

Leave of Absence

Friday, September 09, 1994

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 09, 1994

The House met at 1.50 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have granted leave of absence from today's sitting to the hon. Members for: Chaguanas (Miss Hulsie Bhaggan); Diego Martin West (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley); Couva North (Mr. Basdeo Panday) and Caroni East (Miss Indera Sagewan).

PAPERS LAID

1. The Defence (Rates of Pay and Allowances (Amendment) Regulations, 1994. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*])
2. Loan Agreement (Water Sector Institutional Strengthening Project) between Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

COMPANIES BILL

Presentation

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Keith Sobion):
Madam Speaker, I beg to present:

The Report of the Joint Select Committee of the House of Representatives appointed to consider and report on the Companies Bill, 1993.

LAND ACQUISITION BILL

Presentation

Mr. Jarrette Narine (Arouca North): Madam Speaker, I beg to present.

The Report of the Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives appointed to consider and report on the Land Acquisition Bill, 1994.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

**Reinforced Concrete Wall
(Cucharon River)**

144 Mr. Trevor Sudama (*Oropouche*) asked the Minister of Works and Transport and Minister of Local Government:

- (i) Can the Minister inform this House when the project for the construction of a wall at one side of the Cucharon River, Debe opposite the Debe Hindu School commenced?
- (ii) Can the Minister also give an update of:
 - (a) the number of metres of wall constructed;
 - (b) the cost of labour on the project;
 - (c) the cost of equipment used on the project;
 - (d) the total expenditure on the project?

The Minister of Works and Transport and Minister of Local Government (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, the construction of the reinforced concrete wall on one side of the Cucharon River commenced on May 24, 1994. The projected length of the reinforced concrete wall is 30 metres. It is 3.15 metres high and is being constructed on a foundation that is 2.1 metres wide.

As of August 31, 1994, 23.2 metres of the foundation and 23.2 metres of the superstructure were completed. The cost of labour expended on the project was \$49,234 and expenditure on equipment and materials was \$39,273. The total expenditure on the project was, therefore, \$88,508.

It should be noted that the soil conditions in the area are generally unstable and the project was also adversely affected by bad weather conditions. The project, however, is expected to be completed before the end of this month, September, 1994.

**NEWSPAPER ARTICLE
(MISREPRESENTATION)**

Mr. Trevor Sudama (*Oropouche*): Madam Speaker, I wish to raise a matter today in the House, pertaining to a press report of my contribution on the Bail Bill which was debated in this House on August 29, 1994.

This report has grossly misrepresented what I said in this House. In fact, it is a distortion of what I said; it was taken out of context and it has embarrassed me to no end in my relationship with members of the police service.

It appears to me that perhaps there is need for some guidance for journalists as to the accuracy of their reporting in the media. It appears to me that there are journalists who, perhaps, do not hear; and if they hear, they do not listen; and if they listen, they do not comprehend. If they hear, listen and comprehend, then there is probably a congenital inclination to distort and misrepresent what is said in this House.

I am seldom reported in the media, and I make no complaints about that, but when they do report what I say, I take strong objection to the distortion which is reported.

On August 29, 1994, in the course of the debate on the Bail Bill, I had cause to make reference to the performance of the police service. This is what I said:

"We have only one police service. Our duty is to ensure that the police service operates in the most efficient, competent and honest manner and that it is a police service of the highest integrity. At the same time, we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that in that police service, there are totally corrupt elements that ought not to be there."

Of course that has been substantiated by the Scotland Yard Report, the Scott Drug Commission and so forth. So that when I made that statement, it was on the basis of public investigations done into the police service which have established that there are corrupt elements in it.

I continued:

"In fact, in that police service there are elements that are more criminal than the criminals on the outside."

I want to repeat that.

"In fact, in that police service there are elements that are more criminal than the criminals on the outside. The question is: How do we deal with those elements? Weed them out rather than have them existing in the police service to which the Government wants to grant the power of automatic denial of bail merely on the basis of charges being laid."

Madam Speaker, you will recall that I went on to explain to the House a report made by the relatives of someone of Ethel Street, La Romain, in my constituency, who was held at the CID office in San Fernando—his name was Selwyn Andrews. He was handcuffed—

Madam Speaker: The Member needs not go over that again.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I am just trying to put it in the context in which I said that there are elements in the police service that are more criminal than the elements on the outside. The context was that—apart from the Scotland Yard Report and others—it was reported to me by the relatives of Selwyn Andrews that he was given gramoxone to drink at the CID office in San Fernando with his hands handcuffed to the wall—he reputedly drank that gramoxone after taking the bottle with his feet. Selwyn Andrews reported to his relations that they shoved gramoxone down his throat.

If that is the case—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, you are starting a debate. I thought you wanted to make a complaint about something in the press.

Mr. T. Sudama: Madam Speaker, I am just indicating that what was reported in the press was taken completely out of the context in which I was talking about elements in the police service that are more criminal than those on the outside.

The *Trinidad Guardian* of Tuesday, August 30, 1994 under the headline "Sudama against giving more power to police" by Peter Richards, had this say:

"The Opposition parliamentarian said it was a fact that within the Police Service there were 'more criminals than criminals outside'..." "

A complete, gross misrepresentation and distortion of what I said. In that context, I thought I would raise this matter under "Personal Explanation", in this instance, rather than move a motion to ask for the matter to be referred to the Privileges Committee.

I believe that if a subsequent incident like this recurs, then I will be forced to move a motion to have journalists brought before the Privileges Committee.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

2.00 p.m.

