been handled for decades, it has not been handled properly. And this People’s Partnership will go after every single area we can possibly fix once it means improving the quality of life for our citizens. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

**The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Dr. Rupert Griffith):** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a distinct honour for me to contribute to my second budget debate as the Minister of Tourism. [Desk thumping] Before going any further in my contribution I wish to express my deepest appreciation and congratulations to the hon. Prime Minister for her leadership skills—her dynamic leadership skills in leading this People’s Partnership Government. [Desk thumping] I also want to congratulate the Minister of Finance who presented a budget in this honourable House, one that clearly indicated that it would stabilize Trinidad and Tobago, put us on a solid footing and take us on the way forward where we could have confidence and faith in our system. So I do wish to congratulate him. I also want to thank all of the tourism stakeholders: the Tobago House of Assembly, the Standing Committees on tourism, both in Trinidad and Tobago, and all of the tourism stakeholders who have worked with us to develop tourism in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I really get into my planned text tonight, I just want to reflect on the debates so far that have been going on. We have been here for about 12 hours and we were also here on Friday until wee hours in the morning—many hours and I listened attentively to the debate.

I want to compliment those Members on this side for bringing the policy formation of this Government [Desk thumping] and talking about our mission as far as how we propose to serve the people and provide for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what good governance is all about, using the resources and the skills of the country in the advancement of all of the people in the country and I appreciate and congratulate my colleagues for doing just that.

Before I go, I listened to the Opposition and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you know I have been in this House since 1991, save and except a term that I was out of the House, and I had the distinct opportunity to sit where you are sitting and to listen to many debates, budget debates and Motions, Bills, the whole works. I want to tell you, I feel very saddened at the quality of the contribution of the Members of this
Opposition. It is one of the weakest Oppositions I have seen and [Desk thumping] and you know really it is a shame because they have ample opportunity to upgrade themselves and lift the standard. [Laughter] Their whole tendency—they need more than a scholarship. Their whole tendency, really, is to look at what we are saying and look for anything that may in their own perception be negative or weak and come in for the kill and hope by so doing the rest of the population looking on through television, radio, and this honourable House, will be happy with that and vote them back into government. That is their mission, but it is not going to happen. It is just not going to happen. I want to tell them if they keep that up, they will be in this House long before all of us depart this wonderful life, I can tell you that.

I am not going to spend a lot of time; my colleagues have spoken all of them referred to the last debate. I want to congratulate my colleague, Mr. Cadiz, who just preceded me, excellent and brilliant contribution. [Desk thumping] I want to congratulate him. But let me just look at one example of the Opposition and the very trivial way they approach things and very important things. The trite level that they pursue from time to time is really, really shameful.

The Member for Laventille East/Morvant, made reference to an article on page 7 in the Express and that is: “Trinidad and Tobago is the World’s Best Tourism Destination.” If anyone read that article they would see the power and extent of this award that this beautiful country won. You will see it.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Award and the extent.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: The extent and the power of this award. I will talk more about that in detail in my text. But I want to tell you, listen to what the Member for Laventille East/Morvant did; she went into the article and talked about, oh, we patting ourselves on our back. We won the award and took one little paragraph out where it talked about cultural patrimony, traditions in offering, tourism, a possibility to participate in impressive paraphernalia festivals such as: Holi, Hosay, Divali, Corpus Christi…and say what is all that. That is trivia, that is nothing to pat yourself about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the very next paragraph, if you will permit me, I will read to you what the President of the European Union Committee on Tourism and Trade said. Let me read this thing to you, the very next paragraphs it said:

“Trinidad and Tobago’s dedication to the protection of the environment especially along the east coast, the wetlands, beaches and ecological and geographical biodiversity was also hailed.
Mr. Caragea, the President, also praised the range of activities which include…” [Interruption]

Miss. Hospedales: Kindly give way Minister.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: “…wildlife, photography in places such as, El Tucuche Reserve, Valencia Wildlife Sanctuary, Caroni Bird Sanctuary, cave exploration at the Gasparee Caves, cycling, hiking and Argyle Waterfall…” and so forth and so on. A whole host of things he outlined here that are beautiful and positive, and that is all the Member for Laventille East/Movant could talk about. What is this all about? But I will tell you all later in my text as I proceed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the budget presented by my colleague the hon. Member of Parliament for Tunapuna and Minister of Finance, manifests a path for steady foundation to economic transformation. It is a path which began last fiscal year leading to sustainable economic growth and prosperity for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, tourism sector overview. Let me give an overview of the tourism sector. Before accounting for my stewardship as Minister of Tourism over the past fiscal year, it is incumbent upon me to inform this august House about the peculiarities of the environment in which the tourism industry laboured over the past year. The last 12 months have been quite challenging for all of us in the tourism industry. The international tourism industry remained plagued by, and is yet to recover from the negative impact of the global economic financial slowdown that started in 2008. The external shocks have impacted negatively on the performance of our local tourism industry at the expense of our forecast for growth in the sector over the 2010/2011 fiscal year. It was a year according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization where robust growth forecasts in the tourism industry in a number of countries had to be modified.

Globally, the travel and tourism sector accounts for approximately 9.1 per cent of world economic output. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimates the sector’s contribution to global economic output at US$5.7 trillion in 2010, which is approximately $100 billion below the pre-recession estimates. So you saw the impact that the word global recession had on tourism globally. Nonetheless, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the importance of tourism in the world economy remains well entrenched. Directly and indirectly the industry employs approximately 8 per cent of the global labour force.

In fiscal year 2010/2011, the tourism sector maintained its well-established position as the Caribbean’s biggest export. For a considerable period this has been
peerless at the commanding heights of Caribbean economic growth and development. Its leading role among the drivers of investment, employment and foreign exchange earnings for most of the members of the Caribbean Community is well documented.

In fact, the economies of most Caribbean countries are classified as tourism-centric. This is contingent on the reality that, on average, the tourism industry accounts for 12.8 per cent of the gross domestic product of the Caribbean countries making us the most tourism dependent region in the world. The Caribbean tourism industry employs 2.1 million people, directly and indirectly. In some of our small island states, the tourism employment labour force ratio is as high as 25 per cent. This means that in these countries the tourism industry is the biggest employer after the public sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the tourism employment or labour force ratio though not that compelling in Trinidad, remains substantial in Tobago. According to the most recent World Travel and Tourism Council data, the travel and tourism industry accounted for 14.7 per cent of the total employment in Trinidad which is the equivalent of 88,000 direct and indirect jobs. So that is not a small feat. The situation in Tobago is aligned closer to that of a number of Caribbean countries. The travel and tourism industry in Tobago accounts for approximately 14,000 direct and indirect jobs, the equivalent of some 47.6 per cent of the total employment on the island.

In 2010, Trinidad and Tobago’s share, of the 5.4 million international stay-over visitors who travelled to English-speaking Caricom countries was 7.4 per cent. These 399,600 visitors generated $538 million direct revenue to businesses in Trinidad and Tobago. A further $7.9 million in airport charges was collected by the State. The total contribution of the travel and tourism industry to gross domestic product of the country has been approximately 10.9 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, when viewed within the context of the Caribbean competitors, Trinidad and Tobago’s current market share of 7.4 per cent is not what is desired nor truly represents the potential of the tourism industry. The effects of the global financial meltdown on Caribbean countries were compounded by the imposition of an airline passenger tax by the United Kingdom government which made the cost of travel to the Caribbean destinations relatively expensive and indeed less economic particularly, in comparison with destination which market similar tourism products.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I recall when the airport departure tax was first implemented last year in the UK, the Members of the Tobago House of Assembly
and myself at the World Travel Market, we had to on the spot determine how this £150 airport departure tax would impact on tourism in Tobago, because as you know the largest visitation to tourism in Tobago comes from the UK, and therefore we had to do something. The Minister of Tourism, along with the Tobago House of Assembly and myself, got together and decided that we would approach the UK government to put a hold on that imposition of the tax which they did not do right away, but eventually, when leaders such as our hon. Prime Minister stepped in, and other Prime Ministers, they put a hold on the tax for one year. But before that hold was imposed, we had to agree to fund part of that airport departure tax: Trinidad and Tobago agreed to pay £100 of the £150 tax so that we could maintain the level of travel and we did that on the spot and it really assisted the travel to Tobago as the main destination.

In consequence, tourist arrival in the English-speaking Caricom member states in past year grew only at an average rate of about 1 per cent. So, notwithstanding the assistance with the airport departure tax, the global recession particularly in the UK, really impacted on the visitation to Tobago and also Trinidad. Among the hardest hit countries as a result of the world recession were: Antigua and Bermuda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Grenada and the Cayman Islands, which reported decline in the international visitor arrivals ranging from 1.3 per cent to 6.6 per cent. As expected Trinidad and Tobago did not escape unscathed.

Estimates undertaken by the Tourism Development Company suggest that for the year 2010, international tourist arrivals in Trinidad declined by 4.6 per cent.

9.15p.m

The situation in Tobago was more challenging, as Tobago’s international visitor arrivals experienced at least a 12 per cent reduction in 2010. Nevertheless, visitor expenditure for 2010 was estimated at TT$3.4 billion which represents a marginal reduction over that of the previous year of approximately TT$3.5 billion.

The impact of the reduction of tourist arrivals in Tobago on the economy of the island over the last fiscal year has been substantially mitigated by the continued heavy flow and domestic tourism to the island. So during that period the situation in Tobago was really saved in my opinion, saved, I use that strong word due to local marketing tourism, we marketed local tourism and it did impact on the economy of Tobago somewhat. Estimates for the fiscal year 2010/2011 indicate that domestic tourism expenditure in Tobago may have increased by 19.8 per cent, relative to the immediate proceeding comparative period.
Cruise tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the international tourism industry, as evidenced by a record-breaking $15 million passenger cruises in 2010, reflecting 20 consecutive years of growth. Despite the current economic challenges facing the world economy, the industry is poised to grow further in 2012. Much of the success of the cruise industry is predicated on the delivery of hassle free and high value for money experiences. The rapid growth in cruise tourism has been ably supported by ongoing expansion in vessel fleets and ship size, continuous innovation and luxury and ship features. Cruise lines have been thriving in North America, and now successfully penetrating markets in the UK, Spain, Italy, Germany, Alaska, China/Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Middle East and Brazil.

Nevertheless, the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico remain the number one cruise destination in the world. Together they account for over 50 per cent of the world’s cruise itinerary. These three areas remain highly attractive to cruisers, particularly during the winter. The prospects of the Caribbean cruise industry remain very bright. We intend in Trinidad and Tobago to explore the opportunities through cruise tourism. There has been a fall-off in cruise passenger arrival in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly, Trinidad. In recent years, this has been due mainly to inadequate and inconsistent marketing efforts, which I am in the process of correcting.

To this end, a cruise coordinator has been appointed on the staff of the TDC, and a small three person high-powered team, comprising the cruise coordinator, a representative from the Ministry of Tourism and the representative from the Port Authority has been established with a specific mandate to drive the development of our cruise tourism industry.

The committee has been diligently addressing the challenges facing the cruise industry and has been collaborating very closely with the THA in this effort. To date a number of significant strides have been made in addressing the challenges facing the cruise industry.

One of these include the resolution of the long, outstanding matter on the return of approximately $6 million seized from the Customs Division in Trinidad to the Pullmantur Cruise Lines. What happened: two of the workers on this cruise line in Jamaica, stole $6 million and came to Trinidad. When they arrived here the Customs confiscated the money—this was in 2009, and when they got here, the matter was litigated in the court in Grenada. It took some time, and what the Pullmantur company did they held Trinidad responsible for returning the money. But it could not have been returned until the matter was fully resolved. The two
persons who stole the money were found guilty and then we went through the process very quickly, even though it did not happen during our tenure—it happened in 2009, and returned the money. The Pullmantur Cruise, which is Royal Caribbean Line, which is one of the largest shipping lines in the cruise business, agreed to come back to Trinidad and Tobago. So that was one problem that the Ministry of Tourism and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had to solve very quickly.

Royal Caribbean has now returned to Tobago, and will be calling with the Azamaras Ship of 800 hundred passengers in the 2011/2012 season. Ada Cruise which did not call at our port since 2007 is scheduled to return to Trinidad and Tobago in the 2011/2012 season with two different ships, each has a passenger capacity of 1,200 persons. The Kristina Cruises, a Finnish ship carrying 350 passengers, will call on both Trinidad and Tobago ports starting in the 2011/2012 season. Further to that, our cruise team has also had talks with Saga Cruises, a European line carrying 500 to 600 persons and they have firmed up three calls to Trinidad starting from 2011.

The Government through the Ministry of Tourism, along with Aruba—listen to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker; listen to this innovative approach that we have taken to sort of keep the cruise aligned and progressing for us. The Government through the Ministry of Tourism, along with Aruba, Bonaire, Colombia, Venezuela, Grenada and Curacao are forging a southern Caribbean partnership focused on attracting cruise passengers to the representative countries. The proposal is for a seven-destination, seven-day cruise-air-hopping among these destinations. But built in to that, is that one, you can enter Curacao for instance, and if it comes to Trinidad and the passengers feel that they want to stay longer in Trinidad or any other port among the seven, what they can do, they can catch up with the said cruise by air and it is at no additional cost. We believe this would generate the cruise business among the seven islands. It makes a lot of sense.

Let us look at the hotel occupancy. Some of the Members of the Opposition talked about filling the rooms. I believe it was the Member for Diego Martin Central who asked the question, what about the room stock and how many people are there? I want to tell him try to book a room at Hyatt any time soon.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What about other hotels?

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Well, the other hotels are putting initiatives in place and they would receive incentive from us—hang on I am coming to what we are doing for the other hotels.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: May I please ask a question?
Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Sure go ahead.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You have given the statistics for Hyatt or you said that there is great occupancy and so on, but what we want to know is about the small and medium-size hotels. What is the occupancy rate? Very simply, you must have that at the top of your head—occupancy rate for small and medium-size hotels.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: You will get it okay. According to the Smith Travel Research Incorporation, that is one of the largest world research companies on tourism in hotel occupancy and other aspects of tourism, it is an international tourism company on hotel occupancy in Trinidad. This is the report. Over the period July 2010 to August 2011, we saw an increase of 7.7 per cent relative to the previous corresponding period—and keep in mind we are doing this against the background of what?—a world recession.

Indeed, according to the report from the Trinidad Hotels, Restaurant and Tourism Association—this is the local organization—Carnival 2011, was an outstanding success in terms of hotel occupancy. The hotel in Port of Spain registered 100 per cent occupancy—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I am not talking about Carnival.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith:—for the period March 4-9, 2011. Did the PNM ever do anything like that during their reign? Never in their history! You should be complimenting the Ministry of Tourism for all of its efforts, so that our hotels could have 100 per cent occupancy during the Carnival period.

What was interesting is that high arrivals were received from the United States, the UK and the Caribbean region, especially Barbados and Jamaica. Visitor arrivals for Carnival 2011, increased 12 per cent when compared to 2010. Some 41,597 visitors came to Trinidad and Tobago during the 20 day period, prior to and inclusive of the Carnival Tuesday, representing the highest level in the four years.

Hotel occupancy levels continue to be problematic in the Caribbean destinations. Many hoteliers in these countries have confronted the problem squarely by offering attractive price discounts and other incentives of preferred package of interest. So a kind of trading and bartering is going on among the hotels in the Caribbean countries to even survive. We in Trinidad are not doing that badly.

In 2009, the average daily room rate in the Caribbean was slashed from US $180 to US $157—a discount of 16.2 per cent. As at July 2011, the Caribbean ADR has been approximately US $174.50, some 7.2 per cent below the 2009 rates. So here again, you see the impact on the fall-off. Interestingly, the initial response of many
hotels in Trinidad to reduction in the rate of growth in hotel occupancy was to increase room rates so as to buffer the reduction in the revenue. This business model has since been abandoned in consequence of the obvious. As at July 2011, hoteliers in Trinidad have been offering an average ADR of about 21.6 per cent below 2009 rates, and it is working because the occupancy rates are improving.

Let us look at future prospects. The current global economic uncertainty poses a significant risk to robust recovery in tourism arrivals in the Caribbean, including of course, Trinidad and Tobago in 2012. The short-to-medium-term economic prospects for our traditional source markets, that is, the United States, Canada, the UK, Germany and the Caribbean region are for the most part mixed. While expansion in overall economic activity in each of these markets is focused, one cannot escape the likelihood that potential tourists from these countries are not immune from the downward economic cycle, which does not portend a quick upturn particularly, in the United States and the United Kingdom.

In effect, visitor arrivals data for January to June 2011, demonstrate the necessity to temper projections in growth rates in the tourism industry for the 2011/2012 fiscal year. But moderation does not portend stagnation or reduction in growth in the industry. Things already point to a reasonable level of optimism. In consequence, the People’s Partnership Government has placed reliance on the tourism industry to assist significantly with its national economic diversification programme through sustainable job creation and poverty reduction.

9.30 p.m.

In May, this year, a US travel agent body—the Travel Professionals of Color (TPOC) announced at its May meeting in Kentucky in United States that Trinidad and Tobago was certified as an Authentic Heritage Tourism Destination. So that was our first international award we won this year in May from TPOC. [Interruption] Who are they? The international rating body for heritage tourism in the world. They came to Trinidad, they visited our heritage, they looked at what we were doing with heritage. And I want to tell you, the People’s Partnership Government approved a note to form a heritage tourism advisory committee to advise the Ministry of Tourism, the Tobago House of Assembly and the Tourism Development Company in keeping with that. So that is our first award. I hope that it is not going to be trivialized by those on the other side, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This certification augurs well for our intent to market Trinidad and Tobago’s unique multicultural experience in the world. Through TPOC, we are going to be on
their website; they are going to market in magazines and several social media for
Trinidad and Tobago as a result of Trinidad and Tobago winning that award. You
quantify it and put a dollar figure on it and you will see the value.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You tell me!

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: I will tell you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of
Tourism and the TDC have put effective measures in place to optimize performance
in the sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker 2010/2011 promise of achievements. So we did make
promises and that was in last year’s budget. The tourism development efforts have
been hamstrung by a sub-operational Tourism Development Company (TDC), the
implementation arm of the Ministry, mainly in terms of less than full complement
of staff. Nevertheless, the majority of the projects we had promised, we delivered.

In my last fiscal year budget contribution on behalf of the progressive
Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I promised to deliver the
following in the 2010/2011 fiscal year. Let us look at beach facilities upgrade. I
indicated that upgrade and maintenance work at the Maracas, Las Cuevas,
Manzanilla and Vessigny beach facilities would have commenced. Mr. Deputy
Speaker, these promised beach facility upgrades were completed; done; project
delivered.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, refurbishment work was conducted by the Ministry of
Tourism on all lifeguard towers at Maracas, Tyrice, Las Cuevas and Salybia.
Additionally, improvement works were done on lifeguard quarters in Quinam and
Salybia. Mr. Deputy Speaker, work done; projects delivered.

Maracas beach, one of our most popular beaches and a destination that most of
the tourists coming to Trinidad and Tobago frequent: as promised, at the Trinidad
flagship beach, Maracas, the TDC did a tremendous amount of rehabilitation works
to ensure that a superior level of amenities would be provided to vendors, tourism
staff and the visiting public. Work done; project delivered.

