

Leave of Absence

Friday, February 18, 2000

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 18, 2000

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from the Member for Diego Martin East who has asked to be excused from sittings of this House up to February 19, 2000. The leave of absence that he seeks is granted.

**UNITED ISLAMIC ORGANISATION
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (INC'N) BILL**

Bill for the incorporation of the United Islamic Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago and for matters incidental thereto [*Member for Fyzabad*]; read the first time.

**TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO EMERGENCY
MUTUAL AID SCHEME (INC'N) BILL**

Bill for the incorporation of the Trinidad and Tobago Emergency Mutual Aid Scheme and for matters incidental thereto [*Member for San Fernando West*]; read the first time.

PAPER LAID

Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1997. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

**NATIONAL CHUTNEY FOUNDATION
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (INC'N) BILL**

Select Committee Report

Presentation

Dr. Fuad Khan (*San Juan/Barataria*): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Report of the Special Select Committee appointed to consider and report on a Private Bill entitled, "An Act for the incorporation of the National Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago and for matters incidental thereto".

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, the Government would be prepared to answer all the questions today, except Question No. 19 by the hon. Minister of Education. We are asking for a deferral of one week.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement?

Mr. Manning: Do we have a choice?

Mr. Speaker: You may not have a choice, but you may object.

I take it, by agreement, that Question No. 19 is deferred for one week.

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds:

**Primary School Textbooks
(Special Case Students)**

19. (a) Would the Minister of Education tell this House whether the Government purchased new primary school textbooks in 1997 for needy and special case students to replace those used for the prior three (3) year period?
- (b) If the answer is negative, could the Minister state whether the policy in this regard has been changed?

Question, by leave, deferred.

Ringbang Millennium Concert

15. **Miss Pamela Nicholson (Tobago West)** asked the hon. Minister of Finance, Planning and Development:
- (a) Could the hon. Minister inform this honourable House under what financial regulations the Tobago House of Assembly functions?
- (b) If the Tobago House of Assembly is guided by financial regulations, could the Minister state whether there was a parliamentary appropriation of approximately \$40.9 million for a project called the Ringbang Millennium Concert which was scheduled to be held at Shaw Park, Tobago on December 31, 1999?
- (c) If there was not any parliamentary appropriation for the Ringbang Millennium Concert, could the Minister state whether he approved a special release of approximately \$40.9 million to the Tobago House of Assembly for this project?

- (d) If the answer to parts (b) and (c) are in the negative, could the Minister immediately investigate the alleged investment of \$40.9 million of public funds on the Ringbang Millennium Concert by the Tobago House of Assembly on December 31, 1999 at Shaw Park, Tobago?

The Minister of Tobago Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Dr. The Hon. Morgan Job): Mr. Speaker, the Tobago House of Assembly Financial Rules 1990, which were made under section 32(1)(f) of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, Chap. 25:03, continue to apply to the Tobago House of Assembly until such time as new Financial Rules are made pursuant to section 52 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act No. 40 of 1996.

There was no parliamentary appropriation of approximately \$40.9 million for a project called the Ringbang Millennium Concert in the 1999/2000 Estimates.

There was no special release approved in the sum of \$40.9 million to meet the expenses for this project.

I propose to exercise my powers under section 9(5) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01 and request the Auditor General to investigate the alleged investment of \$40.9 million of public funds on the Ringbang Millennium Concert.

Miss Nicholson: Supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I would like to know if the Minister of Tobago Affairs, the Member for Tobago East, could tell us when he will investigate, because that is critical if it is to have meaning to the society.

Dr. The Hon. M. Job: Mr. Speaker, I can promise the Member for Tobago West and all other Members of this honourable House who may have an interest in this matter that next week, when I have my regular meeting with the Minister of Finance, I will endeavour to bring to his attention that we should have a timetable of some immediacy aimed toward having this matter addressed.

Mr. Manning: Let the Minister of Finance answer the next time.

**Misir Community Centre
(Repair and Refurbishment)**

20. Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*) asked the Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:

Would the hon. Minister indicate the expected date for the repair and refurbishment of the Misir Community Centre, Morvant?

The Minister of Social and Community Development and Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Manohar Ramsaran): Mr. Speaker, the Misir

Oral Answers to Questions
[HON. M. RAMSARAN]

Friday, February 18, 2000

Community Centre was constructed in the late 1960s. The centre is situated at the head of St. Francois Valley Road just off the Lady Young Road at the Morvant/Mon Repos intersection.

The centre is one of the early "C" type which was intended to support a resident population of approximately 2,000 persons. Over the years, the population of Misir has grown considerably creating an increased demand for the use of the facility of the community centre.

The structure, apart from being a forum for the activities of a number of community-based voluntary organizations, also supports a small pre-school.

Approaches had been made by the Misir Village Council in 1997/1998 for assistance to have the centre refurbished so as to be able to accommodate new and added activities of the community and the voluntary community-based organization.

In the 1999/2000 estimates for repair/refurbishment to community centres, the Misir Community Centre was given due consideration.

It should be noted that the programme of community centre repair/refurbishment of the 1999/2000 financial year takes into consideration the repair/refurbishment of 51 existing community centres in a two-phase programme.

All the factors being favourable, the Misir Community Centre is carded for works in the second phase which should begin in May/June 2000.

It should be noted, though, that the Ministry's programme of community centres repair/refurbishment is a collaborative effort between Government and the communities at large. In this context, the Misir community will be called upon to make a contribution to the project whether such contribution is made from a financial or labour perspective thereby reinforcing the community development policy on self-help and self-reliance.

I trust that this information satisfies the expectations of the hon. Member.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

Priority Bus Route Passes (Cancellations and Issuance)

21. Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds (*Laventille East/Morvant*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

- (a) Would the Minister provide the complete list of former Priority Bus Route pass holders whose passes were cancelled or withdrawn since December 1995?

Written Answer to Question

Friday, February 18, 2000

- (b) Could the Minister state the reason for the cancellation or withdrawal in each case?
- (c) Would the Minister further provide the complete list of persons who have been issued with Priority Bus Route passes since January 1996?
- (d) Would the Minister outline the Government's policy with respect to the issuance of such passes?

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Works and Transport (Mr. Chandresh Sharma): Mr. Speaker, the written answer for Question No. 21 has been lodged with the Clerk and is now for circulation.

Written answer to Question No. 21 can be accessed in the Parliament Library because of the voluminous nature of the answer.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to advise that I have received communication from the Prime Minister who has indicated that he does have a statement to make to the House, but that he would be late.

In the circumstances, I wondered whether it is the feeling of the House that this particular item should be stood down to a later stage of the proceedings. In the absence of there being any negative comment, I would take it there is agreement. If there is, I would put it to the House, and that is being as objective as can be.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, we have no problem.

Mr. Speaker: It is not always that silence means consent. Very often, it does not mean that, but I get the feeling that the House feels that this item should be deferred to a later stage in the proceedings.

ASHTANG YOGA ASSOCIATION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (INC'N) BILL

Question put and agreed to, That a Bill for the incorporation of the Ashtang Yoga Association of Trinidad and Tobago and for matters incidental thereto, be now read the first time.

Bill accordingly read the first time.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (NO. 2) BILL

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [February 11, 2000]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Roger Boynes (*Toco/Manzanilla*): Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity of making my contribution on this very, very important debate.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House recognize and do, in fact, appreciate the value of and the benefits to be derived from an increase in the in-flow of foreign exchange. We also recognize that the tourism industry, which as the hon. Minister pointed out, is the single largest industry in terms of growth in the world, is one of the foremost means of attracting that badly needed foreign exchange.

The hon. Minister, in making his contribution in another place, provided recent figures establishing worldwide and Caribbean trends with respect to the boom and anticipated growth in the figures of tourist arrivals, and urged the Members of that place to support the Bill which the hon. Minister claimed would allow this country to tap into this most lucrative industry.

While we on this side of the House have no problem with the development of our tourism product and the tourism industry, *per se*, we would like to urge the Government to look before it leaps, and not to squander the hard-earned money of our citizens, chasing behind that somewhat elusive Yankee dollar.

The hon. Minister has said that tourism arrivals are on rise worldwide and that Trinidad and Tobago should cash in on this supposedly ready-made market. But, one may ask: How ready-made and how accessible is this growing tourism market to Trinidad and Tobago? What is the extent of the market analysis of worldwide and Caribbean trends which makes this Government feel confident about establishing Trinidad and Tobago as a premier tourism destination? These are some of the issues which must be addressed, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

1.45 p.m.

For instance, was there any analysis as to what exactly is accounting for the increase in tourist arrivals? Is it that more people are going to the same destinations or is it that people are responding to different types of tourism

product? These questions must be fully ventilated, Mr. Speaker, because it is not simply a question of building more rooms or having a cultural theme park as the Government seems to think. One would have thought, Mr. Speaker, that especially in the wake of their jurassic losses, which our country's taxpayers suffered as a result of the Miss Universe Pageant/World Beat shows, this Government would have sought to properly analyze the market and the real potential of the investment which it is asking the citizens to make.

Mr. Speaker, what the Government is saying is this: "The number of tourists is growing worldwide. We have sun, we have sea, we have carnival and culture, therefore, the increase in tourism is bound to spill over to Trinidad and Tobago." That is what they are saying. What the Government is banking on is that supply-side economics—the supply of sand, sea and culture—will create its own demand of tourism and the tourists. It is not as easy as that. The market, though it might be growing, must be properly analyzed to assess the trends. Are there more tourists because the national economies of countries are growing and therefore more people have more money to travel? Is it that the same stock of tourists is travelling more widely? Is it that people are looking for destinations in which they can feel at home and not like tourists? It is when these questions are answered that we will know the way forward, Mr. Speaker. It is not sufficient to say that our culture is excellent and that if we package it properly, people will buy it. We must first find out what the people want to buy. If that philosophy were true then Trinidad and Tobago, by virtue of our carnival, should be the leading tourist destination in the Caribbean, but the sad reality is that we are not.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, no one is saying not to develop tourism, but we have to know what we are developing before we spend taxpayers' money. We have to put mechanisms in place to give the tourist quality so that our reputation for so doing would be taken throughout the entire world.

Mr. Speaker, this Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill is proposed legislation which we hope will, in fact propel development in Trinidad and Tobago. I do not even know if the hon. Member for Tabaquite understands the Bill. I do not know if he fully comprehends the clauses as they relate to this particular Bill. The instrument seeks to develop, non-traditional areas and forms of development. That is what it seeks to do. For instance, the eco-lodges and dive lodges are given certain incentives in this piece of legislation. This will certainly support the tourism industry's development in attempting to diversify the tourism product and create a wide variety of offerings for several kinds of tourists.

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[MR. BOYNES]

Friday, February 18, 2000

We can, in a nutshell, say that the Bill is an improvement from its predecessor the Hotel Development Act of 1963 which outlined an incentive package solely for hotel development. In my particular constituency of Toco/Manzanilla where eco-tourism can play a very good part in attracting tourists both internationally and locally, some of these incentives in this proposed legislation can simply be described as being timely.

The Bill outlines several incentives to encourage development in tourism activities, including the transportation sector. One notable benefit that will accrue to a tourist taxi driver is a reduction of the rate of customs duty. To ensure that the benefits provided are not abused, and used for development outside of the tourism industry, we notice that the Bill also applies to the Tourism Transfer Tax in instances of change of use of the tourism project's assets.

There are several criteria designed to ensure that the tourism project has met the requirements of registration with the Tobago House of Assembly and the corporation—the Tourism Industrial Development Company (Tidco) in this case—such as inspection, reporting, engaging local human resources and linkages with several sectors within the economy: agriculture, furniture, construction *et cetera*.

Further, the Bill seeks to give added incentives by allowing locals a reduced amount of capital expenditure for tourism project approval in several areas as stated in Schedule 9. There are also specific projects which will be reserved for ownership only by locals, accommodation facilities under 21 rooms, transportation services, and ground tour operations or destination management companies.

The Integrated Resort Development (IRD) is another new feature that has been introduced in this Bill. To be classified as an IRD, a tourism project must include a hotel of at least 200 staterooms, a major amenity such as golf course or marina, and have a minimum capital expenditure of at least \$350 million.

The legislation also specifies penalties for persons who contravene the sections relating to the tourism transfer tax, and customs and excise duties. For the former the penalty is a fine of \$1.5 million and imprisonment for two years, and for the latter, the penalty is a fine of \$100,000 or the relevant duties to be charged. Further approval of a tourism project for incentives can be revoked if the investor gives false or misleading information.

