

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, September 19, 2001*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS***The following questions stood on the Order Paper:***Caroni (1975) Limited
(Annual Rent Due)**

- 30.** Could the Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs state:
- (a) With respect to the lease of lands at Caroni (1975) Limited to INNERCOB Industries Limited for the establishment of InnCogen and other industries in 1998, what is the annual rent due to Caroni Limited?
 - (b) How much money has been paid by INNERCOB to Caroni (1975) Limited as at June 30th, 2001?
 - (c) If any arrears are owed to Caroni (1975) Limited, could the Minister further state:
 - (i) for which year/s and how much is the total indebtedness; and
 - (ii) what action the company intends to take in order to collect, in a timely manner, all moneys owed to it by INNERCOB? [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

**Charlotteville
(Overall Plans)**

- 34.**
- (a) Would the Minister of Transport, Tourism and Tobago Affairs inform this House of Government's overall plans, including a schedule of dates for the development of the port at Charlotteville, Tobago?
 - (b) Would the Minister indicate whether consultations were held with the people in Charlotteville on Government's plan for the port, and if so, could he specify?
 - (c) Would the Minister say what Customs and Immigration facilities are in place at present to facilitate the (almost) daily arrival and departure of yachts and other crafts using the port? [*Mr. N. Moore*]

**Secondary School Syllabus
(Form Is Special)**

41. (a) Would the Minister of Education indicate whether children registered for the Form Is Special for the up-coming school term are to pursue the regular Secondary School syllabus or curriculum?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is negative, would the Minister outline the syllabus they would pursue and explain the rationale for this programme/syllabus? [*Mr. F. Hinds*]

**Biche Government Secondary School
(Delay in Construction of)**

43. (a) Would the Minister of Education state the reason(s) for the delay in the construction of the Biche Government Secondary School?
- (b) Could the Minister tell this honourable House the cost of construction and furnishing of this school? [*Mr. F. Hinds*]

Secondary Education Modernization Programme

44. (a) Would the Minister of Education outline the schools that have been constructed so far under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme?
- (b) Could the Minister state the amount budgeted for construction in each case?
- (c) Would the Minister outline the actual cost in each case and explain the reasons for the difference, if any? [*Mr. F. Hinds*]

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the established practice, I would move that these questions on the Order Paper be deferred until after the budget debate.

Questions, by leave, deferred.

NATIONAL RACING COMMISSION BILL

Bill to provide for the establishment and operation of the National Racing Commission and for matters connected therewith [*The Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs*]; read the first time.

BETTING LEVY BOARD (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Betting Levy Board Act, No. 35 of 1989 [*The Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs*]; read the first time.

GAMBLING AND BETTING (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Gambling and Betting Act, Chap. 11:19 and for matters connected therewith [*The Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs*]; read the first time.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO RACING AUTHORITY (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority Act, Chap. 21:50 [*The Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs*]; read the first time.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 14, 2001]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Patrick Manning (*San Fernando East*): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, this budget has brought into stark focus some major differences in outlook between the UNC and the People's National Movement in a number of important areas. We find it inconceivable that the budget presented by the Minister of Finance can be so devoid of the excellent analysis done by the staff of the Ministry of Finance in the *Review of the Economy* with respect to the current international economic environment and our own domestic objective situation.

The realities of the prevailing economic environment have been totally ignored in the preparation of the Minister's budget. While the *Review of the Economy* points to the weakening of global economic activity, the marked slow down of growth in the United States, the continuing decline in global equity markets, the expected increases in unemployment for most of the major economies, the fragile recovery efforts in Japan, the slower domestic growth in Europe and in a number of emerging market economies, consumption and investment restraint, lower business confidence, risk aversion, and the world is still coming to terms with those tragic and horrific events in New York and Washington DC last week; while that is happening, the Minister piddles and tinkers with economic measures, offering a palliative here, a 1 per cent there, zero-rating salt fish and blue soap and confusing the tax and value added systems.

While talking about the tragic events in the USA last week, we find it very strange that the Government was not moved sufficiently by these events to call for national prayers. Accordingly, we would like to declare Sunday, September 23,

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2001 as a national day of prayer in honour of all those who lost their lives in the events in New York and Washington last week. [*Desk thumping*] We are calling on all denominations to offer special prayers on Sunday for such persons and we are inviting members of the national community to attend and worship at your regular places of worship. The Muslim community is asked to worship on Friday, September 21. The PNM wishes to offer our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved.

Mr. Speaker, what really does the Minister hope to gain by changing the date for the filing of VAT returns? What informed the decision to reduce individual and corporate taxes by a mere 1 per cent? If the Minister was unable to provide a significant reduction in tax rates, would it not have been more efficient to leave the rates where they were and abolish that vexatious green levy? Is he not unduly cluttering up the tax system that previous Ministers of Finance painstakingly simplified? Where are the measures that will address our declining fortunes in crude oil production, in manufacturing output and in agriculture?

The *Review of the Economy* points out that world output is projected downwards to 3.2 per cent for 2001, from 4.8 per cent in 2000, and that the direct impact of the global slowdown would be felt most by those countries with strong trade links to the United States of America. May I remind the national community that the United States is Trinidad and Tobago's main trading partner, accounting for approximately 44 per cent of our exports and 43 per cent of our imports.

With respect to the domestic economy, the Review informs us that the economy grew at the slower rate of 4.2 per cent in 2001, compared to 6.4 per cent in 2000, down from the Government's projection of 5 per cent growth. What is even more disconcerting is that the growth in the economy in 2001 is, at best, suspect, and in reality, shows a weakening of the real sectors in agriculture and manufacturing which recorded declines of 2.1 per cent and 0.2 per cent in 2001 respectively, compared to growth rates of 6.3 per cent and 8 per cent in 2000.

In the fiscal year, 1993, the structure of the supplemental petroleum tax was revised to include tax credits for well workovers with a view to stimulating oil production and arrest the downward trend in that production. The incentive worked, such that crude oil production, which reached a low of 44.6 million barrels in 1994, rebounded to 48.1 million barrels in 1995. The absence of further fiscal stimulus, coupled with the corruption surrounding the Soldado West Field, have resulted in annual declines in oil production since 1996, to an estimated 41 million barrels in the year 2001. This trend is expected to continue in the year 2002.

So crude oil production is down. Output in agriculture is down, output in manufacturing is down, and there are no coherent policy initiatives in the

Minister's budget to arrest the decline in these real sectors of our economy. In fact, the tinkering by the Minister, or the piddling, if you like, in this budget, would worsen the already delicate situation, causing further declines in the real sectors of the economy. Growth in the energy sector in fiscal 2001 is a result of PNM initiatives in fertilizer, methanol, urea, iron and steel and in LNG, coupled with higher oil prices.

1.40 p.m.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, any slow down in the US economy would cause Europe to experience a decline. Such a weakening in the international economy would impact negatively on the demand for ammonia, urea, methanol, steel and LNG and cause prices to fall sharply. In the non-oil sector growth is somewhat illusory as it is mainly in the services sector, more particularly, in government services, electricity and water, and in the distribution and restaurant subsectors. Export agriculture declined by 15 per cent following a decline of 11.7 per cent in the year 2000. Sugar production declined by 5.3 per cent in 2001 from a growth of 13 per cent in 2000. Yet, the budget is absent of any policy position to get these sectors back on a growth path.

The central government's fiscal operations is another cause for concern. While the Minister, in his budget statement, neglected his accountability obligation to inform the national community of the fiscal performance of the Government for last fiscal period, the *Review of the Economy* records that while total Government revenues increased by \$2,102.4 million in fiscal 2001, recurrent expenditure increased by \$2,148.1 million in the same year. In other words the increase in recurrent expenditure exceeded the increase in total Government revenues by \$46 million. They are spending more than we earn.

Mr. Speaker, even the extra oil revenue passed in the rush. This is what is known as profligate spending. But, for the Minister, of course, it is as though last year did not exist. There is no accountability whatsoever. What one is forced to ask is: What would have been our position were it not for high oil prices? Oil prices for Galeota crude mix are estimated to average US \$25 per barrel for fiscal 2001. I have noted that the Minister's budget is based on an oil price of US \$22 per barrel for fiscal 2002.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to remind the hon. Minister that while Opec agreed in July, 2001, to cut crude oil output by one million barrels per day, with effect from September of this year, in an attempt to keep oil prices at a desired level, the medium term projections for oil prices is still uncertain. Moreover, the Minister

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has failed to factor any possible fallout of the events in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, in his estimation of oil prices. What seems certain is that crude production would be lower in fiscal 2002. Yet, for all of this, the Minister of Finance is projecting high oil revenues than obtained in 2001, even though he tells us that his assumed oil price is US \$22 per barrel as opposed to US \$25 in the previous year. Lower production, lower prices, but higher revenues. That is the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, this brings us to the vexed question of the sleight of hand implied in the Oil Stabilization Fund. Really, with what credibility can the Minister tell us that he is setting aside \$840 million of the extra oil revenue in 2001 when the public debt rose to \$30,900.4 million from \$28,348.7 million; an increase of \$2.6 billion in 2001 alone, and an increase of more than \$12.7 billion since this Government took office in 1995. There is an increase in the size of the public debt. Contrary to their untrue claims, this is the stark reality; an increase in the public debt of about \$13 billion to date. Would it not have been more prudent to use the \$840 million to avoid the further build-up of debt? That is a question we ask.

Mr. Speaker, while the Minister of Finance informed the IMF that a moratorium has been instituted on all borrowings by the non-financial public sector for the current fiscal year with the exception of selected projects at an advanced stage of completion, he went out and increased the public debt by TT \$2,600 million. We ask the question: Is a moratorium on borrowings consistent with an increase in debt of \$2,600 million? What, may we ask, would have been the position without the moratorium?

The Minister now informs us that he plans to reduce the public debt by the year 2005 from its current high of 60 per cent of GDP to 50 per cent of GDP. While at first glance this sounds rather laudable, it begs the question: How does he intend to achieve this? Clearly, if GDP were to rise on account of inflation, the ratio would be achieved without any effort.

Mr. Speaker, over the five-year period from 1995 to 2000, GDP grew by 56 per cent. If GDP grows at a similar rate over the five-year period to 2005 the GDP would be \$78,000 million. Does it mean that the Minister plans to borrow an additional \$9,000 million by 2005? This is clearly what the figures imply. Is this why he sought parliamentary approval to allow for additional borrowings of \$10,000 million over the next five years? Is this debt moratorium? How are the mega 1.2 billion projects at the Port of Spain waterfront and the Wallerfield Science Park to be funded? There is really no debt moratorium and, to us, this is

very disconcerting. Accordingly, the theme of this budget response is “Squandering the Inheritance”. [*Desk thumping*]

The basic issue is whether the critical target should be the ratio of public debt to GDP or debt service to current revenues. The public debt is not serviced by the GDP, though an important statistic, but it is serviced from revenues. Central government debt service for fiscal year 2001 is estimated at \$5,356.7 million while current revenues are estimated at \$14,029.5 million for a debt service ratio of 38 per cent. This does not include debt service on Government guaranteed debts, practically all of which must be met by the Treasury. Based on the ratio of Government guaranteed debt to Government debt, the overall debt service ratio is estimated at 59 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, this means the Treasury is exposed to paying \$0.59 cents on every dollar to lenders because of the debt excursions of this profligate Government. On every dollar we earn, 59 per cent has to go to satisfying debt in the year 2002. A similar analysis will give a public service debt service rate of 38 per cent which, in 1995, we considered to be too high. It is 59 per cent now and we considered 38 per cent too high in the year 1995. Obviously, their task is to reduce the public debt service to more manageable ratios.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, the PNM recommends that the objective of the Government should be to achieve annual debt reduction of four percentage points over the next five years.

There is the paradoxical situation that while the Minister goes merrily along on his borrowing spree, we are informed of allocation to a Revenue Stabilization Fund. He cannot balance the budget. He is borrowing like it is going out of style, but finding money to appropriate to what they call a Revenue Stabilization Fund. Borrowing to save, Mr. Speaker. Which individual or company can follow such a policy and avoid bankruptcy? Which company can do that? No wonder one of our top entertainers commented, “Dey borrowing to tief”.

1.50 p.m.

While the Minister informs the IMF in July that the Revenue Stabilization Fund requires parliamentary approval which is expected shortly—as he puts it—to date, no legislation has been considered by this Parliament on this matter. Let it be clear that the PNM considers the establishment of the so-called Revenue Stabilization Fund without the required parliamentary approval to be illegal. Moreover, until it can be shown that allocations to such a fund are in fact made out of overall savings, the PNM will not support any legislation for such a purpose.

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While the Government has failed to take the Parliament into its confidence on the operation of the so-called Revenue Stabilization Fund, one reads of it in the IMF Article IV Report for 2001. Thank God for the Internet. Without that we would not have known. They would tell us nothing. They said nothing to the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I think you should listen to the outline of this hare-brained scheme. Management aspects. The responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Revenue Stabilization Fund would be vested in the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, subject to the general direction and control of the Minister of Finance. The Central Bank will manage the RSF in accordance with the terms and conditions as set out in a management agreement, which will stipulate among other things, the management fee structure and the broad investment policies and strategies to be pursued.

As manager, the Central Bank will determine the quality of financial assets to be held and the target levels of return for the investment of such assets. This is the real interesting part. The manager would be empowered to appoint from time to time, a reputable foreign investment banker, to manage a portion or all of the assets of the RSF. We ask a question. Is the fee to the investment banker additional to the fee to the Central Bank? Given the size of the public debt, would the best results not be obtained by using these funds to reduce the public debt itself? Is this simply another avenue to favour an investment banker known or unknown? I give you one guess as to whom it might be.

What this Government has obviously done, is to take a good concept and corrupt it. But then, this is an art that they have perfected. [*Desk thumping*] If Government's tax revenue from a particular source fluctuates based on external market price of the underlying commodity, there is wisdom in pegging projections on an annual basis to the average price of that commodity, over at least the medium-term. Over the last seven years, realized oil prices for Galeota crude were as follows:

Year	US \$ per barrel
1995	16.67
1996	20.42
1997	20.45
1998	14.12
1999	14.51
2000	30.29
2001	25.00

Thus the average price over the seven-year period would be US\$20.21. The concept of revenue stabilization suggests that the Minister's task for fiscal 2002 was to balance his budget at this benchmark oil price of US \$20.21 per barrel.

At least 50 per cent of any savings realized thereafter, occurring from extra oil revenues, could then be used to reduce the public debt, with the remainder set aside for periods when oil prices are below the benchmark rate. That is 50 per cent for debt reduction and 50 per cent for revenue stabilization. Such a strategy demonstrates fiscal discipline and builds investor confidence in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Moreover, on no account should political gimmick such as the dollar for dollar scam taint such a fund. Quite frankly, this plan is a failure. I advise the Government to withdraw with grace now. It fails on equity grounds. Poor bright children do not have the matching dollars and, unlike their election promise, are students who wish to study abroad eligible. Not even second-year students at UWI qualify. More on this later.

The *Review Of The Economy* also points to an increase in the rate of inflation to 5.3 per cent in 2001, up from 3 per cent in 2000. While inflation is increasing, average weekly earnings declined by 14.1 per cent in 2001, following a decline of 1.1 per cent in fiscal 2000. What we are seeing as a new feature in the economic landscape of Trinidad and Tobago is underemployment. This is what this massive decline in average weekly earnings indicates. Coupled with this, is the fact that even though there has been continuing and increasing rates of growth in economic activity since 1994, the rate of decline in unemployment has remained relatively constant over the period.

Let us look at the statistics according to the Central Statistical Office. In 1993, the unemployment rate was 19.8 per cent. In 1994, it was 18.4 per cent; a change of rate of 1.4 per cent. The unemployment rate in 1995 was 17.2 per cent; change of rate was 1.2 per cent. In 1996, it was 16.2 per cent and the unemployment change in rate was 1 per cent. In 1997, the unemployment rate was 15 per cent, a change of rate of 1.2 per cent. In 1998, it was 14.2 per cent unemployment rate, a change of 0.8 per cent change. In 1999, it was 13.2 per cent; 1 per cent change. In 2000, it was 12.8 unemployment rate, a change of 0.4 per cent change. In 2001, it is 11.1 per cent unemployment rate, a change of 1.7 per cent.

As early as 1995, based on our plans and programmes, we forecasted that our economy would have achieved full employment by fiscal 2000. You would recall that I was wrongly chastised for this and accused of living in dreamland and being

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unrealistic. I have no doubt even now, that had the PNM been in government in the ensuing years, this goal would have been achieved. The Minister of Finance has now projected full employment by the year 2010. It has taken him and his Government six years to realize that this is not pie in the sky as they originally thought, but a realistic and achievable target. For me, it is a regret of significance that the country has been denied the opportunity to achieve single digit unemployment rates and moreso, that our country now faces the spectre of underemployment.

As if this is not enough, our economy now seems to be in the early stages of a downturn. The *Review Of The Economy* records that while commercial banks' deposits increase by 5.3 per cent, outstanding credits increased by a mere .04 per cent. Moreover, while credit to the Central Government and the rest of the public sector increased by 2.1 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively, there was a marginal decline in credit to the private sector of .01 per cent. Surely, the first signs of a downturn in consumer confidence.

The following quotes which are taken from the *Review Of The Economy* are instructive. Page 34 states:

“Notwithstanding lower lending rates, credit extended by the commercial banks exhibited only a small increase mirroring the slowing of economic growth during the year.”

Page 37 goes on to say:

“The modest growth in commercial banks' outstanding credit, in the face of an expansion in deposits, mirrored the general slowdown in domestic economic activity,...”

Page 39 states:

“Added to this has been a reduction in the domestic demand for US dollars, engendered in part by a lull in retail sector activity...”

All of it points to one thing.

While the Minister regaled us with empty rhetoric, idle platitudes and cheap and callous attempts to curry favour with the weak, our senior citizens, the destitute and other socially disadvantaged groups in our society, the stark reality of the Trinidad and Tobago economy in fiscal 2001, is a slowdown in domestic economic activity. That is the reality of the situation. These are the objective conditions that a minister of finance is expected to consider in the preparation of the annual budget. As a budget designer the Minister has failed miserably. I should advise him that Meiling is a good designer of clothes, not budgets.