Extensive upgrade and maintenance works were executed on all existing
vendor huts including electrical, plumbing, masonry and carpentry work to ensure
the huts were compatible with public health and food safety standards. Work done;
project delivered. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when next you feel for a bake and shark,
you can rest assured that all safety measures are in place and you could enjoy your
bake and shark as you wish to. [Crosstalk] Doubles; gyros—what else? Las
Cuevas—I think the Member for St. Ann’s East would be happy to hear that.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, Las Cuevas as promised, upgrade and maintenance works with the emphasis on improvement of public amenities were done within the picturesque Las Cuevas. Work done; project delivered.

Manzanilla beach; three of the four contracts planned for execution at the Manzanilla facility have been completed in time with the infrastructural improvement programmes as mentioned in last year’s budget address. Works done; project delivered.

Vessigny beach facility: I promised and delivered installation of a new power generation system and the installation of the upgrade of the site office for TDC staff has been done in tandem with the improving of other facility infrastructure. The installation of emergency lighting and electrical upgrades for the Vessigny beach are completed. Work done; project delivered.

Mr. Jeffrey: Was there open tender?

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Was there open tender? Mr. Speaker, the zoological society: phase one of the upgrade of the facility at zoo was completed. That was promised; work done; delivered. Phase one. In addition, new species of animals and birds have been introduced at the zoo rendering exhibits more interesting, particularly for educational purposes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, strategies for growth in 2011/2012—the TDC restructuring: the human resource constraint at the TDC has been rectified substantially. It has been restructured for greater operational efficiency and to strengthen the team. We now have a Chief Executive Officer, newly appointed; three line general managers as well as managers dedicated to the strategic development of our most important niche market. This has enhanced our capacity to develop and implement projects and programmes significantly portent of stronger performances in the coming fiscal year.

The tourism action plan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, for fiscal 2011/2012, the Ministry and the TDC will commence the implementation of a 15-month tourism action plan. This has been approved by the Cabinet forecasting the following five key areas and these were mentioned in the budget presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance. These five key areas are:

1. Product development and enhancement;
2. Marketing and public awareness;
3. Competitiveness and investment;
4. Safety, security and access; and
5. Quality assurance of all of our products.

The interim plan lays the foundation for the Five-Year Tourism Growth Strategy and Action Plan, 2013—2017, scheduled for roll-out in the first quarter of fiscal 2013. Cabinet appointed the establishment of an advisory committee on Heritage Tourism to advise the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC on the development and implementation of a comprehensive heritage programme for Trinidad and Tobago.

We have forecast that these activities will increase the contribution of tourism’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by approximately 4.2 per cent. Let me read this again. We have forecast that these activities will increase the contribution of tourism’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by approximately 4.2 per cent over the ensuing three-year period. This growth rate is contingent on a forecast of 3.5 per cent per annum increase in visitor arrivals and 2 per cent increase per annum in tourist expenditure over the next three years.

We are very conservative with our estimates which underplay the ripple of the multiplier effect of tourism expenditure throughout the economy, particularly in heritage, entertainment, culinary, agriculture, culture, sports, medical, and eco and agricultural tourism.

On the 29th and 30th of this year, the Ministry of Tourism would be hosting an International Culinary Competition down at Hasely Crawford Stadium. We are having international—rated chefs coming to our shores. There will be training and there will be a cuisine competition. I want to extend an invitation to all of you to come to this excellent event. Cuisine tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism in the world today; people just love to eat and they love to eat different foods.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in keeping with the principal objective of national tourism policy to develop tourism industry in a sustainable manner, my Ministry will pursue and ensure the development of an appropriate form and scale of tourism, taking into consideration such factors as culture, sub-cultures, history, recreational resources, caring capacity and natural environmental communities. To this end, plans are in place to involve, in 2012, relevant public and private agencies, community groups and other stakeholders in the selected communities.

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. C. Sharma]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker and thank you colleagues for the extended 30 minutes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, further upgrade and maintenance work are scheduled for facilities at Maracas, Las Cuevas, Manzanilla, Vessigny and Toco, as well as advanced training initiatives for employees thereof.

In addition, the TDC has partnered and will continue to partner with Penal/Debe and other regional corporations, organizations, communities and stakeholders and will conduct infrastructural improvements to a number of sites and attractions, including Blanchisseuse, Oropouche West—Member for Oropouche West, I am sure you will be happy to hear that—the Penal/Debe Doubles Pavilion and Knolly’s Tunnel in Tabaquite which will be open in a matter of days.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, similar improvements are planned for tourist attractions in Paramin and Seau d’eau Island. Where is the Member for Diego Martin North/East? So Seau d’eau Island and Paramin are big tourism projects that will make an impact in that constituency. Other sites will be Rio Seco Waterfall; Orosco Road Leatherback Turtle Nesting Site. And the Member for St. Ann’s East raised this issue with me when she spoke on Friday; Fort Abercromby in Las Cuevas—work will be starting very shortly. I enquired and they have done all the planning and they are about ready to start right after this budget debate. I hope that will make you feel good.

9.45 p.m.

Hon. Member: Very good.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Member for Diego Martin West, there are plans also to develop the Blue Basin Waterfall in Diego Martin. For my friend from Caroni Central, with respect to the Chickland Zoo, we will commence work later this year. That zoo—Morvant—[Interruption]

Mr. Warner: Laventille.

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith:—Laventille is still on the drawing board. My grandmother used to tell me “hurry dog eat draw meat”. Wait, your turn will come. We are developing Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are doing. The Valencia Visitor Information Centre, containing—listen to this one; this is another great project—the zoo would be specialized with large animals. While the Port of Spain
Zoo will continue with the smaller animals, the Chickland Zoo will emphasize on animals such as elephants, giraffes, large lions; very large animals. The zoo, according to the consultant, will be designed along the lines of the zoo we saw in India, in Karnataka, and it would be a natural habitat only separated by some high-powered fence, but they would be on the free habitat—

**Hon. Member:** Like a safari.

**Hon. Dr. R. Griffith:**—like a safari. Thanks for that. That is what it would be like. One of the weaknesses in this country, particularly for our local, as well as international tourism is proper bathroom facilities. Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I live in a constituency where there is high tourism visitation, I have seen very often where people would have to stop their caravan or their bus, particularly the females, and they would have to look for the bush or some place. We are building a visitor information centre, containing visitor amenities, craft shops, cafeteria and an interpretive centre, which would be opened in November, next month, right there in Valencia. It would have several toilets, both male and female, a place to eat, a place to relax and even rooms where parents can change their babies. That is the extent of that, and that to me, is a great and badly needed project.

We will embark on environmental education workshops. These are scheduled to be held at least for the next quarter, in two communities to ensure sustainable tourism practices are adopted and incorporated in all tourism programming and products. We will be going from community to community.

On marketing, tourism is a highly competitive business. Effective marketing, therefore, is crucial and it is in this regard that the role of overseas marketing representatives is quite an important one. The Ministry of Tourism has appointed six new overseas international marketing representatives, one in the United States, one in the United Kingdom, one in Germany, one in Canada, one in Scandinavia and, indeed, one market in India. These international overseas representatives will provide advertising, public relations and promotions services to promote and sustain the nation’s tourism thrust.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the marketing plans presented by the representatives have proposed strategic measures to increase visitor interest and arrivals from our traditional tourism source markets as well as potential tourism source markets among the BRICS countries, in particular India.

Branding: we have begun the process to overhaul and rebrand the destination image of Trinidad and Tobago to give it a more attractive face. Early completion of this project in the 2011/2012 fiscal year is of high priority. Before year end, a brand
consultant will be hired to undertake the project. My Ministry, the TDC, the THA, along with a number of stakeholder groups will collaborate with the consultant to advance this process. It is proposed to image Trinidad and Tobago’s capability of offering three protocols in the branding:

1. we will have a Trinidad tourism brand product;
2. a Tobago tourism brand product; and
3. the Trinidad and Tobago tourism brand product.

All before, our marketing strategies branded Trinidad separately and Tobago separately, and in the eyes of the tourists they thought Tobago was a separate country and Trinidad a separate country. What we are seeking to do in this brand is to offer our unique offering of tourism beaches and we will brand those.

It is essential that we derive a brand that is reflective of our uniqueness as a people, reflective of the harmony in our diversity and reflective of our warmth and visitor appreciation.

A few moments about my mission to India in January this year. It is incumbent upon me to give a brief account of the very tangible results of the highly successful promotional mission to India that I had the honour to lead over the period January 11—22, 2011. Visiting the major cities in the Gujarat state: Ahmedabad, Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore in India, the Trinidad and Tobago delegation had several successes in increasing the awareness and visibility of destination Trinidad and Tobago.

A significant amount of publicity was generated in India. Five features in publications, with an advertising equivalency value of US $178,000 and 25 television clips with an advertising equivalency value of US $48,118. Exposure was also extended to non-traditional media channels to include 38 online articles, publications and web features.

While in India, we had three tourism business fora with a combined attendance of over 2,000 persons. Indian visitors, namely Apollo Hospitals Enterprises and Fortis Hospitals also came to Trinidad and Tobago since the mission, to follow up on their interest in exploring opportunities for medical tourism. We are in the final stages of finalizing a memorandum of understanding with the state of Karnataka that will see benefitting from training, transfer of technology, eco-tourism development of sites and attractions, partnering in tourism promotion and several other areas.
In June this year, a high-powered Indian tourism delegation visited Trinidad and Tobago to further discussions on possible areas of tourism linkages. Interest has been expressed in collaborative projects with major private sector associations in India to identify and pursue tourism business and investment opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to go to accommodation. Our tourism expansion plan is predicated in part on strategies to increase the number and improve the quality of tourism rooms, in order to meet anticipated demand in this regard. We are reviewing the tourism investment incentive matrix. An integrant of this matrix is the Hotel and Guest House Room Stock Upgrade Incentive Project. This project makes available a 25 per cent reimbursement of the cost of works per room. The strategy is expected to improve the quality of our hotel and guest house room stock over the next three years. Evidence that this projection will be realized bodes well. Over the last fiscal year, 223 applicants requested finances for upgrade works totalling some TT $10.3 million.

If tourism is to succeed in the defined role as one of the media through which economic diversification will be realized, the industry has to be reshaped so as to make the country a globally competitive destination. Part of the remodelling process will require foreign investment. The People’s Partnership Government will encourage and facilitate the interest of global investors in the construction and management of hotels and the wide range of ancillary tourist facilities. We are especially interested in hotels in the middle range, that is three to four bedroom hotels. The Ministry of Tourism will revise and update its investment incentive package to enhance its competitiveness.

In the last few minutes I have, let me talk a little bit about Tobago tourism development and I will end with the award that we received. As far as Tobago tourism development is concerned, already our room stock constraints in Tobago are being addressed. The Magdalena development, as my colleague, the Minister of Trade and Industry said earlier, the former Tobago Hilton, which is poised to reopen its doors in November this year under a new management, will add some 200 quality rooms for Tobago. This is so important because airlines felt that we do not have the carrying capacity in terms of hotel rooms, and as a matter of fact, two of the airlines, Virgin and, I think Condor were planning to pull out, but now that they know that we would add 200 more quality room stock to the Magdalena— [Interruption]

Hon. Member: Five Star rooms.
Hon. Dr. R. Griffith:—Five Star rooms, they have decided to maintain their flight schedule to Tobago. This is expected to bring much needed respite in the Tobago tourism industry. We may all recall with a measure of dismay, I am sure, the violent crimes inflicted against a few United Kingdom visitors in Tobago in 2009. This was largely responsible for the negative travel advisories which impacted significantly on the already fragile international visitor arrival situation in the island.

It cannot be denied that the state of emergency has negatively impacted on the international visitors’ arrival problem in Tobago. Unofficial data estimates 26 per cent cancellation in room reservations on the island correlated with the state of emergency. We intend to work with the THA to address the issue of crime against visitors and the decline in visitor arrival. Currently operational in Tobago is the THA hotline 211, which is interconnected to all police stations on the island. We intend to collaborate with the THA and the stakeholders in Tobago to provide toll free use of that 211 hotline by international visitors, both in circumstances of distress and for general information on Tobago.

In conclusion, Trinidad and Tobago is an emerging tourism destination whose performance over the past fiscal year has been marred by an unfortunate global economic situation over which it had no control. Being the big secret that we were, we were forced to swim against the raging economic tide of the day, but we did not despair. We stuck steadfastly to the task, manfully, and prevailed against the odds. We were not daunted by the challenges which confronted us. At all material times, we stood in the confidence that the power of the institutional knowledge, due diligence and will was greater than that of pitfalls ahead of us.

10.00 p.m.

We backed ourselves, our People’s Partnership Government backed us and our God saw us over the worst.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what could easily have been a year of despair in the industry, we turned into a year of hope. At least we are now known as the outstanding tourism destination indeed in the Caribbean. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a fact that—[ Interruption]—indeed the world; this is a fact backed by evidence. I mentioned earlier in my budget contribution that Trinidad and Tobago was certified as an Authentic Heritage Destination by the United States body of travel agents, The Travel Professionals of Color in May this year, our first award; and I told you the benefits of receiving that award.
On Monday, October 10th—and as was mentioned by our hon. Prime Minister—I received the news that once again this beautiful twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago was shining brightly on the international stage. On October 09th, in Bucharest, Romania, during the autumn meeting of the European Union Council on Tourism and Trade, the representatives of 27 European Union member states—I repeat that, 27 European Union member states—Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are tourism organizations—voted unanimously, to award Trinidad and Tobago the prize of World’s Best Tourist Destination For 2012, and to declare Trinidad and Tobago the Favorite Cultural Destination in 2012.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the designation of the World’s Best Tourist Destination is the highest honour to be awarded for a country’s achievement in tourism. We are actually the first country in the Western Hemisphere to receive such an award. [Desk thumping] This award is offered to countries which have complied with the United Nations Tourism Division—listen carefully, Member for Laventille East/Morvant. This award is offered to countries which have complied with the United Nations Tourism Division, UNESCO and the European Union, on tourist and trade principles on fair tourism, ethical tourism, safety standards and the historic preservation of cultural sites.

Indeed a four member team from the European Council, led by the Minister of Energy of Romania and the Council Vice-President, arrived in Trinidad and Tobago on Sunday to present the prestigious award to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. This award will be presented on Wednesday this week at 12.30 p.m. at the Hyatt. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to extend an invitation to you and your family and all Members of this House to come and witness this great feat that Trinidad and Tobago, not only the People’s Partnership Government, but Trinidad and Tobago receiving this great international award. You all are welcome to come and witness.

For the sake of general information, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the European Union Council on Tourism and Trade was established in 2005 and its member countries include—listen to this, and all 27 of them voted for us. It includes: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.

The past recipients of this award include: The Arab Republic of Syria in 2007; Turkey in 2008; in 2009 the United States of Emirates and the Republic of Korea (South Korea) in 2010.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand here today a very proud man of the achievements of Trinidad and Tobago. However, this award for the World’s Best Tourist Destination, 2012 really belongs to the hard-working and committed tourism stakeholders, employees and all our organizations that have supported me at every turn. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister and her People’s Partnership Government showed confidence in my Ministry’s development programmes in the coming fiscal year, by approving our plans and financing our key strategies.

The Ministry of Tourism shall not disappoint this Government or the people of this country. We will deliver in times of adversity. Much more lies ahead in more favourable economic circumstances. We are moving steadily from foundation laid last year to transformation of the tourism industry in the coming year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, no rational mind, and I repeat, no rational mind can deny that the prospects are bright. No rational mind can deny that our management of the tourism economy has provided a foundation for which Trinidad and Tobago is being transformed from being the best kept secret under the PNM to among the best known tourism destinations in the world.

We call on those on the other side to sit up, admire, participate and stand on the promises of a more vibrant economy in the coming year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, accept and rejoice and let it be known that 2012 springs hope, mirrored in the transformation and resurgence of the tourism industry and the economy for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I pray God’s blessing on Trinidad and Tobago, on all of us, and I thank you! [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk]

Mr. Sharma: Well done! Well done!

Miss Alicia Hospedales (Arouca/Maloney): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2012. I would also like to thank our political leader, the Leader of the Opposition [Desk thumping] and all of my colleagues for their contributions, their in-depth analysis of the 2012 budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the lack of foresight, incompetence, deception and lack of transparency of the Government which was presented in the budget statement [Desk thumping] of the Ministry of Finance was exposed during the last two days of the budget debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to refer to a newspaper article in today’s Express;
and the headline is “T&T is World’s Best Tourist Destination”. And we see a photo here with the Minister of Tourism receiving a book or—I am not sure exactly—a certificate. Earlier during the course of this afternoon’s debate particularly, the Prime Minister made a groundbreaking announcement that the European Union Council had selected Trinidad and Tobago as the number one tourist destination.

**Hon. Member:** Groundbreaking!

**Miss A. Hospedales:** There was desk thumping and shouts, I mean, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we were in a different place the Members might have been leaping to the sky, you know, celebrating this great achievement. We have learned over the last 18 months by a bitter experience, never, ever believe a —word that the Prime Minister says! [Desk thumping] It begs the question, who are these people who gave this prestigious award to Trinidad and Tobago? Who are these people? And as my colleague says, the Member for Point Fortin, this so-called prestigious award to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like the Minister of Tourism, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, to tell us who are these so-called, prestigious people. The Minister of Tourism, he was not backward, he stood up, he started the debate on talking about this so-called prestigious award and he ended the debate talking about the award again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to tell the Member for Fyzabad, because even when the Member for Fyzabad got up to extend the time for the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, he told him talk about the award. So we are going to be talking about the award now! [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I regret to inform this House that this so-called European Union Council on Tourism and Trade has nothing to do, whatsoever with the European Union. [Desk thumping] And he called out 27 member states, he called each one of them out [Crosstalk] [Interruption], it has nothing do with the European Union, nothing whatsoever!

Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members! Members! Member for Point Fortin, Member for Diego Martin Central, you all allow your colleague—

**Dr. Browne:** We are supporting our colleague.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I am trying desperately to hear, the Hansard recorder is also trying desperately to hear, and the mic system is giving a bit of sound right now. Please allow her to speak in silence, so that we could hear exactly —what is
Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the European Union Council on Tourism and Trade is a tiny—t-i-n-y—NGO based in Budapest, Hungary.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It is a non-governmental organization.

Miss A. Hospedales: It is non-governmental representative of the 27 European Union states. [Desk thumping]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It is an NGO!

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the country which was selected—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Point Fortin!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I am sorry!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If you want to participate in the debate some other time would be fine, not at this time. I am trying to listen to the Member for Arouca/Maloney. Continue, Member.

Mr. Warner: “Have some respect nah!”

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande rightly said that the country which was selected last year was South Korea and this year, unfortunately, Trinidad and Tobago had to be selected. [Crosstalk] [Interruption]—It is an NGO, you all are not listening, are you all paying—Mr. Deputy Speaker, these Members are not paying attention, it is an NGO! NGO! Misrepresenting the truth!

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the Prime Minister of this country to come into this House and stand during a budget debate—it was not just any ordinary debate, on a special occasion during a budget debate to create the illusion that a respectable authority had given this award to Trinidad and Tobago as the —leading tourist destination, this is a shame! [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk] This is a disgrace! Particularly since the entity is a lightweight NGO, and I just want to repeat that, a “lightweight NGO”. I will give you the website just now!