By and large the sum total of this piece of proposed legislation before us is such an important piece of proposed legislation that we on this side have studied this Bill through and through. We have analyzed the focus of the Bill and what we

on this side are saying is that we now want to put this new one forward. There are certain comments/criticisms as they relate to this piece of legislation—constructive criticisms. If the Members on that side have this country in their best interest, they will take note of our concerns and implement them accordingly.

Although, perhaps, some would argue that this tourism development Bill breaks some new ground in terms of providing incentives for the development of a wider range of tourism projects than were provided for, there are definitely clear lines of weakness in this Bill. I would set them out.

1.55 p.m.

The Bill provides incentives for investments in special events. Mr. Speaker, if I can just direct your mind to Schedule 9, which lists a number of activities that will cause the investor to benefit under this piece of legislation. Schedule 9 refers to minimum capital expenditure and lists different types of tourism projects that will qualify for incentives under this legislation. When I look at “Film/Special Events”, the requirement for the local investor is \$3.1 million and the requirement for the international investor will be about \$6.2 million. There is no definition of what is a special event. What is a special event? This could lead to a lack of transparency in the Bill.

For example, in the case of local investors, they have to spend a minimum of \$3.1 million to eventually qualify for a tax incentive. It is difficult to understand why this is so. Suppose there are people wishing to financially support a special event, a cultural festival, for instance, pan-in-the-grand in Sangre Grande or Point Fortin’s pan-on-the-move without investing so much money as \$3.1 million? The Bill is saying that they will not receive any benefits.

It is clear from past festivals and attempts at various cultural events in this country, that the private sector which nets millions in profits every year, must be encouraged to invest in and sponsor such events. To anticipate that this should be the role of the state in the foreseeable future would be myopic. The state never has and never will have the resources, whether financial or human, to dedicate to such events; it is impossible. It is not for every event in the country that we should ask the state to contribute, so we have to look toward the private sector. Yet we are trying to market Trinidad and Tobago as the cultural capital of the Caribbean.

It is clear that if we are serious about this, then we should use this Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill as the logical place to provide some type of fiscal incentive, not just for investment of big money or tax benefits to those in the private sector who wish to invest in different events which will promote Trinidad

and Tobago's cultural product. We have to use this legislation to encourage businessmen and the private sector to invest in our culture.

Mr. Speaker, in the same Schedule 9, if I might just direct your mind's eye to the section called "Cultural Centres" the local person has to invest some \$9.3 million. One of the plans that we on this side foresee is the building of mini-cultural centres throughout the length and breadth of each region and ensuring that there is proper management to run them, so that our culture will be exposed throughout the length and breadth of this country. We have been meeting with several investors who are prepared to invest in these mini-cultural centres and on analysis, after assessment, the value of the investment for some of them would come up to about \$5 million or less.

Sometimes a community has a football club and they may say, "We have a spot of land and we want to develop this into our cultural home where we can play football, cricket or basketball, where we can showcase the talents of our young and old in these cultural centres." Is the Minister saying that these communities must climb up to the tune of \$9.3 million in order to obtain tax incentives under this legislation? The amount of investment under this particular heading should be looked at very carefully if we really are to encourage investment by our locals in their own culture.

By the same token, for landmarks and heritage sites, the local persons have to invest a minimum of \$630,000. With respect to the villages in the constituency of Toco/Manzanilla, from Matelot going right on to Matura, each name means something. There have been certain things that annex the name to the villages and the village communities are mobilizing themselves to make sure that they put their heritage sites in place. The Minister is telling this honourable Chamber that in order for them to benefit from this tax incentive they must climb up to the tune of \$630,000. With respect to these village councils that are trying to showcase their heritage, which is coming from the bowels of the village itself, special consideration should be given in terms of the amount of money they have to invest in order to benefit under this piece of legislation.

Furthermore, there are no controls over who can and cannot access benefits outlined in the Bill. In other words, any individual—whether or not they belong to the relevant tourism industry association to which their tourism project belongs—can access benefits under this Bill. This means that any taxi driver or anyone who calls himself a ground tour operator or a dive operator can apply for and access benefits under this legislation. Why are mechanisms not included for ensuring that those wishing to access benefits, first become *bona fide* members of their

respective tourism organizations? At another place, a Member raised this as a major concern under clause 8, but it was just swept under the carpet.

The Bill must encourage persons to form the legitimate part of their legitimate association, whether it is the Hotel Association, the Taxi Drivers' Association, the Bed and Breakfast or whatever it might be. This would ensure a certain transparency in dealing with the incentives, since pressure would then be put on the relevant associations to ensure that members accessing benefits remain *bona fide* members of these associations and, therefore, of the tourism industry as a whole.

This will also have the related and positive impact of strengthening the numerical base and level of influence of such associations, thus freeing the relevant state agencies which regulate these incentives to use these associations to check the *bona fides* of the applicants, instead of the state agencies dealing with a vast number of applicants to check whether they are a legitimate part of the tourism industry or not. This will bring order to the system of applying for incentives.

Another aspect which is missing from this proposed legislation relates to the whole question of establishing standards within the tourism industry. Mr. Speaker, let us say that the Bill leads to the development of the tourism plant and this in turn leads to increased levels of arrivals into Trinidad and Tobago, who or what agencies would monitor and enforce standards in the industry so that we would be sure that the visitors, who we anticipate we would get, would not be totally turned off by what they see and experience here? In other words, it is not only about improving the quantity of the tourism plant, we have to put mechanisms in place to improve the quality.

For example, to operate a restaurant in Trinidad and Tobago, legally, you must be in possession of a Public Health Certificate from the Ministry of Health which certifies that you can do so. Yet, any hotel, taxi or anyone calling themselves a tour operator, can operate freely in this country without anyone monitoring the standard and quality that they give to tourists. This should be addressed or else we would find ourselves with a plant which is developing, but in the wrong way and "any old thing" would be accepted.

On this matter of quantity versus quality, I have not heard any discussions about how we are going to balance the rapid development of the tourism industry, which is what we are supposed to be encouraging, with ensuring that the benefits will really redound to our national economy. The rapid development of all-

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[MR. BOYNES]

Friday, February 18, 2000

inclusive resorts in places like Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, the rampant foreign ownership of these resorts, the removal of beaches from public use and their conversion into private beaches and the disdain which some of these and other developments have led to in some of these and other countries, are truly disturbing. We have not heard the Minister mention anything addressing these concerns.

Economic growth is not necessarily the same as economic development. This is why sometimes if an economy is growing too fast and, therefore, leading to symptoms such as high inflation, then governments in various parts of the world are likely to put things in place to actually slow the economies down. So the question is, if the proposed Bill heats up the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago too much and develops it too rapidly for our economy's own good, where is the mechanism that will lead to the slowdown of the tourism sector, if this is deemed necessary?

If this is not put in the legislation, we might find ourselves in a position where we have more development in the tourism sector than we really need or can handle and then we will all suffer the consequences. In other words, instead of achieving tourism development, we will achieve tourism mis-development. This is something that must be avoided at all costs to ensure that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago benefit. Let us remember that this is who we are seeking to really benefit from the tourism industry; make no mistake about that. Let us make sure that our citizens are the ones who truly benefit from this proposed legislation.

2.10 p.m.

If I could just go through some of those clauses of this piece of legislation—just a few concerns that we have on this side. On page 10 of this proposed piece of legislation the definition clause says:

“‘cultural centre’ means a specially prepared space for the preservation, display or performance of items of culture.”

What does “specially prepared space” mean, and by whose standard? Who is to determine what a “specially prepared space” is? What does it mean? Mr. Speaker, the term is too restrictive; it is too prohibitive for persons to go and invest in a specially prepared space.

Under clause 9, as I had mentioned earlier, another restrictive nature of this piece of legislation is the \$9.3 million that the local investor has to invest in a cultural centre. So it has to be specially prepared and a minimum of about \$9.3

million must be invested in a cultural centre. Perhaps the centre at Macoya might be the only one, under this piece of legislation, that could benefit. It might be a centre of excellence—who knows. Mr. Speaker, but under this piece of legislation other centres of excellence would be difficult because who do we know? How can we determine that this place is specially prepared? What does that mean? That is now in the hands of the Minister; the Minister determines what “specially prepared” should be. So that an investor could come and now invest \$40 million in a cultural centre and he is told that it was not specially prepared, and he does not benefit under this piece of legislation.

The whole point, as we see it in this particular scenario, with this Government, is sometimes who you know. So that a gentleman who would invest money in a big centre would automatically qualify for it being specially prepared. Last week that same gentleman, because he knew someone—the people of Salybia Village do not have water since January—and he has a property in that area and you know the fire service came and filled his swimming pool. That is what is taking place in this country, Mr. Speaker. The entire village—which has its natural resources of waterfall, rivers and seas, do you know how they have to bathe? By going into the river or the sea, but this gentleman, because he knows someone, is getting the Fire Service of Trinidad and Tobago to come and fill his swimming pool. This cannot continue any longer.

Do you know the strange thing about it? I stood up in Salybia and saw the fire service vehicle passing—I thought the goodly gentleman probably had a fire there, only to be told by the workers at that site that it is the swimming pool the fire service vehicle was filling for the goodly gentleman. I do not want to call anybody’s name in this debate who is not here to defend himself as the case may be, but the entire Salybia Village is hurting because of this particular situation. I would like the hon. Member for Tabagite to explain to this honourable House, while he is still here and still the Minister of Tourism to explain to us what is the meaning of a “specially prepared space”.

I move on in the “Interpretation” clause to the meaning of “guest house”. Under this clause, it says:

“‘guest house’ means a building having a minimum of eight separate rooms each offering accommodation;”

Mr. Speaker, I would just ask you to follow me in terms of a back-to-back definition section because I am still trying to find out exactly what this means and if the hon. Speaker could assist this honourable House and the Minister in

determining what this means. A “‘guest house’ means a building having a minimum of eight separate rooms...” I would now look under the definition section of rooms, it states:

“‘room’ means the sleeping room of a tourism accommodation facility which is of a specified minimum size, is furnished, includes bathroom and toilet facilities...”

The hon. Member for Tabaquite, in another place, mentioned that we are not saying that each room must have a bathroom. When confronted in another place by the whole definition of “‘guest house’” and whether or not he expects local persons, who want to set up a guest house to have eight separate rooms and in each of the rooms, does he expect them to have separate toilet and bathroom facilities? He also goes on to say: “We are not saying that each room must have a bathroom.” When confronted another time, on this same issue he goes on to say: “I am informed that it is just for access to bathroom and toilet facilities.” That is how he described the room. He is saying “‘room’” means—and he is informed that it is just for access to bathroom and toilet facilities. So if we have a hotel with 200 rooms it just means access to bathroom and toilet facilities? Two hundred tourists and 200 rooms could be serviced by one bathroom and one toilet facility? Each of them could have access to a common toilet and bathroom facilities. Mr. Speaker, he is playing games.

The Bill clearly defines a guest house as having eight separate rooms. The Bill is quite clear when it defines “rooms”. Each one must have a separate bathroom and toilet facilities and no amount of wheeling, dealing and ducking by the Minister, in his explanation, would change that fact. When you are looking at a piece of legislation and you have to interpret legislation, if this is clear and unambiguous then the literal meaning of the law must prevail. We do not have to look at the mischief rule, which tries to get behind what is the intention of Parliament. It is clear and unambiguous! It says “‘room’” means each one of the facilities, the sleeping quarters, must have a separate bathroom and toilet facility.”

2.20 p.m.

So if one were to take this literal meaning also to heart, if we really intend to encourage local tourism throughout the north-east coast, for instance, then, Mr. Speaker, it would be out of reach, from a financial perspective, of a number of the investors. The persons who would normally bring their homes up to scratch, yes, they will have facilities for eight persons staying in eight separate rooms but they may not be in a position to afford to provide eight separate bathrooms and toilet facilities.

If they, for instance, have to show off their natural resource, like the people in Grande Riviere—they are widely known in Grande Riviere, Mr. Speaker, for having leatherback turtle viewing. The river is next door to the Mt. Plaisir Hotel and several persons throughout the length and breadth of Grande Riviere have what is known as breakfast facilities. When Pierot, the Italian gentleman who runs the only hotel on that side, is full, he sends his guests and tourists to these places that offer bed and breakfast facilities, which are kept to a certain standard, but each one of these rooms does not, in fact, have a separate bathroom and bedroom.