It is obvious that this was not the Minister's intention. Rather, the budget statement was in fact a propaganda tool to be used on the campaign trail should the budget fail to receive the support of Parliament and the President agrees that an election be called. This is seen most clearly when one observes the absence of any attempt to review the measures proposed in the last budget.

May I remind the national community that the general elections held on December 11, 2000 are not yet complete. The process would be completed only when all the election petitions are finally determined. These petitions are listed for October 1, 2001. This Government is aware that it is merely a caretaker government, an interim government, if you prefer. The Government's strategy is most transparent. They are desirous of forcing an election before the final determination of the elections petitions in the hope that the padded voters list would guarantee their victory.

The PNM's position on this issue is very clear. The PNM will contest and win any election tomorrow, as long as the Elections and Boundaries Commission complies with its mandate of ensuring free and fair elections. [*Desk thumping*] This is an appropriate time for us to reiterate our position. We have lost confidence in the Elections and Boundaries Commission.

The hon. Minister of Finance has failed to account for his stewardship over the last fiscal period. For him, last year did not exist. He has failed to consider the prevailing economic environment, both domestic and foreign and he has not considered the potential fallout of September 11, 2001 on the world economic environment. His piddling and tinkering with the economic measures has placed the economy, which is already showing signs of a downturn, at further risk. The failure of the Minister of Finance has left us with no alternative, but to place a PNM position for the consideration of the national community. This is all the more important since the probability is extremely high that it is the PNM that would be called upon to implement a budget for fiscal 2002.

As I stated, this budget has brought into stark focus some major differences in outlook between the UNC and PNM in a number of important areas. The first area is that of a national science and technology park at Wallerfield. I visited such a facility in Taiwan two years ago. A science and technology park is an industrial estate in which there is the commercialization of the results of significant sustained science and technological, research and development efforts conducted at nearby institutions of higher learning.

Silicon Valley in the United States developed largely as a result of research and development done at the nearby California Institute of Technology. In New

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England, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, Boston College, Boston University and other prestigious institutions of higher learning have spawned major science and technology investments in that area. Is such research taking place at the University of the West Indies? The answer is no.

Where in this budget is there the commitment of the necessary funding to allow the University of the West Indies to undertake such research and development efforts? What the Government contemplates is not a science park, but an industrial estate for hightech industries at Wallerfield, targeting as they say 5,000 to 9,700 direct jobs over a 10-year period, as opposed to the PNM's approach of building at Wallerfield an industrial estate based on light manufacturing, including hightech industries and targeting 50,000 to 100,000 jobs in a 20-year period. The difference is that the PNM contemplates the development of major new communities in the area and along the east coast of Trinidad.

2.05 p.m.

Area number two—a national centre for the performing arts. The PNM's concept is for an academy for the performing arts. In the case of the academy, talented citizens would be given an opportunity to be trained to improve their skills. Access to this academy will not involve academic qualifications, but will be on the basis of talent alone. It will therefore cater for a vast number of talented citizens who are now debarred from formal training in this area of skill because they do not possess the requisite academic background. The implications for the Prime Minister's Best Village Programme and for the vast amount of untrained talent existing in our communities are clear.

The PNM remains convinced that the strength of our nation lies in the richness of our cultural diversity and recognizes the vital role culture must play in inculcating in our people a strong feeling of civic pride, patriotism, dignity and self-worth. A PNM government also recognizes that, in the context of industry, culture can generate products that may be marketable and exportable and in the process be instruments of major activity.

In addition to the Academy for the Performing Arts, our programme for culture will focus on the following:

- (1) heritage preservation and protection;
- (2) placing culture and the arts, including steelband instruments and music, squarely within the education system.

Area number three—taxation. Two schools of thought have clashed on taxation policy for quite some time now. On the one hand, there are those who

believe that large numbers of deductions could and should be applied to the taxation system as the government targets the areas in which it wishes to direct economic and therefore social activity. This, however, leads to a very inefficient system, resulting in lower levels of revenue and higher rates of taxation. In addition, this approach constitutes an administrative nightmare for both the State, on the one hand, and the business organizations on the other.

The other approach is one in which tax concessions are given in the three or four areas singled out as national priorities for development, resulting in a cleaner system, easier to police, more effective compliance and lower levels of taxation. The PNM is committed to lower levels of taxation since this leads to greater equity in the propagation of an investment climate that is competitive, resulting in higher levels of job creation. It is this difference in outlook that caused us to announce, since 1995, that we intended to reduce taxes by five percentage points to 30 per cent in the budget for 1996. Moreover, we were targeting a taxation rate of 20 per cent at the earliest opportunity that circumstances permit. This, hon. Members, is the modern approach to taxation. Regrettably, those on the other side are unable to achieve such an objective because of their wanton mismanagement and corruption over the last six years. They prefer to live in the stone age and keep us all there with them.

Area number four—the Government's proposal to expand the port of Point Lisas further. Mr. Speaker, we disagree with this approach. The original development objectives that the PNM set for Point Lisas, when we initiated that major industrial development, have largely been met. This has resulted in County Caroni being the most prosperous county in Trinidad and Tobago with very low levels of unemployment and poverty.

We in the PNM are very proud of this, since we discarded narrow partisan political considerations and located the estate in that part of the country despite its political references. Economic activity for us is a vehicle for social development and, since our social development objectives in County Caroni have now been largely met, we believe that the time is appropriate to transfer PNM's successful approaches to other areas of the country where the social need exists.

This Government's approach to the expansion of the Point Lisas Industrial Development Estate must also be roundly condemned. To relocate the Farmland Ammonia Plant one and a half miles to the north of the estate and one and a half miles to the north from La Brea, cost the State \$110 million. They had to pay \$110 million in infrastructural work to do that. The existence of this plant at this site threatens with destruction the mangrove that forms a part of the Caroni

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Swamp. In fact, that is one of the biggest objections to the expansion of the estate at Point Lisas because it threatens the mangrove development with all the implications that go with this.

In addition, because of the location of that Farmland plant so far away from the harbour, it is not feasible to associate a urea plant with it—a product that now has a ready market abroad. Urea production expansion in Trinidad and Tobago is now constrained by the non-availability of an appropriate site, which is not now available and will not be available from the expanded estate, as conceived by the Government.

What is really required now is a new industrial estate and/or a new strategy for heavy industrial development. The location of the InnCogen power generation plant is also ill-conceived. To the Minister's credit, this year, in relation to InnCogen, he did not tell us the four plants initially used to justify that construction of the InnCogen power plant were coming in any particular time frame. He spared us of that this year and we are grateful to him for that. The Minister chose to remain silent on this issue.

Incidentally, that was the justification for the so-called co-generation that allowed them to give the plant to their friends without tender—four plants were coming with it, you see. Anybody visiting that power plant—this is the InnCogen Power Plant—will see that the sign identifying the site as a location for a number of plants is now overgrown. They would not even clean the site; they do not want us to see it.

Those four plants are not coming and were never intended to come to Trinidad and Tobago. We have now ended up with a power plant that we did not need, far from its source of water, irritating the residents who now live nearby. The short pants man, Mr. Speaker, now looking much more prosperous, continues to drink Scotch and soda on the veranda of the Prime Minister's resident, except that now he is wearing long pants.

Accordingly, our strategy is two-fold:

- (1) develop the almost completed estate at La Brea mainly for downstream industries from the primary products of iron and steel, methanol, ammonia, urea and for any industry that requires a deep-water harbour;
- (2) locate at any appropriate spot along the coast between Point Lisas and Icacos, large plants that can stand alone and which can act as catalysts for social activity and, therefore, social development. County St. Patrick is now one of the most depressed parts of Trinidad and Tobago.

This approach to development as we have just outlined, will also contain, in the Gulf of Paria, any pollution with which such plants are normally associated.

Area number five—the Invaders Bay Project. This Government does not seem to be concerned about the environment in which we live. Any government that can pave the Savannah will do anything. I wish to suggest to hon. Members that we of this generation ought not to see ourselves as inheritors from those who preceded us, but borrowers from those who will succeed us.

A very fragile eco-system exists between Sea Lots and Chaguaramas and before any developmental objectives are identified, a proper and complete environmental study must be carried out. It is only after this is done that development objectives can be identified. Even then, environmental impact assessments must also be done. Scientists are only now beginning to understand the implications of unduly upsetting the environment, implications that can be far-reaching indeed.

Area number six. The Government, of course, is not concerned with the environment. What are we to make of this curious statement on page 39 of the budget, that goes as follows?

“Mr. Speaker, we intend to upgrade the services provided to the people of Tobago in areas such as the inter-island ferry service, the air bridge, the international airlift for bringing tourists to Tobago...”

Such a statement could have been made by any third-standard child and these platitudes have been expressed time and again by this Government. The reality is that they have given us no indication of how they intend to do this and, clearly, this is because they do not know. They have no solution to the problem. Fortunately, the PNM does have a solution to the problem.

We propose the formation of one company to provide air and sea services between Trinidad and Tobago. Such a company must include all the current stakeholders including the State, with each stakeholder putting into the company the assets he now holds which are dedicated to the Tobago service. Such a company would be large to provide other special services in the Caribbean in the more lucrative markets so that the additional revenues can be used to minimize the cost of travel between Trinidad and Tobago.

The company would provide ferry services with two proper and efficient boats, a barge service for transporting bulk cargo, especially building materials, and an efficient airline service between the two islands. Mr. Speaker, we believe that such an approach stands an excellent chance of success.

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Area number seven. Mr. Speaker, the biggest area of difference between the PNM and the UNC as outlined in the budget for fiscal 2002 is in the field of micro and small enterprise development. The Minister of Finance announced increased funding to FUNDAid and the Small Business Development Company; a micro-credit programme introduced in 2001 which really is a slush fund to benefit friends and associates of the ruling party. There is a curious statement on page 33, which goes as follows:

“Further, apart from the general reduction in interest rates, the fact that Government guarantees 80 per cent of loan amounts through the SBDC, we expect that the small businessperson using the SBDC facility to access financing, through commercial banks, will do so at preferential rates.”

A very naïve Minister of Finance. Almost as an afterthought, he announced a micro-credit facility on page 55.

A similar statement was made by the Minister’s predecessor to no avail. Small business loans guaranteed by SBDC are not given at any preferential rates. I do not know how the Minister could expect that will happen without the coercive influence of the State. It does not happen like that. He should know that. He is from a bank.

This approach has not worked in the past. The PNM sees micro and small enterprise development as a major area for the social transformation of our people. This area requires major new institutional arrangements and a new role for the SBDC.

2.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to assure the national community that the PNM has worked out, in great detail, our approach to this important area of national development, and at the appropriate time more of this would be revealed.

I turn now to public administration. As far as the State’s indebtedness to public servants is concerned, the Minister of Finance has said absolutely nothing of any significance. In 1995, the PNM government had several meetings with the various bodies representing our public servants and concluded negotiated settlements to honour the public service pay arrears to a variety of non-cash options—PNM times. Agreements were signed with TTUTA, NUGFW, First Division Fire Services Association, Contractors and General Workers Trade Union, SWWTU, the Institute of Marine Affairs and the Amalgamated Workers Union. I recall clearly, Mr. Speaker, that one of the election promises of the UNC

in 1995, as was articulated by the hon. Member for Couva North at the time, in reference to the debt to public servants was, and I quote:

“A debt is a debt and it must be paid in cash.”

That is what the Member for Couva North had to say on the campaign trail—I almost said Couva South, but that could start a fight in the Parliament and I do not want to do that. Today, after six years, this Minister of Finance comes in a national budget and says that the amount of the indebtedness to the public servants has not been yet quantified, but it is substantial, and he has made adequate provisions for settlement in fiscal 2002. He is trying to create more problems in the public service. What was the Government doing over the last six years with regard to this matter? Absolutely nothing. They were too busy intimidating public servants and lining the pockets of themselves and their friends to do anything meaningful for the public servants themselves.

The commitment of the PNM to our public officers is to settle, expeditiously, all the arrears of income and any other matters pertaining to terms and conditions of service. We will negotiate in good faith and come to a settlement that is mutually accepted by all the stakeholders. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the Employment Training Programme. As much as we have looked, we have not been able to find any allocation for this programme. We must appreciate that regardless of how it is called, URP, ETP or LID, it is the only programme available to bring some real short-term relief to our less fortunate citizens. This Parliament must be told exactly how much money is to be spent on this programme. Why is the amount being concealed? We do not know. I hope that the Minister of Labour, Manpower Development and Industrial Relations, under whose portfolio the ETP falls, will ensure that the programme is properly managed this time around. Proper management includes ensuring that fairness and equity prevail in the administration of the programme, lest like his predecessor, he too becomes a ward of the State. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I have evidence from several constituencies that members and supporters of the PNM are unable to find places in the Employment Training Programme, and it is our understanding that this wicked and ungodly action is supported and encouraged by the hon. Minister of Labour, the Member for Nariva and his Junior Minister, the losing candidate for San Fernando East. [*Interruption*] Wait until the NWRHA's investigations are complete before you talk.

Mr. Speaker, corruption and nepotism are still the order of the day. It requires the PNM government to bring some sanity and control into the ETP and to give

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back dignity to those of our citizens who are forced to rely on this for their existence at this point in time. A PNM government will join with community-based organizations to determine how best the ETP would be administered, so that maximum benefits would accrue to the communities and individuals. The ETP must not be an end in itself, having participated in the programme; there must be other avenues through which individuals then have the opportunity to monetize their acquired skills through agencies such as the Micro and Small Business Enterprise Development Programme, which we would put in place.

Mr. Speaker, at the heart of the PNM's vision for the future lies a sophisticated reconsideration of the relationship between citizens and their community for the global age. The PNM views citizens as active contributors to societies rather than passive benefactors. In this context citizens must be encouraged to take responsibility for their communities to ensure that those communities realize their full potentials. This requires a deepening of the partnership between communities and Government, greater control of communities by citizens particularly in the areas of social services and cultural activities.

These goals may best be achieved by putting the management of communities back into the hands of their local representatives who will be accountable to the communities themselves. Mr. Speaker, over the last five years there has been a movement to centralization, as against the international approach of devolution. The allocation in this year's budget demonstrated this approach. Little or no development funding is provided to corporations, while the Member for St. Joseph, the hon. Prime Minister's new best Minister who replaced Mr. Dhanraj, keeps the bulk of the allocation under his direct control so as to award contracts to friends and families of the Government throughout Trinidad, as he sees fit. [*Desk thumping*] It has been done before. We know the stroke. We know the approach. You have only just come; you might now be learning it.

The PNM, Mr. Speaker, rejects this approach. We commit to divest much of what now passes for community administration from the Central Government to local communities. Moreover, the PNM will devolve an expanded role for provision of services to the local authorities. The UNC's performance with respect to local government has been nothing short of a mishap. That is to say, Mr. Speaker, during the last six years the hon. Prime Minister gave us his best Minister and nothing else. Mr. Speaker, unfortunate as it is, we wonder at the UNC's failings to give support to local government. The hon. Prime Minister's best Minister as you know, is now a constituent of Arouca North [*Laughter*] and a burgess of the Tunapuna/Piarco Corporation, I think, and it is appreciated by

Chairman Narace. As such he is now in a very good condition to truly come to grips with the inadequacies of the local government system. Mr. Speaker, four years ago I cautioned him. Today, as I did then, I now wish to caution you, Mr. Prime Minister, as well as the Minister of Finance and the Member for St. Joseph. I caution all three of you. [*Desk thumping*] And I pause for now.

Mr. Speaker, while the UNC danced and sprinkled powder, the burgesses of every corporation across Trinidad and Tobago have been short-changed, cheated and denied the very basic of amenities. All of this because the hon. Prime Minister and his band of “not so merry men” had an agenda that had nothing to do with the welfare of the ordinary citizens. [*Desk thumping*]

I turn now to urban development and housing. The Minister has identified Invaders Bay and the International Conference Centre as the urban development projects. I have already commented on the Invaders Bay project. With respect to the International Conference Centre, the company, which is sponsoring this project, has indicated a requirement of more than \$500 million from the public purse to undertake the project. The State must provide \$500 million for it. Moreover, the role of the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (UDeCott) in the project is highly questionable. While envisioned initially as a facilitator for Government to allow development of public lands in concert with the private sector, UDeCott has become something more than that. It would appear in the current light to be nothing more than a diversionary channel to allow this Government to manage its affairs in a clandestine manner, in the same way that Nipdec, Tidco, as well as the same UDeCott were used to funnel funds for road paving, bypassing the Central Tenders Board. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, the ACS Complex and Convention Centre was a concept developed by the PNM while this party was in power. It is the UNC Government that has delayed this project for five years. There is little question about the benefit to the country in the long term of having such a development. It simply comes down, as in the case with several other high profile developments during the term of this Government, to our concerns on the mechanics of execution and the level of transparency and equity involved.

For example, Mr. Speaker, did the Government call for proposals? Did the Government publicize what incentives it was prepared to provide for such a development? Who made the decision to go with the particular development, the Government or UDeCott? Did UDeCott evaluate the proposal? I just want to ask the Minister two other questions, since you see, he is formerly associated with Royal Bank and the company involved is RGN. Does the Minister not see that

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being former executive director of Royal Bank could give rise to some concerns over a potential conflict of interest, in having any role on specific projects involving his former substantive employer? Does he not see that? I ask another question: Is any other director of Royal Bank or Royal Bank-controlled companies involved in this project, either through the Government or UDeCott? If you find the answer to that question, Mr. Speaker, you will see a nice web that is being weaved for yet another time.

Before leaving the issue of urban development, permit me, Mr. Speaker, to enquire: What is the Government's policy on the rejuvenation and renewal of our older run-down neighbourhoods? The reality is, they have none. We the PNM will use UDeCott to inject new life into our older communities and allow that State agency to fulfil its original mission by ensuring that commercial development provides sufficient returns to aid non-commercial uses.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister raises the spectre of 30,000 homes being provided for low and moderate-income families. Certainly there is nothing creative in this budget other than a reference to an IDB-negotiated facility in the order of US \$100 million. Assuming that approximately 25 per cent of this facility were used for sites and services, that leaves US \$75 million to provide for the 30,000 homes. The arithmetic is simple, that translates into an average of US \$2,500 per unit or \$15,000 per home. It would appear, therefore, that the IDB facility would be by way of upfront grants. What is perhaps more of a challenge, is that prospective homeowners will have to arrange finance in accordance with market rates. That is what it really implies from what they have said.