10.15 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on their official website they are calling on people to give funding to them. They raise funds by offering to build people’s websites. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want you, when you are finished to go upstairs in the library and visit www.worldbesttourismdestination.yolasite.com. If you go and visit that site you will see that this European Union Council, it is an NGO, a non-governmental
organization, a tiny non-governmental organization on top of that. You know the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande said that the award was extensive and it was powerful—yes indeed “extensive and powerful”. The website address is the evidence that you have this evening. You can go and visit it and you will see for yourself that this organization is an NGO, and it has nothing to do with the European Union and the 27 member states.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande boasted that the award is going to be presented on Wednesday, come and see, and that the staff—the award, the acclaim should go to the staff. I am sure that the staff at the Ministry of Tourism are ashamed right now to know that this is not even a reputable organization that has given them an award; probably some member from this organization decided to visit Trinidad and Tobago and went back and tell everybody: “Oh gosh, the place was so nice let us give them an award.” This is so shameful, it is disgraceful—misrepresenting the truth.

It is a shame to know that the leader, the head, the Prime Minister came to this House and presented this information as though it is fact. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a shame. I am also amazed that the Prime Minister came to this House today and talked about breach in the Constitution, breach in fundamental rights. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish she were here for her to answer and tell us what happened to the hundreds of persons who have been arrested under the Anti-Gang Bill. What happened to those individuals? Were their rights not infringed? Mr. Deputy Speaker, where was the Member’s voice when many of those individuals were herded like animals and thrown into pick-up vans and taken to the police stations or detention centres? Where was she? Where was the Member? Mr. Deputy Speaker, because these hundreds of individuals their rights have been infringed, today, many of them have sued the State because there was no evidence brought against them with respect to their cases.

The Member spoke about breaching the Constitution, as I said, and I thought the Prime Minister would have lifted the level of debate today when she came, but what we saw here was another of their strategies to deflect from the truth, the reality that they do not know what they are doing. They do not know how to manage the economy—they do not know. The Prime Minister’s decision to bring an old document to use it in a budget debate to us is an admission of the Government’s failure.

I particularly want to thank the Member for Diego Martin North/East for vanquishing the 2012 budget. Taking it apart and exposing the falsehood of the Government. It is a failed budget, and that is what they wanted to deflect from, the
fact that everybody would know that it is a failed budget.

I sat here as a young Member of Parliament in amazement, seeing a woman who claimed to have been here for 17 budgets come to this House and not bring any substance to the budget debate: her contribution, relevance to the budget, focus, contents specific to the budget at present, accountability for their stewardship, for the past 18 months, the Prime Minister gets F-. The Prime Minister gets F- because she did not bring anything of substance to this debate.

I also want to highlight a newspaper report in the Express on September 09, 2011, and it was reported by Anna Ramdass. The report says that:

“The upcoming 2011/2012 national budget will be one that is ‘gender responsive’, Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar disclosed yesterday at a meeting in New York.

Persad-Bissessar was speaking at a side meeting at the United Nation’s 66th General Assembly, ‘Women's Political Participation: Making Gender Equality in Politics a Reality’.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this statement was made on a United Nations platform, at the United Nations 66th General Assembly on Women’s Political Participation. The whole world would have heard this announcement, if it were in Trinidad maybe some people in the region might have heard the announcement, but the whole world heard the announcement that a gender-responsive budget was going to be presented this year by the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, over one month later on October 10, 2011, persons then gathered here, so a lot of people would have gathered with the expectation to come and hear about a gender-responsive budget. They gathered here, they gathered in front their televisions to hear about this budget. I am sure that even world leaders, advocates, champions for gender equally tuned in to hear what this gender-responsive budget was all about. But we all discovered that the term was used simply to impress. The Government failed to understand what must be done before, what must be done during and what must be done after a gender-responsive budget statement is made. One may ask what is a gender-responsive budget? The Member for Couva North should have told us this on Friday when—

**Miss Ramdial:** Would the Member give way?

**Miss A. Hospedales:** No, I am not giving way you had your time. Mr. Deputy Speaker—
Miss Roopnarine: Do not worry, I will deal with her.

Miss A. Hospedales: A gender responsive budget is a budget that acknowledges the gender patterns in society, and allocates money to implement policies and programmes that will change these patterns in a way that moves towards a gender-equal society.

I return to the point of what must be done before, during and after a gender-responsive budget. Mr. Deputy Speaker, before a gender-responsive budget is done what the Government should have done was their research, for instance, in an IMF report on gender budgeting the country of Belgium—the Government of Belgium, what they did when they decided that they wanted to go the way of a gender-responsive budget, the first thing they did was a situational analysis to see whether a gender-responsive budget would have been feasible for implementation in that particular country.

The second thing that they did was engage their stakeholders who would have been persons in civil society, the partners like NGOs, they engaged these people, they engaged the population as a whole informing them about what a gender-responsive budget was all about. The third thing they did was ensured that they built capacity amongst the civil servants, the persons who would have been responsible for the implementation of the policy.

All of these things were done to ensure that they educated the population and they ensured that they prepared those persons who would have been responsible for the implementation, that these people would have understood what gender-responsive budgeting is all about, would have set targets, would have been able to accomplish the goals that they have set out to accomplish. The research that was done before helped them to realize that they were already conducting gender-responsive budget work, and they also found out that some of the information that they needed to ensure that the gender-responsive budget, the implementation of the gender-responsive budget, they realized that it was not disaggregated according to male/female and they needed to ensure that the data was there to support the work that they would have had to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the UNC-A Government had taken the time to do these things they would have realized that under the People’s National Movement, gender-responsive budget work has been a major focus, and if this were not so under the People’s National Movement females would not have surpassed males in
education. And what we have seen because of the gender-responsive work that has been done over the years, we realize that now males are marginalized and as a result there has to be a significant focus on them. And even in our time there was some measure of focus being placed on males, especially males between the ages of 15 to 29.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is under the PNM that this country placed 21st on the Global Gender Gap Index surpassing other developed countries. Under the PNM, females attained equal opportunity for employment, ownership of property, credit; they were never restricted with respect to their freedom. No legal restriction existed to prevent them from purchasing land. There are so many things that happened in Trinidad and Tobago with respect to gender equality. All of this happened under the People’s National Movement. Under the People’s National Movement there was a higher percentage of women represented in the Parliament, and even in this House today there is a greater percentage of female Members of Parliament represented in the People’s National Movement compared to those that are represented in the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for lack of preparation before a public statement is made about conducting a gender-responsive budget, I give the Government a fail—an F, because they did not understand. The statement was declared, they did not do their research, they did not understand what needed to be done before. So I give the Government an F.

The IMF stated that in the “during phase” in gender-responsive budget statements, there are certain things that you have to look for and the first thing they said is that the statement of intent of the Government, you have to look for that, because it signifies whether the Government is committed to gender equality, whether they are committed to reducing gender discrimination.

10.30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is often the opening statement of a gender responsive budget made by the Minister of Finance on behalf of the government. If we were to go to page 4 of the budget statement, the Minister of Finance opened with this statement. Firstly he said: “It is a privilege to deliver the second Budget of the … Government” et cetera, and then he said:
“I would like start by quoting a statement made to this honourable House on September … of this year.”

He went on to state that:

“A failed state is where crime and violence becomes the norm. A lawless society takes over driving law-abiding people out. The state of emergency is not something we picked out of the sky…”

He went on to say that:

“…these inspirational words have set the stage for today’s discourse, disclosures and decisions. They will inform our Budget Statement for the fiscal year 2012.”

Automatically, we saw that this budget was not gender responsive because of the statement that was made by the Minister of Finance; it is not a gender-responsive budget. The statement must be clear, concise and must indicate the Government’s commitment to gender equality.

The opening statement made by the Minister of Finance does not display the Government’s understanding of a gender-responsive budget and it does not qualify. Further, out of the 51 pages in this budget statement—51 pages that consist of over 14,000 words, only two lines—

**Mr. Sharma:** You count it?

**Miss A. Hospedales:**—highlighted the Government’s desire to make any concrete advances to gender equality, and it was statement made by the way; it was a by the way statement—

**Hon. Member:** Poor, poor, poor.

**Hon. Member:** PR gimmick.

**Miss A. Hospedales:** Twenty words, just a speck in the budget statement that consisted of 14,000 words. Also, on page 21 of the Medium-Term Policy Framework 2011 to 2014, only one paragraph out of 124 pages, only one very small paragraph was dedicated to gender equality. This is the commitment that they have towards gender equality.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if this is the way the Government measures its commitment to gender equality through their non-existent gender-responsive budget, because the budget is not a gender-responsive budget, then they have failed the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They have failed the women of this country.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are experts in using rhetoric and we have seen them on display today, from the Prime Minister to the Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Trade, name it, they have all stood up here and let us know that they are experts in rhetoric and using flattering words. Non-performers who lack leadership, they are the coalition, and I call them the coalition of the incompetent.

Dr. Browne: Flattering words.

Miss A. Hospedales: I heard someone say that the Minister of Finance is really stuck in doing the traditional type of budgeting, and that is why we did not have a gender-responsive budget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do blame the Minister of Finance you know, he got caught in the web where there is no leadership, not even the person who declared that there was going to be a gender-responsive budget, understood what it was all about. So, how could the Member for Tunapuna understand what a gender-responsive budget is, if he was not provided with direction from the leader. This is just a case of the blind leading the blind. [Desk thumping]

The budget statement lacks disaggregated data, there is nowhere in here where you find data; nowhere. We can find disaggregated of males against females, the issues that are facing them, nowhere in this budget statement, and I heard the Chairperson of the National Network of NGOs say that she will accept that the NIS pension increase was a gender response but where is the disaggregated data to support this statement? A statement like that cannot be supported if there is no gender-disaggregated data.

How many men and women will benefit, that is question you know, the Minister of Finance needs to tell us that. How many men and women would benefit from this initiative? Would this impact significantly and improve their standard of living; we need to hear—I wish the Minister of Finance were here.

For the second phase with respect to understanding on how to go about doing a gender-responsive budget they said that “during phase” which significantly focuses on the examination of the budget statement to see whether it was gender-responsive, and again we went through the statement and from the statement we concluded, it was not a gender-responsive budget.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they did not even understand what they needed to have done, they failed in providing making a commitment to the people of this country.

The third area of focus is what occurs after the budget statement is made—[Interruption]—yeah, yeah, they will get a certificate of participation.
[Laughter] For all of the information that I am providing, they will get a certificate of participation.

Mr. Speaker, if there is no data the implementation will fail, and I did not say this you know. The IMF is saying that if there is no data—no disaggregated data—the implementation of a gender-responsive budget is going to fail. The Government failed to also get buy-in from those persons who are responsible for ensuring that the policies and programmes would be implemented. [Crosstalk] And although, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I indicated before, gender-responsive work was being done under the People’s National Movement in the past to bring us to the point where we are 21st in the world for gender equality. In order for the budget to be implemented there requires greater focus, commitment, accountability, and as a result the capacity development of the implementers is necessary. They need to be able know their targets and the impacts, the policies, programmes, the budget allocations and the expenditure will have on the beneficiaries.

Mr. Speaker, just to re-emphasize the point, the UNC-A Government failed to make the relevant preparations before making the declaration that there is going to be a gender-responsive budget. They failed to present a gender-responsive budget, and they failed to ensure that they had the data that was necessary to implement the gender-responsive budget, according to the IMF.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another area that I want to focus on is the fact that the Minister of Finance announced that a theme for this year’s budget is, “From steady foundation to economic transformation”, this is the theme of the budget statement. The theme does not reflect the reality of what the Government has done to this country’s economy. Last year the Minister of Finance said that they were going to turn the economy around, and certainly they did. They turned the economy around from economic stabilization to economic stagnation. As a result of this a more accurate and a more realistic theme for this budget is on shaky foundation to deepening economic destabilization.

The UNC-A Government did nothing in the past 18 months to stimulate the economy, not one thing, except for a decline in economic activity, that is what they did, they declined economic activity. The Prime Minister has said that “they have been delivering the dreams of the people”, and this dream must be a nightmare, because they have not done anything to stimulate the economy.

Let me highlight the Member for Chaguanas West—and even the Prime Minister talked about their successes, let me talk about their failures right now. The UNC-A Government caused a decrease in investor confidence. When I was thinking about this point I remember long ago, under the NAR government there was a
“Chase Charlie Away” campaign, but you know what happened, under the UNC-A Government there is a chase investors away campaign.

The Minister of Tourism, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, talked about the decline and persons coming to this country. Oh, you know what, today he talked about the increase in people coming to the country but in yesterday’s Guardian there was an article about SoE is what, is bringing a boost to local tourism, but in the article, it is really kind of contradictory. In the article the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande said that there was a decline in persons coming to this country for business purposes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas East did not tell us that they did nothing to stimulate the construction industry. He talked about all sort of things that they “claimed to have done”, they did nothing to stimulate the construction industry causing a construction decline.

Mrs. Goppe-Scoon: And loss of jobs.

Miss A. Hospedales: A construction decline of 28.4 per cent in 2010 with a projected further decline of 7.9 per cent in this year. This also had significant impact on the cement industry which experienced a 19 per cent decline by the first quarter of 2011 of this year with further projected decline of 11.9 per cent by the end of this year.

There was also a 26.1 per cent reduction in concrete products, inclusive of concrete blocks and ready mixed concrete. This is their track record.

Dr. Browne: Their legacy.

Miss A. Hospedales: They chased visitors away rather than increasing the number of visitors that came to this country.

Here is what happened: cruise ships docking in Trinidad and Tobago decreased by 26.7 per cent. Cruise ship visitors—he is asking me; just imagine the Member is asking me, where did I get that from? No—it is found in the economic reports, so, if you take your time—the Review of the Economy.

Mrs. Goppe-Scoon: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

Miss A. Hospedales: Member for Toco/Sangre Grande when you go home get your book and review your notes. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, cruise ships docking in Trinidad and Tobago decreased by 26.7 per cent; cruise ship visitors fell by 23.7 per cent for persons coming to Trinidad and Tobago, and 12.2 per cent for those who visited.

10.45 p.m.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, air visitors decreased by 21.2 per cent, those visitors who were coming to Trinidad, while air visitors to Tobago fell by 31.3 per cent. The Member for Point Fortin asked about the occupancy rate for small and medium-sized hotels and she has not gotten a response. We know why; because there has been a significant decrease in visitors coming to this country.

Yachts visiting Trinidad and Tobago in 2009 were 1,379. This decreased by 1,080 at the end of 2010. In April of 2010, under a PNM government, 113 yachts visited. By October 2010, only 39 visited.

There was a significant decline also in the production of 11 out of 15 vegetables. There was a decline in the production of bodi, pumpkin, cucumbers, melongene, cauliflower and pak choy. [Crosstalk] That is their performance. Rice production decreased by 53.2 per cent. Meat broiler production decreased by 9.3 per cent and there were also significant decreases in pork, dairy, beef, et cetera.

In this instance, many things they put their hands to do decreased. [Interruption] That is right. The Member for Diego Martin Central said no wonder they prefer to talk about 2004, rather than 2011. They also have a significant history of causing increases that reflect negatively on their performance, which also highlights their failure to manage the economy. This is their legacy.

The following increases can be noted. They increased the unemployment rate in 2010 to 6.4 per cent. In the first quarter of 2011, the IMF recorded a higher figure of 7.4 per cent and I am sure by now, if they were to recalculate, they would realize it was much higher.

Under the PNM, there was full employment. The Prime Minister said that no one would be left behind, but I would like her to tell that to all the contract workers that have been fired during the last 18 months and see what they will tell her. Approximately 53.3 per cent of young persons under the age of 29 years are unemployed to date. This is the direct result of the Government’s policy to fire everyone that would have been employed under the People’s National Movement’s administration. This is a sign of their lack of prudent leadership and the inability of the Government to steer the nation in the right direction.

The Minister of Finance also gave an example of what has happened to them. In 2010, he said that they stood at the edge of a cliff. They looked up and they looked down and stopped and decided what to do. They decided to take the nation in a downward direction. Rather than look to God to help them to lead this nation in the right direction, they turned to themselves and said, we can do it.

We have seen the devastation that they have caused. The job losses were
registered in industries such as wholesale and retail trades, restaurants and hotels; 10,300 persons in 18 months. In the petroleum and gas industry, there were 1,500 workers; community and personnel services, 900 workers were unemployed. They are all unemployed today and all this happened in 2010 during their tenure.

If we were to recalculate these figures, we would realize that they are even much higher today. Many people have been sent home; their work hours have been reduced, especially those persons who work shift. The state of emergency has negatively impacted on many of them. Some persons are unemployed; some have less work hours; some have less work days.

Is this the Promised Land that the Prime Minister is talking about? I read my *Bible* and it talks about the Promised Land being a place of abundance and blessing. Is this the Promised Land? A place of lack where people are unable to support themselves; a place where they can hardly survive? Is this the Promised Land that she is talking about?

I met a young woman on Facebook probably about a month ago and she told me she was unemployed as a result of the state of emergency. She used to work in a restaurant and because the employer was unable to pay her because of the losses incurred, she was sent home. At the time, she was unable to pay her rent because she had no money. She was unable to purchase food and, as a result of her unemployed status, her landlord was threatening to put her out. Not only that, she is six and a half months pregnant and it is a high-risk pregnancy. Undue stress would cause her to lose her baby. She was given assistance to cover her rent until the birth of her baby, but the question is what is next for her after the birth of her child.

The unemployment rate is so high that the challenges that she may face to get a job, she may not be able to overcome. I do not think the Government understands the devastation it has caused to individuals and families in this country. If this is a reflection of the Government’s employment policy, I would say, God help Trinidad and Tobago. All the people of this country have experienced from this UNC Government is devastation in government.

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

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

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Miss A. Hospedales:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I would like to
thank my colleagues, the Member for Laventille West, Members on this side and even on that side for giving the extension.

I was saying that all the people of this country have experienced from the UNC-A Government is disaster in governance, disaster in economic management, disaster in health care, disaster in foreign policy, disaster in energy, disaster in education, disaster in poverty eradication, disaster in the AG’s office, disaster in national security, particularly with the state of emergency. All these negatives have occurred because of the bad decision-making of the members of the UNC-A Government, the coalition of the incompetent.

They appear to be out of touch with reality. I heard the Member for Chaguanas East talking about all that was said last year during the budget debate as though last year is today. It really tells us they are out of touch with reality, thinking that the budget they have presented will make a difference and transform the economy. We know otherwise.

They have presented another deficit budget. Last year they came and presented a deficit budget and they came again and presented another one, a $54.6 billion budget and an overall deficit of $7.6 million, with the intention of spending $154,520.58 per day and over $6 million every hour. This is what they have passed. In our time, they talked about squandermania. This is squandermania. They have not convinced anyone that they will transform the economy.

Listen to what others had to say about the budget and this is found in the Express on Tuesday. It is not the paid bloggers. One person said that the expected stimulation of the economy would not happen in an environment of mistrust, perceived victimization, ministerial high-handedness and continued governmental missteps and favouritism, “Reshmism” and “Bassantism”.

That is what one person said. The paper is here for your record. Another person said:

That is a budget of fear and intimidation. Nothing tangible was said. A little amnesty here; a pat on the back there. Some pensioners just got a raise of just over $100 on their pension and overall this budget does not indicate where the country is going. 2012 will just be like 2011, full of ideas, promises and very little action. Trinidad and Tobago will be dead and stagnated in the water come 2012.