CHILDREN (AMDT.) BILL

Senate Amendment

The Minister of Labour and Co-operatives (Hon. Kenneth Collis): Madam Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Senate amendment to the Children (Amdt.) Bill, 1994 listed in the appendix, be now considered.

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Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 11(11).

Senate amendment read as follows:

In proposed new paragraph (f) substitute the word "courier" for the word "mule" appearing in line 3.

Mr. Collis: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the House doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the House now consider Motions under Private Business, Motions Nos. 6 and 7 on the Order Paper at pages 5 and 6.

Question put and agreed to.

COMPANIES BILL

Adoption

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Keith Sobion): Madam Speaker, I beg to move, that this House adopt the report of the Joint Special Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Companies Bill, 1993.

Madam Speaker, during the deliberations of this Committee several meetings were held, and there were several meetings which had to be postponed because of the fact that the Committee was *inquare*. The first meeting was held on January 26, 1994 and agreed that, having regard to the nature of the Bill, the Committee's mandate should be extended to allow it to consider general merits and principles of the Bill in addition to its details. That approval was granted by both Houses of Parliament.

The Committee then proceeded to invite public comments on the Bill through the media and submissions were received from the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce; the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Trinidad

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and Tobago, Mr. Raymond Pierre, Chartered Valuation Surveyor, Property Consultant, Estate Agent; Messrs. Price Waterhouse and Deloitte and Touche.

No evidence has been taken from these entities and the Committee was therefore unable to complete its deliberations.

Whilst there is a report signed by all Members of the Committee, I want to note that Mr. Martin Daly, a Member of the Committee expressed the view that the Joint Select Committee system did not work, and that it would be an exercise in futility to appoint another committee. The Committee of Members, bar Mr. Daly, however, recommended that this Bill be reintroduced early in the 1994/1995 session and be referred to a Select Committee for further consideration.

I, therefore, beg to move that the House adopt the report of the Joint Select Committee.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

LAND ACQUISITION BILL

Adoption

Mr. Jarrette Narine (*Arouca North*): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House adopt the report of the Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives appointed to consider and report on the Land Acquisition Bill 1994.

Madam Speaker, your Committee held three meetings on the following dates: July 7, July 13, and August 15, 1994.

Your Committee sought the assistance of the office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel in its deliberations. Your Committee was unable to complete its deliberations on the Bill, and recommended that the Bill be introduced in the 1994/1995 session and be referred to a Select Committee for consideration.

Therefore, I beg to move that the report of the Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives appointed to consider and report on the Land Acquisition Bill, 1994, be now adopted.

Question proposed.

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Seconded by Mr. K. Valley.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, it is with pleasure that I now beg to move that this House be adjourned to a date to be fixed by the President. It is to be prorogued on Monday.

2.10 p.m.

Madam Speaker: The Motions on the Adjournment. The Member for Oropouche.

NHA Site Debe (Problems)

Mr. Trevor Sudama (Oropouche): Madam Speaker, it does not give me great pleasure to have to raise this Motion in the House, but since it is the last sitting, I suppose the Parliament would like to hear my voice on this last occasion of this session. The content of this Motion relates to matters of the problems experienced at the site of the National Housing Authority (NHA) at Wellington Road, Debe. I have written to the Minister, but I have had no response.

This brings into focus the role of a Member of Parliament and the relationship between a representative in this House, the Government and Ministers. When a letter is written and followed up with reminders, there is no response. There is a kind of negativism in this relationship where we, as Members of the Opposition do not seem to be given any respect for our position in this House.

I would have thought that whatever the response of the Minister, at least he would have responded in a reasonable time to my letter. Because of that denial of respect and negativism that I have been getting with respect to the performance of the Member for Point Fortin, the hon. Dr. Vincent Lasse, I have come to the conclusion that perhaps he is not Dr. Lasse, but Dr. No. Anything that is raised with him, the answer is negative. There is no response.

Let me go into the details of this Motion. I invited the Minister to visit the NHA site at Wellington Road, Debe in order to look at certain problems which affected that site and the residents in the area. On April 13, 1994, he visited the area, and on the same date I wrote him a letter outlining the matters which we

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raised. I want to read that letter and then go on to discuss some of the matters contained in that letter. The letter states:

"Dear Dr. Lasse,

Further to our visit to the NHA lot development site at Wellington Road, Debe, today April 13, I wish to confirm that the following decisions were arrived at for follow-up action.

An estimate to be prepared by the Penal/Debe Corporation and forwarded to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Settlements for possible assistance by NHA with respect to the construction of a culvert across the Wellington Road, Debe linking the NHA drain on the western side of the main NHA access road to the drain on the northern side of Wellington Road currently under construction by the Penal/Debe Corporation."

I had to go into this earlier. I want to set the background. On April 13, I wrote to the Minister. I received no response. On June 3, 1994, I wrote him a reminder. It stated:

"Dear Sir,

I refer to my letter to you of April 13, to which I have not had the favour of a reply. I shall be obliged if you will indicate to me whether any action is being taken with respect to the representations in the letter on the basis of our site visit to the NHA project at Wellington Road Debe."

I received no response.

On July 4, 1994, one month later, I sent another reminder to the Minister.

"Dear Sir,

I refer to my letter of April 13, 1994 and to my reminder of June 3, 1994 to which I have not had to date the favour of a reply."

I did not receive any response.

On August 4, 1994, after another month, I wrote him again.