Mr. Speaker, given the abject failure of the last housing financing scheme introduced by the Minister of Housing and his predecessor, what steps are being taken to ensure local funding? The Minister details a point schedule on allocating units to the most deserving, but if that is the case, then why are appointments being made for all persons interested in obtaining a unit to have an interview with the Minister of Housing and Settlements? He has an office in the National Housing Authority in San Fernando and one in Port of Spain. I understand, Mr. Speaker, that to see the Minister of Housing and Settlements there is a four-month waiting period. The message is clear.

It would, perhaps, be too sanguine to suggest to the hon. Minister of Finance that he use his banking connections and his ministerial powers of moral suasion to have the commercial banks examine their mortgage interest rates, in light of the recent reduction in deposit rates and the substantial liquidity in the system so that

these interest rates will come down and we could achieve a greater deal of affordability for the less fortunate in our society.

Mr. Speaker, we see that the Minister proposes to get tough with the NHA rentals. Where is the programme that this Government talked about selling off these NHA developments? Where in this budget is there any reference to home improvement and repair? Where in this budget is any reference to reducing the transactional cost of ownership? Where are the financing opportunities for the disabled and the elderly? All of these are important considerations in a proper housing policy. They have talked about none of that. [*Desk thumping*] They have talked about none of that, but they tell us about US \$100 million from the IADB. Where are the financing programmes to assist young families in major cities to get started in home ownership? This is what a government, which thinks about people, thinks about in determining a housing policy. [*Desk thumping*] None of this has been taken into account by the Minister in his housing policy, or by the Government.

2.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, ignore the rhetoric. What do the estimates provide? A reduction from \$73 million in the housing development programme to \$57 million in 2002—a reduction. Is this a government concerned about housing? A reduction of 22 per cent in the development programme, and this Government can still talk about 30,000 units in six years. “Dey talking dotishness”, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Frankly, what we have is a budget bankrupt of ideas and reflecting the deep crisis within the governing party. So it is, “Let’s Make a Deal” time.

There is no vision. There is no policy paradigm. There is no creativity. The Government goes about making deals with their friends, impervious to the need to institutionalize policy so as to ensure transparency and equity. [*Desk thumping*] This budget reflects more of the same. Little reason, Mr. Speaker, why several Members opposite appear to have had enough of their *vaille que vaille* approach. [*Desk thumping*]

Education. Mr. Speaker, I turn now to the political gimmickry, the so-called dollar for dollar education plan. The PNM has always subscribed to an effective programme of subsidized education. With special reference to tertiary education, most of our graduates from the University of the West Indies benefited from free or highly subsidized tuition under the PNM government. Even the introduction of a cess in an environment of structural adjustment was matched with the appropriate student support programmes, so concerned was the former PNM administration

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about tertiary education. Our emphasis will continue to be, ensuring access to university training to all qualified applicants through grants and loans on a needs basis. We will also expand the availability of places through higher utilization of the physical facilities and by increasing the teaching staff; in other words, night classes and all of that.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the inequity implied in the dollar for dollar gimmick, it suffers from demand-side disequilibrium as it fails to consider the current space limitation at the University of the West Indies. We find it amazing that, in championing the Dollar for Dollar Programme the Minister speaks about increasing the number of students who will go to tertiary institutions, particularly UWI, while totally neglecting among other things to address the need that the actual intake capacity of the institution needs to be increased. What is clear is that high pronouncements and cheap platitudes cannot improve the system of education in any country. The business of educating our young is a sacred responsibility. It must not be used to score political points but rather to develop the God-given talents of our young citizens. We cannot simply change from Common Entrance to Secondary Entrance Assessment and trumpet a revolution in education. The focus must be on quality. The People's National Movement will take the system back on track. The White Paper developed in 1992 and 1993 continues to be our guiding policy with the appropriate adjustments where necessary. *[Desk thumping]*

Agriculture. Mr. Speaker, the problems with agriculture are perennial. The sector suffers from low productivity and low production. Estates are abandoned, farmers are disillusioned, little water management is practised, agrotechnique is low and mechanized operations are few. There is little new private investment in this sector and there is a shortage of credit from commercial banks. Nevertheless, a sizable proportion of our national community depends for their daily survival on this sector. Sadly, they can feel no comfort from this budget.

The offer of a one-stop shop for the redevelopment of agriculture is apt to have the same experience as the disaster relief fund, which was to be operational from January 1, 2001. The farmers may see God's face in due course but they have not yet seen that. Now we hear it is to be fully operational during the fiscal year—fully operational, suggesting that it is operational. It “ain” operational at all. There is no fund. As an aside, Mr. Speaker, could we also ask, what has happened to Tidco's one-stop shop? Paving roads, perhaps? I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has said as far as back as 1997 that it will walk the talk. Its policy will be designed to increase employment opportunities and growth within the sector. This remains simply a statement. The Government has

not done anything to promote agriculture. A PNM government will focus on the production of crops aimed at the satisfaction of domestic requirements and encourage the development and effective maintenance of a vibrant food processing industry which will include a significant role at the input level for small farmers. A PNM government will address the technical, economic and operational inefficiencies of Caroni with a view to making the sugar industry efficient and economically viable.

Water for all, Mr. Speaker. This Government promised in its budget statement 2001 that by October of 2000 there would be water for all. Remember the hon. Member for Caroni East. Not only did the Minister of Finance say it, but when he got up you should hear the lyrics, Mr. Speaker. “Yuh talk about talk?” Caroni East—water for all by October 2000. Whatever happened to this boast? Instead, citizens of this country were faced with the spectacle of water for none in the year 2001, since the country had to face the most serious drought ever experienced in its recent history; this because of bad management of the country’s water resources by a WASA board that was described by an international agency as incompetent with nepotism in their appointments. A national agency described the board in that way.

It is no wonder that the Minister of Finance in his Friday’s budget statement could only say:

“...expansion of the nation’s water supply and solid waste management services are as much a part of our programme as the modernization of the telecommunications sector.”

All this talk about “water for all”, they are not saying that again. I imagine the elections have come and the elections have gone, you see. Mr. Speaker, we are being told that the desalination plant is now scheduled to come on stream next month. We will not hold our breath, given the number of dates previously given. Our position on the desalination plant and water supply in general has already been made very clear. After over \$1 billion squandered on the water sector, this Government has increased our water supply by only a meagre 12 per cent. The only thing left for the Minister to say Friday last is that his:

“Government is also working towards the development of an Integrated Water Resources Management System...”

What is this, Mr. Speaker? What, may I ask, is this? I do not know.

Crime. Mr. Speaker, in a response to the budget 2001—2002, we, tongue in cheek, said to the nation that perhaps the UNC’s campaign slogan should have

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been, “We failed with crime please give us more time.” The Minister has proved us prophetic. Listen to the Minister of Finance and I quote:

“...you will agree that while we have done a lot to deal with crime since 1996, we realize that criminal activity is a complex issue and requires a multiplicity of strategies in attempting to reduce its incidence.

With respect to crime prevention, Government will commission studies aimed at developing a fuller perspective on the state of crime...”

Commission studies, Mr. Speaker? In 2001, commission studies to tell us what we already know? Listen to their record, Mr. Speaker. Murders—87; robberies—2,728; larcenies—1,868; total serious crimes—10,082, and that is only for the first eight months of 2001. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we are in a very sorry state. What this Government fails to realize is that their behaviour in office has a demonstration effect on the population.

When before was a Minister incarcerated? When before were there searches of Minister’s homes for illegal activity? We have reached a situation here in Trinidad and Tobago where major infractions by those who are supposed to be exemplars go unpunished. Politicians must not continue with statements of, “I have done nothing wrong”, when there is credible information that suggests the opposite. What example do we expect from our young people? What is the UNC’s solution to crime? Buy 100 more vehicles for the police service. Mr. Speaker, you do not need any police vehicles to catch Dr. Gopeesingh. [*Desk thumping*] You do not need that. The PNM calls on members of the Government to behave themselves in office, to respect their oath of office, the institutions of our democracy, for these are necessary preconditions in our view in our quest for reduction in the levels of criminal activity. [*Desk thumping*] To us, moral authority must come from the top. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the situation in health is a case in point. Where is the national health insurance scheme, which was mentioned in last year’s budget? Silence on it this year. While our citizens are denied proper health care, appointees of the Government are feeding at the trough, and even when they are caught with their hands in the Treasury they are bold enough to declare that they are not resigning. The situation at the North West Regional Health Authority is a national disgrace. [*Desk thumping*] While the Minister would have us believe that there is nothing rotten in the state of Trinidad and Tobago, we are faced with the spectacle of a former chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority having been found guilty of an abuse of power in the award of unauthorized, illegal and scandalous

employment contracts refusing to do the decent thing and resign his position, and brashly declaring he would do it all again.

So in Trinidad under this administration, bandits can pilfer the public purse with impunity and break every rule in the book and live to boast about it. It is with a heavy heart, Mr. Speaker, that we have to call on the Minister of Health to resign. Let him resign. [*Desk thumping*] I also call on his junior minister to resign forthwith for abusing his authority as confirmed in the NWRHA report. [*Desk thumping*] Twenty-six letters were written trying to instruct the authority— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: Instructing?

Mr. P. Manning:—instructing who to hire and who not to hire. You see, they have this view, you know, Mr. Speaker, that is how the PNM operated. The PNM was not so foolish—entirely out of order and improper. The PNM does not operate in that way. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I call on the former chairman, Sen. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, to resign forthwith, [*Desk thumping*] failing which, I call on the Prime Minister to advise the President to revoke his senatorial appointment. [*Desk thumping*] Let us return morality, decency and accountability to public life. [*Desk thumping*] The very soul of our nation is threatened. Wanton waste and corruption engulf the corridors of power. Our institutions are under threat.

The Elections and Boundaries Commission, the primary watchdog of our democracy, is under siege. There is a lack of accountability in our state companies. All around us, societal norms are being challenged and changed as personal gains and individual agendas replace the public good. The PNM is the only hope out of this morass. [*Desk thumping*] Trinidad and Tobago cries out for a return to ethics, honesty, integrity and morality in public affairs, [*Desk thumping*] for respect for state institutions, for good governance, for public safety, for accountability, clarity and transparency in government dealings. Our country cries out for fair play and equity. These considerations overshadow the Minister's attempt at budgeting.

Mr. Speaker, what can one say of an attempt that lacks rigour, that is silent on a consideration of the economic environment, that fails to provide any initiatives to arrest the decline in the real sectors of the economy, that concentrates on palliatives at the expense of a focused vision or major thrust, that fails to target a certain percentage of revenue from its \$16 billion budget to a comprehensive social safety net package? If the budget was short on one thing, it was that. Notwithstanding all the talk about people-oriented, the budget did not demonstrate

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that any social safety net is in place. [*Desk thumping*] They have done nothing about that.

Over the last month, the Government has been so wracked by internal wrangling and bickering that the daily public revelations of massive and widespread corruption in the conduct of public affairs that threatened to engulf the ruling party have taken second place to obscene name-calling. So, instead of endless corruption scandals on the front page of the newspapers, we have been confronted on a daily basis with the use by the Prime Minister of expressions such as—well, I “cyar say de first one”. [*Interruption*]

Mr. B. Panday: Just say, “Let them bray”. [*Inaudible*]

Mr. P. Manning: I never knew, Mr. Speaker, that I would reach the stage where I take advice from the hon. Prime Minister, but I will—with the use by the Prime Minister of expressions such as—let them bray?—“Let them bray”, “Judas”, “bachac”, “corbeaux” and all of these to describe members of his own Government, in yet another thinly disguised attempt by the Prime Minister to distract the public from the real issues facing the country. And in this budget address we see the new Minister of Finance, who is well aware of the extent to which his Government is tainted and immersed in deceit and duplicity, trying to sweep it all under the carpet by brazenly declaring that no other Government has taken the steps that they have taken to deal with corruption.

Mr. Valley: Shame on you!

Mr. P. Manning: What utter rubbish, Mr. Speaker! [*Desk thumping*] They must take us all for fools. They glibly speak of investigations that achieve nothing and parliamentary committees that cannot work, but they refuse to admit what the entire country knows to be true, which is that their empty rhetoric about positive action on corruption is but a smokescreen and a facade to conceal and cover up the truth.

While the Minister bleats about his Government’s stance on corruption, we hear of rampant fraud and theft at Metal Industries Company Limited (MIC), that has apparently been going on for years, to the tune of millions of dollars. We see the Government’s favourite sons denying responsibility after having filled their pockets at taxpayers’ expense. We see them preparing to feed at the trough again in their latest scam, aptly misnamed the Skills Development Centre, where the only skills that would be developed is how to steal, cheat and embezzle public funds. [*Desk thumping*]

We see the shocking situation with the billion-dollar, second-rate airport, that iniquitous shed of shame with mismatched tiles, leaking roofs, antiquated and defective equipment, shoddy workmanship, poor construction and substandard and ineffective design and meanwhile you are not hearing anything about the Linquist report. While the Government claims to be initiating so many investigations into alleged corruption, they continue to resist the holding of a proper enquiry into the massive fraud and corruption at Piarco. What are they hiding from us at Piarco, Mr. Speaker?

Why does the Minister not want to find out where all that money went? We want to know. I am sure he would want to know too. Why does he not want to know why the cost for that tasteless shack masquerading as an airport moved from \$400 million in 1995, to \$700 million in 1996, to \$1.5 billion in 2000 and to \$1.6 billion in 2001? Is he protecting someone close to the seat of power? I do not know. Why is the Minister concerning himself with nickels and dimes when hundreds of millions of dollars have been squandered and stolen right in front of his nose? [*Desk thumping*] The Government's steadfast refusal over the last four years to commission an enquiry into the airport racket is living testimony to the mockery and contempt concealed within the Minister's pious platitudes about fighting corruption.

2.55 p.m.

Look at the ISS report on the raging epidemic of corruption at Petrotrin. This report has implicated a former Minister of Energy and also points to the connection of a former Member of the Petrotrin board who is now a Member of Parliament for the time being. The cover up involving the attempted theft of hundreds of millions of dollars of public funds.

The findings in the ISS report and scale of the corruption involved are unheard of in Trinidad and Tobago. They reveal a web of intrigue and double dealing at almost every level of the state sector, yet the Prime Minister has sat on this report for six months, and to this day, refuses to hand it over to the Attorney General who is the competent authority and advisor within the Cabinet on the legality and validity of contracts and acts of misconduct by Government officials. [*Desk thumping*]

It appears that the ISS report is destined to gather dust like the buried Soodhoo report which exposed the high jinx at National Petroleum Company Limited (NP) and implicated a number of top ranking Government officials in questionable transactions involving the construction of gas stations. Again, the Prime Minister

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refused to table that report in Parliament on the weak and flimsy grounds that it contained libelous statements. Imagine, no less a man than the Member for Couva North who has demonstrated time and again, inside and outside of Parliament, that he has no licence for his mouth, being afraid of tabling a ministerial report on corruption under cover of parliamentary privilege. He is afraid.

The situation repeats itself with those infamous secondary school building contracts which have gone from their original budget of \$100 million in 1998 to \$200 million in 1999, to \$400 million in 2000, to \$500 million in 2001. All with no rational explanation and all in the space of less than three years. Yet, no forensic audit has been ordered for MTS where the scam began and continues to this day.

No one is being made to account for this waste and mismanagement of public funds by MTS; least of all the Chairman who was last seen trying to illegitimately and forcibly acquire private land to build a mysterious port at Toco. No one at MTS has been asked to explain why schools like the Blanchisseuse school are one year behind schedule, while the Minister carries on about the dollar for dollar scam which is merely a device to enrich supporters of the ruling party who have suddenly become educators overnight. No possible explanation is given by the Minister for the massive cost overruns at all these schools.

Mr. Speaker, last year we presented the top 10 of corruption, squandermania, waste and nepotism. We were of the view that by highlighting these scandalous acts and bringing them to the attention of the Parliament and, by extension, the national community, that the perpetrators would cease or considerably curb their outrageous behaviour. However, it has apparently become a bad habit which they cannot stop.

You know the old saying: It is difficult to stop a dog from sucking eggs. Once you suck egg, you suck egg, Mr. Speaker. You like eggs till you die. Today I restate that list. The Piarco Airport terminal; that is the first one. InnCogen, desalination, Caroni, NP gas station upgrade, Miss Universe beauty contest, WINSURE settlement to Maritime Life, White Hall renovation, NFM rice and Tobago ferry penalty compensation.

Mr. Speaker, this year, as more and more corruption comes to the attention of the national community, we have a new hit parade. Number one, the North West Regional Health Authority. Top of the charts. [*Desk thumping*] A close second on the charts this year: Petrotrin. Number three, TIDCO road paving programme. Number four, cellular contract to Government Minister. Number five—and I want

to get the attention of my good friend from St. Joseph—sale of Caroni Rum Division. Like he is not hearing, Mr. Speaker. Well if he did not hear that, he might hear this one. Sale of Tanteak. [*Laughter*]

Mr. John: Nice one.

Mr. P. Manning: Number seven, for all those who travel north to south, Solomon Hochoy Highway. Talk about scandal! Number eight, construction of the National Library. Number nine, construction of four new stadia—my good partner. And number 10, construction of secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker, every three months I could change the hit parade. [*Desk thumping*] Every three months, I could change it. The corruption is continuing in this country at a scale that is unprecedented. [*Desk thumping*] As far as we on this side are concerned, therefore, the Minister of Finance is simply two-faced and hypocritical when he claims that his Government is serious about corruption.

He is fooling no one but himself as he mouths this nonsense. He sits in Cabinet and condones the actions of government Ministers with their private business interests, who make decisions which favour their friends and associates. I better read that again. He is fooling no one but himself, Mr. Speaker, as he mouths this nonsense. He sits in the Cabinet and condones the actions of Government Ministers, with private business interests, who make decisions which favour their friends and associates, as we read in the newspapers of the scandalous giveaway of public assets at a fraction of their real value: Tanteak and Caroni Rum Division.