One other person said:

Sorry, I just think it is a little ironic. Here is Dooks presenting a budget in the same building the partners criticized as a waste of money. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Deputy Speaker, the repercussions of their robust spending measures are quite evident. The Government’s public sector debt will increase significantly. The Minister of Finance failed to tell us in his budget statement how much it will cost the taxpayers to establish the National Infrastructure Bank. How will this be operationalized and which institution will be responsible for its supervision?

He also failed to tell us whether the NIS fund can support the $1,000 increase in pension. Will this result in the current NIS contributions being increased? He did not tell us that. Who will be financing the pension for 15,000 self-employed persons who would have made significantly fewer contributions than employed persons who have been making contributions for the entire duration of their work life?

Can the Minister please clarify for us the initiatives that will revitalize the economy? We are at a loss. Why are there no developmental initiatives for the south-western peninsula?

11.00 p.m.

Can the Minister tell us when the land and building tax will be reintroduced? What strategies are in place to reduce food prices so that the average householder would have a great supply of food? Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister said that food prices are down, but I am sure, if he makes a regular visit to the supermarket, he would realize that that statement was not a statement of fact. Can the Minister tell us whether the unit holder, under the Clico trust would be taxed for the increase earned under the trust? What are the proposed legislative amendments that will result in the substantial increase in donations to NGOs? Can the Minister tell us the Acts that would have to be amended as a result?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, $108.9 million was spent on the Ministry of the Attorney General for forensic investigations and legal fees, et cetera, and over $94 million was estimated to be spent for the payment of legal and other fees this year. This money could have been better utilized for transforming communities—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Gender studies!

Miss A. Hospedales:—yes, for gender studies, and for conducting a number of exercises or programmes and implementing policies. Mr. Deputy Speaker, additionally, the $94 million that was spent on CEPEP in 2010 that was increased in 2011—CEPEP got $367 million, and in 2012 CEPEP is getting a further $320 million which is estimated to be spent in 2012. This could have been used for the empowerment of the less fortunate; conducting drainage studies and building
drains to relieve flooding in communities such as Bon Air Gardens, Arouca, Maloney and Trincity. [Interuption]

As part of their campaign promise, the people of this country were told that there would be no more flooding but, to my surprise, I heard the Member for Chaguanas West saying, “Do not blame me, blame the PNM.” As part of their campaign promise, they said no more flooding. They told the people of this country that, and he is saying, “Do not blame me, blame the PNM. Mr. Deputy Speaker, he failed to fulfil his promise and then he says, “Do not blame me.” I could understand that the Member does not have time to do work, because he is preoccupied starring in videos.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, can the Minister of Housing and the Environment tell us, where are the CEPEP teams the Government has increased? How many of them?—because we are not seeing the evidence. The evidence of their presence is lacking in many communities. Where do all these teams work? Where are they? Where is the clean and beautiful programme? We are not seeing the evidence of this programme. I am asking these questions, because on—I am sorry that the Member for Barataria/San Juan is not in his seat. On July 29, 2011, the Minister of Health declared that there was a dengue outbreak in Montague, Trincity; the Third and Fourth Streets, East Montague. He told us this, and this was far from the truth, and it was rather an irresponsible statement that was made by the Minister of Health, because there was only one case found in Montague, Trincity.

This declaration was made on July 29 and since August 02, I have been appealing to the CEO and the chairman of the Tunapuna Piarco Regional Corporation to cut the overgrown areas in and around the Montague area, but there has been no response to date. The football field—I wish the Minister of Local Government were here. If he would go to the Montague area and look at the football field, it is five feet high in grass. The residents cannot use the football field. [Desk thumping] I am saying all this to say that the Government is not serious about dengue prevention. [Interuption] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek your protection.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, allow the Member for Arouca to speak in silence, please.

**Miss A. Hospedales:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there really such a thing as a gender-prevention strategy? I wish the Minister of Health were here to answer this question.

I am also appealing to the Government to take a more proactive approach and ensure that the overgrown areas, not just in Montague or other parts of the
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[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Arouca/Maloney constituency, but all constituencies are cut to ensure that there is a decreased risk of dengue.

Can the Government tell us what will be done to reduce the suicide rates? Yesterday, it was stated in the newspaper that Trinidad and Tobago is ranking second in the English-speaking Caribbean for suicide and Canada is ahead of us. Can the Members tell us what will be done to reduce the suicide rate? The Member for Arima is saying that people are frustrated. Yes, they are frustrated because they have no jobs. That is why they are frustrated. What strategy would be employed to reduce the number of newly diagnosed HIV/AIDS infections? This issue is of concern to me, because there are currently 25,000 people living with HIV/AIDS in this country, and if there is not a comprehensive prevention strategy, the number of infected persons will increase. Mr. Deputy Speaker, any responsible government will know that it has to invest in a prevention campaign to ensure that the numbers do not increase. There has been a registered increase over the last 18 months. Could someone tell us why the National AIDS Co-ordinating Committee was disbanded? Could someone tell us why?

The issue of domestic violence has also been on the increase. We have seen the most heinous domestic violence acts, the worst ever recorded in history has occurred under this Government. Can the Government tell us how they intend to respond to this social issue? Can they tell us? These are critical issues that must be addressed and were not mentioned in the budget.

Over the last 18 months, the Government, to deflect attention from their non-performance—I must say, what is the Government’s poverty reduction strategy? Is the Government serious about poverty reduction? Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me tell you this. On page 23 of the Budget Statement it says, the Minister of Finance stated that poverty increased to 17 per cent, so that is 221,000 people of the population. Guess what happened again? The Medium Term Policy Framework for 2011—2014 laid by the Minister of Planning and Economy on the same day of the budget highlighted the figures from the survey of living conditions and based their poverty reduction strategy on 16.7 per cent. That is the rate of poverty for the year 2005. He based their poverty reduction on that. That is found on page 18 of this document.

On page 35 of the Social Sector Investment Programme, it is stated that the Central Statistical Office in September revealed that 21.8 per cent of the population is now living below the poverty line. So, you see, there is a lot of confusion. They do not even know what the real poverty statistics are.
Today in the *Guardian*, we have the Minister for Community Development stating in a big long statement about poverty reduction, that 17.9 per cent of the population is living in poverty. Mr. Speaker, you see the confusion. The Minister of Finance is saying one thing; the Minister of Planning and the Economy is saying another; the Minister of Community Development is saying another and then the Central Statistical Office is presenting the most accurate figures—21.8 per cent of the people are living in poverty. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 283,400 people are living in poverty today. [Desk thumping] The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre did not know this, because when he came and he talked about poverty and poverty rates and so, he did not know this. This is a good example of the lack of transparency of the Government.

The Member for Chaguanas East said that the Government is transparent. He said the Government is responsible and that is so far from the fact. Mr. Deputy Speaker, based on the percentage used by the CSO and the statistics used by the Minister of Finance, when you calculate it, you will find 64,000 people would not have been accounted for by the Minister of Planning and the Economy in his implementation of their poverty reduction strategy. This is shameful; disgraceful and pathetic. [Desk thumping]

The Government has already failed all of these people who are living in poverty. One does not know what the other is doing. There is no agreement. They operate by “vaps”. Earlier someone was talking about the Government does not operate by “vaps”; the Government operates by “vaps”. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was saying that. Where is the clear thinking, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was talking about?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as part of their poverty reduction strategy, they are proposing to restructure the economy to provide meaningful income. Generating opportunities for sections of the population have traditionally operated on the margins of the economy. That is found in their policy framework. We have heard nothing to convince us that they are going to transform the economy in a way that will generate wealth, [Desk thumping] that will break the cycle of poverty and enable self-sufficiency. We have heard nothing of that. We have heard nothing about that.

What we have seen on this side is a government’s commitment to increasing poverty, because over the last 18 months that is what they have done by causing many persons to be unemployed. Mr. Deputy Speaker, no jobs equals no money, equals poverty. This is simple, simple to understand. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Deputy Speaker, can the Minister of Finance tell us how many women are living in poverty? I am sure he does not even know. How many women are living in poverty? How many have fallen below the poverty line? Why I am asking; the Survey of Living Conditions indicated that the female heads of households are most likely to be poor.

The Minister of Finance stated that poverty levels are rising. Again, this is on page 23 of the Budget Statement. Poverty levels are rising to 30 per cent in geographic areas. Could the Minister tell us, why there is not significant focus on Sangre Grande, Princes Town, Rio Claro, Siparia and the Borough of Point Fortin?

[Desk thumping] Let me go back to Siparia. A councillor in the Siparia borough said that Siparia is neglected. [Crosstalk] Yes, a councillor reported that in the newspapers yesterday. [ Interruption]

Hon. Member: It is not a borough.

11.15 p.m.

Miss A. Hospedales: In the consequence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, why was there not significant focus on the Borough of Point Fortin, or Port of Spain, Tobago, Diego Martin and San Juan/Laventille? Why I am asking this, if the Government were serious about poverty eradication, they would realize that in the Survey of Living Conditions there are communities highlighted with high levels of poverty, and they have made no mention about focusing on these areas. [Crosstalk] According to the Survey of Living Conditions these areas have high levels of poverty. What has been done in the past 18 months to ensure that there is a decline?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask for your protection.

Mr. Sharma: From what?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have my protection.

Miss A. Hospedales: And injury time as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on page 20 of the Public Sector Investment Programme there is a list of communities that were specifically targeted during the period 2010/2011 for poverty reduction, none were from Sangre Grande which records the highest levels of persons living in poverty. None were recorded for Princes Town, Point Fortin, Port of Spain or San Juan/Laventille. The Government’s claim that it is serious about poverty reduction is just a facade, certainly not a priority concern. [Crosstalk]
Could the Minister of the People and Social Development tell us why 3,000 people were removed from the targeted conditional cash transfer programme, after a comprehensive sterilization programme was done by professionals, in partnership with the staff from the Ministry? Could you tell us why? Could the Minister tell us what the criteria were for removing these persons who would have been reassessed by a reputable researcher in partnership with the staff as well?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about the direct effect initiative, as a poverty reduction strategy. This is a joke, a big joke. I want to ask the Minister: why was Maloney left out of the list of communities that had the direct effect initiative? [Desk thumping] Do you know why? [Crosstalk] Let me tell the Deputy Speaker why. This is what happened: we recognized that this was one of the biggest public relations gimmicks that was conducted. This direct effect initiative was held in the Maloney area. The Member came two hours late, and not only that, there were no arrangements for people to talk about their concerns in privacy. Groups of people had to huddle together and talk about their business openly to the worker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, their dignity and worth were ignored. [Crosstalk] The disabled and elderly were sidelined.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Diego Martin Central, you are facing the Member for Arouca/Maloney, but I am hearing your voice. The Hansard reporter would like to record the events happening here. Members on both sides, please allow the Member to speak in silence.

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said the disabled and elderly were sidelined. There has been no response to their concerns from the Ministry to date.

I just want to talk a little about the constituency of Arouca/Maloney. I would like the Minister of Community Development to tell us when the community centres for the Bon Air Gardens and Trincity would be built. [Crosstalk] I would also like the Minister of Education to tell us when the ECC centres for Bon Air Gardens, Arouca, Maloney and Trincity would begin. The Minister came to this House and told us that Arouca ECC Centre would have been built in August of this year, and the one in Bon Air would have been built in October. We have not even seen the turning of the sod or even any form of construction. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, could the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs tell us when the upgrade of the Clayton Ince, Bon Air Gardens and Henry Street recreational grounds would begin. Approximately five months ago, he came to this House and said that there was a survey being done and that all the work would begin on all
recreation grounds, once the survey was completed, but this has not taken place. So I would like the Member to tell us what is the revised commencement date for these recreational grounds.

Could the Minister of Works and Infrastructure tell us when the river above Bacaday Junction, Arouca, that flows under the Priority Bus Route, would be desilted. Almost a year ago, a letter was sent with respect to desilting that river, it is still not done.

As indicated earlier, a comprehensive drainage study needs to be done for communities such as Bon Air Gardens, Trincity, Arouca and Maloney as well as surrounding constituencies. Lopinot, Bon Air West and D’Abadie/O’Meara would benefit if they get at the root causes of flooding in those areas. I am appealing to the Minister of Works and Infrastructure to make this a priority on his list of to-dos for constituencies, while he is still in office. [Crosstalk] I am also including the road paving and patching request that was previously submitted. Can you tell us when would road paving work begin, particularly in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney?

I would also like the Minister of Public Utilities to pay special attention to water shortages experienced by residents in Maloney, Trincity, Dinsley, Red Hill, D’Abadie, Arouca and Bon Air, particularly during the day and on weekends. [Crosstalk] [Interruption] In these communities there is a high level of senior citizens, and many of them are home during the day. As a result, if water goes during the day, they are unable to bathe and do their chores, so we are asking that they look at the water supply with respect to ensuring there is water in the tap during the day.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other issue I want to talk about is the need for a comprehensive traffic management plan for areas such as the Cane Farm Junction, Golden Grove Road, Lopinot Road and even the main road. [Desk thumping]

**Hon. Member:** That is representation!

**Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan:** PNM did nothing for you! You want the People’s Partnership to do it for you. [Crosstalk]

**Miss A. Hospedales:** We are also making a request for the possibility of having agricultural development in the Arouca area. [Crosstalk] We are asking for the EMA to come in with respect to noise pollution.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, in closing this year’s budget contribution—[ Interruption]

Hon. Members: “Raaay”! [ Desk thumping]

Miss A. Hospedales:—it is not sustainable. It lacks initiative that would promote economic transformation. It certainly is not a gender-responsive budget, and the theme that reflects what the Government is doing is on shaky foundation to deepening economic transformation, so it is certainly a seismic shift that could lead to further destruction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [ Desk thumping]

The Minister in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Stacy Roopnarine): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute, this being my second contribution to a budget debate in this honourable House. As I begin, I want to firstly commend the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance for having the vision to execute a people-centric budget. [ Desk thumping]

I would like to spend just a few moments on the Member for Arouca/Maloney’s contribution, because it really does not deserve more than just a few moments. [ Desk thumping] I want to share with this honourable House a few things she said in an attempt to mislead this House and fool the population, because that is PNM style.

Firstly, she criticized the Minister of Tourism saying that the award which was received by Trinidad and Tobago from the European Union Council on Tourism and Trade was not valid, because it was an NGO. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you look on their website, it says that its members are from 27 European Union Tourism Organizations. [ Desk thumping] [ Crosstalk] Furthermore, these 27 countries, all members of the European Union, comprise of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and Sweden, and the list goes on. So what is the point?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Point Fortin, if you want to resile and have some dinner, please do so, otherwise allow the Member for Oropouche West to speak in silence. Standing Order 40, please do read it and understand what it is about.

Mr. Roberts: Are you hungry?

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the second point I want to talk about is the issue of gender in the budget. She claimed that this was not a gender-focused budget. But if you look in this document, the Social Sector Investment Programme on page 23, it clearly says, and I quote:
“According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2010, 13 countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region have fully closed their gender gaps in the health and survival sub index including Trinidad and Tobago…” [Desk thumping]
So she did not read this. [Crosstalk]

Furthermore, she talked about it not being a gender-responsive budget, but does she know that a gender-responsive budget requires a gender audit to be done, and this is exactly what is being done through the new Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Affairs? [Desk thumping] So clearly they did not do their research before coming to this Parliament, in an attempt to fool the population. [Crosstalk]

She spoke about these great women in leadership in the PNM, but what do you all have to show for it? You have a past Minister of Finance, a woman yes, who run away “with de people money from Clipo”. [Desk thumping] [Laughter] You have another former Minister in this House who mobbed the President of the United States of America when he came here.

Hon. Member: No, no, no, apologize. [Crosstalk]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). Would you please repeat it? [Crosstalk]

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Sit down.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I am asking for an apology and a withdrawal. I did not mob the President of the United States. This is nonsense. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear exactly what was said by the Member for Oropouche West, because I had just arrived. But I just want to remind Members, do not get personal, do not personalize debates, because once we get there—[Interruption] Could I be allowed to speak. Member for Oropouche West, if you have gone in that direction, I would ask you not to go there.

11.30 p.m.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Speaker. As I go on, she also spoke about the agricultural sector and a decline in the agricultural sector, but she was quoting specific parts of the document and not the entire thing. So I want to read for you, because you have to look at the agricultural sector in a holistic view; you cannot look at it, one part or the other. It is a holistic sector and you have to look at it holistically.

If you look at the Review of the Economy document, page 16, it says:

“The agricultural sector…is projected to expand by 2.0 percent in 2011,
marking an improvement on its 1.6 percent contraction in 2010. This expansion reflects a turnaround in the domestic agriculture subsector which is expected to grow by 2.0 percent in 2011...

The overall performance of the agricultural sector was mixed during the period October 2010 to March 2011 as variable weather conditions favoured the production of certain commodities while impacting negatively on others.”

So really and truly, we do not have control over the weather system, and if that is what happened and it prevented certain crops from being in demand, then so be it. But it is not because of something with regard to what the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Affairs is doing; it is with regard to the weather system. The sector was particularly hard-hit by flooding during the period October 2010 to December 2010, but production normalized in early 2011 as weather conditions stabilized. Significant increases in output were recorded—for oranges, cassava, yam, dasheen, et cetera.

So the point is that the Member for Arouca/ Maloney really did not make a point with regard to agriculture, so I say no more on that issue. You know, what amazes me is that she comes to this House and demands a drainage study and a traffic management plan. Why did they not do it? Why did she not ask the Member for Diego Martin North/East in his incarnation as the previous Minister of Works and Transport to do the study?

Mr. Indarsingh: He could not go beyond the elevator. [Laughter]

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Mr. Speaker, I listened very intently to this debate and on the very first day the debate was opened by the Leader of the Opposition, he criticized the Minister of Finance, because he said and I quote: “The Minister of Finance met a stable economy.” He went on to say that he turned the economy around into recession. But let us look at the reality of what exactly we met when we came into office in 2010. We met the Clico fiasco, handled very irresponsibly from the start by the then PNM administration, which we had to resolve, and the Minister of Finance came up with a very comprehensible plan that would accommodate all the stakeholders and would also facilitate what our country can afford at this point in time.

We also met a country that was plagued with crime. But what did we do? Did we sit here and do nothing, like they did? No. The Prime Minister took a very hard-handed approach. She faced the criminals head-on. She called a state of emergency, and, today, there is a 70 per cent reduction in crime. [Desk thumping]
What did we meet? We met high inflation rates. And what happened today? In July 2011, the Central Bank advised that inflation dropped to 0.8 per cent, the lowest since 1969. Over $300 billion spent and what do we have to show for it?

Mr. Indarsingh: Four hundred billion dollars.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: I want to focus a little on infrastructure development in this country, because, as you know, this is of critical importance to the citizens and every day we see something in the newspapers about somebody reporting a bad road somewhere, poor drainage, resulting in flooding. And, of course, you know, the Prime Minister, in her wisdom, would have split the Ministry of Works and Transport so that we, through the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, can focus on the works aspect of it and perhaps bring the infrastructure development up to where our human development is.