Mr. Speaker, I could take Sans Souci. Sans Souci has some of the most beautiful rivers and waterfalls. People from the University of the West Indies are always coming to Salybia to visit the waterfall. It is where the river meets the sea and there is also a reef in the Salybia area. In Matura we can engage in leatherback turtle watching. That activity has been featured on CNN and it has international acclaim. In Fishing Pond, as well, the turtles also wash up there and lay their eggs. Throughout the length and breadth of that north-east coast are many places of pristine beauty—beauty and more beauty—and the Member for St. Joseph could tell you that. He found beauty up there and he probably lost it thereafter.

The area is tremendous and the people who have demonstrated a will, not only to survive but to succeed, are focusing on these types of investments and they need the assistance of the benefits to be derived under this piece of proposed legislation in order to continue their will to succeed. I therefore ask the goodly gentleman to redefine “guest house” and ensure that, yes, it could provide for eight rooms, but not necessarily should it be that each one of the rooms must have a separate bathroom and toilet facility, as he said it means in another place. It does not necessarily mean that each room must have the same bathroom or toilet facility, once one has access to it. That is what he is saying it means, but I say the legal interpretation of this Bill does not suggest that.

Mr. Speaker, you know, he may feel that this is a simple issue that is being raised here but an entire region, and I am sure throughout the country, can benefit from this type of tourism. In Cumaca, for instance, there is the pawi bird. I mean, people leave from far and wide to visit Cumaca for that reason. The caves in Cumaca, that is the Valencia area, attract hundreds. There is a sulphur health spa in Cumaca village that people journey up through the mountains to reach and they bathe in that sulphur health spa. Tourists from all over the world come there, you know. The reason they do not overnight sometimes is simply because of the lack of accommodation. So if they were given the right incentives we would definitely have growth in that part of the country, Mr. Speaker.

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[MR. BOYNES]

Friday, February 18, 2000

The Government is also talking about the Toco port and ferry service. They are talking about building up Toco and bringing tourists from Tobago to Toco so that the people of Toco can benefit by having all types of guest houses. I will tell you something, however: the people of Toco are not wealthy but they are trying. So if these hundreds and hundreds of tourists who were to come into the area and the region of Toco and its environs were to stay, then they will need the accommodation and guest house facilities. So that we would not only have persons coming from throughout the rest of the country or from abroad investing in the region of Toco, for instance, but we can get our local people investing in their own region.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members the speaking time of the Member for Toco/Manzanilla has expired.

Motion made, that the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. K. Valley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. R. Boynes: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much Members of this honourable House. I was just making the point, Mr. Speaker, that if we are to encourage locals to invest in this sector, we should ensure that we have legislation in order to give effect to their investment in their own region, because I will tell you something, local tourism is on the rise. Persons who cannot afford to visit the United States of America, England or Paris, do you know where they go? They go to Toco, Mayaro, Maracas and, of course, lovely Tobago. If we are to encourage our very own to invest in their region and benefit from the local traffic, then we will find, Mr. Speaker, that we will be doing something worthwhile in this honourable Chamber.

There is also, Member for Tabaquite, a need to amend Schedule 1: the definition of "Bedroom" has been deleted. I am sure it was an oversight in Schedule 1 where, under "Articles of Equipment for Tourism Accommodation Facilities" in (a) it talks about "Bedroom furnishings and fixtures". I am sure it just was an oversight because you have taken out "Bedrooms" so it probably is "Room furnishings and fixtures". It is just an oversight. I hope it was.

Mr. Speaker, there is another definition to which I wish to draw the attention of this House, that is, the definition of "Tourist". In this legislation it is defined as:

"...means one who travels to Trinidad and Tobago for business or pleasure or one who travels within Trinidad and Tobago..."

I repeat:

“‘tourist’ means one who travels to Trinidad and Tobago for business or pleasure...”

So that my uncle in the United States of America could come to Trinidad to do some business—as it relates to the United States of America—with my neighbour, stays at my house, and he is designated as a tourist. He comes, he overnights by me and he goes back on a plane and we are defining him as a tourist? Mr. Speaker, not every businessman is a tourist in this country but there are, in fact, I must admit, businessmen who could be classified as tourists. They come to a business venture and they appreciate the beauty of the place as well and we would like to encourage that, without a shadow of a doubt. So that if we are to put that into effect we can have an amendment stating:

“...one who travels to Trinidad and Tobago on a mixture of business or pleasure...”

In that way we could capture the true meaning and intent of Parliament in that piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, clause 3(2) states as follows:

“In conferring the tax benefits referred to in subsection (1) the Minister shall have regard to the amount of capital invested...as well as the measure of contribution that the owner or operator has made or is likely to make to the sustainable development of the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago and the achievement of National Tourism Objectives.”

Let me just read the whole definition, Mr. Speaker.

“In conferring the tax benefits referred to in subsection (1) the Minister shall have regard to the amount of capital invested by an owner or operator and the consequent financial risk as well as the measure of contribution that the owner or operator has made or is likely to make to the sustainable development of the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago and the achievement of National Tourism Objectives.”

I ask the questions, what does this mean and why is so much subjective discretion being given to the Minister? Is there any objective criterion or standard against which the Minister can validly assess this contribution to the sustainable development of the tourism industry? The Opposition would surely hope that the still touted potential of having staged the Miss Universe pageant here is not being

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[MR. BOYNES]

Friday, February 18, 2000

used as the yardstick for sustainable development. Or, is that just another avenue to fatten the pockets of the Government's financiers? We must be circumspect, Mr. Speaker, when the Government comes here and says that this Bill will benefit the country. So to some of the financiers who invested in that bust show, up to today they are still saying that it is going to augur well, perhaps in the next 100 years, for Trinidad and Tobago. So all the friends and financiers who acquiesced in that bust and failed show, will they now come forward to benefit under this piece of legislation? Mr. Speaker, we have to be serious, you know.

Clause 4(2) talks about the importation of motor vehicles and says:

“Where a licence is granted under subsection (1) the importer shall pay—

- (a) customs duty at the rate of 10 per cent and
- (b) value added tax.”

I ask the question, how does this affect the present customs duties in the Customs and Excise Act? Are there even any amendments proposed?

2.35 p.m.

The Minister must tell us because we are here as a Parliament and if we are proposing certain changes in this legislation and if it is needed in another, then the Minister must say so.

Clause 8 states:

“In addition to the criteria set out in section 7, in order to obtain benefits under this Part, a tourism project shall—

- (a) have a minimum capital expenditure as outlined in Schedule 9;”

Mr. Speaker, now “shall” is mandatory and what I am seeing here—

“In addition to the criteria set out in section 7, in order to obtain benefits under this Part a tourism project shall—

- (a) have a minimum capital expenditure as outlined in Schedule 9;”

When the Minister is closing, I want him to explain to me, what about the activities outlined in Schedule 2 or in the other Schedules 1 to 7, because not all of the activities that could benefit under this Part were contained in Schedule 9, so that the Minister will have to address that factor for us on this side. Once again, in this particular Schedule, why then exclude that most members must be in good standing with a national association representing the hotels or other sectors in the

tourism industry. Why leave out that! As I had mentioned earlier, it would stimulate and put more order into the tourism sector. If we can encourage the formation of associations—and persons must be registered with the associations and they must be in good standing with these associations. This was included here but it was taken out. I do not know if the Membe, in closing, will explain to us why it was taken out here.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at clauses 11, 12, and 13, you know, we on this side are not saying that they do not have some good features in this Bill. If it is that the other side will take our suggestions, our concerns to heart, we will have a good thing going for the people of this country, and we definitely would be the leaders in tourism in this side of the Western Hemisphere. I cannot imagine any country in the world that has the beauty that Trinidad and Tobago possesses. We have the most beautiful women in the history of the world, we do! *[Desk thumping]* *[Interruption]*

Mr. Assam: I am really surprised that you said that.

Mr. R. Boynes: Mr. Speaker, eco-tourism—we have been featured on CNN for some of the leatherback turtles coming to the region of Toco/Manzanilla. We have been featured prominently and the nature seekers have been commended. They are the local organizations that protect the leatherback turtles on a regular basis without any moneys going to them. They do it on a charitable basis—on a community basis. We have some of the best beaches. Look at Tobago! We have culture. You know, I met at one time the Minister of Tourism in St. Kitts, and do you know what he said? He said if that country had one-thirtieth of the culture that we possess in Trinidad and Tobago, that country would be one of the wealthiest countries in the Caribbean—steelband, chutney, calypso, limbo—oh my God! The list is as far as the eyes can see!

Mr. Speaker, you know, they on that side do not really want this Tourism Bill to pass. They do not want us on this side to play a hand in saying, yes! We were groomed; we were a responsible Opposition; and we took the Bill and shaped it into what it should be. The Government does not want that. Do you know why? The Government brings clauses 11, 12 and 13. That is what it does. The Government does not understand that Tobago is an island, it is not like Toco. You have to travel to go to Tobago.

Mr. Assam: You do not have to walk to go to Toco.

Mr. R. Boynes: You have to go by sea or plane to go to Tobago. It is a unique situation there, and the people of Tobago should be given a certain amount of autonomy.

Hon. Member: They have.

Mr. R. Boynes: But do you know what? The Government comes here this Friday afternoon to take away the autonomy of Tobago. That is what they come here to do. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. Member: Good point.

Mr. R. Boynes: And the Government comes here telling us that they are for tourism in Tobago! Mr. Speaker, the people of Tobago are watching them, and as day is day, and night is night, they are waiting to dip their hands in ink come the next general election and show you how they feel about them.

Hon. Member: For the UNC.

Mr. R. Boynes: That is what they are going to do. The people will speak. I know they are afraid to call elections because they have angered the people. *[Laughter][Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, the right thing should be done. If there is a good soul amongst anyone of them on that side, he or she would understand that Tobago is crying out for its autonomy. We are going to ensure that when we get in governance; when we become the next Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we will give the people of Tobago what they want. That is exactly what we are going to do because as far as we are concerned, clauses 11, 12 and 13 are not in the best interest of the development of the people of Tobago, and for that reason, and the number of reasons listed by all of us on this side, we are not going to support this piece of legislation. Fix Tobago and we will support it!

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

The Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution and to support a Bill to facilitate the development of the tourism industry by providing to investors incentives and concessions and to make provisions for matters incidental thereto.

Mr. Speaker, we had contributions from Members on the Opposition side: the Member for Diego Martin West; the Member for Laventille East/Morvant; and now the last speaker, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla. I will deal with the Member for Toco/Manzanilla first, because substantially, he supported the Bill. The Member said a lot of good things at the beginning and gave the distinct impression that he himself is going to benefit, not only his constituency of Toco/Manzanilla, but he as a budding entrepreneur in the tourism sector will benefit when this Bill comes into operation.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, having generously supported the Bill, he had no choice but to get into his Opposition mode, like his previous colleagues, and he went astray. He went astray in so many different ways, I am amazed that in so doing, he murdered the English language. He got carried away and, in so doing, the English language became a victim.

He went into all kinds of comparisons about what is a special event and how much money a local has to invest as against a foreigner; how much local businessmen have to invest versus foreigners in terms of cultural products; how much local businessmen have to invest in terms of heritage products and so forth; but I would leave that for the Minister of Tourism to respond to, because any such consideration has to come from the Minister.

I make it abundantly clear that this Bill has nothing to do with village councils. I think the Member misled himself. But we do have in place, if he wants to know, something called Tourism Action Committees. These committees have been established throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is from these committees that ideas are spawned with respect to the kind of tourism projects that we undertake in the various communities.

In the original draft, we had a provision for associations to make representation, on behalf of their members, to the various governmental agencies and institutions for various types of concessions. We were advised that this was unconstitutional because you could not deny an individual his right to apply to any agency, ministry or institution of government, in his or her own right, as opposed to having to come through an organization. As a lawyer, I thought he would have known better than that, that the very concept of individual rights would have been abridged if we had gone that route. That is the reason we had to pull back and allow individuals the opportunity to exercise that right. I hope he understands that now.

Moreover, he speaks of standards and he is quite right. I have a document here from the Caribbean Tourism Organization of which Trinidad and Tobago has been a longstanding member. One of the things they talk about here is training under Industry, Training and Development. Training needs in respect of interpersonal skills training—management and supervisory training; computer literacy; foreign language training; marketing training; culinary skills; tour guide training; food and beverage service skills training; maintenance training; training the trainer; distance learning and so forth.

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

When you have all these things being put in place, Tidco, which is the Tourism and Industrial Development Corporation, is about to finalize standards with respect to every type of tourism-related activity in Trinidad and Tobago, whether it is a stand-alone restaurant, a guest house, a hotel, a tour operator, a ski diving operation, a marina or a golf course; all of these tourism-related projects will have standards to observe and they will be monitored by Tidco, through a monitoring agency, assisted by the Inter-American Development Bank.