The Minister is part and parcel of the Government's conspiracy to conceal the criminal actions of the supporters and friends of his newfound party, as is his Prime Minister. And he must take full responsibility for every corrupt act of his illegitimate regime that now squats temporarily in the corridors of power.

Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance may wish to investigate the de facto owner of the posh residence situated at 12A, Campden Hill Court, Campden Hill Road, Kensington, London, W87LR. And if you cannot recognize the apartment, here is a picture of it. [*Displays coloured photograph*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I imagine you would want to see it too. I give it to the Clerk so that it can be drawn to your attention appropriately. [*Passes photograph to the Clerk*] I can tell you one thing, Mr. Speaker. That the de jure owner of the apartment is Saint Sampson's Limited. Who is the de facto owner?

Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Finance neither understands the society in which he lives, nor does he know what is going on here. This does not surprise us since

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he is safely ensconced in his ivory tower in Westmoorings. There are a few things that we think he ought to be told. First of all, if you go to someone's home and they offer you salt fish, they are not poor. They are well off. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] Salt fish sells at \$22 a pound. Poor people cannot afford that. What poor people eat is chicken. [*Laughter*]

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister should know that few people in this country now use blue soap. Blue soap was used many years ago to wash khaki pants. [*Laughter*] What poor people now use is Breeze.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has been quite generous to the people of Tobago in promising to initiate construction this year on new primary schools at Buccoo Government, Castara Government, a new secondary school at Mason Hall, and new community centres at Bon Accord, Bethel, Lambeau, Pembroke and Mount Saint George. I think the Minister ought to know that Government primary schools already exist at Buccoo and Castara. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] That the Mason Hall Secondary School is already under construction; they are not going to initiate anything this year. And community centres already exist at Bon Accord, Bethel, Lambeau, Pembroke and Mount Saint George. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of Tobago, I thank the hon. Minister very sincerely for his kind generosity.

Mr. Valley: Send the money still. We will build something else.

Mr. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Minister should know that his \$10 million allocation for the treatment and cure of AIDS is very welcome. Except that—and he might not know it—there is, as of now, no cure for AIDS. At number five, the Minister indicated that construction of the CL Financial M5 Plant is in progress. Construction of the CL Financial M5 Plant is not in progress. What they have done so far is to build a new administrative centre for all their plants on the site of the M5 Plant. Please do not be fooled by what your colleague from St. Joseph tells you. Do not be fooled.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, I wish to remind this Government that economic performance is not a chance event. The waste, mismanagement and the corruption of this Government has squandered and frittered away the inheritance. More than two years ago, we in the PNM signalled that the management of our public finances left much to be desired, and that our economy would be in recession unless there were some drastic changes. Though oil prices came to our rescue, unplanned and increasing central government fiscal deficit persisted.

That analysis was based on the fact that though the Government has been high on propaganda and public relations, the perception of corruption pervades the corridors of power, and it has been extremely low on economic policy initiatives. The vibrancy, efficiency and effectiveness that were the hallmarks of the 1992—1995 period have been conspicuously absent, while the legacy inherited by the Government is frittered away into the pockets of friends, family and party hacks.

Economic fortune is not a chance event. It is the result of clarity of vision, leadership and management. As a fact, Mr. Speaker, this Government has completed some of the projects which were in the pipeline when the PNM left office in November '95. However, those initiatives which were in the embryonic stages have been stillborn, while others have suffered from a lack of appreciation of the overarch envisioned.

The Orinoco/Apure project remains on a cold backburner. The BWIA/LIAT hub-spoke initiative was not understood nor appreciated. The business and financial centre concept is now being revived and trumpeted as a new initiative. Six years old. How different this is to the committed and dedicated approach to economic management evidenced over the period 1992—1995 through the liberalization of the economy. Major initiatives included signing of the one-way trade agreement with Venezuela and Colombia; complete removal of the negative list anti-dumping legislation; liberalization of the currency and the foreign exchange market—most important decision, Mr. Speaker.

Relaxation of the work permit requirements to allow foreigners to be gainfully employed in Trinidad and Tobago for up to 30 days, thereby facilitating short-term foreign expertise to the manufacturing and services sectors; membership in the Andean Development Bank to provide a source of credit to the private sector; sourcing financing through a US \$27 million business and industrial sector World Bank low-interest loan for the private sector to finance new plant and equipment; the rationalization of the state enterprises sector which resulted in a reduction in the participation by the State in the commercial sector and in Treasury funding for state enterprises.

Investment facilitation involving, Mr. Speaker, the encouragement of savings by the ordinary citizen to the reintroduction of the tax-free savings bonds and enhanced credit union and Unit Trust tax incentives. Enhancing the domestic investment climate by executing an investment promotion and protection agreement with the United Kingdom. A bilateral investment trade and an intellectual property rights agreement with the United States; and a revised double taxation agreement and a foreign investment protection agreement with Canada.

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Legislating the Financial Institutions Act to regulate banks and other financial institutions and the Venture Capital Act. The positioning of Trinidad and Tobago as a business and financial capital, and the gateway to South America and the undertaking of investment missions to sell the concept: Encouragement of energy related investments, namely the development of gas fields in the southeast coast by Enron at an estimated cost of US \$250 million; the divestment to the German firm Ferrostaal of an interest in the Trinidad and Tobago Methanol Company, and the further investment by that company in two new methanol plants; the investment by a consortium of three foreign investors in the LNG plant; the investment by Ispat in ISCOTT, and that company's further investment in a new DRI plant; the investment by Farmland in a US \$300 million ammonia facility; encouragement to the private sector by providing an environment conducive to economic growth. This included stable macroeconomic policies, falling unemployment, low inflation, prudent fiscal policies, negotiation of trade agreements, infrastructure development in water, electricity and the competitive environment.

The legacy, Mr. Speaker, bequeathed to the new government was not mere happenstance. It was the result of vision, planning and implementation, qualities and attributes which seem to be lacking by those currently in charge. Sadly, the incompetence, mismanagement and corrupt practices of the Government have to be paid for by the ordinary man, either through higher taxes, underemployment, unemployment or lack of amenities.

The outlook for the new fiscal period is not bright, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister's budget will merely exacerbate the downturn in the economy. Over the last six years, the Government has squandered our inheritance. Mr. Speaker, the country cries out for the return of the PNM.

I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs (Hon. Mervyn Assam): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank you for giving me the opportunity to intervene in this debate on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2002. We have just been treated to about almost an hour and three-quarter by the Leader of the Opposition and Member for San Fernando East of a requiem for the Trinidad and Tobago and world economy. Secondly, he gave us a treatise on corruption; and thirdly, he made some statements attributing some kind of performance by his government when he was in office during the period 1992—1995.

Mr. Speaker, it is very sad that someone who has positioned himself to take charge of this country and, consequently, will become a regional leader and will

have to interface and interact with world leaders can only speak of doom and gloom. It reminds me of when the Member for Diego Martin Central, in the budget debate of 1999, stood in this Parliament and predicted serious recession, high inflation, and that the Trinidad and Tobago dollar will depreciate to the point where it may be even eight or nine to one.

3.15 p.m.

Of course, all these maledictions have not come to pass and we have seen buoyancy, growth and development in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago over the last two years. The Member for San Fernando East is quite right; this did not come by chance. It is, perhaps, the only thing he said that was correct this afternoon. It did not come by chance; it came by serious planning and implementation and the hard work of Government, the public service and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly in the private sector, who were responsible for the transformation of this country over the last five and a half years and, particularly, over the last two or three years. To them we must show our great gratitude.

I, therefore, wish to compliment my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance, for producing yet another budget; the seventh of this United National Congress Administration, where we have delivered and performed to the satisfaction of the citizens of this country, to the extent that they returned us resoundingly on December 11, 2000, by over 307,000 votes. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East said that the budget was devoid of analysis and that there was nothing concerning what had taken place in the past year. I often wonder—because I have had to repeat it several times during my budget contributions over the last seven—because this is the seventh budget—that the budget statement is only part of the budget. We have several documents: the *Review of the Economy 2001*. Mr. Minister of Finance, through you, Mr. Speaker, did you stint in giving the Opposition copies of this document? [*Laughter*] I wonder if you were biased in not giving them copies? The *Review of the Economy* is part of the documents. The *Public Sector Investment Programme 2002* is part of the budget. The *Medium Term Policy Framework 2002/2004* is part of the budget and, of course, the voluminous documents of revenue and expenditure, both for the public service, the statutory boards and so on, are all part of the budget statement.

I cannot understand why the Member for San Fernando East, who boasts that he is now serving 30 years in the Parliament—he was Prime Minister for a little

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less than four years; he was a Minister for a few years—of course, not under Eric Williams, because he dared not make him a minister, because he did not think that he had the capacity to be a minister; he was not a minister under the Eric Williams administration—comes here year after year and does not understand that it is a compendium of documents that form the budget statement of the Minister of Finance and of this Government for the ensuing year and for the ensuing three years with the medium term policy. I will not waste more time on that.

He went on to lament what is happening in the world economy and, particularly, the tragic events; as if he is gloating about the tragic events that took place on Tuesday, September 11, as if to say, “It’s good for you UNC people; ah almost glad that the ting happen so that you can’t achieve your budgetary objective!” It was almost like it was that he was trying to tell us and the national community. He started to talk about increasing unemployment, slow growth, reduced demand. He knows nothing about economics so I suppose one of his members must have given him these fancy phrases to talk in economic jargon.

He went on to say that we, too, have suffered, in Trinidad and Tobago, all these symptoms that characterized the world economy over the last year or so. He quoted the Central Statistical Office statistics. Whenever we quote CSO statistics they say that these statistics are not correct, so I am happy that he quoted, so I will follow in his footsteps. [*Interruption*] The only time I will follow in his footsteps, because I will quote CSO statistics.

He said that the manufacturing sector has not grown. I will tell you the contribution to GDP of the manufacturing sector since this Government assumed the reins of office. In 1996, \$2.4 billion; 1997, \$2.8 billion; 1998, \$3.4 billion; 1999, \$3.7 billion; 2000, \$4.1 billion and to September 2001—the year has not ended yet—\$4.2 billion. The year has not ended—[*Desk thumping*] CSO statistics. The Member for San Fernando East gets up and misleads the House and, by extension, the national community.

He talked about job creation. These are CSO statistics again: in 1996, the manufacturing sector contributed to the job stock in the country 43,300 jobs; 1997, 44,900; 1998, 49,500; 1999, 51,300 and in 2000, 53,800. That was just in manufacturing; I can give you services. In 1996, 284,500; 1997, 294,400; 1998, 312,300; 1999, 317,200 and in 2000, 334,400. Increasing jobs in manufacturing, increasing jobs in services from year to year under a UNC Administration. [*Desk thumping*] I can give you the breakdown for the utilities, transport, finance, insurance, government and education, but there is no need to, because you can do

your research with the Central Statistical Office, a source that was quoted by the Member for San Fernando East.

Mr. Speaker, when you come to this honourable House and you want to feel that you are holier than thou, you must speak the truth, because as the lawyers say, when you go to court you must come with clean hands. You must come with clean hands in the Parliament because this is the highest court and when you speak, you must speak the truth and you must be factual. If you are incapable of analysis, sit down and shut up!

He said that 59 cents of every dollar in the budget is going to debt servicing. The Member for San Fernando East must have gone out of his mind. That is what he said: 59 cents of every dollar is going to debt servicing, so it is only 41 cents to do the rest. This is the most misleading statement that a man, who says he wants to be the next leader of this country, could make to a Parliament and the national community when, in fact, out of a budget of \$16 billion, charges on account of the public debt is 3.8, so it is less than 25 cents. It is here for everybody to see; it is right here. But he thinks he can come and mislead the public and the Parliament, create confusion in people's mind with a view to creating a certain amount of social and political instability in the society.

Then he says that we borrowed \$2.6 billion more, even after the Minister of Finance had announced a moratorium on borrowing. I think Yul Brynner in *The King and I* would say that that is a false lie. [*Laughter*] I think Yul Brynner would describe it in *The King and I* as a “false lie”, because there was no borrowing after the Minister of Finance had announced the moratorium. The only thing we did was to continue to honour the commitments that we had made prior to the moratorium.

I think it is a question of intellectual problems for the Member. He does not make a distinction between borrowing and the Minister of Finance coming to the Parliament and seeking authority to increase borrowing limits. In other words, if you have an overdraft of \$20,000—not that you want to borrow more, but you would like to have a greater borrowing capacity—you go to your banker and say, “I want my overdraft increased from \$20,000 to \$40,000.” In case something down the road takes place, you cater for this eventuality.

People do not understand, it is the same thing that Eric Williams did when we were flowing in oil money, in “petro dollars” as they say; during that period where the late Prime Minister of Jamaica, Michael Manley, said that your \$80 billion went through the system like a “dose of salts”. Although you had lent him

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\$200 million, that was his remark to you, your party, your government in power then. Dr. Eric Williams, notwithstanding those enormous surpluses of revenue, went on to the world financial market and borrowed money.

Do you know what was his explanation, Mr. Speaker? Every country must have a credit rating. It is true, because if you go abroad and you do not have a credit card in your pocket, you cannot rent a car, you cannot go into a hotel. They do not take money, you have to give them a credit card, so you must have a credit rating. Everybody who has any sense establishes a credit rating, not because you need it but because we live in a society that requires you to have a credit rating.

So if you have \$100,000 you do not buy a car cash; you take it out on hire purchase or bill of sale terms. If you have \$1 million, you do not buy or build a house; you take out a mortgage. That is why they do not understand: you can borrow to save, even though we did not do it. He does not understand that; and this man says he knows finance, but they do not understand these things. We will teach you. Once you remain on those Benches, we will teach you, but you may not have the capacity to learn; that is the unfortunate thing. You may not have it.

He talked about our debt ratio to GDP. The PNM's debt ratio when they were in office was 60 per cent to GDP; that is a fact. They want to give us the impression that they prudentially managed the economy when they were in office. They want to give us that impression.

He went on to knock the port project and the technology park and asked, "Where will the Government get the \$1.2 billion," without realizing that it is a joint venture between the Government and the private sector. So the project of \$1.2 billion will be funded both by the private sector and the Government, and the Government's contribution is not immediate. It is over a period of 20 years, or whenever it is, so that it will soften the amount of liability and commitment that the Government has, over a 20-year period for that project.

With respect to the technology park, the Minister of Finance has provided \$55 million in this budget period, but we have developers who are prepared to put US \$75 million as soon as we come up with our TT \$55 million. Did you hear what I said, Mr. Speaker? We have developers who are prepared to put US \$75 million once we come up with our TT \$55 million. He says that that is not the kind of development he wants; he wants an industrial park. Why did he not do it when he was there? Why did the PNM not do it when they were in office for 35 years?

You see, Mr. Speaker, they do not understand that the world has changed. What he wants is for people to continue to make garments and knock up a few

little things together and call it an industrial park, when we are going into high-tech, knowledge-based industries; that is what we are providing. [*Desk thumping*] I cannot understand why the Member for San Fernando East is so thick. We are moving away from that and going into services and knowledge-based industries and that is why we are training our young people.

They are knocking the dollar for dollar programme and calling it a scam; they cannot take it. Do you know why? Because education is going to transform this society. [*Desk thumping*] Knowledge is power and they cannot take that, because they under-educated the people of this country. They built a few comprehensive schools which they could not manage; they did not have the capacity to do it. Therefore, they brought out functional illiterates, for years. Our approach to education is different. We are not building a set of comprehensive schools to give people the impression that we are educating people. We are giving people quality education.

So when the Member for San Fernando East said that he wants to go back, I could understand. We want to go forward with education, he wants to go back. [*Laughter*] We are going forward, he wants to go back. That is his problem; he always wants to go back, but Sparrow said, “Doh back back on me boy.” [*Laughter*] “Doh back back” at all; we must go forward. So he wants an industrial estate. We started industrial estates many years ago and established what you call “infant industries” and, unfortunately, many of them have not grown up since.

He said that he does not want a national centre for the performing arts. Could you imagine that? What he wants is an academy. Is it Plato Academy he wants? I do not know. He does not want a centre for the performing arts. Why did he not build an academy when he was there? Why did the PNM not do it in 35 years? Suddenly we are going to build a centre for the performing arts, where all our artistes will have an opportunity to exhibit their skills and talents for the benefit of our own people and will create a tourism product for people who visit our land, but he wants an academy.

Do you know what is the *coup de grace*? Their taxation policy. The members of the PNM should never talk about taxation; never, because when the National Alliance for Reconstruction came into office, notwithstanding very stringent and difficult economic times, they changed the whole taxation policy and philosophy, made the system simpler and moved from personal direct to indirect by the introduction of VAT. As soon as the PNM came into office in 1991, under their minister who says that he wants to get back into politics—I see that he is going all about saying that he wants to get back into politics. I know the PNM will kill him

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if he ever tries that. I know that they are only waiting to destroy him. Every year of a PNM budget, '92, '93, '94 and '95, they increased taxes.

Not only did they increase taxes—because the NAR had rolled back, they increased it—the allowances that people had for their mortgages— Now that is a serious thing, when a husband and wife go to a mortgage company and say, “On the basis of our salary, we would like to have a mortgage for X number of dollars to be paid over a 20-year period, with an instalment of so and so, amortized,” and they do that on the basis that government has given them a commitment that they would have certain deductions for their mortgage interest and repairs and maintenance of their home. Do you know what Mottley and his motley crew did? They just chopped it; every year they chopped. In fact, they eventually removed maintenance and repair allowances and they chopped.

You could have claimed every cent of your mortgage interest. It went to 48,000 then 36,000 then they brought it right down, imperilling the standard of living of families, particularly young families. And they want to talk about this Government “ain't” care about poor people and young people. Imperilled, you know, Mr. Speaker.

Do you know what happened? Many people lost their houses as a result. Those people; those unconscionable, heartless, wicked people. This is what he said, “If you cannot reduce the taxation by a decent level, rather than 1 per cent, you should not touch it at all.” Could you imagine that?

We have signalled both to the corporate community and to the individual taxpayer in this country that we are beginning a programme of incremental reduction of income tax and corporation tax, so that if every year we bring it down by 1 per cent, by the year 2005, we would have had it down from 35 to 30 and from 28. Could you imagine this thing? In addition to which, we have also removed the nuisance taxes.