We have seen that the current situation is such that we have a lot of poor roads and that is simply because of the neglect of the past administration, and we, in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, are certainly attempting to rectify the wrongs of the past administration. We have attempted to fix roads throughout this country. No longer will Trinidad end at the north of the Caroni Bridge. Trinidad and Tobago extends throughout the region.

When we took office in 2010, the cry was the same throughout the length and the breadth of this country: poor drainage, dilapidated bridges, potholes, insufficient roads, unpaved roads. The Prime Minister mandated the Minister of Works and Infrastructure to go out there, fix the roads as much as we can, pave them; fix the drains. I want to tell you that this is certainly what the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, the Member for Chaguanas West, has been doing. In case Members on the other side have forgotten, I want to take the opportunity to remind them that it was under this Government that we completed the dualling of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, from O’Meara to Santa Rosa. [Desk thumping] For six years it was languishing. Why did you not do it?

We completed the Aranguez overpass which now reduces traffic congestion. We turned the sod for the Couva Preysal Interchange, and let me not talk about the Maraval roundabout, because those on the other side will attempt to take the credit for it, in particular the Member for Diego Martin North/East. I recall at the opening of that roundabout he said that it was a PNM plan, and the Prime Minister had to remind him then that this PNM plan took him 20 years to plan and it took our current Minister of Works and Infrastructure 11 months to execute. That is delivery. [Desk thumping]
We have commenced work on many roads throughout the country, and my colleague from Arima just reminded me about the significant Arima bridge. Over 29 years they left the people segregated in those communities. We did it. And this year we plan to continue the upgrade of the road infrastructure, in particular we have plans for the highway from Princes Town to San Fernando, as well as work will continue on the current highway to Point Fortin.

I want to take a few moments to talk about rural neglect, and I say this because, of course, as I sit here as the Member for Oropouche West, there are many parts of my constituency which are considered to be rural. I know the Member for Chaguans West touched on this a bit, but this is very close to my heart, because I see every day the rural neglect that the people of Oropouche West would have faced over the last nine years under the PNM administration, and today, as we attempt to rectify that neglect, they claim political favouritism and inequity. Well, they need to look in the mirror.

Imagine in Oropouche West, Raju Trace in San Francique, not paved for over 30 years! Thirty years one road was not paved. Gopie Trace and Tulsa Trace, over 12 years! The Minister of Works and Infrastructure and I finally had the opportunity to reopen that road just last month for the people of Gopie Trace and Tulsa Trace. [Desk thumping] I want to ask the Members of the Opposition where they were for the last eight years in Oropouche West. Not a single road paved. I do not know, were the people of Oropouche West not paying their taxes like everybody else? Or was that political victimization?

The PURE unit of the Ministry has undertaken paving and upgrading of many roads, and in particular in the rural areas. Just to name a few: Lal Beharry Trace; I mentioned Gopie Trace and Tulsa Trace; Tenant Trace, Penal Quinam Road, Cacandee Road, Sinaswee Street in Couva North. You would recall the Prime Minister opened eight kilometres of road in Pluck Road. The Member of Parliament for Siparia tried to get Scotts Road paved for so long, and we were able to do it under this Minister of Works and Infrastructure. And as we speak, work is also being done on Pond Street in La Romaine, a promise the Prime Minister gave to the people of La Romaine. And as the Minister of Works and Infrastructure would say: “Done”.

As I talk about rural neglect, I must mention the Tulsa Trace Hindu School. Since 2008 the roof of this school collapsed and the principal and staff were told that while the government of the day repairs the school that they should move into the annex of a nearby temple. So from 2008 to very recently—for nearly three
years—these children have been working out of the annex of a temple. When rains falls the children get wet. That was the care that the then government had for the children of this nation.

When I took office and I realized what was going on when I attended the school's graduation ceremony, I immediately took it to the Minister of Education and on hearing that, he understood what those children were going through, and he took steps to rebuild that school. Today, I am very pleased to announce to this House that that school, because of this Minister of Education and the EFCL members, will be opened this year. It is almost complete. [Desk thumping] Imagine they could have found $1 billion to spend on a stadium and not just $5 million to spend on a school that would have benefited 250 children. That was the care of the last government.

I want to also say that under the Highways Division we also have a lot of work going on there. For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago one can now drive from Golconda all the way up to Port of Spain without encountering a single traffic light. Under the National Highways Programme, we have allocated $61.3 million to meet various obligations, to do road work on the San Francique Road, the Southern Main Road, bridges, and the list goes on. Also we have allocated $2 million to deal with the continuation of cable barriers.

As you know, we have installed recently six kilometres of cable barriers along the Solomon Hochoy Highway and my colleague, the Member for Caroni East, is reminding me that every weekend we see lives being saved, and in particular, there was one incident where a cement truck ran off the road, and those cable barriers held that cement truck in the median. Can you imagine the havoc that that would have created had that truck gone across to the other side of the road? But this is what we are about. We are about the people of this country and saving their lives. [Desk thumping]

One of the first challenges that we had to deal with when coming into office was that of flooding in this country. Now, we know that flooding is a global problem and it is not something that you can, perhaps, eliminate completely, but it is something that if you put measures in place, over a period of time you can ensure that it decreases and not increases, which was what was happening under the previous regime.

I want to say that when I first became MP for Oropouche West, every time rain fell for one hour, I would cross my fingers and say a prayer, because I know Woodland is flooding. Last rainy season I went to Woodland—and I am saying
where Woodland is, because I know the last Minister of Works and Transport does not know where Woodland is, and if he says that he does know, then that is immense political victimization and neglect of a people undeserving of it.

The Woodland areas is in the Oropouche Swamp and it is certainly a challenge because there are many rivers and tributaries in the area. Now, we have done quite a lot of work there. We have since dredged the Trinidad River, Bagmania River, Black Water Channel, Newcut Channel, just to name a few. Last rainy season I cannot begin to count the number of times that I went to Woodland in flood. This rainy season I have not been there since. So this is what we are about. We are about improving the lives of people and becoming more efficient in what we do.

**11.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, just to tell you how much we care about what we do and how integrated we are with our systems and with our checks and balances, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure and myself took a boat tour down the Bagmania River in a “lil” two by four boat, we could have barely fitted in it. I think the Minister was a little pale on the boat ride, but at least he went, at least he went [Laughter] and that is the point. The point is that this Government, these Ministers are out there on the ground viewing the problems of the citizens and not in our tall high-rise buildings telling people what to do and having not a clue of what is going on out there.

**Dr. Rambachan:** “They would not buy ah tall boots.”

**Hon. S. Roopnarine:** Even the Prime Minister has “ah tall boots” because we know that the first thing that she did on assuming office was put on her Wellington boots and go out in flood. [Interruption] So, we now have to follow the mandate of our Prime Minister and serve the people and deliver to the people.

Mr. Speaker, this year we have again put emphasis on drainage, allocating $138 million for improvements to the drainage infrastructure and flood control in low-lying areas, such as construction of reinforced walls, paving of watercourses, continuing drainage and coastal studies. The national programme for the upgrade of drainage channels will continue with $20 million allocated. We would also continue under the major river clearing programme with an allocation of $20.7 million for work on some other rivers as well, so you see drainage is really a work in progress and every year we will have to continue rectifying the wrongs of the previous regime.

**Mr. Sharma:** Well said. Well, well said.

**Hon. S. Roopnarine:** I want to spend a few minutes on the Point Fortin Highway. As you know, the hon. Prime Minister would have turned the sod to start the construction of the highway in January this year and she would have announced
then that 40 per cent labour and 40 per cent material would be local, because you see, Mr. Speaker, it is our belief that the local contractors and suppliers must benefit from a project of this size.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of this project are so tremendous, not only are we improving the transport network for those who would have to travel all the way from Point Fortin to Port of Spain, but we are also creating jobs, stimulating the economy; there will be a greater demand for materials including aggregate, sands, cement, bitumen and asphalt. This would also result in several downstream industries which would stimulate the transportation industry, service contractors, small entrepreneurs to provide food and other products, and of course this project is certainly in line with what this budget seeks to do, which is job security for you all.

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, as you know earlier this year the hon. Prime Minister announced a ministerial committee. This is certainly in keeping with pillar six of the People’s Partnership Manifesto which focuses on transparency, accountability, participation and effective representation. So, you see, the Prime Minister wanted to ensure that the Members of Parliament were involved in order to participate in setting guidelines and doing general oversight. But, of course, the Leader of the Opposition had to criticize her for it. He went on to question why a junior Minister was part of that ministerial committee. I do not know what a junior Minister is, perhaps the Member for Diego Martin West could enlighten me, because as far as I know my title is Minister of State and not junior Minister.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Well done, teach them. [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Roopnarine: I would like to add to that, Mr. Speaker, I sit in this august House representing the people of Oropouche West who will be directly impacted by the highway to Point Fortin so therefore I am a Member just like my colleagues, the Members for Oropouche East, Siparia, Fyzabad, so I do not see what the issue is.

Do you know what the funny thing is, Mr. Speaker? Under the PNM they had ministerial committees—those are the norm—they had one for the rapid rail project, they had one for the restructuring of Caroni, but that is the hypocrisy of the PNM. What is good for them is not good for us.

I want to spend a few moments on the Public Transport Service Corporation and I know my colleague, the Minister of Transport would spend some more time on this in the Senate. As you know, during the last financial year the Ministry of Works and Transport were together so we would have had responsibility for the
PTSC at some point in time. I want to say that certainly we have seen the marked difference in the operations of the PTSC. Today we have over 325 buses, when the new board met only 190 functional buses and in just six months they were able to repair existing buses and get them on the road. Today we have new routes in Wallerfield, Piarco, Arima, Tamana, Talparo, Siparia, San Francique, Debe, Massahood Junction, Chaguanas; and the list goes on, because that is what this Government is about. It is about bringing the services directly to the people. We are not about building high-rise buildings; we are about taking the services, improving the lives of our citizens by these simple things that touch their lives. [Interruption]

So, this Government is certainly committed to providing efficient and cost-effective transportation. As we understand that our children and elderly citizens need to access certain services, health services, go to school, so these buses will improve their lives. We even went an additional step where the Prime Minister mandated that the school children and citizens over 60 should ride PTSC buses for free. As soon as this mandate was given out the very next week the then chairman of PTSC, now Minister of Transport, executed and implemented this service so that the children were allowed to ride for free and citizens over 60. When we launched that initiative I went to City Gate with the then chairman of PTSC and children were telling us they would save something like $40 a day on going to school. Can you imagine if you have five children? [Interruption] Do you know how that is affecting the lives of people? But, you see, the last regime chose to use the PTSC buses in another way, and so I would like to ask today, perhaps those on the other side could tell us when they plan to settle the PTSC debt? I say no more on that matter.

Mr. Speaker, as you know in the People’s Partnership Manifesto, we indicated that we would begin the introduction of camera technology at traffic lights, this year we commissioned intelligent transport system, traffic surveillance and control system. The system is a part of a new traffic management plan designed primarily to reduce traffic congestion, a national traffic management centre now monitors 11 major intersections from Ana Street in Woodbrook to Grand Bazaar. While we see the importance of ensuring technology is in place we also need to ensure that we have the laws of the country adhered to in terms of the traffic laws. It was to this end that the hon. Minister of Works on March 12, 2011 was able to have 75 traffic wardens successfully graduate. I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that this traffic warden plan had been ongoing in the Ministry for 18 years and this Minister of Works, the Member for Chaguanas West, was able to implement that in just nine
months. That is delivery. [Desk thumping] Now we currently have a second batch in training and we do look forward to having more of these traffic wardens on the road.

I want to shift my attention now to the youth of this country because I feel it is important that as a young person that I speak to the youth of this country and give them an assurance that this Government is committed to the development of the youth population. We have 35 per cent youth population and therefore it is certainly imperative that Government recognize youth as leaders of not only today but also tomorrow. Young people are at the core of sustainable development of any nation and, of course, the development of our country is directly proportional to the development of our youth.

This Government recognizes youth as an important partner in social development programmes in Trinidad and Tobago as youth play a vital role as agents in effecting this change and should be a critical part of the decision-making process. August 2010 to August 2011 was deemed “International Year of Youth” by the UN with the theme “Dialogue and Mutual Understanding”. This Government, in keeping with that theme, launched a national consultation programme to allow young people the opportunity to be included in the decision-making process by consulting with Ministers of Government. These consultations were intended so that the feedback from these consultations would be incorporated in the upcoming review of the National Youth Policy, so this way all of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago would have a chance to have their feedback incorporated into the policy that guides young people. So we are about participation and incorporation of all of our citizens.

I want to give you the assurance that this Government is committed to the development of young people. The hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, showed her commitment to the development of youth as she hosted the participants of the Ninth Youth Parliament at the Diplomatic Centre last year and then also called on the Parliament to have more of these Youth Parliaments to help in the development of future leaders of tomorrow. She even went as far as to call on the Commonwealth to explore the development of a Commonwealth Youth Parliament last September in her capacity as Chairperson of the Commonwealth. So, she has also demonstrated her focus on youth by the appointment of young people to state enterprises and other decision-making bodies.

Mr. Sharma: Including your good self.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Including my good self, the Member for Fyzabad has reminded me of that.
Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister certainly recognizes the importance young people play in the country and she also recognizes it is important to keep our young people on the right path, and it was to this end that she was present at the launch of the National Youth Mentorship Programme, launched by the Ministry of National Security, that would allow our young people to be mentored along the right path.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, I want to talk a bit about Oropouche West, and I spoke about rural neglect under the PNM and I want to just tell you that in Oropouche West the neglect was not only infrastructure, it was not only roads and drains—even our community centres, the members of the Woodland Community Council, they had to raise funds, have a little bar-b-que to do upgrades to their community centre. This year for the first time they have gotten assistance from this Government from the Member for Naparima. [Desk thumping] As I said, the Tulsa Trace Hindu School has been reconstructed and almost ready to be opened; we also have now water lines; basic amenities of water lines we do not have in Oropouche West and today we have been able to install in Antiles Trace, Banwarie Trace, Banwarie Branch Trace, Akaloo Trace, Bhaig Trace—and I know Members on the other side have not a clue where these roads are. We also never had lights in our recreational facilities. [ Interruption] Today, we have in the Antiles Trace Grounds and we have quite a few in this financial year.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the People and Social Development, the Member for Caroni Central, also brought the direct impact programme to Woodland, these people were so grateful for them that they said that they never had something like this in their area that would benefit so many people. [ Interruption] I can go on and on about the neglect that we faced in Oropouche West, but I know it is late, therefore, I would like to close my contribution. But before I do that I want to reiterate that this Government has certainly delivered in 2011 and will continue to deliver in 2012. [Desk thumping] So, I take the opportunity to reiterate some of our achievements. The Prime Minister has set up now a Children’s Life Fund to save the lives of our nation’s children. Today we have laptops for those children who are moving on to high school—and you know the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, spoke about these laptops not having a DVD burner and a CD burner; [ Interruption] I am still at a loss as to why this is a necessity for children who are using these laptops in schools, perhaps, I do not know, to burn music or to burn movies. I do not know, maybe she could tell us why this is a necessity.

Mr. Speaker, we have also increased the minimum wage from $9 to $12.50 an hour; we created the Ministry of the People; we have delivered land leases and
deeds to former sugar workers which the other side could not do. The Minister of Public Utilities now has 28 kilometres of water mains from Navet to San Fernando. So, you see, Mr. Speaker, we have certainly delivered and, as I said, we will continue to deliver in 2012, because this is what the Prime Minister has mandated all of us Government Ministers and Members of Parliament to do.

12.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago has been recognized globally for her leadership [Desk thumping] and therefore, our citizenry—and I say that to reassure our citizens of her ability to continue to lead this nation. She had proven by what she has delivered, she has been known throughout the world. Not only in the Caribbean, Mr. Speaker, but this is globally, internationally. She has been recognized for her leadership, and we on this side are certainly confident that she will continue to lead this country, well.

I thank you Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Community Development (Hon. Nizam Baksh): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I embrace this opportunity to contribute to the debate on the national budget for fiscal 2012. But before I continue, let me just make a comment on the previous speaker, who delivered her information this afternoon with such eloquence, grace and finesse. [Desk thumping] You know, especially at this Tuesday morning, 12.01 a.m., it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to deliver my comments on this budget here this morning. The budget presented by the hon. Minister of Finance represents this administration’s steadfast commitment to ensure sustainable national development even as we grapple with the challenges and impact of the volatile international economic environment.

I further congratulate the Minister and his team on identifying innovative means of sourcing capital for infrastructural development and for the sustenance and expansion in our small and medium enterprise sector. It is to the benefit of our children and future generations that the country is not being plunged into further external/international debt, but the necessary funds are being sought internally through our local stock exchanges and the creation of an Infrastructure Development Bank. This country stands to benefit both in the short and long term.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister now responsible for the Division of Ageing, I too share the pleasure and joy of senior citizens, as expressed when the increase of national insurance pension to $3,000 was announced. The additional funds will not only directly benefit the approximately 80,000 NIS pensioners, but also indirectly benefit those who contribute, their children, grandchildren and others to the
monthly expenses of the ageing population. I also expressed dismay that the Leader of the Opposition’s first criticism of the budget was aimed at the increase in national insurance pension. How and why would such a measure be bothersome to the PNM? I am sure some of you on the other side receive an NIS pension. It is clear that the PNM feels that the 80,000 NIS pensioners should not have an increase to $3,000 per month in this pension. The budget presentation allows all to benefit from the policies, programmes and priorities, as well as the resource allocation of this People’s Partnership Government.

Mr. Speaker, the mobilization, engagement and development of communities are key to preparing our nation for sustainable development. At the Ministry of Community Development, we are ideally poised to be the key driver of this mission of community mobilization, engagement and development. We interface directly with the members of the public through formal and informal groups. For example, village councils, women’s group, faith-based organizations, and a range of other non-governmental organizations. Our interaction with groups enables us to acquire an intimate knowledge of the social economic conditions that characterize and motivate communities to identify and address issues relevant to their development. Community centres are the hub of life for a vast number of our citizens. These provide ideal venues for learning, self-development, shared leadership and socialization. Last year I informed this honourable House of the previous PNM government’s robust initiative to construct a total of 100 community centres in the country. The approximate cost to construct 100 community centres was estimated in excess of $600 million. The allocation of the community centres construction programme was highly skewed in favour of the then constituencies of the then PNM government. County St. George alone was allocated 54 per cent of these centres. The other seven administrative districts in Trinidad and Tobago got 46 per cent—that is the rest of the country got 46 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, this reminds us of the discussion we heard this morning by the hon. Prime Minister, with regard to the scholarship programme that was undertaken by the PNM government. The then UNC constituencies hardly got more than one and in some instances we got none. The constituency of Naparima, which I proudly represent, got none under the PNM. You know I wish to remind them that I got the third highest votes in the country in the last election, only followed by the Member for Chaguanas West—tipped the country—followed by Oropouche East and Naparima was third in this. But we were denied all these opportunities to serve and to deliver to our communities. I sincerely thank my constituent for their confidence and continued support.
The People’s Partnership Government makes a solemn promise that this type of imbalance will never be practised. We will ensure that community centres are distributed in accordance with community needs and aspirations. Equity will prevail. [Desk thumping] In their last year in office, that is 2010, $40 million was allocated for the construction of 53 new community centres and $15 million for the refurbishment of old centres. In 2011, we allocated 60 million for new centres, an increase of 50 per cent over the PNM’s allocation, and $15 million for refurbishment of old community centres. In the 2012 budget we have maintained the $60 million allocations for the construction of new centres, but we increased the allocation for the refurbishment of old centres by 331/3 per cent, from $15 million to $20 million. During the fiscal year 2011, 20 community centres were targeted for completion, to date eight have been formally opened and a total of 12 would be completed by the end of December, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, we from the People’s Partnership Government deliver more than we talk, unlike the previous PNM government with lots of grandiose plans and inability to implement or deliver. Whatever we promise, Mr. Speaker, I give you the assurance that we will always deliver promptly on our promises and this is exactly what we are doing.

