SENATE
Tuesday, September 04, 2007
The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[Madam President in the Chair]

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)
[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 03, 2007]:
That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.


Sen. Raziah Ahmed: Thank you very much, Madam President. As I rise to continue this debate in this honourable Senate this morning, I want to wish you all a very pleasant good morning. Madam President, for hundreds of school children in the nation, this morning, there is no place in school.

This morning, I was deeply disappointed to read in today’s Daily Express, Tuesday, September 04, 2007 that several schools were unable to reopen on schedule—despite promises by the Minister of Education in a ministry that got the largest bite of the budget—because of non-performance by the Minister of Education. [Desk thumping] I refer directly to the first two paragraphs of an article by Ariti Jankie of the South Bureau of the Trinidad Express where it says:

“Hundreds of pupils could not enter their classrooms yesterday, the first day of the new school term, following the long eight-week July-August vacation.

Main reason for the children returning home: their schools were still undergoing repairs.”

Madam President, the scandal continues with the whole deshifting exercise where schools that were supposed to be deshifted—we were reliably informed that schools would be deshifted and the deshifting has not occurred. There is absolutely no infrastructure for the deshifting of several of these schools.
The newspaper goes on to quote 11 schools: Chaguanas Junior Secondary, Diego Martin Secondary, Polytechnic Sixth Form, Providence Girls Secondary, Bishop Anstey High, Mucurapo Secondary, Libertville TML Primary, Palo Seco Government Secondary, Penal Junior Secondary, Claxton Bay AC Junior Primary and St. Clement Vedic School. I feel certain that there are schools in rural communities that we have not yet had word on. There are parents protesting about these schools.

On behalf of the UNC Alliance, on behalf of the parents of this country; on behalf of the single mothers who had to go to work this morning, but could not go because yesterday and today they have to take their children back home; and on behalf of the poor children of this nation, we call for an immediate resignation of the Minister of Education. [Desk thumping]

Madam President, it is never too early in the morning for school. [Interruption] The morning is my best time. I will assure you. As I rise to continue this debate, the most illuminating description I can find is in the words of the Prime Minister himself; the most illuminating description of the budget and the state of the nation is in the words of the Prime Minister on the front page last week of the Newsday: “Prime Minister says I am sorry.” I am sorry, for it is indeed a “sorry budget” that has failed to recognize the deep stress of this country in a practice over the past five years that has consistently failed to make the shift from dependency on oil and gas to an economy that is diversified, stable and sustainable.

What looms large in the budget is the great disparity between the GDP and HD which is human development. There is a massive gap between production or what some call output and human development. It is a mighty chasm between economic good and the ability to use revenue wisely to foster people-centred development, and the case in point is that the school children of our nation are at home this morning, unable to foster people-centred development in spite of old talk. In fact, Trinidad and Tobago is ranked below Barbados, Cuba, St. Kitts, Nevis and the Bahamas on the Human Development Index.

The rendering of this budget is a promise of the greatest social deprivation that will arise from our inability to grow food fast enough; from our inability to protect our children from the vagaries of a Minister of Education; from villains and from social evil; and from our inability to protect our personal assets from bandits and hooligans with current PNM policies. I will therefore focus on this sector which has suffered the most; the social sector, because it is the most critical sector that will warrant the attention of the UNC Alliance when we take Government in December.
I will show how that PNM Government has failed to strengthen the institutions—the traditional institutions that support all of society—hurting the poor where it hurts most.

Secondly, I will show how the PNM Government has caused the collapse of traditional forms of work in manufacturing and agriculture and the social deprivation that results when workers are displaced from their traditional skill set and exploitation of the business community that contribute to non-energy GDP.

Madam President, I will also show how the PNM Government has posed and positioned itself as a Government for mainly its own supporters. It is nepotistic and cronyistic in its distribution of social programmes.

Fourthly, I will show how the absence of time lines and concrete quantified goals is testimony to how the PNM has, once more, produced a budget that is short run, short term and short on delivery, but long on empty promises.

Fifthly, I will show this morning how monetary policy continues to hurt the middle class. I will show how a blitz of prime time advertising and full page colour ads only hurt the poor, because ads are inherently glamorous and inherently deceitful.

It is an electioneering advertising campaign. The Prime Minister called it a “love thing” but it is whisper of sweet nothings. Tomfoolery of the poor people in the disguise of love, and the PNM called it a “love thing” and crowned it off by saying he is sorry.

Even though the economic advisors locally and abroad have been advocating a diversified economy, we are still hearing about incentives to foreign transnational corporations to further exploit our situation in the form of foreign direct investment. We are still hearing about the old Arthur Lewis model from the 1940s inviting MMCs to industrialize by invitation.

Madam President, this budget is sorely lacking in content that demonstrates sound policy decisions that will diversify the economy away from energy into non-oil and non-gas in the direction of agriculture and tourism.

Indeed, yesterday, Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano had made scholastic reference to his cocktail party experts who opined about the oil and gas not going to run out. We all know that oil and gas will not run out, but what we know and what the PNM does not know, is that with present technology we cannot reach the
reserves, as is evident by the Ibis and other dry holes and the withdrawal of bpTT from exploration last year, and folding production in other companies as was pointed out yesterday by Sen. King.

Madam President, always remember the case of Nigeria. Nigerians won their independence in 1960, and they wrote a federal constitution modelled on the British installing codes guaranteeing substantial human rights. The 1970s oil boom in Nigeria brought wealth, but it also fuelled corruption and did little to sustain democracy.

The military seized power, once again, in Nigeria in 1983. Ten years later a brief attempt to return democracy or, at least, civilian rule, was squashed by the General Sani Abacha whose regime perpetrated massive plunder and human rights abuses in Nigeria. It is instructive for us to recognize these things, because the Commonwealth expelled Nigeria in 1995 after the military government executed Ken Saro-Wiwa a renowned playwright who had campaigned against oil industry exploitation.

10.15 a.m.

The self-appointed leader pillaged the country for 15 years until his death in 1998. By then Nigeria's problems had come to seem endless, corruption is still rife and the economy is too dependent on oil. In the slough of corruption practices, just about everyone who has email in Trinidad has received an e-mail from some Nigerian good samaritan who is trying to help a Nigerian princess get her money out of Nigeria. Almost everybody has received an email; it is an evidence of the level of corruption.

Sen. Yuille-Williams: You really believe these things?

Sen. R. Ahmed: I do not indulge in corruption, but everybody has received these emails. That reminds me of a young bright petroleum expert that I had the privilege of meeting in Malaysia in July of this year. Apart from being world class himself and apart from being employed with a world-class company, this young man is a son of the soil; he is an expert in leading edge research in tertiary recovery in oil, and this young man living in Malaysia enjoys an enviable lifestyle. This is the kind of expertise that we need to mobilize from abroad and provide incentives to such experts to come back home. We do not need to provide further incentives to transnational corporations and multinational corporations. We need to bring our research scholars home and this is the kind of thing that leads to the innovation that Sen. King referenced yesterday in her contribution, but instead the budget here debated—
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[Cellphone rings]

Madam President: Everybody please check your cell phones and make sure they are off.

Sen. R. Ahmed:—appears to be designed to mobilize ground support for a general election in the form of salary increases; lump sums of cash in the form of back pay and strategic pay hikes for specific sectors like the police. Of course all pay hikes are good, but the way the wage negotiations were stalled and manoeuvred at certain places and artificially delayed for months; so many unbearable months of artificial delay that bargaining units and workers were out demonstrating all over the country this past year, it is a symbol of delay tactics and election engineering. [Desk thumping]

Do you know what this is symbolic of, Madam President? It is symbolic of a government that has failed and is now dangling money in the form of paychecks and smart cards, in front of the noses of suffering poor, like the proverbial amulet designed to hypnotize the innocent.

In truth, these payments are nothing but pittance handouts to the aged and disabled and a token minimum wage increase of $1 that would have ripple effects down the economy. Do you know what the ripple effect is? The price of almost everything will go up if the employer has to pay more in wages, in a labour market that has no idle capacity that will bring more hardships in the form of increased labour cost that is transferred into output; transferred into cost price and transferred into selling price. Who bears the brunt of it? [Interruption] The $1 is not sufficient, you could have given more—[Desk thumping]—to cancel the ripple effect. And I will also show—if it was meaningful, it would have been more. The electioneering is a $1 gimmick, and I will show how all of this is really abuse.

In fact, it is the worst form of social abuse, which is the root cause for the ultimate deterioration of the social capital of this, our beautiful country. So what is social capital? Social capital is the crux of the matter and it is defined as the cumulative capacity of social groups to cooperate and work together for the common good. Because we are social beings, we thrive on human relationships and these relationships determine our self-esteem and our appreciation for the groups within the society.

The most significant aspects of this matrix of human relations occurs at three levels: levels of trust; levels of anger and levels of reciprocity. The economists add another factor that has shared information to this equation, because shared information is supposed to lend itself to equality, equity, stability and effectiveness.
The new thinking is that social capital is the critical construct that ties the society together with its cultural issues and it has come to the front burner on the world forum. You see, social capital is an asset, a resource that accrues to individuals simply because the levels of access they have through people, connections and contacts are extremely significant in every economy.

Let us now look at the institutions; at how the institutions have been weakened by the slough of ad hoc programmes. In an assessment of public health institutions, the 2007 World Values Survey in Trinidad and Tobago identified that the population has very little or no confidence in the police as an institution; with 71 per cent of respondents saying they did not have much confidence in the police; 67 per cent of the population did not have much confidence in the courts; 78 per cent had little confidence in the press and 73 per cent said they had little or no confidence in the Government. In fact, 65 per cent of respondents had no or little confidence in the public services.

In other words, the protective services, the legal apparatus as institutions, are weak. The press as a disseminator of information upon which people feed is weak. The Government is weak. These are our public institutions and a serious indictment of all of them. In comparison with the region in terms of public institutions and social services delivery, our institutions here are in fact, weaker than those in Barbados, which ranked 23 on the scale compared with Trinidad ranking 85—low down at the bottom of the barrel. In terms of the global competitiveness indicator—and even Jamaica ranked above us at 76, with us coming in at a low 85.

The Government, itself, recognizes that the low Trinidad and Tobago ranking as quoted on page 22 of the Social Sector Investment Programme—this is what they put, giving an account of their stewardship—is due to:

"Government inefficiency, reflected in the waste of public resources...;"

That is what they wrote about themselves. I continue:

"Ethics of Government behavior and the prevalence of corruption;"

Page 22, the account of the Government to this nation about its stewardship. Undue influence by Government on the Judiciary and the private sector. In fact, the World Values Respondents favoured and had more confidence in religious leaders, charitable organizations and women’s organizations, which shows up in the relative strength of the institution of the church.
In fact, confidence that the PNM Government was committed to making Trinidad and Tobago a fully developed nation has fallen in the period by over 21 per cent, down to the bottom of the barrel.

In terms of the family, the family is a nonpublic institution. Let us look at the marriage and divorce rates. The survey of living conditions reported that 96 per cent of the population valued the family as the most important social group and the World Values Survey showed that 87 per cent of the population believed that marriage was not an outdated institution. But Trinidad and Tobago, as part of its social decline perhaps, has experienced a decrease in the number of marital unions with only 26.4 per cent of families founded in marriage and also there is an increase in the number of divorces in the society.

The survey also found that legally married women were better off financially than women in common-law relationships. In fact, women in common-law relationships were found to be among the poorest in the country. And this has a direct bearing on the quality of life of these children and our women in the society.

The fear factor, Madam President. The fear factor is another increasing phenomenon in the equation of social disruption. In the survey of living conditions, 75 per cent of all households admitted that they live in fear of criminals; 44 per cent of the population; almost half of all of us feared that they would die by murder and another 14 per cent felt that they would be kidnapped. What do these kinds of statistics say about the social and moral fabric of this nation?

The Prime Minister, the hon. Patrick Manning is on record as saying, that drug trafficking is high in the country and he even implied that drug lords were supporting the Chatham smelter programme. When people live in fear they are forced to change their lifestyles. For example, according to a report on Crime, Violence and Development, Options for the Caribbean, March 2007, published by the United Nations in conjunction with the World Bank.

In the Dominican Republic, 19.4 per cent, almost 20 per cent, one-fifth of the population declared that they had stopped leaving their houses for fear of violence; 12 per cent of the population had stopped participating in entertainment external to their homes; 12 per cent of the population had ceased to go out in the night; in Jamaica, residents of inner cities in Jamaica from what they call "area stigma" because they are judged to be criminals if they are known to be living in certain areas. And you know what that does? It makes it difficult for them to get
jobs, because if you are deemed and if you are stigmatized from an area, you cannot get a job. Can we say the same for certain areas in this country? Certain streets in Chaguanas that have turned into some kind of gang arena. I was reading in the newspapers of certain places in Laventille and Morvant, I do not know, but the research showed that the same is applicable here.

In Haiti, Haitians avoid places like Port au Prince and are afraid of going to certain areas for fear of being mugged. According to the report, violence eroded social relationships, not only through death but by restricting physical mobility and increasing levels of tension. Would I be wrong to say that the same thing has happened here?

10.30 a.m.

Now, Madam President there is an underground economy that we must now add to the mix. The redistribution of wealth by trafficking, racketeering, and smuggling in which the small person, the "fellas" at the bottom of the food chain, the poor, draw a livelihood from participating at the lowest levels in the various gang and cliques fighting for social power. This vastly increases the cost of transfers in the legitimate world and breeds only negative social conditions that undermine the best efforts of market efficiency and the legitimate economy. The victims of crime are another transfer cost that is increasing daily. In fact, there is something called the “Daly”—D-A-L-Y—it refers to disability, adjusted life years lost due to the direct violence.

Madam President, the cost of crime has been computed in certain places like Jamaica where it is estimated to contribute 3.7 per cent of GDP. What is the cost here? Have we done the research? In terms of death rates from violence, the Ministers on the other side are quick to reference the global situation, that in fact, according to WHO, deaths due to violence in Trinidad and Tobago are higher than in our neighbouring countries, like Barbados, St. Lucia, Cuba, Suriname, and in the Far East, Japan. Violence against women is grossly under-reported, especially as there is a low level of trust in the police service. In fact, we in the Caribbean have higher rape rates than the weighted average for the world. And what is the social impact for this among our women? So, the PNM response is a series of ad hoc programmes to fix medical waiting lists; to create OJTs; to spawn weed whacker experts, a whole bunch of promises; small programmes, tiny little programmes sprinkled all over the country, like sprinkles on a cake, while the basic institutions, the hospitals, the schools fall apart in disrepair—no maintenance and neglect.
Let us look at some of these ad hoc programmes. Page 108 of the SSIP is instructive. It is the status of programmes and policies and initiatives that were planned for implementation in fiscal 2007.

Madam President, Youth Rise—fancy acronyms, fancy name—no implementation; broken promise.

National counselling programme—broken promise; no implementation.

Survey on Child Victimization—no implementation.

Public Education on Social Displacement—Broken promise; no implementation.

New Community Mediation Programme—nothing since 2004; broken promise.

National Steel Symphony; broken promise.


They even have one that they call BLING is synonymous of the love thing. You know, the ring and the bling—broken promises again; no implementation.

Voice of Youth—broken promise.

Boyz II Men—broken promise. That is in your report.

Community School for the Performing Arts—no implementation.

Senior Citizens Centres in Tobago—broken promise.

Steel Pan for Primary Schools—broken promise.

That is what is in your report. Page 108. [Crosstalk]

Senior Citizens Centres, Tobago House of Assembly—status: Not yet implemented.

Same thing; broken promise. [Desk thumping]

So, instead of strengthening the traditional institutions, the hospitals; they bring makeshift programmes to shorten—surgery-less—depending on you know what, world charity, global charity. And you know what we get for that? We get billions of dollars in advertising campaigns. They have so many ads inside this newspaper here, when you are reading the newspaper it is only PNM ad, ad upon ad, upon ad. Ad upon ad, upon ad, upon ad. But you know what, they do not add up to anything significant. [Desk thumping and laughter]
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So, Madam President I went to the San Fernando General Hospital after listening to an ad in prime time, just before the 7 o'clock news and in between the 7 o'clock news, the most expensive advertising slot in the country, talking about this full-scale, brand first-class, spanking, new medical treatment that they are getting in the public system. So I went to the San Fernando General Hospital, I stood between two beds on which two patients were lying.

**Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh:** You are sure it is not four patients lying on two beds?

**Sen. R. Ahmed:** No, there were two patients lying on two beds, if one patient threw her arm out, it rested on the other bed. That increases the risk of hospital-borne diseases among many other social ills that that is symbolic of.

Madam President, the fact of the matter is that you can fool some of the people all the time; you can fool all of the people some of the time, but the PNM will never be able to fool all the people all the time. [Desk thumping] “All yuh back all yuh bags.” So, let us see who gets less money this time around in the $42 billion budget.

Again, in the appendix of this book, pages 105 to 107; do you know who is getting less money this time around?

The Blind Welfare Association;
Assistance to the Homes for the Aged—less money;
Tobago Council for Handicapped Children—less money;
Civilian Conservation Corps—less money;
Servol Junior Life Centres—I think they are getting no money;
Princess Elizabeth Home—no money;
Lady Hochoy Home.

Non-profit institutions with respect to Gender Affairs—all getting less money this time around in the allocations.

Madam President, I move to my next point. Let me demonstrate what has happened to the social sector as a result of what has happened in manufacturing and agriculture. Hardly a word has been said about manufacturing and its declines. In 2000, manufacturing stood about 10 per cent of GDP and we controlled the Caricom market in manufacturing. Today manufacturing contributes less than 7 per cent and has fallen every year consecutively.
In tourism, total air and cruise arrivals fell by 4.3 per cent into the last year. The arrival of the fancy boats at the fancy piers decreased 36.6 per cent and passenger cruise ships declined 8.1 per cent; another falling sector in a traditional work environment; manufacturing, a traditional work environment; and tourism, a traditional work environment. And what these statistics translate to is loss of jobs in the traditional skills set that makes people feel comfortable and happy. It is a displacement and a deprivation and there is need for re-training.

I am not even going to broach Caroni (1975) Limited, except to say that some 40,000 people were displaced by what they did to Caroni (1975) Limited and that is based on an average calculation of a household of four persons. And of course, agriculture declined by almost 6 per cent and expert agriculture, coffee, cocoa and citrus, down by 25.4 per cent. They have virtually destroyed agriculture. And what is the cost of all of this to our economy? How does it affect the lives of the poor directly in the food bill where it hurts the most?

Madam President, on average about 40 per cent of income is spent on food alone in the poorer household and we have 16 per cent of the population living on less than $700 per month. Those are probably spending all $700 on food alone. There are jobs in certain sectors, like CEPEP and construction and there is a lot of talk about who gets the jobs. Deny as much as you like, at any level, success depends both on what you know and who you know.

Nepotism is favouritism shown to relatives; it is more who you know, than what you know. And who is the biggest nepotist? Unprecedented in the entire Commonwealth Parliament apparatus, a Prime Minister appoints his own wife as a Senator, a Minister, a Member of Cabinet and whose Ministry gets the largest bite; and whose son gets or was getting a lucrative basketball contract; and who builds up a palace and foreign diplomatic centre for himself and his family; and who were the people there when the lights went out, that was what our money was spent on. Only his friends and family and Cabinet cohorts, and some of the press to tell the story. And who went to Germany World Cup on the Government’s tab? And how are the State boards constituted?

If in answering these questions, we see that there are some relationships that favour some above others, then we understand. Like common people suffer because the group interaction on the ground has become antagonistic and some people are even calling that it "racist". But there is something else to be said for the “emperor's palace”. I was trying to avoid the word that the press described as palatial and a picture in the news reminded me of the summer palace of the King of Thailand, complete with watercourses, water fountains and prayer place in the
lake. So it is a palace for all intents and purposes, where the King will hold court with the diplomats and according to Sen. Piggott's contribution yesterday, "the diplomatic are falling over themselves, lining up to meet the King." [Laughter and desk thumping] The only thing—

Sen. Piggott: On a point of order.

Sen. R. Ahmed: My time is running out—

Madam President: On a point of order—

Sen. R. Ahmed: How to connect the dots? Madam President, the hon. Prime Minister builds a $140 million complex on the grounds of the Prime Minister's residence and the press calls it a palace. It was Sen. Wade Mark who announced the other day that he is “king”. You connect the dots and guess who will be occupying the palace? And guess who will be occupying the west wing? And guess who will become desperate housewives? [Crosstalk]

Now let us look at the distribution of social programmes. Twenty-four per cent of the national budget and in their own words, in their own reports of their stewardship, page 10 of the Social Sector Investment Programme, this is what they wrote. Problems in the Social Sector Investment Programme and I quote:

"…inadequate and insufficient delivery systems,…"

After five years in Government and 40-something years experience;

“weak or non-existent targeting mechanisms…”

social delivery.

“Insufficient coordination…which retards programme impact and results in duplication …”

In other words, wastage and inefficiency.

The report goes on:

“Social services delivery, lack of monitoring; lack of evaluation; lack of evaluation personnel; lack of evaluation systems…”

in their own report.

10.45 a.m.

That is what you wrote here; it is an account of your stewardship. [Crosstalk] Page 10 of the report talks about wastage of scarce resources and of the inability to assess the impact of any programme. This is the account of the PNM in their own words of their performance. [Desk thumping]
Let me bring another picture to the equation; a vivid one that speaks to the kinds of things happening out there on the ground. Imagine that I was at an NP Quik Shoppe at the gas pump. I saw a maxi-taxi pull up in front the door of the Quik Shoppe. I saw the Quik Shoppe employees abandon their posts and rush to lock the door. That was 10 o'clock in the morning on Independence Day. The Quik Shoppe employees were scared; the people who emerged from the maxi-taxi were cursing. Men and women "cuss, get on” and abused the employees. Business came to a halt and the Quik Shoppe was under lock down at 10 o'clock Independence Day this year.

Imagine I was told by a manager in the National Petroleum (NP) scenario that it was a chronic occurrence on public holidays and Sundays that have resulted in the loss of goods through brass faced and blatant shoplifting at NP Quik Shoppes in certain key commercial districts all over the country. Imagine that the NP Quik Shop managers have to pay for this out of their own pockets.

That is but an example of the deprivation that pervades certain classes in the society; a deprivation that results in hooliganism. It is an example of the developing social relationship between the business sector and the social capital deterioration.

Then there are transportation woes. They have moved the bottleneck from the Nestle factory to the Mount Hope Medical Complex. Madam President, I was there this morning; you should have seen cars weaving and bobbing their way at 10, 15 miles per hour. You should have seen the number of vehicles going onto the shoulder; the number of persons breaking the lights; the number of persons not obeying the laws; the stress and duress of bumper to bumper traffic.

Do you know that they now market stress release CDs for drivers stuck in traffic? No wonder they had to read into the budget remedies for persons watching DVDs in their vehicles. This is probably how they have to amuse themselves in order to avoid the stress of the hundreds of productive man-hours lost in traffic. Do you know that type A personality men cannot bear to be closed up in a locked vehicle; they cannot bear to be stuck in traffic? [Interruption]

**Madam President:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

*Motion made,* That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. W. Mark]

*Question put and agreed to.*
Sen. R. Ahmed: Affirmative action. [Crosstalk] With the anger and frustration caused by the bumper to bumper traffic on the way home, do you know who gets the brunt of it? The women and children at home.

Yesterday Sen. Montano boasted about the number of motor cars on the roads. He claimed it was a significant sign of affluence in the country. Perhaps so, but more glaring is the fact that it is a sign of another weak institution, public transportation. [Desk thumping] People will not buy so many cars if there was an efficient public transportation system. [Desk thumping] Do you know what all these cars and the fact that so many of them are foreign used vehicles, some of them eight, five and six years old, is also symbolic of? The carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere in this bumper to bumper traffic. We have unleashed in this country the highest levels of carbon dioxide pollution in this part of the world. Do you know what else all these cars are a symbol of? An extremely high consumption of gasoline per capita, and that with diminishing oil and gas.

Let us look for a few minutes at the monetary policy. When the PNM took office they immediately put pressure to lower interest rates. Prime lending rates fell to an all time low and borrowing increased; borrowing they said to stimulate investment. In addition, make-work programmes mushroomed and massive construction projects began. The transfers plus the access to loans flooded the market and high liquidity was the result, pushing inflation up further. In addition, persons who were saving their little money, who were getting 10 or 11 per cent, their returns fell to 4 and 5 per cent. High liquidity in the banks meant that the banks were not willing to pay anything for the person who was saving to bring his money to them.

Meanwhile, inflationary pressures continued to push. Consumer spending remained strong. The index of retail sales rose by 11.2 per cent. Prices, which the index of retail sales is about, showed that vehicle parts, construction material and dry goods were really skyrocketing. People were borrowing more money and could not pay back their loans as efficiently as they were doing five years before.

Next began the mopping up operations; heightened open market operations at the Central Bank, pushing inflation up even more. What happened to the middle income people; those who were contributing and saving in mutual funds? There was a marked decrease in the growth of mutual funds under management in the past year; falling to 1.7 per cent from an average growth of 35.8 per cent over the period 2001 to 2005.
The stock market continues to decline with composite indices falling by 2.8 per cent. Trading activity is weak. Mortgage loans increased by 13 per cent. In the insurance sector, which contributes some 8 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), gross premium income declined by 3.9 per cent compared to the previous year’s growth of 9.2 per cent.

Corruption and poverty are other big ticket items. In a professional report from the Australian Government website, www.accc.gov.au and the Journal of Australian Competitive and Consumer Consumption, it is reported that in 2005 Bouygues or bogus—I do not know how to pronounce the word—was fined for colluding in highway construction contracts. [Laughter] What is the name of the company, Bogus?

**Sen. Mark:** Bouygues. They are bogus!

**Sen. R. Ahmed:** Bouygues bogus. [Crosstalk] Bouygues Construction, sorry.

This is a professional publication, ISSN: 1449-6712. In 2005 they were fined for colluding in highway contracts in France.

“Several units of each of the companies, Bouygues, Eiffage and Vinci, have been fined a total A$82 million after an inquiry into the construction industry...” [Crosstalk] [ Interruption]

**Sen. Mark:** Oh goood! Pass that to the police!

**Sen. R. Ahmed:** The article continues:

"...found they had created software that calculated an equal split of the government's contracts among them."

Can you believe that? [Crosstalk]

**Sen. Mark:** Pass that to the police! Bogus Bouygues! [Laughter]

**Sen. R. Ahmed:** The Minister has gone. The Minister in his introduction to the Bill repetitively used the words "milestones" and "mileposts", but do you know what? These have now turned into millstones. [Desk thumping] [Laughter]

**Sen. Mark:** Oh goood!

**Sen. R. Ahmed:** Millstones unleashed upon an unsuspecting people, grinding them into the ground; my people. I bleed for them. [Crosstalk] We in the UNC Alliance, as we prepare to take government in the next couple of months, let me share with this honourable Senate just a few points on how we will bring better value to this nation in party with all of our alliances. Some of them will be from your side too. [Crosstalk]
What will we do? Agriculture is now the biggest issue in this country. We will bring it to the front burner. We will set time lines to increase the number of family farms each year, to increase the contribution of agriculture to GDP to 10 or 15 per cent.

We will work towards fully funded pension plans for government workers. We will examine the indexation of pensions to CPI. We will budget, using a lower price for oil, thereby contributing a hefty bite to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Mark: More savings!

Sen. R. Ahmed: We will bring down inflation by implementing fiscal policy. We will not print new money for every dollar of gas and oil, based on foreign exchange. We in the UNC Alliance will establish a public sector maintenance programme, [Desk thumping] to ensure that hospitals, schools and our institutions are maintained on a routine basis.

Sen. Mark: The airport runway!

Sen. R. Ahmed: We will bring public administration reform to further strengthen the institutions. We will establish a praedial larceny unit to deal with hazards in agriculture. We will ensure that whatever poverty exists in the society is transitory, that it does not stay with the same people all the time, but that the poor will be developed and move on.

Madam President, in closing, I pray for this my country. I take comfort in the Lord, because the PNM Government has played the economics all wrong. They have sacrificed our future in the name of political expediency, [Desk thumping] in the shortsighted boast of fast-paced growth and high GDP. But the PNM's budget has failed to do anything real or substantial for people-centred social development and for social capital that will be sustainable over 100 years.

There is no amount of apology or sorry from Mr. Manning that could be accepted by this nation. Mr. Manning is on record in this Parliament as saying that he was mixing it up; serious issues dealing with integrity are mixed up in his mind; what a travesty. He stands begging the population saying sorry. The hon. Prime Minister will do better to get on his knees and beg the Lord for forgiveness. I say to the people of my country that by the glorious morning light and the night when it is still, thy Lord has not forsaken thee and what is coming after the PNM will be better.
With a UNC Alliance at the helm of governance, we will do the right thing; we know how.

Thank you, Madam President.

11.00 a.m.