"Dear Sir,

I refer to my letter again of April 13, 1994 and to my reminders of June 3, 1994 and July 4, 1994 to which I have not to date had the favour of a reply."

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I wrote an original letter and I sent three reminders within the span of one month between them. I received no response.

On August 19, I was forced to put this Motion before the House for debate. Lo and behold on August 25, 1994 according to the stamp at the Post Office where my office is located, I received a response. Strangely enough, this response was dated August 11, 1994. It took two weeks for a letter to move from the Ministry of Housing and Settlement down to my constituency office at Debe.

The letter states:

"On behalf of Dr. the Honourable Vincent Lasse, Minister of Housing and Settlements, I wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated August 04, 1994 in connection with the above subject.

The Honourable Minister would like to inform you that the matter is receiving attention. You will receive further communication on this matter at a later date."

To date there has been no further communication.

That is the first point I want to make with respect to non-response to elected Members of this House when they raise legitimate concerns to Members of the Government. It is a kind of political culture that has been developed over a number of years, where people who are merely Members of Parliament and do not hold a portfolio, are treated with the most utter contempt with respect to their role and function in this House.

I move on to talk about the issues I originally raised with the Minister. The first item related to addressing a drainage problem which was aggravated by the construction of this NHA site. The Minister would argue that there was a drainage problem before. What they did with respect to the drainage at the NHA site aggravated the problem for residents at Wellington Road. The area was flooded when there was a minimal amount of rainfall and the people did not have access to and from their homes and the children could not go to school.

We said that if NHA could assist in relieving this problem we would be happy. I persuaded the local government authority for the area to begin the construction of a drain on one side of the road. All I was asking NHA to do was to assist us with a culvert from one side of the road to the other, in view of the fact that they aggravated the problem on the site.

At the site meeting on April 13, it was agreed that an estimate should be prepared by the Penal/Debe Corporation and forwarded to the Permanent

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Secretary, Minister of Housing and Settlements. This was supposed to be taken up by NHA with respect to assistance for the construction of this culvert to relieve the drainage problem. That is the first issue. As I said we did not get a response. That estimate was sent two weeks after April 13.

The second matter I raised in that letter was communication with the Shiva Dharam Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago Incorporated with respect to their application for three lots of land on Phase II of the Wellington Road project for the purposes of building a temple, pre-school and care centre. That letter to NHA was dated December 18, 1992. As of the date of writing, April 13, 1994, there was no response from NHA or the Ministry concerned with respect to this application.

The third matter related to communication with Mr. Ramdeo Balkaran of Wellington Road, Debe with respect to an allotment on Phase II. This gentleman had already deposited \$15,000 and at that time, he was not told whether he would be given an allotment or not, although he paid well over half the deposit fee required. There was no communication.

The fourth matter which is a very serious one was communication with Lutchmeesingh's Transport Contractors Limited, main contractor on the sewerage treatment plant, with respect to non-payment of workers by sub-contractor, Manichand Sankarsingh of Endeavor Road, Chaguanas. A list of nine workers whose wages are outstanding is enclosed as well as a receipt of moneys received by Manichand Sankarsingh for the works undertaken by him.

2.20 p.m.

I want to elaborate a little further on this. The Minister stated—and I asked him to look into it because it raises very serious questions—he said, well, they gave the matter out; the contractors employ their people and he does not think that the Ministry could do anything about the matter.

My question here is: If the National Housing Authority, which is responsible to the Ministry of Housing and Settlements, has given out a contract—you have a main contractor; the main contractor subcontracts to a subcontractor, the subcontractor employs people and refuses to pay them the wages that are due to them—does the Ministry have a responsibility in this? Does the NHA have a responsibility in this? If they have no responsibility, then anybody in Trinidad and Tobago could do anything and get away with it.

The main contractor has said that he had paid over the moneys to the subcontractor. Does he have a responsibility as to whom he employs as a subcontractor, and that persons whom he employs should have a certain kind of integrity and should not defraud workers of their wages? It is a very serious thing. Matters like these could end in violence, if workers feel that they have no recourse. Does the NHA have any responsibility to ensure that the main contractor gives work out to subcontractors who are *bona fide* contractors and who, in fact, will carry out their functions with any kind of integrity and responsibility?

Apparently, there is no chain of responsibility. All I can conclude is, it is an irresponsible government and an irresponsible ministry. The Government is disclaiming responsibility and telling people that they must go to court. Madam Speaker, do you know what it costs to go to court, for people who are owed, maybe, a few hundred dollars in wages, to try to recover those wages in a situation where they cannot find the subcontractor?

This is the kind of government they run, a government that encourages corruption. Now they say, "Well, you know, we have no responsibility in this matter. We gave it to contractors; the contractors employed; we do not oversee who the contractors employ and then the contractors contract to a subcontractor." Madam Speaker, this fellow called Lutchmeesingh's Transport Contractors Limited; this is not the first instance where he subcontracted and a similar instance occurred. It is a regular occurrence. What happens—I am convinced—is that the Ministry and the NHA condone this activity for reasons best known to themselves, and here you have people working and being deprived of their legitimate wages through the system which they operate.

I would like to know, in his response, whether he still holds that view, or whether he could have referred that matter to the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives, if there is one in this House, and whether that Ministry has any responsibility in a situation where workers are employed and are not paid their wages. It is a very serious matter, and this is one of the reasons that I brought this Motion to the House, because I would like an explanation for the future with respect to Government's responsibility from the operation and performance of main contractors and subcontractors on any contract which is funded by the Government. What is their responsibility, if they have any at all, or if they think that they can just deal with these matters in an offhand manner.