Mr. Speaker, do you know the nuisance taxes that the PNM introduced to this country? Wicked, vile, malicious nuisance taxes: 6 per cent on your general insurance policy premium, which we have just liquidated; 6 per cent. Could you imagine what hardship they put on people, 15 per cent on your savings?

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Imagine you want to increase the level of savings rather than they having to borrow all the time from outside and to increase the level of savings in order to convert savings into investments in this country. They imposed a tax of 15 per cent on savings. The PNM did it. It was this administration that dropped it to 10 and then to 5 per cent and I thank the Minister of Finance that last Friday he

dropped it to zero, like the VAT, zero-rated, and they want to talk about tax policy, those wicked, vile people.

Do you know that they imposed what is called a transaction tax in banks? If you want to go to the United States or the Canadian Embassy to get a visa and you go to the banks for a letter stating how much money you have with them, they will charge you \$50.00 for the letter and 15 per cent on the \$50.00 for the transaction tax. If you buy a bank draft to send to your children who are studying abroad, you are charged 15 per cent. In addition to the draft, there is a 15 per cent tax for that and that kind of thing.

For your safety deposit box, 15 per cent tax. The PNM government, when it was in office imposed all kinds of taxes on the population. According to the saying: “Yuh” wet them with taxes. And they want to talk about taxation policy. We eliminated the need—not only in terms of the inconvenience that you had to line up for days in the hot sun and in the rain—to pay motor vehicle licences annually. Could you imagine this thing?

This Government has been the most receptive to the needs of persons involved in wages and salaries in this country, and particularly those over 60. Because the requirement for those over 60 years was removed in terms of the savings. Last year it moved from 24,000 to 30,000 in terms of your personal deductions. This year it moved from 30,000 to 36,000, and you are talking about taxation policy? All they knew was to tax and spend and squander, that is all they know about, and they do not want to expand Point Lisas.

Do you know they have the temerity—why do they come to this Parliament and tell untruths? The PNM put an industrial estate in Point Lisas. Do you know who started the industrial estate at Point Lisas, Mr. Speaker? The Southern Chamber of Commerce. They are the ones who started it and because at that time the Government of the day had the excess revenue as a result of petro dollars, they took the idea and ran with it. But they had no vision. And they want to talk about squandermania! I am surprised that the Member could raise this LABIDCO (La Brea Industrial Development Company) thing again. They want to develop the LABIDCO estates in La Brea for downstream industries. They squandered \$135 million there and have the audacity to say that we had to spend \$110 to move Farmland. Farmland could not have been located there. They spent \$135 million, wasted it into the ground as they wasted in the Caroni Racing Complex, as they wasted in the King George V Park and all these things, but they want to talk about wasting and squandermania. If you people have short memories, I would educate you on your sins.

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The Member does not want Invaders Bay because of the ecology and the environment, but this Government has been following the rules. Every project that is initiated in this country must have an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment), so I do not know what the Member is talking about. It is as if he just woke up yesterday and heard about EIA. It reminds me of “E I E I O”, maybe that is what he just woke up to hear.

They want to talk about Tobago. They suffered the Tobago people for years. The Member for Tobago West would not admit it but, you know, the truth would set you free. You must be liberated by the truth. The PNM in office suffered Tobago for years. It is this Government that has been giving them development: roads, self-sufficiency in water, \$37 million in a new electricity submarine line.

We talked about the stadium. We gave you stadium, you will be getting hospitals just now, more schools, more funding. You never had that level of funding for more recurrent or development before, but they want to talk about this Government.

The Member for San Fernando East comes today and talks about having a solution—a company for air and sea services. Who does he want to give that to? The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and others?

Micro and small enterprise: Can you imagine that? They did absolutely nothing for micro, medium and small enterprises. We are the ones who ran with it to the extent that we have a small business leasing company today and we are creating a new culture of entrepreneurship and people are now going to that leasing company because they do not have to go to the bank to pay that onerous rate of interest that eats into their pockets as a result of interest costs, and that is taking off.

What the Minister of Finance talked about—he never said that it exists today—preferential rates. We are working on it. We are asking the banks to develop a window of opportunity, a dedicated window of lending to provide that kind of equity lending to small businesses so that they will pay, not the regular rate of interest, but a rate of interest that is more in sync with the development of micro, small, and medium businesses. We are going to get it done, have no fear. I see the Bank of Nova Scotia today dropped its interest rate to 14 per cent and we are going to get the banks to come around in a consortium to do it.

The Member spoke about arrears to public servants. Do you know in the days of Moses, he would have turned into a pillar of salt? It is this Government that satisfied and paid every arrear to public servants that we inherited from the NAR

and PNM governments. [*Desk thumping*] The only area that is still to be settled is the increment and they did not do anything about it, and the Minister of Finance has clearly stated that he has had very cordial and harmonious discussions with the Public Services Association and the unions that represent the public service and they intend to settle it in the year 2002. You cannot say that is an idle promise or boast, because we settled every arrear and every outstanding liability that we inherited from the two previous parties that were in office.

They talk about they being responsible for expanding tertiary education and they are pooh-poohing our dollar for dollar plan. Do you know that Trinidad and Tobago is one of the most prosperous and most modern countries in the Caribbean and perhaps in Latin America and we have the lowest rate of entrance of the High School cohort graduates in tertiary education? Less than 8 per cent, and they were in office for 35 years. They should be ashamed.

I know the Member for Arima is an intelligent, progressive person; I do not know how she tolerates that. Such a decent, intelligent woman. I do not know how she tolerates those lies and lack of care. Less than 8 per cent. One of the worst in the world. China, almost 50 per cent; Singapore, 60 per cent; India, 42 per cent; Barbados, close to 20 per cent; Jamaica, 16 per cent; Trinidad and Tobago, less than 8 per cent under a PNM regime of 35 years. You should do like Tom Dooley, hang down your head in shame, all of you. Hang down your head in shame, or be hanged.

The Member wants to return this Parliament to decency, morality and accountability to public life. I have some documents here with the names of Rennie Dumas, Lawrence Achong—well Lawrence Achong's name is appearing three times here, he is getting plenty contracts. Mejias, Deputy Chairman of Tunapuna/Piarco; Raj Maraj, Councillor; something Pierre, another Councillor; all of them are PNM, you know. Fitz Hudson Regis—who is that, boy? Do you know what happen? All the PNM from all parts of Trinidad and Tobago, like vultures, have come to feed on the carcass of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation which is PNM-controlled whose chairman is Mr. Jerry Narace. And all these contracts were awarded without tender, every one.

Hon. Member: Read it.

Hon. M. Assam: I am not reading them. I want to deal with the budget, but the documents are here where all PNM from Point Fortin, to Arima, to Tunapuna, to Arouca South, to Tobago and so on are feeding on this carcass and that is why we cannot get any service in the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation.

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In all the cemeteries, the bush is 10 feet high; all the recreation grounds, the grass is three feet high; all the pavilions are broken down; garbage strewn all over the place; no drainage; mosquito infestation and the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation buying Prado, cellular phones for everybody, bills running up to \$2,000 a month and accounts at Chinese restaurants running up to \$30,000 a month and they are giving contracts without tendering, to their PNM friends and they want to talk about corruption, nepotism, and mal-administration. You people have a nerve. Dishonesty of the highest order! The signatures are here, you know. You cannot deny it is not Rennie Dumas and Lawrence Achong and Regis, the signatures are on the documents.

Mr. Bereaux: Why do you not pass it across?

Hon. M. Assam: Why do you not shut your mouth?

Mr. Speaker: Members, Member for Tunapuna please sit. Members, the noise levels are getting a little too high and I am cautioning you to keep it down. Proceed.

Hon. M. Assam: I have the documents here, Mr. Speaker, but I will use them at an appropriate time, because they have said over and over in this Parliament that they have a judgment against me. I will use the appropriate time in Parliament to make the statement and tender the document for everybody to see that I have no judgment against me. The document is here, I brought it from the DFL, and the attorneys, I have it here. So I will shut your mouth up once and for all, but I will do it on another occasion that is more appropriate.

The last statement I am going to make about the contribution of the Member for San Fernando East. He said this budget is “dotish”, but he is reported in the newspaper as saying that the UNC stole the PNM’s vision. [*Laughter*] This budget is “dotish”, but he is recorded in the newspaper as saying the UNC stole the PNM’s vision.

I think I have said enough about the Member for San Fernando East to prove unequivocally, incontrovertibly, that he does not know what he is talking about, or he has not studied the budget, or he is perpetrating a fraud on his own party, to the Parliament and the national community. I rest my case.

Mr. Speaker, after December 11, 2000, the Prime Minister gave me a challenge and that challenge involved the integration of several ministries and departments and this ministry is now called the Ministry of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs and we have developed a vision and a mission in conformity with the nine objectives set out in the 2000 Manifesto of this party. The objectives being sustainable growth which is happening every year—if they forget, or maybe they cannot read—an intelligent nation; the dollar for dollar plan

which is griping them. I think we should buy some gripe water for them. Do they still sell Woodward's Gripe Water? More and better jobs—I have just read out in every category of economic life—more jobs, a faster pace of development. Because we did 6.6 per cent in 2000 and we only did 4 point something per cent this year, they are alarmed about it. What they do not understand is that there are cycles, business cycles, and economic cycles. There are peaks and there are troughs, but once you can manage growth, that would take care of all your people, that is what is important. We prefer to have that kind of growth, not sudden spurts of growth.

A better quality of life for all the citizens and it is very clear we have now a social safety net. What this Minister of Finance read in his budget speech for the seventh budget and what the former Minister of Finance read in the six previous budgets, is an indication that we care about people and we have put a social safety net in place.

I just give one example to prove the point, but I can give you many, but I want to move on to my ministry. When we came into office, old age pension was \$325 or whatever it was. The PNM was in office for four years and they increased old age pension by \$15. This Government has been in office for less than six years and we have moved it from \$325 to \$800. [*Desk thumping*], but the Member asked in some statement, where the \$1,000? We never said in our Manifesto that we would take it to \$1,000 this year. We said that we would take it to \$1,000, and the \$1,000 is coming; it is coming. Why are you so impatient? The \$1,000 is coming.

Look at all the other areas in terms of social safety net, social services, sport and community affairs. Do you know what is grinding them? The four new stadia, they want to say it is corruption. I wonder if the people in Tobago, Arima, Couva and San Fernando are happy? Do you know they cannot even get into the stadia? I have been advised that every night the stadia are sold out and hundreds of people are outside and cannot get in. It is such a tremendous, overwhelming success. [*Desk thumping*]

The best quality health care for people. They talk about the universal plan has not come into being. You are right, it has not come into being, but it will come into being. Have no fear! You want to fire the Minister of Health because he is a decent fellow? You want to get rid of decent people? [*Interruption*] You could call names of people you know, it is all right, no problem. You are using parliamentary privilege to do it. Go right ahead. I hope when they do it to them, “yuh doh” cry because I will bring my bottle and comforter for you.

Greater equity in Trinidad and Tobago and this is happening, Mr. Speaker. Greater equity is happening in this country. I went to open the newest branch of

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the Unit Trust Corporation in Westmoorings last night and I was amazed at the kind of people who are investing in the Unit Trust and the stock market. Do not tell me it is only people like the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West because they have over 350,000 unit holders in this country. They do not have it. If you look at the stock market, it is bullish and the transactions that are going through are from ordinary men and this Government is making it even more possible through the introduction of NEL where we are going to now include some of our energy stocks that will now share the wealth. That is why greater equity in Trinidad and Tobago will take place under the UNC, never, ever under the PNM. You all have pauperized the country and made just a few rich.

3.55 p.m.

Peace, security and harmony. We want to buy 100 more vehicles but he does not want that. He does not want security for people and a more competitive economy. He does not want that either. So we have developed a mission statement to be the foremost professional and dynamic organization, strengthening international relations and serving as the catalyst for enterprise development. You heard it? And our mission statement is to transform the economic base of the country by creating an internationally competitive business environment. Does the PNM know anything about that? When I brought the Industrial Policy the first time to this Parliament, do you know what the Member for Diego Martin Central asked me? What you need an industrial policy for? Why do you need that? That is what a former Minister of Trade—although he was only there for 16 months and he wants to talk about Orinoco/Apure and all kinds of trade matters. He just spoke about a trade agreement with Colombia and Venezuela—partial scope, you know!

It is this UNC Government that negotiated a full free trade agreement with Colombia, not partial scope; and we are about to do so with Venezuela very shortly. That is what he is boasting about, two partial scope.

We are going to transform the economic base of the country by creating an internationally competitive business environment that facilitates sustainable growth, encourages meaningful participation in the new economy. You see it? A technology centre, Member for San Fernando East. You do not want the new economy—knowledge-based. Perhaps you cannot cope with that. I suspect so—and promotes the socio-economic well-being of our citizens through our international network, which is all of our missions abroad, through a vibrant foreign policy.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. M. Assam: Hence our goal is to facilitate the creation in our sector of 70,000 new jobs over the next five year; attract two billion of non-oil investment in the next five years; ensure that the economy continues to grow at the rate of, at least, five per cent over the next five years, in the non-oil sector to be led by manufacturing. Approximately 10 per cent of GDP for that and three per cent for services.

We intend to ensure that our vision and mission are achieved by continuing to restructure the ministry that I have the honour to lead; and to create and sustain a competitive business environment. To secure more effective regional and global profile for Trinidad and Tobago, and to develop Trinidad and Tobago's external relations with a view to increasing trade.

Our ministry, in accordance with our vision to become the first world country by 2010 will continue its efforts to accelerate the diversification of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and to adopt the strategies that would be successful and appropriate to the achievement of these objectives. We are looking at increasing employment; we are looking at sustainable growth and a faster pace of development; we are looking at investment. We have identified 30 new business projects that have been approved for assistance with an investment capital of \$9.2 billion. These are new projects—not expansion—new projects in the pipeline.

In terms of small business, the Small Business Development Company issued 332 loan guarantees with \$8.82 million and this facilitated \$16.16 million in loans. One thousand, eight hundred and seventy four persons received training in small business management and entrepreneurship; and the Small Business Development (Leasing) Company commenced operation and we have already issued 12 financial leases in a wide variety of businesses, including a medical clinic, a nuclear medical clinic.

If you go to Marli Street, just west of the Embassy, you would see a First World nuclear medical clinic, financed by the Small Business (Leasing) Development Company. All of you who have heart problems and other types of problems should go there and get yourselves checked.

We also give a lot of technical assistance. We assisted St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines in terms of bringing up to speed their small business development sector.

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We have also done a number of studies to facilitate the implementation of these objectives and to ensure that we are on track, because these studies not only provide policy guidelines but they do evaluation and monitoring of our progress. .

As you know, I had the honour, after Cabinet's approval, to lay on the table of this honourable House, the Enterprise Development Policy and Strategic Plan, 2001—2005, which the Member for Diego Martin Central thought was not necessary.

We also had a task force report on micro, small and medium enterprise development that is being implemented now through the coordination of the ministry and the Small Business Development Company. We also did a study—measures to increase non-oil exports and our view to dampening imports. That means that we are trying to develop a whole range of industries and sensitize the business community and the investing community to those industries, that they should invest their money rather than import the raw materials from abroad. So we are deepening the manufacturing process.

The aim of enterprise development is to force the competitive economy through partnership, because the Government cannot do it alone. We have to do it with all the stakeholders in society, therefore, its aim is to improve national competitiveness, to maximize human capital, to expand non-oil exports, to facilitate access to investment capital, and to ensure balance between the environment and development—balance, I hope the Member for San Fernando East understands that—balanced development.

We have also prepared a document for the export sector which we identified as critical to Trinidad and Tobago's export strategy, which will identify infrastructure improvement, enhanced competitiveness, diversification of exports, and development of new markets.

The development of these policies involves extensive interaction with both public and private sector stakeholders, in an effort to build consensus. That is how we approach things. I have a committee called a Committee on Trade and Related Matters, and it is the entire private sector. The President of the TTMA is on it, the Chambers of Commerce, NGOs, IRO, Trade Unions, NATUC, all of them are on it.

Mr. Valley: That committee was in my time.

Hon. M. Assam: You set up everything. Yes, you set up everything. He reminds me of Genesis. He created the world.

We believe that this is the model for the future. A close and binding relationship amongst stakeholders in the creation, but particularly, in the

implementation of policy. Our strategy has been working successfully and I believe that these successes are reflected in what we have done over the last couple years.

We have signed a free trade agreement with the Dominican Republic and this was laid in the Parliament and passed in both Houses. We have signed a free trade agreement with Cuba and that legislation is soon to come.

We have done a partial scope with Brazil that is still to come to the Parliament. We have been negotiating the free trade area of the Americas which is to come on stream by 2005; and we are extremely active in the nine negotiating groups; and we have many experts from the public service and the private sector and parastatal organizations involved in this process.

4.05 p.m.

We are doing a free trade agreement with Mexico and we are soon to conclude a free trade agreement with the Republic of Costa Rica, hoping that that should be concluded sometime in October.

In order to have an intelligent nation and more and better jobs, we have to pursue certain areas that will facilitate this. One of the areas, as you know, is involved in the telecommunications revolution and trade liberalization areas. In support of this vision we have been doing a number of things, for example, the technical support of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, one of the premier institutions, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but in this region, and it is internationally accredited; and of course, Cariri, which is also a premier institution. We have made provision for the development of the entrepreneurial skills in the agencies responsible, and we are going to do a lot of marketing support and participation in trade fairs, exhibition, inward buyers, and so forth, in order to ensure that our manufacturers/exporters are well served.

Of course, one of the important areas, as the Minister of Finance said, one of the important drivers of the future, would be the establishment of the Technology and Innovation Park at Wallerfield. I just want to give an example of the kinds of things that we are going to be doing at the Wallerfield Technology and Innovation Park. There are seven clusters. They are called centres and back office operations: software and computer-related services; electronic components and accessories; computer peripherals; telecommunications equipment; medical and dental equipment; pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, and we are going to link that with the aviation city, so that the aviation city and the University of the West Indies, will be the kind of three-partnership approach that we will be pursuing in order to

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achieve these objectives. Of course, the Minister of Transport and Tourism and Minister for Tobago Affairs will tell you more about the aviation city, and so forth.