The Minister of Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Rennie Dumas):
Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the development of Trinidad and Tobago. I really want to start with the good wishes we received this morning because I want to continue making sure that the good wishes are shared. I think we should take the time to correct a few statements that were made this morning that demonstrate that exactly where the last speaker ended is where we cannot go, because if we do go there, it would be woe on Trinidad and Tobago. Total devastation and a descent into the abyss of underdevelopment and negative development if we dare to treat with the prescriptions that have been laid out by the goodly Senator who spoke last. It would be the destruction of everything we enjoy now and, certainly a hard life for our children, grandchildren and many generations to come. [Desk thumping]

We can start by demonstrating the policy confusion that we started with. The policy confusion says that the Government has settled the pay issues of a number of workers across the country and the Government has proposed a minimum wage that treats with the lowest paid people in the country, and the Senator stands against it, suggesting that any such action would lead to a carry through of these costs to the rest of the population and therefore that is a negative thing. Then a few minutes after, she suggests that a UNC government will raise the contribution of agriculture to 10 per cent of the GDP. In other words, it would be more than $14 billion a year, in a short period. The investment required to do that; the possibility of that, would lead to rack and ruin for this economy. It is policy on the hoof. It is policy that is unsustained by thought, evaluation or even knowledge of the economy. We want to suggest that those prescriptions not be followed. I come to the process today with a sense of awe.

In the last 40 years in the discussion of development in this country, there has been no time in which the capacity of the country has been as large; there has been no time in which the contributions of labour in the country have matched the present time; there has been no time in which the competitive capacity of our firms has been demonstrated and continues to be demonstrated over an extended period of time and over such an extended range of production of goods and services as we have now. There was no time that any region in the country; any
area of endeavour in the country, has been as positive as today and certainly, there has been no time in which we could count ourselves as having emerged from being what Lloyd Best described as, a colony of occupation and exploitation to being a real country on a known and planned development path, as we have today. [Desk thumping]

The demonstrated capacity and endeavour of our people, the production of our firms, the earnings of our country, have never been as well placed. It therefore puts us at a point in the matrix of development which allows us certain opportunities which I am sure that the leadership of this country has taken on board. When a government comes to the country with a vision, a plan and a well- laid out programme of activities, projects and policy, that demonstrate that as a country we are determined to achieve the goals that we have established as Vision 2020, that positive attitude must infused the country.

A leadership that has taken that pathway in the face of our colonial past, in the face of the path of economic development that we were led down by the last government, in the face of all the difficulties that we face as a people, I am suggesting that that leadership has to be respected and I would like to take the opportunity to commend the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and his team for that vision, that attitude to development and that attitude to leadership. [Desk thumping]

I think we also have to take account that in all the discussions that we have had, the scoffs and doubts of the last few years have all disappeared. No longer is Vision 2020 a joke. It is no longer “if we can get there”; it is now, “how we get there.” Some people are jumping in front the train to try to grab the steering wheels to carry us where they know we want to go, because the opportunity is there. It did not come by accident; it was created by leadership, by talk and by analysis. Development is not an accident, but it is easy to get derailed.

I want to congratulate the country beforehand for ensuring that there is no derailment of the path that we are following. I saw a paper being waved a while ago. Do you know what that paper reminded me of? It reminded me of the difference between the leader of this Government and the leader of the last government and his disciples. It shows the difference between acknowledgment of wrong, the possibility that you could face the population and say: “We made a mistake and this is how we are going to correct it and we ask your forgiveness.” [Desk thumping]

Compare that with the arrogance with which the young reporter was faced. I do not even want to say those words in here. I am sure the goodly Senator from Tobago would slap me hard across my face if I were even to tell somebody: “Go
ask”. It takes a proud bridegroom to stand next to his bride and say: “I love you”, and not have to sneak behind the bride’s father’s back and steal her away. The Prime Minister stood here and said this Government loves this country and we do not have to indulge in a set of negative predictions that suggest that our people are incapable of doing what has to be done to take us from one level to another.

There is a significant difference in attitude. We are not stealing anybody away; we are facing the country and saying: “This is what we are and this is what we are asking you to join.” More than that, in good old Tobago tradition, we are even showing you the house where we plan to carry you so you will know just where you are going to live. [Desk thumping]

The way in which our country was described and the aspirations in which our people have been traditionally described, gave us no hope, and suggested that we would always be victims of those who come to transport our funds away and who come to exploit our country. For the first time we have a paradigm of development that speaks to us managing the process from top to bottom, ensuring that the investments are those we agree with; that we price the ways in which we engage our people in the national or international transactions that make up our economy. It is the first time we are able to do that. Before we were price takers; for the first time in the transactions we pursue, we are price determiners. [Desk thumping]

It is a good time to be a worker in Trinidad and Tobago. It is the first time a government has laid out just what the pay policy is and whether you are at the highest rung or the lowest rung, you know that we have agreed that the wage level changes are going to be about 15 per cent. Whether you work in an OWTU-led organization or you do not have a bargaining agent, wherever you are, you knew just what the wage level changes were going to be. If you want to call that politicking, electioneering, and you want to call giving people a predictable set of expectations around which they could plan their individual family and community lives, electioneering, I want to suggest too that you have seen the best in which electioneering and political management of any governmental system can be, and I am sure the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be quite grateful.

There are some words that you do not expect to hear from certain people. When the UNC speaks about social capital and then takes the time to define it for us as if we are children now entering school, and they do not understand that when you talk about trust, the degree of anger, the degree of reciprocity and shared information, and that is used as a critical factor in the development paradigm, then certainly that cannot be provided by the UNC or the UNC Alliance.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
[SEN. THE HON. R. DUMAS]

Therefore, thanks for reminding us and the country of exactly why you should not be in government, because you would not be able to bring that slice of change to the development paradigm. The UNC is famous for laying insults left, right and centre, and that certainly cannot be the means by which social capital is built and transmitted to the process of development.

Even as an example, even as we suggest that one of our problems would be the transport system, we noticed that in the last eight months, the biggest problem, but all you have been hearing is, “stop the rail project”, and every speaker on that side has come to the table saying: “Stop the rail process.” But that is the single largest possible contribution to the decongestion of the roads. Therefore, one has to ask: If this is the problem; if the analysis says that is the way to treat with it and all your efforts are to stop that project, then how, pray God, are you seeking the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

I heard about a type “A” personality, how you do not like to be cooped up, listening to nonsense while travelling, and so on. I want to admit to being an “A” type personality and therefore the difficulty—

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: You are not a type “A”; you are free-spirited and you are a nice person.

11.15 a.m.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: I hope that we could engage in some training so we could reduce the level of trouble that we see.

An issue arose yesterday and the newspaper took it up. I think that we have had cause before to suggest that people in positions of trust have to be a little more careful. When you say that the Central Bank in its behaviour will not be able to contain the requirements for foreign exchange and you speak about the possibility of a devaluation from a venue like this, the scholarship behind such a statement should be good and solid. Unfortunately, the Senator is not here today.

Let us put it very simply. Foreign exchange availability is a function of the source of that foreign exchange; the flows of it; the number of transactions and how the Central Bank uses it to release it into the economy. That is an A level equation you learn once you study Economics. The reality in Trinidad and Tobago is that the Government is the largest earner of foreign exchange and it is managed by the Central Bank. The Central Bank makes it available to banks and other organizations which may get into such foreign exchange dealings in a way
that treats with its management of that flow. It is not a governmental activity. Certainly, the Central Bank will do nothing to so expose us and put us in trouble. I suggest that we check the information. I am sure that the Minister of Finance will take the time to assure us, as will the Central Bank Governor, that there is no threat of devaluation in the country as it is currently managed.

A while ago, I heard another statement about this question of erosion of the stock market. I thought that I heard a law being changed with the presence of the Senator that suggested that a provision has been made that better managed funds are now available for investment on the stock market. If we do it right I am sure that it means that we have quite a few billion dollars in those managed funds now available for investment on the stock market if any stocks can make themselves attractive enough to those fund managers.

Therefore, where are we? In the local government system, the transference of these large global figures to our homes, neighbourhood, communities and municipal regions fall under the management of those municipalities in the local government system. All over the country, individuals are investing in their homes; building better neighbourhoods; demanding better quality services and changing the landscape for the better in which all of us live. That is true whether we come from Sangre Grande or down to Penal/Debe. That is happening across the country.

The local government system is specifically focussed on contributing to the attainment of Vision 2020 and is as determined as the Government has been, to reach those development and the creation of sustainable communities in that context. That happens despite the fact that some of these corporations are managed by the PNM led corporations as well as some UNC managed corporations. Another instance is the decision being taken across the country and informing the actions of the local government system. In that context, our work is an endorsement of this administration’s commitment to an improvement in the quality of life and certainly, as it is translated at the level of the community. In all matters within that system, the remit has been to act in the most equitable and responsible manner. That is demonstrated by all our relationships with the various corporations and the staff of the Ministry of Local Government. The system demonstrates the principles of good governance, accountability and transparency at both the local and national levels.

What is our major task? That has been defined for us in the 2020 documents as nurturing sustainable communities and facilitating regional development. The 700 plus communities across the country fall into regions and are governed or managed in a number of identified functions by those municipalities. We try to
build systems and communities in which residents and their families can gain and retain access to quality municipal infrastructure so they can go after growing business opportunities in line with the growth in the economy, as well as provide quality municipal services and an overall enhanced environment.

We have also contributed significantly to the reduction in unemployment; the increase in community and family incomes and the overall improvement in community life and the families therein. We do all these things without decreasing the ability of future generations to pursue the same ends. We are quite proud of the mission of the ministry being, “the sustainable development of our communities through effective policy guidance; facilitation and monitoring of the implementation agencies in a network that provides high quality partnerships; wide participation in governance and the continuous development of our human resource.” As our primary goals and those which we are determined to reach as the Government is determined to reach these goals at the national level are: the local government reform agenda; building institution capacity at both the ministry and the corporation level; provision of municipal, social and physical infrastructure and an efficiently managed Unemployment Relief Programme.

In the context of local government reform, we have made a commitment to fix the system of local government. To that extent, the planned reforms have been discussed at the parliamentary level; the wider population in the communities and various institutions across the country. We consider this critical because local government reform is seen as an integral element of the overarching vision of the 2020 framework. It speaks to achieving certain institutional strengthening; capacity building and public service transformation goals.

Reform and decentralization are geared towards the imperatives of national restructuring; regional development planning and community-based socioeconomic paths of progress. Activities under this reform agenda included the identification and contracting of consultants to assist us in the drafting of the appropriate legislation in developing the institutional structures required for carrying out the new mission of local government; identifying the functions both at primary and secondary level, for which the local government organization is responsible, as well as develop an implementation plan strategy, timetable and contingency plan which is now being reviewed before submission to Cabinet.

We have executed a national level stakeholder consultation on the functional and legal framework for modernizing local government in Trinidad and Tobago. That was done on August 06 and 07 this year, and a whole cross section of the country attended. We have worked with the Ministry of Finance in the
establishment of mechanisms that could assist in the transfer and improvement of property taxation; house rate collection and a change in the house rate and property taxation system at the regional corporation, as well modernizing that system across the nation.

We have worked with the Ministry of Public Administration and Information in the start-up of the Certified Assistance Scholarship Programme which is a preliminary and requisite capacity we must have for being able to determine the rates at which people should be taxed. These people are expected to start their studies in September this year. We have collected the data and verified it in the context of the domestic, commercial and industrial properties in most of the areas. This exercise is over 80 per cent complete. A property ownership registration exercise has been carried out and this is about 50 per cent complete across the country.

A draft model of an IT system for management of property taxation by the Ministry of Finance in collaboration with the Centralization Unit has been developed. A fixed asset management system for the ministry is also being developed. We have identified the human resource, physical, technical and system requirements for effective implementation of property taxation initiatives and the modernization of the system of house rate collection.

We have executed hundreds of community institutional roll-out consultations across the country, as part of the participative process of informing the country on the reform process; the expected ends and the participant roles which the community as well as the elected people in the corporation will have to carry on. In other words, what is left is to complete the draft legislation; bring it to Parliament and then set the modalities in place to execute that process and programme with which Parliament would have agreed.

The Ministry of Local Government is also charged with the management of a certain level of physical and social infrastructure. We believe that the delivery of this infrastructure in the community leads to the promotion of healthy families; to increased social activities; facilitate commercial activity and lead to overall development of the regions. These provisions in terms of physical and social infrastructure are in keeping with Government’s planned investment in the development of an efficient structure base as a condition and mechanism for social and economic progress.

We can build the highways; the rail system and the system of inter-island transport, but until we bring the social and physical infrastructure into the communities and regions and maintain them at an appropriate standard, the
question of our being able to enjoy the desirable quality of life remains hanging. In recognition of this, the Government has invested significantly in funding local infrastructure development across the municipalities in the last five years. It is imperative that the local infrastructure work as well as the inter-regional infrastructure.

Under the PSIP, the Ministry of Local Government received an allocation of $126 million of which $30 million was allocated for infrastructural development. Some of these may seem mundane to us. You had the Roads and Bridges Programme that allows people to travel within the municipal corporations. We developed almost 2 million metres of roadway; constructed 395 metres of box drain; divide that by 5 metres and you will recognize how many were built; footpaths; retaining walls and curbs. You name it as what is required in the rural and city areas and these were built.

11.30 a.m.

In rural development works, in particular, there is $8.5 million for a programme of road paving now ongoing across municipalities. Whether you are in Mayaro, Rio Claro, Chaguanas, Sangre Grande, San Juan, Point Fortin, Arima, Princes Town, Siparia, Tunapuna or Piarco, the local government system is there building the infrastructure required.

We recognize that oftentimes, in trying to replace a bridge, we have to find temporary means of relieving the problems that may arise, minimizing the disruption. Two Bailey bridges were bought, and a third one this year. The people in El Quemado, Los Iros, Mendes Trace and Arima, were the recipients of this relief prior to the rebuilding of their broken bridges.

Sitting with the leaders of the municipal corporations in the last four years, we identified drainage and irrigation programmes as the major problem. The Government responded by giving each of these corporations $5 million per year. In that context, in 2004/2005, 2005/2006, there was the development and reconstruction of 93 drainage projects all across the country at a significant cost to the State. I think that $210 million was spent in those years by the corporations. I was told that one corporation said that they received no funds and that they were being punished. I suggest that we take those statements with a grain of salt, Madam President.

The Government further developed a programme called Infrastructure Renewal Improvement and Development (IRID) Programme, which recognized that there were small problems in areas; somebody’s sidewalk or somebody’s bridge was falling apart and the Government agreed to allocate $25 million for
this programme per year for the last four years. Under this programme, we
delivered 990 such projects across the country; no discrimination as someone
suggested.

In other words, in line with the decentralization policy of this Government, the
councillor in his electoral district has the capacity to determine which sidewalk,
which bridge and which drain will be fixed. That is not determined at head office.
In line with the decentralization and reform policy of this Government, the
councillor has that responsibility. The corporation has the overall responsibility
for allocation.

I say it here because sometimes you get fed up. Someone said I have a gentle
personality. I hope that is correct. Sometimes you get fed up. If I have found
discrimination in that system, it has been found in the areas in which the UNC is in
charge, with PNM councillors in the minority. I have had to intervene to say that
they cannot treat the people unequally. [Interruption] Enterprise? Chaguanas?
Princes Town? That is the reality.

So when we provide equal opportunity at the central level, as it should be—I
am not saying we are doing any favours—when it gets down to that level, that is
where the discrimination starts. We are suggesting that we cannot set one
standard at the national level and not enforce that standard at the local level.

Madam President, understanding that we must bring our management systems
into today's world—I do not know where this view comes from that we do not set
standards and time lines. It is furthest from the truth. We are quite careful to treat
ourselves as professionals who know a little about management and who
understand that you must have objectives, set goals and measure your activity
according to those given standards.

In that context, we in the Ministry, with the compliance of the other people in
the system and the facilitation of the Cabinet have established a geographic
information system project with the intention of developing an interactive database
and map of all essential infrastructure under local government. Therefore, we
would have cross-referencing capacity and capability with all relevant
information pertaining to existing and proposed infrastructure within the country.

The implementation of this GIS system would allow for more efficient
planning of infrastructure development and maintenance. We want the ability to
access an interactive map, to be able to deal with that at consultative opportunities
with the communities, as well as, facilitate the planning with the corporations and
treat with that when we go to the Ministry of Finance to look for money. When
we go to the Ministry of Planning and Development, we want to be able to explain exactly what we are trying to do, as well as, as is done in all modern cities, allow for the possibility of your being in your car and mapping your path to known addresses. As long as you know the address, you should know how to get there. All of this we are suggesting can be provided by an appropriate geographic information system.

We have contracted the Department of Surveying and Land Information at the University of the West Indies (UWI) to work with us on that matter. The pilot project was completed in Sangre Grande, and we plan to do it for the remainder of the country. We expect to complete it at the end of this year. We have also recruited staff and purchased the relevant software for the Regional Development and Planning Unit as well as the Technical Unit and are actively seeking to use this project and the information provided both in local government reform as well as in our infrastructure development and management process.

Madam President, I have been intrigued by the statements suggesting that government expenditure to create government property, somehow is wrong. We have the situation in which people look at the waterfront projects and ask why we are building those things. Of course, we hear remarks of condemnation of the Prime Minister's residence all the time.

It was also the decision of this Government, which nobody remarks on, to build municipal complexes across the country. Three have been started and the design of a fourth is in place. I have, a number of times, laughed to myself—I just want to share this with you—that the cost of the Prime Minister's residence is exactly the same as the municipal complex in Chaguanas over which Mr. Rambachan will preside—of which he will be king and lord.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Why must it be so expensive? You are the Minister, break it down. You are responsible for it.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, you do not change the price of your operation. The cost of the infrastructure is that. That has been in the public domain now for two years and contracts have been given, sod has been turned, but somehow it is all right for Mr. Rambachan to be participating in that environment, but a problem for that same expenditure on the Prime Minister's residence. It is ridiculous reasoning.

I advise, whether you are in the COP planning to sell Government property to whom, I do not know, or you are in the UNC and plan to occupy it. [Interruption] You have no problem occupying it after it is built. Ridiculous! We plan to build
14 of these, one in each regional corporation because that is what it takes. Nobody goes about talking about Mr. Rambachan’s “palace” or Mr. Ramnath’s “palace”.

Sen. Seetahal SC: Are they going to live in them?

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: They are going to manage them and work in them. A ridiculous assertion! It is time you get real. In addition, a number of local government buildings, whether police posts, administrative centres or otherwise, have been improved across the country.

I really thought we should not leave this matter for the Minister of Education to respond to. It is traditional over the vacation to repair the 700 or so primary schools. I used to be in the trade union so I know that for the time they were in office the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA) could have closed every school because almost none met the standards of OSHA or whatever. This Government, having grappled with the problem, last year spent millions of dollars. This year they went out on time with contractors, and 321 schools were addressed. Eleven schools were not opened; in other words, a failure rate of 3 per cent; a success rate of 97 per cent [Desk thumping] in managing projects. There is a 97 per cent success rate and somebody screams [Inaudible]. Madam President, I wonder how often we get 97 per cent in any exam or evaluation. I suggest we congratulate the Minister of Education on her performance this year. [Desk thumping]

The issue of the municipal police arises as a contribution in treating with praedial larceny and peace in the municipal areas. The municipal police service is being developed and, recognizing that there are issues in terms of recruitment, training and management, the Cabinet has established a committee to look at the reconciliation of the variance between the national police service and the municipal police service. There are differences which must be recognized and treated properly, but the intention is to ensure that the municipal police service becomes fully established so that we are able to determine under what rules recruitment and management of that service should arise.

At present, there is confusion in which there are some being appointed by the Public Service Commission and doubting whether they are under the statutory authorities, and disciplinary issues arise. In one tribunal a policeman asked the CEO by what rules he was managing him. Another one asked the Public Service Commission Tribunal what authority it had. Let us clear all those things up so that people would know how they are managed.
Madam President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Hon. Dr. L. Saith]

Question put and agreed to.

11.45 a.m.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Madam President, thank you. In line with an earlier statement that I made, there is this issue of unspent balances. Year after year the corporations complain that they do not have enough funds. They asked for the funds and when the funds are released, they do not spend them on the things that they said that they would spend them on, and they amass the funds.

At this point in time, the ministry has agreed that a number of building projects should occur. These building projects should occur if they fall within the definitions of the law that says how that money should be used. It should be used for public buildings that meet the functions of the municipal corporations.

Madam President, I have not responded before, but there was a gentleman on a radio station screaming and saying that he has been asking to build a school, and I have refused to give him permission. I just want to make it public that, as far as I know, building schools is the business of education. If the gentleman applies to the Minister of Education, who has a budget adequate to meet her requirements, I am sure she will facilitate.

Madam President, the mobility of the corporation has also been in question, and the Government has been moving to treat with that. In the last four years, just about $36 million has been spent on making sure that the corporations are mobile in terms of major vehicles and equipment.

With respect to disaster preparedness, we often have the first call, and though disaster preparedness is an area that is under the full management of national security, services in that area are provided by local government. Local government has programmes for disaster preparedness, and has gone out to assist in the establishment of shelters; work along with all the other relevant agencies—the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, the Ministry of National Security and other forces to ensure that we play our part.
In fact, the reality is that the system established at the island level in Tobago, is so well organized that we have asked the corporations to visit Tobago to see what is going on and to ensure that a level of preparedness is, in fact, treated within all municipalities in Trinidad.

In terms of social infrastructure, these include: burial grounds, cremation sites, markets and slaughter houses and recreation facilities. All of these are being addressed.

With respect to burial grounds across the country, special attention is being paid to them. When we came into office, these grounds were all overgrown and in various stages of disrepair. The mandate has gone out to the corporations to try their best to treat our dead as we would like to be treated at that time.

Market and slaughter houses across the country; the improvement in the markets have assisted in treating with the issue of ensuring that we afford more comfortable accommodation for vendors. We are hoping that with the discussion that we have had with food security, and the informed presentation made by the various persons, that we have all agreed that the market system should be expanded to include farmers market, et cetera, and that local government will play its role in treating with the provision of markets and slaughter houses which would treat properly and in an acceptable manner with the provision of food for the country.

With respect to recreational facilities, we are working with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs on a system of classification. A system of standards has been established for recreational facilities throughout the municipalities and, in that context, the Sports Company, NSDP from the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, as well as the corporations themselves have been working on a number of recreational facilities across the country. I think the evidence is there. On the East-West Corridor people could see it. Those are only three out of more than 87 recreational facilities across the country which have received some attention and which are in a planned programme.

Public baths and conveniences; year after year we have these arguments. We can report that attention to these has started. The Chaguanas Borough has built three new ones this year. The San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation has begun working on some, as well as the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation.

In terms of play parks, this is a programme that is starting, and contracts have been awarded. We have set 14 of these parks—one in each corporation—with the
first being the Sean Luke Play Park which we have suggested will be the classic example of what we will be putting in place.

The Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation has built eight of these parks and is expected to install five more before the end of the financial year to service all the electoral districts in the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. They have been at the forefront with the delivery of this park system in the country.

Madam President, as I was saying earlier, all regions across Trinidad and Tobago have responded to the changed framework for governance that we have had. At all levels, changes have come. It will be quite remiss of me if I do not point out that just as attention has been paid to all the corporations in Trinidad—all areas, all communities and neighborhoods—the island of Tobago has also received adequate treatment from this Government.

In fiscal 2007/2008, the Tobago House of Assembly is scheduled to receive resources in the order of $2.23 billion. Madam President, I cannot help but contrast that with what was the situation that we had to deal with prior to this term of governance.

Prior to this term of governance, the cry of neglect of Tobago, the cry of anguish—let us put it this way—when I see people coming and talking about this alliance, and then go to Tobago and invite people to join this alliance, I know the history of UNC-led alliances.


Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: And you abused the man who gave you that opportunity. I have sat in this Chamber and heard you call that man thief, liar and other things. [Interruption]

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Not me.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: I say “you” meaning UNC. I am not saying “you”. I have heard you say here “stole the election”. Is that not a thief?

Madam President: Just be careful with your words.

Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas: Madam President, sorry, it is a rhetorical question. I have heard you so describe the man. I have heard Morgan Job, as part of that alliance being forced to describe himself before the country as a “puppy dog”. I have heard the abuse laid down on Deborah Moore-Miggins and Nathaniel
Moore. I have heard the destruction and damage that was done to Hochoy Charles and, by definition, the Tobago population. All these persons were members of that alliance. So, when I see a UNC alliance being formed, inviting people from Tobago to join that alliance again; I say I have to talk about this.

I have to walk from Charlotteville to Canaan to remind people about how it went. I want to be able to contrast that with the treatment and the set of mannish relationships we have been able to carve in this present administration.

We have been able to work with an administration to establish a system of governance that understands the views of Tobago; that understands the ways in which Tobago would like to be administered and that understands that the Tobago House of Assembly is a real institution for governance in Tobago, respects it and knows that the institution shall not be diminished in any way.

**Madam President:** Minister, you have five minutes.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Dumas:** And, therefore, I must take the opportunity to draw to the nation’s attention that yes, we can have a nice social compact that travels the boundaries of the whole country and which keeps all dimensions, all sections and all areas of that country in a cohesive development paradigm.

Madam President, the way in which Tobago was treated in this budget—whether it was in the budget before where we had to treat with the fast ferry—you know, I look on the front page and I see the *Warrior Spirit* going up the road, and it is not by accident it was named *Warrior Spirit*; not by accident at all. The naming of it treats with certain connotations that we have to accept—peaceful, proper, relationships that are respectful of the sense of self of all members of the national community and, certainly, of the Tobago personality—can be delivered by this administration. [Desk thumping]

I am suggesting that and I am doubtful that it can be administered anywhere else. It is in that context, I want to congratulate the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance again, for understanding that the development paradigm in Tobago is a little different and, therefore, it needs a different way of address and, certainly, you have a critical catch-up to play and, therefore, the treatment that understands whatever the survey of living conditions says; whatever the unemployment rate says; there is a development process ongoing in Tobago that is at the point of take off and for which we need major investment in critical facilities.
These facilities will treat with the various spans of social activities which any neighbourhood or any community or any island people must have. I want to suggest that has been treated with in this budget. [Desk thumping] I want to congratulate the Government and the Minister for that understanding.

Madam President, thanks for the time, but there is quite a lot more to be said and, as somebody said, there will be the hustings. I want to end by reminding each of us that there has never been a better time to be a citizen, a parent or a child of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran:** Madam President, it is with a sense of civic responsibility, love for my country and faith in the future of this country that I wish to take part in this very important budget exercise.

I do not know why this season is called the “silly season”. I think election is a very serious matter, and the conditions surrounding such a matter should, indeed, be taken very seriously by all citizens, and especially those who intend to participate in that democratic challenge. I think we are about very serious business at this state as exemplified by the budget exercise. [Desk thumping]

Madam President, lest I forget—I have a number of issues to raise within the time limit—I wish to extend my very warm congratulations to Minister Conrad Enill; not only because he is one of the major architects of this budget, but I think it was a remarkable thing to see him confronting adversaries, the challengers at all corners of the media with a sincerity that I think is quite impressive.

**12.00 noon**

That too, is part of our democracy, the willingness and more so the capability of being accountable to the population in a very transparent way. Others could follow his example; and indeed they have. The other Minister, Christine Sahadeo, entered virgin territory too and displayed an acumen that is worthy of the position she has taken, especially coming from the quiet corners of the private industry.

Then I was also pleased to see another Minister being exposed to the vagaries of electioneering, Minister Christine Kangaloo; facing the music last Saturday with a bravado that shows some value for future challenges. In fact, there was a scientific poll conducted in Pointe-a-Pierre, I have the results in my back pocket. [Laughter]

**Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie:** Well do not sit on it.
Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran: I would not sit on it. I hear a voice telling me, Ramesh, tell them, tell them, but I say, no not yet, not yet, not yet.

Madam President, we really need a new breed of politicians in this country, not in a total sense, but there are some gaps in the political management of our economy and also in the management of the Parliament itself, and I believe the leaders of all parties do recognize that.

This is a challenge for new politicians to come in and those who are not new should refurbish themselves to recognize that the challenges are too serious to be treated superficially. Not only because of the amount of money we have, but there is an impatient public and in these globalised challenges that we face we need to respond quickly, efficiently and very wisely.

We look forward to politicians, elected or nominated, who can handle our dollars well; who appreciate the value of dialogue in a democracy, the examples that I just mentioned; they do not have to be necessarily good looking, but they must be of proven honesty; civic minded; knowledgeable and have some ideas about the Westminster system. Because I have a feeling that when people demand accountability, some Members of Parliament, especially Ministers, take it personally and I do not think that should be encouraged, but it will come with an understanding of what the Westminster system requires of all of us. And I think in the new era and the coming elections we are able to provide many more examples of what I will call the “new politicians.”

It is not only a matter of the new politics, it is more so a matter of the new politicians, who would also recognize what their parliamentary duties are in terms of punctuality and in terms of attendance to their constitutional duties. So while we need political reform, especially in separating the powers between the Executive and Parliament and to help get rid of the redundancy—whereas Ministers sit in Parliament, the Legislature and also in the Cabinet, which really contaminates the separation of powers and the role of the Executive to really manage the country, uninterrupted by the legislation, but be accountable to the Legislature—I would wish to see a new scenario in which the Prime Minister is allowed to choose his Cabinet from outside the Parliament, but have the Parliament as an elected forum in an exchange with the Executive in terms of governance but also having the Executive accountable and bargaining with the Parliament in a matter of reciprocal democracy.