The other matter I raised in this letter was, and I quote:

"Action with respect to maintenance work and missing manhole covers near Debe Presbyterian School."

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The missing manhole covers are a risk, because if a child falls into that, it is certain death. This is not a matter which was raised only on April 13, 1994. I have a response of a similar representation made and the response from the NHA was dated March 24, 1993, and the letter stated as such:

"I refer to your letter dated 27th January, 1993..."

But I received a response two months later. It goes on to state:

"The Authority has noted the problems raised in your letter and will take appropriate corrective action. As you may be aware, the manhole covers are being stolen from some of these sites. Since the National Housing Authority does not possess the resources for around-the-clock patrol, it may be necessary to use a temporary cover to eliminate the hazard."

I want to report to this House that as at April 13, 1994, over one year later, no temporary covers were installed, and children ran the risk of falling into these deep sewer holes. It goes on:

"With regard to the overgrown bush on the vacant lots the Authority will seek to attend to this, despite severely limited financial resources. It should be pointed out, however, that neither the Ministry of Education nor the Presbyterian Board informed the National Housing Authority that a school was going to be constructed on the National Housing Authority site. Consequently, no provision was made for the sort of maintenance required for a school environment prior to disposal of all the lots by the Authority."

Imagine, a big school is being constructed, and the NHA does not know that a school is being constructed on that site, and they did not give the Ministry of Education any prior approval. So you can understand how this Government operates. Then one year later, as at April 13, no maintenance work was done, although a promise was made in a letter of March 24, 1993.

Then, Madam Speaker, the other matter which states:

"Action with respect to repair of landslip at the back of the home of Ramcharitar Seepaul of Orion Drive, Debe..."

This was a road which was constructed on the NHA development. The road had a huge landslip which threatened the home of Ramcharitar Seepaul. This has been a matter which I had been raising with the NHA for the last four or five years, with no response. I have advised the fellow to go to court, but it is the same problem. Where will he get the financial resources to take the NHA to court? They know

that, and this is why there is this obstinacy on the part of the Ministry and the NHA in dealing with these problems.

Finally, it goes on:

"Action with respect to flooding problem at the back of the home of Sookram Seenath of Orion Drive, Debe and compensation (since 1989) for loss of ten (10) bags of fertilizer."

What happened was that they constructed a drain at the back of his house; the drain shifted and was filled with silt and the water from the NHA site flooded this man's premises. He is a farmer, and he stored fertilizers. About 40 bags of fertilizers were affected. The NHA, in writing since 1989, promised to compensate him for 10 bags. This is 1994, and this caring Government cannot find the resources to compensate this farmer for even the 10 bags out of the 40 which were completely destroyed through the flooding as a result of the overflow of water from the NHA site.

Madam Speaker, I raised these matters for two reasons: Firstly, to inform this House about the attitude of Government Ministers to Members of this House. They show total contempt and arrogance in their role as elected representatives, not only towards me as a person, but to thousands of people in the constituency of Oropouche.

The second thing is that those people who made these complaints to me, come week after week asking, "Well, are you hearing anything about this?" I say, "No. I brought the Minister down here; I wrote him a letter on the same date, and I am not getting any response." Whether the response is that you can do anything or you cannot do anything or you are going to ignore these people, whatever it is, please give me a response so I can then respond to my constituents. But this is what we have had to put up with for the 30-odd years of PNM rule. I have been here for 13 years and that is what I am confronted with on a week-by-week basis.

When I get up in this House and I am angry, this is justifiable anger about how we are treated as elected representatives. This is why, from time to time, I ask about our real function in this House and whether this Chamber and our position here serve any useful purpose in resolving people's problems in Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

2.30 p.m.

The Minister of Housing and Settlements (Dr. The Hon. Vincent Lasse):
Madam Speaker, before I address the question raised by the Member for

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Oropouche, may I inform this House that on the two occasions when I have been invited by the Member for Oropouche to visit the area, I did. What is happening here is based on, I believe, the second visit I made and a letter he had written to me.

May I also point out that this is not the first time that the Member for Oropouche has raised the question in this House, that he had written to me and I did not reply. On the first occasion when I asked him what was the date of the letter, he said that he could not remember but he thought he handed it to me in the corridor. This is the type of situation one would have from time to time.

Madam Speaker, in replying to this Motion permit me, first of all, to express a certain amount of sadness and disgust that Members would use the time especially under "Motion on the Adjournment", to raise certain questions which, to my mind, could have been settled or discussed otherwise.

Mr. Sudama: How?

Dr. The V. Lasse: The truth of the matter is, I visited Oropouche on April 13, the said day that the Member wrote to me.

Mr. Sudama: You must beg. You must go on your knees like in the days of the colonial masters.

Madam Speaker: Apparently, the hon. Minister is having some difficulty in replying while comments are being made.

Mr. Sudama: He has much difficulty, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Would you let the Minister present his position?

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Madam Speaker, I did a walk around with the Member for Oropouche on April 13, 1994. Consequently, I received a communication dated April 13, 1994; the said day that I made the visit. Note! This communication was received in my office on May 2, 1994. Note again! The communication went on to state:

"Further to our visit to the NHA lot development at Wellington Road, Debe today April 13, I wish to confirm that the following decisions were arrived at for follow-up action.