We have identified certain industries that we would like to place emphasis on, and to invite investors, locally, regionally and internationally, to come and help us develop these areas: Information technology; plastics, printing and packaging; chemical processing and metal processing.

We want to create a competitive economy. Various reforms have been instituted in the past years: financial trade; legislative and regulatory. These have contributed significantly to improving the competitive position of Trinidad and Tobago. It is expected that this process will continue, and we intend to do the following: We want to create a national competitiveness council; reform of the Customs and Excise Division—and I think the Minister of Finance alluded to this already, because that is part of his portfolio; it is critical to have a Customs and Excise Division that is friendly and facilitative in the area of imports and exports—reform of the Board of Inland Revenue—critical to business development, and he has already indicated what he intends to do there—and also the review of the investment facilitation and regulatory procedures. We are working on all of these areas in order to ensure that we achieve all of our objectives in the coming year.

The Member for San Fernando East talked about some of the agreements that they have entered into: double taxation and investment promotion. We congratulate them for having entered into these two or three agreements. But we have expanded this exponentially, over the last five and a half years—exponentially.

Hon. Member: Tell us—

Hon. M. Assam: I will give you a whole list of countries. We just recently did it with China and Korea. We have done it with France, Germany, England, Canada, the United States. So that we have expanded this list exponentially, in terms of double taxation treaties and investment protection and promotion treaties with a whole range of countries and we continue to do so, because we have to have a démarche on our competitors in every part of the globe.

We also commenced a study on national policy and regulation on bio-safety and we have just had an enhancement of the investment environment in Trinidad and Tobago and initialed a bilateral treaty with Switzerland, and I just said Korea and the Republic of China.

One of the other areas that is complementary to small business is venture capital. I am sorry that I have not been able to bring that Venture Capital (Amdt.)

Bill to the Parliament, but we are hoping to do it soon, because we ran into some difficulties after the study was concluded, in that some of the areas that we had sent in the Cabinet note, were not compatible with some of the existing legislation, and we had to look it over again, but we would be bringing it to Parliament very soon.

As you are aware, the Venture Capital industry consists of three venture capital companies, and these companies have raised, I believe, about \$11.2 million in capital, and have invested today only \$3.7 million, which is very, very poor. It is not their fault, because of some of the deficiencies in the existing Act, and I am sure the Member for Diego Martin Central is aware of what I am talking about. But the three areas that they have invested in are important areas: entertainment, which is a very important growth pole for the future. The entertainment industry is one of the largest industries in the world, and with the kind of multifaceted talent, as a result of our multiculturalism that we have in Trinidad and Tobago, we can develop an entertainment industry that could create jobs, generate foreign exchange and promote Trinidad and Tobago internationally. That is why the importance—although we get a lot of criticism about the \$70 million we spent on the Miss Universe contest, it will bear fruit in the near future. One of the fruits of that is that complex in the Port that is going to take off in the first quarter of 2002.

So entertainment had some investment; manufacturing and tourism. Of course, the tourism sector is probably going to be facing some difficulties because of the recent tragedies that took place on September 11, 2001 in the United States. Perhaps in other parts of the world people may demonstrate a kind of a paranoia in terms of flying, and we hope that over time all of these scars would be removed and these wounds will be healed so that people will develop a little more confidence in the air travel business. Because as you know, these terrorists use commercial airlines to perpetrate their dastardly acts.

But you know, what is encouraging is that the Venture Capital Incentive Programme has received requests for \$259 million, and I hope the Member for Diego Martin Central can help us to raise that money. In fact, it is a challenge I threw out last night in addressing the Unit Trust Corporation in their new branch. I threw out the challenge of their getting involved in venture capital.

Another area that has potential for creating jobs and other synergies is the horse racing industry. I had the honour today to lay on the Table the four racing bills which I hope to pilot after the conclusion of this debate. Because, indeed, the horse racing industry, at this point in time, employs close to 3,000 persons, but

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indirectly, probably three times that number, because you have it in so many other industries to which they are related. Therefore we expect that the horse racing industry will be resuscitated when these bills are debated and passed by the Parliament.

A fundamental area to the development of this transformation and diversification and putting us into the 21st Century is the whole question of e-commerce. E-commerce is one of the most important tools for doing business and for promoting trade. Of course, I came to this Parliament before and I passed two bills in terms of electronic transfer and misuse of computers. We have to bring some other pieces of legislation in terms of digital signatures, and so on, so that people could develop a certain amount of confidence in the whole process of e-commerce. But e-commerce transactions amounted to \$354 billion in 2000, and it is estimated—of course, I do not know what will happen because of this tragedy in the United States—that by the year 2005, there will be transactions amounting to US \$5 trillion from Internet commerce; more than one billion persons engaging in Internet commerce.

Of course, this will mean increasing the number of telecommunications service providers, increasing the speed of telecommunications access to our citizens, developing technology standards, adding value added services and rationalizing Trinidad and Tobago's Internet domain. Of course, this means that we have to take other initiatives: enhanced customs procedures, because the customs will have to become very much involved in e-commerce; overseas warehousing; business incubation facilities—and I hope we will have one of that at the Science and Technology Park—community access centres, so that the ordinary person can go to these community access centres and do e-commerce transactions; home-based access centres; e-commerce education; Internet awareness and removal of certain financial constraints to Internet access. So that the growth of e-commerce is a very important development in the commercial and trading life of Trinidad and Tobago.

4.15 p.m.

We have to support e-commerce with a regulatory legal infrastructure in order to ensure that the e-commerce marketplace problems or challenges are addressed in terms of intellectual property rights, administration and enforcement of taxation laws—because you can have a lot of tax evasion and tax avoidance through electronic commerce transactions. You can also have harmful and illegal content, as a result of people making false advertisements, jurisdictional conflicts, labour laws and, of course, as I said before, electronic payment systems—verify digital signatures.

Mr. Speaker, I see an extremely bright future for Trinidad and Tobago from where I sit. Notwithstanding what took place on September 11, 2001, it is my view that the United States of America's economy is a resilient one. The people are hard-working, resilient people and they will bounce back. Perhaps, there may be a bit of deceleration over the next few months, but I think, over time, the economy will begin to show signs of growth and eventually, robustness. So, to all the prophets of doom and gloom, all the people who are predicting that we are going to have a melt-down and from recession to depression, I do not hold that view at all. I hold a very optimistic view of the international economy.

Mr. Speaker, we have been pursuing a number of other areas in terms of the legal framework. As you know, we have already introduced anti-dumping legislation into Trinidad and Tobago, and we have had some serious challenges. We have had some 13 instances where countries wanted to dump into Trinidad and Tobago and we had to use the machinery and go through the procedures in order to determine whether this is so. In fact, to date, there are about five instances where we have had to impose countervailing duties, although we have been challenged in the court by two of them.

We had to go even further, Mr. Speaker, because our trade policy must be on a kind of tripod in terms of its legislative capability. The first is the anti-dumping; the second would be—I hope it can come to Parliament very soon—the Fair Trading Bill in terms of competition policy and the third leg of the tripod would be safeguard mechanisms. All three forming an important triad of legislation that will enable us to move forward in our trading activities.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to place emphasis on Caricom. We would continue to be very much in the forefront of ensuring that the Caricom single market and economy comes into being as soon as possible. All of us are taking an active part in this particular development. I hope, before long, that I would be bringing the ratification of the nine protocols to the Parliament to give legal effect to the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. It is my view that we are well poised as a community, notwithstanding that there are some economic problems within the community itself. We will be well poised by the time the Free Trade Agreement comes on stream. By that time we would be able to renegotiate the successor agreement to Lome V—because the interim is the Cotonou Agreement—that will make us well poised to handle this whole international trading system. We are fighting very hard to ensure that even in the World Trade Organization we have that special and deferential recognition of small developing islands states that are vulnerable in so many ways to the vicissitudes of commodity prices and other kinds of problems.

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Mr. Speaker, we are reasonably confident that the single market and economy will be a reality before long. Hence, we will be collaborating more closely in terms of our economic and foreign policies and our harmonization of fiscal incentives—Protocol II, which is one of the most important of the protocols, that is the right of establishment, to ensure that the treatment of all companies, wherever they are established obtains the same kind of access to capital and kind of incentives and treatment in the borders of Caricom. I was able to pass sometime in late June early July of this year, the Immigration (Caribbean Community Skilled Nationals) Bill which enables the movement of skilled persons, and I intend to come to the Parliament, sometime in the future, to amend the schedule to expand the number of persons who will be eligible for this kind of treatment.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of our foreign policy, Trinidad and Tobago's foreign policy is going to place enormous emphasis on our foreign economic policy. Hitherto, our missions abroad were involved in very important work, but the emphasis was not on foreign economic policy. Today, we are restructuring our missions and hoping, to a point, to have ambassadors in those countries where we have not had heads of missions. We intend to beef-up some of the missions in the important capitals of the world so that they can pursue some of the policies and objectives that we are trying to achieve, particularly in Washington, Geneva and Brussels to put Trinidad and Tobago on the map of the world in a high profile fashion in order to achieve our objectives and carry out our local policies. Therefore, the staff of the missions abroad will have those skills that will enable them to achieve our objectives and to carry out the policies of Trinidad and Tobago.

We are looking, very seriously, at the areas in terms of where our missions are physically located. We are doing a review. One would remember that when we gained independence 39 years ago, we automatically went to certain capitals, and for good reasons, perhaps—perhaps, it was for reasons of geography, colonial, ethnicity or cultural ties. We need to look very seriously at where we are located now and see where we can optimize the money we spend on foreign missions abroad and to see whether these are the areas or places we want to continue, scale down or beef-up. Whichever determination would be made after we have done our review.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to ensure that we have the best relationship with our friends and allies abroad, particularly in these critical demanding times. We have a very good relationship with the local diplomatic community. We liaise with them constantly, both at the diplomatic level and at the consular level and we will continue to do so in order to enjoy the mutual benefits that could be derived from this kind of consultation.

In fact, the Minister of Transport and Minister of Tourism and Tobago Affairs and myself held a joint meeting recently with the diplomatic community, exposing them to the possibilities of investment in both the tourism and transport sectors and it was very well received. It is this kind of collaboration that I intend to pursue with all of my Cabinet colleagues, now and in the future, to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago gets full benefit from its diplomatic representation abroad and from the people who represent foreign countries in our own country.

Mr. Speaker, I feel very happy and proud to be associated with this budget. This budget has given to all—every sector of this community—an opportunity to improve his or her quality of life. It was very encouraging to read what the various commentators had to say in the newspapers. It was interesting to read Ernst & Young and PriceWaterhouseCoopers' reports. They gave us marks in certain areas and not in others, but on the whole I think we came out with an A grade in both reports in terms of the measures contained in the 2001/2002 Budget and, equally important, in terms of the performance of this Government during the period: what we said we were going to do and what we have in fact accomplished—actual versus planned or projected. Therefore, I am very happy that we were able to do that. I am also very happy that the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) has been increased; not dramatically, but, at least, it has gone from \$900 million to \$1.3 billion. I think that extra \$400 million will go a long way towards satisfying some of the capital projects that all of the various ministries need in order to carry the developmental process and the growth of this country forward.

4.25 p.m.

You would observe that in terms of the budget itself, the areas that got more or higher allocations than others. It indicates the priority that this Government places in certain areas. When I hear the Member for San Fernando East say that we are not interested in people, the social sector and we do not have a safety net, I am wondering if he read the budget.

Out of a \$16 billion budget—this is recurrent—education got almost \$2.1 billion. Infrastructure got almost \$1.5 billion. How do you improve the quality of life if you do not have proper infrastructure? [*Interruption*] Why are you so impatient? I am coming! [*Laughter*] The Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs got \$1.1 billion; the Ministry of Health, almost \$1.3 billion; the Ministry of National Security, for peace and security for people, \$1.6 billion.

We have identified the areas of emphasis; the drivers of the economy; the areas that will create more wealth, security, happiness, a better and sustained

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quality of life, jobs and a society with equity. That is what this budget has done. I sincerely hope that all of those who have come to scoff will remain to pray. Some were born to do great deeds and live, like us. Some were born to be obscure and die, like them!

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: This House is suspended until 5.00 p.m. We will take the tea break now.

4.29 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Lawrence Achong (Point Fortin): Mr. Speaker, we in the PNM were absolutely amazed at the paucity of this year's budget contribution. I heard the hon. Member for Tunapuna say that they got an "A" from two auditing companies. I will let him know that he gets an "F" from the people. In our opinion, it was one of the worst budgets that has been presented to this honourable House, if not the worst. The figures do not add up and in many instances critical information is absent. These omissions and errors were partly highlighted by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member for San Fernando East. Other Members on this side will deal with the rest later on in this debate.

Before I go further, I would like to correct a statement made by the hon. Member for Tunapuna, in terms of a criticism of the contribution of the Member for San Fernando East. For the sake of the record, the Member for San Fernando East said:

"Central government debt service for fiscal 2001 is estimated at \$5,356.7 million, while current revenues are estimated at \$14,029.5 million for a debt service ratio of 38 per cent. This does not include debt service on Government guaranteed debts, practically all of which must be met by the Treasury. Based on the ratio of Government guaranteed debt to Government debt, the overall debt service ratio is estimated at 59 per cent."

Mr. Speaker, this means that the Treasury is exposed to paying 59 cents on every dollar to lenders because of the debt incursion of this profligate Government.

I continue. As I peruse the budget documents, some aspects of it simply could not escape me, as being unusual. I believe that the same applies to my colleagues. Quite early in his contribution, the hon. Minister stated that "this Government has done more than any other government to promote social equity in our society." I think that the hon. Minister does not understand the term "social equity".

5.05 p.m.

This UNC Government has deliberately done things to widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots and to increase, by its partisan behaviour, the tension between the two major ethnic groups in this country. I hope for the country's sake that this Government does not reap that which it has sown.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance boasts that after five years the circumstances of the poor have improved markedly. Let us look at how this has been achieved. I refer you to Appendix VIII of the *Review of the Economy, 2001*. I want us to look at the Index of Average Weekly Earnings between the years 1996 and 2001. Using 1995 as baseline of 100, the increases were as follows:

7.5 in 1996; 6.5 in 1997; 6.7 in 1998; -6.1 in 1999; 9.1 in 2000; -1.1 between October 1999 and June 2000; and -14.1 between October 2000 and June 2001.

What is the implication of that? It means that a person who was earning \$100 per week in 1995 now earns \$106 per week in 2001, but that person had to endure inflation averaging some 4.1 per cent annually. In a real sense his spending power was reduced by approximately 20 per cent.

During that same period, 1995—2001, the public debt increased from \$19 billion to \$31 billion. The figure suggests that none of that \$11 billion of increased borrowings went to the have-nots in this country. Who will pay for the borrowings in the future? It appears to me those persons who cannot afford it will be asked to bear this burden in the future. What a legacy for our children!

I would now like to move on to page 16 of the budget presentation. Again I quote the hon. Minister:

“Mr. Speaker, it cannot be said that this Government is not doing enough on corruption today, neither could it be said that there are any attempts at covering up acts of wrong-doing.”

I will make an aside here. I will deal with the Member for Tunapuna shortly. They have shut the stables after the horses have bolted. I would like to know where the former Minister of Energy and Energy Enterprises is. Where is the former chairman of Trinmar? They have all mysteriously disappeared, and disappeared with people's money. In fact, in my constituency, they call Bartlett, “Mr. Soldado”. I understand that the former Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is missing ministerial company. I hope that in the not-too-distant future he does not complain of over-crowding.

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This Government talks about transparency. This morning, I received a document from an unimpeachable source. It will probably shed some light on the ferry service between Trinidad and Tobago, which the Member for Tunapuna was very vocal about.

The Government Shipping Service is defined in the Port Authority Act, Chap. 51:01. The Act identifies the Authority as the agent of State with responsibility for the operation of the service supplied by the vessels owned by the State and engaged in the carriage of passenger goods between Trinidad and Tobago.

In accordance with the foregoing, the Government Shipping Service has been subjected to a calculated and systematic haemorrhaging of public funds much to the detriment—

Mr. Speaker: Since you are reading, for the record, could you identify the document? If there is a signature to it, please tell us who the author is.

Mr. L. Achong: Mr. Speaker, I am afraid you are asking me to betray a confidence. I am in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: I am not asking you to betray a confidence. If you are going to read a document into the record, it is necessary that the document is properly identified.

Mr. L. Achong: Mr. Speaker, the document was sent to me by a group of senior public servants and since we are on the whole issue of transparency in this Government and the fact that they are fighting corruption, I am just trying—

Mr. Speaker: I have no doubt about the arguments that you are making. I am clear on the argument and the direction in which you are going. I am merely saying that you should identify the document if you are going to quote it into the record of this Parliament. If you cannot do that, then just make reference to it.

Mr. L. Achong: Mr. Speaker, this document suggests that the grounding of the *mv Panorama* for such a lengthy period of time—it is still on dry dock—was done to facilitate the hiring of two boats from a source in England.

The negotiations for the hiring of those boats were done by a member of the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and a person who is a national security advisor at the level of Rear Admiral. The whole thing smacks of corruption and I draw it to the attention of the House, simply because of the statement being made by the Members opposite. I was prepared to lay this in the House if I had received

permission to do so, but I did not. It would be patently unfair of me to do so. This is just another example of the corruption that the hon. Leader of the Opposition spoke of.

Corruption and transparency is not just about financial impropriety. It is also about the management and the operation of certain organizations such as the Elections and Boundaries Commission. There is a big vote for them in the budget—\$39 million for the year 2002. Maybe some consideration ought to be given to removing the entire executive of the EBC and its commissioners, especially the Chief Election Officer.

We here in the PNM are convinced that there is sufficient evidence that criminal charges be brought against the Chairman and the Chief Election Officer of the EBC—he and other persons well-known to the PNM. We understand that it is the Government that is preventing these people from being charged. The EBC is one of the vanguards of our democracy and if the people of the country cannot trust it, something has to be done. Whether the President was right or wrong to attempt to remove Mr. John two or three days' ago, one cannot understand the fight that the EBC is putting up to maintain a member, who was appointed by the President who says he does not want him again—who appoints can disappoint. It would suggest that there are ulterior motives and they do not want anybody else to get in there.