We have had some of that and there have been some very good Ministers, I will not call names, but there were a few of them who appreciate—and I do know they will appreciate—the value of what I am saying. I was pleased to hear
Minister Dumas provide a lot of hope in terms of basic necessities and decentralizing the democratic way in which the local government would function.

I expect all the parties in this campaign to tell us something more concrete about what they will do with the value of the dollar and I would hate to see any back door intervention after the elections, without declaring themselves before the elections, what they will do with the dollar. I have a sneaking suspicion that one or two of them would like to devalue this dollar in a very unreasonable way.

I would want each of these political parties to tell us, because the evidence is there, the Central Bank reports are there. There is enough evidence to tell us which one will handle the dollar in a devaluing direction or if not, why not. There are many more things they should tell us; we are not hearing as much as we should with respect to the issues confronting the country, except that we know there is a battle for government that is imminent. So that is what I mean by requiring a new politician and accompanied by constitution reform.

The Review of the Economy is a very important document; it is a guide to the budget; it contextualizes the budget; it also expresses some measure of accountability and I think it is reasonably well done, except to say, when you speak about review of the economy, you are speaking about the formal economy. We cannot be so blind as to ignore the fact that there is an informal economy, which contributes to a lot of commercial exchanges and business exchanges taking place in the national community. And under that informal community there is an underground economy. I do not know who will review the informal economy and worse yet, I do not know who will review the underground economy. Dole Chadee is not here with us, but people of his ilk know much more about that economy than we care to think.

In other words, there is a lot of currency and business transactions taking place around and under the formal economy to which this budget directs itself. So, we have no choice. So, when we see prices going up here and there and a Minister or a government tries to explain it in a formal sense, through a formal review of the formal economy, a large part of the target is being missed, therefore public policy cannot respond appropriately.

I took the opportunity to peruse all the relevant documents to see where we sit with the important macro-indicators. I derived some of the information from *The Economist*, its intelligent services and I must tell you, we are sitting pretty well internationally with our macro-indicators. We are about 48th now with a per
capita of over US $14,000; Luxembourg is first with $70,000; Bermuda 2nd, Bahamas 42nd, Aruba, 25th; Singapore, 29th. So we are really getting into the big league as a small country with a very excited economy.

We are not doing so well in the Human Development Index; I think we all know that. We also have to ask ourselves what are Bermuda and Bahamas doing without oil and gas that puts them higher than we are in some important respects. [Desk thumping] We are doing very well in two important measures and it tells you why I say I have faith in the future of this country.

In terms of the rate of economic growth, we are 28th with Singapore on that indicator—the rate at which our economy is growing—and we are first in the Caribbean. The highest growth in industrial output, we are about 15th in the world. In terms of the surplus as a percentage of the GDP, we are 22nd with Sweden; Singapore is 26th. So really—I have a list, 15 of them—without belabouring the point, we have to admit that in the macro-indicators we are doing extremely well and we should therefore manage that prosperity to close the gap between the quantitative indicators and the qualitative aspects of our life. And it takes not money, but as I will keep on saying, faith in this country, and I use the word love for my country deliberately, because I feel very distressed when people are faced with one or two problems in this country and the first thing you hear from them, publicly or privately, “I am going away”.

I really cannot understand that in this day and age. It is a private matter. Of course, there are reasons for going away, but not to run away from the challenges of your country, when you as a citizen, born here, have a responsibility to take part in preventing or trying to solve those very problems. That is why I say all of us are here, many of us could have gone abroad or stayed abroad, in my case and I am quite sure in the case of many others. I spent 12 years abroad at the University of Toronto, and I worked in the university; I worked at Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, Toronto Board of Education, but my country is in my blood.

This is the kind of patriotism that will help make sense of the dollars. Without that sentiment, the passions and the aspirations we had just after Independence, so well articulated by the first Prime Minister, we have to revive that spirit of Independence and money alone will not do it, because when it comes to the business creativity and research indicator, we are way down below.

When it comes to research and development as a percentage of GDP, we are almost nowhere in the world, especially in those countries which are known to be competitive, and innovative. In fact, I did raise the issue with the Attorney
General at a conference and I was happy at his immediate response when I made the plea for a research and development fund, run by independent boards, so people from all parts of the country could apply for their research ideas, to get their projects going that have meaning for the development of the country. And the Attorney General, in a rather unprecedented way, promised to take up the matter, and of course, he has taken it up and I hope it reaches the place that we had in mind. I say no more on that particular point.

In terms of patents granted, Japan has 120,000; United States, 88,000; Taiwan, 27,000 and China, 6,000. Let us hope the G-pan brings the kind of inspiration I hope we need. My colleague, Sen. King has spoken extensively about this, the matter of innovation and the matter of intellectual capital. So the very serious question that must now be asked—whether we find more oil and gas or not—for how long can our tax dollars afford to support these expensive programmes or will we soon reprioritize the list, so as not to hurt the truly desperate and needy ones.

Will more and more people be attracted to these programmes year after year or will we see a gradual reduction by closing the institutional cracks through which these needy people have fallen through? But the fundamental question was posed by my distinguished colleague, the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, and he always inspires me sometimes to attend to a subject I did not think about.

He posed the question quite legitimately; how much more can a government do. There are limits to government and 10, 15 years ago that was a big subject in the international discourse. Reports by IMF and the World Bank started to talk about not only the limits of the government, but the improved role that the private sector must play, and it was defined, that the government, as a facilitator.

I am not too sure whether that challenge was taken up, and a lot more done by the private sector than they should do really. Government finds itself having to do more, and more, and more for the country. I think we need a fresh partnership to get rid of all the noise and to heal the breaches, a partnership between labour, business and government in a rather permanent, ameliorative way.

12.15 p.m.

The noise is deafening, sometimes we need some more light in trying to shape the future. So I thank Minister Montano for raising the question because the more you expect and ask a government to do, you are almost becoming a communist country. You are inviting dictatorship upon yourself. You want government to tell you about parenting; you want government to do this; to do that. Where is the
sense of personal responsibility? I make no excuses for a government that neglects the people. I am not saying this is the case, but it worries me to know it is as if the individual in this country has lost the sense of personal responsibility and the lawlessness you see, to which we refer so regularly is germinated by that sense of irresponsibility; “Oh, I am not responsible for anything”, whether it is littering, disrespect; and it is always more. Madam President, do you know that there are studies on health, education which show that the more you give is the more demand you create, especially in health, which is the irony of that aspect of public policy.

The Prime Minister on page 43, made a remarkable statement, he is trying. My view of the Prime Minister is simply this, I do not think he is getting the advice that he really needs at the level—my colleague says he may not be taking it—but, when you see the challenges and the issues and the response he gives, because he cannot know everything, he has to depend on information and rather than saying information, I am not too sure whether proper information, if not advice, is reaching him, or whether as the Prime Minister he is too busy to peruse all the information. But he made a point on page 3, he says, "...anyone, who needs a job today can find one." That is a remarkable statement and it is largely true because there are so many programmes, even if you are not skilled, you have YAPA, HYPE, MuST, YTEPP. It is not only if you want a job you can get one, if you want an opportunity to be self-reliant and responsible, the opportunity is there and that is what distresses some of us who want to see this country become a better place. But, more than that, having said so, on page 3, and I perused what is the most available statistics on unemployment.

I am puzzled, maybe I am not bright enough, but I am missing something. I, myself need better advice. If things are so good, how come up to March you had a 13 per cent unemployment rate in the construction industry? Review of the Economy document on page 43—how come you have a 6.5 per cent of unemployment in forestry, hunting, fishing? There has to be some explanation, but 6 per cent unemployment in wholesale, retail trade, restaurants and hotels, so there is something else in the economy that needs to be clarified or is it the question that they are not available or willing to work, because I know of many instances where people are looking for workers.

So it is a question I had posed to Minister Enill about three years ago. It came out here and there, snips and bits that we need to tell the country how unemployment is measured in terms of the six-month or three-month period; willingness and availability and so on; how poverty is measured and how the cost
of living is measured. The experts know it, all of us know it, but the general public must understand when the figure is used, what it means, and you can understand what it means by knowing how it is measured.

So I believe that the budget and the speakers from the Government side should send a heavy message now about self-responsibility, savings and thrift. Not because you have more dollars in your pocket as a citizen, you should support high prices by prolific spending or by squandering. We have had $2.5 billion in the last five years for URP and CEPEP. It is a lot of money, people can still open a small account and I am always happy when I hear Sen. Dr. McKenzie talking about how the little things can lead into bigger things, maybe that is the Tobago spirit.

On poverty reduction programmes, $17.5 billion; 14 per cent of the revenue for the past five years and that is why Sen. Montano asked, what more can a government do? We have reached the limit and I note with great interest in the Prime Minister’s statement that we have no new social programmes and he is right, maybe there is some reflection going on. Not because a CEPEP or a URP job is easy to get, you should want to stay there all your life. Not because Government is now finding a place for squatters—a remarkable job, by Dr. Keith Rowley, almost 30,000 houses with all the quarrels and protests. Like a gladiator, he is moving his way through to fulfil that important pledge—you should look forward to squatting all your life. Not because government is providing supplementary skill training with HYPE, MuST and YAPA, you must squander your years in secondary school.

I believe we have reached a stage that if some of these students have their way, they will let the Minister of Education come and write the exam for them. That is about the last thing you feel they would want somebody else to do for them. We have to buck up and shape up and express our civic obligations for our personal growth, as well as for social stability. Not because Government now pays your full tuition fees, you must stay in school as long as possible, idling and liming. And all the secondary schools now; it used to be at university, where they would go to lime in clubs. That is a big thing with peer group pressure now in this country. You have to be in the in-crowd to go and lime on a Friday night, drink beers and behave the way you see in the movies, and now the secondary school children are doing it.

Those bad habits are perverse distractions from what they should be doing, studying hard to have a stable successful future. In fact, at the same time, it is unfortunate that CEPEP and the URP have become so stigmatized. I am not dealing with the policy itself, I am dealing with those who are in the programmes, those
young people and adults too. They are so stigmatized, I do not know how they feel about themselves. If you want to insult a worker today, you tell them, “You think you in CEPEP or what?”; “You think this is URP project or what?” I always wonder how those who are in the project itself feel about themselves when such stigma is laid against them. I really find that regretful. How can they recover from such stigmatization? It is almost like the junior secondary schools where it is not the children to be blamed, but it is the psychological obstacles we put in their way, by unleashing this stigma upon them, and we create what is known in my discipline, the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Madam President, the time has come, in fact passed, when certain conditions however slight, should be placed on all such taxpayers’ support systems. Even the welfare driven Scandinavian States, as well as, France, England and the United States, now recognize that welfare should also mean that the beneficiary eventually look after his or her own welfare as much as possible. This brings self-respect; self-responsibility and lawfulness. It is not that you want to be heartless, Madam President, you should know, it is like medicine. People do not like medicine, but it is good for you to bring you out of your malady.

In the United States, for example, single mothers and the unemployed during the period of welfare assistance, must participate in appropriate training programmes so that after five years, they should become detached from welfare payments and I know some of that is taking place with some of these programmes. Make it compulsory, have an attendance list, because it will help shape the sense of responsibility.

It is not being spiteful; it is not being heartless, and of course, we will not ignore the fact that some single mothers have children to look after. We can put that infrastructure in place too, but let the message of self-responsibility and self-respect be sent loud and clear in this country now. This is not only helping to create responsible and self-reliant citizens; it is an expression of a responsible government and the welfare or supplementary training provided should be seen as a reward for eventually becoming self-reliant, innovative, and enterprising on their own.

Madam President, the Government recognizes and the Prime Minister has said we have to ensure able-bodied people work, but those in need be looked after. He also said on page 30, doing some needs analysis for CEPEP to see if the programme is as appropriate as it should be. What I would like to suggest though, is that the needs analysis not be used only on the current sample of YTEPP people, but we have a tracer study established. I think some of my colleagues will appreciate this point.
You trace the student from Form 1 to Form 3 to Form 5, see how many drop out; see how their behaviour changes; see how parenting affects what kind of student in what school; what region; what happens to them after they leave Form 5; and then you will see why they have to go into YTEPP; why they have to go into MUST; why they have to go into YAPA; and why they have to go into CEPEP and URP. What has broken down in the institution that was supposed to harbour and shape them into valued and productive citizens? How can you heal those cracks; at what point in point in the system? It will help you create preventive action apart from ameliorative action.

So eventually the number of people who are taking part in these pick-up helpful programmes will diminish over the years because you will have a searchlight now to heal the breaches by knowing more precisely where in their system are the cracks opening, have opened, and how they can be properly, professionally closed—tracer study.

We must remember when secondary school expansion opened up, they put so much pressure on educational institutions, that a lot of them are now falling into YTEPP, CEPEP, URP. It was too sudden. I have a gentle advice to give to the Government from that experience. In expanding tertiary places without determining or helping to shape the absorptive economic and employment capacity in the country, you might really have an overflow of students coming out of tertiary education in one way or the other. I do not think migration is the answer for that alone. This is where the private sector should come in. And I think a dialogue should also take place with the private sector so that these tertiary places, when they graduate—you have thousands of them. Where will they go afterwards? And I think that is a policy issue which is very demanding.

12.30 p.m.

Linked to that on the East-West Corridor is serious crime. The Minister has announced it several times. The Northern Division is one example, the murder rate, the serious crime rate. With all that in mind, the Public Services Association asked us to do a study.

I will just summarize one or two aspects of it. We completed the study last year; it was titled *African Youths in Danger on the East-West Corridor*. If something is not done rather quickly, comprehensively and appropriately, the danger will increase, because it is a high risk issue. We spoke to young African males from the high risk schools. Apart from measuring them, seven of us, a whole research team, had a number of one to one interviews with them. They appeared goalless.
In one instance we asked five of them, "What will you like to be when you grow up?" A fellow, 17 years old, said, "A doctor." That was a big joke. Do you know why? They felt it was impossible for him to achieve that and it was a joke for him to even think about it.

For him it might not be impossible, but the peer group burst out in laughter; that is where the peer group sets the standard and the problem becomes cultural rather than purely individual. The individual has a difficulty in solving it, because the peer pressure is so embracing with such standards and aspirations. How do you break through that?

More than that, they did not know which subject to take for which careers; which institutions offered what programmes and they had no clear idea of what occupation they would follow after school. I am not telling you an opinion; we have the data. I think we sent a copy to the Ministry of Education. I asked the PSA to give one to the Ministry to help them configure their career guidance units and help these students.

When compared to boys from a prestige school—and the word prestige is commonly known—the answers were so different. These young "fellas", 15–, 16–and 17-year-olds from the prestige schools could tell you right away, "I want to be a corporate lawyer", not just any lawyer. "I want to be a psychiatrist", not just a doctor. It tells you the precision with which their imaginations have started to work from that age, fueled not only by the culture of the school and the role of the teachers. Not the Minister, not the Government. We are speaking about schools, teachers and their relatives, which bring in the social class complication. A lot of them have relatives who are doctors and lawyers, so the language of professional aspiration would have spread.

Do not forget on that East-West Corridor, over 50 per cent of them are in juvenile homes for running away from home and being beyond control. Getting a job for them was an important issue and they were without such a vision. How much more can the Government do with all these programmes? A job is not just money; it gives you a sense of social identity; it puts you properly in the scheme of things. The first thing somebody asks you when they meet you is, "Where yuh working?" A lot of people have to lie; some of them say, "Sanitary engineer", when, of course, they mean something else; because that is how society is. It has its own wickedness stigmatizing people in humble professions.
There was another important point in the report. We asked the principal to send us the high risk boys, because we wanted to know why they were so. We wanted to create some prevention to prevent them from jumping the hurdle into a criminal career.

I refer now to an interview we had with them. In the interview what was uncovered was how unfair the teacher was to them. This is from the horse's mouth, as it were, a word for word for word transcript. We asked them, "How does the teacher treat you?" Punish them; tell them to sit down; they do not listen to them; buff them. The teacher listens to everybody else except that one person. What does that do to a young child? Unfairness in the classroom is an injustice to these young people. Teachers must have a sense of social justice, especially in such communities where that aspect is needed more than many other communities.

"Interviewer: How is the community outside? Is it a friendly place?"

It was on the East-West Corridor.

"All Boys: What! Here?"

Boy: You have to be real careful. These high walls and razor wire can’t stop them."

Meaning the outside criminals. In that school there was a 10-foot wall with razor wire all around a steel gate at the front. Is that a penitentiary or a school? It has to be done I suppose.

“Interviewer: Why careful?"

Boy: Everybody here have a gun, knife or something. We see de guns and how to use it. You have to watch out every day. If you do something they go hunt yuh down."

That same day, the Principal showed us a boy who got two stabs with an ice-pick in a retaliatory attack. ‘This is a regular thing’, admitted the Principal."

So when I say the East-West Corridor is in danger in these regards, I think we know what we are speaking about.

Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie spoke about the responsibilities of truant officers. We are not keeping an eye on these young people as we should, from the family to the school.
There are laws in the Education Act which compel principals, supervisors and other school officers to take a daily check attendance on the whereabouts of these children. That system has collapsed. What more can the Government do, except through the Teaching Service Commission make some enquiries and take disciplinary action against the principal, the supervisor and the teacher where these irresponsible actions take place?

Madam President, we have to have faith in the future still. We have to train persons to handle these challenges. Part of my responsibility, like others who are here, my colleagues on the right, is to mentor young people to be trained in dealing with these problems, rather than have the problems overtake us.

In one instance I supervised seven graduate students. We met last week and they were so excited about their work and their commitment to going out there and doing something when they graduate: Master in Philosophy; Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy. I supervised seven of them. Christopher Holder who is an acting superintendent I think now. In fact, he has finished his MSc with me and he got a very good mark; I cannot go further than that, but we will see.

He looked at the dark figures of crime; the jewellers, the people who encourage stealing, but remain invisible. Without them there will be no such stealing. Then there is Joel Joseph who is doing crime and relative deprivation, meaning not poverty, but relative deprivation; Cathy Ann Cameron, who is looking at 9–11-year-olds; how they develop their attitudes and habits, their civic mindedness, their sense of responsibility from small at that stage; Vidya Lall, school bullying and victimization, who gets bullied in school, who gets victimized and to what extent is physical violence a form of retaliation rather than initiating the conflict. That is where the teacher must have a greater role in adjudicating; not just somebody hit somebody else, you must grab him and beat him up. You must understand what happened to you first.

There is lot of bullying going on in schools, [Desk thumping] a lot of extortion below our eyes. The Minister cannot go into these schools. The Minister has hundreds of schools, as Sen. Dumas pointed out. In fact, knowing something about the Minister as I do, I asked her last week, "How much staff do you have to deal with these problems?" In her own modest, coy way she said, "Enough." She does not complain, but I know it is not enough. Not in numbers, but in awareness and the competence to deal with some of these fresh, overwhelming challenges.

Then you have Ian Ramdhanie who is doing white collar crime in state corporations; not just now, but years ago, a longitudinal study; Susan Phillip who
is comparing crime in St. Lucia with crime in Trinidad and Tobago, and Nalini Singh, I think she is a prosecutor, the jury decision making. I am saying this in a very exceptional way. I have to get rid of my typical modesty to make this reference, but it is important for the community to know that there is hope and there are persons being prepared to fulfil the aspirations that we have. If we do not spend the time, we will get the crime.

The haste for pronouncements every Monday morning and the pressure from the public to say something new everyday has a role to play in the Westminster system, but we have to spend the time with these young people, otherwise we will get the crime.

Our civic organizations are ready, if they can be encouraged and facilitated. The United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention asked us to do a study in Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica, where we selected 20 organizations to see whether we could help them in terms of institutional capacity building and research, so they would be able to implement their projects properly.

It was a wonderful experience. We have it here all bounded; we should be publishing it for use by the national community. We examined the groups closely to see how they were doing, how their objectives were being met and what management assistance they needed, something like what Sen. Dumas spoke about, how you manage the organization in terms of objectives, evaluation and measurement. The groups were Families in Action; Piparo Empowerment Centre; Servol; Vision for Mission; the Family Court; the Ministry of Education pre-carnival project; Transform Life Ministry; New Life Ministry and the Roxborough Police Youth Club. We had a presentation. I think the Minister of Social Development was there. We gave each a report and told them what the way forward should be. So there is hope, because they are taking this advice and these documents now and making good use of them.

Madam President, I want to spend a minute or two on oil and gas.

Since gas has been the centre of so much discussion, I found a 1958 budget address by the late Dr. Eric Williams extremely intriguing, especially when he cited the oil survey done by Sir Thomas Holland, the report from which was laid in the Legislative Council in 1928.

**Madam President:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.
Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15
minutes. [Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie]

Question put and agreed to.

12.45 p.m.

Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran: I quote:

“The oil industry should have passed out of existence long ago as a wasting
asset.”

The Holland Report was laid in the Legislative Council in 1928. I ask, with
respect, therefore, if the colonial government could lay the Holland report in the
Legislature in 1928, why, in an independent country like Trinidad and Tobago,
should the PNM Government be reluctant to lay the Ryder Scott Report? It will tell
us; it will remove some of the skepticism, because the Ryder Scott report really
made an important distinction and I do not know what will happen in the next 12
years, to me, to the oil or to the gas. In fact, I do not know what will happen to me
tomorrow.

They made a distinction between known reserves, probable and possible in
that continuum. Of course, Holland argued for higher taxation on oil companies.
He felt then, as some people feel now, these companies are not taxed, if not
sufficiently, but appropriately. And he questioned the length of the oil leases,
which made Dr. Williams so happy that in that same budget speech of 1958, he
promised to build the North Coast Road.

Quite noteworthy, though, in fact, today’s budget is about 185 times more
than the budget for 1958, but yet in that budget, poor as we were then, relatively
speaking, there was not one word about crime and violence; even in ANR
Robinson’s budget speech in 1964 and 1965, not a word about crime and
violence. We, therefore, have to rethink—and this is in my few minutes; I hope I
have the time to make the connection between the socio-economic structure and
crime. Why is it with so much money, crime has escalated so very much? What is
it? Is money a blight? What has money done to our minds? What really has
happened? Where and why did it go wrong? But I am not disheartened neither do
I wish my fellow citizens to become so. History has shown that many countries
become great. Their people become spirited during times of uncertainty. That is a
time of creativity and risk. Uncertainty is a time for risk, not retreat, and this is the
first challenge the Government—now, and after the election, whichever one—will
have to face after the next election: how to revive the spirit and aspirations of independence in our plural society. Let not our economic prosperity distract us from being mannerly, respectful, dutiful and thrifty.

I have had some things to say on food and construction prices and the way I think it should be handled, but I have a priority matter here. On page 7 of the Budget Speech the Prime Minister said there was a 22 per cent fall in the number of murders, and so on. First of all, there is a newspaper clipping here, where the Ministry of National Security released a report to show that homicides have been down for a period, and also the detection rate has been down. In the first place, ever since I saw ACP Reyes talking about the crime statistics for the same period last year and this year, with respect, I think the Ministry is asking for trouble, especially with the murder rate, and I will tell you why.

First of all, the Express newspaper of September 03, 2007 stated:

“There has been a 6 per cent reduction in the detection rate for homicides for the first eight months of 2007 compared to the same period last year.”

It really is not 6 per cent. If you take the base of 26.07 per cent for last year and the base this year is 20.66 per cent, that is not a 6 per cent decrease. It is a 6 percentage point difference, but the decrease is 20 per cent. So it is much more than 6 per cent. There is a difference between a 6 per cent difference in points and a 6 per cent decrease from the base line we have.

You see, whenever the Government or the police tell you: “We are using the security service and therefore the murder rate is down”, well, when it goes up what does that mean? Incompetence? But it goes up for different reasons. There was a report done some years ago—I think the Ministry should initiate or perhaps publish that—where it stated that the circumstances around which murders are committed are so far away from the police sometimes, and the Government: A husband gets “vex” with a wife; a wife gets “vex” with a husband. So you are entering into dangerous waters and that is why I say statistics is a Pandora’s Box. When you open it, you are riding a tiger, and he has difficulty now in getting off that tiger for the reasons I suspect. But who am I, really, in this scenario?

I do not know who is giving the advice. A press conference is good but not in this particular matter. When it goes up, they say it is the parents; it is the school system; they say crime is everybody’s business; crime begins with me, but when its goes down, it is “We, SAUTT. You see what we are doing? The job is good.”
So we have got to be reasonable because you will lack credibility. It is just a warning and it may or may not be taken. You see, if I were a Minister, I would be really under pressure to tell the public something. Every day they want you to tell them something good, and under that pressure, which I spoke about earlier on, we enter into dangerous waters from which there is little or no retreat.

But it is more than that. When you look at the transformation—I left my documents home, but there is a transformation document and it lists, I think it is about 15 or so specific actions that the Government took in dealing with the murder rate and serious crimes. But they seem to be of no effect, because there was a very small percentage difference in the impact that all these measures—money, manpower—had on the murder rate. It is nothing to boast about. So things are not really going well as they should in that regard and I think we need to rethink the whole question of crime and punishment in this country.

The document I just got is a World Bank Report; it is a copy and I had the opportunity to comment on it at a Washington conference attended by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the University, and so on, and in reviewing this document—it was very good; several recommendations that could be used and I think they are being used—but there are some errors which I think we ought to be guarded against. There is a page I quoted—I cannot find it here now, but it says where the Muslimeen has a representative in Parliament and they are a political party fighting the election. I cannot find the exact page but I did quote it at the conference. I had it marked off but I left my copy at home.

What we are asking is, who is the representative here, according to the World Bank, that is a Member of Parliament? Before the day is up, I will tell you the page. Dr. Mc Kenzie wants to know if it is in the Senate or the Lower House. The report went further to say that the Muslimeen is now a political party. I treat these as errors.

**Sen. Mark:** He treats them as errors, but it is not an error; it is a fact. The CIA knows about that.

**Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran:** I am just pointing this out to show you that you have to be careful with these documents. There is another one, a UNDP document that was done on: “Youth at Risk”, where the Ministry at the time asked me to review it, and I did review it—many errors. The reports are good; the objectives are good, but we have to be careful when these reports come our way and we have to understand that people who do such reports should be familiar with the soil. We
should know what we are talking about, because we can make errors and these documents go all over the world. When investors see that the Muslimeen has a member in Parliament, it is very dangerous.

**Madam President:** Senator, you have four minutes.

**Sen. Prof. R. Deosaran:** So the question of poverty, unemployment and crime has always been a puzzle for criminologists. That is why we who practise the art and supervise students, have to be on the cutting edge of the literature, always reading night and day to be able to train our students properly, just as, perhaps, I think Dr. Gopeesingh; those of us who supervise graduate students. But we have come a long way. In 1833 there was this quarrel in France, Holland, and Belgium and two gentlemen, one was Guerry and the other, Adolphe Quetelet, gathered data from these three countries to show that it is not poverty but it is the opportunity and the proximity between wealth and poverty that instigate the passions and resentment that motivate people to commit crime. But we have come a long way from hanging people for political views, from amputating people for robbery, but we still have some journey to go.

I wish to close with what I said earlier on. I am not disheartened neither do I wish my fellow citizens to become so. History has shown that many countries become great; their people become spirited, during times of uncertainty. This is a time for creativity and risk and this is the first challenge the Government will have to face after the next election: how to bring back; how to revive the spirit and aspirations of independence in our plural society. Let not our economic prosperity distract us from being mannerly, respectful, dutiful and thrifty.

Thank you very much, Madam President. [Desk thumping]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, we will now suspend for lunch. We return at 2.00 p.m.

1.00 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

2.00 p.m: Sitting resumed.

**The Minister of Education (Sen. the Hon. Hazel Manning):** Mr. Vice-President, at the recent sitting of the Lower House, I had the privilege of reporting to the Parliament and people of Trinidad and Tobago on the achievements of the Ministry of Education over the past five years. Particularly so, I had the pleasure of reporting with respect to value for money. On that occasion, I indicated to the House that we had obtained value for money in the area of people development which was our focus.
Allow me to provide some pertinent examples because we have invested in students and the education system and we have seen a turnaround in the students’ performance.

You will recall that student and system performance had dipped in 2005. It was because of the haphazard policy of the previous government. In 2000, those on the other side did a disastrous thing. They had provided universal secondary education in all kinds of unsuitable environments and without any plan. Five years down the road we saw the dip in the results. On the other hand, this administration systematically developed a well-structured plan for the development of education.

I want to go through that plan. We are starting at early childhood care. We had carefully crafted a sustainable plan for universal early childhood care and education. That plan took us through the following steps. We began by researching and discovered that we needed to put in place over 600 early childhood care centres. We identified over 300 sites through a demographic and planned mapping and 60 sites where we thought that the greatest needs were. We also involved our stakeholders in the identifying of these sites and the development of the policy. We involved our stakeholders at all stages of the planning and development. We developed a standardized architectural design based on international standards and then we put in place measures for the pre-service training of the administrators who will manage these centres.