1. ...possible assistance by NHA with respect to the construction of a culvert across Wellington Road, Debe linking the NHA drain on the western side of the main NHA access road to the drain on the northern side of Wellington Road currently under construction by the Penal/Debe Corporation. "

In short, Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche was requesting NHA's assistance in carrying out construction which was being done by the Penal/Debe Corporation.

- "2. Communication with the Shiva Dharam Sabha of T&T Inc. with respect to their application for three lots of land on Phase II of the Wellington Road project for the purposes of building a temple, pre-school and care centre.
3. Communication with Mr. Ramdeo Balkaran of Wellington Road, Debe with respect to an allotment on Phase II.
4. Communication with (a Transport Corporation) contractor on the sewer treatment plant...
5. Communication with respect to maintenance work and missing manhole covers near Debe Presbyterian School.
6. Communication with respect to repair of landslip at the back of the home of Mr. Seepaul.
7. Action with respect to flooding problem at the back of the home of Sookram Seenath... and compensation (due him for the loss in 1989) of ten (10) bags of fertilizers.

I repeat: loss in 1989

The Member for Oropouche failed to recall that he was in Government at that time and should have done something about it, regarding the fertilizer.

Hon. Member: They had kicked him out already.

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Madam Speaker, on May 11, 1994, the Executive Director of NHA was written to and a copy of the communication was forwarded, which is the same one dated April 13, 1994. NHA was asked to advise for the information of the hon. Minister on the feasibility of implementing those decisions falling within the scope of NHA's responsibility.

A letter addressed to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Settlements from the Member for Oropouche dated April 28, 1994 was received on May 13, 1994. The Member for Oropouche stated:

"I am enclosing a copy of a letter dated April 13, 1994 which I sent to Minister Lasse as regards the visit which he made to the Oropouche constituency in company with yourself and other officers of the Ministry on April 13, 1994."

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The letter went on to state:

"I am enclosing an estimate for the supply of materials by NHA for works to be undertaken."

I must remind Members of this House that it was a request asking NHA's assistance—the work which was being carried out, everything was being done by the Penal/Debe Corporation.

"Labour supervision will be provided by the Corporation."

The letter further stated that the official with whom contact should be made at the Penal/Debe Corporation—and this is very important—is one Mr. Steve Heru—and telephone number given. The letter ended:

"I trust that the NHA will assist with those projects at Wellington Road, Debe."

Madam Speaker, following this, on May 25, a letter was addressed to the Executive Director of the National Housing Authority from the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Settlements concerning what NHA could do to assist with this matter. This letter stated:

"Further to my letter dated May 11, 1994 on the above subject, I have attached another letter received from the Member for Oropouche wherein an estimate is provided for the construction of a box culvert across Wellington Road, Debe."

2.40 p.m.

Again, Madam Speaker, all these works were to be done by the Penal Debe Corporation and, of course, they were asking the NHA to assist with these works.

Mr. Sudama: Would you give way? Madam Speaker, I want to put the record straight. The request was made in the light of the fact that the development done at Wellington Road, Debe, aggravated a drainage problem which affected the existing residents there. I made the point to the Minister that NHA had a responsibility to assist in correcting the damage they had done. It is in the light of that, that we asked for the assistance.

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Further to this, Madam Speaker, before I was interrupted I was trying to create the nexus whereby it was a request for assistance from the Member for Oropouche which had been addressed to NHA to see what assistance could be given. At that point in time a contact person at the Penal/Debe Corporation would have been in touch with NHA to see what assistance could be

given. Therefore, I fail to understand what type of reply the Member for Oropouche could have been seeking from me when, in the first instance, the letter dated April 13, 1994 was in the form of a report indicating what transpired and what assistance was needed. The follow up was simply a letter indicating the contact person with whom the NHA officials would deal in the Corporation. So, Madam Speaker, to come here today—

Mr. Sudama: You do not have a responsibility to reply to people?

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse:—to insinuate that it was a shortcoming on the part of the Minister of Housing and Settlement not to reply to the Member, I think, is misleading the House.

Mr. Sudama: You do not regard me. We do not exist on this side. You have an attitude problem!

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Madam Speaker, what I would do to make this matter very short, because I believe, again, it is really a waste of parliamentary time; and one can realize that there is a certain amount of mischief being created from someone coming here—

Mr. Sudama: Attitude!

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse:—when a letter—a report—was written indicating what transpired and asking for assistance and giving a contact with whom this assistance would take place.

Mr. Sudama: That is item one—go on to the six other items!

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Madam Speaker, again, I detected a certain amount of mischief in this because in the Motion in question, the Member for Oropouche was referring to a letter dated April 18, 1994, and I have no knowledge of such a letter. Let me go back to exactly what was actually done concerning the communication.

In the first instance an estimate was to be prepared by the Penal/Debe Corporation which would be forwarded to the Permanent Secretary. That was done and it was addressed by the NHA.

Communication with the Shiva Dharam Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago Incorporated Madam Speaker, that matter has been settled because the Board of NHA approved allocation of a parcel of land comprising 15,000 square feet for the construction of a Hindu Temple at Wellington Road, Debe. So that matter has been taken care of already.

Mr. Casimire: Mischief!

Mr. Sudama: Your office is discourteous. They should have communicated to the members.

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Madam Speaker, to my knowledge we have communicated with the Association. [*Interruptions*]

Mr. Sudama: You are a sort of colonial governor of the country.

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Madam Speaker, I have a problem when one is trying to give the truth of the matter, and there is a lot of disturbance on the other side. A motion was raised, I am answering it; so, at least, I demand the courtesy—

Madam Speaker: A Member ought not to be interrupted unduly. Will the Member for Oropouche try to restrain himself?