Contained in these standards will be an extension of what that previous administration attempted to do when it brought—I do not think it brought it formally, but when it published the tourism master plan. As a spin-off of that, we have a tourism policy which will be very shortly put for public comment—

Miss Nicholson: That should have been the first thing.

Mr. Valley: “Ent”!

Hon. M. Assam:—along with that, a tourism strategic plan.

As a consequence of two consultations, when I had the honour to be the Tourism Minister for 18 months, we had a consultation in Chaguaramas for Trinidad and one in Tobago for Tobagonians. Those consultations were attended on both occasions, by members of the Tobago House of Assembly and, specifically, the Secretary for Tourism, Mr. Stanley Baird, both in Trinidad and in Tobago. So when they say we are leaving out Tobago, again, I must say, Mr. Speaker, it is a false lie, like Yul Bryner in *The King and I*. It is not true.

Miss Nicholson: You do not understand. You have your own false lie.

Hon. M. Assam: Now, they speak about clauses 11, 12 and 13. This Bill has had a long gestation period, but they talk glibly. They did not bring it when they were in office for four years. They had a tourism master plan. They had a Minister of Tourism. They did not bring a bill. It was this administration that went through the whole process of refining, honing and bringing a bill eventually. When I was the Minister of Tourism, I brought the Bill but, unfortunately, the House was prorogued, it lapsed and it was the new Minister who now has the opportunity to bring this new Bill.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I just want to inform the Minister that the PNM could not bring this Bill because when this Bill is analyzed, the purpose of the Bill is to benefit one project, the Plantations project, and the PNM does not deal with making laws for one project.

Miss Nicholson: Good point!

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I quite understand how the PNM thinks, although I am embarrassed at how the Member for Diego Martin Central thinks sometimes because he is an Aquarian like me and Aquarians are level-headed people, but sometimes, unfortunately, he does not demonstrate that capacity and that level-headedness that is supposed to be the hallmark of one who is seeking leadership.

Mr. Valley: It is all based on one project.

Hon. M. Assam: If he says that it is for one project, I am amazed that he has not read the Bill, because although I am digressing, I shall read Schedule 2, if he has not read Schedule 2. How does Schedule 2 only benefit the Plantations project? Schedule 1 tells us what the Member for Toco/Manzanilla already read out in terms of the tax break.

Schedule 2—and that is where the Member for Diego Martin West misled himself when he said it was already contained in the Finance Bill and the Hotel Development Bill. A mention of tourism-related projects is contained in that Bill but there was no specificity in terms of naming specific areas and, therefore, it lends itself to ambiguity and all kinds of interpretation depending on which officer in which Ministry and in which agency is dealing with the matter. So, this legislation seeks to clarify in a very specific way what is meant by a tourism-related project and it is not for a Tobago Plantations hotel project. Schedule 2 says it is for:

- “1. Marinas.
2. Boatyards.
3. Dive operations.
4. Water sports.
5. Charter boats.
6. Cruise activities.
7. Tour Operations (land, sea and air).
8. Recreational Space Use.
9. Theme Parks.
10. Cultural centres.

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

11. Film making.
12. Special events.
13. Golf courses (attached to tourism accommodation projects or stand alone courses—”

Could this, by any stretch of the imagination, even that warped imagination of the Member for Diego Martin Central—

Mr. Valley: Would you give way?

Hon. M. Assam:—apply only to one project, that is, the Tobago Plantations Limited project?

Mr. Valley: Would you give way?

Hon. M. Assam: Of course I will. I am not as discourteous as you on that side. Whenever I ask you to give way, you do not.

Mr. Valley: I am speaking immediately after you. I hope I get an opportunity to do so this afternoon. I consider Schedule 2 to be padding because, as a fact, with the reduction of the tax-free benefit—*[Interruption]* Well, you have given way. Are you giving way or not?

Because of the reduction in the tax exempt period and knowing that a project of that type would not be profitable in the early period, all of that really is simply padding and they would get nothing. The only project that is going to benefit from this Bill is the Tobago Plantations Limited project.

Miss Nicholson: The Member is correct.

Hon. M. Assam: I would not give way again. Do you know why? Because the Member is repeating himself; he is not asking questions and he wants to make a speech during my time. So I am not going to give way again. If he were making sense, I would not mind.

Mr. Speaker, I have already read out the list. Is the Member suggesting that the Tobago Plantations Limited project will be the only IRD, which is the Integrated Resort Development, in all of Trinidad and Tobago, now and in the future? It just does not make sense. I believe the reason the Member for Diego Martin Central is saying so is that he feels a bit peeved that his administration did not bring in this piece of legislation that will redound to the benefit of all of Trinidad and Tobago and not just Tobago Plantations Limited. It will redound to the benefit of all of Trinidad and Tobago.

I will proceed to tell you how it will be done in due course. But the member for Toco/Manzanilla, in his own PNM attitude, mentality and style, went on to say that any old thing will be accepted. Not the UNC. That is PNM. Just as how it was once said by one of your former leaders that if you put up a crapaud, you have to vote for him. That crapaud mentality has since evaporated and gone.

We are people dealing in standards and people dealing in quality. That is why the Prime Minister launched, about 18 months ago, the total quality nation concept. We have a quality council that is driving the process to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a quality nation. That is why we are doing it. So it is not any old thing will go. No, Sir, not anymore. That was when PNM was in office, not this administration. We are quality driven, quality conscious and quality oriented. That is why standards are being developed and will soon be promulgated by Tidco for all tourism-related projects and activities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, he speaks about ownership of resorts leading to all-inclusive packages, like in the Dominican Republic and in Jamaica. It shows quite clearly the abundant ignorance that emanates from the mouth of the Member for Toco/Manzanilla.

Trinidad and Tobago is unique in the entire world with respect to the ownership of the tourism industry. There is no country in the entire world that owns its tourism industry. Look at all the hotels in Trinidad and Tobago, whether they are guest houses, whether they are four, five or three star hotels, whatever they are, they are owned by the locals of Trinidad and Tobago. Because of the kind of policy that we intend to pursue, with respect to niche marketing, Mr. Speaker, we do not intend to go the route of all-inclusives, nor do we intend to go the route that other countries have gone.

We intend to have a qualitative tourism industry developed, both in Trinidad and in Tobago, to the extent that we have given a ceiling of the number of rooms that we will be prepared to develop in Trinidad and Tobago. It will be that over the next 10 years, we hope to have 8,000 rooms; 3,000 in Tobago and 5,000 in Trinidad. The design of these hotels will be such that we will not destroy the ambience, the environment, the ecology and the beauty of the shrubbery and the beauty of the trees around us, so that no hotel will be taller than a coconut tree. That is our commitment to the development of tourism in Trinidad and in Tobago.

So when they come with their nonsensicality about all-inclusive and we are going the way of the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, that is so absolutely erroneous and misleading, I hope they would read and understand, Mr. Speaker.

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

Then he talked about infrastructure. We do not have the infrastructure to develop tourism. Let me give a sampling of the kind of product that has been developed in this country over the last seven years, including the constituency of Toco/Manzanilla, which he knows quite well and from which he is benefiting and is going to be benefiting because he will be personally involved in the tourism project in that area. So, do not come here, Member for Toco/Manzanilla, and talk through different sides of your mouth.

We are having what we call community tourism projects all over the country. One is going to be in the constituency of Oropouche where they are constructing a religious ceremony site, a boating facility, a car park and a slipway. We are having the Quinam beach facility. We have the Manzanilla beach facility. We have the Vessigny beach facility. We have the Pitch Lake visitor renovation facility.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have the Mayaro beach facility, constructed in conjunction with the Roman Catholic Church in Mayaro. We have the Caroni Swamp headquarters facility. We have a signage project which means that tourists, whether foreign or local, would be able to travel throughout the country and not get lost and be able to go to a destination with the facilities. We have the refurbishment of the sewage treatment plant in Tobago. We have the Valencia River recreational facility, which some people mistakenly call the Oropouche River. We have recently opened the Caura River facility with all the various amenities there. We have the launch of the Renaissance Project in St. James and all that is attached to it. We have the launch of the Renaissance Project in St. Joseph and the complete renovation of George Earle Park and the establishment of a museum. *[Interruption]* We have the gateway over the Harvard Bridge—PNM policy paper “mih eye”. We have the St. James market renovation and so forth.

When the PNM says that we do not have the infrastructure in place, we have put the infrastructure in place and we continue to improve on the infrastructure. This will be a project that is continuing in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and Tidco, Government Policy and Support Unit. Mr. Speaker, we are transforming the landscape of this country in terms of tourism, in conjunction with the Tourism Action Committees (TACS) which are locally-based, community-based committees informing us what they want to do. The lighthouse in Toco was one of those; they informed us. The facilities for looking at turtles in Salybia and it will be done, before long, in Grande Riviere and so forth.

We have been encouraging the development of small hotels and guest houses in the private sector. In fact, there is one in Grande Riviere. I recently opened one in Aripo. There is the beautiful Asa Wright Nature Centre in Blanchisseuse. Before long we will be making improvements to the Caroni Swamp which is a tremendous attraction for both local and foreign tourists. I do not know what the gentleman from Toco/Manzanilla is talking about.

In addition to which, Mr. Speaker, a lot of money has been spent in developing the tourism sector. It has led to enormous results, and the PNM talks about pageant—no results. That is all right, I am coming. We have developed an accommodation guide. We have developed advertising and promotional material. We have developed a video of Chaguaramas—selling Chaguaramas. If one goes to Chaguaramas today—if anyone has a conscience one would see that Chaguaramas has been virtually transformed in the last three to four years. The Member for Diego Martin West, whose constituency is benefiting enormously from these developments, stood here last Friday and spoke a lot of misleading statements to this honourable House and by extension to the national community.

We had Hash 1995 cruise-a-thon, a CTO presentation. We had diving, snorkel and fulfilment pieces, familiarization tours from travel agents, historical cultural event calendar and the ITB Trade Show we did in Berlin. We brought down marketing representatives. We have a monthly calendar of events. We have an eco-tourism brochure. We have a sun tour international market and support system, a hotel guide and a dema dive show. We go to World Travel Market, the Holders Sun Launch Marketing Support, tourism marketing symposium, tour guide services, travel writers co-ordination, promotional videos and we have a 1-800 telephone system. The Member says we do not have an infrastructure in place? We also have a web site, Mr. Speaker, 47,000 hits per day. When the Minister of Tourism said so, the Leader of the Opposition was aghast. He was aghast! He did not understand that one could have 47,000 hits on a web site per day. Do you know why? The PNM was living in the donkey age and the UNC is now living in the space age; where technology is driving the processes of government and the way we govern.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. It is regrettable, when his colleague spoke on this matter in another place, the figure was less than half, but then that would be dealt with by my colleague from Diego Martin Central—the inconsistency of the Government, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I would not worry with the Member for San Fernando East because, as I said, for someone who says that he is going to be the next Prime Minister of this country, if he does not understand what is taking place in his own country, how could he understand what is taking place in the region and in the world? What kind of man—he does not even understand what is going on in his own country and the nature of technology, but he wants to lead this country?

Do you know what has happened, Mr. Speaker? Since this Government has come into office we have had, in the second year of assuming office, an increase of 21 per cent in visitor arrivals to the extent that the distinguished Prime Minister went to London year before, in order to receive the coveted Crystal Palm Award from the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA).

Mr. Speaker, we have had airlines returning to Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular Tobago: Condor from Germany, Caledonia from the United Kingdom, British Airways has now added another flight to Tobago, American Eagle. When we complete that airport—whether it is June, July or August 2000 with 14 fingers, state of the art—one would see that there would be an interminable number of airlines returning to Trinidad and Tobago in order to be part of this hub and in order to take advantage of the enormity of business; whether it is passenger or cargo business that would be generated from the prosperity and the economic policies that this Government has been able to undertake during its four years of governance.

Mr. Speaker, stay-over arrivals, after having increased by 21 per cent in 1997, went on to an increase of 8.1 per cent in 1998 and a further 3 per cent in 1999. We have stay-overs now almost 300,000. One would observe, Mr. Speaker—although Members opposite do not like their country, they like to knock their country. As I tell them: "You could knock the Minister of Trade, but do not knock Trinidad and Tobago for God's sake, knock me, but not the country." They would not admit because of the attractiveness of this destination, the infrastructure, the beauty, the culture—as the Member for Toco/Manzanilla boasted so proudly during his presentation—and all the other attributes of this country that St. Kitts wants to have 1/30th of. We have been having a steady stream, on a weekly basis, of two, three, sometimes four of the largest cruise ships in the world docking in the Port of Port of Spain. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know what is the size of these ships, Mr. Speaker, and the kind of revenue we have received at US\$5 per head? It is estimated that each passenger, on an average, purchases about US\$40 when they

dock at the port. Business is booming and benefiting as a result of this new tourism thrust.