There is an ongoing Teacher Education Programme to ensure sustainability in the system. To date, we have started the construction of over 22 early childhood centres, seven of which are completed and we believe that many of the 22 if not all, will be completed by December 2007. We have developed policy, curriculum and curriculum guide and standards for operation of all centres in Trinidad and Tobago. We have introduced the use of computers for student learning and enjoyment at all the centres. To summarize, we developed standards for early childhood care and education ranging from physical facilities to curriculum development to teacher training to overall early childhood care and education management. We have developed briefs for construction and the actual construction works have started.

The process was long; sometimes tedious and often difficult but we are happy that we took this approach. Today, we are at roll-out stage. We have got value for money. We have kept the faith. I am talking after Sen. Prof. Deosaran. We have kept the faith and we will continue to keep the faith on this long journey that we are on.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]  

Tuesday, September 04, 2007

There has been a focus on equity, quality and people development. I was really very pleased to hear Sen. Prof. Deosaran because he was talking our language. We know what we have to do. We do not do things for the media or sound bites on a Monday morning. I have taken note of the contribution of Sen. Prof. Deosaran.

Our vision was not only to provide places for all students, but also to ensure that there was quality for all. We have established and for the first time, a Student Support Services Division which provides psychological and social services to our students. We on this side care about the poor. We have been focusing on creating social support services to facilitate participation by all and bring relief to the less fortunate. We have lost many of our valuable young persons in the society and our communities. Many of them were too poor to access psychological assistance. Our aim is to stop this slide. We have taken possession of the PSA report as placed on the table by Sen. Prof. Deosaran and a sub committee of the ministry is providing a road map for the way forward. You will hear more about that road map in fiscal year 2008.

In 2006 to 2007, the beneficiaries of student and family services were as follows: approximately 14,600 primary school students received guidance services, while at the secondary level approximately 59,000 students benefited from these services—that was an increase of over 300 per cent over the previous year—3,300 primary and 9,200 secondary school students have benefited from counselling services; 3,500 students received and benefited from school social work services. This is 100 per cent increase over the level of the previous two years. There were 676 students with special education needs within the mainstream school system who have benefited from special educational services. I am sure that you are aware of Mr. Nymal Manswell, our blind student from Tobago who has done exceptionally well in CXC this year. [Desk thumping]

The Ministry of Education has also funded to the sum of $10.8 million students with special educational needs and staff of such schools, especially the private special schools. The Ministry of Education has agreed to fund partially, special private schools to the tune of $15 million. Approximately 1,200 students and 232 teachers at these private schools have benefited from this measure. The nurturing and uplifting of these students is what we call value for money. We are keeping the faith on this long journey.

I want to talk about full day schooling. One of the elusive objectives of the education system over the past 30 years is that of whole day schooling for all, in short, the deshifting of junior secondary schools. As we all know, the shift
system has been the pariah of the education system. We developed a well-structured plan for the deshifting of junior secondary schools and their conversion to full five-year or seven-year schools and the conversion of the senior secondary schools to seven-year schools. When students go to school, within the same system they can go from Forms 1 to 5 or 1 to 6. We have finished the deshifting and conversion of 23 schools; the remaining six junior secondary schools will be deshifted and converted in fiscal year 2008.

The result of this is that 80 per cent of the secondary school population now enjoy full day schooling. We are planning that by the next year the shift system will be a bygone era. This again, is value for money.

We also incurred expenditure on school transportation to enhance student punctuality, regularity and safety. Over 210,000 students benefited from this initiative. School meals to ensure that students are nutritionally fortified so as to increase participation and retention rates; over 400,000 meals were provided and 80 per cent of our students benefited. Textbooks and learning materials to support student learning; over 965,000 textbooks were provided for all our students at all levels of the education system. This is what we call value for money. Alleviating fears and stresses on parents on their wondering how they will manage with their children; transport them to school and what they will give them for lunch, nullifying the embarrassment to poor students who could no longer afford textbooks and who have no access to computers at home. Again, value for money.

Let us turn to construction. We have developed a massive Maintenance and Repair Programme which peaks during the vacation period when the school plant is empty but continues all year around.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, do you know why we had to do this? We had to do this because when we assumed power in 2002, we got reports that spoke to the fact—in one ad those members placed in the newspapers, they boasted about repairing nine schools. In one instance, they repaired 45 schools. That is what they did over the years they were there. We now had to move into the system and begin a comprehensive repair programme. So, this year, the school repair system was the largest in our history.

Over the period 2002—2007, over 1,000 repair projects have taken place on our schools to upgrade, refurbish and renovate them. [Desk thumping] During fiscal year 2002/2003, 161 repair projects were completed; during fiscal year 2003/2004, 150 repair projects were completed; during fiscal year 2004/2005, 147
repair projects were completed; during fiscal year 2005/2006, 202 repair projects were completed and during this fiscal year, 2006/2007, 281 repair projects were completed. [Desk thumping]

Even though Cabinet approved 281 repair projects, we had to include an additional 40. This year we went to schools. We did 281 schools and we did a further 40, bringing the figure to 321. The additional schools were mainly denominational schools which were included in the programme on August 15. I am sure that you would be aware, as the honourable Senate would be, that we had been negotiating with the denominational boards on how to implement the repair programme.

Of the original 281 schools, all the urgent problems were attended to and only five were delayed. These schools were opened on Wednesday, August 05. Of the additional schools that were added, eight schools were not opened for various reasons. Three would be opened on September 10 and five on September 06.

Mr. Vice-President, this year's programme was subjected to competitive tenders on all projects, including a level of transparency and accountability of the repair programmes that we have never seen before. It is the intention of the Ministry of Education to continue the repair programme on an ongoing basis.

I take this opportunity to congratulate and thank all members of staff involved in this exercise, especially our supervisors, our staff from the Education Facilities Management Division, our project management firms of the National Insurance Property Development Company (NIPDEC), MTS, the Education Facilities Company Limited, all the contractors who worked around the clock, some of them foregoing vacation just to get the job done.

I move now to construction. Construction has been completed on 20 primary schools and work is on the way. This is the same team, especially the Education Facilities Company that has moved off repairs and got involved in construction. Construction is now under way in Arima New Government, Arima Old Government, St. Paul's Anglican, Tranquility Government Primary, Icacos Government Primary, just to name a few. Icacos Government Primary will come on stream, hopefully some time in October.

Construction of 37 replacement primary schools is planned for this fiscal year 2007/2008. The Education Facilities Company is now up and running. At the second level, construction has been completed at 22 secondary schools. [Interruption] We put the ads; the names are right there. I can call all of them for
you. I can pass it for them to see. [Interruption] He cannot read? All the names are there so that when they get up to tell untruths, the public could read. That is why we put the ad out—to conquer the untruths.

Construction has been completed on 22 secondary schools, and on 109 pre-engineered classrooms at 17 secondary schools, mainly the schools that have been deshifted.

Mr. Vice-President, laboratories are also being upgraded in many of our schools. We also have tenders out. Tenders have been awarded for Tunapuna Secondary School, Princes Town Junior Secondary, the Marabella Junior Secondary, the Siparia Junior Secondary, Couva Junior Secondary and Chaguanas Senior Comprehensive. Tenders are expected to be closed on seven additional schools during the month of September 2007.

School construction gathers momentum as we have spent over $630 million on 76 schools and that figure is increasing almost on a weekly basis. We have only now begun, as almost all our designs have been completed and approved and invitations to contractors to tender for the construction of school buildings have begun.

I take this opportunity, in my second presentation on the budget, to inform this august house on the way forward. It is really very clear. First, we must consolidate and expand on the gains and achievements of the past. As I said before, this is a long journey. One of the comments on the other side is that we keep saying the same thing. We have to; it is a long plan. [Desk thumping] If you hear me say anything different, you know we are in trouble. Education is a long tedious journey. We have planned it well and we are moving on a well-planned journey.

Secondly, we must now operationalize the components of the corporate plan, 2008—2012. We have a corporate plan. The Ministry of Education has developed such a guideline to take us to the year 2012 and the focus of that plan is the school.

Thirdly, we must implement and deliver a world class, seamless education system from early childhood care straight through to the tertiary level.

With respect to the first element of our way forward, we must now move with confidence and go beyond the initial activity to the implementation of a well-developed administrative structure for the efficient performance of our early childhood system to bring it to world class level. This subsector will be managed at every centre by a director, deputy director, 32 programme facilitators, eight
family and community officers and by the local school boards. This is well planned out; no "vaps"; properly organized. Each early childhood centre will have enrolment capacity for 50 children and will be managed by one centre administrator who must be qualified with a university degree. For the seven that have been opened, they all have their master's degree. There are one or two doing an M Phil in early childhood care and development.

Also, in these centres, we are hiring early childhood teachers qualified with university degrees in early childhood education. We are hiring two early childhood teacher assistants relevantly trained and one auxiliary, relevantly trained. Each centre must have a pupil/teacher ratio of 12 students to one teacher.

We have put in place measures for the pre-service training of our early childhood teachers with the UTT being required to develop the capacity we need. We have put in place a programme for the next three years. There will be ongoing teacher education programmes to ensure sustainability in the system. We are providing, in the first instant, 120 scholarships for early childhood teachers and, as we drive this programme forward, we will build, furnish and equip 600 early childhood centres between now and the year 2010. Our mission is that by the year 2020, we will have all 30,000 of our children between the ages three and four included in a high-quality early childhood programme.

Not like they did across there. The centres they have put in place are now falling down. [Interruption]. That is so not true. We will establish partnerships with the University of the West Indies, the research and development programme in early childhood, and we will ensure that we have proper research done to guide our learning patterns. We will strengthen parental education and involvement in the early childhood experience. We will continue to partner with international organizations such as the OAS and the UNDP to build expertise and capacity in this sector and we will develop a seamless project with funds from the IDB. We have started already and we will continue.

Our way forward is to have a healthy well-educated nation. I stress nation; not for some, but for all of us. [Desk thumping] We are going forward. We will always remember those in need and we will be guided in our policy making. We will continue to build on the achievements of the students and family support programmes that we have. The programme that I said was the first ever established, the psycho-social support for our students, we have been able to establish and expand that programme through a student support service division. We have established such a division which now has approximately 165 persons.
We have guidance officers, school social workers for the first time, diagnostic and prescriptive officers, school psychologists for the first time, Braille technicians and Braille conversion operators. That is the system we have in place to help those in need.

2.30 p.m

Mr. Vice-President, our way forward in continuing student and family support is to fully implement the management of the Student Support Services Division. At the end of the roll-out, the structure is to comprise of over 390 technical and professional staff deployed to our schools.

Mr. Vice-President, we are talking about an inclusive education system, where our special need students will be able to go to our normal schools. The aim is to have all students ranging from early childhood care and education, through the secondary, benefiting from psychosocial support. One of the elusive objectives of the system has been to provide that psychosocial support. Again, I refer to Prof. Deosaran’s contribution. We know we could not have afforded; we know that it is an expensive service to provide; but we know we have to do it. We want to provide psychological, social, diagnostic and special educational services to the entire school population.

As we move forward, we are deepening our partnership arrangement with the Ministry of Health, other ministries and agencies to ensure and to expand on the health and wellness services to all our student population. We will deepen our junior CDAP which exists. We want to strengthen it and deepen it to provide health care for all our students with chronic diseases. We want to provide early diagnosis and ready care. We have already started looking at visual impairment, hearing impairment and we want to deepen that process. We will continue our drive in the provision of school nutrition to increase the number of beneficiaries to over 80 per cent of the total student population. We have begun to deepen the research into nutrition to address the issue of childhood obesity.

Mr. Vice-President, school transport is also of importance to us, especially in rural areas. We want to increase the number of beneficiaries by an additional 20 per cent. With respect to textbooks, teaching and learning materials, we want to ensure that all our students benefit well from early childhood care and education level to the tertiary subsector.

Mr. Vice-President, when we implement these programmes, we will be enhancing the quality of students’ lives and school experiences and we will continue to obtain value for money. [Desk thumping]
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Let me turn now to construction. We will continue the construction programme that we have started since the year 2002. Mr. Vice-President, not one school was built by the other side in the year 2001. We started the programme in 2002, and we will continue the construction programme for the subsectors of early childhood care and education of primary and secondary schools. Mr. Vice-President, repairs, upgrading and renovation of schools; the construction of new schools; as well as the deshifting and conversion process will also continue. We will use what we are calling our asset register and computerized maintenance and management system. This is a system that we are now putting into our school system. This system is web-based and on completion it will be used by all schools as an asset register showing us what we need to do for physical development of the schools.

By December 2007, 195 schools will be managing their own school assets, utilizing this system of computerized maintenance and management system. While this is taking place, the Government is about to reform its maintenance system by attaching small maintenance contracting firms to maintain our schools all year through. We believe that these two initiatives will bring an end to the recurring problems of school repairs, school upgrades and renovations. We will continue to persevere and we will continue in this long journey of providing quality education to our students. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Vice-President, we will preserve and continue to preserve our relationship with our denominational partners. As we all know, 70 per cent of our primary schools belong to the denominational bodies. We will continue to support them in the development of their properties, since approximately 50 per cent of the primary school buildings have been poorly maintained and many denominational boards are experiencing difficulties to upgrade and rebuild their schools.

I want to make mention of Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie who has asked us to look and support the auxiliary staff, and to let her know that in our negotiations with the board, we are also putting that on the table. It is a long journey, but it is a journey where we are focused and guided because we know where we want to go.

I want to turn now to full-day schooling and the enhancement of the curriculum. As we move forward, we do so with an enhanced curriculum in whole-day schools. That is what we are going to have. We will continue to build on the gains of a modernized early childhood centre and a secondary level curriculum, with some initial revision of that primary level curriculum.
You see, we aim to have that continuous system from early childhood—we call it the seamless system—to primary, to secondary schools and, therefore, we would have to revise the entire primary school curriculum ensuring that there is connectivity at both ends. We have it well articulated at the early childhood level and at the secondary levels.

The modern curriculum at the secondary level has ten compulsory subjects and these subjects include History. Cabinet has approved and we have made History compulsory in the school system, and so to are the non-traditional subjects of Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education and Technology Education. At the upper level Forms 4 and 5, we now have included Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education and Technical Education as examinable subjects at CXC. Just a few months ago, we signed the contract with CXC on technical and vocational subjects.

In addition, we have included a Caribbean Vocational Qualification at Forms IV and V. This is a competency-based curriculum. It means to say that students who are successful in this curriculum can leave school with the Caribbean Vocational Qualification which will allow them to work in any country in the CSME, from the Bahamas down to Suriname, and anywhere in the rest of the world. It is a global village and our children would be able to cope. That is our goal. At present, over 20 schools now offer this subject on the curriculum. As we drive forward, we aim to continue the revision of the entire primary school curriculum, and we hope to put the whole thing together and make the difference.

We have established a task force which has a wide cross section of stakeholders for our technical vocational programme; businessmen and members from the industry. They will oversee the implementation and the strengthening of the technical/vocational educational programme in our secondary schools. The goal is to expand opportunities for technical and vocational education; to increase the workforce competitiveness in Trinidad and Tobago in the region; to give our children that competitive edge to meet with the rest of the world; and to build a strong technical and skilled workforce to meet the demands of a diversified economy.

We intend to modernize TVET so that we can ensure that our graduates will be very competent in the TVET skills, for example, they must be computer literate, bilingual, career focused, mature and confident and they will understand what it is all about and, therefore, they should be ready to embrace life-long learning as they move through the system, and be able to get a job anywhere in the region.
Mr. Vice-President, as we push forward, we will deshift and convert the remaining junior secondary schools. In 2008, we hope that the shift system will be a bygone system. All students will be able to benefit from supervised sport and physical education, co-curricula activities such as football and cricket on evenings, scouts, girl guides, drama, dance, theatre and arts, etc.

These students will have a full day of schooling for seven hours starting at 8.00 a.m. and ending at 3.00 p.m. and students will have the opportunity to begin and to end in the same secondary school without having to be moved halfway in their learning experience. These factors are very important to achieving quality education. We call this the development of the human capital, the development of the innovative citizen. We are talking about value for our money.

Our aim is to have a world class seamless education system ranging from early childhood care through to life-long learning. Our plan is to articulate the different levels of the system, and thus flatten the seams between the different levels. This means the introduction of a common management system. Having appropriate management assessment system, we will broaden the certification; we will assess prior learning and prior knowledge; and we will remove the overlapping programmes that exist. The previous government had no such plans for the overall development of the system.

They were implementing an education system without any plan. Planning for the sustainable development of the education system is our priority. In fact, they were planning a system with seams—a community based early childhood centre for anybody who wants to come; an isolated primary subsector that had no connectivity whether on one end or the other; and an automatic transition from primary to secondary with no consideration for readiness; no consideration for how prepared our children were. They just opened the gates and let them in, and then at the end of the day, a stand-alone tertiary sector.

The model for a world class seamless education system will ensure appropriate assessment; will ensure remediation starting from early as Standard 1 or even before, and a readiness as the basis for promotion—you have to be ready to move forward—while ensuring 100 per cent participation by all our students. Our students who walk slowly, we will walk slowly with them; our students who walk quickly, we will walk quickly with them, but we will be supporting them all along that journey. This is totally different from what the previous government had in mind; a focus on expanding the tertiary level access without due consideration, but not only not doing that, but talking about dollar for dollar. You
had to have a dollar to be able to get involved in their system. They had no commitment to broaden the curriculum; no commitment to the expansion of the Sixth Form programme; no commitment to cater for varying aptitudes and interests. They had their own hidden agenda.

A major element of this seamless education system is the move towards universal certification and a 60 per cent participation rate at the tertiary level. This is to be facilitated through the national certificate of secondary education, an expansion of our Sixth Form programme. At the Form 3 level, we are having what used to be called the 14 plus examination replaced by a National Certificate of Secondary Education; a certificate that measures skills and competencies and even character development.

Mr. Vice-President, we will continue to focus on—because the journey has started—the development of the human capital to support the development of innovative citizens. That is our goal.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Hon. J. Jeremie]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Thank you very much, colleagues. Mr. Vice-President, I want to now define the road map for the corporate plan. The road map for the implementation of this world-class, seamless, education system is clearly articulated in our Corporate Plan 2008—2012. We plan all the way along. We do not get up one morning and say let us do this. We plan by also talking to our stakeholders.

This sectoral plan also includes well defined pathways for a lot of strategies. As we press forward, we are placing emphasis on focusing on the school. We focus on the school; we look at the duration of the programme; how long should it take for a student to go through the school system? We look at the curriculum; the student learning assessment, evaluation and examination. Those are the factors that we will be looking at. We are looking at school based management; staffing; school operations and security.
We will therefore embrace the school based management approach at all levels. We are saying that principals need to take their schools and manage those schools at all levels, early childhood care, primary and secondary. We would empower the principals and provide them with support from the community through the local school board.

Accordingly the early childhood centres will be staffed to ensure an effective pupil/teacher ratio and have total community involvement. At the primary level, the schools must have a PTA. We are calling on all schools to establish PTAs in their system and establish local school boards and indulge in the fullest practices of school based management. Take your school and do the stakeholder analysis within your school; do the focus group meetings and build your school development plan and manage your schools.

In fact, the stakeholders of each school will be encouraged to participate in the development, implementation and review of a school development plan. This will improve accountability and transparency at the level of the school and at the primary system will be demanding a pupil/teacher ratio of 25:1.

At the secondary level, each school will have two vice-principals. One vice-principal will focus on the business of the school and the other vice-principal will focus on curriculum and teaching and learning strategies. So, you have a technical side and a management side in the school system. Because we feel that when principals are very good and they leave the system, the system tends to collapse. So we are putting the platform and support to facilitate the principals who are in the school system. Each school will be staffed with its complement of Heads and Deans to form an effective middle management team to implement the curriculum and maintain discipline in the school system.

A critical component of the National Model is the quality benchmarking of the education system through appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanism. We are developing quality standards and benchmarks for class sizes and teacher workload; literacy and numeracy at all levels; student participation and performance in major subject areas; institutionalization of the Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP) in all primary and secondary schools—and Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie spoke of the national test which is part of our Continuous Assessment Programme. It is just started; we do not have it right yet, but it is a long journey, Sen. Dr. McKenzie, through you, Mr. Vice-President, and we know that we are going to get it right. Institutionalization of National Tests at the primary level and NCSE at the secondary level will make that continuous assessment rigid. Participation in international benchmarking programmes will help us; that is where we are going.
We are looking to see what the rest of the world is doing and then we are bringing that back into the system. And to do that, what we have done; we have already joined the programme called Programme in Reading and Literacy Studies (PIRLS) and our 9-year-olds have been involved in that particular study. Next year we are going to be involved in Progress in Student Achievement (PISA); a programme in student achievement and our 15-year olds will be involved in that programme. As our officers go abroad they would learn how to develop and manage these international programmes and bring them back here to assist us in our local benchmarking programmes.

At the school level, we are also ensuring equity in access and educational opportunities for our 3—16-year-olds. We are talking about a transition rate of 60 per cent for the post secondary level to tertiary level by the year 2015. We are talking about an auditory, visual, physical disability and health concerns being addressed and remediation takes place at every level. We are talking about the infusion of information and communication technology in our education management and curriculum planning and delivery right through the system. IT would be the platform.

The implementation of a high quality curriculum, which would evolve national, regional and global requirements; effective leadership; strong teacher preparation; we are really very, very big on teacher preparation. We must have quality teachers to be able to have quality students; a quality school system; the establishment of safe and nurturing learning environments; well designed schools which provide friendly teaching and learning spaces and school security to give additional confidence to teachers and students. That is why we are spending so much time repairing, upgrading and rebuilding our schools. They may open a little late, maybe a bit of a problem, but we have got to do it, because the long-term benefit is really worth it. Mr. Vice-President, these are the elements of our world class Seamless Education System (SES).

So, in addressing the need for effective leadership, management and development of the education system, we are also putting in place organizational development with regard to processes and systems. We are training a skilled workforce under an effective human resource structure and we are enhancing recruitment policies for teachers. We are going to be very stringent on the performance management and appraisal for teachers, because our Heads and Deans would go in place by the end of September and this is going to help us to get that off the ground.
Mr. Vice-President, our last leg is one involving the community. We will focus on the engagement of parents and guardians in the business of education; the participation and communication at the community level. We have got to talk to our community outside there, because if we do not do that they would not understand what we are doing and sometimes the Members on the other side tell you such strange stories, that we have to always be out there making sure that the right message is outside there.

With regard to the engagement of parents and guardians, we recognize at the Ministry of Education that without this collaboration we would not be able to get our programme off the ground and so, parent-teacher associations are going to be really very, very big on our agenda.

The community participation is going to be very important as we keep on our engagement in talking to our denominational boards, TTUTA, NPTA and NGOs, civil society in general; any group interested in education, willing to talk with us. To govern the entire process of involving the community, the Ministry will begin to continue this organization, which is spearheaded by a unit that has been developed in the Ministry called our Restructuring and Decentralization Action Unit.

So, I go on to say, Mr. Vice-President, that education is everybody's business. [Desk thumping] I repeat that over and over. I make no apologies for saying that. The Ministry of Education with this Government cannot do it alone; we will not do it alone. We must be focused; we must be full of faith; we must involve all partnerships, all stakeholders. And that is our way forward; our love for our students; our love for all the strong community involvement; a world-class seamless system and a strong partnership with our stakeholders. It is a long journey and we halfway there. We are here for the long haul. We are not disheartened; we are focused; we are full of faith that we will achieve our goals by developing our human resources. Well done; all rounded, well developed socially, well developed academically, even well developed politically, well developed psychologically and physically, because we believe that our students must become good, good citizens to help in the development of Trinidad and Tobago and to be able to take his or her place on this world stage.

Thank you very much.

Sen. Dr. Glenn Ramadhar-Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. It was the worst of times, it was the worst of times; that statement is an apt description of the last six years of PNM rule in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk
It was a period that would be remembered for crime, more so the traumatic kidnappings, murders and the sprees of lawlessness that infected our society.

It was a period that would be remembered as a period of plenty—plenty wastage, plenty crime and plenty questions hanging over the heads of plenty people. [Laughter] [Desk thumping] What exactly is this budget all about? It is a plan, an estimate, a forecast, trying to look financially into the future. But it must form part of a bigger plan to develop the country and increase the standard of living of our people. An annual budget for one year, is one that any responsible government must be capable of, and so try to substantially achieve, if it is well thought of and well prepared.

The non-achievements of the budgets of 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006 by this Government are due to basically three reasons. One, incompetence; this is the hallmark of PNM administration. It seems as if it is the way they operate; it is the way that they are constituted that so facilitates them to become incompetent or it is the balisier tie. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Mark: The balisier tie.

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: It seems not to matter; the point is they are simply not up to the job. They continually insist on promises to fool their supporters and continue to try to hoodwink the citizenry and anyone who would listen to them anymore, that they can fulfill their promises. It seems as if they do not want empower the citizenry far less their own supporters, who boldly and brazenly claim that they would vote PNM until they “dead”. With the policies that they are following, that too would be made very easy. The third reason is handouts. It is a government that believes that they must give people a fish and not teach people to fish. It seems as if they predicate their government policy on the fact that they can promise, not deliver; make bold promises; pretend to have a plan and at the end of the day, when they do not deliver, come with a hamper and say, hold on to this, I will see you on election day.

3.00 p.m.

The final reason of massive spending seems to be the order of the day and certainly a key factor to their incompetence, is the concomitant wastage and corruption that is associated with the frittering away of the blessing of our oil and gas windfall.
Mr. Vice-President, this has been a period marked by high oil and natural gas prices, and consequently, record levels of revenue as us evidence by the budget which is $42.3 billion budget that is currently before this House. At the end of fiscal 2008, the Government would have collected some $203 billion in revenue over the period 2002/2008. I have presented this information in the context of my contribution to this debate. This Government came to the Parliament successively for $15.7 billion, $18.7 billion, $24 billion, $34 billion and $35 billion and they effectively spend $20 billion, $22 billion, $27 billion, $34 billion and $38 billion.

Mr. Vice-President, $203 billion is going to be projected to be spent at the end of 2008. But what does this money that is being spent in such large sums mean to the citizens? Surely, the role of Government must impact upon that. What is the role of Government? That is the question. That does not deserve an operational answer. It is not about the nuts and bolts, day-to-day, month-to-month, year-to-year, but really it deserves a first philosophical answer. The founding fathers of the United States put it much profoundly when they proffered that man is entitled to three things: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is therefore, the role of the State and the Government to ensure that the environment is created to allow citizens to ascribe to these three pillars of our democracy and to achieve these objectives.

In my contribution to this debate, I intend to show how these three objectives have been eroded by the inability of this Government to understand fundamentally what their role is. The role of the Government is not to make themselves happy or their friends happy; it is to increase the level of happiness of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] The 2007/2008 budget like its five predecessors goes against this grain. It is another chapter in the dark lamentable catalogue of Trinidad and Tobago under the PNM administration. [Desk thumping] It contains no solution to our daily problem. The only answer it seems is to throw money at problems, something that they have become professionals at. If there is one area that there is certainly failure that erodes these three basic principles, it is the area of crime.

Mr. Vice-President, the budget delivered by the hon. Prime Minister cements in the minds of citizens that the PNM is incapable of getting Trinidad and Tobago out of this quagmire that they have put us in. Today, when we look around our nation is falling apart. Today every citizen of this country lives with the literal sword of Damocles hanging over their head, at the crack of the next door, around the next street corner, we do not know when death will come. That has come
about because of their incompetence, mismanagement, and abject failure. They are soft on crime and not up to the job. At the close of their term, more than 1,600 body bags will have been carried upon their shoulders after squandering $15 billion recklessly, carelessly and without regard to proper management and common sense.

We all know that the best way to deal with crime is crime prevention and crime detection. It is no secret that the misled young ones are responsible for a large percentage of crimes. Therefore an important strategy in crime fighting would have been a massive outreach programme to reach out to the communities, touch the lives of these youths, identify the ones that will be aberrant, get meeting with those who are weak and who are tempted to go astray and try to make a meaningful contribution to these communities.

The PNM has failed. What they have done is makeshift consultants asking their supporters to flood rooms where they have rum, roti, food and drinks for all to share in public relations exercises, while crime and criminals remain a burning issue for people of Trinidad and Tobago.

You would know, Mr. Vice-President, that the UN World Bank Report conducted a study in drugs and crime in Latin America and the Caribbean Region, entitled, “Crime, Violence, Development Trends, Cost and Policy Options in the Caribbean.” This country picked up the dubious distinction of becoming a high profile nation for kidnapping and gun crimes, with an entire chapter on the report caption, “Guns and crime: a Case study of Trinidad and Tobago,” and I quote:

“In fact, drug and trafficking has spawned a vibrant industry, namely, guns for hire, a service particularly useful to addicts who need to commit crimes to support their habits and hence perpetuate more violent. From this has spun off another criminal industry, contract murders...”

Mr. Vice-President, this Government has spent more and more money on national security, and achieved less and less. In 2002, when they first started to fail, they spend $1.46 billion—in 2007, they spend $3.296 billion—while under the watch more than 1,600 persons have died, more than 10,800 persons have been victim of serious crimes and just over 1,200 persons have been kidnapped while the murder rate today, stands over 200 in number.