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: The matter with the communication concerning the contractor who, it has been alleged, had not been paying his subcontractors, Madam Speaker, in all honesty this was viewed as a private matter in which NHA or the Minister of Housing and Settlement, at that point in time, should not intervene.

Action with respect to maintenance work and missing manhole covers near Debe Presbyterian School. Madam Speaker, that matter was addressed in December, 1993. The covers have been returned, and I am positive that the Member for Oropouche is fully aware of that.

Mr. Sudama: Would you give way. On a point of order. The Minister is misrepresenting the House. When we visited on April 13—on a point of order.

Madam Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Sudama: The Member is misrepresenting what actually happened, and that is on April 13, when we visited the site and he was there, the manhole covers were not put in place, and this is in my letter. How come he is telling me that it was done in December, 1993? He has come here to misrepresent!

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Madam Speaker, I will repeat that, based on the records of NHA, the manholes were addressed in December, 1993 and whether they were stolen again is another question.

Mr. Sudama: Check out the records.

Dr. The Hon. V. Lasse: Action with respect to the flooding at the back of the home of one Mr. Seenath. This matter will be addressed.

There is also one other question I wish to raise, Madam Speaker, that during the last two weeks, NHA went on site and realized that there was a certain measure of silting taking place and the NHA is addressing that matter.

Madam Speaker, I do not think I would take much more of the valuable time of this House, but simply to state that it is rather disturbing to me that a Member of Parliament would come and try to create a situation giving an impression which is false and mischievous, in my view, to create an impression.

Mr. Sudama: You are arrogant. You should not be a Minister at all. Three reminders. A letter and all these reminders—a waste of time as a Minister.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Inadequate Telephone Services (Caroni Central)

Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh (*Caroni Central*): Madam Speaker, I think we have a rare opportunity today where Members on this side can, at least, get some time to converse in the Parliament with respect to some of the problems.

When I communicated with you, Madam Speaker, I indicated that the matter is about inadequate provision of telephone services, especially in the areas of Caparo and Carlsen Field. The provision of telephone services is becoming increasingly necessary because of several disconcerting factors, such as murder in the Carlsen Field area, stripping of motorcars, lack of safety for people who walk in the area of Carlsen Field; and, of course, Madam Speaker, the Caparo area is a very large community. I have been trying for several years now to have telephone services.

One of the major problems there is the fact that when there is flooding, that community is cut off for several days, hence the reason that telephones would be an advantage to communities that are cut off from the rest of the nation, during the period of flooding. The self-evident reason, however, is the fact that telephone services would greatly enhance the communication network with people, and improve their quality of life.

Madam Speaker, in February 1992, the then Minister of Public Utilities, the late Morris Marshall, visited with me in my constituency, the areas that I am speaking about—Caparo and Carlsen Field—and indicated that he would do something about the serious problems, particularly, in respect of telephones.

He gave me that assurance on that visit in February, 1992. But I was careful to remind him of that commitment. Then I wrote him subsequently on the matter and he acknowledged my letter in which he said that he had sent the problem of telephones to the Chief Executive Officer of TSTT, Nigel Davis, for his attention.

2.50 p.m.

On July 15, 1993, I got a note from the Minister of Public Utilities from his office indicating that the matter is as follows, which was stated in a letter by TSTT on June 24, 1993 to the hon. Minister, Morris Marshall, in which it states:

"Dear Minister Marshall,

SUBJECT: TELEPHONE SERVICE TO CAPARO AND CARLSEN FIELD

We refer to your letter of 11th May 1993 enclosing a letter from Mr. Raymond Palackdharrysingh, M.P. for Caroni Central, concerning the provision of telephone service to Caparo and Carlsen Field.

Because of the distances involved in providing service to these areas, it is our intention to serve Caparo and Carlsen Field from Couva and Chaguanas exchanges respectively. However, this development will not take place until our 1994/95 financial year. In the interim, we are investigating the possibilities of locating a number of public payphones at strategic locations in the area, that would operate through our cellular telephone system. We would of course coordinate the exact location of these payphones with the representatives of the communities.

I regret that full telephone development cannot be carried out any sooner than indicated above. As you are aware, there is a logical way of developing the network as a whole, and TSTT is doing this as rapidly and effectively as possible, with the resources available to it.

Yours sincerely,

Nigel B. Davis
Chief Executive Officer."

So, Madam Speaker, this period had been set as 1994, and we are coming to the close of the year. Since that, there has been no indication whatsoever of what is going to take place in the Carlsen Field and the Caparo areas. As a matter of fact, information coming to me is that some of the original plans for the provision of telephones in these areas have been stopped, and therefore, the resources have

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been redirected. But I have here a copy of a letter sent to me from one of my constituents, Neil Madray of No. 16 Carlsen Field in Chaguanas in which it states:

"Chief Executive Officer

T.S.T.T.

118 Frederick Street

Port of Spain.

Dear Sir,

RE-INSTALLATION OF TELEPHONES IN CARLSEN FIELD

On behalf of the farmers of Carlsen Field (List Attached) and as a last resort, I appeal to your inherent goodwill for the installation of phones in our homes.

Over the past five (5) years we have been promised connection several times only to be disappointed on each occasion. The disregard shown to farmers in this matter is appalling, notwithstanding correspondence over time. Several farmers have paid for connections and then refunded their money when connections were not made.