The core concept of principles of community development is based on the voluntary efforts and initiatives of citizens, the spirit of volunteerism is therefore critical in the practice of community development. We from the People’s Partnership insist on volunteerism in many aspects of work at the community development level. We have decided that citizens from the village and environs where modern community centres are located must be involved in the management of the facility. We have, as a result, appointed voluntary community facilities management committees, to oversee and to organize and promote activities at these centres. These persons are selected from among representatives of the NGOs, FBOs and CBOs and business organizations within the geographical area of the facility. We agree that volunteers must not only give their free time in the management of facilities, but they must be made to feel that they are part owners of the facility and that they must ensure that the facility is utilized properly.

Mr. Speaker in consideration of the substantial sums expended on the construction of modern centres, the People’s Partnership Government has decided further that each of these centres must be equipped with competent staff to ensure that centres are not only utilized effectively but maintained properly as well. I am happy to announce that the Cabinet has conveyed approval for a facility administrator and an administrative secretary to be appointed as full-time staff for
each of the modern community centres. These shall be employees of the Ministry of Community Development.

The People’s Partnership Government will also promote environmental awareness, going green, and maintaining the “Clean and Beautify Trinidad and Tobago” initiative year round. In this context, Mr. Speaker, Cabinet has taken a policy decision to construct initially two community centres with a focus on being environmentally friendly. One centre will be located at Ben Lomond Tabaquite Road, Williamsville and the other at Bunsee Trace, Penal. These two centres will be part of a pilot project.

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The community education programme is a major component of community development portfolio for social action programmes aimed at community capacity building. Its main focus is the promotion of an equitable distribution of educational opportunities for the people in local communities. It is a response to the national poverty eradication thrust in that the focus is on the developmental needs of our citizens who are considered less fortunate in the society.

The mission of this programme seeks to focus on the needs of householders, the unemployed, the underemployed, the vulnerable, the less fortunate and at risk in our society, by providing the opportunity to learning a skill which can be used to improve and uplift their quality of life. Another programme with which the community of development was widely successful is the CARE programme. This social programme provides priority funding for human development activities. It is a critical community intervention strategy which focuses on interaction, community cohesiveness and employment generation. Between October 2010 and August 2011, the CARE Programme provided financial assistance for projects which addressed the basic needs and development aspirations in communities.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister’s Best Village Trophy Competition began in 1963 and was introduced as a conscious effort to build a shared, social and cultural identity in our newly independent nation. The programme started with one category, Handicraft, but eventually it evolved into eight competitive events which included: Traditions of Carnival, Village Olympics, Environment and Sanitation, Food and Folk Fair, La Reine Rive, Folk Theatre and Village Chat.

Mr. Speaker, during fiscal 2011, 120 groups participated in the Best Village Food and Folk Fair; 66 young women in La Reine Rive; 121 in the Folk Presentation; 27 groups in Folk Theatre; 96 communities in the Clean and Beautify Trinidad and Tobago Environmental Sanitation and 91 groups in Handicraft and 52 villages in Village Chat.

12.15 a.m.
Mr. Speaker, there will be greater emphasis on all categories of the Prime Minister’s Best Village Competition especially the Clean and Beautify T&T competition. I am happy to announce that starting from next year one million dollars worth in projects chosen by the community will be awarded to the winning community in the clean and beautify competition in addition to the cash prize.

The clean and beautify initiative was promoted by the the hon. Prime Minister in 2010. The Ministry of Community Development has since adopted this initiative, in an effort to promote total community involvement in this programme. As we all know, environmental awareness is an ongoing thrust of the Government and this programme is geared towards the promotion of this objective. The programme will focus on beautification of spaces within communities that allows for people interaction; plant distribution to community groups, schools, and households; clean-up campaigns and support for recycling projects; collaborative efforts with various government and non-governmental agencies.

There is another very important programme that falls under the Ministry of Community Development and that is the GAP programme, which is a social programme, which trains and employs caregivers between the ages of 18 to 25 years to look after their senior citizens. This programme commenced operations in 1998. The People’s Partnership rates GAP high in status among the list of social programmes administered by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. GAP welcomes the Division of Ageing under the umbrella of the Ministry of Community Development. This innovation will allow for coordination and collaboration of programmes aimed at improving the quality of life of senior citizens. I am aware that GAP was launched in 1998 by the former UNC government, during that period I was Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Social Development, and therefore, had a direct input into the formulation and establishment of this programme. After that time we had the foresight and vision that a programme of this nature was necessary to provide care for the elderly because it is our quest to achieve develop status. We did not want to leave them without proper care and attention.

Moreover, the fact is that we have an ageing population. The definition for this is: an ageing population is defined as one where 10 per cent of the population is over the age of 60 years. In Trinidad and Tobago, we have 12 per cent in this age group. Following the launch of this training programme, the former UNC government commenced a placement agency for GAP graduates in 1998. At that time we started the placement agency with 25 graduates. This programme ensures that support and care are administered to senior citizens who either live alone or
whose relatives are unable to look after them. Senior citizens who benefit from GAP do not only represent those from poorest classes in our society. As our society develops and the population becomes more mobile the need for GAP will become more evident. More and more in our society senior citizens are more inclined generally, to show a preference for their own homes or the family home environment, rather than a commercial or state-owned home. The need for GAP will continue to reflect a progressive increase in the forthcoming years. In other words, GAP is here to stay.

We have increased the number of caregivers who will be employed on an annual basis from 400 to 600, an increase of 50 per cent. The previous PNM government did not increase the number of caregivers since 2006, a period of five years, even though the programme was overwhelmed and bursting at its seams.

This lack of response on their part was so typical of their incompetence and inability to enhance an important programme as GAP. There is now a high demand for our caregiving services. We have increased the monthly stipend paid to caregivers from $1,800 to $2,500, that is a 38 per cent increase. For five years the caregivers pleaded for an increase, indicating that inflation had reduced considerably the value of their stipend and the insensitive PNM government did nothing to assist them.

I turn to another aspect of the Ministry of Community Development that is, the National Commission for Self-Help Limited, which is one of the Ministry’s agencies which has worked diligently to partner with communities and low income homeowners to improve community infrastructure and to provide the highly demanded home minor repairs and reconstruction grant.

The National Commission for Self-Help provides finance, material and technical services, while the communities supply the labour. In fiscal 2010/2011, the National Commission for Self-Help Limited was able to positively impact upon an estimated 12,851 citizens in both Trinidad and Tobago, through our minor repairs reconstruction grant and community infrastructure development programmes.

I have a good example where we did one of these community infrastructural development programmes. In Gonzales we assisted a young guy Aaron Smith, 25 years old, who is suffering from cerebral palsy, he lives down a hill and when he had to visit his doctor or go out, the villagers had to lift him bodily to take him from his home to the road. And when he returned they had to take him back down bodily to his home. What we did through the National Commission for Self-Help is that
we built the stairs to go down from the road to his house. He was the happiest person I have ever seen when we opened that project, and this also assisted other homes around his home. People were very happy with this.

Our aim and objective in this fiscal period is to use the arms of the Ministry of Community Development through agencies such as the National Commission for Self-Help to work assiduously to achieve Government’s medium term policy framework 2011-2014, towards the reduction of scio-economic and regional inequalities, move people out of poverty and promote social inclusion, through more meaningful economic participation. To achieve our priority for action coined as poverty reduction and human capital development, the National Commission for Self-Help Limited, aim for this new fiscal period is to leverage our projects to mobilize and empower communities, thereby accomplishing our objectives of building strong and resilient communities. Our goal is to revive the principles of self-help, self-reliance, and the old adage of where there is a will there is a way.

In many communities the concept of “gayap” is not known anymore. “Gayap” is an Amerindian word that means “lend a hand”. Through the Ministry of Community Development and the National Commission for Self-Help, we plan to re-establish this system of “gayap”. As we implement certain home improvement projects, we recognize and acknowledge that the restoration of this initiative symbolizes the institutionalization of community participatory systems. It is our belief that the resurgence of gayap will assist with community empowerment and by extension national development. Our aim is to work with community groups, NGOs, the CBOs, FBOs, to identify ambassadors in villages and neighborhoods, who will act as point persons to the National Commission for Self Help, to identify the specific needs within the community, and spearhead the “GAYAP” initiative, with respect to the actual implementation and labour component of a project. We are confident that this collaborative approach will ensure that the venture is successful.

It is our firm belief if this is also applied to our MRRG programme, then senior citizens, single mothers and the physically challenged, who have received a grant, will benefit and have readily available labour to assist with repairs to their homes at no extra cost. Only this weekend, we did a project in San Fernando for a pensioner—88-year-old pensioner in Circular Road where we provided through the National Commission for Self-Help $14,000 worth of roofing material, galvanize and a few laths and we got villagers and a contractor to assist in repairing the roof at no cost to the pensioner. This is the kind of work we want to do in the National Commission for Self-Help. Only this morning on my way to work—I made an appeal on Saturday—I got a call from a private company, Furniture Plus, offering a bed and some furniture for the home as well. I have also spoken with the
Community Development Division to see if we can get one of our local organizations to go in and help that pensioner to do some cleaning in the interior of the home.

When we looked at the roof, you had the galvanize in his bedroom—he had six basins collecting water there. Even on the bed he had a piece of plastic that collected water there. The ceiling which was decorative ply was like a strainer, you could have seen where all the water was pouring through. And this guy was so happy that within two days we were able to change the roof for him. And we are now looking to see how we could improve the inside of the home for him as well.

Another aspect of the MRRG programme that we plan to explore in fiscal 2012 is the allocation of funds, for the installation of flush toilets in targeted communities across the nation. Our work in these communities has revealed that there are hundreds of households in catchment areas in North, Central and South Trinidad and in Tobago, that still depend on outhouses for the disposal of human waste. Not only is this a major health hazard to those who live within the immediate surroundings, but destructive to the environment as well. When gayap is applied to this proposal it will ensure that all sectors of the community are actively participating and contributing to the development of our people and our nation.

In June 2011, the National Commission for Self-Help Limited sponsored its first hydroponic project. This project which is now producing lettuce, cabbages and pakchoi in a six-week period is located in Maracas, St. Joseph.

A low cost prototype of this model would be offered to communities in fiscal 2012. The intention is to cause more low income earners to produce short crops in their backyards to encourage income generation. I am going further with a pilot project working in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity, the National Commission for Self-Help, the private sector and the CDF, to encourage projects in rabbit rearing, grow box, and tilapia rearing. And this is to get people to solve our poverty problems in this country.

The CDF, continues with its main strategic objectives to alleviate poverty in the poorest communities, and to assist with strengthening the institutional capacity of the non-governmental and community-based organizations.

In fiscal 2011, the CDF approved approximately 30 community-based projects which have been submitted by NGOs, CBOs and FBOs. These projects cover a very wide area of community activities. Consistent with its strategic plan for 2009/2014, the Export Centres Company Limited has proposed for inclusion in the 2012 estimate, the establishment of a craft research and design centre, and commercially viable community craft business outlets.
The latter involves the establishment and operation of eight community craft retail outlets, which would offer for sale the output from the production of trainees of the programme and the community education programme.

Additionally, a warehouse and a retail wholesale outlet for high end products will be established.

12.30 a.m.

The Craft Research and Design Centre is expected to provide entrepreneurial support for craft practitioners through consultancy and engagements and craft development and research with partners, a research programme for the development of indigenous materials in partnership with CARIRI, UTT and in collaboration with international agencies and the conduct of 20 craft workshops for practitioners.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude, and once again, thank my colleague, the Member for Tunapuna, hon. Minister of Finance for a comprehensive, compact and sound budget, I would like to recognize a few of my other colleagues who have contributed in no small measure towards the improvement of the quality of life for my constituents in Naparima.

This particular constituency has been openly neglected by the former PNM for as many years as they served in government. I want to say thanks to all our service delivery Ministers—the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure, the hon. Minister of Local Government; the hon. Minister of Sport; the hon. Minister of Public Utilities; the hon. Minister of Housing and the Environment; the hon. Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs; the hon. Minister of the People and Social Development; the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; and the hon. Minister of Education for their projects completed in Naparima.

Mr. Speaker, to name a few: under roadworks, we have had the Papourie Road in Barrackpore done; we have Iere Village Branch Road in Princes Town; Halfway Drive in Harmony Hall; GP Road in Barrackpore; St. Croix Road Extension, Ridge Road, Lothians Road, Marcano Road; Centenary Road, and I can tell you that we are going to have a new road soon from the Barrackpore Police Station, using the old Tasker Road to the M 1 Ring Road in Ste. Madeleine taking us through the Daisy Road to the Link Road in Tarouba to the highway.

I understand that the scope of works and surveys are being done at this point in time, and I am sure that before year end, we will see work starting on this new road, and I want to thank the Minister of Works and Infrastructure for this initiative here. We have had landscape works in Garth Road, Princes Town; St. Croix Road,
Lengua; Reform Village; Tarouba Link Road; Jaipaulsingh Road; Mount Stewart Road; Papourie Road; Realize road—where on that road alone we got the Minister of Works to do 11 corrective landslip works.

Drainage—we have had work done in Realize Road; Tabernacle Street; Solomon Street; Sattar Avenue; St. Croix Extension. Flooding alleviation—I am proud to say that every watercourse in Naparima, major and minor, has been cleared. It is now history that you do not hear the Valleyline and Naparima flooding as before. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, there is one river that work is going on—they are cleaning—and that is the Guaracara River but the HDC, under the former PNM, built houses there and they reclaimed half of the Guaracara River in that particular area to put houses there. Today, you see the houses are collapsing and the water is now eroding the houses on the other side of the river and creating a havoc there as well, and that is the kind of work that PNM did. At present, works are in progress and I know that other critical areas will be addressed soon.

Also, I want to recognize and pay special tribute to the hon. Minister of Public Utilities through whose assistance; my constituents have been able to obtain pipe-borne water for the first time in their lives. [Desk thumping] Through this Ministry, I was able to have wiring and rewiring electrical installation to dozens of houses owned by low income citizens. I also want to place on record my gratitude to the Minister of Public Utilities for the new 28 kilometre WASA trunk line from Navet to San Fernando which he commissioned at Ste. Madeleine in Naparima. This facility has increased considerable, the supply of pipe-borne water to constituents. Also, the new water mains from the Barrackpore Police Station to Lengua along the Papourie Road will commence shortly. These constituencies have been suffering for years and today, the People’s Partnership Government is delivering.

I would like as well, to express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the hon. Minister of Housing and the Environment who has responded readily and provided urgent houses to citizens of Naparima who suffered as a result of natural disasters. I am confident that as a Member of the People's Partnership Government, we are on track to improving the quality of life for our citizens; we are in delivery mode. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to support the 2012 fiscal measures presented by the hon. Minister of Finance. Thank you.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Local Government (Hon. Rudranath Indarsingh): Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with a distinct sense of pride and privilege that I join this debate in relation to the fiscal package
for 2011/2012 which was presented by the distinguished Member for Tunapuna, our Minister of Finance, under the broad theme of “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation” which was built in terms of the next fiscal year on the budget presentation, the first budget presentation of the People’s Partnership Government at a time when our country’s revenues faced or the country’s economy faced the challenges of a stagnating economy, falling revenues and an increasing national debt.

Mr. Speaker, during the 2010 debate, I took the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister of this country and Member for Siparia for having achieved the distinction of being the first democratically elected female to lead this twin island Republic, and also as it relates to providing a sense of visionary and cohesive leadership for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, this sense of leadership has not changed since May 24th, and in fact, it has extended itself in looking after the welfare of the entire country from the point of view of taking a bold initiative as it relates to dealing with the issue of crime, and more so, averting a national crisis within Trinidad and Tobago.

When those on the other side failed to display the political will and what was needed at a critical juncture in our nation’s history, our Prime Minister and the People’s Partnership Government, and more so, the Cabinet and the National Security Council of this country, in a process of what we would term, committed dialogue, intense consultation, displayed that decisive leadership as it relates to the implementation of a state of emergency, a state of emergency which has been widely embraced and supported overwhelming by all sectors of Trinidad and Tobago with the exception of the Leader of the Opposition and the Members on other side—the party that failed to display a sense of patriotism that was needed at a very critical juncture in the country’s history. The results are there to be seen and the statistics are there in terms of the overall reduction in crime in Trinidad and Tobago, and we have been guided by the statistics which are saying that crime has been reduced by over 70 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, this sense of leadership has now gone into the realm of the economic arena, and the economic arena is now seeing this through our distinguished Minister of Finance who, through his second budget presentation, has once again reiterated the rich contribution that he continues to make to the national development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, it is a forward-thinking presentation which showed a direction of
moving boldly forward and creating opportunities for growth. This presentation has heralded a major shift from what I would term, a government-alone inspired growth to harnessing all sectors to participate in the national development of this country.

When the hon. Minister of Finance made his presentation, he focused on the issue and I quote:

“National development cannot be imported, it must be inwardly driven from the strength of the country itself by unearthing our people’s entrepreneurship, talent and capabilities.”

Mr. Speaker, this indeed was a very profound statement, a statement which shows that the hon. Minister of Finance understood that there is the need for all of the stakeholders to come on board and take ownership of this new direction. This budget truly reflects the partnership of the Government and all sectors of the society.

As I sat here and listened to the contributions of those from the other side, they have been of little or no substance in responding to what was presented by the Minister of Finance. What they have attempted to do was to place the burden of economic mismanagement and misdirection on the People’s Partnership Government. But the truth be told, this financial rut that we are in, or we are trying to extricate ourselves out of, did not start on May 24th. The statistics will reveal that it started with the PNM.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, I simply want to read into the record that in fiscal year 2009, Trinidad and Tobago recorded its first deficit in seven years. This deficit amounted to TT $7.4 billion or 5.3 per cent of the GDP as compared with a surplus of $12.1 billion or 7.9 per cent of the GDP in fiscal year 2008.

Mr. Speaker, as the government’s revenues began to decline, the PNM failed to re-examine and to redirect its method of spending and as such, we inherited a sliding economy. In fact, on numerous occasions, I could recollect the Governor of the Central Bank, in the run-up to this financial slide, indicating to the then government that its spending pattern was pushing the country in the direction of a slippery slope, and the spending pattern was overheating the economy; and on numerous occasions, in spite of the advice that was given, Ministers, on that side at that point in time failed to take heed and even failed to take advice. It was arrogance and arrogance over the nine years of PNM.