There is no functional witness programme as cases continue to collapse day in, day out, including kidnapping cases because witness have been threatened or killed. Just recently, we saw the traumatic passing of a JP, the goodly Asquith Clarke, metres outside the police station and Magistrates’ Court, where a few days
after, he was due to testify in cases at that court. And while the cases keep failing and justice is denied to these people, Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, Minister, proclaimed in February 2007, in the midst of multiple cases collapsing around him, that the state witness programme was up and running and with working well.

In the 2004 budget presentation, the Prime Minister unable to dismiss the burgeoning criminal trade of kidnapping for ransom promised counselling by trauma specialist for the victims of kidnapping and their families. Three more budgets have come and gone, hundreds have been kidnapped for ransom and the Government has failed to deliver this service of counselling for kidnapped victims and their families.

They have also failed in an area that is very close to the heart of many of us on this side, and that is, with regard to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act, and when you would have read an article in the Guardian of May 13, just two days ago, a woman was beaten. Police are still searching for the man who beat a San Fernando woman with a piece of wood, damaging her hearing aid. She also told the police the suspect picked up a piece of wood and struck her on her head. She said her hearing aid was valued $3,000 and as damaged. What is her faith? Who does she go to?

When people in our country toil and work hard for their living, and they are injured by an unsuspecting criminal or bandit because they are applying a trade or walking the streets to get a taxi home after long hours of working for minimum wage—on May 12:

Only yesterday, a poor doubles vendor in South Trinidad trying to earn a living with hard work with the use of his hands, both hands were chopped off by a violent offender. Randy Poolchan, 26 years old suffered chop wounds to his hands and head, and as Poolchan lunged to the ground the offender fled with a bloody cut last. Where do they go? They go in search of the missing unit. They go to get redress from a piece of legislation that was supposed to protect the poor and those could not afford to bring back themselves to a level where they were before criminal activity. This legislation was passed in this Senate and they were supposed to set up a board. This is a newspaper article of May 27, 2007, “In search of the missing unit.” Two weeks ago on May 15, Attorney General—

[Interruption]

Hon. Senator: What is the date?

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: The date is May 27, 2007, an article written by Yvonne Baboolal, “In search of the missing unit.”
Sen. Mark: Trinidad Guardian?

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: Trinidad Guardian—John Jeremie declared in the Senate that Social Development Minister, Anthony Roberts should be commended for setting up the Criminal Injuries Compensation Unit three to four months ago. Jeremie called for kudos to be paid to Roberts during the debate on an Act to amend the Criminal Injuries Act and I quote:

“The Act was made law in 2002, and under it, victims of crimes are entitled to $25,000 in compensation …”

But since 2002, not one single person has been received a cent under this Act, simply because the unit has never been set up. Neither relations of thousands of murder victims nor victims of robbery, rape or any serious crimes have benefitted from this Act.”

The UNC under whose watch the Act became law has recently been urging members of the public to apply and I continue:

“A 68-year-old man from New Grant, who lost his sight after he was chopped in his head by thieves in September 1999, was one of the first group of people who applied under the Criminal Injuries Compensation Act …”

Under the section “Futile Search”:

“The futile search for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Unit began with the Social Development Ministry on Independence Square…”

Public Relations Officer Suzanne Wood offered a copy of ‘Helping, Empowering, Transforming Lives’, containing information in several key divisions in the Ministry.”

I continue:

“On page eight is data on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Unit, including an address—3rd Floor, Nahous Building, 45A-C St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain.

Asked for directions,… a blank look adorned the face of the female security officer at a second Social Development Ministry office, at 45A-C St. Vincent Street…”

3.15 p.m.

“Two buildings away, inside the ABMA Building where there exists a third Social Development Ministry office, yet another security officer declared that
there was no such unit as the Criminal Injuries Compensation Unit.

This security officer said the Social Services Delivery office was located at ABMA building but no compensation unit.”

In the final analysis, the board was not located and the reporter was told:

“We’re putting things in place to set up the unit and we see it as coming on stream by next month,…”

When they contacted the Chairman of the board, Mr. Norton Jack, he was non-committal, as to what the unit was about or whether it was functioning.

I challenge the Minister, the Attorney General, who gave kudos to the Minister of Social Development, to provide information as to why the kudos were provided. Is it that persons are being compensated and we do not know? We will like to get that information, please, Mr. Attorney General. [Desk thumping]

Sen. Mark: We should take the Attorney General to the Privileges Committee!

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: Mr. Vice-President, the long and short of it is that crime has sky rocketed and continues to be unacceptably high. The fact is that the total number of murders for the six-year period from 1992—2001 under the UNC was 667. Under the PNM, from 2001—2007, the same period, the figure has climbed. No public relations imagery will change that. We know that this Minister of National Security walks around with three types of statistics: One to fool the Cabinet, one to fool the public and one to fool himself. [Laughter] [Desk thumping] The citizens of this country have recognized incompetence when they see it. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Mark: Drink some water for that. [Laughter]

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: Mr. Vice-President, how can the citizens of this country be happy with the crime situation? Crime may be easy to talk about when you are aloof and distant, but when it hits you directly with a loved one, it is a heart wrenching affair. It convulses your whole world; turns your intestines in and out; overheats your brain and causes your heart to bleed.

It is noteworthy that of the six budgets presented by the PNM administration, the 2007/2008 budget is the one with the least reference to crime. [Desk thumping] I estimate that less than 5 per cent of the budget speech dealt with crime. However, as we all know, the number one concern of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago is crime.
While the budget boasts that the economy has doubled in size, it is a sobering reminder to ourselves that in the same period the murder rate also doubled. Over the last six years crime has destroyed thousands of lives through kidnapping and robbery; a generation of entrepreneurs have been demotivated, lost or have migrated.

In early 2002, coincidentally just a few months after they were given a gift of power, the scourge and plague of kidnapping for ransom descended on this country. Prior to that, kidnappings for ransom were few and far between. In 2002 under the watch of the PNM it became a criminal enterprise. Kidnappings terrorized and traumatized the business community for five long years. It eroded the happiness of our citizens.

Can the family of kidnap victim Vindra Naipaul Coolman find happiness? Can her employees at X-tra Foods find happiness? Kidnappings have left a trail of broken families, lost loved ones and tremendous pain. The Government has failed to fulfil its basic function, to protect the citizens. That is the legacy of the PNM for the last six years. To deal with crime their solution was money and Mastrofski and they threw a lot of money at him and told him to come up with a solution; certainly, this also has been a failure.

It was the same with the blimps; I believe there were two, in fact, maybe three in all; once again, public moneys thrown at blimps, no tangible results in sight; total failure. Mr. Vice-President, before 2002 parents could send their children out and feel safe, now there is anxiety whenever their children go out. They have turned Trinidad and Tobago into a war zone and there is no doubt that with these make-work programmes and programmes that do not truly empower young people and respect their development process, there will continue to be a nexus between crime and some of these programmes. Even though you give a 15 per cent increase, you may see increases in crime concomitant with those types of programmes that are not truly empowering the young people.

What are the economic consequences of crime? There is, first of all, entrepreneurial flight. In the past six years we have lost young entrepreneurs. An entrepreneur is a special person to the development of a country; there is a cost to our country that cannot be qualified and quantified in dollars. He or she is the creator of employment and a provider of goods and services to the population. When we lose such persons, we lose initiative and creativity.

Secondly, crime increases the cost of doing business. Security cameras, security guards, bodyguards, these things are no longer cheap. They add to the cost of doing business and this cost is passed on to the consumer.
Thirdly, there is a loss of confidence in the economy; this speaks directly to tourism and investment alike. One only has to read the travel advisories of our major trading partners and see how this negatively affects the economy.

I turn now to the area of road fatalities; that is an issue that has greatly contributed to unhappiness in Trinidad and Tobago. For this year alone we have had about 150 road fatalities. Last year there were 210. In the 2007/2008 Budget, the Minister of Finance sought to address this most serious issue in a manner that was an insult to all citizens. It was as if he was told to mention it. So in typical PNM style, he decided to throw some slapdash measures in the budget; these included proposals to ban cellphones while driving and DVD monitors in the front seats of cars; but really these are just two minor dimensions of a larger problem.

The larger problem is a lack of will by the Government of the day and the police. If there was a will to do something they would have found a way to increase police patrols on the roads, especially on the weekends, because this is when most road fatalities take place; but you see, there is no will. If the same aptitude was applied as was with completing the emperor's palace, this issue plaguing us, road carnage, they would have built some progress, lives would have been saved and this would be a happier place. Alas, the power of governmental will is reserved for the construction of palatial abodes for the emperor in record time.

The fundamental economic issue facing this country is how to manage wealth. The Government is acting as if it won the lotto and it intends to spend the winnings as quickly as possible. This attitude with money is what has gotten us into the problem of inflation.

The country is in the throes of inflation and we are here today because the Government lacks the basic economics to get it right. Incidentally, if you want to find out the lowest inflation rates on record for this country, you must go to the years 1996 to 2001 under the UNC, under the prudent fiscal management of the Panday administration. [Desk thumping]

The inflation we experience is a direct result of Government spending over the last six years and, more so, in the last two years. It is a result of consumptive spending as opposed to productive spending. It is a result of a government that stimulated the demand side of the economy, while ignoring the supply side. The Government induced demand shocks of the three last years, which has manifested itself in a number of shortages that have caused the increase in prices of goods and services. However, there are other causes and solutions to inflation.
The Guardian of Monday, August 27, 2007, states the Central Bank as saying that inflation had increased from June to July 2007. Why is this so? Why would inflation increase from June to July? It is because July is the wettest month of the year. This is information that can easily be obtained by calling the Met Office, but you see they lack the will and the knowledge. Where there is an increase in rainfall, agricultural output falls, therefore, the price of vegetables rises. As we know, a major contributor to inflation is food prices.

If we know this, then the programme of clearing drains, rivers, et cetera, should prioritize in areas of high agricultural output. A great man once said that rain is an act of God, but flooding is an act of the PNM. If flooding is related to inflation, the inability or lack of will to deal with it is itself an economic crime.

One also has to consider the role of the inefficiencies at the Port of Port of Spain in exacerbating the inflation. We all know the problems at the port. When an importer has to pay extra for a container of cheese that is delayed at the port, the cost invariably passes on to the consumer. That fuels the inflation. In addition it takes time to haul the container from Port of Spain to other parts of the country; this is because of the stifling and suffocating traffic, the chokes and congestion in Trinidad and Tobago. I will come to that in a bit.

In November 2006, CMMB Chief Economist, Jwala Rambaran, noted that the Central Bank has wisely made a fundamental shift in its battle against inflation. This strategy was to let the private sector finance the Government's non-energy deficit through the issue of government securities, the proceeds of which would have been sterilized, namely, locked away so that there was less liquidity impact. This represents an essential break with the traditional method of financing the non-energy deficit by drawing down Government balances at Central Bank. That Central Bank approach has worked. The Central Bank, therefore, is doing its part through monetary policy. What is going wrong?

While the Central Bank is pulling the inflation beast back into its cage, the Government through the PNM Cabinet has been sending it forward and feeding the inflation beast through fiscal indiscipline.

In the context of the Government's fiscal package for 2007/2008, one wonders how realistic the 6 per cent inflation target set by the Ministry is. The inflation experienced by this country in the past three years, in 2005, 2006 and 2007 have eroded savings and diminished the buying power of the average family.
3.30 p.m.

Given the $42.3 billion package that is proposed in this budget and given the obvious spending that we expect from the State sector companies, we can expect inflationary pressure to persist in Trinidad and Tobago. The hon. Leader of the Opposition was correct then, to describe this as an inflationary budget. But what do they care about the people's happiness? Their sole concern is to win the election. The budget increases the minimum wage. Incidentally, were it not for the United National Congress, there would be no national minimum wage. That was introduced by the UNC in 1997. [Desk thumping]

The minimum wage was increased in the budget from $9 an hour to $10 an hour. This is an 11 per cent increase. The minimum wage was last increased in 2005 from $8 to $9. According to Ernst & Young in their focus on the Trinidad and Tobago 2008 budget, this document says and I quote:

“An increase of TT $1.00 per hour in the minimum wage over a two year (period) is not going to materially affect the disposable income of employees whose earnings in real terms is being eroded by the rate of inflation.”

If these inflationary pressures persist, as we can expect, a decline in the international competitiveness of our manufacturing sector is imminent as the cost of inputs will increase.

Yet the Government boasts about its desire to empower the manufacturing sector. While they do this with empty words at various breakfast meetings, Government inflation beast gnaws away at the competitiveness of the manufacturing sector.

One of the mechanisms used to cushion a country like ours against the cyclical nature of the petroleum sector, the oil and gas industry, is a Stabilisation Fund. In 1999, the United National Congress established the Interim Revenue Stabilisation Fund. It was the vision of the UNC that the country save for a rainy day and for its future generations. Back then, the PNM condemned this move. When they came into office, they renamed the fund the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

It was noted in the budget that the fund now stands at $10.9 billion. That may sound impressive to Members opposite, but it simply means that the fund represents less than 10 per cent of our GDP. In the Express newspaper of Saturday, September 01, UWI economist, Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir said that the savings rate for this fund should be doubled to roughly $6 billion per year. Dr.
Mahabir said that we should aim for a savings in this fund, of US $20 billion by 2020. Saving more money in the fund is one way of taking money out of the system and thus containing inflation.

While we are on the topic of funds, what about this Green Fund? The 2007/2008 budget also mentioned a Green Fund which will be operationalized next year. Have we not heard this before? Maybe in a previous budget speech? The PNM has sat on the Green Fund for as long as six years. Maybe they were hoping that the Green Fund would get ripe. This fund, as Senators will recall, was established by the UNC administration. Its original intent was to empower the community-based and grassroots organization to go into the community and implement environmental projects. But for six years they sat on it. Thankfully, they will never get a chance to operationalize it, because shortly they will make their exit from Government. [Desk thumping]

So how do they propose to deal with inflation? Firstly, they blamed the international economic environment, and then they blamed mysterious cartels in the construction industry and the retail sector, and if everything fails, they say: “Well, the sky would not fall.”

Last year in the 2006/2007 budget, the Minister of Finance in the wake of double-digit inflation in October 2006 and the warning by the Central Bank Governor of a slippery slope, announced an expansionary programme for agriculture. They boasted in the budget of state farms. Just three years earlier, they closed down Caroni (1975) Limited. But fast forward to 2006, they are now talking about state farms. Needless to say, the record of State involvement in agriculture is nothing to get excited about.

But what is their record in agriculture? Let us examine the data. In 2001, agriculture was 1.42 per cent of the GDP. By 2006, after five years of PNM, it has fallen to 0.5 per cent of the GDP. So the contribution of agriculture to the GDP under this Government has been halved. The decline of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago is again due to a lack of and the philosophy that development is defined in terms of gas plants at Point Lisas, tall buildings in Port of Spain and that the people who cannot make it with this, should eat the concrete and steel.

Instead of working with the indigenous Trinidad and Tobago farmers who for generations toiled and fed this country, they are talking about Cubans’ farming expertise to provide technical assistance to the small farmers, including former Caroni workers. They bring the Chinese to build, now they bring the Cubans to plant. It is as though they have no faith in the people of this country.
The budget talks about Caroni lands being utilized to establish large commercial farms through joint venture arrangements with the private sector. At the increasing cost of labour, one wonders what the economics of these large commercial farms will be. When I speak of agriculture, I do so in the context of a community of people who are near and dear to me and I can tell you that they have not provided the assistance, the roads, the infrastructure and the support in times of flood and the days of long heat when the crops dried and perished in front of the eyes of the farmer. This Government has not been on the side of the farmer nor will they ever be. They talk empty promises that will bear no fruit.

I turn to the area of housing. Man's basic needs are food and shelter. It is the base of the Maslow Pyramid. The Government continues to espouse love and care for the citizens on one hand and then displace and tear down the homes of citizens on the other. They fracture and dislocate brothers, sisters, families and communities and, like the proverbial wolf in Grandma’s clothing in Little Red Riding Hood, they talk of love while hiding the salivation dripping at the sides of their canines.

According to the HDC estimates quoted in the *Sunday Guardian*, August 30, page 19, there are some 17,000 squatting households in Trinidad and Tobago, and as the NAP indicates, squatting has become a widespread trend and an accepted practice in Trinidad and Tobago. It also contributes to a number of environmental and health challenges in the communities. The PNM continues to boast of tremendous success in the housing sector, but what really is the case? Are members of the public really accessing these services in a real way? Why is it that certain constituencies have complained that they have sent so many forms and none have been acknowledged, after sending in hundreds of forms to the NHA?

**Hon. Senator:** It is the HDC. You should have sent it to HDC.

**Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh:** Same thing—HDC. Is it that the process is polluted with the fragrance of a particular flower? When you look at the form that the people have to apply on—and I have had people whom I have advised to fill these forms out. They filled out the forms and under, “Selection Process”, I want to read this:

“All applicants will be entered into a database and a random selection/needs process will be adopted in the selection of prospective beneficiaries. Successful applicants will be informed of their selection and interviewed to ascertain the veracity of their application.”
A raffle. And if I did not believe that that were true, I quote from yesterday, the Hon. Minister Satish Ramroop:

“Long ago when I wanted a house, my parents also told me I would not get a house. I never applied for one because the thinking was that I would not get a house. But if you do not have a ticket, you do not have a chance.”

So we are gambling with a man who needs a house, a poor person who needs somewhere to stay, who has a right—

**Sen. Dr. Gopeseih**: A PNM ticket.

**Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh**: He must have a PNM ticket. That is the ticket he was probably referring to. So people who work for minimum wage and pay rent and have to support their sick grandmothers and their disabled brother, will have to continue to work and become the working poor until they become an underclass in the society before they could dream of getting a house. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Mark**: Anyway, by December that will be over.

**Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh**: The Ombudsman is cemented in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and the 29th Annual Report of the Ombudsman, January—December 31, 2006, and I turn to page 31:

“There was a multiplicity of complaints against the Ministry of Housing. These included delays in obtaining housing accommodation, lack of maintenance and repairs to tenanted units, lengthy waiting periods to obtain deeds, delays in obtaining letters of comfort.

Site approvals for construction:

Allegations of injustice in the Ministry’s mortgage procedures.

Well, we would not go too much into that. That issue is being ventilated in the public domain. On page 53—

**Sen. Joseph**: What period was that?

**Sen. Mark**: Let him quote and let us see.

**Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh**: I quote that: January 01 to December 31, 2006.

**Sen. Mark**: Last year, under the PNM; discrimination!
**Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh:** The note of the Ombudsman states:

> “Having regard to its mandate from the Government to provide suitable and adequate housing, the HDC as a State corporation, is expected to exhibit a greater sense of responsibility than a private developer. In fact, I am of the opinion that the corporation is under a moral obligation to rectify the situation expeditiously, especially in cases where the persons have suffered losses and may not have the wherewithal to have the matter litigated before the courts.”

This is a case—and I will not go into detail—where the HDC has been playing with a particular poor man whose house has been falling down because of poor infrastructural works and poor construction.

**Mr. Vice-President:** Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

*Motion made.* That the hon. Senator’s speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. W. Mark]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh:** Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President.

I turn briefly to public utilities and the area of WASA. Perhaps the most dramatic difference between the UNC and the PNM can be made clear in the area of management of the resources of State in the area, specifically, of water-delivery to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In this area the PNM’s style of mismanagement is thoroughly exposed, demonstrating their lethargy; the fact that they condone patronage and nepotism and their expertise in the seasoned practice, age-old, political PNM cronyism.

This Government spent $8.5 billion in 5.5 years, amounting to almost $1 billion per year while more than 70 per cent of the households in this country do not have an adequate supply of water. When the UNC took power from them in 1995, under the very PNM administration at that time, only 8 per cent or 85,000 persons could have counted on getting a 24-hour a day, seven days a week water supply. We moved this figure from 8 per cent in 1995 to where 80 per cent of the families in this country were receiving a regular supply of water and we were moving to water for all. [*Desk thumping*]

**3.45 p.m.**

They have now decimated this figure from 80 per cent to 30 per cent. Not only have they done that but they have also described WASA as a $27 billion headache. They stopped short of saying a $27 billion headache that they could do
without. Such is the sorry state of their incompetence, leading to the suffering and pain of the elderly whom they pass laws here for, having to walk for miles with pails and pails of water. While you pass laws to make life more comfortable for the elderly you have them going to ponds one and a half miles away in Maturita or in the forest to get water because there is no water from this Government. Not only the elderly but also the young who help the elderly and stay away from school to carry water for miles for their parents and grandparents to cook, wash, clean and bathe. While the “Emperor’s mansion” is fitted with the latest technology in plumbing; magnificent waterworks and fountains, the poor suffer in the rural villages of this country.

Not only in WASA but also throughout the entire public service, the budget is silent on the issue of implementation of efficiency and effectiveness in the public service. The Government has a serious problem with implementation of programmes and projects and seems to be unwilling to admit to such a problem. The budget is filled with projects that would have been completed long ago but are not because of cost overruns such as in the Brian Lara Stadium, the Scarborough Hospital and the building of schools.

Under this Government there is a great disconnect between allocation and implementation. If you look at their book, *The Social Sector Investment Programme* on page 108 you will see steelpan for primary schools, not yet implemented; senior citizens centres, not yet implemented; community school for performing arts, not yet implemented; boys to men, not yet implemented; voice of youth, not yet implemented; block of leadership initiative, not yet implemented; National Steel Symphony, not yet implemented; publication campaign, not yet implemented. Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, the board was established, but we know better. A nationwide survey on child victimization in Trinidad and Tobago, not yet implemented; but Car Wash Programme For Recovering Addicts, established. A car wash programme is seen as a priority.

This Government seems to be implementing 10 to 20 per cent of what they promised. Connected with the problem of implementation is inefficiency in the public service. Productivity is very low and the Government is unwilling or incapable of dealing with this problem. The problem lies not with the quality of the public officers who can compete with managers within the private sector, but it is a question of management and leadership. It appears that the system in the public service militates against the best public officer rising to the top. What, Mr. Minister, of public reform?
What does the 2007/2008 budget mean to us? It is in the main a collection of plans that were not achieved over the last five years. Add a few teaspoons of promises; a dash of handouts; swirl; stand still for 10 minutes; then, gently swirl in a few gifts for the election to secure votes. Use either CEPEP or URP back pay; boil gently; continue swirling in massive spending and the result is $40 billion of wastage, corruption and finally, wastage. This recipe, if the PNM were to continue, would spell disaster for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I go the area of congestion. I was very stirred when my colleague introduced this document in the Senate and mentioned that Vinci and Bouygues are the world’s largest construction companies and Bouygues was previously fined in 2005 for colluding on highway contracts in France. When we look at the form IC—the certificate regarding the ineligible contracts—which is put out by NIDCO, in the first page of the form we see:

(1) Have not within a five year period preceding this proposal been convicted of or had a civil judgment rendered against them for commission of fraud or a criminal evidence in connection with attempting to obtain or performing a public transaction or contract under a public transaction. Commission of embezzlement, theft, forgery, bribery, falsification or destruction of records, making false statements or receiving stolen property.

(2) Are not presently indicted for or otherwise criminally or civilly charged by a government entity with commission of any of these offences enumerated in paragraph 1 of the certification.

(3) Have not within a five year period preceding this proposal had one or more public transactions terminated for cause of default.

It is a very worrying situation and I am sure that the dialogue will continue on this issue. I wish to cast no aspersions on this matter. I simply ask the Government to produce a report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago on this matter.

In that report I will put on the record of the Senate a few concerns.

(1) Is it a fact that the evaluation report shows T3 far better than Trinitrain Technical?

(2) Is it a fact that two members of the evaluation team went abroad to view rail installations done by both companies; that one of the members of the team was not allowed to enter Heathrow Airport to view the T3
installation which was an ongoing job; was not allowed to enter the secured area because of not having proper documentation; but nevertheless, he still submitted a report as though he had visited the installation?

(3) Is it a fact that T3 had submitted an alternative proposal for the hybrid train which operates both diesel and electricity and the Minister advised the evaluation team that it should not be considered, although it represented a savings operations cost of US$100 million?

(4) Is it a fact that the T3 proposal gave Government a shorter time frame by one year for the completion of the construction; also they had a shorter period of six months for Phase I?

(5) Is it a fact that the evaluation team broke off the evaluation process and left the jurisdiction for five days contrary to the instructions that they should not leave the country during the evaluation process?

(6) Is it a fact that both teams agreed to a coin toss to determine who presents first? This was cancelled by the Minister and T3 had to presented first.

(7) Is it a fact that Alstom was charged for corruption in Europe and the document is being circulated in the Senate?

(8) Is it a fact that a worker at Trinmar had a salary of $16,000 a month and was brought to NIDCO at the salary of $65,000 a month? He continued to receive both salaries until it was discovered that he had to pay back a considerable sum to Petrotrin and has only five O level.

(9) Is it true that the chairman of a State company who was responsible for this project is an aircraft mechanic—[Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Senators, please allow Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh to complete his two minutes. The disturbance will rob him of a part of that.

Sen. Dr. G. Ramadhar-Singh: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

(10) Is it true that the chairman of a State company who was responsible for this project is an aircraft mechanic and was taken on trips to France and England during the visits of the consultants?

(11) Is it because the hon. Prime Minister was simply a passenger on the Bombardier plane that that worked against Bombardier in the negotiations?
Those are the questions I read into the record of the Senate for further ventilation until a substantial transparent report is produced by this Government.

In conclusion, this Government is far removed from the people who put them there. These air-conditioned politicians have no regard for their constituents who face flooding; bad roads; poor infrastructure and crime, as their political leader is now finding out from his so-commissioned polls. They have levitated their feet off the ground and only determine to reach their goal of winning the elections at all costs. It is as if they are insulated and suspended in the air, as if huddled together in a blimp floating above us, unable to connect with the hurt and pain of the small man who is feeling the blows inflicted upon him by the beast of runaway inflation.

Like 60 year old Boodwah Goodman who left a note of desperation that he could not continue to pay his bills and eat and then proceeded to hang himself. How many will join the line that the PNM points to? With the increasing and relentless attitude of this Government, how many underprivileged will continue to form a line and walk that way?

There is hope as the resisting brothers and sisters in Chatham join hands with the fearful for their lives in San Fernando, and they join hands with those who have experienced a spate of killing in Central, join hands with our brothers in Sangre Grande and Toco who cannot buy food and they join hands with our sisters and brothers in Tunapuna who cannot get housing and, as the frustrated in Laventille join hands with the brutalized in Bagatelle and as they join hands with the victims of crime.

A revolution is emerging. They cannot see it because they are blind to the sufferings of the poor. They cannot feel it because they are immune to the victims of crime. Their stomachs do not growl or burn. They are unaware of the pain in the society. They cannot connect with the pain of those who have been raped, humiliated and desecrated. They will not know when the revolution gets into full gear because they have lost their footing with the ground. All these brothers and sisters will unite under a strong alliance and they will march around those billion-dollar buildings, Jericho-like structures. They will march and march until the walls of Jericho come tumbling down. [Desk thumping and laughter]

Mr. Vice-President, tell them; tell them we are coming for them and we are coming from the ground.

Thank you.
The Minister of Tourism (Sen. The Hon. Howard Chin Lee): Mr. Vice-President, I rise today to share with hon. Senators the great accomplishments in my Ministry, the Ministry of Tourism and also to contribute to this 2007/2008 budget debate. Following on this, I will highlight some of the ongoing efforts to stimulate further the development of the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

When this Government took office in late 2001, visitor arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago totalled 383,101 for that given year. In the past five years, this industry has seen an increase to some 457,434 in 2006, an increase of just over 19 per cent. Today, as part of my contribution, Mr. Vice-President, I wish also to highlight some of the new tourism investments in Trinidad and Tobago, the many new hotels which are being built, the largest investment that this country has ever seen, which has continued beyond the past two years.

I will highlight the accomplishments of the Tourism Development Company—their marketing, their promotion, their domestic awareness programmes—and to speak about the implementation and construction of the Maracas Beach Facilities as well as the new project with the Emperor Valley Zoo, the upgrade of all our beach facilities—Manzanilla, Las Cuevas and so on.

I will highlight the many signature events we have accomplished such as the Tourism Park, the Culinary Festival, the Tobago Jazz Festival and many others that the TDC was either responsible for or co-promoted. I will also highlight for this Senate the increase in the airlift that we have experienced over the past five years; the many new airlines that we have managed to accomplish and the many airlines that have come to the Piarco and Crown Point Airports. I will speak about the cruise ship industry and the successes in that area; the tourism policy as well as the newlyformed lifeguard services that came under the Ministry of Tourism in 2004 and is now up and running and a very successful operation.

I will talk about the prognosis on tourism internationally—the effects of climate change as well as the increase in fuel cost—one of the Senators mentioned that yesterday—the use of the Internet, the low fuel air carriers and all the other services that effect the tourism industry today. I will also speak of plans for 2008 and beyond and then I shall wrap up.