With respect to rooms, we now have 2,087 rooms in Trinidad and 1,884 rooms in Tobago, making it 3,971 and soon 200 rooms will come on stream, I believe, at the end of March for the same hotel that, unfortunately, the Member for Diego Martin Central has been saying some unfortunate things about.

In terms of employment, in 1998 the tourism industry employed 15,000 persons. The figures in 1999 suggest that there will be at least a 10 per cent increase in that 15,000.

3.10 p.m.

Another 1,500 persons will be employed in 1999 with Tobago Plantations, Stone Haven Villas, Blue Waters and so forth. The number of rooms at Kapok and Holiday Inn and so forth, all of these would add up, plus the other guest houses that came on stream. As I told you, Mr. Speaker, I opened up Aripo in 1999, so another 10 per cent increase in employment will take place. That is direct employment and not indirect employment.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the dive market, in 1995 we used to have 1,313 divers coming here, in 1998 we had 3,912 divers; in the space of three years an increase of 198 per cent. Do you think that this is happening by guess? This is not by guess; this is a policy that has been undertaken by the Ministry of Tourism, buttressed by the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation and the Tobago House of Assembly which is producing these fantastic results.

Weddings and honeymoons: in 1996 it started with 72; 1997, 147; 1998, 196; and up to October 1999, 206. Those are the kinds of statistics that we have been having. We are also looking at bird watching which is a very important part of our tourism package. In 1995 we had 1,400; in 1996 almost 1,500 and in 1997 almost 1,600. We do not have the other figures available at this point in time. That is the kind of development that has been taking place.

In terms of investment—although they tried to pooh-pooh it and the Member for Diego Martin West made a most misleading statement about the showing of legs. I mean, the vulgarity in the way he describes women! That is a Member of Parliament aspiring to lead this country talking about the showing of legs that led to investment! That is how they view women. That is the indignant, disdainful and undignified manner in which they look at women; the showing of legs!
[*Interruption*]

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

I did not say that, Mr. Speaker, I merely read into the records, without having any association with any event or anything, the following hotel tourism projects that were in the pipeline. I did not relate it. I related other things directly to the Miss Universe Pageant 1999, but not this. After having said all the benefits that accrued immediately from the pageant in this country and what is expected, I went on to say, “the following items are also in the pipeline”, and I mentioned Atlantic Bay which is an investment of \$240 million with a proposed employment of 300.

So if we look at all these proposed things that would come on stream, perhaps, in the next three to five years we are talking about another 1,800 in direct employment. I really do not understand why Members opposite have to get up and criticize the tourism success of this Government, but more particularly, of this country. When you are criticizing that, you are criticizing the country which you are seeking to lead and govern.

Mr. Speaker, one of the important things about tourism is that it is one industry which impacts on the entire economy. That is what is so interesting and important about tourism—it impacts on the entire economy. There are all these backward and forward linkages, all synergies. There is this vertical and horizontal integration taking place and that is why tourism is so important. I do not know why the party that is in Opposition, having spent 34 years in government, did not see the importance of developing a tourist industry and why they put all their eggs in one basket, in the basket of energy.

They neglected agriculture, services and tourism. They even neglected the development of the infrastructure, the skills development, and the education and health needs of the country. They placed all their eggs in one basket and having lost the election are now saying that they are responsible for the enormous success we have had in the energy sector.

Mr. Panday: That is true, because since they have lost the elections these things have happened.

Hon. M. Assam: I would have hoped by now after over four years that they would have stopped licking their wounds and settled down to serious analysis of being in Opposition and hoping that they would be there for another five years in purgatory, so to speak, in order to expiate for their sins of 34 years; so that when the people of this country are satisfied that they have now, in fact, served their period in purgatory they may now consider whether they are a candidate to enter into the celestial portals.

Mr. Manning: That is “dotish” talk!

Hon. M. Assam: That is not “dotish” talk at all. I was talking about the importance of the tourism industry, which the PNM totally neglected while they were in office for 34 years. Notwithstanding the fact that they had a tourism master plan—I am coming to it just now—for which they paid hundreds of thousands of US dollars, and they want to tell us about squandering money. Imagine that, they want to tell us about squandering money; hundreds of thousands of US dollars they paid for a study which was called the Tourism Master Plan. They never implemented it. I do not think that they even took it to their Cabinet for approval and ratification, but they never implemented it.

They went to Hong Kong—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: Would you give way please?

Hon. M. Assam: Oh gosh!

Mr. Valley: I just want to inform the Minister—and he knows quite well—that this document, the Tourism Master Plan, was completed around July/August of 1995. If he were to look at the People's National Movement's Manifesto for 1995 he would see quite clearly where the PNM said that this plan would have been implemented over the next five-year period.

Hon. M. Assam: So, Mr. Speaker, what is new? All he wanted to do was interrupt me while I was in full flight, but I am never distracted, he ought to know that I have an elephantine memory and I would come right back to the point where he interrupted me. [*Laughter*]

I was saying that they have accused this side of squandermania and I was telling them that they spent hundreds of thousands of US dollars to develop a Tourism Master Plan. They went out of office in November 1995, the report was produced in July, they had enough time to take it to Cabinet and even lay it in Parliament as a White Paper for public comment. They did no such thing, they just squandered money and it is in some drawer in the former Minister of Tourism's office or, perhaps, in the Prime Minister's office or maybe in Balisier House, I do not know. But he comes today and talks about, “It was only then,” and all kinds of things.

They went to Hong Kong. Do you know how much they spent on that trip? They spent \$1.5 million on that trip and when I became the Minister of Trade and Industry I got an invoice. Do you know what I got an invoice for? I did not believe it; they left out the Minister of Foreign Affairs all together, that is why

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

there was a confrontation subsequently. Instead of having the Ministry of Foreign Affairs organize the trip of a Prime Minister and a visiting delegation to Hong Kong and other places, they left him out all together and they hired a private firm, Credit Suisse First Boston, to organize a trip that should normally be organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

When I came into office I got an invoice which was on a supplementary invoice from Credit Suisse First Boston, for 500 and something thousand dollars. Then they went to France, a fellow by the name of Pouchet—I do not know where they found this man—and they probably promised Pouchet to be Honorary Consul of France and all kinds of things and business deals. Then I got a letter from one of their PNM attorneys requesting US \$1 million on behalf of Pouchet; US \$1 million they promised him. I got a letter from one of their attorneys for US \$1 million for Mr. Pouchet.

Yet they are talking about squandering. These people have the temerity and bravado to come to this honourable House—and I want Ria Taitt to print this on the front page. In the same way that she printed \$60 million bust on the front page of the *Express* newspaper, let her print all this so that the national community could be educated about the facts of their squandermania and lack of proper responsibility and accountability.

Mr. Manning: What “yuh” getting on so for?

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, that PNM government spent \$120 million on a racecourse that never materialized; \$120 million of the taxpayers’ money that went down the drain! They spent \$300 million on the La Brea Industrial Development Company (LABIDCO), and there is nothing from that \$300 million LABIDCO.

The Member for Diego Martin West hoists himself on his high, moral petard every time he comes to this House and if you scrutinize him the “Emperor is without clothes”. [*Laughter*] He was the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of National Quarries. I have the accounts of National Quarries. Mr. Speaker, when he was the CEO, do you know what happened to National Quarries?

Hon. Member: “Dey bus!”

Hon. M. Assam: They had accumulated losses of \$44 million when he was the CEO of National Quarries, but nobody talks about it; \$300 million in LABIDCO, but nobody talks about it; \$120 million on a race course, but nobody talks about it; over \$2 million on a jaunt to Hong Kong, but nobody talks about it. He went to

review the troops in Haiti and he hired a whole MD 83 plane and he did not take his foreign minister again. He did not take him to Hong Kong either. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Valley: Whenever you go to Guyana is to apologize, big man like you!

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to the hon. Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs for giving way. I rise merely to state, at this stage, that almost the entire contribution of the Minister for the last 10 minutes is completely inaccurate; I just wanted to put it on the record at this time and just to put the Parliament on notice that we would be setting the record straight. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. M. Assam: Another inane statement, but I do not expect better from the Member for San Fernando East, because he is saying “inaccurate” when the verifiable facts are there. Facts that are in documents, he is saying that they are inaccurate. I am amazed, honestly! You could go to St. Joseph and walk around like some old—*[Interruption]*

Hon Members: That is what is hurting you. “Yuh” cannot take that. *[Desk thumping] [Laughter]*

Hon. M. Assam: You could go to St. Joseph and walk around like some old mendicant trying to buy or get votes, but it will not work. *[Crosstalk]* You could go to Arima and present Elvin Edwards—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: I did not think that the hon. Leader of the Opposition was in need of protection. I thought that people needed to be protected from him. I was just about to rise and call for order, actually. I think we are going to come back down to earth at this stage. I am advised that this is an election year, but let us come back down to earth please.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, I merely responded to the Member for Diego Martin West and I thought it was my duty to do so, because I am speaking on the Bill, but he introduced a number of tangential matters which were totally misleading. I merely responded so that the national community would know the truth and that the press will print the truth.

He went, as I said, to Arima and presented Elvin Edwards and those fellows. He had the Rottweiler with him and said that it was only himself and the Rottweiler who could shake hands; but the Rottweiler is no longer Rottweiler, he has now become a piranha, a more dangerous species.

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

Now they talk about all these things. I have a schedule in front of me of the moneys the PNM spent.

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Hon. M. Assam: I am not knocking this expenditure, I am merely bringing it to the attention of the national community; the hundreds of millions of dollars that the PNM spent, either with the Carnival Development Corporation (CDC) or the National Carnival Commission (NCC) or whatever form or incarnation it had over several years. But they would not call this an investment; they would call it a subvention to the promotion of culture. I have no difficulty with it, because I believe that carnival, calypso and steelband should be promoted. All our art forms should be promoted, even though it cost the taxpayers money; I have no difficulty with that.

The point is, when this Government spent some money on World Beat or the Miss Universe Pageant, which many of them enjoyed—I saw many of them in their black ties and bow ties and in suits. In fact, the Member for Diego Martin West was asking for more tickets. I gave him two tickets free, yet he asked for more tickets!

3.25 p.m.

He was asking for more tickets, Mr. Speaker. He went up to Level 5 of the Algico's Plaza drinking Johnnie Walker Black. Many of them took the tickets and came—and I am glad they did—because we were showcasing Trinidad and Tobago, and the reception that we got from abroad was fantastic. They did not believe that a small country of 1.2 million people could have produced a show of such high artistic excellence. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, and all we got was Mr. Universe.

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, why does not the hon. Member keep quiet? He is just like Rumpelstilskin as I told him before. He may go through the floor before long with Sen. Muhummad pushing him through, with the help of the Member for San Fernando East. *[Desk thumping]* Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member had his turn, he spoke already so why does he not keep quiet.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West was the greatest beneficiary of the Miss Universe Pageant. You know that, Mr. Speaker. In addition to literally begging for more tickets to go to the various shows—I am sorry the hon. Member is not here because I do not like to say things behind people's back—in terms of infrastructural development of which that same \$70.2 million was a part. We had

a total upgrade of T&TEC supplies to the island homes, the northwest peninsula and to all the businesses in Chaguaramas, to the extent that we have an independent dedicated substation. That is a fact. We had 2,000 telephone lines added in the peninsula and we had an increase in water supply because we put on a larger main to supply water down there.

Mr. Hinds: How many?

Hon. M. Assam: Mr. Speaker, it seems like the hon. Member was absent when I was reading or he did not have on his hearing aid. That is his problem, he did not have on his hearing aid. *[Laughter]*

We refurbished car parks; we improved Williams Bay; we improved the Carenage area; we improved three schools in Carenage; we did beautification of the environment—planting trees and so forth. We improved the Carenage Market; the fish market at L'anse Mitan. We put water tanks; we put bathrooms; we put toilets; we put soakaways; and we did a lot of work in the Pt. Cumana area. Mr. Speaker, I told the hon. Member before, that ingratitude is a very bad sin. Blasphemy and ingratitude are the greatest sins against the Holy Spirit! The hon. Member would pay for it. I know what kind of fellow the Member for Diego Martin West is now.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what happened? Every week, between 20 and 40 persons were employed from the constituency of Diego Martin West of which the Member for Diego Martin West personally supplied the names of six persons. He was using it like an Unemployment Relief Programme, but we facilitated him because he said that he is for the project and he is happy and so forth, and now he comes and speaks with forked tongue. That piranha!