12.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, in that context of the slippery slope it continued with the CL Financial/Clico fiasco and debacle. Do you know what really amazed me with this particular issue? Up to today, we are confronted with the reality of not knowing
how much it will cost the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. The then PNM government entered into and signed a memorandum of understanding being fully aware that audited financial statements of CL Financial and Clico existed up to 2007. I am forced to ask the question, with the full knowledge that there was no audited financial statement beyond 2007, on what basis did the Patrick Manning government enter into this memorandum of understanding? I could only conclude that the government’s intervention at that point in time was driven by an overarching policy that was never geared to resolve the Clico/CL Financial debacle, but one of protecting personal investments. And I wish the Member for Diego Martin North and the Member for Port of Spain South could have benefited from the information that the then Minster of Finance was privy to, in the person of Karen Nunez-Tesheira. She bailed out at a point in time and failed to give advice and directions to her friends.

Dr. Moonilal: With bedroom slippers on.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: They should come to the conclusion that she was not a worthy friend indeed, in terms of giving advice and support at a time when it was needed.

The national public debt increased from $50 billion in 2008 to $66 billion in 2009, and by the time the People’s Partnership Government took office this debt climbed to $68.2 billion. In other words, Trinidad and Tobago’s public sector debt was equivalent to every man, woman and child owing over TT $50,000. This is the scenario that the People’s Partnership Government, led by the Minister of Finance, has been trying to navigate, in terms of the choppy waters and the financial mayhem that has been left by the PNM. During this entire debate, they have come here and attempted to lay the blame on the People’s Partnership Government.

I simply want to quote from a special report of the Auditor General of Trinidad and Tobago on the Fifth Summit of the Americas, Office of the Prime Minister, dated February 04, 2011. It tells you, when you listen to what I have to say, how the PNM approached the finances and the windfall that it had at its disposal as it relates to the business of the day and the economic affairs of this country. I read:

Under strategic planning, we found that the majority of activities involved in planning the Fifth Summit occurred during the period March 2008 to April 2009, in spite of the fact that Cabinet gave its approval to host the event in April of 2006.

It further goes on to say:

However, there was no evidence that a structured and well-planned approach to the delivery of the Fifth Summit, as evidenced by a formal plan at the strategic
level, was developed and used to guide the implementation of activities.
What is instructive is that it goes on to say, on page 9 of this report, that the
methodical development and preparation of the budget of $503 million for the Fifth
Summit by the experts in the field was not seen. This budget was prepared by one
individual, and under accounting for expenditure, it goes on to read:

We found that despite the significant level of expenditure to be incurred for the
Fifth Summit, a system was not put in place to capture the overall cost. As a
result, the total cost of hosting the Fifth Summit was not determined and the net
financial cost of this event is not known up to today.

Economic management courtesy the People’s National Movement.

During the course of this debate, as they continued to peddle propaganda and
half-truths—the PNM has attempted to peddle, and has failed miserably—that this
budget has no focus on the citizens of this country and no direction on the citizens
of the country. A thorough examination of the PNM’s track record will reveal that
they have engaged in old talk and have been mamaguying and misleading this
population since 1956, and during successive budget presentations, they have told
nothing less than what I would call—it would be termed unparliamentary, so I
would have to watch what I have to say in relation to the PNM’s track record of
delivery.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: At least you have the sense to know.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Member for Point Fortin, you could say what you want
but this thick bundle of documents that I have in my hand says between the period
2002—2007, this is what you have failed to deliver. Just for the record, to remind
you, for example, the PNM promised in 2003, to increase the minimum wage to $10
per hour within the next five years. In 2005—[Interruption]

Mr. De Coteau: Deceit!

Hon. R. Indarsingh: I want to read from their budget presentation in 2005. In
2003, they promised to increase the minimum wage to $10 per hour. In 2005, I
quote:

“We propose to recommend to the Minimum Wages Board that the minimum
wage be increased from $8 per hour to $9 with effect from January 01, 2005.”

Mr. De Coteau: Arouca/Maloney, you see we cannot trust them?

Hon. R. Indarsingh: In less than one year, it was the People’s Partnership
Government that moved the minimum wage to $12.50 per hour.

Mr. De Coteau: That is deception.
Hon. R. Indarsingh: Just simply to remind the Member for Point Fortin, this has been the track record and legacy of the PNM. [Interruption]

Mr. De Coteau: Deception.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Nothing but deception. I was amazed when the Leader of the Opposition concluded that the budget presentation was one of deceit, lies and so on—[Interruption]

Mr. De Coteau: Sanctimonious hypocrisy.

Hon. R. Indarsingh:—this presentation. You must recollect. This country must never lose focus of what you have been doing consistently, since 1956.

Mr. De Coteau: Fooling the people, fooling the people.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: In fact, in 2003, when you closed down Caroni (1975) Limited, you indicated to the national community and the national population that there would be land for agricultural and residential purposes. When we came into power, not one lot of land for residential purposes was ever distributed by the Estate Business Management Development Company headed by Mr. Rao. I am told that he is holidaying somewhere and relaxing somewhere on the French Riviera with the taxpayers’ moneys; courtesy the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago and ably supported. He absconded from this country, ably supported by senior members of those on the other side.

Less than 200 agricultural plots were delivered by the then administration and in less than one year, the hon. Vasant Bharath, the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Resources, has distributed in excess of 1,500 agricultural plots to drive the agricultural transformation of Trinidad and Tobago—[Interruption]

Dr. GopeeSingh: He has nearly 4,000 plots.

Hon. R. Indarsingh:—and he will distribute, as my colleague, the hon. Minister of Education and Member for Caroni East has just reminded me, and we expect within the next month or so, within the shortest possible space of time, 4,000 further plots will be delivered to the ex-Caroni (1975) Limited workers and it will bring a sense of comfort, a sense relief and a sense of liberation for them, having been subjected to the arrogance, the high-handedness and the political discrimination of the People’s National Movement. They went to such lengths that in their attempt to discriminate and to vilify the ex-workers of Caroni (1975) Limited, they resorted to the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago to deny these workers their rightful benefit from a land point of view. And from a monetary point
of view, they even attacked the Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago when it attempted to put the wrongs right. That is the track record of the PNM, as it relates to people and people-based organizations in Trinidad and Tobago.

This particular presentation has contributed and focused on what I would call widespread development. And we are prioritized to focus on national security, health, infrastructural development, social services and educational development. It tells you that the People’s Partnership Government understands very clearly what is needed to transform the economy and shift the paradigm in terms of what we have grown accustomed to from the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, they have consistently said that the budget did not focus on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to say, when we were faced with the Clico/CL Financial scenario and the Minister of Finance put forward his initial proposal to the national community, we listened to the pulse of the country. We took into consideration the criticisms to a process of committed social dialogue, hence the reason, the platform has been laid for the establishment of the Clico Trust Fund. As a result of the establishment of this fund, not only thousands of citizens will be repaid with their investments but two critical components of the society from a people-based point of view will benefit from this new scenario.

1.00 a.m.

1.00 a.m.

1.00 a.m.

It must be understood in the context of people-based organizations, the trade union movement and the credit union movements stand to benefit fully. Whichever credit union in this country, or whichever trade union in this country had investments in this particular scenario will have their full investments repaid to them within two years, Mr. Speaker. That is in itself listening to ensure that those within the rank and file of Trinidad and Tobago stand to benefit.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has also committed itself to settling negotiations for the period 2008—2010, and for the period 2011—2013 via the established process under the Industrial Relations Act, and we are committed to ensuring that there is intense dialogue and consultation as we move forward in this particular scenario.

There are a number of initiatives in this budget presentation which have attempted to focus on the ordinary man, for example, the reduction in mortgage rates from 6 to 8 per cent—that band of persons who had mortgages at the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance, would now see their mortgage rates being reduced.
to between 5 to 7 per cent and it would benefit in excess of 13,000 homeowners in Trinidad and Tobago. That in itself will encourage a spur towards what we would term new homeownership. Then there is the thrust of facilitating land for the landless, which will facilitate greater opportunities for homeownership with a foundation base.

This, too, will see a continuation of people-focused policies through the continuation of a utilities assistance programme, whereby lower income customers of WASA and T&TEC will benefit through subsidies. Again, approximately 12,000 persons throughout Trinidad and Tobago will benefit from this particular process. I do not have to say much on the increase in the national insurance pension from $2,000 to $3,000 and where the Government will be seeking to bring the self-employed within the benefits of the National Insurance System of Trinidad and Tobago which will stand to benefit in excess of 115,000 persons.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on in terms of the benefits of this particular budget presentation as it relates to the ordinary man in the society, but enough has been said. My colleagues will continue to make their input into this particular visionary budget presentation, a budget presentation which will ensure that the People’s Partnership Government is laying the platform for the People’s Partnership Government to be victorious at the next poll [Desk thumping] in Trinidad and Tobago, and to ensure that those on the other side continue to remain in the political wilderness of Trinidad and Tobago.

I simply want to take a few moments to delve into the work, or the projected work, of the Ministry of Local Government, which is headed by the visionary, dynamic, the energetic, very intense, and focused Minister, Minister Chandresh Sharma as it relates to transforming the [Desk thumping] local government dynamics of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government operating within the Government’s national stated policy which is the framework for sustainable development and based on the pillars of people-centered development and good governance, will continue to pursue the implementation of the following policy objectives:

- improved service delivery;
- improved governance;
- quality infrastructural development; and
- poverty reduction.
To achieve these objectives, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government will focus on transforming and modernizing the local government system, building and strengthening institutional capacity, providing adequate social and physical infrastructure, contributing to the achievement of national food security and collaborating with other Ministries to provide an efficiently managed Unemployment Relief Programme, Mr. Speaker.

And so far, Mr. Speaker, it has been a sense of joy and pride to work with the hon. Member for Fyzabad and the hon. Member for Princes Town as we move towards delivering quality local government service for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, as you may recall, the budget presentation for fiscal 2012 provided the Ministry of Local Government with recurrent expenditure in the sum of $1.6 billion; the Consolidated Fund in the sum of $288.1 million; and the Infrastructure Development Fund in the sum of $121 million.

And as I said we recognize, Mr. Speaker, that a well-developed and efficient infrastructure base is a prerequisite for social and economic progress. Thus the Ministry of Local Government requested and received substantial funding for local infrastructure development. In this regard, I just want to highlight to you that the Ministry proposes to focus on the following major infrastructural programmes namely:

- municipal roads and bridges in the vicinity of $61 million;
- municipal drainage and irrigation $47.72 million;
- a market development programme to the tune of $20 million.

We recognize that there is the need to provide avenues, places where persons, farmers, et cetera, can take their produce outside of NAMDEVCO, outside of what is being achieved through NAMDEVCO and the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, to provide and establish that enabling environment which will allow our customers and our citizens to be able to access food which has been produced by the hard-working farmers of this country at a rate which is affordable to all.

Further to that, Mr. Speaker, we will focus on recreational facilities and play parks in excess of $15 million; the restoration of certain secondary roads and the installation of Bailey bridges and, of course, the establishment and the building of a number of administrative complexes within Trinidad. And, of course, we are keeping pace from a local government point of view in relation to the issue of the
technological age and the whole question of information as it relates to communication and technology. And we plan to focus on computerization where productivity will be further enhanced by the modernization of our management systems through computerization of the Ministry’s head office and our respective municipal corporations.

We will continue our thrust to build a robust information, communication and technology system to support the effective implementation of projects. This will involve the installation and commissioning of a wide area network, and local area network at each of the 14 municipal corporations; installation of Voice-over Internet Protocol, development and implementation of an intranet and document management system, Mr. Speaker.

Within the next fiscal year we plan to focus on local area and what we would term regional planning development and, of course, near and dear to us the very critical issue, Mr. Speaker, of urban development and, of course, the issue of environmental services. One area targeted for development is that of waste resource management as outlined in our medium term policy framework for 2011—2014.

The Ministry has commenced the development of an integrated waste resource management policy, including a policy on recycling which will be completed in March 2012. For fiscal 2012, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has identified complementary projects for the implementation through the Solid Waste Management Company Limited to support our policy framework. They include construction and equipping of transfer stations and material recovery facilities. Demonstration projects promoting recycling and waste sludge diversion, procurement of a sludge separation vehicle for waste collection.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government has an overarching focus on disaster management as it relates to the implementation, or the continuation of our comprehensive disaster management plan, which would incorporate an infrastructure rehabilitation and flood mitigation programme; the mitigation of the effects of disasters through the purchase of heavy equipment; training all in the use of the equipment, and to focus on the issue of hardware and software in this particular field and the purchase of GPS units; which will place the Ministry in an aggressive position and a very proactive position to deal with the whole issue of disaster preparedness which is becoming more and more relevant in the context of environmental change and the context of climate change.

From this end we will continue to ensure that the Ministry of Local Government continues to be one of the delivery Ministries in Trinidad and Tobago, because we
understand that from the time a citizen walks out of his home, local government impacts on the stability of that individual from a psychological point of view. That individual wants to see that the drain which is in front of his home is properly cleaned, he wants to ensure that his garbage is collected; he wants to ensure that his recreation ground is maintained in a particular manner; he wants to ensure that when he goes to pay his/her final respects to someone who has gone to the great beyond, the cemeteries and places of burial, and cremation sites are properly maintained.

So we have a holistic responsibility to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and it is in this context that the Ministry of Local Government will continue to perform, Mr. Speaker.

1.15 a.m.

In my remaining moments, I want to take the opportunity to focus a bit on the constituency of Couva South, and the culture, and the paradigm shift which has been taking place at a national level in terms of a central government point of view is trickling down and trickling down in the context of the constituencies of Trinidad and Tobago. And those on the other side who are now crying foul, they too are benefiting from this paradigm shift, this culture of change, this culture of transformation that the People’s Partnership Government will continue to deliver this term and for many more terms to come in Trinidad and Tobago.

I want, with a sense of pride, Member for La Brea, to extend my congratulations to a young man by the name of Mr. Shastri Ram. It is only from a delivery point of view, but good things are happening in Couva South at all fronts. And this morning I could stand and boast to you that we have a President’s Medal Winner, in the constituency of Couva South, more precisely from Beaucarro Road, Mr. Shastri Ram, who has gained support because of his achievement, his hard work, and his sense of focus and commitment. Today, he is now an employee of NIDCO courtesy the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure, and Member for Chaguanas West, as it relates to the business and work of NIDCO, and I am sure that Mr. Ram will contribute richly to the national development of this country for years to come.

The educational development has been seen in the context of the Balmain Presbyterian School that was finished within—if I could recollect, my friend from Caroni East—within three months; unheard of and today the entire Balmain community and surrounding areas stand to benefit from the record time that this school has been completed and it is part of the Government’s overall policy as it
relates to the development of the youth and transformation of the education system in this country. We will also finish early childhood education centres at Phoenix Park and Milton focusing again on a holistic educational development within the constituency of Couva South, and I have to go beyond early childhood, primary school and secondary and educational development in the context of those who have fallen through the established, or what we would call, the established educational system of our country. The Workforce Assessment Centre that was launched by the hon. Prime Minister earlier this year in tandem with the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, has gone beyond a launch and only about two weeks ago in excess of 700 young people from across the length and breadth of this country have now become students of the Workforce Assessment Centre, at what is termed the “old tractor shed” or BC Field Engineering Department, and that in itself tells you what is happening in the constituency.

From an infrastructural development point of the view it is going and working in a very positive direction and manner. Only about a week ago a bridge in Princes Avenue, Calcutta No. 3, I want it to be noted, and I want you to listen very carefully, what occurred there again is indicative of what has been happening with this Government on all fronts. A bridge collapsed at Princes Avenue, Calcutta No. 3; I had discussions with the Minister of Works and Infrastructure and in less than 48 hours, in record time, a steel and concrete bridge with guard rails and so on was constructed for the benefit of the residents of Princes Avenue, Calcutta No. 3. In addition to representation it is delivery, it is action.

We have paving of roads between Milton and Basta Hall that are now connecting communities. We have the establishment—it was unheard of. If a bridge collapsed in Couva South, well you could not have heard of a Bailey Bridge coming to aid and to ensure that there was—

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.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank all my colleagues who have extended my speaking time and I want to assure them that I am in the process of winding up.

As I said, we are in the process of ensuring that communities are connected; there is the free movement of vehicular traffic, and that would be further enhanced with the completion of the Couva interchange, which will not only benefit the
entire Couva community and the entire central community, but it will benefit all those employees who are contributing to the national and economic development of this country in terms of those who work on the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. And when I hear them say nothing is happening in this country via this Government, well I want to say that the Couva interchange will cost in excess of $70 million.

So the infrastructural development is well on its way, the social sector transformation is well on its way, courtesy the Minister of the People and Social Development. Food cards, subsidies, grants and so on, are coming the way of the constituents of Couva South. When they came to my office—and they are coming, they have been coming—a number of them broke down, some people threw up their hands with a sense of despair and frustration saying to me that they never thought that the day would have come when they would have been able to be the recipient of a food card, flood grant, or a housing grant, and so on.

And, of course, the Minister of Housing and the Environment is looking aggressively to deal with the requirements of the constituents of Couva South from a housing point of view, and also the hon. Minister of Community Development has been playing a very critical role in providing that level of socioeconomic support and stability at a time when disasters occur, through the medium of the National Self-Help Commission. They have been aggressive, focused and committed and timely as it relates to the provision of cheques and so on, that are geared towards the restoration of homes in times of flooding and in times of natural disasters and so on.

So it is educational, it is infrastructural, it is public utilities, it is road paving, it is holistic as it relates to the development of Couva South. On that note, and I want to say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that your destiny, your future can only lie in one particular political party and one government and that is the People’s Partnership Government as we continue to improve the quality of life and transform Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security (Hon. Collin Partap): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2012. Mr. Speaker, the Italian unification activist and politician, Giuseppe Mazzini once said:

“A Country is not a mere territory; the particular territory is only its foundation. The Country is the idea which rises upon that foundation; it is the sentiment of love, the sense of fellowship which binds together all the sons of that territory.”
Mr. Speaker, this notion was expressed in our first budget entitled, “Facing the Issues Turning the Economy Around” in which we laid the platform to not only turn the economy around, but also to build a proper foundation to serve the people of this country.

Before I get into my contribution I would like to take this opportunity to commend the hon. Minister of Finance, the Member for Tunapuna for his outstanding budget presentation. The prudent initiatives and responsible fiscal policies contained therein, give me hope that we will indeed realize the theme of the budget “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is truly a people’s budget. Those sentiments were echoed by Ernst and Young when they did a review of the 2012 Trinidad and Tobago budget. This is what they said:

“…the ‘big picture’ suggests that the People’s Partnership has sought to commence the process of transformation with a great emphasis on stimulus rather than austerity…by itself, deficit financing can be used by governments to simulate the economy.”

So all this talk about we are running the country into deficit; deficit financing is being used by First World countries to stimulate growth and therefore reduce the deficits in the future. The great Roman rator Cicero, once said: “The safety of the people is the supreme law”. It is a fundamental law that was disregarded by the former administration, and as a result we are here today.

I stand here today as an elected Member of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as a guardian and enforcer of that sacred law. When the citizens of this nation overwhelmingly rejected the PNM and voted for the People’s Partnership, under the leadership of the indomitable Member for Siparia, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, they placed their trust and faith in us to uphold the laws of the land and to always seek their interest first and foremost.

The Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago guarantees the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person, enjoyment of property, and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law; also the right of the individual to equality before the law and protection of the law. I wish to take this opportunity to reaffirm the oath which I took on becoming a Member of this honourable House:

“…to uphold the Constitution and the law, and would conscientiously and impartially discharge the responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago…”
Mr. Speaker, for eight years the PNM had the opportunity to deal with crime with an overflowing Treasury caused by high energy prices. Instead of equipping the protective services with the resources they required including additional policemen, they chose to host international summits, so they could parade their new-found wealth, and as you would recall this meant hiding some of our own citizens behind walls, shrubberies and trees—the infamous berm down in the Beetham area.

**1.30 a.m.**

On February 21, 2002 having been in government for a mere three months, the PNM declared war on crime and launched the infamous Operation Anaconda, which was used to target the high crime areas. By the way, there was no identification of what specific targets and how many guns were expected to be retrieved, how many gangs were supposed to be pursued or anything of the sort.

The PNM Minister of National Security announced Operation Anaconda as a success. *Newsday* February 21, 2002, and I quote Operation Anaconda—National Crime Plan by Nalinee Seelal. Echoing the sentiments of the then Prime Minister speaking in a budget debate a few months later boasted, and I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, Operation Anaconda brought immediate relieve to our citizenry who were literally under siege.”

That was the Appropriation Bill Monday, October 21, 2002. Immediate relief, he claimed, instead the number of murders went from 151 in 2001 to 169 by the end of 2002. Not surprising, one year later he went back to the very same Chamber and then declared war.

In the budget statement of October 6, 2003 the then Prime Minister said and I quote:

“The level of security enjoyed by citizens is the most critical problem facing Trinidad and Tobago today. The population is being terrorized as the criminals have declared virtual war on the society.

The Government must respond and shall respond. Accordingly, we now declare war on the criminals and shall do whatever is necessary…to return this nation to a state where our people can conduct their lives in full safety…”

That was the *Hansard*, Patrick Manning, House of Representatives Appropriation Bill October 6, 2003. Again the PNM declared war on the criminals but talk is cheap and all we got from that government was talk, talk, and more talk.

**Hon. Member:** And cheap talk.
Hon. C. Partap: Cheap talk. And again, Mr. Speaker, the number of murders jumped up by 35 per cent to 229 in 2003:

“I have not forgotten Jilla Bowen, an innocent mother who was shot and killed in MovieTowne.”

And what did the then PNM leader said, he described her death as unfortunate, as “collateral damage”. I remember the rage I felt when I read that story in 2003. “Collateral damage” that is how you describe someone being shot.

Several of those sitting in the Opposition today who were part of government then, most of them they sat down there quietly and condoned what their leader was doing.

Mr. Sharma: They still sit quietly.

Hon. C. Partap: Very much so. And while the citizens continued to be pounded into submission by the criminals, all we got was meaningless assurances that the PNM and Prime Minister would say, “don’t worry, things will get better”.

In an address to the nation on July 28, 2004, the Prime Minister said and I quote:

“Your government has taken note of this situation and is just as concerned. The government recognizes that we have a responsibility to every citizen to ensure a safe and secure Trinidad and Tobago.”

That was Patrick Manning’s address to the nation on July 28, 2004. Later, on Monday 27, 2004 the Trinidad Express reported under the headline, “T and T will win the fight on crime” and their quote from the story:

“The Prime Minister insisted that there have been improvements in the national security situation and assured “Trinidad and Tobago was not about to collapse under the weight of crime.” [Interruption]

That year I will give it to you. The murder rate that year went to 260.

He said that:

“…the Government had taken measures to stem the crime rate and was beginning to see results”.

Improvements? Instead of confronting the problem, the PNM preferred to hide behind flowery language and public relations. That was their improvement. Telling the besieged population that it was okay and things were really improving, and our
mothers, sisters, daughters, fathers, brothers, sons were being slaughtered with impunity at that time. Instead of improving as the PNM claimed, things were rapidly spiralling out of control, Mr. Speaker.

But the end of 2004 the number of people murdered in Trinidad and Tobago had reached 260. In fact under the PNM every successive year saw a record number of murders. Things were improving according to the PNM. Total serious crime which was 15,722 in 2001, before they took office, had leaped to 16,387 in 2004.

Mr. Sharma: Imagine that Paula joined at that time.

Hon. C. Partap: But the PNM preferred to try and convince the country that all was well. Improving for whom? I ask. Improving only for the criminals.

In 2005 the PNM Minister of National Security went on his usual song and dance routine when he informed the nation that kidnappings were under control and I quote:

“We are progressing, as our law enforcement becomes more intelligence driven we would be able to put a handle on those types of crimes taking place.

That was under the story, “Minister—Kidnappings under control,” Friday January 7, 2005 Trinidad Express.

At the end of 2005, a record 280 kidnappings were officially documented, the worst year in history for kidnappings in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Sharma: They said there was “an increase in the decrease”.

Hon. C. Partap: That is true, the infamous—

Miss Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, 36(1).

Hon. C. Partap: Mr. Speaker, yes, I will continue. I will disregard the Member for Arouca/Maloney, she is always 36(1).

Hon. Member: She is dreaming, she is dreaming.

Hon. C. Partap: The Trinidad and Tobago Guardian reflected on the frustration being felt by the population when it published the following opinion questioning the PNM government’s response to the criminal upsurge and I quote:

“Unfortunately under this regime the criminals are winning the war against crime. Little wonder that a senior Member of Cabinet admitted that the only people with crime plans were the criminals at the time.”
Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. C. Partap: And that was under the heading of the Trinidad Guardian, of April 22, 2005 “Crime, Crime and more Crime”.

Mr. Speaker, by Monday, June 6, 2005 the PNM Attorney General came to this Chamber—well the old Chamber—and told the nation:

“Today the Government states in forthright and unambiguous terms that we are at war with each and every criminal in Trinidad and Tobago.”

That was the Attorney General, John Jeremie, June 6, 2005.

Again more war talk, instead of mere words what did the nation get? Instead of putting more policemen on the street they purchased the now infamous blimp which they promised would sniff out the criminals and spent millions to equip it with high-tech spy equipment—$72 million of high-tech blimp. That was the story—$40 million spy ship high-tech crime blimp to sniff out criminals, Express Monday, July 18, 2005.

Again, targeting what they were now calling crime-prone areas they spent $627 million for street lighting.

Mr. Sharma: Oh God, PNM rob we everyday!”

Hon. C. Partap: And that was under the Express of Saturday, March 5, 2005—$627 million for street lighting in crime prone areas.

In August 2005, it was revealed that the PNM spent $7 million to purchase crime fighting software, and the PNM crime fighting initiatives, this was it—spending money on useless apparatus. Remembering that they had money to spend they could have undertaken any of a wide range of options to confront and deal with crime. This is how they dealt with it when the PNM sat in the government at the time included the former and current leaders of the PNM, this is how they dealt with crime, and what was the result?

By the end of that year, 2005, the number of men, women and children murdered in Trinidad and Tobago jumped 50 per cent to 386, yet another record under the PNM. And the number of serious crimes skyrocketed to 17,989.

On April 4, 2006 the PNM Minister of Security in an address to Parliament said and I quote:

“We were the first to admit that we have an unacceptable level of homicides for the first quarter of this year, as newspaper slashes across their front pages, was the bloodiest year in Trinidad’s history.”
“The Government is going to be initiating certain actions designed to sensitize persons who are for whatever reason holding guns and ammunition,… on behalf of other persons. We have to go after the guns and we are going to go after the guns. We are going to reduce the level of homicides the same way that we have been able to deal with the two other major categories of crime: kidnappings and bombings. We are going to deal with … homicides."

Really, Mr. Speaker, this was all bravado, you know, talk. By the end of that year 371 persons were murdered and serious crimes skyrocketed again to 19,654, with the number of rapes and sexual assaults to an unacceptable, 903.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, every year the same promises were made—[Interrupt] no, no, no, you must hear your mistakes, you must hear your mistakes, so that you do not repeat them in the future. [Interrupt] Oh, that is the leader of the PNM; there is no one here.

Hon. Member: “Look where they have reach”.

Hon. C. Partap: Paula you know there is always Panadol in the pantry, there is always Panadol in the pantry. [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member—

Hon. C. Partap: Member for Point Fortin; my apologies. Every year, Mr. Speaker, the same promises and the same incremental increase in crimes at the hand of the criminals—2007, 2008, 2009, and thank God 2010 the people of this country had an opportunity to judge the misinformation and direction of the PNM and made the decision to replace them.

Strangely, it appeared that the more money the PNM threw against crime and the criminals, the more they flourished. The more crime plans that they undertook the more criminals took control of this country.

Again, no information was provided to the asking population; everything was a matter of national security and could not be released to the public. That was find but the PNM of today is demanding that this Government release every aspect of its crime initiatives and is casting wild allegations daily on national security, but keep listening perhaps the reasons for their demands for information would become clearer.

That was the problem with the PNM in government, they had no credibility; they would not tell the population when things were not well. Plans were in place and bearing results, they will not tell them anything. That is why the Leader of the
Opposition believes that this Government has no plan and is operating vaille-que-vaille because that is the way his government operated.

When they sat in government it was all mirrors and smoke, PR and gimmicks. He sat there as part and parcel of it all, and I understood that is why he stuck it out to one point repeating the same misinformation because that is how he is and his government was, and that is how they dealt with crime. But that is not how this Government tends to operate; when we talk, we talk and we walk the walk. We are not afraid of criminals and we are taking them head-on.

**Hon. Member:** Santa Claus?

1.45 a.m.

**Hon. C. Partap:** Mr. Speaker, Santa Claus comes in December. It is Christmas time in December. I look forward to the day when the largest budgetary allocation will no longer be that of national security because it would mean that our beloved country would be crime free and there would be more resources to spend and divert to social services, infrastructural development, health, education, local government, youth affairs, sports and we would be able to spend more on the human development of this country and foreign affairs.

As mentioned on several occasions by Sen. The Hon. Brig. John Sandy, Minister of National Security, my colleague in the office, our intention is to reduce crime and the fear of crime, diminish gang warfare, restrict the use of unlicensed firearms, improve road traffic management, improve customer service delivery, enhance public trust and confidence, engender community patriotism, reintroduce family values and virtues and focus on development of the youth.

The state of emergency announced by the hon. Prime Minister in August did all of those and reduced crime by 70 per cent on top of it.

**Hon. Member:** Temporarily!

**Hon. Member:** Everything is temporary. You are temporary, too.

**Hon. C. Partap:** Indeed, the standard of living of a country is judged such as a safe society based on law and order where people do not have to live in fear of criminals, but can enjoy the fruits of their hard work and sacrifice.

We are committed to meeting this challenge head-on and we remain steadfast to the restoration of law and order in our land. These will be achieved through effective law enforcement and new legislation in specific and pro-social and
community-based applications. There is no point in creating economic wealth if citizens are not there to enjoy it.

I hear a lot of chatter from the Member for Point Fortin telling me to wrap up, but when she rambled on for an hour and 15 minutes with no sense of direction, we let her talk. It is my time now. This is national security’s time and I am going to use it to full effect. [Laughter]

Mr. Speaker, that is why the Government of the People's Partnership came into office. We are about success. Let me take this time to thank the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for affording me the opportunity to serve as a Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security.

I see my new portfolio as very important and I take that role very seriously. From the outset of my tenure, I met and continue to meet—continually—with the divisions under my oversight to get a first-hand look at what is needed and what is to be done to have these divisions run more smoothly and more effectively to benefit, not only the workers, but also the citizens.

These divisions include the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, the Trinidad and Tobago Immigration Service, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service and the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force. This budget debate now provides me with an opportunity to highlight the achievements of these divisions of the Ministry of National Security that fall under me.

I start first with the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is cognizant of the role the prison service plays to eliminate crime and criminal activity on our country’s streets and the reduction of the rate of recidivism by the use of rehabilitative programmes to curb the revolving-door syndrome.

The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service is an important arm of the protective services of this country and as such, it is the Government’s intention to emulate the best practices and standards that apply to prisons internationally. This is one of the reasons that I was elated to hear that the prison service has adopted the restorative justice model of prison reform and prison rehabilitation.

In my humble opinion, this I know is a step in the right direction as it falls in line with international best practice of prisoner rehabilitation. In that regard, the Ministry of National Security and, by extension, the Government, has been and will be continuing its focus implementing this new philosophy.
We intend to focus considerable attention in the upcoming year to ensure that the prison service has the required human resource complement, physical infrastructure and access to modern security methodologies, techniques and equipment to carry out its mandate professionally and efficiently. The prison service is working towards fulfilling its mandate to provide a safe and humane physical environment for its inmates, visitors, staff, prisons and servants of the prison.

In tandem with the restorative justice thrust, improvement of the accommodation and facilities of those committed therein forms an integral part of the rehabilitation process. As a result, the infrastructural upgrades are being undertaken in several prison facilities. However, the most noteworthy of fiscal 2010/2011 was the completion of the vocational workshop at Golden Grove.

The issue of prohibited items being smuggled into prison facilities by inmates, members of the public and other officers continues to be a challenge to security. In an effort to improve and ensure optimum security at these institutions, the prison service has acquired two baggage scanners, which were installed at the visiting areas at Golden Grove and the Maximum Security Prison. These machines have increased the division’s capability to detect persons attempting to smuggle contraband into the facility.

In keeping with the drive to strengthen security within and around the prisons, the division has also installed CCTV surveillance equipment at the remand facility and has begun the installation at the Port of Spain prison.

In fiscal 2011/2012, the prison service will place considerable effort into the improvement of the physical condition of staff and inmates, as well as the development of human resource. Legislation and policy reform, amendment to the prison rules, best practices and restorative justice fall under the purview of the Ministry of Justice.

Acquisition of equipment: the purchase of launches for the prison service, the upgrade of the existing armoury.

Upgrading the infrastructure: continue to upgrade the existing prison facilities; upgrade of Carrera Convict Prison; construction of the senior officers’ mess; refurbishment of the officers’ dormitory; construction of quarters for senior officers; refurbishment of the building for the Youth Training Centre; establishment of the female juvenile centre; construction of the nursery and women’s prison at Golden Grove; and purchase and installation of stainless steel toilets in the penal institution, phase one, women’s prison and remand prison.
Recruitment of human resource development: increase of the staff by approximately 600 officers, and increase in the strength of the Emergency Response Unit by 20 officers from each new batch of recruits.

Mr. Speaker, under the last administration, career path and planning, training for officers within the prison was a nonexistent entity. As such, the Government will be looking at what obtains abroad, in developing societies, as it pertains to succession planning and careers within the prison institution, with the intent of adopting their best practices.

I am happy to announce that the prison service will continue, in accordance with the 2011—2014 development training for prison officers, to conduct specialist training for all prison officers and conduct leadership and management training for all officers from the rank of prison supervisor to Assistant Commissioner of Prisons.

Mr. Speaker, I would now move to the Immigration Division. [Interuption] There is some more. We have all night. The Trinidad and Tobago Immigration Division is working consistently to enhance the efficiency level and upgrading its infrastructure to facilitate attainment of the goal of making a full transition to machine-readable passports by November 2015, in keeping with the International Civil Aviation Organization requirement. In pursuit of this goal, the division, over the period October 2010 to August 2011, issued 135,064 machine-readable passports.

Mr. Speaker, projections—the purchase of a launch for the division, construction of the Immigration Division in San Fernando and outfitting and redesigning the existing immigration offices; upgrading hardware and software as it relates to the border management systems; providing training for officers—international protection policies—to guide management, refugees, asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lot more I can say, but in the interest of time I will move over to the fire service and just say what we are doing for the next fiscal year. We are constructing three new fire stations at Mayaro, Lowlands and one other. We are reconstructing 10 new fire stations and improvement work in six other fire stations and having a computerized fire service division, which will include computers for the inventory, management and land area networks. I will now move on to the constituents. [Desk thumping] [Interuption] The amount of work we have done in that constituency, I think it would take a lot more than three minutes.
I would like to personally thank the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, Mr. Jack Warner, for coming to the aid of our constituency on many, many occasions. [ Interruption] The Member for Diego Martin North/East should have come to your aid a long time ago, but he threw you in the wilderness. [ Crosstalk]  
Mr. Speaker, let me detail some of the works that were being done in the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla. So far, in the electoral district of Sangre Grande South, 100 metres of road was strengthened and paved; 500 metres of box drain was constructed and the number of people getting jobs in that electoral district from the regional corporation went up by 25 per cent. [ Crosstalk] You are in Opposition now, my dear.  
I expect a lot more infrastructural works to be done, including in Shepherd Lane, Deguiles Trace and Soo-Soo Lands, which are all orphan areas and, through the Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Local Government, these areas will now see some development. Box drains will be done at Veronica Boulevard and Palmiste Drive, just to name a few; and a bridge will be built in Harrinarran Trace, Coalmine.  
There is also the upgrading of agricultural access roads in Santa Ana and others and the upgrading of the Maharaj Hill Community Centre, with the view of having two other community centres built in the electoral district.  
In the electoral district of Manzanilla approximately 350 persons have gained extra employment. One thousand, four hundred feet of box drain was built. A number of communal tanks were distributed in Marquis Road, Plum Road, Hard Trace, Plum Mitan, Flemming Road, Caiqual and Logan Road, North Manzanilla.  
A number of agricultural access roads were also built—Anthony Trace, Nirvan Road, Boodoo Trace and Old Plum Road. Electricity was also provided to residents in Flemming Road where over 10 households received electricity for the first time.  
There were a number of recreational grounds upgraded, over 2,000 feet of box drains and other infrastructural works were done. We are also in the process of having a library unit established in that constituency and also pipe-borne water for Plum Mitan and Biche. That is something we will be looking at in the next fiscal year.  

2.00 a.m.  
Within the last fiscal year, in the electoral district of Cumuto/Tamana, over 400 people have gained extra employment. There were repairs to a lot of agricultural access roads such as Pereira Trace, Tamana/Quinto Road and Toolsie Trace.
Infrastructural work being done: one hundred feet of box drain in the De Gannes and Jairowsingh area and La Tosca. In Los Armadillos Road: roadworks have begun in the rehabilitation of the Tamana Road, Los Armadillos Road and upgrading of the sporting facility in Tamichael.

Also as Mr. Warner came up to Cumuto, the rehabilitation of the Cumuto Main Road from Four Roads to Bon Air Road; the completion of the North Oropouche Fishing Pond Road; completion of infrastructural work on the North Oropouche School; [Desk thumping] also the reopening of the Biche High School [Desk thumping] by the Minister; and a number of early childhood centres are being constructed. We are also looking at having Internet access throughout the whole constituency, and also a lot of ecotourism initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, we have also had over 200 NSD programmes completed through the Ministry of Public Utilities and over 200 self-help grants through the Ministry of Community Development.

I will conclude, Mr. Speaker. [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, the man tasked by the hon. Prime Minister with leading the war on crime is a man of unblemished record, and that is Minister John Sandy. [Desk thumping] He has inspired confidence in our security forces, and for which I, again, would like to thank them for all the hard work that they have been doing and, indeed, the national community, that we will win the battle against the criminal elements.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the Prime Minister for her strong leadership during the state of emergency period, [Desk thumping] and her strong leadership thus far. Without her, this Government would not stick together. She is really the glue that holds this coalition together, and she is going to hold it together for many years to come. [Desk thumping]

I leave with a quote by General George Patton, rightly said: “Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory.” Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: Well said! Well done! [Desk thumping]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to later today, Tuesday, October 18, 2011 at 10.00 a.m. I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.
House adjourned accordingly.
Adjourned at 2.03 a.m.