Before doing so, there is an issue I wanted to clear the air on which was raised by Sen. Mark in his contribution to this debate. I pulled out the Hansard. I knew nothing of it and I sought clarification on the matter. I just want to clarify this misinformation to be written into the Hansard and provided to the population.
Appropriation Bill (Budget) 

Tuesday, September 04, 2007

[SEN. THE HON. H. CHIN LEE]

Sen. Mark stated that there was a double payment of $28,750 by the Tourism Development Company to a particular supplier. I shall just read the Hansard. It says:

“A case in point is this organization; $28,750 on the same day, invoiced and paid and they sent another invoice for the same amount of money on the same day and they got paid in March this year.”

As I knew nothing of it, I had asked the President of the TDC to supply me with information on this matter to see if there was any truth behind it. An invoice was sent by JCD & Associates on July 12, 2006 to the TDC for production costs and filming on Betacan for Taste TNT 2006, for the sum of $25,000 plus VAT and a cheque was issued to that company on the following month for the sum of $28,750. The following year, 2007, a similar invoice was sent to the TDC, I understand, in error, for the same amount of $25,000 plus VAT.

Because of the due diligence of the accounting department of the TDC, that amount was recognized. Although the invoice had a different number, it was recognized as a duplication and a cheque was never written or sent as payment. So Sen. Mark has misled the Parliament once again and has misinformed the national population on this matter. [Interruption] I have it as well.

I can make this available to the Senate with the invoices for the cancellation of the cheque. The information provided by Sen. Mark saying that there was a second payment is incorrect and misleading and he continues to do that to this Parliament. [Interruption]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, the Minister has explained what has happened—

Sen. Mark: [Inaudible]

Mr. Vice-President: Do that somewhere else please! If we have banter going on, this will not help. The Minister has the same documents you have. He has explained that the second payment was not made. That is it. [Interruption] Sen. Mark, I want you to discontinue your line of argument.

Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee: Mr. Vice-President, as part of my contribution, I wish also to highlight the accomplishments of the Tourism Development Company over the past three years. As I said, I shall speak in all the other areas—the airlift, the increase in arrivals and the increase in investment.

In 2007, the Ministry continues its efforts at stimulating the growth of the tourism industry through an increased focus at developing the tourism product
and through increased marketing of the destination both regionally and internationally. Over the past three years, there has been a significant change in the way in which the tourism industry of Trinidad and Tobago is managed. Very significantly, we undertook, in 2005, a revamp of the tourism marketing agency which saw the replacement of the Trinidad and Tobago Industrial Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (TIDCO) by the Tourism Development Company Limited, often referred to as the TDC.

The TDC was created as the implementation arm of the Ministry of Tourism and was established to focus on product development and marketing of Trinidad and Tobago and project implementation for the Ministry of Tourism as the TDC is the special purpose state company assigned to the Ministry of Tourism.

TDC is now close to three years old and has taken a dedicated and focused approach to the market and development of our local tourism sector. It is charged with four main responsibilities: to increase the awareness of Trinidad and Tobago in all our key overseas markets, which are the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and the Caribbean. We have representatives in all the markets we have out there. They are to enhance our awareness and to ensure that it is felt.

The second purpose of the TDC is to promote investment opportunities. Persons who are interested in investing in the tourism sector can come to the TDC, learn and understand what the Tourism Act has as well as to assist in navigating through some of the red tape that is necessary to begin construction of a hotel project.

The other area is to expand and improve the range and quality of the tourism product right here in Trinidad and Tobago, such as our beach facilities, the Manzanilla Beach Project, the Maracas Beach Project, the Emperor Valley Zoo and all other facilities necessary to improve the product.

Fourthly, to implement the project for the Ministry of Tourism, especially where infrastructural development funds are appropriated. With the TDC, there is aggressive promotional and marketing campaign aimed at building the image of Trinidad and Tobago internationally and promoting Brand TnT. The TDC aims at positioning Trinidad and Tobago within the top Caribbean destinations through business, conference tourism, events, culture and leisure, brand building, Internet marketing and target promotions.

This has been pursued through the development of a strong, high value, differentiated brand for Trinidad and Tobago. To achieve this, the TDC recently introduced the line “Trinidad and Tobago: the true Caribbean”, which has been
well received by the industry, as well as they have embarked upon a series of advertising and marketing campaigns in North America, Europe and the Caribbean, designed to increase the level of awareness of Trinidad and Tobago amongst its key market segments.

I am also happy to say that the marketing campaign running in the Caribbean in the traditional slow seasons after carnival, May to September, appears to have increased visiting numbers to Trinidad and Tobago on weekends at a time when the hotels tend to need more business. [Desk thumping]. I am particularly happy that the international publicity engaged by the Soca Warriors’ successful participation in the World Cup and the efforts made by our Government to enhance the publicity have both played an enormous role in increasing awareness of Trinidad and Tobago worldwide.

Mr. Vice-President, you will also recall the tremendous marketing blitz undertaken by our tourism marketing agency in Germany during the Football World Cup events. The markets of the UK, Germany, Holland, Scandinavia and the United States were all targeted. This gives a huge impetus to our branding initiative, placing Trinidad and Tobago amongst the attractive tourist destinations to be explored by prospective travellers in these markets. We continue to build on the goodwill created.

Mr. Vice-President, you would also recall the website socawarriorstt.com, which was perhaps the most successful website ever created in this country with over 20 million hits to date. [Desk thumping]

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, the TDC in its wisdom, used the Internet to transfer a lot of its information through broadband, through video technology, through photos and images of Trinidad and Tobago by using the Soca Warriors’ brand as the impetus towards people visiting the sites. That was a very successful venture, as well as creating a soca caravan within Kaiserslauter and Nuremburg where Trinidad and Tobago highlighted its colours, and T-shirts were given out. All these programmes led towards better awareness.

Mr. Vice-President, out of the money spent, the return on investment from what persons in London and Germany said, was that we got in return over £40 million in publicity, and that amount exceeded our expectations. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Vice-President, also the awareness of Trinidad and Tobago as a tourist destination was further enhanced when we hosted the Cricket World Cup Tournament which was held earlier this year. In light of our hosting of the Cricket World Cup, the Ministry of Tourism undertook a cricket youth essay competition. This competition highlighted the linkages, benefits and importance of the hosting of the ICC Cricket World Cup 2007 Competition within Trinidad and Tobago to the development of our local tourism industry.

In addition, our marketing efforts over the last five years have seen a review of our marketing representation in our major markets of North America and the United Kingdom with responsibility for Holland, Scandinavia and Germany with purview over Switzerland and Austria. The primary responsibility of the overseas representatives is to work with the airlines and tour operators to support direct airlift into both Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, I will speak later about the increase in airlift and the great relationship that we have developed in the United Kingdom with British Airways, Virgin Atlantic, Condor, Martinair, Lauda Air and all the major air links coming out of Europe.

The Government recently signed a memorandum of understanding with China giving Trinidad and Tobago approved destination status. This is expected to initiate tourist traffic between both countries.

We have also developed strong strategic alliances with advertising platforms abroad such as the BBC, Travel Channel, BET, MTV and ESPN. All aimed at reaching a significantly higher percentage of households in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, European and Caribbean markets.

For Carnival 2007, like in 2006, the Ministry of Tourism commissioned BET J to produce and air a documentary on Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival. Hosted by top ranking United States of America actor Chris Spencer, the documentary provided glimpses of the island’s natural beauty and charm against the backdrop of our economic pursuits whilst focusing on showcasing the energy and vitality of Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival. The Carnival special will air later this month.

More recently, in March 2007, the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC undertook the initiative of airing a concert in New York with Machel Montano as well as Peter Minshall in Madison Square Garden. That also will be aired in September. The show also featured Peter Minshall, Trinidad and Tobago's leading costume designer. The broadcast was aimed at showcasing the tourism product of Trinidad and Tobago against the background of its soca music and mas. The
Ministry of Tourism well appreciates, that the genre of "soca" is on the verge of becoming an international musical genre and the world must be aware of its roots.

Just for information, these particular networks and platforms reached more than 84 million households according to Nielsen Media Research, and can be seen in the United States of America, Canada and throughout the Caribbean. Our marketing efforts in this area are geared towards expanding our reach into homes of repeat and potentially new visitors in the Caribbean and the United States of America.

In other areas of marketing, we have over the years hosted international media in what is commonly known as "familiarization trips" or “media tours”. For Carnival 2007, over 20 such international media were brought in. These efforts have proved to be quite successful in promoting Trinidad and Tobago as a tourist destination to international journalists and travel writers who get to experience first-hand the essence of our culture, the spirit and creativity of our people, and the charms and attractions of our islands.

The Ministry of Tourism also collaborated with the TDC in the hosting of the third annual Culinary Festival, themed “Taste T&T 2007”. I am aware that many of the Senators here attended. [Desk thumping] This was the third event hosted at the Jean Pierre Complex. This event has grown from strength to strength, so much so that as the event continues to grow, it continues to get international coverage, and there has been an increase in the number of persons that come to this particular event.

This particular “Taste T&T 2007” showcased the talents and expertise of our local chefs and restauranteurs; including our gourmet and indigenous chefs against a backdrop of cultural entertainment and chef demonstrations. “Taste T&T 2007” was, again, highly successful attracting 10,000 patrons over the two nights. It is our hope that Taste T&T will become a major Caribbean food festival within a few short years attracting regional and international participation.

Our national culinary team continued to outshine all the Caribbean competitors at the Taste of the Caribbean Festival which was held in Miami this year. This year’s young and talented culinary team won the highly prestigious title of Caribbean Culinary Team of the Year and the much-coveted title of Bartender of the Year and the National Team Gold. In fact, Trinidad and Tobago culinary team ran away with the most medals in the 2007 Taste of the Caribbean. It is interesting to note that Trinidad and Tobago was the only country whose team had women in the finals of the chefs’ competition.
Moreover, Trinidad and Tobago had the only female judge for the Taste of the Caribbean competition in the person of Deborah Sardinha-Metivier, who has been instrumental in assisting in our culinary festival. Our culinary tourism is an important niche that has the potential to reap significant benefits.

It is proposed that the TDC will expand its efforts in attracting more North American visitors, particularly to Tobago, and will support the efforts of the THA as that island intensifies its efforts to diversify its source markets.

During 2007, the TDC launched a very aggressive online marketing campaign in North America designed to drive potential customers to key websites and by so doing generate incremental business to both Trinidad and Tobago.

TDC will expand its regional marketing efforts to bring in more visitors to purchase goods and services from our many shops and companies.

As well, the TDC will expand its efforts to establish Trinidad and Tobago as the conference and meeting capital of the southern Caribbean and will be marketing aggressively to meeting the conference planners throughout the region as well as in North and South America and also Europe. It is anticipated with the opening of the Hyatt Hotel, the conference and business tourism would create a platform for growth in these niche markets.

Mr. Vice-President, the conference centre on the Waterfront as well as the newly build Hyatt Hotel will revolutionize conference tourism in Trinidad and Tobago. It is this centre that will generate more events coming to our shores such as the Florida Cruise Ship Association (FCCA) which has chosen Trinidad and Tobago as their host for their 2008 Cruise Conference and the Heads of Government meeting. I am going to outline all of that as I continue with my contribution. Because of the conference centre, Trinidad and Tobago will become the conference and tourism capital here in the southern Caribbean. [Desk thumping]

There are so few of us who know of the many different things tourists can see and do when they visit our beautiful country. Far too many people think that Trinidad and Tobago has a limited industry sector, but every year in Trinidad and Tobago over half a million people visit our shores to do business, shopping or otherwise. Mr. Vice-President, this is more than any other island in the Caribbean such as Antigua. It is more than the British Virgin Islands, Curacao, St. Lucia, St. Maarten, and it is almost as many as received by our sister island or Barbados.
Every year, we strive to provide a new way to look at the tourism sector here in Trinidad and Tobago, and to reach new audiences, and which is why this year we brought the renowned Tourism Park to a new location which was at the Divali Nagar site in Chaguanas. By the way, I did invite the mayor to attend, but he did not attend.

We changed venues for two reasons, firstly to capitalize on the large 12-acre site, which offers more space than in years' past and thus greater opportunities to highlight our tourism attractions in a new and different way, and secondly to bring the Park to Central Trinidad thus making it easier for a brand new audience to enjoy this park—[Desk thumping]—residents who might not have been able to do so in years past.

I am pleased to say that it was a tremendous success at the Divali Nagar site, especially in terms of attracting the totally new audience. In doing a survey, we recognized that 58 per cent of the total number of patrons at the park over the 10 days were first time Tourism Park visitors. [Desk thumping] We clearly increased the level of awareness of our tourism sector amongst a whole new segment of the population.

This year’s theme was “Discover the Undiscovered” where we feature places such as the Knolly Tunnel—do you all know where that is?—and many other attractions. We simulated the effect of these sites which included the Argyle Falls and Gasparee Caves and places many of you have not been to.

The TDC, also in April of this year, launched its domestic tourism campaign, "stay to get away" to encourage more of us to travel within Trinidad and Tobago to know our country better; to enjoy all that we have to offer and to have an appreciation of what our assets are.

We are all aware of the fact that last year Barbados attracted some 30,000 visitors from Trinidad and Tobago; Grenada attracted 13,000 visitors from Trinidad and Tobago and St. Lucia attracted 11,000 of our citizens. However, the sharp rise in regional airfares and the cutback in the number of regional flights has made these destinations less accessible and thus enhanced the attraction of Trinidad and Tobago as a preferred destination for our domestic tourists.

Domestic tourism offers great potential for hotels and guest houses in both Trinidad and Tobago to generate incremental business, particularly at weekends. Most of our hotel business is generated from Mondays to Fridays and, in many instances, you find that the weekends have very low occupancy levels, and because of the “Stay to get away” campaign most of the domestic tourists use these hotels on a weekend.
I am pleased to say that since we have launched this campaign the programme “Stay to get away”, this year’s campaign was enormous and had a beneficial impact on our local industry. Since the campaign began the number of room nights—this is on weekends—by local residents in hotels in Trinidad has increased by 44 per cent.

4.30 p.m.

That was compared to the same period of last year. So that, this particular campaign not only created more of our domestic tourism but it also encouraged business amongst our hotels during the weekends. The TDC will continue its domestic tourism marketing programme for the rest of 2007 and 2008, as well as to stimulate this business. This will not only involve marketing to both the travel trade and consumers through traditional media, such as television, radio and newspapers, but also through aggressive public relations initiatives such as the tourism park.

However, the success of the domestic tourism campaign will depend heavily upon increased ease of transportation between Trinidad and Tobago. And it is this Government's intention to improve the quality of service between Trinidad and Tobago particularly by introducing online booking capability for the fast ferry service and by enhancing air service between the two islands. And you would recall, Mr. Vice-President, that the takeover by Caribbean Airlines of Tobago Express should alleviate most of the problems plaguing the present air bridge service. And according to the Minister of Works and Transport, the first order of business for Caribbean Airlines will be the improvement of the Tobago Express fleet, including the upgrade of the present aircraft to the requisite international standards. Also, by having one carrier, it will be possible very shortly to book straight out of your source markets directly into Tobago without having to book two separate tickets, and many of you are aware in the industry, that by having a direct link it will ease the discomfort, it will encourage more people to book directly to Tobago, thus increasing the number of arrivals and interest in Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, both the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC will continue their local tourism awareness campaign, inclusive of the beach safety education campaign, designed to heightened awareness, the role, and importance of tourism within Trinidad and Tobago. These campaigns are vital as we move to world-class standards and successfully compete on the world stage as they would require the whole population to buy into the concept of delivering a world class tourism product.
I now move to the development of the Emperor Valley Zoo. The Ministry of Tourism was assigned the responsibility for the Zoological Society and by extension, the Emperor Valley Zoo, in December, 2005, and that is almost two years ago. Since that time, we have made significant strides in formulating a master plan for the redesign and expansion of the zoo, through services of a reputedly highly accomplished consultant company.

In recent months, the upgrading and expansion plan for the Emperor Valley Zoo was fine-tuned and taken to Cabinet. The outline of the master plan was approved and we are now seeking to engage the appropriate architects, engineers, contractors, surveyors, to detail the plan, following which the process of the construction will begin. We intend to execute this project over a two and a half year period beginning in fiscal 2007/2008. The completed project will result in a significantly improved facility that will compare in stature and pride to any of the numerous city zoos around the world.

The facility will include much improved habitats and displays, enhanced walking trails; much improved parking facilities; a separate building, which we call a tourism or discovery centre, where our young children can learn more about nature as well as learn more about our products; as well as an orchid garden; a water garden and an indigenous butterfly area.

I assure you that the new and improved Emperor Valley Zoo will be a visitor’s attraction of which citizens in this country, mainly our young children, will be truly proud. Zoos are important for our populace, especially for our children and just seeing these animals fosters a greater appreciation of these animals and promote animal conservation. The TDC will execute this project and the upgrade of the zoo.

Product Improvement. In addition, in order to capitalize upon the heightened awareness of Trinidad and Tobago that both the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC have done, through its public relations and marketing initiatives, we need to increase the range and quality of our tourism product. The key mandate of the TDC is to improve the quality of the product of Trinidad and Tobago. Whilst it is to be hoped that the private sector will undertake this investment, given the relevant early development stages of Trinidad’s tourism industry, the Government will act as a catalyst to facilitate the development and improvement of such products.

The Government is already doing this with its investment in a Maracas beach and other related beach facilities. The strategic intent of such an initiative would be to commence the process of the development cluster, world-class sites and
attractions which would serve to define the destination and enhance its appeal. Such products could, for example, include the development of forest canopy walkways at selected areas of our rainforest.

To achieve these objectives the TDC will have access to the Infrastructural Development Fund, to obtain funds which will act as a catalyst to develop the infrastructure and aesthetics of areas in the immediate vicinity of the core projects. The Tourism Development Company will first identify such opportunities then assist in financing such developments.

We have clearly recognized the need to improve the quality of the beach experience here in Trinidad and in this regard, the TDC has prepared a comprehensive long-term plan for the radical upgrade of the facilities and environment at our flagship beaches and that of Maracas beach immediately. This plan will result in a substantial improvement in the quality of the facilities as they are brought to world-class standards.

The redevelopment plan for Maracas will see a dramatic change in the layout and operation of this facility. At the end, we can expect to see major changes in the road system, the system that bottlenecks and creates traffic. We will also see a significant alleviation of the traffic woes currently being experienced. A much bigger shore on the beach for the relaxation and enjoyment of the beach lovers. As well, a more structured system of vending; facilities for beach sports and entertainment; an expanded car park and a generally cleaner, better managed, more attractive and more comfortable Maracas beach and beach facilities.

This project is expected to commence in 2008 and to be completed in two years time. Our product improvement efforts will not be limited to Maracas, as plans will be prepared to also upgrade Las Cuevas, Vessigny and Manzanilla to a similar standard.

**Sen. Prof. Deosaran:** Can I ask? Thank you for giving way, but it seems to me, and perhaps rightly so, you were emphasizing Maracas beach, but is there is list of other beaches like Toco, Moruga, Mayaro, because from my experience and I am quite sure the others, some of those beaches are, to put it bluntly, filthy and packed with bottles, cups and so on. Is there any plan to monitor and to help it get sanitized so that people could really experience the beaches as they are supposed to?

**Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee:** You are totally correct in that many of our beach facilities are in dire need of improvement and upgrading and that while the TDC has taken the bull by the horns, so to speak, and attacked with full force the
Maracas beach facility, which was in dire need of redevelopment, as well as the beaches which fall under the TDC, such as Las Cuevas, Vessigny and Manzanilla. The system of Government, many of the beaches do not fall under the TDC, many of them fall under the Local Government. But we are now in consultation with them because they are now asking for assistance. So we are going to work very closely with Local Government and the municipal corporations to try and improve all the facilities in Trinidad and Tobago.

And what I will outline later on is, we have done that with the lifeguard services, because before the lifeguard services were only assigned to a few beaches. And as the lifeguard services expanded and improved and as we purchased more vehicles, more ATVs, more jet skies, more ambulance equipment and more underwater tanks, more and more beaches have been reaching out for assistance by the lifeguard. You will notice that there are more lifeguard towers; there is more equipment which can facilitate more of our beaches, but we have not reached where we would like to be. In 2008 we intend to expand those services.

**Sen. Bro. Khan:** Just a bit; on the question of Maracas Bay; it is one of the few places on the North coast that has a sort of lagoon, so to speak, where the river comes and meets the sea behind; where they sell the fish and other things now. What are the plans for there? Do you intend to block it off or to have little walkways, as you mentioned? Is it one of the areas for that? Because I think you should consider this in keeping that part of our heritage in place.

**Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee:** Thank you for your question, Sen. Bro. Noble Khan. To speak on Maracas, one will understand that right behind the parking facilities, there is a water caption area, what we have experienced is that over the years, as a result of flooding that when the rain level is high, flooding takes place on the parking facility, and many of the vendors that you speak of will complain about the unsanitary conditions of water overflowing and coming into their vending booths. Part of the redevelopment plan is to raise the level of the car park, so that when the water rises, one would not experience flooding that presently exists.

With respect to a broad walk, the intention is to move the present road which runs between the car park and Maracas to run directly behind the parking facility. So what that would do, is alleviate the bottleneck that is created right now between Blanchisseuse, Las Cuevas and the Maracas Main Road, because most of the cars are now parking illegally and creating a bottleneck between that caption. And because of that you have this long traffic that is created on a Sunday afternoon as people are coming from Blanchisseuse.
So part of the redevelopment plan of Maracas beach is not only to expand the beach front, it also deals with the problem of the unsanitary conditions with the venders; it also deals with parking. Today, because of the amount of cars we have in Trinidad, the facility which was only able to park about 300 cars and now that there are more cars and more people can afford cars, because of economic circumstance, more and more people are going to Maracas beach. And what you have now is that there are too many cars for the size of facility that presently exists.

So part of the redevelopment plan would be to increase the parking facility in its size to over 600 parking spots, as well as bus stops, where the buses can come and park; a central area to facilitate the increase in the amount of traffic, as well as to alleviate the bottleneck which presently exists.

Mr. Vice-President, as I was saying earlier, part of the redevelopment plan will be to also identify other beaches: Las Cuevas, Vessigny and Manzanilla. Also the Ministry of Tourism has been working with the various regional corporations—which was your question—in identifying various tourists’ sites and attractions that can be targeted for development. So, we are working with the regional corporations and we have been discussing ways of improving sites and attractions that presently fall under the regional corporation.

4.45 p.m.

To date, personnel from the Regional Corporations have been assisted by the Ministry of Tourism. We have been working in developing business proposals for various community sites and it is my understanding that funds are being sought for the development of specific sites and attractions. This type of collaboration with local communities will certainly redound the enhancement of the sustainability of our tourism product as our local communities need to be proud owners and stakeholders of tourist facilities and attractions within their locales.

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Hon. J. Jeremie]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen The Hon. H. Chin Lee: Thank you. Mr. Vice-President, I have so much to say, so I will try and speed it up in the 15 minutes that I have remaining. I want to go straight to investment projects and approvals because I have heard many people on the other side say that tourism is on the decline. I do not know where they got these figures from; lack of investments.
I do not know where you get this information because as far I am aware, as the Minister of Tourism, we have an increasing number of arrivals coming into Trinidad, and the level of investment has quadrupled in the past three years. And the level of investment, in our economy, all it does, it shows the confidence that the private sector has in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago [Desk thumping] and confidence in the Ministry of Tourism. I just want to outline quickly some of the investments that are taking place, the increasing investments, private investments, as well as public.

In fiscal 2002, approval was granted for five tourism projects, four of which were ancillary tourism and one accommodation. The total estimated capital expenditure was $221,000,329. These projects were expected to generate permanent employment for 950 workers.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to just outline some of the new hotels that are presently being under construction and the size of investment and inventory that is now being added to our present stock. Many of you would be aware that our tourism stock which is the amount of rooms that are available for tourists is probably around 5,000. If one were to compare that to Barbados which probably has maybe about 9,000 or Jamaica 12,000, we are about 5,000. But within the next two years, we will have an increase of over 50 per cent of our room stock.

These are the hotels that are presently under construction, the Holiday Inn Express which is in Trincity and that has been completed. It is an 85-room hotel which was officially opened in June of 2007; there is also a 120-room Star Hotel currently under construction. That is also private sector. There are a number of hotels as well, the Hyatt Regency Hotel, that is 428 rooms; there is the Cara Suite Hotel which is also private sector and that is in Piarco, that is 150 rooms; as well as the Carlton Savannah Hotel with 165 rooms.

Investments in this sector have therefore been booming over the past few years making the Government well on its way to achieving its Vision 2020. [Desk thumping] And as I said, having one of the largest convention centres now being built on the waterfront, Trinidad and Tobago will become the conference capital of region. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Vice-President, also we had some amendments to the Tourism Development Act, which also encouraged the private sector to take part in this booming industry. We amended the Tourism Development Act in 2005 to enable investors to access an enhanced package of incentives. Further amendments were made in 2006 to make the Act CSME compliant. I could read all of that, but I will
circulate it after, I do not think I have enough time. Also, we had a review of existing incentives for investments. The Ministry conducted consultations with various stakeholders, such as hoteliers, tourism taxi operators, as well as employed a consultant inter alia to examine and make recommendations on existing incentives for accommodation sector with a view to improving incentives for the investment sector.

Mr. Vice-President, the waterfront which is presently on its way, there are 428 rooms, it is a four star Hyatt Regency Hotel and Conference Centre, and is well on schedule for completion and handover. This brand new, much needed hotel will be opened in December, 2007, and marketing efforts will continue over the next 12 months to ensure that when the hotel opens, not only will it be fully booked, but also the existing hotels will not suffer as a result of this major expansion in our room inventory. As mentioned earlier, this is a major thrust in our business and conference tourism, which will give us the competitive advantage over other countries in the near future.

The Government is ensuring that all of the other major hotels will have the quality when the Hyatt opens—$240 million is being expended by the Government in a substantial upgrade, also, there is the Trinidad Hilton and Conference Centre. This upgrade will continue over the next two and a half years and will culminate with the complete renovation of the hotel by 2010. So in addition to all of that stock, there is the expansion of the Hilton Hotel in Trinidad.

A new 80-room hotel recently opened in Trincity; a 150-room hotel is scheduled to open in close proximity, as well as a 150-room Carlton Savannah Hotel is scheduled to open early in 2009 in St. Ann's, Port of Spain and other hotels are actively being considered both in Port of Spain, as well as in Chaguaramas and Chaguaramas. The Ministry of Tourism and TDC have identified potential sites for hotel development and will act as catalysts to bring new projects to fruition in as rapid a manner as possible.

Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Vice-President, I just want some clarification on one thing.

Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee: I do not have much time.

Sen. Mark: Thank you very much, hon. Minister. We just wanted to ask you, hon. Minister, whether you would be able to give us a breakdown of tourism, the contribution to the GDP over the last five years. Do you have those statistics with you?
Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee: I have the figures and this will not be my figures or Minister Enill's figures, it is the World Tourism and Travel Council that came to Trinidad last year, they did a presentation on their assessment of the contribution to our GDP contribution, the contribution to direct employment, the contribution to indirect employment. I have it here and when I get it I will read the document, but let me finish, then I will present it to you. But what I can say is that the numbers are very promising, in that the percentage and the number of contributions that tourism is making to the GDP has increased exponentially and the contribution for job creation has also increased in a very big way.

But what I was saying earlier, Mr. Vice-President, is that also as part of our tourism thrust, is promoting signature events and I will just quickly gloss over the pan yard sensations which are continued to be hosted in collaboration with Pan Trinbago. Already, we co-hosted the Plymouth Jazz Festival which has proven to be a real winner. This event has rivalled more established events, such as the St. Lucia Jazz Festival, the Barbados Jazz Festival, as well as we have already confirmed major international conferences right here in Trinidad and Tobago. Conferences we would not have been able to have, had it not been for the waterfront project and the conference centre and I will just name some of those conferences that we have confirmed for 2008.

One is the Summit of the Americas and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Conference which will be shortly hosted in Trinidad at this Hyatt Regency Hotel, as well as the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Investment Conference scheduled for May 2008. Also, on my recent trip to the Cayman Islands, I was able to secure at the Florida Caribbean Cruise ship Association (FCCA) which we would be able to handle before, all of the top cruise ship directors, owners of cruise ships, Carnival, Royal, Caribbean, you name it, they are coming to Trinidad [Desk thumping] October of 2008. I think that will be a very proud moment for us; we have never been able to track such prestigious conferences in the past. In the coming years, the Ministry and TDC will also continue to investigate other opportunities.

Mr. Vice-President, event tourism generates substantial visitor expenditures and effectively markets the destination while providing a range of opportunities for tourism stakeholders to optimize; for instance, maximizing visitation and length of stay and promoting holiday opportunities to visitors who attend our events. Successful events also draw substantial media attention, which effectively markets your destination. I am going to talk quickly about the airlift. The airlift has increased tremendously over the past five years.
The expansion of our tourism sector as I have said in my earlier contributions, cannot happen without a safe, reliable and affordable air service to Trinidad and Tobago. As the hotel sector expands so much, the capacity of the airline serving Trinidad and Tobago will also expand—it is like a chicken and egg situation. If we are to achieve our vision of establishing Trinidad and Tobago as the centre for meetings and for conferences, for shopping, for sports, then we must continue to strive to ensure that adequate and reliable air services are in place.