We also improved facilities at the St. Andrew's Home for the Aged. We did over the entire flooring of that home and we put in a 1,000 gallon water tank. Mr. Speaker, all of that was done in the constituency of Diego Martin West, and then the stage that was left to us by Miss Universe Inc. is being used, free of charge, in all kinds of functions all over the country and he wants to come and talk about the Miss Universe Pageant. Of that \$70.2 million, well over \$13 million went into infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for St. Joseph has expired. However, before one continues with this we would just revert, at this point, to the Statements by Ministers. I now call upon the Prime Minister. *[Desk thumping]*

**MAYARO/RIO CLARO REGIONAL CORPORATION
(BY-ELECTION)**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Basdeo Panday): Mr. Speaker, first of all I apologize for being late for Parliament when it convened at 1.30 p.m. today, and I thank you very much for allowing me to make this statement at this stage.

The reason for my lateness is that I was at Cedros to install Cedros as a port. Mr. Speaker, since 1979, 21 years ago, after a PNM Cabinet took a decision that Cedros should become a port. That is to say, Sir, 21 years and four Prime Ministers later. Soon, of course, Charlotteville will also be declared a port.

Mr. Speaker, the local government representative for the electoral district of Rio Claro North, Chairman/Councillor Hansraj Sumairsingh passed away on December 31, 1999. As a consequence of his death, the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, in a special statutory meeting held on January 03, 2000, in accordance with section 27(1)(e) of the Municipal Corporations Act, No. 21 of 1990, declared that a vacancy had occurred in the electoral district of Rio Claro North in the Regional Corporation of Mayaro/Rio Claro.

Section 27(1) (e) of that Act reads, and I quote:

“Where a person elected to a corporate office—

(e) dies or, by writing under his hand, addressed to the Mayor of the Council of which he is a member, resigns his seat on the Council;

his office is thereby rendered vacant.”

It is pertinent to note that by custom an election to fill such a vacancy is normally held within a period of approximately three months.

Mr. Speaker, since my Government is committed to a free and democratic society, I now take this opportunity to announce that the Local Government By-Election for the electoral district of Rio Claro North will be held on April 03, 2000.

Thank you kindly, Sir.

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]

Question put and agreed to.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (NO. 2) BILL

Hon. Mervyn Assam: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the ungraciousness and the discourtesy of the Member for San Fernando East and the Member for La Brea I still thank the honourable House for extending my time, but, of course, not having the qualities of leadership I would expect that of the hon. Member.

Mr. Speaker, before the Prime Minister made his statement I was talking about the enormous benefits that the Member for Diego Martin West and his constituents enjoyed during the Miss Universe Pageant 1999. Of the \$70.2 million that was expended on that pageant, over \$13 million went into the development and improvement of infrastructure and a large part of it was in the constituency of Diego Martin West, and that he was personally and intimately involved in all of those works, including giving names for the people in his constituency to get employment during those six months of construction and other events. He comes from time to time, with his ungrateful inclination, and gives the impression that he was against the project. Of course, I understand people who bite the hand that feeds them—ingrates.

Before that, I was saying that I have no objections to the hundreds of millions of dollars that the PNM expended on carnival celebrations while they were in office. No problem at all. You have got to spend money to promote your culture; to promote your artistes; to promote your country. It does not come by just saying that we have plenty good food; we have many strains of culture; we have all different kinds, it does not come like that. In order to promote it you have to spend money to develop it; you have to export it; you have to market it, and therefore you have to spend money; whether it is on carnival; whether it is on Miss Universe; whether it is on World Beat or whatever; whether it is on your Jazz festival or whatever; on your carnival day events—whatever; you have to spend money. But you feel that it is a profit and loss thing. It is not like the National Quarries where the Member for Diego Martin West was the Chief Executive Officer and he chalked up \$44 million in losses. The promotion of culture is not a profit and loss matter. It is an investment into the future of your country and for the future generations in order to create sustainability.

Therefore, that is part of the importance of the tourism industry where it has synergies and backward and forward linkages. That is one of the linkages: into the entertainment industry; into the cultural and creative arts aspect of your country's activities; into agriculture and agro-processing; into boating; yachting; light manufacture—all of the areas; finance; services; transportation; telecommunications; software development and informatics, Mr. Speaker. This

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

matter of investment does not, in the future of your country, develop in our cultural society.

3.35 p.m.

The tourism industry impacts on all of these areas and if you do not have a vibrant, well organized structure with the proper infrastructure of a tourism industry, the other industries cannot be given the fillip and the growth that other countries have enjoyed as a result of a very strong tourism industry. England is a good example, Spain is a good example, to name only two, but I can name many others that have benefited tremendously from a tourism industry and the impact it has had on other aspects of the economy.

So that, one of the reasons why this economy was skewed for many years and why the contribution of the petroleum or energy sector was so high, in terms of GDP growth, in terms of foreign exchange reserves, in terms of your revenue situation, was because that government had a cock-eyed view of development. They felt that energy was the only way to develop and grow the economy and that was so wrong, Mr. Speaker. It was not until they realized and—poor fellow, he is dead now—when the late Mr. Chambers came into office he requested that the late Mr. Demas do an investigation into the economy. He then brought in a report called the *Economics of Adjustment*—[*Interruption*]—or the *Imperatives of Adjustment*. I have no difficulty in a valid correction.

He also asked the then Governor of the Central Bank, Dr. Bobb, to do research on the tax base of the country because the tax base was vastly eroding and the expenditures were spiralling; they were out of whack, because of that stupid award of 43 per cent that he gave after he won the elections in 1981—totally unwarranted and unnecessary! He won the election and then he gave a 43 per cent increase to the public service. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I am not going to argue with the Member for San Fernando, I am going to talk to you. I would not worry with him because he is a misleader of the highest order. That is why he went to an election after 3 years and 11 months. He misled his whole team, including his Front Bench, which afterwards resigned on him. Every deputy leader resigned on him afterwards—Augustus Ramrekersingh, Wendell Mottley and the guy who is now trying to reingratiate himself by walking behind him around Arima, San Fernando, Port of Spain and St. Joseph like a little puppy-dog, trying to give the impression that things have been patched up and in the meantime there is all kind of back-room stabbing. It reminds me of cloak and dagger and it reminds me of the movie, *Arabian Nights*. That is what is happening.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the value of the development of the tourism industry which that administration neglected and which today this administration has begun to put into some kind of order and some kind of organization and some kind of structure in order to ensure that we have a balanced, integrated, diversified economy, not only based on energy but based on agriculture, agro-processing, fisheries, light manufacturing, services, tourism, information technology, informatics, telecommunications, entertainment, culture and all the other things that are necessary to make an economy well balanced, Mr. Speaker.

That is why we have had such good ratings. The reason why our credit rating has shot up is because of that, prudent management of the economy but, more than prudent, innovative. Why do you think investors have been coming here? It is for the same reason; not only in the energy sector, they are coming in the non-oil sector and the tourism sector, Mr. Speaker. Why do you think we are called, “a tiger in a sea of pussy cats”? Do you think the people in New York love us? Do you think the *Financial Times* and the *New York Times* love us? They do not love us; they have no choice but to speak the truth.

Why do you think people continue coming here by the dozen every week to meet Ministers in order to discuss investment projects and their possibilities? It is simply because they recognize that Trinidad is an investment destination where they have confidence that, if they invest their money here, it is secure, they will get a proper rate of return and they can repatriate their funds because the economy is sound, the governance is sounder and the people of Trinidad and Tobago are soundest. *[Interruption]*

I am so sorry for these guys, you know. They have a chorus. One just has to wind them up like a little pussy cat and they will begin their little bleatings and their meows all the time. I cannot understand it. It is the same thing all the time! Can they not come with something new, Mr. Speaker? At least come with something new. We have been hearing about InnCogen for all these months. *[Interruption]* Come with something new. You see, that is the difference between large minds and small minds, Mr. Speaker; small minds dwell on these small matters, *[Interruption]* large minds dwell on these national issues *[Interruption]* that will take the country forward—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order please, order please!

Hon. M. Assam:—into development and growth and a quality life for all its peoples and citizens. That is what large minds are all about and that is why we cannot trust you people to govern this country ever again.

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

It has been 34 years of penury and poverty, 34 years of destruction of the infrastructure, 34 years of destruction of quality and standards, erosion of the health system, erosion of the public service, erosion of the police service, erosion of every conceivable institution in this country under the demonic governance of the People's National Movement—incompetent and inefficient governance. That is what they want to talk about and yet they want to come back?

Mr. Bereaux: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: The Standing Order, please?

Mr. Bereaux: Yes, 36(6).

Mr. Speaker: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Bereaux: Not that one but 36(5), Mr. Speaker, the word, “demonic”.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think it applies. Please continue.

Hon. M. Assam: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What this Bill is seeking to do, Mr. Speaker, is to ensure that we develop a tourism industry that would deliver all of these backward and forward linkages, create employment, generate foreign exchange, impact on and interact with other sectors of the economy so that the economy could now become well balanced and well integrated. That is why we have, therefore, as opposed to the Finance Act and the Hotel Development Act, a specific list of those projects which are tourism related projects, and specific lists of things for which one can get import duty-free concessions. It is spelt out so there is no ambiguity.

We did not leave it to the interpretation of an officer who may interpret one particular application in one way whereas another officer may interpret that same application in another way. One does not leave things to chance. So the vagueness, the ambiguity and the non-specificity of the Finance Act and the Hotel Development Act have now been completely changed and clarified in the Tourism Development Bill 1999, Mr. Speaker. That is the purpose of the thing and it is not for one particular project, it is for any one.

I remember the Member for Tobago West—and she was right—made many, many statements with respect to not only small tourism facilities but that certain areas of the tourism industry should be kept specifically and exclusively for local entrepreneurs as opposed to foreign. This is what the Bill is all about. The Bill has that provision in it. The Bill, in a very real sense, promotes small business for which, again, I have a responsibility because small business is a growth pole in

any society. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, you will be hearing more about small business in the coming weeks because we have set up a task force, which was approved by Cabinet. We have now set up the terms and conditions for implementation and that is going to be taking place and tourism will be part of that.

We have the review of the venture capital regime, which is also going to give a fillip to that. Then we are, in a much more active and meaningful way, going to bring in the concept of enterprise zones. So that when you come back and you get the conjuncture of venture capital, small business task force implementation, enterprise zones development and the Tourism Development Bill, you will have an economy, Mr. Speaker, that will speak to all classes, all regions, all businesses, all entrepreneurs for the total, balanced and integrated development of our twin island state of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, what we have to understand is that we need to put certain things more in place. This morning, for example, in my capacity as Minister of Consumer Affairs, I had a meeting with a number of stakeholders in WASA, T&TEC, TSTT, members from the Ministry of Social Development, particularly the physically challenged section, the Downtown Merchants Association, the cable companies and so on. We were trying to see how we could develop a plan to have a utility corridor, as a start, in Port of Spain. This means that we will be eliminating all those wires and so on, we will be putting up new poles so that the physically challenged, whether impaired or otherwise, could have a more user-friendly sort of city.

One of the things that we talked about, tangential to this is, how do we prevent the inner city of Port of Spain from dying as businesses go out. I remember very clearly, when I was in London from 1987 to 1990, one of the factors was rent, but they were also developing docklands and other places. The public service was moving out of Central London, many head offices were moving out of Central London and people began to believe that London would become atrophied but it did not. This was because there were innovative, imaginative entrepreneurs who kept London alive.

That is precisely what I was telling the representative of DOMA, but it has to be in a collaborative effort with the agencies of Government and so on. So that we must tackle vagrancy, we must tackle lighting in the city, we must tackle crime in the city, we must tackle hygiene and the collection of garbage in the city. We must tackle all of these matters that impact on sustainable development but also in

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

terms of attracting our tourists. Not only must we attract tourists, we must also attract our own people into the city so that the city does not die after 5.00 p.m. or does not die on Saturday at 12.00 noon.

We should have a living city of Port of Spain, our capital city, with all the amenities, all the attractions but, at the same time, all the safeguards in place so that people will not be attacked in broad daylight or even at nights. We, therefore, have to bring together National Security, Social Development, Trade and Consumers, Works, the city of Port of Spain and all the stakeholders involved in this mammoth effort to ensure continuous and sustainable development.