I have paid since 89/06/02 (copy of receipt attached) and have not been connected as yet. I will not accept a refund for I need a phone.

A telephone service in this area has now become a necessity. Your company's media ads prove this. I am sure, Sir, you are aware of the proliferation of crimes in this area. Not only praedial larceny, but the more heinous types like murder, car-stealing and stripping. Add to this, the illegal dumping of rubbish and tons of chicken guts.

A telephone service would enable each farmer to have immediate contact, not only with the police but with each other, which would alleviate these pressing problems, and concomitantly enhance domestic and social life.

In such a dire situation, the fact that there are no over-heard lines can no longer be accepted as a valid excuse for the lack of a telephone service in this area.

Hoping for your benevolent action in this matter."

And he signs: "Neil Madray."

So I think that this constituent has re-stated the case in his letter and that is not an exaggeration; it is what really exists.

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Again, right on the periphery of Carlsen Field and Caparo, we have the village of Palmiste and on October 4, 1994, they wrote a letter to TSTT and stated the number of people who have applied for telephones. Up to now nothing has been said.

I am wondering, after all the representations being made, by myself, by members of my constituency, for telephone services in deserving areas in this country, why up to this point in time there can be no indication as to when work will start and when the project is going to be completed.

I hate to think that because I represent Caroni Central, if plans were afoot, funds are diverted. If funds are available for the 1994/1995 period, let me know, for like the Member for Oropouche, I, too, would have to give my constituents some sort of reassurances, especially in dismal and desperate times in their lives when they seem to be cut off from the world.

I rest my case and I hope that the Government would be able to appropriately respond on this matter.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Madam Speaker, before I respond, I want to make the observation that, obviously, one sees Members of Parliament working in the service of their constituents, which, of course, I think is the primary function of Members of Parliament. As a matter of fact, yesterday afternoon while I was in my office dealing with my own constituents, I got a call from the Chief Whip who was at that time dealing with his constituents.

The other observation I want to make is that with the previous Motion and this one, one saw quite clearly that Members of the Government were quite willing to respond to the concerns expressed by Members on the other side. We had Minister Lasse going down to Oropouche, and as the Member for Caroni Central mentioned, that, in fact, our late colleague, Minister Marshall, visited with him in Caroni Central and that he responded to him and sent him further communications from the CEO of TSTT which indicated, quite clearly, the plan that was afoot to deal with the telephone situation in Caroni Central, which was that, given the structured way in which TSTT has been approaching the increase in lines, that Caroni Central, Caparo and so forth, is planned to be on service in 1995, and that in the mean time, TSTT, bearing in mind the case made by the Member for Caroni Central, would consider using pay phones via cellular.

I have to report that when I checked for information with respect to this Motion, I got the same information. I can provide to the Member for Caroni Central a copy of the document which still schedules Caroni Central for 1995. So that there has been no change, as far as the information provided to me, that the plan is still to have Caroni Central on the system in 1995—I can provide this to him—and that they are, in fact, contemplating using the pay phones in the interim.

I want to congratulate Members for serving their constituents.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

3.00 p.m.

**Bridge
(Inner Mafeking Road)**

Mr. Krish Jurai (*Nariva*): Madam Speaker, before I begin this Motion, I wish I could agree with the Leader of Government Business, the Member for Diego Martin Central. I, myself, have written several letters to the Minister of Works and Transport and Minister of Local Government to visit my constituency, and to date, he has not done so. He has made it abundantly clear that he is not going to the bush in the country to see any roads. I think that speaks for itself.

I rise to speak on this Motion because of the urgent need for a bridge to be rebuilt at the Inner Mafeking Road. In case Members do not know where Inner Mafeking Road is; there is a road from St. Joseph Village in Mayaro that goes through on the right side which crosses the Ortoire River and comes out at the other end of Mafeking Village on the Naparima/Mayaro Road.

The romantic era of the ferry boat has long passed; not particularly because of the passage of time, but more so through the neglect of the PNM Government in maintaining or repairing anything that is good in this country. The cable ferry was left to die several years ago, and this was replaced by a river boat crossing—a small boat which was used for taking people from one side of the river to the other.

At the present time, people have to stand on the bank of the river and stare at the other side, wondering how they could get across because the Ortoire River is the deepest river in Trinidad. It is a fairly wide river—about 200 feet wide at that point—and the swirling, murky water can be viewed as a very frightening situation because of the turbulent current that passes at that point. People are having severe problems crossing that river, as I said.

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At the present time, there are about 60 people who need to cross at this point on a daily basis to go to work on the other side where there are several plantations. In addition, people work on the Madoo Estate—the URP estate—which is also on the other side of the river. People have great difficulty in getting there.

This crossing is also important because children cannot attend the St. Joseph Roman Catholic School, and as a result, they have to go several miles away either to the Mafeking Government School or to other schools in Mayaro. This is causing severe hardship on those children, particularly, when we consider that the Mafeking Road is in a terrible condition; and in addition, there is no form of public transport for the people of that area.

The crossing is also important because villagers—the fishermen, the crab catchers and agriculturists—travel in general and have great difficulty in getting across this river.

The Mafeking cremation site is also on the bank of this river. This cremation site was erected there because of the vantage point and it would have facilitated the people of Manzanilla, as well as those from Mayaro and Rio Claro. This was a sort of central point, but since the ferry is no longer there it is causing great hardship because people now have to travel about eight to 10 kilometres just to get across the river to get to the cremation site.