Over the past five years, we have established Delta Airlines, recently commenced a new non-stop jet service to Port of Spain from Atlanta four times a week and will expand its service to include flights from New York to Port of Spain and from Atlanta to Tobago by December of this year.

British Airways has deepened its commitment to Trinidad and Tobago with the re-introduction of its service from Port of Spain to the United Kingdom. The UK and Europe are important markets for both Trinidad and Tobago.

On January 01, 2005, Caribbean Airlines took to the air for the very first time with new and improved service to our major markets. Caribbean Airlines has recently announced major expansion to its route structure as it continues to increase its services.

Constellation Air has also expanded its service into Piarco International Airport with new twice weekly flights between Trinidad and Panama which commenced in July 2007. Negotiations to bring Spirit Airlines into Trinidad with non-stop service from both Fort Lauderdale and New York are also in hand.

Mr. Vice-President, cruise shipping. As I spoke about the conference, we are far more active than we have ever been. We are expanding the pier at Scarborough and although it took a little while to build, now completed, Tobago is now experiencing an increase in the arrivals of cruise shipping. How much more time do I have?

Mr. Vice-President: Two minutes.

Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee: Mr. Vice-President, the lifeguards’ services which came under my Ministry in 2004, have had tremendous success. Over the past two years, the need to outfit the lifeguards’ services with the necessary human resources, provided a range of new positions that were created including—before it was one level of lifeguards. What we did, we created a managerial system with patrol captains, lifeguards instructors, community education officers, as well as permanent positions of lifeguards. This reclassification has contributed to an increase in the number of beaches being patrolled and evidently to a boost in morale among our lifeguard officers.
Along with an increased presence at beaches, lifeguards have also been better tooled to conduct their patrol, surveillance and rescue exercises—ATVs, jet skis, as well as rib dinghies. This was brought about by an increase in the provision of ambulances, transport buses. We provide ATVs (all terrain vehicles), jet skis, which is the new way of rescuing people used in Australia and the United States; diving and rescue equipment, and training gear to the service.

Additionally, a significant amount of infrastructural work was achieved through the refurbishment of several lifeguard towers and the construction of 18 new ones at Vessigny, Quinam, Los Iros, Salybia, Las Cuevas and in Mayaro. Lifeguard accommodation quarters were also constructed or improved where necessary at various beaches across the country. And it is our intention to expand the services even further to ensure the safety and protection of our citizens.

Careful to ensure the staff in the lifeguard service possess the skills—because what is important, Mr. Vice-President, is that you have people who are skilled and trained and this is something we identified and we collaborated with the Galveston Lifeguard Academy in Texas where we had many of our senior lifeguards sent to learn the latest methods in lifeguard saving. We also collaborated with lifeguard facilities in Daytona, Miami, and those people were brought to Trinidad in order to train and ensure that our people here recognized the latest techniques in lifeguarding. [Desk thumping]

I am pleased to say today, that the lifeguard services is up to an international standard and so much so, that when in the past, people never saw the lifeguards services as a professional outfit, that the number of applicants to join the lifeguard has been greater than ever before because they are proud to become lifeguards of Trinidad and Tobago.

5.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, in closing, plans for 2008 and beyond; the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Development Company (TDC) will focus on several initiatives:

1. Continued streamlining of the incentives offered to investors to increase the amount of investment.

2. The establishment of a Standing Committee on Tourism in Trinidad and Tobago that will steer the development of our tourism industry.

3. The development of high quality tourism product consistent with international standards.
4. Support of a proactive and aggressive approach to marketing our destination. This includes the use of indigenous cultural traditions to ensure authenticity of our tourism product.

5. Investment in human resource development on a sustained basis.

6. Implementation of the National Tourism Policy.

7. The engagement and empowerment of our local communities in tourism planning and management that will certainly assist in the development of a sustainable tourism product.

8. Establishment of a partnership between private and public sector.

9. Work with the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and other agencies in collating of sound and timely research.

10. Intensify domestic awareness programmes so as to encourage buying towards tourism development.

11. Improve the standard and functioning of effective lifeguard services.

12. Execute the upgrading of all beach facilities and the Emperor Valley Zoo.

13. Re-engineering of the TDC to meet its strategic operational needs. [Crosstalk]

Sen. Mark: Time up! [Laughter]

Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee: Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago's tourism is truly going places. However, we need to develop a sense of pride and ownership of our natural resources and attractions and in so doing ensure that we take care of the environment. We need to develop a respect for the industry and recognize the value of tourism. [Crosstalk]

Let me remind this House that tourism opens many doors. We have the potential to improve the country, once the cash left by tourists is directed to the local communities most in need. Tourism empowers communities. Let us all work together, ensuring that tourism is one of the economic pillars that will ensure the economic, substantial and sustainable development of our twin islands of Trinidad and Tobago. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, I promise you if I am sitting here, that I will give you five minutes for your two. [Laughter]

Hon. Members, we shall now suspend for tea and come back at 5.40 p.m.
Sen. Dana Seetahal SC: Madam President, if during this contribution I begin to cough, please understand that it has nothing to do with the substance of my contribution or any kind of response I may get during it, but it is because I have a—[Sen. Seetahal points to her throat] I have a plethora of mints that have been supplied by many of my colleagues.

May I say at the outset that during the five years that I have been in this Senate, this being my sixth budget contribution, I have made many acquaintances, associates and some friends. It has been an enriching experience. I do not know if I will be here for another budget debate; it is up in the air, as we say, so I do not know if this will be my swan song, like some Members of both the Government and the Opposition, I dare say. I do not want to assume anything.

As I begin my sixth contribution, in some ways I am assailed by a sense of déjà vu, because I have heard many things I have heard before and some of the same promises that have been made. It causes me to wonder on occasion whether or not we are spinning top in mud.

I mean no disrespect to my colleagues on the Government side, because I know there is a tendency when one makes comments that are not favourable, for persons sometimes to take it personally or become a little hurt; that is human nature. As a representative of the people, as we all are, but in this case without any partisan bias—I do not like to use the word bias, but you know what I mean—one is expected and people have pointed out to me to represent what is perceived as the view of the public out there. Although like the view of the American people, a lot of times one is not sure what the public feels.

Madam President, there are times when you get a general consensus, whether it is from letters in the newspapers, things on the call-in shows or conversations with the world at large about the concerns people have. It seems to me that one of the major concerns is that there has been too many delays in implementation by this Government. In other words, getting things done seems to be a problem.

Another concern is the ailing criminal justice system. If we read in the newspapers: shortage of fingerprints, fewer murders being solved, matters of that kind, this would be indicative of what we speak.

The third, of course, not that people like to point to themselves, is a citizen disassociation from crime solving, which has resulted in that being the number
one concern. Ironic as it is, citizens disassociate themselves from it and yet call on radio stations, call on the television, write letters and complain about the crime problem and how it is affecting tourism and everything.

With $162.2 billion in the past six years, one would expect, with that unprecedented amount of money available to the Government that there would have been some roads built, some bridges made, some houses set up. You would have upgraded the public service and the like; these are expected. So when Ministers of Government and government supporters talk about these things, in my view it is not something any government that is basically honest—and I attribute that to this Government like other governments I am sure—should take extra credit or any credit for; you are expected to do that.

So, it is expected that the Minister of National Security would have refurbished police stations and things along that line; that the Minister of Education would have caused schools to be repaired. What we are really looking for is whether or not there has been progress in the last few years or has the quality of life improved. [Desk thumping] Is that not really the test? We are talking about moving towards First World status; the test for that is whether or not the quality of life, such as you would experience in a First World country, has improved. It includes the standard of life, things like conveniences, but overall the quality of life in terms of environment, how you treat your disabled; all those things.

I do not know that we can say that our institutions, for instance, are functioning better and more effectively. Can we truly say that we have moved significantly toward this status? I feel that there are differences in this, in different ministries, if you like, or different aspects of governance. At some levels we have moved; at other levels we seemed to have gone down, but generally there has not been the progress that we would like.

I feel that in part it has to do with the different levels of inaction; secondly, the failing criminal justice system, for a multitude of reasons, and citizen disassociation.

May I just for the benefit of Members indicate what I mean when I say inaction, by giving specific examples of in action. I will refer firstly to an article in the Express of Thursday, August 30. The headline is:

"Cabinet considers parole system"
The Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security said, among other things:

"We believe that prison ought to be reserved for the most dangerous and persistent offenders."

And he announced the plans for a parole system in Trinidad and Tobago when he made a contribution in the other place. That is what I mean when I talk about déjà vu.

This Minister was not then a minister in 2002 when this very same intention was announced by the then Minister of National Security, Sen. Chin Lee, in his budget contribution. He talked about the benefits of the parole system and the fact that they hoped soon to put it in place. I remember commenting then, as I do now, that in 1990 I was part of a Cabinet-appointed committee to study the feasibility of parole. We went to Canada with the then Prison Commissioner, Mr. Hercules, heading the delegation and we also had the Chief Probation Officer.

In 2002, the then government supported by the Minister of Community Development, who also made some remarks about it, talked about it being almost a fait accompli.

Sen. Mark in his contribution made a statement something to the effect that everything in the budget is what the Government says “it is going to do.” I will not actually subscribe to that, but when you hear of the plan or their now considering parole which was considered in 1990 and reached somewhere, and then five years afterwards you are still considering it; are we spinning top in mud? [Interruption]

**Sen. Yuille-Williams:** I heard the Minister of Community Development; I did not hear in what context.

**Sen. D. Seetahal SC:** It was this Minister who at that time supported in her budget contribution the system of parole in 2002. I checked the records when I was doing my preparation.

**5.50 p.m.**

The second inertia, I would say—and I know that we have talked about this at length—is the DNA Act. I know the Minister of National Security, of late, has been working on that front and it has come before us and we know that it is coming again on Tuesday, but it was promised since April 2004. I know we can say, “better late than never”, but when things take three-and-a-half years after
they are promised, whatever the reasons, it does not create trust in the public; it does not create trust in other legislators, that we are moving things along. It could be excusable that this valuable crime fighting tool, which is a tool; in this legislation—which will force accused people or require them to give their DNA so that you can make comparative tests in solving crime—there is no explanation that I hear that will exempt anyone from, what I call inertia.

The Prison Rules: I see in the legislative agenda announced in the budget speech the plans to introduce these prison rules. I went to a meeting more than two years ago where the prison rules were discussed; prison rules to replace the 1843 or 1838, I believe, existing rules. I know the Minister is aware of this; I know that work has been done, but again, I heard someone call up today on the radio and say: “How come we have two more prisoners escaping? Why do we not have shackles, for instance, to bring prisoners to the station?” It is because they see it on television. In the US all prisoners are brought in shackles.

Now, under our law, unless it is shown that there is some reason to fear that they are violent prisoners, we would not normally put them in handcuffs whilst they are in court, but in transporting the prisoners in some level they should be. But do you know why they do not? It is because of the discomfort of those vans that we have. Prisoners hate it because it is claustrophobic; it is not meant to transport human beings, I think. As a result, there are accommodations made, and accommodations which are taken advantage of by prisoners. And if the prison rules which they are now talking about again are to go anywhere, they must recognize those matters.

SAUTT: I have had some dealings with the officers of SAUTT and I think that they are in general, very professional; they are trained well; they know their business. However, in the last three to four years over $200 million has been spent on SAUTT. It was pointed out in other budget presentations—I pointed out that there is no provision for a joint unit in either the Defence Act or the Police Service Act. There would be problems in the operation of such a joint unit. There have been problems in terms of the order of authority. As we speak, I can tell you as a fact, that because of that, when exhibits, for instance, are seized by the police—that would be the homicide or whatever division—and are required by SAUTT to be sent for testing or so, there is a long, long process, because SAUTT, as a unit, does not have that legal authority.

It was raised by me and I do not know if it is because I raised it and it may have sounded critical of the Government, there was not this action in dealing with it. It was not anything new. A legal opinion had been done by the Police Second
Division Social and Welfare Association and that was the same opinion proffered more than two years ago. I see again that there is now the proposal: the Government will pass legislation to give effect to SAUTT. While they do this, crime detection suffers; crime investigation suffers.

The construction of police stations—and I note the Minister himself recognizes that there has been delay. I see in the budget speech and I quote:

“In the new fiscal year eighteen new police stations will be constructed...”

While saying that there are five in the course of construction.

I would like to know whether 18 police stations were constructed in the last five years and if they were not, why are we to assume that 18 will be constructed in one year?

Sen. Joseph: Can I answer that?

Sen. D. Seevalal SC: If you wish, certainly I will allow you.

Sen. Joseph: Thank you very much. Because the approach we are going to use is different. Given the experience we have had over the years, what we are going to do is to bundle them into acceptable packages for which we are confident that persons will bid and in the circumstances we will be able to construct the police stations next year, contrary to the problems that we have had in the past.

Sen. D. Seevalal SC: If that is so, I am pleased to hear it and I look forward to the construction of these police stations, because on occasion I have had to visit the St. Joseph Police Station, which is the police station in the area where I live, and I have had to go behind the police station to the property room and dogs should not have worked there. Really, it was unpleasant for an attorney, for any person. The officers’ behaviour was akin to the kind of environment that they worked in. The property room was a dark, dim, dirty place. At least the holding cells there, you could see people in them, because some of the holding cells—for instance, the Tunapuna Police Station, you have a little air vent about that big. [Senator demonstrates] So everyone is behaving in a bestial form. It is just not good. It is not even for vengeance or anything like that; it is like the Black Hole of Calcutta, one might say.

But the fact is, it gives the officers that sort of attitude, a kind of dehumanizing attitude because of the environment in which they work. I have been to the new temporary St. Joseph Police Station, and apart from everything else, having no parking and you have to park in the street and the officers come
inside and say: “Why you park on the street; go and move your car.” We say, well: “Do not talk to people like that”, and they do not understand the need for being polite. It is all in the environment, and these are matters that, of course, in the long run, will affect public trust and confidence in the system and result in a cycle of lack of trust; lack of enforcement.

The final point, in terms of the inaction—and of course I am focusing on the criminal justice system and, unfortunately, on the Ministry of National Security because that has a lot to do with the criminal justice system. But the final point really is the delay in the implementation of MILAT and MYPART. MILAT is referred to in the Social Sector Investment Programme. This was spoken about in the 2003 budget presentation and I believe it was by then Minister Howard Chin Lee. And we are now told at page 65 that:

“The Ministry of National Security commenced MYPART and MILAT on 16th April, 2007. The goal of the programme is to train, develop and certify…a quasi military environment, young persons between the ages of 14 to 25.

The first phase will be a pilot phase…The programme targets at risk youths who are vulnerable to socially unacceptable behaviors/attitudes.”

I have said here in this Senate that those are great programmes. We endorsed them; it was something that would be very good because the majority of criminals who are before the court are between the ages of 14 to 25. And if you are targeting them by this, you are putting them in a sort of military kind of thing, they will be less inclined to join gangs and they will be less inclined to join a gang to get a gun because they will be legally getting a gun. I say this because I have interviewed persons who have been convicted and they tell me that they join—let us put it this way: “I became a Muslim”. I asked why. The answer was: “To get a gun.” That was the direct response. I am not ascribing this to any religious sect or anything, I am merely pointing out that there is that perception. If you are talking about young men whose testosterone seems to be proven by getting a gun, whether it might be some kind of a psychological connection, or whatever, the point is these programmes have been shown to work abroad; they have been shown to work anywhere and yet it took over three years to come about.

Last year they just had the vehicle. I saw it and I mentioned that. It is not like things take time. It is now in effect, I am told, based on the report, April of this year and I heard good things about that programme on 95.5 where Garth and Tasha talk about how you deal with substance abuse, which is a wonderful programme and they were talking about this.
Sen. Joseph: Thank you very much again for giving way. Madam President, and hon. Senators, one of reasons MILAT and MYPART took so long to get off the ground is that there was a debate among the providers and educators as to the heavy emphasis on a military programme. There were those who felt that there ought not to be such a heavy emphasis on the military; that that turns off young people. We went around in circles. We were also trying to determine whether we got value for money in terms of what were some of the other Government programmes that were being implemented. While there are no excuses, that was the reality for the reason MILAT and MYPART took so long to get off the ground.

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: Thank you very much. I appreciate the Minister’s words. But may I say that when you announce a programme like that, one would have assumed that before you did it you would have canvassed those views and I would have thought that you would have looked at the programmes elsewhere and would have come to a conclusion, and when you made up your mind, make up your mind. That is my point. If one makes up one’s mind, you can be wrong, but make up your mind and go with it. That is the thing. There is too much delay. We have to stop vacillating.

So those are the matters that I wished to speak about. Having identified at least six issues, I would just like to point out that the Government has put in place many social programmes. We know this. But what the Government, in my view, has failed to do with sufficiency is to set measurements as to how successful they are; targets; where are we going at a specific date and get feedback, as my colleague is saying.

For instance, one way of starting the ball rolling, to me—in 2002, I raised the matter—that you had all these wonderful programmes for single mothers, adolescent-something, geriatric—I do not know all the names, of course; they are all there; you cannot expect me to remember the 50-odd programmes. But I had asked that a booklet be prepared and made available to the public and you would say where you could get it. Now, I saw a booklet about a year or so afterwards; I was shown it by the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. I do not remember if he was then that Minister. But I go to the public library; I actually am a member—so that is a very good library, brought into being by whichever government, so that is good spending of public money, by the way. Now, there are no copies of this book that I asked about, which in 2002, at least two Ministers on that side assured me that my suggestion would have been taken on board. And all these wonderful programmes, you would have where you could
go and how you could access them and, whatever. It should not have taken five years to prepare. Because if you have all these great things and people still have to rely on word of mouth, it creates an impression that you only get in by contact. I raised it then and I raise it now.

In this vein, I just want to read a letter that I received from—perhaps I would not call his name because I used to receive letters written in yellow paper from him, which means it used to be from the prisons. It states:

“Dear Ms. Seetahal,

…I am writing you this letter in your capacity as independent Senator… Presently I am quite frustrated and sad and I do not know who or where else to turn to. It has been more than two years now since I’ve made an application to Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited for a plot of land upon which I intend to do farming and also build a house for my family and up to this date there has been no progress. I renewed my application a few months ago and provided PSAEL with all that was required of me in order to process my application and yet there is no progress.

Ms. Seetahal, most times I just don’t know what to do anymore. At present I live with my common-law wife and two kids, a ten year old boy and a five year old girl. I do wish to get married but I can’t do that right now because I do not have a home for us. At present we are staying at my girlfriend’s mom’s house. I want to be able to provide for my family and for us to have a decent home. My passion is in farming and I do wish to set up a farm but I am not receiving any help.

Government always encourages people to get involved in farming and agriculture and yet here I am with a great passion for farming and I am not receiving help. Several months ago I was taken on a site visit by an agent at PSAEL and a two acre plot of land was identified and so my application is in relation to that plot of land. I just want PSAEL to prepare the lease document so that I could have access to the land and be able to uplift my standard of living and that of my family.”

Then he gives me his application number, and so on.

6.05 p.m.

Ironically, yesterday, I received this letter in Parliament. It is addressed to me. To me, that indicates one of the failings of all these programmes for the people they are supposed to target. What will happen to someone like that? He
will either go back to crime or join URP and do nothing. That is a programme, as I have said before, that should be abolished. It facilitates the creation of laziness and persons involved in propagating criminal activity. It should be replaced in totality by CEPEP. That is in terms of matters I see in general that could be worked on; have taken too long and something can be done. You have great programmes but we need to have them work.

I want to deal with my major area of concern which is criminal justice. Before I get there, in passing I will refer to the major economic concern which has been referred to many times in the Senate. I am no economist but I can read and listen to the news like everybody else. Since I heard of the Ryder Scott Survey and Report which talked about our gas reserves being only for 12 years, I have been concerned and other citizens who know nothing about economics have been concerned. They think about what will happen to all these citizens grants where we spent between $1 billion and $2 billion this year on the senior citizens grant? We are talking about free tertiary education; free books and lunches and CDAP. Yesterday, I benefited from CDAP when I went to get my prescription given to me by Dr. Gopeesingh here in the Senate. [Desk thumping] I said that there are good things. I paid $1 and a few cents for a whole lot of—we are all working together. The point is that such programmes like CDAP and the wonderful Waterfront Project, I do not know enough about the allegations of whatever, but it looks wonderful to me on the face of it. The results of CEPEP look good. To facilitate all these things we need to have the same income. Therefore, we are worried. I think that most of us will recall when public servants had to take a 10 per cent salary cut; people’s mortgages went by the way and all those houses in Santa Rosa were abandoned. Clearly, we do not want that. We expect the Government to make provisions for us not to fall back in that trap. It is simply that.

I have heard Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano and what he said has failed to convince me, even to assuage some of my concerns. He was talking about the United States and their seven year reserve. He talked about a dignitary assuring him that the energy reserves will not run out. That is ridiculous! Sorry to say it like that. Just because somebody says to me, “no hurricane will hit Trinidad” and you say, “God is a Trini”; is that any kind of evidential basis on which to run a country? No, no, no, Madam President.

Sen. Dr. Saith: You started off your premise that the Scott Ryder Report and thanks to Sen. Basharat Ali who mentioned that Scott Ryder is not a person.

Hon. Senator: Ryder Scott.
Sen. Dr. Saith: The Ryder Scott Report says that we will run out of gas in 12 years. I do not know if you were present yesterday for Sen. Basharat Ali’s contribution. I think he put a clear explanation of what these reports are. He went further to say that it is his experience with Shell for the last years 28 or 40 years we have been running out. I do not think that one could put the report of the gas reserves at this time in the context that it will run out by any other date. The fears that you and other people have will not be assuaged by continuing to say that gas will run out in 12 years.

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: I appreciate that and I do grasp that the fears will not be assuaged by repeating this fear. That never happens. We need to have some kind of solution to suggest that, if this fear should prove to be so, what are we going to do? You have to look at the worst case scenario which is what I try to envisage in my personal and professional life, so when that happens I will be well equipped. [Interruption] That is right. The worst case scenario is that I could be kidnapped; kept alive for months and tortured.

My point is that I have looked at countries with similar circumstances where there have been reports stating that their reserves will run out and I have read of what their governments did. I am suggesting—my words do not mean that I am taking back anything—and a simple suggestion does not mean that I am an economist, but we could make provision for that eventuality.

I read of Dubai in the Express Travel page 12 dated September 02. Fortuitously, this weekend, there was an interview with Lisa McShine who is now living in Dubai, the country where the sky is said to be the limit.

“Dubai is considered to be the fastest growing city in the world and its landscape is changing thanks to Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum’s vision of turning Dubai into the number one tourism destination by 2016.”

Probably, the Minister of Tourism should have some regard for that destination and what they have done.

“Dubai’s oil reserves are expected to be depleted by 2016. The economy has to be based on something. So why not the tourist industry? The sheik is gearing the country towards that.”

In that country, they say that “Dubai is a land of high rollers and heavy spenders, a land where money is not a problem.” Many people who left BWIA went there to work. They are happy working, never mind that their dress must
conform to some extent with the country. I know no conformity is required but there is a picture. You still have to be accommodating. The point is that they are making provision.

I quote the *Focus on Trinidad and Tobago Budget* Ernst and Young on the situation with Qatar.

“This Gulf state with a population of just over 900,000 people is now the largest exporter of LNG in the world…Qatar has enough natural gas resources to last for decades. Yet Qatar has recently been unrelenting in its focus on diversification. So much so that the stated policy of its Government is to decrease energy’s contribution to GDP from 60 per cent down to 20 per cent by 2015 by aiming at certain sub-targets along the way. To bolster diversification, the Emir has lead and financially backed several well thought out schemes to develop Qatar in parallel with its energy sector in the areas of Education, Science, Technology, Healthcare and Financial Services. All this diversification rapidly occurring in a country with a per capita GDP ranked among the highest in the world and a seemingly endless supply of gas reserves!”

One is talking about resources finishing in 2016 and the other is unlimited for decades but they are making provision. We must have foresight; we cannot say it is unlikely. Clearly, it may very well be that the next few years we will discover energy and other resources. I am glad to see that the Government Bench is so interested in what I am saying and it is causing comments across the board. The point is that they are doing more than it appears to me that we are doing.

I read what Sen. Sahadeo said over the weekend on the Prime Minister’s budget speech about these hundred acre farms. The Government is establishing some of them; three of them in Picton Estate. I looked in my book on Great Estates in Trinidad and I could not find Picton Estate. I would like to know where that is. They are setting up 10 and then you have private enterprise setting up some others. You are having these massive 100 acre estates. I do not believe that that is the solution. I think that there is an over reliance on these plans when we have no indication that they will be successful and earn us the kind of money that the Prime Minister envisages. When he talks about “tall buildings in the city and rolling undulating farms in the country”, it sounds good. It is something that I would like to see.

In terms of funding all these programmes and allowing me in my dim years—when I say dim I do not mean necessarily dim; I meant visually maybe as I get older—to enjoy a commensurate standard of living and everyone else, we would
like to see something more certain. In Trinidad and Tobago, agriculture for so many years for all these reasons has not been successful financially. I speak from personal experience of trying to do some agriculture and not seeing it work, even though I have registered and satisfied the criteria for all these subsidies.

**Sen. Joseph:** How many acres do you have?

**Sen. D. Seetahal SC:** Eighteen acres and 33 perches; 36 perches make an acre, so I actually do know a little bit.

Now I move on to crime and criminal justice. Headlines such as “Shortage of fingerprint experts”, I know the Minister will deal with when he makes his contribution. This is what I saw in the newspapers on August 31, Independence Day.

“Police agree that many of the crimes could be solved easily with fingerprint analysis.

Most times, however, the thieves escape because there is no expert available to dust the scene for fingerprints.”

There are five; one was on a course; one was on leave and the three officers in the whole southern area were overburdened. We know this. I know this from experience that people do not call out officers. They save them for certain robberies where you might have fingerprints on the louvres and so. You get drug cases where lawyers ask why you did not get the fingerprint expert to check the car. The officer says, “I have the drugs; what else do I need?” You have those suggestions that you did not do a proper investigation and the simple reason is that you do not have that.

You have this headline in today’s newspaper, “Fewer murders being solved.” It states:

“There has been a six per cent reduction in the detection rate for homicides for the first eight months of 2007 compared to the same period last year.”

The homicide rate dropped by 18 per cent.

6.20 p.m.

Although we hear about so many homicides, they have actually gone down. The detection rate, too, has gone down, which is not good. It means that we are not getting the perpetrators. That is something that we should be concerned about.
Another matter is the fear by jurors. Recently there was a case—actually not one, but many cases. Sometimes you have to question the jurors and all of them want to know if people could know them or are looking at them and they are afraid. These are jurors here. We know that sometimes by what happens. You see it on their faces. There are witnesses that are being intimidated, afraid of what will happen if they come forward. Having come forward, they are afraid, if they give the evidence, what will happen.

First of all, detecting is lower. This means that it could be as a result of not having the witnesses, so you cannot charge anyone you cannot detect. The rate is therefore dropping. Then, when you do detect and you go to court, there is a problem with the actual witnesses coming to give evidence because they are afraid that the accused will stare at them, which they must because they are there to be questioned.

Then you are talking about judges who need protection. If things go on as they are, then everyone in this country will want protection. There are the lawyers wanting protection; the prosecutors, the judges, the jurors and the witnesses. What will happen? Then the Justices of the Peace are talking about protection as well. So, it will continue. It is ridiculous.

I personally would not subscribe; not because I am bad or bolder than anyone else, but if I as a prosecutor want protection, what about the ordinary witness or the juror. They are seeing this and will be afraid to convict anyone because they do not have protection. They wonder what will happen to them.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Planning and Development and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Madam President, I beg to move that the Senate continue its sitting until the completion of the contribution by Sen. Seetahal SC and Sen. Titus.

*Question put and agreed to.*

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: Thank you very much. Madam President, I read in today's newspapers the story: “Accused afraid: father of murder victim in tears”. It says here that the case collapsed because the main witness, his own stepson, refused to testify. This was a person charged with a murder allegedly witnessed by the stepbrother of the deceased and another person and they refused to testify because he claimed that money had been offered to him on the threat not to testify.
Frankly, I understand if you are family to a kidnapped victim or a murder victim who has been going through trauma and you are afraid, but I feel that persons who say that their lives are threatened and that they will not give evidence, or who worry about what could happen, have no one to blame but themselves when the crime increases.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, the speaking time of the hon. Senator has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Senator's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes. [Sen. Dr. E. Mc Kenzie]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: Thank you very much, Madam President and Senators. I say this even as I meet relatives of victims and victims themselves and they tell me their plight. Whether or not people like the police, they like to come to court or they have never been to court in their lives, it does not matter. These are the excuses I hear all the time.

We have a reasonably good witness protection system. I do not know anyone who has been in the programme who has been killed or injured. If you really want to give the evidence, you can, but many people choose to leave the country. They make provision for their family to go out. Other people come and they do not want to give the evidence because they say these people live in their neighbourhood—and they will continue to do so. They (the criminals) will continue to have rank in the area and continue to say pull guns and shoot up the area and say, “Everybody duck”, which happens in many areas because the witnesses let them get away with it as far as I am concerned.