The same thing goes for tourism, Mr. Speaker. We have to educate our people from day one. That is why in St. Lucia, at a Heads of Government meeting three years ago, the heads decided that we would introduce tourism education from primary to secondary to tertiary, and that is important. We have to educate our front-line or frontier personnel, such as, customs, immigration and taxi drivers, so that when people come here they will have a certain image of Trinidad and Tobago as a friendly society where tourism could flourish.

We have to educate the people who are in the hotels and the restaurants, whether they are stand-alone restaurants or in the guest houses, so that we have a certain quality of service—the same thing that the Member for Toco/Manzanilla was talking about, standards—which will be promulgated before long by Tidco, Mr. Speaker. We need to have an awareness on the part of our entire population that tourism is not servility or servitude, tourism is about service where tourism can provide some of the best-paying and highly qualified jobs, as I told you when I read the document from the Caribbean Tourism Organization, highly qualified in every area of advertising, tourism, marketing, computer literacy, food and beverage, you name it—interior decorating—every aspect.

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if you are going to have tourists from various countries you will have to develop a facility in languages, so the National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST), the school of languages, will become even more active because you will have to learn Chinese, Japanese, German, French, Spanish and Dutch and so forth, in order to meaningfully communicate with your tourists.

It is going to give a fillip to your national airline, whether it is Air Caribbean or BWIA; it is going to give a fillip to all small businesses because there are going to be spin-offs in all of these areas that I have mentioned before. St. James is

burgeoning; Ariapita Avenue is burgeoning; Tragarete Road is burgeoning; Westmoorings is burgeoning; lower Wrightson Road is burgeoning. You are having pockets of development; pockets of business emerging in all of these areas, and they will all benefit from a tourism industry that is well-managed, well-structured and properly owned with standards and quality; and an awareness in your population from the cradle, right up to the grave, that tourism is an important part for the development of the country and that contributes to the gross domestic product.

Mr. Speaker, that is an important part of the education process and that is what the Tourism and Industrial Development Company (Tidco) and the Ministry of Tourism are doing by bringing out, first and foremost, a tourism policy which was a spin-off, as I said, from the master plan, and also a tourism strategic plan which is as a consequence of two consultations: one in Trinidad and one in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the last point I want to make before I sit is the question of Tobago. I want to make it abundantly clear to this House that this Government is by no means disrespectful to Tobago. This Government values its relationship with the sister island of Tobago. I can tell you, when I was the Minister of Tourism and even as Minister of Trade & Industry and Consumer Affairs, I have attempted to hold consultations on the Tourism Development Bill and—another Bill that was laid in Parliament—the Investment Promotion Bill. Of course, it is not easy to hold discussions with persons who have a different perspective from yours, but nevertheless, we tried. We tried very hard to reach some kind of consensus, some kind of compromise with our counterparts at the Tobago House of Assembly. It does not always work.

In the final analysis, you have got to understand that this is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; this is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago governed by a Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and, finally, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. No subsidiary body can override the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago or the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. In the final analysis the buck stops here. If you have spoken and you have consulted and done everything that you can, and you cannot reach a certain kind of compromise within a certain time frame, the Government has an obligation as a Cabinet, as a Government, to make a decision and bring it to the Parliament for final determination. That is precisely what we did with the Tourism Development Bill. We talked, we consulted, we did everything and we had to bring it here for final determination. It was finally determined in the other place and I hope this afternoon, it would finally be determined in this place to be given assent by His Excellency, the President, in

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[HON. M. ASSAM]

Friday, February 18, 2000

due course. So, I thought that I would make the point before I sit that, there is no attempt at antagonism of the people of Tobago or the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, if you want to talk about antagonism, when the Member for San Fernando East was responsible for Tobago Affairs, I was told that they told him not to return to Tobago, because his attitude was so antagonistic and confrontational that he angered every single living citizen on the island of Tobago. The Member for San Fernando East; the Member for Diego Martin West and others want to come today and scold us in terms of our relations with Tobago. Our relations with Tobago are so good that the Chief Secretary has written a letter to the Prime Minister asking for a meeting. If the relations were bad, would the Chief Secretary say: “Let us meet together and let us deal with the thing in an amicable fashion”—if the thing was so bad?

Mr. Speaker, if there was confrontation; if there was hostility; if they had considered us not to be part of them, would the Chief Secretary have done so? I do not want you to answer; I am going to answer; I will say, no! He would never have done so, but the Chief Secretary understands that we are willing to work with the people of Tobago; we are willing to cooperate with the people of Tobago; and we are willing to go the distance. In the final analysis, I said, when we have done all of that, we have a responsibility because we have taken an oath to uphold the Constitution and the law, and the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago must be the final arbiters of whatever legislation goes through and becomes law in our country.

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

Mr. Kenneth Valley (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, I join this debate at this time with a certain degree of reluctance. After listening last week to the Minister of Tourism, I had to do some research. The Minister of Tourism told us last week, quite clearly, that he is in the process of formulating a tourism policy for the Government and that he had persons working on a five-year strategic plan. Now, of course, it begs the question: Why in the fifth year of the life of this Government only now they are working on a strategic plan or on the national tourism policy? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you are aware that the legislation that is before this House is called: “An Act to facilitate the development of the Tourism Industry by providing to investors incentives and concessions and to make provisions for matters incidental thereto.” It is called a “Tourism Development Bill”. After hearing the Minister, I have difficulty understanding how we can determine a

package of incentives when we did not first determine the policy position of the Government or, for that matter, the five-year strategic plan to inform the Government.

Now, I have listened to my friend outline a number of issues and the thing about it is they have all been taken from a draft policy position paper, which the Member obviously met when he came into the Government, because this is PNM's draft policy position on the development of the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago. The Tourism Development Act, which I will show later, was all-encompassing rather than this Bill, which masquerades as the Tourism Development Bill, when in fact, as I will show, the whole purpose is to provide certain benefits for one project, as I said earlier, and that is the Plantations Project in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, the Minister in presenting the Bill told us that this Bill is supposed to be historic and landmark legislation. One is still waiting to understand, really, what of it is landmark or historic. All that the Minister is doing is providing some tax incentives, supposedly to a number of projects, when in fact the tax incentive would really be obtained by one project.

Mr. Speaker, as recent as 1994, in the budget speech, the then Minister of Finance outlined certain tax incentives benefits for the tourism sector and it is there in the Finance Act of 1994, page 11, where it states quite clearly that a person who invests in a tourism project would gain a tax credit that he can access—I think it was 25 per cent—over a three-year period. In that piece of legislation, the Finance Act of 1994, the Minister of Finance widened the definition of a tourism project.

4.00 p.m.

One wonders, really, if they wanted to give the Plantations Project a particular benefit, why did they not just do it in a finance bill, rather than repealing the Act of 1992, reducing the benefit contained in that Act. Even though they say they widened the application, I am going to show, in fact, that there is no widening of the application of the legislation.

Let us put this in context, Mr. Speaker. Cabinet Note:

“By Minute No. 2039...”

—now tell me if I am wrong—

“...dated August 3, 1996, Cabinet agreed, *inter alia*, to equity participation by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in the Tobago Hilton

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[MR. VALLEY]

Friday, February 18, 2000

project which formed part of the tourism development being undertaken by Tobago Plantations Limited.”

So, first of all, we agreed to take an equity position. No problem. I do not know which policy informed that. But, the Cabinet in Trinidad and Tobago—and this is what people have to understand. When you elect a government, really, you can be held to ransom for five years, so one has to be extremely careful of the government one elects. So, they decided to take participation in the Tobago Hilton project, Tobago Plantations Limited.

“As a result of representations made by developers...”

So these people came to them, the developers of the project.

“...a technical team was established to hold discussions with the developers. Based on the report of that team, Cabinet agreed by Minute No. 3062...”

Go and check it.

“...dated November 20, 1996, to the amendment of the definition criteria for approved tourism projects to include integrated resort development.

Subsequently, the Attorney General caused to be prepared a Bill entitled the Tourism Development Act, 1997.”

Mr. Speaker, do you understand the point I am making? Somebody is putting up a hotel project with villas and so forth. Perhaps, and I do not know, I must confess, who are the sponsors of this Tobago Plantations Limited project, but, obviously, they seemed to have found themselves in some type of difficulty. They ran to the Government and the Government decided to help bail them out. One can understand that, too, to some extent. Tourism is important so they plan to take an equity position.

But, going further, they have decided, based on that project, to amend the definition and, by some magic, they moved from that position, to the Attorney General being instructed to come up with a new bill. So that the Hotel Development Act of 1962 has been repealed and we now have legislation that, to my mind, is extremely restrictive, in fact, and would benefit only this project.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at some of the clauses in this Bill to make my point. I go first to clause 41 on page 35. Remember, that this Tobago Plantations

Limited project, this Tobago hotel, is supposed to be this Integrated Resort Development. Hear what it says:

“Where on the commencement of this Act any person is engaged in the tourism project which commenced on, or after 3rd August, 1995, in respect of which he may be eligible to enjoy tax benefits under this Act, such person may submit an application under this Act for the tax benefits that he would be entitled to, had this Act been in force 3rd August, 1995.”

My understanding is that this project—well, the Bill has, at least, been completed; it has been sold; but this Government now is having retroactive application of this legislation so that this project would benefit.

I am saying that the whole purpose of the Bill that is masquerading as a Tourism Development Bill, is for that project to provide certain incentives. If the Government would come and say this is the logical situation and because of this, and because tourism is so important for us, we want to provide this benefit, I would have no difficulty.

Hon. Member: True!

Mr. K. Valley: But do not give me smoke and mirrors that you want to do this and that. You do not even have a policy but you are providing incentives. *[Interruption]* You said that. You are now formulating a policy; you are now doing a strategic plan; but you are giving tax incentives. What informs it? Tell me. What are we doing? We are putting the cart before the horse. What type of madness are we getting on with in this Parliament?

Let us look at some of the other clauses. Let us look at page 32, clause 36(1). Before that, I would go to clause 3(3) which sets out the tax benefits. On page 15, the tax benefits are outlined and clause 3(3) says:

“(3) The tax benefit which the Minister may confer on an owner or operator when an approved tourism project results in the creation of a new tourism project or the expansion of an existing tourism project, shall be...

(b) a tax exemption in respect of the gains or profits derived from the initial sale of a villa or condominium...”

Understand what is happening, Mr. Speaker. You have a developer building houses—they call it condominiums or villas; it is a house. Ordinarily, people

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[MR. VALLEY]

Friday, February 18, 2000

build houses every day in Trinidad and Tobago but, this particular developer, under this legislation, is allowed:

“(b) a tax exemption in respect of the gains or profits derived from the initial sale of a villa or condominium or the site for a villa...”

He could sell the land, too, and pay no tax.

“...or condominium that forms part of an IRD which is an approved tourism project.”

With all of this huff and puff in this piece of legislation, which is 49 pages, that is the only real benefit in this Bill and that benefit would go to one company and one company only. [*Desk thumping*]

I make that point because, you see, in this legislation they have reduced the tax exemption period for a project, although in 3(3)(a) they said:

“(a) a tax exemption not exceeding seven years in respect of the gains or profits from the approved tourism project;”

Okay. They say that. I do not know if they are not aware of the reality.

In the other place, I think it was Sen. Marshall who was making the point that, really, it is the third buyer of a tourism project who makes money because tourism projects do not make money in the early years; they make losses. That is why in the legislation that we had, the tax holiday period was longer. That is why in our policy position outlined, we were talking about providing tax credits and so forth, but when you limit that tax exemption period for seven years and this hotel project is making losses for, at least, the first three, four or five years, what benefits are you really giving to this company?

So, they can list Schedule 2 from Port of Spain to San Fernando, it makes no difference whether it is a small project or a large project, new businesses tend to make losses for some period—[*Dr. Nanan rises*] let me just finish the point—and if you really want to encourage, you have to give a longer period.

Dr. Nanan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I just make the point that you have the ability in this legislation to carry your losses forward, outside of the tax exemption period.

Mr. K. Valley: Perhaps, again, you see the lack of understanding. I have that right already. Any company has that right, but I am saying it makes the situation worse. I have these losses. I can carry them forward, then what is the purpose?

You gave me five years and even under the Income Tax Act, after a tax holiday period, that is when I am going to take my losses and take them forward. Do you understand what I am saying? If I have losses in the first five years, if you do not give me the tax holiday, then I am going to start using that tax loss immediately.

The point I am making is, it is not in the legislation, but it is up to five years, and in your contribution, you made the point that for the smaller projects, they are going to get no more than five years. I am saying that if those smaller projects are making losses for three, four, or perhaps even five years, you are not giving them anything. So that, by reducing that and making sure you give—I nearly said your friend, but I do not know—that particular project that benefit, this is what you are doing.