If this were in another Third World country, the Government would be looking to hire all commissioners and several Chief Election Officers. However, we are a peace-loving nation.

As I went through the budget, I paid a little attention to the allocation for the Ministry of Labour. I have a special interest there. I am not sure whether sufficient staff would be made available to that Ministry to properly discharge its mandate under the Occupational Health and Safety Act when it comes into force. It does not look like they would be properly staffed. If this division of the Ministry is to be successful in doing its job, it may necessitate the recruitment of professionals outside of the existing public service at salaries that would be a lot higher. I think, therefore, that the hon. Minister should have a look at that. We want it to succeed because they would be playing a very important function in the industrial life of this country.

5.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, what about the Employment Training Programme (ETP)? Did the ETP achieve what it was supposed to have achieved over the last year? The

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concerns that were raised by the Leader of the Opposition were real. The programme, nationally, has been fraught with all sorts of problems, not the least of which is nepotism.

Mr. Speaker, I had cause to call the hon. Minister, the Member for Nariva and his Junior Minister to ask them to intercede in terms of what was happening in Point Fortin. In Point Fortin the programme was being administered by one of the two losers in Point Fortin and La Brea. In fact, instead of doing the work associated with the programme they have spent all their time discriminating against citizens of this country who have a right to enjoy the benefits of that programme. The discrimination was simply based on their perception as to whether the person was a PNM supporter or not. We cannot condone that and I would hope that the Minister, this time around, would ensure that the programme is run in an equitable and fair way. Everybody is entitled to that kind of relief.

Mr. Speaker, it will be remiss of me if I do not talk about things a little closer to home which is Point Fortin, because we have a lot of problems there. A few months ago, I think it was about two months ago, I raised, on a Motion on the Adjournment, the problems associated with schools in Point Fortin. I got certain promises from the Minister, the Member for Siparia, and I am yet to see anything, either physical work or even communication at this level as to what was happening there. We still have a serious problem with our schools. The school term has reopened and parents and children are faced with a lot of hardship and all we are getting is promises and nothing else.

The hospital in Point Fortin was supposed to have been renovated last year. That was stated in the last budget but I see it is repeated again this year. Point Fortin is a highly industrialized area and to make the point, two weeks ago there was a fatal accident where two people were killed; one on the spot and the other died on the way to the San Fernando General Hospital because there were no facilities to handle the case in Point Fortin.

We have the largest industrial plant in the West Indies and in South America situated in Point Fortin. I cannot understand why some urgency, some priority, is not being given to the establishment of a proper hospital in Point Fortin. It is well known that if you are sick and you want to die you should go to the hospital in Point Fortin. I suppose the Government does not care about that because they could never win the Point Fortin seat, now or never, so they do not care about the people there.

Hon. Minister: What about Selby?

Mr. L. Achong: I do not even know who is Selby. I do not know the gentleman.

In the budget there is also a lot of talk on the environment and the measures that Government took and will take in terms of protecting the environment. The premier beach in South Trinidad, which is located in Point Fortin, has been totally destroyed because of the laying of a pipe to the LNG plant. The Government of the day did nothing to ensure that the people of Point Fortin and of Trinidad were not deprived of this excellent bathing facility.

To compound matters, Mr. Speaker, another pipeline is being run in Point Fortin, this time from British Gas and from all appearances another beach is going to be destroyed. They talk about enforcing legislation but they do nothing. They do not even know where Point Fortin is. So through you, Mr. Speaker, I am bringing it to the attention of this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to agriculture, there is a one-stop shop in agriculture. It does not say very much. What I would have hoped to see there was a comprehensive plan for saving an industry that is dying in Trinidad and Tobago. I am speaking specifically about the coconut industry from which several hundreds of my constituents earn a living; people in Cedros, Fullerton and Icacos. *[Interruption]* Part of Fullerton, Sir. *[Interruption]* And to which you will return. Mr. Speaker, the coconut industry needs a lot of assistance from the Government and unless this happens, the industry will die very quickly.

At the moment the people in Cedros—I use the name Point Fortin generally—who make a living off that, are living on tenterhooks. It would appear that the owners of CGA are bent on ensuring the industry dies and that is simply to allow importers to bring in oil—other than coconut oil—for use in Trinidad. A couple years ago it was said the coconut oil was bad, high in cholesterol and so on, but that has since been disproved. There is no reason why some measures of protectionism are not given to the coconut industry in Trinidad and Tobago, and in Point Fortin in particular.

It would appear that when this budget was being developed precious little attention was paid to rural communities. Mr. Speaker, you read all sorts of things there but you have communities that are virtually disappearing from the face of Trinidad and Tobago and one such community is Icacos. Icacos will disappear in the next 20—25 years if some urgent attention is not paid to it. It is below sea level, the flooding is horrendous and it is plagued with mosquitoes. The Minister of Education would not give me a school down there despite several pleas. The

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people want a school—five-year-old children have to travel from Icacos to Bonasse to attend school. I would like, if there is a revision to this budget, that some provision be made for areas such as Icacos.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to the corruption issue. I need to come back to that for a little while. This House was told a few minutes ago that I was the recipient of the contract at Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, not having undergone any tendering procedure. I would like to make this statement. I am an employee of a company that worked there. The contract was for a manpower audit and for training needs analysis, and it could not have been done by a better person—[*Desk thumping*] the best Industrial Court judge they have ever seen. So the money was well spent.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about transparency and anti-corruption and so on, and I would like to know how could a Minister recommend that his wife serve on the board of a company for which he has direct ministerial responsibility. [*Desk thumping*] That said Minister who made an allegation against me, how could his former wife be employed with another state organization for which he has direct ministerial responsibility?

Mr. Speaker, I sit here day to day and I do not take part in the crosstalk. I sit here and listen but seeing that we are on this issue, we have some other pictures that we will show, not of London this time, but of Toronto with better facial features. The owner of that house is the same owner that was mentioned by my Political Leader. I have it waiting for the press when I go out there. [*Desk thumping*] You should leave me alone. As I look across there, we in the PNM have accumulated a mass of evidence of corruption, corruption and more corruption. Practically everyone is tainted there and this is not signing a contract. [*Interruption*] I said practically all, not all. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, whatever I did—it is public information; I did not hide and do anything. I signed a document that is public information, yet the Minister comes here and tries to impute some improper behaviour. Why is it after being soundly rejected for St. Joseph he gets a chance to fight a seat in Tunapuna? What was the arrangement with Clico? We have it on tape, who gets what for what seat. Who is still getting \$30,000 and \$50,000 a month from Clico while sitting here as Government Ministers? [*Desk thumping*]

Totally unacceptable; totally unacceptable, but coming back to the budget—
[*Interruption*]

5.35 p.m.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the Standing Order which deals with imputing improper motives to Members on this side—
[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Which one?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Thirty-five. I do not remember the subsection.
[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thirty-six.

Mr. John: Thirty-six, five. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, order please! Order! [*Interruption*] I said order please! Continue, Member. [*Interruption*] Point of order 36(5).

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, she said 35.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Thirty-six, five.

Mr. Speaker: Did you say 36(5)?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: She said 35.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The one about imputing improper motives.

Mr. Speaker: In particular reference to the matter of a minister of Government sitting in this Chamber and receiving \$30,000 a month and getting two salaries, all right, he did not mention the name of the minister. So therefore, while he is making a statement about a minister, he did not specifically refer to a minister; but I want to caution the Member. Again, he is coming very close to imputing improper motives to a Member of this honourable House and I am asking him to refrain from going in that direction, and I so rule. Please continue.

Mr. Valley: If you will give way.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin Central—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: I just want to ask a question for your direction, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Sure.

Mr. Valley: Are you saying, Mr. Speaker, that if, in fact, a minister is sitting in this Parliament and getting \$30,000 from Clico that that is improper? Is that what you are saying, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: I am saying that he is coming very close to imputing improper motives to a Member in this honourable House and I am asking him not to go in that direction.

Mr. Valley: Yes, I know, and that is why I am asking you for clarification because the improper motive is that—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Sit down. Take your seat. *[Mr. Valley sat]*

Mr. Valley:—someone is getting \$30,000 from Clico and if, in fact, such a Minister is getting that, is that improper? *[Mr. Valley rose]* That is what I am asking.

Mr. Speaker: That is not for me to answer.

Mr. Valley: Well then—it is not improper motive then, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, are you questioning my ruling?

Mr. Valley: No, no, no, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]* I just want clarification.

Mr. Speaker: Well, I have ruled that the Member, what he said is coming very close to imputing improper motive to a Member of this House and I ruled in that direction and that is final.

Mr. Valley: Ask the Minister to deny it. Call a name and ask him to deny it.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, please continue.

Mr. L. Achong: Thanks for the clarification, Mr. Speaker. I will continue.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go back. I had to digress a bit just now. I want to go back to the Ministry of Labour. I want to go back there because, you see, I do not know whether, at this point in time, the Industrial Court falls under the Ministry of Labour or whether it is with the Attorney General. I do not know. It shifts from time to time, but I see there was an allocation of \$1.5 million for development work at the court. I suspect it is for the procurement of a south court. I suspect it is that, but it raises the whole question of the role of the court in the near future, in the not too distant future, given the additional work that the court will get, once the Occupational Safety and Health Act comes into being. It is with some concern that certain members, the public, certain members of the legal fraternity and so, view what has happened in that court in terms of recent appointments.

Mr. Speaker, I was a member of that court for a considerable length of time and therefore as a member you receive your written evidence and arguments from

the various advocates who are representing various parties. There was a particular gentleman who could neither write, read properly nor speak properly, and this Government had the effrontery to force him on the court. It is causing untold damage down there and the court is fast becoming the laughing stock of Trinidad and Tobago when you have a judge sitting there who “cyar” read nor write nor speak properly. That is—[*Interruption*] I will call name—Sam Maharaj. This is what they have done and “dey” giving the court additional responsibility of a more technical nature. So, I felt that I had to touch on that. It is part of the whole budget thing. I think it would be unfair to the people if they do not know what they are likely to face at times when they go down there; all done by this Government.

In closing, I would like to say that the budget was not even a good attempt; [*Desk thumping*] it was not even a good attempt, right? There are certain things, certain omissions there, that were done quite deliberately. How could you hope to expend in excess of \$100 million on a thing like the Employment Training Programme and yet you refuse to put that in the actual figure in your documents? It is not \$10 million. It is because they intend to use that fund to carry out all their electioneering and so, [*Desk thumping*] just as they did in the local election in the UNC when ETP vehicles were toting people up and down to vote against the Attorney General and the Member for Naparima—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: The hon. Member for Naparima.

Mr. L. Achong:—the hon. Member for Naparima. They intend to do it again in a general election. So they exclude it, they do not show you it, right, so I have to make mention of that—must make mention. It is too important, you know, it is a very important function, and because it is dealing with the people who could least—the people who are unable to properly look after themselves and so, it is subject to manipulation. “If you do my bidding you get a 10 days or a 20 days.” They tried it in Point and they still “get licks” in Point.

So I would like to wind up here, Mr. Speaker. The budget is no good, not at all. The contribution from the Member for Tunapuna is the worst I have heard [*Desk thumping*] the worst, worst—the worst that I have heard. His behaviour as a minister leaves a lot to be desired as well, a lot, and he would leave me alone in the future. Come with good evidence. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Labour, Manpower Development and Industrial Relations (Hon. Harry Partap): [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I want to say this afternoon that the budget presentation by our hon. Minister of Finance has been one of the best that we have heard in this House for a number of

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years [*Interruption*] [*Desk thumping*] and indeed it was the best since we came into office since 1995. Conversely, the reply by the Opposition Leader today has been the worst that I have heard in a budget reply since I have been listening to budgets since 1956—[*Desk thumping*] the worst. [*Interruption*] It was so bad that even Dorothy did not come. [*Laughter*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Laventille East/Morvant, I can hear you loudly shouting “Your royal shortness”. That is distracting and I am cautioning you not to repeat that in this House. The Member has a right to make his presentation without being disturbed. There is a Standing Order that says you ought to remain in your seat quietly when another Member is on his feet. So I am cautioning you for the first time, please refrain from doing that. Please proceed, Member for Nariva.

Hon. H. Partap: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but I know that the only thing they can do on that side is to make noise because really they are incapable of presenting reasoned objections and/or alternatives, therefore we do not expect them to understand the deeper implications of the budget that was presented by our hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, the budget touched everybody. In fact, nobody was left behind in this budget and, as we proceed during the course of the financial year, we will all be party to the success of the budget. We will all be receiving benefits from the budget and I am sure that those old age pensioners outside will feel a great deal of relief in receiving their \$800 at the beginning of October. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to dwell too much on some of the things that they said this afternoon. For example, the Member for Point Fortin, who replied a few minutes ago, really raised no serious matter in relation to the budget because he was saying that the budget was the worst, but he discounted all the things that we did for the poor people of this country, the ordinary man in the country. That is important because those opposite, when they presented their budgets—and we all know this—year after year they would come and would impose taxation on the people of this country, with hardly a relief until election time, and then they offered some slight relief and if they won, as they used to at one time, they would come back again for another four years of punishment. This Government, the UNC Government, headed by our distinguished leader, the Member for Couva North, since 1995 I think it is, that we have been—we have not imposed any taxation but we have brought relief after relief to the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Point Fortin this afternoon made some spurious statements in his contribution and I simply want to refer to one at this time in

which he said that a member of the Industrial Court—and I am not holding brief for anybody, but I thought it would have been unfair for somebody who is not in the House to be accused in the manner in which the Member for Point Fortin did. He was referring to the judgeship of Mr. Sam Maharaj.

I simply want to put on record here that Mr. Maharaj served for a number of years in the field of practical industrial relations. He was the General Secretary of one of the largest trade unions in this country and I cannot understand how we can have a person who cannot read or write holding down the office of a General Secretary of one of the largest trade unions in this country. Apart from that, Mr. Maharaj attended several international conferences. I used to work in the newspaper industry and I will tell you that I would have gotten some of his speeches at these conferences and they were intelligent pieces. They made sense, much more sense than what the Member for Point Fortin said this afternoon—much more sense.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you, too, that Mr. Maharaj is considered an expert in the sugar industry in this country. I am surprised to hear the Member for Point Fortin make such disparaging remarks about the goodly gentleman and I just wanted to disabuse the minds of the Members of the House and, by extension, those who listen outside, that Mr. Maharaj, I think and I believe—verily I believe that he is capable of being a member of the Industrial Court. I am sure that the Attorney General will deal with the matter of the Industrial Court. I simply want to say that when we came into office the staff, including the number of judges at the Industrial Court—there were a number of vacancies and the hon. Attorney General did, in fact, increase the number of judges at the Industrial Court. I think the court is very well poised now to take care of the additional work they have in relation to the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), to minimum wage and to all the other pieces of legislation that we will be bringing from time to time.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Point Fortin also said that Icacos was disappearing. I do not know what he meant by that but we have been in Icacos, some of us here, and we have heard that people there in Icacos saying that they are glad for this UNC Government, that now under the UNC Government Icacos is part of Trinidad and Tobago. They feel that they are part of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know where the Member for Point Fortin is getting his information but certainly he is not getting it from the people of Icacos.

Mr. Speaker, a lot has been said and perhaps the only thing that the Opposition has is they want to rake and scrape every inch of ideas that they have on what they perceive to be corruption. I just want to tell you and I want them to

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understand this; that this Government, regardless of what you think—we have been taking every single action necessary to ensure that we deal with any acts of corruption that may arise.

Dr. Rowley: Shame on you!

Hon. H. Partap: You may say shame on me but I will tell you, shame on you on that side because you allowed corruption to thrive in your time. [*Interruption*] It is not me who went to Nariva and used to walk away with brown-paper bags of money, you know, while the rice farmers were destroying the ecology.

Dr. Rowley: Who was doing that?

Hon. H. Partap: “I doh know but I am telling you is not me! I never walk away with brown-paper bags of money you know, never!” [*Interruption*] So the corruption, friends, we—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I think, Member, you are allowing yourself to be distracted and I will caution you, continue as you were going. You were going well. Do not be distracted, all right?

Hon. H. Partap: Thank you very much for the advice, Mr. Speaker, and I will certainly follow your advice, and I think I will follow the advice of my friend on this side and I will address you so I can get away from there.

What we have done, Mr. Speaker, is put a number of things in place to ensure that corruption is dealt with. I have no doubt at all, no doubt at all, that this Government is going to ensure that if there are any acts of corruption they will be dealt with according to the law, and I will say no more about that.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry, the Ministry of Labour, Manpower Development and Industrial Relations, is at this moment concentrating on two major aspects: manpower development and industrial relations. We started developing the manpower development division since 1995, and we have reengineered and we are continuing to reengineer the manpower division. We are looking specifically at the National Employment Service which we have converted into something which is going to be—when we do make the announcement—transformed.

When we came there in 1995, the National Employment Service was a division within the Ministry. It was on one of the floors, but people hardly came in, because it was operating but the department did not get any help from the government of the day. Today we have reengineered the division with the

assistance of several agencies, including the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United States Department of Labour. We are developing a one-stop shop in the National Employment Service where people would come in, they will be registered, they will get résumé preparation, get advice on employment and we will try to match skills. This is what we will be doing.

We are going a step further. Right now in Trinidad and Tobago we have a National Employment Service established in Port of Spain, San Fernando, Chaguanas, Siparia and Point Fortin. But what we intend to do this year is use maybe the ETP offices—one section of the office—or maybe we may use the regional corporations. We have not decided how we will go with it. Also, we will put a computer there with a data entry clerk and people who are unemployed and want to register can go there and it will be online, so they will register in the various areas and it will feed back to our mainframe in Port of Spain. We intend to put this in Rio Claro, Sangre Grande, Arima, Couva, Penal and Diego Martin.

Mr. Hinds: Thank you very kindly for giving way, hon. Minister. In the course of your contribution, it would be very helpful if you will indicate what was the expenditure in your Ministry in the last fiscal period, and what is the expenditure allocated for your Ministry in the ensuing period, 2001—2002? I will be very grateful if you could enlighten us.

Mr. Assam: Tell him to do his research. You do not need to tell him that!

Hon. H. Partap: The yellow books are here, but I am sure the Member will look back and see what it looks like. Let me continue in the vein I have been going. Maybe I will touch on that a little later. So the school leaver, he or she would not have to come into Port of Spain, San Fernando or Chaguanas to register. They can do it in their own little areas and it will feed back to the mainframe.