After this cable ferry was left to ruin, the Rio Claro local government at that time—now the Rio Claro/Mayaro Regional Corporation—operated a ferry boat service. This boat was a very crude one hewn from rough logwood, but it served the purpose for a number of years. Recently, the boatman asked for a replacement boat since the one being used was leaking, but lo and behold, before the corporation could replace the boat, the service was discontinued and the boatman sent to work elsewhere.

The villagers, in their enthusiasm to have the boat running again, repaired it themselves, and have been asking that a boatman be appointed there to operate the ferry, but the corporation has not seen it fit to reappoint a boatman. This is causing severe hardship because as the boat is there, whoever gets there first uses it to cross the river and the boat remains on the other side, so those who come after have great difficulty in getting to the other side. This is causing much bad blood with the villagers because when the person gets across he does not want to take the boat back to the other side to bring the others across.

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As a matter of fact, many of the villagers prefer to swim across the river if they do not have the facility of the boat, rather than make that extra eight to 10 kilometres and, perhaps, take three taxis—if they can get one—to get there.

The previous government had seen the necessity for building a bridge there and, perhaps, they did not have sufficient time, but they had dropped material on the site, which is still there. I am wondering why this Government has not seen it fit to build a bridge or, perhaps, at this point in time to reemploy the boatman to do the crossings until such time as the bridge is built.

Very recently I was in that area and I saw work in progress on the Mafeking Bridge on the Naparima Mayaro Road at Mafeking Village. I wish to suggest to the Minister that since that bridge would eventually be dismantled, perhaps it can be rebuilt at the site I am talking about at Inner Mafeking since it is a narrow bridge and seems to be in fairly good condition. That would serve the needs of the people of Inner Mafeking.

I hope that the Minister would see the necessity for providing this urgent link for the people of the Inner Mafeking area and would act promptly to solve this problem.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3.10 p.m.

The Minister of Works and Transport and Minister of Local Government (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, before I go into the matter at hand, let me deal with some of the misleading statements made by the Member. The Member indicated that he had written several letters to the Minister of Works and Transport to visit the constituency, and I had never done so and, I also allegedly said that I was not going in the bush to visit country roads. I am sometimes amazed at the imagination of some of the Members in this House.

Mr. Sudama: I heard you say so.

Hon. C. Imbert: I have visited the Nariva area on many occasions since I was appointed Minister of Works and Transport. I will continue to do so as long as I hold that appointment. I receive regular reports from the district engineer in that area on the condition of the infrastructure in the area. I think, there is a basic misconception here. Because a Member of Parliament may have written several letters to the Minister or any Minister for that matter, to conduct a tour of the constituency with them, and this tour has not taken place, the Member should not automatically assume that the Minister has not visited the area. I wish to put on

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record that I have visited the Nariva area on many occasions to inspect the roads and to inspect the drainage systems, and I shall continue to do so.

As for the other comment, it is not worthy of rebuttal. The Member has a habit of making these inaccurate statements and it is becoming quite tiring to respond to them on a regular basis. Let me also say that I have with me some information with regard to the bridge in question.

The bridge in question is a footbridge and the proposed location of the footbridge is, indeed, close to the cremation site along Mafeking Road. The span of the bridge is 50 metres or about 165 feet. You will understand, Madam Speaker, for a clear span footbridge of 165 feet, it is not a simple structure. It is quite a substantial structure to get a clear span of 165 feet for a footbridge.

In 1990, I am advised, the Nariva/Mayaro County Council then controlled by the Government of which Members on the other side formed a part, had requested the Highways Division of the Ministry of Works to assist in technical aspects of the construction of the footbridge in question. The project involved piling works, and the bridge itself. The estimated cost at that time was \$148,000. At that time the Ministry of Works requested the persons involved to award a contract, at least for the piling works, so that the project could be expedited even on a phased basis. The contract was never awarded because the funding was never supplied by the Nariva/Mayaro County Council then controlled by Members opposite.

Mr. Sudama: Ask them from where they get their money?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, the Members opposite then controlled the Nariva/Mayaro County Council, both at the level of the Central Government and at the local government level. They were all one party. I understand that the council did, in fact, release a sum of \$90,000 but since the project was estimated at the time to cost \$148,000 the work could not be done. The current estimate for the project is now \$200,000. I think it is necessary to put those facts on the record.

Let me also say there are other access roads to the sites mentioned by the Member for Nariva. There are many other routes that persons can take to reach the places mentioned by the Member for Nariva, and one would appreciate that along the banks of a river one cannot simply erect foot bridges at various locations to satisfy persons wishing to gain access at any particular point along the river. One must come up with the most economic location for such a footbridge. My information is there are many access points and access roads to the locations mentioned by the Member for Nariva. It is quite commonplace in Trinidad and Tobago—

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Mr. Jurai: Could the Minister give way to a question please? Could the Minister tell us some of the other access roads to that area?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, my understanding is that questions are not allowed. In any event, there are many access roads. The Madoo Estate which he referred to is accessed from a road in another location, and there is no difficulty in accessing the Madoo Estate through a road accessed from another point. So that the information given by the Member in this House is simply inaccurate. They cross the river at another point, at a vehicular crossing where there is a substantial bridge to take vehicular traffic and make their way to the various points through other access roads. That is a fact.

Let me also say, in listening to the Member's contribution, I will examine the feasibility of using the dismantled bridge he is referring to, to see whether it has the span and the length required, whether it can be erected on the site in question, within budgetary constraints, and, if that is possible, I will make every effort to expedite that project.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.18 p.m.