The policy paper was left. Understand what we were doing. We were looking at the capital expenditure and saying that the developer, or the operator, would get a tax credit based on the capital investment. So that if one were to invest \$6 million, then over the five-year period, he can claim a tax credit over the period and that is where you provide a real benefit to the developer. But I have a more fundamental problem with this legislation.

Let me look at something else. I go to page 32, clause 36(1) which says:

“The gains or profits that are eligible for exemption from tax in any accounting period shall be the gains or profits derived by the owner or operator from the rental or operation of the approved tourism project or the initial sale or lease of a villa or condominium or the site for a villa or condominium which forms part of an IRD which is an approved tourism project.”

The only part there that is of importance is to protect the gains made on an initial sale and they are so careful, they so want to provide it for this one company, they say that if it is resold, well, of course, there is no tax benefit.

Miss Nicholson: Please explain.

Mr. K. Valley: I am saying that is the benefit, the second part, because I am saying my whole argument is that in the first five-year period, there would be few operators who would have any profit to benefit from the first part.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. K. Valley: The only thing that is going to be of a benefit is the second part which states:

“...or the initial sale or lease of a villa or condominium or the site...”

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[MR. VALLEY]

Friday, February 18, 2000

They are selling land.

“...for a villa or condominium which forms part of an IRD...”

In other words, it is those villas and condominiums in the Plantations Project which are now all sold, but the Government is allowing them to go back because as they say, this legislation is retroactive; it is taking effect as of August 03, 1995 because the project is finished. The Government is allowing them to go back and all the sales they made, the Government is now telling them that they do not have to pay tax on the profit made. Do you understand? That is the only thing this Bill is doing.

Mr. Manning: Ramesh, you draft that? You are too devious.

Mr. K. Valley: One cannot understand, Mr. Speaker, especially when the Minister makes the point that this industry is in its infancy. If the Minister was really interested in providing benefits to the industry, he would have extended the benefit. He would have gone, in accordance to the draft policy paper that we left, and provide tax credits. But that was not the intent. The intent, as the Cabinet Minute said, was clearly to provide a benefit to a particular group of persons—
[*Interruption*] Yes.

Dr. Nanan: I just want some clarification on what the hon. Member said. Is it that the profits that were originally achieved would come forward? What we are saying in this legislation is once the Act is proclaimed then the tax holiday period would begin and the profits in that particular period. What we are taking back retroactively is the interest on Corporation Tax. That is what we are doing in this legislation.

Mr. K. Valley: No my friend. I am sorry. I am very sorry. I would read page 32 again for you. Firstly go to the definition part of this Bill. It states clearly, in the definition, that this existing tourism project—understand what is an existing tourism project:

“...means the tourism project on which construction, expansion or alteration commenced on or after 3rd August 1995;”

So it is an existing project. As long as you do that it is an existing—
[*Interruption*] Let me finish the point please—tourism project.

Then clause 36(1) states:

“The gains or profits that are eligible for exemption from tax in any accounting period shall be the gains or profits derived by the owner or

operator from the rental or operation of the approved tourism project or the initial sale or lease of a villa or condominium or the site for a villa or condominium which forms part..."

Do you understand? They are going back. It is retroactive.

Dr. Nanan: Let me take you to page 35, clause 41.

Mr. K. Valley: Yes.

Dr. Nanan: That is what we made specific reference to.

"(2) Subsection (2) shall not apply to section 38."

That was put in there so that what you are speaking of would not happen. The tax holiday would only begin when the Act is proclaimed and the profits would begin from that particular period. That is what that was put in there for. The only part that becomes retroactive is the Corporation Tax on the approved loan. Read the Bill and you would know.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Minister, I am talking about clause 36.

"(2) Subsection (2) shall not apply to section 38."

What does section 38 say? Section 38 is something quite different. Section 38 states:

"Subject to subsection (2), the Minister to whom the responsibility for Finance is assigned, may by Order exempt from tax, interest received on an approved loan for a period not exceeding seven years..."

It says:

"subsection (2) shall not apply to section 38."

The clause I read is clause 36. I am saying that clause 36, of course, will apply. As a matter of fact I have clause 38 flagged for some reason. I am right, am I not?

Dr. Nanan: No. I will tell you in my winding-up.

Mr. K. Valley: If you look at clause 38, it talks about exemption with respect to loan; in other words the interest on the loan is tax exempt. The point I want to make on clause 38 is that this will not work. Understand what is being said in clause 38. A bank has to keep separate accounts and so forth. No bank is doing that. Ask them what they do with respect to small business guarantee loans—they do not take you on. Although we passed this in Parliament and we say that the

Tourism Development (No. 2) Bill
[MR. VALLEY]

Friday, February 18, 2000

interest element in small business guarantee loans would be tax exempt and so forth, they do not take you on! Because it is a whole bother. The bureaucracy implied in section 38—they are not going to take you on. Nothing is going to happen there, understand that. I am saying that the only thing that is going to come out of this—how many pages, 59 pages?—49-page sort of legislation [Interruption] and “it gone already”. Those people who sell their villas and condominiums they are going to get a nice little tax break and that is it, nothing else. It is not going to encourage tourism. Listen, but understand it, the Government has no policy and they do not know what they are doing. [Desk thumping]

The fact that the Government does not have a policy is the reason we had the Miss Universe Pageant. [Desk thumping] If the Government is not informed and is going *ad hoc* to any nice idea; if a “smart man” comes around and “talk to yuh” and all sorts of things and decides to take \$81 million—I do not think it is \$81 million, I am sure it is much more than that—and spend it stupidly and come into this House and talk nonsense! The Government has no concept of governance; no concept of what is right or wrong. The Minister stands up this afternoon and wants to claim everything the PNM has done. The Minister spoke about how many people have come here and the infrastructure. Who put in the infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago? What nonsense you come here and talk! [Desk thumping]

This Bill is not worth the paper it is written on. [Desk thumping] The people of Trinidad and Tobago are feeling more and more as though the Government thinks it is clean-up time; everybody is taking a bit. [Interruption] Sour grapes? We would do such damage to them in the next election, if “you name man”, call it! Such damage, you would be surprised. [Desk thumping] You better look out!

Mr. Speaker, on Monday, we looked at two pieces of legislation coming from the other place. In one piece of legislation, the Government was trying to institute—I am sure there is a better word than institute, I cannot think about it right now—the NUGFW for life, with the National Health Authorities.

Mr. Hinds: Entrenched.

Mr. Valley: Yes, entrenched, I knew there was a better word. Entrench, clean-up time. The Government knows that its days are numbered; everybody is looking to see what they could grab here and grab there. [Desk thumping]

The next piece of legislation, on the face of it, one thinks that it is good legislation. Do you know what the Government wants to do? The Government is coming to say that games of chance—whenever one is using coins?—they were

going to use the National Lotteries Board. Do you know what people are telling me? A certain senior minister and his partners have already bought all the machines. They have the machines waiting to sell to the National Lotteries Board. *[Desk thumping]* Do you understand? This is the Trinidad and Tobago we are living in!

Mr. Manning: A small country.

Mr. K. Valley: Now, my friend from St. Joseph comes here this afternoon and stretches the truth. If a rubber band would burst umpteen thousand times— Let me deal, first of all, with Pouchet and Credit Swisse; I hope the Minister did not pay those bills! I hope the Minister did not pay them! Because I can tell you that when we went to Hong Kong, Credit Swisse had nothing to do with that and Pouchet. We were willing to give him \$5,000 as you know. When he sent a bill before I left—Ramesh you know that—I told him nothing more. He sent a bill— *[Interruption]* let me finish—and asked me for \$900,000. I asked him if he is mad “wey he come from, and go fly a kite somewhere else, in Paris or somewhere else!” I hope the Minister did not pay that bill! The way the Minister wants to spend money.

Like the arrogance that I have seen—in spite of everything people have said—the Government has gone back paving the savannah. The Government is annoying people, I do not know if it understands that. *[Interruption]* It has nothing to do with Hong Kong—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Assam: Why did they send me a bill?

Mr. K. Valley: Well, you ask them, do not ask me. I was not in Government.

Mr. Manning: Because they know that you are “dotish”!

Mr. K. Valley: They know the Minister is “dotish” and if he gets a bill they know he will pay anything he gets. I hope the Minister did not pay it!

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

4.25 p.m.

I am saying it in public; Credit Swisse had nothing to do with the Hong Kong trip and if you got a bill from them and you paid it, you are personally liable for dereliction of duty. *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]* What stupidity!

It cannot be addressed to me in my personal capacity? *[Interruption]* It cannot be addressed to the Minister of Trade in any case. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order! I would suggest to the Member for Diego Martin Central that in making his contributions in this House, he should address me. I would suggest to the Member for St. Joseph that he should not so provoke the Member for Diego Martin Central, in talking to him across the floor that you force him to talk to you. I am a jealous God. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, let me go back on this legislation, because this thing is really jokey. While my friend from St. Joseph was speaking, I interrupted him to make my central point that this Bill would only benefit one company. He pointed out, “How could you say that, would there never be in the future another Integrated Resort Development?” Now, Mr. Speaker, on page 43, Schedule 5—Tourism Accommodation Project—

A few years ago at some place, we wanted to hire a particular individual and we knew the person's qualification so that the job description came out to fit that person, and this is exactly what this Bill is doing. They have so arranged the affairs of this Bill that it fits this one and only this one.

Hon. Member: And fit it almost exactly.

Mr. K. Valley: Not almost, exact. Listen to what page 43, Schedule 5, says:

“Tourism Accommodation Project

For the purposes of this legislation the following types of tourist accommodation establishments will be eligible for incentives under this Act:

(i) Integrated Resort Development (IRD):

An IRD will be treated as an approved tourism project and be eligible for incentives referred to where the IRD meets all of the following basic criteria:

It includes a hotel of at least 200 rooms.”

To qualify it must have 200 rooms to start with.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether you know, but I think in Tobago there is some rule now, I saw it somewhere, probably in the Tourism Master Plan, that they are not going to have hotels of more than 200 rooms. [*Interruption*] Let me just finish this one point. It must have a minimum capital expenditure of TT \$350 million. Do you understand, Mr. Speaker? So we are talking about one project, the one that fits this one. [*Interruption*]

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): I thank the hon. Member for giving way. We had discussed this matter before and had agreed that

we would have taken the adjournment a few minutes ago. Before I move the adjournment, however, there is one matter on Private Business, a Bill, which I understand, would take no more than two minutes. I did not ask the Opposition Chief Whip about that. It is a private bill. After that I would move the Motion on the Adjournment.

Agreed to.

NATIONAL CHUTNEY FOUNDATION (INC'N) BILL

Adoption

Dr. Fuad Khan: Mr. 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 a Private Bill entitled "An Act for the Incorporation of the National Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago and for matters incidental thereto".

Mr. Speaker, just a short word on this. I would like to thank the members of the committee, Mr. Chandresh Sharma, Mr. Razack Ali, Miss Eulalie James, Mr. Jarrette Narine and the Clerk, Mr. Neil Jaggassar.

This private motion is long in coming because the National Chutney Foundation started approximately in 1991 and they have gotten their systems together with the promotion of chutney music and also chutney soca, a blend of the art forms of our culture. This incorporation will give them the benefits of incorporation and as a select committee we were happy to do so.

I beg to move.

[Secoded by Mr. Sharma]

Mr. Bereaux: I wonder if you know that there is stolen money in that foundation.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be now read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, there is a motion on the adjournment and by agreement, subject to your approval, we will do that next Friday. Mr. Speaker, I am conscious that you are a jealous God. We did agree to it subject to your approval.

Mr. Speaker: I said that the Speaker could be regarded as a jealous God in certain circumstances, but that is not what I was smiling at. I was smiling at the fact that we spoke about a motion on the adjournment being before us. I think that there is a matter to be raised at the time of the Motion for the Adjournment.

Hon. Members, if there is agreement between the parties that the matter raised is to be dealt with at a different time, so be it; that would be dealt with at the next sitting. The question, therefore, is hon. Members that this honourable House—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I did not move the adjournment as yet.
[*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: But you do not know what I was putting.

Mr. Maharaj: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: The question is, hon. Members that this House agree that the matter to be raised by the hon. Member for San Fernando East be adjourned until the next sitting.

Agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now stand adjourned to Friday, February 25, 2000, at 1.30 p.m. It will be Private Members' Day and I assume that the Opposition will deal with the Motion on the administration of justice.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.34 p.m.