You have, at some time to decide that enough is enough; you are not going to allow criminals to control you. Of course, some people may suffer for it, but in the long run the country would be a much better place and their country would certainly be much better off than if they duck and run, as many of them are doing, and leave it for the criminals. It is not something that the Government can do; it is the country. A lot of people call on the talk show and talk about crime and what is happening to their relatives and these same people, when they have to come there, it is either, “I forgive him”, or “I am afraid”; all kinds of excuses.

It might sound very cynical and heartless, but I have no time for that. I find that these people are inexcusable and they are allowing the course of justice to be perverted. They are contributing to crime in this country and should never pick
up their phone or go out there and complain about anything. Unless they are
prepared to do something about it, they should not complain.

Do we have national courage? Is there such a thing? What is happening to
people? They are loud in criticism, in calling the talk shows and saying all kinds
of things, calling people’s names, passing rumours and lots of things, but when it
is time to go to court: “I don’t want to go”. That wimpy attitude.

In today’s Daily Express newspaper, under the headline “Tommy Joseph’s
son killed”, Tommy Joseph's wife says:

“We want the perpetrators to be brought to justice, but we all know how the
justice system is.”

It is sad, but it is something that is contributed to, to a large extent, by the citizens
of this country. On the other hand, there are other citizens who do take the bull
by its horns. Do you know what it is for a rape victim of someone in her area to
make a report? There are children with relatives who have interfered with them.
There are persons in prison who give evidence against other persons who are
sending messages to them in prison; who are using phone calls.

By the way, it was reported in the newspaper about an accused person who
was able to make tapes of phone calls; not just make calls, but tapes, a transcript as
well. There should be an investigation, because these things should not be happening.

To come back to my point in terms of witnesses and people taking
responsibility for what is happening here. One relative of a victim of crime was
saying, if he sees some order in the society—he saw things being done—specific
things in terms of crime control—he would have more confidence to be able to do
what he is supposed to. He was talking about, for example, things like parking
issues. Nobody bothers with people who park on both sides of the road when they
are not supposed to. People park there permanently as if it is their right. I see that
in Arima all the time and it is around the police station, in front of police officers.
That, to me, is just inexcusable. That creates so much traffic in this country
where traffic congestion is about the second or third most serious problem.
People should not do that.

One car parked in the wrong area causes three times as much traffic than if
you had that area free. People either do not think or they do not care. The point
is we need enforcement. You cannot blame police for crime, obviously, but you
can have proper enforcement in terms of order. If you have that, it would create
confidence in the citizenry.
Speeding: this person was pointing out that at one time he had to be on the streets 2.00 and 3.00 in the morning along the highway for a long distance and never saw a police vehicle. That is the perennial cry. I wonder what they do at that time. I have always wondered because they are supposedly on duty. You actually see police on the bus route, the transport police. If you see those people, why are the other police not around at this time?

People talk about the windshield wiping people who are in the area of Westmall. I say: Why are you intimidated? They say because they can say things to you. I just tell them no and if they do it, I am not paying them. Maybe it is your face. If you say no, you mean no. Why do you have to pay a dollar if you never asked anybody to clean your windshield and mess around with your wipers? The point is they still feel intimidated.

That is the kind of thing that we have problems with here. You had that in New York City and subsequent to their intervention—and everyone knows about Mayor Guliani and their intervention; it was not something that originated from him, it was a Fixing Broken Windows theory, which was espoused by Kelling and Coles for restoring order and reducing crime in our communities. I quote from page 151 of that book.

“For those who live and work the New York City today, the changes in the subway and on many streets and public places are palpable as order is restored to the city. Graffiti is gone from the subway trains…one has to walk through the station to feel the difference, see the cleanliness, and notice that a sense of mutual respect now characterizes citizen interaction. Bryant Park has been restored and is a joyous place. Central Park has been largely reclaimed…

And while change is clearly evidence in terms of quality of life and a reduction in low-level crimes and incidents of disorder, a new development is a the dramatic reduction as well in index crime, as reflected not only by what citizens experience but also in the crime statistics.”

When that witness told me how he feels, it is indicative of what can truly happen if we deal with order. All we have to do is to restore order in little things. It is those little things that everybody talks about, you know. I do not know if there is the full realization how much it matters. If people stop those persons who are trying to intimidate people—I do not mind anyone making an honest dollar, but cleaning my windshield and I must give you a dollar, or the parking, especially when traffic is a problem, if that is being done, they will feel that people are up and about. Instead, I am driving along the Solomon-Hochoy
Highway and a policeman stops me—during the day—to ask me about the lights on my car. He never noticed lights like that. It is ridiculous. Go somewhere and look at it in the showroom, “nuh”. You pull me off the highway to tell me about my strobe lights. I do not have strobe lights, by the way, and wonder whether it is legal. That is the kind of thing that is going on. The thing is order.

6.35 p.m.

Madam President, what we face with this kind of thing—the witnesses and lack of order—if we do not get hold of it we will have a very serious brain drain; we will have “coward tax” and things like that being improved; and the country being controlled by muscle. When I say “muscle”, I do not mean “muscle” in the positive sense, I mean “muscle” rather than brains, by brute control, and life could become very Hobbesian short, brutish and nasty. The quality of life will be seriously threatened.

Madam President, just to say on the record, there have been positive things initiated by the Government. I said that at the outset. Some of these things I have mentioned already, and included among them is the Street Lighting Programme—never mind that it will cost us how many millions a year, that in itself is an effective crime reduction strategy. [Desk thumping] It is environmental control. [Desk thumping]

I note the recreation areas. Specifically, I speak about the Aranguez Savannah where at 9 o’clock at nights you see people there. [Desk thumping] It would be nice if there is some security in that area also. To my mind, that Curepe area is the best example of the proper lighting. It is across from the abandoned St. Joseph Police Station, so it will be good if they would set it back up there. At midnight, you see people playing cricket. It looks—I hate to say this—almost foreign. It is a quality of life, and that is what I am talking about. You can leave your house and go there, because there are so many people playing and watching and you do not feel afraid.

Sen. Enill: And also at Eddie Hart Grounds.

Sen. D. Seetahal SC: Eddie Hart Grounds does not operate at midnight. It has lighting with the same sort of security, but I am talking about the cricket and so on. Well, I mentioned CDAP.

With respect to housing, I must congratulate the Government. Madam President, much have been said about it, but from my experiences, not personally, but from persons that I have talked to, the housing allocations have been, from
what I can see, very fair in terms of who have been able to benefit from these houses. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Sahadeo:** Repeat that! [ Interruption]

**Sen. D. Seetahal SC:** You heard me very well. In conclusion, I just want to ask one thing. With respect to the legislative agenda, I note the legislative agenda, and my view has been that we have not been as active as we could have been, in terms of the legislation that we could have passed.

I want to find out why legislation permitting phone tapping is not included in the next year’s agenda—I pose this to the hon. Minister of National Security. This is said to be one of the most effective ways, according to the DEA, of detecting crime—or upgrading of the plea bargaining system; provision for anonymous witness testimony. Finally, in terms of legislation, what about the Bail (Amndt.) Bill which ends soon which is supposed to last three months? I think the time is coming near. What about training of prosecutors?

Two years ago, I did some training, for free, of prosecutors—it is not that I am suggesting that I do it again, by any means, whether for free or not—but I think that is something that is necessary to improve the prosecution.

In closing, it is evident that the Government has big ideas and some of them have been put into effect, but a lot of what is on the table will come to naught, little effect in improving our quality of life, if we do not resolve the economic over dependence on the energy sector and, more importantly, address what is seen, in many aspects as a collapsing of the criminal justice system. This must be speedily addressed.

What must also be addressed at some level—and the Crime and Justice Commission may be useful there of which I am a member—is to have the citizens commit to participation in that latter part; the overall criminal justice system in general. I do not mean with just suggestions about having more police officers, but their involvement in it.

Madam President, thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Rawle Titus:** Madam President, thank you very much. As I rise to make a contribution—not as the Vice-President of the Senate—I would like to begin as some other Senators began, certainly, like Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie and Sen. Prof. Ramesh Deosaran, when they complimented the Minister of Finance and the Government for the presentation of the 2007/2008 budget. I would like to join
them in complimenting the Government. I would also like to compliment and thank the numerous public servants and other interest groups that have made contributions to the product that it is.

I am not going to say like Sen. Seetahal SC, but I am going to thank people at this time, because nobody knows what is going to happen later. I certainly enjoy the fact that I have the opportunity to do this from this side now, because of the fact that most of the time when the budget came up, I was in the Chair.

Every time a budget comes up in Trinidad and Tobago, there are certain predictables and certain responses. Sometimes you wonder if people just pull out their responses from the year before and rush to the front when they see the cameras so that they can say the same thing again.

**Sen. Mark:** Patrick Manning. [**Interruption**]

**Sen. R. Titus:** Madam President, I assure you I shall respond to Sen. Mark. What are some of the popular responses we hear? I was pleased to see on the day after the budget presentation one of the headlines in a daily newspaper—[**Cellphone rings**]

**Madam President:** Somebody has a cellphone on and you should know better than that.

**Sen. R. Titus:** I do not remember if it was the Express or the Newsday, but the headline said: “A poor man’s budget”. We had other responses from people and some of them, of course, were very uninformed. Some people did not listen to the budget, and some people were not prepared for the responses when they were asked: “What do they think about the budget?”

I remember one lady responding to a question in the Express saying that it was a good enough budget, but they could have given poor people more; and they could have done more with the minimum wage.

Madam President, as I come to these points, I am going to say something about them. We talk about the minimum wage, and I remember when it was $7 an hour; I remember when it was raised to $9 per hour; and I know what happened and everybody here could attest to the fact that it affected the attitude of several employers, in terms of how they treated their employees.

Madam President, for those who do not have it at their fingertips, what actually happened was that some employers cut staff so that they could pay less workers the same amount of money that they would have paid if they had kept on
everybody. Now, after having done that, the very people attempted to justify their actions by saying the Government is not doing anything for poor people. So, when you take some of those people, and you send them home so that you do not have to pay the number of workers and, in fact, you pay the same amount of money that you were paying before, I guess you are doing something for poor people.

Presently, if you go to any of the fast food outlets you would find the same person who is cashing and taking your order is the same person packing your box and putting it in a bag. There are very few places where this is not the case. That was in response to the $9, and now that it is $10 somebody is saying that in raising it to $10 you are not doing anything, raise it some more. I think the Government is absolutely correct to take it up incrementally rather than do whatever other people would suggest, and that is to raise it to $15 per hour. What would be the situation of those poor workers?

Madam President, I remember in Sen. Dr. Glenn Ramadhar-Singh’s contribution, he said to raise it. I wonder if he is aware of what I just said. What I would like Sen. Dr. Ramadhar-Singh to do is to probably go and ask some of those unscrupulous employers to do better and honour the $10 per hour in the interest of the lower class earners. [Desk thumping]

There is a situation that is played down when we talk about the minimum wage. People make it look—the Government has the responsibility to take care of all the citizens in Trinidad and Tobago, but we cannot make it look as if the Government has the responsibility to say: “Here”. We cannot do that. There are situations where people have found themselves in circumstances and they are unemployable. We cannot get away from that. That brings me to talk about one of the programmes that I have heard criticized every single time people speak. The URP programme is criticized; the CEPEP programme is criticized even more.

As a matter of fact, just today one would have heard that CEPEP will get a back pay because it is an election year. I wonder what would have happened if the Government had raised the minimum wage to $15. The same response would have come; “they are getting $15 per hour because it is an election year.”

Nobody can help the fact that this budget is falling prior to an election, and nobody can refute the fact that those CEPEP workers have been doing a magnificent job in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

The CEPEP workers have demonstrated that by commitment to what they are doing—no matter how meagrely it is looked upon—they could make a difference
in the development of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] The fact that they have the opportunity to train and come out and become entrepreneurs makes the programme so much better.

As a matter of fact, somebody argued that there was a decision in government quarters to curtail the CEPEP programme, and now there is a turnabout. Madam President, if you drive down the Priority Bus Route as often as I do, you will understand when I say I take my hat off to those people, and I hope the programme continues much longer. [Desk thumping]

6.50 p.m.

You see, I sat here and listened to people talk about places they have been. I myself, have travelled a bit and I remember driving from the airport to go into a city called Lousanne in Switzerland and you look on the side of the road and it is an absolute joy to look at the floral arrangements that are planted on those hillsides and I see us getting there. The CEPEP workers are making a magnificent contribution [Desk thumping] and nobody should put them down.

It is amazing and I want to refer to a statement made by my good friend, Sen. Prof. Deosaran. He said as circumstances change, people change. I will always remember that, Professor, because what we see happening here with CEPEP is an amazing thing you know. One time people were walking up and down and saying that all the CEPEP workers are good for is cutting some grass, painting some stones and wasting Government funds.

Very recently, I was privileged to hear on television a gentleman saying: “I am going back to my union and I will represent CEPEP workers to see that they get their money before Christmas.” I would like to tell Sen. Mark what he did not hear in that statement. Apparently, Sen. Mark did not understand that the person was saying, “I am returning to union, I am finished with everything else.” [Interruption] [Laughter] Madam President, I shall come back to Sen. Mark, I have a tender spot for him.

Sen. Ramroop: It is a love thing.

Sen. R. Titus: Yes, it is a love thing. [Crosstalk] [Laughter] You hear people talking that not enough has been said about crime. The Government is not doing enough about crime. Sen. Seetahal SC has left? I am happy that she mentioned the death of the son of one of the more popular entertainers, and that incident reminded me of another incident where another top entertainer in Trinidad and Tobago lost his son in a somewhat similar manner. I visited Sugar
Aloes one night; the following night I was at home and heard that his son got shot. Now, it is alleged that the person who squeezed the trigger said: “When I came here and you told me that I cannot come into this area and disrespect the people, you disrespected me.” Wow! There is where we are. I read with horror in the newspapers where a 16-year old boy went to look for a 16-year old girl and found her, probably, allegedly, in the arms of a 17-year old. So he pulled a knife and the 17-year old ran to the kitchen to get a knife, swung it to keep him off, but he was close and he was still coming, so he got injured; 16-year old died, and you say, the Government.

Very, very recently, I read where a 19-year old allegedly shot a 36-year old woman to death and the article in the newspapers read: “She found love in the arms of this 19-year old.” That was love!

**Sen. Seetahal SC:** That was in defence.

**Sen. R. Titus:** That was in defence? It was not true? All right, Madam President, I am not going to go into it, but the 19-year old allegedly killed the 36-year old. We have got to begin seeing that crime a social disease. Stopping crime is not something that you can actually legislate and it is pure so that the law is there. [Desk thumping] You make a law and crime finish; it does not happen that way. Crime is committed by human beings and human beings are very, very funny beings. Sometimes I hear people say, “I know you” and I laugh. You know why? Sometimes I, myself do not know what I will do when I go out that door.

The point is, Madam President, it is a matter for the entire society. Every expert has said that; everybody here has agreed on that, but as soon as somebody gets injured, killed, whatever, blame the Government. I would like to appeal to all of us here to understand that we have a stake in this. I would like to ask all of the population to understand that we all have a stake in this. This is our country; every community we live in is ours to protect; and I am glad Sen. Seetahal SC spoke about the fact that some people rather run away than give evidence.

I was talking to a group of young people recently, Senator, and I said, if enough good people get together and stand their ground, the bad people will stay away. It does not work purely as that, but the criminal is not going to be as daring as he is now and we have to understand this is much more than a Government issue.

I have heard comments that not everything they say in the budget they deliver and stuff like that. Sen. Dr. Ramadharsingh, again—I have to compliment him for some of his points, they were a little difficult to pick up, because they were so few. [Laughter] But I have to compliment him for some of his points. He said a
very important thing; he said: “What is a budget? A budget is an estimate.” Now if one is smart enough to accept and understand and actually state that a budget is an estimate, why on earth are you saying, that this estimate should have been fulfilled; every time here. How does it work? It is an estimate, which means—[Interruption] It depends on which side one looks from. I remember hearing the discussion recently—I would like to tell Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh, through you, Madam President, that you look at this glass, I could see it half full. Madam President, I would like you to ask Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh to try not to rile me up, please.

**Sen. Mark:** You see, I am not disturbing my Vice-President at all. [*Laughter*] [Crosstalk]

**Sen. R. Titus:** You see, every time some people talk they feel they have the right to increase, intensify, whatever, the disgruntlement. Whatever somebody says they do not like, somebody jumps up, “Eh heh, I going in front the camera and say that or I am going to the papers and say that.” The people always come to some people. Some people come to me too, you know, but I swear—

**Sen. Ramroop:** You getting in the—

**Sen. R. Titus:** I am not getting wound up. You hear things like Government is spending too much on these buildings, what they want them for? If there ever a more irresponsible question it is that. All of us know that Government has a huge bill to pay in rent of office facilities. What is it costing to build those facilities? They are talking about the Waterfront facilities and others coming up the road here. Madam President, I encourage you to go and see them, please.

What it is costing to build those would come back to us as savings and the people have got to understand that; they belong now—[Interruption]—we do not have to pay to use them; they belong. People make it look like if, when these buildings are finished, probably the Minister of National Security is going to be there; Customs is going to be there. So, the Minister of National Security is every customs officer in the country? They make it look like if that is only person going in there.

Well, oh, I do not want to even talk about the “Manning’s mansion”. You hear all sorts of things about “Manning’s mansion” and you know the people who say “Manning’s mansion” they do not even understand what they are saying. For the information of all those who have been saying “Manning’s mansion”, the Government regards the facility, the compound as the official residence of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Let me tell you what they did not understand. [Interruption] Is it that Sen. Mark is begging?
When you in fact say “Manning’s mansion”, what you are saying is that Manning is going to occupy that for a long time. How you could say that? That is Prime Minister’s quarters. Well, if you give it to him.

Sen. Ramroop: But they know that he will be there for a long time.

Sen. R. Titus: Thank you very much, Sir. I am not getting in that. Why are you saying “Manning’s mansion”? Recently, we heard somebody threatening that you are not going to go in that mansion. And you ask yourself how come it is so bad for Manning but it is good enough for me. That is funny. People say Trinidad is the worst place to be; look so much people going away—you not going. [Laughter] [Desk thumping] Every institution is a mess; the school system breaking down—your children going there. [Desk thumping] [Laughter]

Madam President, I said I would request permission to sing, trust me. In this very Senate, I am sure Senators would recall that we have had to listen to enquiries in the form of questions, even questions regarding the operations of the Tobago House of Assembly. The people have been asking; why you buy Pigeon Point? What you go and buy that estate for? I will tell you something; Tobago has an administration that is run by the Tobago House of Assembly. Tobago has a population that has a determination to go forward and a determination, I must add, to contribute to the Vision 2020 ideal. When I heard somebody say in this very budget debate, senior citizens homes—not delivered; I was upset. If I had been a very impulsive person, I would say why they do not mind their business, but I am never going to say that.

Sen. Mark: Because you are the Vice-President—


Sen. Mark: When I spoke as a Vice-President I was very impartial. [Laughter] [Crosstalk]

7.05 p.m.

Now, I can afford to tell you, Madam President, that the Tobago House of Assembly, headed by the hon. Orville London was taken to shreds on a number of occasions—especially when we had to purchase Pigeon Point, and the decision was made to do that—people said David versus Goliath and people expected the owners of Pigeon Point at the time to take the THA to the cleaners. Well, people have shut up because David in fact got Goliath [Desk thumping] and Pigeon Point is a part of the patrimony and will remain part of the patrimony of the people of Tobago. [Desk thumping]
On Sunday night, I was listening to I think the President of NATUC, and he was explaining that big business in Trinidad is buying up all the lands and doing certain developments—and stop. I want to leave that. Good! If you recognized big business buying up the lands, why are you objecting to THA buying the estate in Plymouth and making it available for housing for Tobagonians? Why do you want to interfere with the THA purchasing the Roxborough estate? And recently, somebody wanted to make themselves fast and get involved in the Goat Island problem. Goat Island was supposed to go up for auction, and I can afford to tell you here this evening, that will not be happening with that THA. [Desk thumping] No foreign company, entity, individual is owning Goat Island. None! That is because of the attitude of the Tobagoians; we are not giving you.

Madam President you think it is an easy thing to have an island a couple miles offshore, big enough to hold a little settlement and you do not know what is happening there? According to Sen. Mark, let us save some for later. When they spoke about the senior citizens’ homes not being delivered, let me tell you something, the way the Assembly works, is by a process of consultation and discussion. I remember I made the point in this very Senate one day, “we discuss, we do not cuss” and this is the kind of relationship that the Assembly has with Central Government. It does not have any “cuss”, it has “discuss”; so that the Assembly is in the process of putting the plans together.

Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie could tell you because she had made an input in this. Those homes are going to be built in a way that they are friendly for the occupants and they are going to deliver the best care for them. That is what is happening and nobody who wants to say, you “ain’t” do the thing yet. You know some people like to come and say, “Ah bet you cyar do that now”. We are going to do it when the plans are accepted as the best for the aged [Desk thumping] So do not come and talk about—[Interruption]

**Sen. Mark:** I want you to replace Callender as Member of Parliament for Tobago West.

**Sen. R. Titus:** Sen. Mark, you are trying to mamaguy. Madam President, since I am closing off the issue this evening, I would like to come to some contributions made by some of the other Senators, including Senators on this side. I think the first contributor was Sen. Wade Mark. [Interruption]

Sen. Mark reminded us that a budget has a vocabulary of its own, con job, reckless, inefficient, and he finished by saying callous and brutal. And you know, Sen. Mark made a contribution that made me realize that Sen. Mark missed his
calling completely. [Desk thumping] I am not sure which of his teachers is to blame. [Crosstalk] But, it is amazing to think that Sen. Mark has such skill. Sen. Mark switches from this facial expression to the next in a hundredth of a second. He switches from this attitude to the next in less than that and as I saw him there playing himself all the time, I said this man should have been a calypso artiste. [Laugher]

**Sen. Mark:** I think I will. [Inaudible]

**Sen. R. Titus:** But. Madam President, I want to warn Sen. Mark, that success in calypso depends on much more than, get something and wave. [Laughter] [Desk thumping]

**Sen. Mark:** I am taking all the lessons from you. [Laughter] I am going to get something and wave [Inaudible].

**Sen. R. Titus:** Madam President, I will leave Sen. Mark. Of course, there have been some fairly good contributions. Is Sen. Ahmed gone?

**Sen. Mark:** Yes, she did.

**Sen. R. Titus:** I would like to ask, what did Sen. Ahmed mean when she said that a UNC government will make the agricultural sector richer in something like $14 billion a year to the revenue.

**Sen. Mark:** $14 billion.

**Sen. R. Titus:** That figure is better than one third of the budget of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Sen. Mark:** She said $14 billion, but [Inaudible]

**Sen. R. Titus:** Well, I hope she was joking because that is so unrealistic, I would not want to think about it. Sen. Ramadhbar-Singh insisted that there should be specific time lines. Madam President, we know even if you are cooking, sometimes you put on the meat to boil, the meat is tough and it cannot finish in the hour that the recipe says. You are building a house, you cast the floor today and you are supposed to put up blocks, but remember there is no roof; rain falls, you cannot put up the blocks. You cannot put specific time lines on everything; it does not work like that.

**Hon. Senator:** [Inaudible] [Laughter]

**Sen. R. Titus:** I am trying to go fast before—I was planning to be finished in about 10 minutes.
Hon. Senator: Take your time.

Sen. R. Titus: Madam President, I would like—maybe I should explain to Sen. Dr. Gopeesingh that in fact I have two hours this evening. I would like to commend the Minister and the Ministry of Education [Desk thumping] and of course, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education [Desk thumping] and that entire Ministry. I will tell you something about the Ministry of Education. Over the last couple of years, I have been hearing all sorts of remarks and nobody who has been commenting seems to have an idea of what the truth is. Nobody could refute what the Minister said, but everybody is objecting to it. It is not true, but they cannot refute it. You understand?

We have a culture that seems to thrive on criticism for whatever the reason God and some of us know too. I nearly said God alone knows, but some of us know too. You do not just criticize for criticism’s sake, and that brings me to the point of making the observation that you hear criticism, criticism, criticism from Sen. Mark all the way down. I am looking for the recommendations, you know.

Sen. Mark: No, I am not offering any to you.

Sen. R. Titus: I am listening for the recommendations and it reminds me of a gentleman who got up and told this nation, “I have a plan to solve crime, but make me Prime Minister first.”

Sen. Mark: Is that Prime Minister Manning?

Sen. R. Titus: He did not become Prime Minister; he will not become a Prime Minister, so maybe we will never hear about the plan.

Sen. Mark: Who said that, Dookeran?

Sen. R. Titus: Madam President, let me continue, please. The information that the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, and indeed the Ministry of Education would have put in front of this Parliament this evening, is something that I think should really be national. Somebody spoke about a booklet, I could not agree more because I will tell you something, in some states in America, they have what they call a directory of educational facilities and programmes, so I would like to encourage the other persons who are responsible, to try and do something like this.

I will tell you something, even though the detractors are saying they are not doing anything, today—I am not going to call the young lady’s name because I know she is going to be upset, she is a shy person. She is 19 and she is in the COSTAATT programme, training to be a nurse. She called me to say thanks for the
part I played in assisting her, blah, blah blah. One of the things she said, is that Government is really doing good for education. [Desk thumping] And if that young lady, at age 19 could spot the important thing and say, “Whoever is going into nursing profession, will be of better stock”; if she could say that, how come some people do not understand that?

It is difficult for me to comprehend, but I do not understand. What is the problem with people, why some of them do not understand that “hey” if we have tertiary education available to the population, we are going to increase the value of the human resource that goes into the place of work? What is the problem? I am at a loss to find out.

Madam President, before I come to my last point, I want to touch on an error I think my good friend, Sen. Dumas made. He said that the Ministry of Education in its school repair programme—I see Sen. Dumas looking at me with a kind funny eye.

**Sen. Dumas:** No no.

**Sen. R. Titus:** I am not taking you to pieces, one piece. He said there were a 97 per cent success rate and a 3 per cent failure rate. I totally disagree with the word “failure”. Madam President, there is no failure in 97/3. What we have to understand is that the Ministry is headed by a manager who is the Minister and the Minister cannot go out there, hammer in every nail, take up every bit of mortar, shift that block and sweep that corridor. The Minister cannot do that and if we only have 3 per cent of the school not completed and readied for the opening, I think that is a fantastic performance. [Desk thumping] Now, I know that the Minister himself was a little conservative when he spoke about local government, but I would have really liked him to explain that local government is moving to a higher level.

7.20 p.m.

Madam President, he is not a "fella" who likes you to praise him up, but I think his recommendations and his contributions to the improvement of local government in Trinidad and Tobago should be commended.

One thing that pleases me very well is the system that the Government is aspiring to. If you look at page 43 of the budget statement it tells you that local government might well adapt the Executive Council system. I want to warn that when that system is put in place, heavens, whoever is Minister of Local Government must ensure that care is exercised to avoid the persons whose ambitions supersede their ability.
An Executive Council is one that has a fair amount of power. It has a fair amount of clout and autonomy with it, and some people could well misunderstand this. What is worse, as I experienced when I went to the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, where there are differences of affinity, people tend to hurt. You have to be very careful with that. So persons have to be properly schooled before this effort comes on stream, otherwise. You are not going to have a situation like Tobago. Tobago is in a very fortunate position, where the whole Executive Council is from one grouping; that makes for a favourable atmosphere to work in. If this is going to happen I suggest that care should be exercised.

Madam President, I now come to the part of which Sen. Seetahal SC spoke. I have had a full five years as Vice-President of the Senate. I thank from the Prime Minister to Mr. Orville London; all my colleagues and definitely all the Senators here for the support, for the encouragement and for the help that I have received in the execution of my duties as Vice-President.

Sen. Mark: Especially me! [Laughter]


I have been able to talk to senior Government personnel here and seek their advice. I particularly want to single out Sen. Montano, who I remember during my first year used to be a very regular visitor. "How yuh going; how yuh feeling; do you understand this?" He always asked. I really thank you for that Sen. Montano; regardless of the fact that the other Montano was a little problem. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk] [Laughter]

I thank Sen. Dr. Mc Kenzie who would always write me a note and tell me some story to keep me on my Ps and Qs. Of course, Sen. Prof. Deosaran was always one who spoke to me. I shared very good moments in committee with him. Sen. King, Sen. Anmolsingh-Mahabir, and so many others; I really appreciate the help.

Madam President, I remember you calling me in sometimes and discussing whatever with me. I appreciate that.

I want to put on record my thanks to the late Dawn Dolly who did so much in the very early stages. I think Dawn was my initiation.

I thank all the members of the parliamentary staff. I will tell you something; I have said it to a number of people on a number of occasions; I think the Parliament has a fantastic staff. [Desk thumping] It could not be better if they had been handpicked; the security, the Marshal, everybody.

Madam President, I thank you.
ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith): Madam President, I am getting kind of worried, because we will have sittings of the Senate after the budget debate and I may not have any speakers, [Laughter] everybody having given their swan song.

I beg to move that the Senate be now adjourned to Wednesday 05 September, 2007 at 10.00 a.m., at which time we will continue the debate on the Appropriation Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.25 p.m.