Our manpower officers will remove themselves from the clerical work that they used to do and they would now be interfacing with employers. We will then have a matching of skills and work. So, this is what we intend to do at that level to improve that system of the delivery in terms of the National Employment Service.

Mr. Speaker, another aspect of our work there at the Ministry is that of the industrial relations, and we are taking a very close look at the conciliation division. I want to admit that we have been losing conciliation officers. Our very experienced officers are now going to greener pastures and they have been absorbed by the private sector, so we have a new group of people that came in, and we are working towards developing these people so that they eventually will become competent in the particular area of conciliation.

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So far, Mr. Speaker, for the past seven months, since we have been in operation, since we came into office in 1995, we had over 2,000 non-unionized people seeking our assistance, and we have them seeking our assistance in various fields; in the implementation of the minimum wage. Right now we hardly take people to court; in fact, we discourage that. We discourage people from going to court. We go in there and conciliate with them. We meet with them.

The people who are not paid their minimum wage or they have any problem in terms of their industrial relations, we try to solve it before going to court. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, we have been able to get four people, I think it was close to \$1 million in wages that they would have lost. So we have been doing, even though our manpower may not be at the level that the Opposition would like it to be—our officers have been working well.

Mr. Speaker, we know—and there is evidence of it—that the industrial relations climate in this country has improved tremendously since 1995. We do not have many upheavals in terms of industrial relations. There have been two major ones this past two or three weeks. One has been resolved already and the workers went back to work today. Then there is one outstanding at the LNG plant in Point Fortin which we are attending to but, basically, we have no major upheavals and we at the conciliation division of the Ministry of Labour, Manpower Development and Industrial Relations feel proud to know that we were able to keep the industrial climate at a level where there have been minor infractions, and these minor ones are being dealt with competently.

Mr. Speaker, we have our legislative agenda as well in the Ministry of Labour, Manpower Development and Industrial Relations, and the Occupational Safety and Health Bill, as you are well aware, Sir, is before a select committee of this House, and we have been discussing that matter. I am sure that the results of that will be known in a little while.

We have two major pieces of legislation that are now before the Tripartite Standing Committee on Labour Matters, and I want to tell you that everything we do at the Ministry, we do at a tripartite level. We interface with the social partners and, right now, the tripartite committee has before it the Employment Injury and Disability Benefits Bill. It also has the Basic Conditions and Minimum Wages Bill before it. I hope that very soon we will be able to get those Bills back into Parliament so that we can debate them.

Mr. Speaker, the Employment Injury and Disability Benefits Bill is the one that will replace the workmen's compensation which is sadly outdated at this time.

We also have there the Cabinet-appointed tripartite committee headed by Mr. Oswald Wilson.

Mr. Hinds: Who?

Hon. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is saying who, who, and that committee was appointed by the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]. So, Mr. Speaker, the committee is looking at the Industrial Relations Act (IRA). It is almost through with its recommendations and we hope very soon to take this to Cabinet and then to Parliament. We feel that there is an urgency for this in relation to the IRA and we are going to be looking at it.

Mr. Speaker, most of the Members, including the Opposition Leader and the Member for Point Fortin, did mention the Employment Training Programme (ETP). The ETP is a reincarnation of several other things that were there before: LID, Special Works, DEWD, and URP, but it was a monster created by the PNM. I will tell you a little about that this evening.

Mr. Speaker, year after year, this monster, DEWD, Special Works—call it what you will.

Dr. Rowley: Dhanraj!

Hon. H. Partap: It was associated with massive demonstrations, people marching up and down the place, fraud—

Dr. Rowley: Dhanraj!

Hon. H. Partap: Ghost gangs—

Dr. Rowley: Dhanraj!

Hon. H. Partap: Low productivity, indifferent quality of work, low esteem and violence. There has been a litany of woes associated with this programme, and I see that the Member for Diego Martin Central is really listening.

Mr. Valley: I must listen.

Hon. H. Partap: Yes, you are, and I am glad because I am going to tell you something that we are doing about this ETP. They have changed it to ETP and it is going to bring some changes in that system. I want to tell you, that system is important, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask the hon. Member whether he has consulted with his predecessor on the operations of the programme during his reign.

Mr. John: That is not necessary.

Hon. H. Partap: I have not done that, Mr. Speaker, but I have read all the documents in relation to how they conducted it in their time.

Mr. Assam: You must not answer stupid questions.

Hon. H. Partap: Last year when the programme came under my Ministry, the Prime Minister, in his wisdom, said that he wanted the programme which was renamed the Employment Training Programme to have an element, a component of training—employment and training—and we are talking about low-skilled, non-skilled people, because these are the people who come into the ETP.

We set about putting in place a system where some measure of training will take place, and this year had been, what I call, a transition period. We had to get people acclimatized; provide the culture of training for them. It will take some time. We may not be 100 per cent successful this year, but we are sure that as we progress in the years ahead, we will certainly change the culture, and that people who enter the programme will now have training. They will be able to develop a basic skill.

I hear a lot of talk about men making flowers and so on, but that is no longer on the programme. We are not going to have that. We are going to train people in the skill, and then we will go a step further and we will help them monetize the skill.

I want to tell the Member for Point Fortin that this year we have a number of people from the Point Fortin area who have opened their own businesses, small as it is, coming from the programme. That is the measure of success we have had. We are going to talk more about that later on in the year, so that we will use those people as an example so that others will know that they can use the ETP and develop their own means of employment. We are glad. I am sure that the Prime Minister will be happy to know that we are getting some limited success in the matter of employment and training.

Mr. Speaker, I heard a lot of accusations here about the ETP. Some people made accusations about us using the vehicles. The Member for Point Fortin said we were using the ETP vehicles for transporting people for elections. The ETP has two vehicles, and what I instructed them to do was mark ETP on them as big as possible so that they cannot use them for anything else than the ETP. That is what we are doing. We put ETP as tall as me on the tall door! *[Laughter]* Two vehicles. Yes, we have two vehicles. And the lettering on the ETP is as high as I am on the door.

Dr. Rowley: And that is not very high.

Hon. H. Partap: That is not very high. For the whole country, we have two vehicles. So when we hear reports about people saying we are taking the vehicles and moving people up and down, it is not true. It is the Member for Point Fortin to whom I am replying. He said it. Not me!

Mr. Speaker: Member, can you not see that every time you allow yourself to get distracted you allow all the crosstalk to come in? Why do you not focus on what you are saying, address the Speaker and you will not get so much crosstalk? Please, carry on.

Hon. H. Partap: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will do that. I will concentrate on the Speaker's Chair and I will not be distracted. Mr. Speaker, I have cleared up that matter with the vehicles because we really do not have the number of vehicles that people talk about. We have two vehicles and we use them as efficiently as possible. We may have to get some more.

Mr. Speaker, we have put in place a procedure for the procurement of material so that there will be no leakage of funds when material is purchased. That was one of the problems that the ETP suffered from. It is that a lot of money went out by way of procurement, and I will tell you it was a simple way they did it, that they would inflate the cost and then some arrangements with the suppliers; and that is how the money would go, but this year, we have stopped that. I do not know if we have stopped it completely, but I know that we have significantly minimized it, so that now we have a procurement procedure and, in some areas, you will notice that in some constituencies you will not find the projects—those construction projects. We did not get started because we were very cautious. We did not want money to leak out from the system through that means.

Mr. Speaker, what we have done, is put things in place—and we are doing a lot of checking and rechecking—to ensure that the procedures are followed and the money goes where it is supposed to go. It is supposed to go to the poor people—facilities for the poor people. That is what we are doing. Our procurement procedure is in place, and I can tell you one thing. I can assure you that in the year that is coming, the new financial year, that if there is leakage, it would be at a minimum. It would be at the barest minimum.

We have also reconfigured, and there is a committee that was set up, a Cabinet committee, a multipartite committee to advise on the ETP. They have submitted a report, the report is going to Cabinet and we are following the advice. We will follow the advice of the committee in relation to how we allocate gangs. I want to tell you that for this financial year, the year that we took it over—we began in

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February of this year, and at this moment—we closed on September 14—54,913 persons had access to the programme. They had access to the two cycle and one cycle. A cycle is a month. And so, 54,913 people had access to the programme. [*Desk thumping*]

6.15 p.m.

In San Juan/Laventille, you had the largest number of people that had access; 9,815 people had access. [*Desk thumping*] So I do not know how they say that we are trying to discriminate against people; we have not been doing that. [*Interruption*] We have not been doing that. When people come to the programme, I do not see PNM or UNC marked on their faces. They get the job. [*Interruption*] I do not do it, but there are people there and they provide the employment.

Mr. Speaker, I am telling you this: if we were not fair, if the Employment Training Programme was not fair this year, there would have been many people marching in the streets. For the first time, since this system came on, no marching; nobody pounding the pavement. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Only Cudjoe marching.

Hon. H. Partap: Do you know why? Because we treated people fairly in this system and we will continue to treat people fairly. I want to assure them of that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just tell you too that we had 69,513 persons registered under the ETP. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: Thank you yet again for giving way. Since the Minister was so good to point out that some 9,000 persons are registered under the ETP from the San Juan/Laventille area, is the Minister able to tell us what work is taking place via ETP in the Laventille area, at the moment? What are the programmes? I say so because in my own constituency I do not see anything happening. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, I do not know; perhaps he does not live in his constituency, perhaps he does not go into his constituency. [*Laughter*] I am not casting any aspersion on the Member.

Hon. Member: Do you live in Westmoorings?

Hon. H. Partap: I am simply saying that 9,815 persons secured employment under the programme. The programme, as I told you, was a transition. You have part work/part training and it was a transition this year. We did not do many large projects because we had the procurement system in place and we wanted to make sure that it worked.

Mr. Bereaux: How much in La Brea? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, I will talk to you and so I will get away from any trouble. I was telling you that 69,513 persons are registered throughout the country for employment and we were able to employ 4,980.

We are sure that we are going to continue on the ETP programme. You will hear people making all kinds of accusations against the programme, but they are making those accusations based on the culture that was there before. I cannot blame them, but the thing is I want them to judge the programme on what it is today. I am willing to take you to most of the regions and to show you, if you cannot see, so that you will be able to see what people are doing.

We are going to be plodding along in relation to what the committee has reported. We are going to Cabinet.

Mr. Assam: Put some of them on the training programme. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. H. Partap: I want to tell you this, Mr. Speaker. One of the things I was told, when I got the programme and we had to do part work and part training, was that some people were saying that the people in Laventille and on the hills do not want training. That is a myth; it is not true. The women came to my office. Some of them can make their own skirts and dresses for their children and so on. They came to the office and said so. They said, "Look what we have been missing out on; we have been missing out on this." So we will do much more for people. [*Crosstalk*]

I want to close now by telling you that we on this side support—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for La Brea, please; will you keep it down and allow the Member to make his contribution.

Mr. Bereaux: I am guided, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. H. Partap: Any unbiased assessment from the provisions of the Budget document produced by the hon. Minister of Finance will be able to trace the consistency between the labour legislative programme of this Government and the provisions of the Budget. Both address the wants of the people of this country; in particular, the little people, the people who want to get along in life and who want small things, simple things.

Whether we are speaking of a national minimum wage, maternity protection, occupational safety and health or employment injury and disability benefits, basic conditions of work, unemployment or amendments to the Industrial Relations Act,

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all these things, we are talking about a people-centred Government. This Government has established a legislative and economic track record for the little people of this country and I am certain that we could be an example for the developed world.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that those opposite, even though they say all kinds of things, are going to give support to this Budget, because they will realize that this is a splendid budget; it is a poor people budget.

I thank you.

Mr. Jarrette Narine (*Arouca North*): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make my intervention in this budget debate.

Mr. Speaker, from the Member for Nariva, we have actually sat here and heard two words: checking into and looking at. I have not heard anything from the Minister in charge of labour. Probably we might hear something more in the Upper House, when the real Minister speaks.

Hon. Member: Who is the real Minister?

Mr. J. Narine: Somebody named Moonilal. [*Laughter*] The Member for Nariva spoke about our speaker from Point Fortin, the Member of Parliament, that the appointment of an Industrial Court judge was based on his expertise in sugar and now he is going to make decisions on industrial relations. I do not know if this is what we need in this country. I would feel that persons who have been working in labour, who probably did not go to Ruskin in London or the Cipriani Labour College and had long years of service in the labour movement and experience in industrial relations, would be qualified and not just have expertise in sugar.

I also heard the Member for Nariva speak about transparency in corruption. I will say something, Mr. Speaker, [*Laughter*] they have real transparency in corruption. As a matter of fact, in my constituency, a certain gentleman is boasting that his wife was related to the former Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority and they were given the contract to import the foreign used equipment at the hospital; those that did not work, those that were obsolete and those that nobody was trained to use. So you have many people getting away, because the Minister of Finance said in his budget presentation that he is now putting things in place to deal with these matters.

Now that he is putting things in place to deal with corruption within his Ministry, to check on the various Ministries and the various projects to audit and

so on, what about what has happened over the last six years? Will the corrupt people get away? Have they received a reprieve or amnesty for the Piarco terminal building, InnCogen, the desalination plant, Caroni (1975) Limited or the NP gas stations upgrade, which have not been completed yet and which cost about four times the amount of money they first said it would cost to upgrade these gas stations?

Will we not do something to find out what went on in the Miss Universe Pageant? Are we saying that the White Hall renovations—[*Interruption*] Yes, I went and a member of my constituency got the contract for the chairs. I understand that he got \$1 million and paid \$800,000 to build them; then after that, he sold half to FIFA and half on the open market. So that is what went on. Those are the things that we need to check on when we talk about corruption. [*Desk thumping*]

The Winsure settlement; \$69 million went to Balandra to bail out Winsure. [*Interruption*] So it was not \$69 million that went to bail out Winsure Insurance Company? It seems as though you only listen to yourself inside here.

Mr. Assam: Ask Valley, he is the Chairman of the PAC.

Mr. J. Narine: I am asking, what about the rice shipment that came to Trinidad? Up to now we do not know what took place. We have been hearing things and, actually, they are saying, “No, it is quite all right; everything was on the level.” You understand. So that the Minister of Finance has a lot to see about before he even starts auditing what is going to take place from now on.

I am asking: what about the Tobago ferry penalty \$24 million? ADDA Ringbang? The sugar mill that never worked that came from Dhanpur? I can go on and on.

When I looked at the budget on the first page, on the cover it says, “Leaving No One Behind”. The Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation sent me this document about a year ago. To show you how this Government is always trying to get ideas from other people, they have none of their own—this document says here, “Leaving no one behind”, a statement made by the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, you understand—and this is what appears here. Probably somebody who saw that document, added it into this one.

Mr. Bereaux: Assam gave him. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Assam: They would not even clean the cemeteries in the Tunapuna/Piarco region. The cemeteries grass is 10 feet high. Narace will dead bad.

Mr. J. Narine: But you had the same problem when you were Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation; there were cemeteries that were not cleaned for years. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Bereaux: Only when the rain fell. You nearly drown yourself, your nose was so high in the air.

Mr. J. Narine: A question was asked—how come he did not know how much was the allocation given to his Ministry. During the short period that he spoke, he did not say what they were going to do and how much money they were going to spend on it. I would not probably go into that. As a matter of fact, regarding the \$7 an hour, every day we as Members of Parliament have problems with that. Persons come to my office to say that they are not being paid the minimum wage. They tell them, yes, they will pay them \$7 an hour; they pay them for eight hours and they have to work 12 hours. They have to work on Saturdays. All these things are happening and the Minister is saying that they are negotiating with the employers. He needs to charge the employers, not negotiate with them.

Every time you have to negotiate with an employer who should pay a penalty and a fine, they are going to offer you a bribe. I do not know if it is happening already, but that is the way that these matters are resolved. They give one person a hush mouth and pay the worker off, instead of going to the Industrial Court or the Magistrates' Court. This is something that I am in total disagreement with. If someone breaks the law, they should pay for it, but this is UNC style so the Minister is just following what was taking place in the other parts of his Government, by negotiating with persons who are deliberately not paying the \$7 an hour. May I remind the Minister that the union asked for \$10 minimum wage and was promised it too.

A little on the Employment Training Programme, Mr. Speaker. Nobody is seeing the ETP operating anywhere; there is no need for any demonstrations. There is no need for anybody to write anything. The ETP is cleaning drains now, doing the work of Local Government. [*Interruption*] Well the few gangs—one gang was in Guatapaharo just before the UNC executive election. Certain people in Guatapaharo—if you want me to call names—did not get work because they were not aligned to you. You understand. I know all these things.

To say that the ETP has done a fine job and all that, is only lip service. The Minister came here with no record of their achievements, as to what they did. It is the first time that a minister or a parliamentary secretary was giving a report on the operations of the unemployment programme, for which \$130 million is placed every year and it accounts for nothing. The Member just said that there was no demonstration, no corruption, the programme is running well and that is that; no accountability, nothing. He took half an hour just to say something to say that he spoke in the budget debate. You understand. That is what is taking place.

It is the on programme that caused one of his chairmen of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation to get his death; the same programme. What happened at that time was because the programme was doing work, but they were paying money to certain people who were not performing; parking up vehicles that were not working and getting paid for it. He told the Minister at the time. The Member for Nariva told the Minister and created the confusion and, today, he is really spending a good vacation in the Arouca North constituency.

When I get figures for budget debates, I do not have a problem with the recurrent expenditure, because from my experience over the years I know you have to pay wages and salaries, you have to pay for goods and services. I am not saying that that started now—you can ask the Member for Tunapuna—when you get goods and services off a recurrent budget for Local Government, your construction gangs only work two months for the year, after that they do not have money for materials and so on. You have to vire money from other areas in order to get some work done after that, and this has been happening. Wages and salaries are on the upswing, but the goods and services are not increasing.

You have almost 1,000 employers in one corporation and what they are doing is taking persons who are masons, carpenters, drivers and skilled people and putting them to do tasks on a daily basis, to clean drains. That is what is happening. When we were trying, by attrition, early retirement and by not replacing persons who just left the job, when this Government came into office in 1995/1996, they replaced everyone. They got together with the trade union movement and split it up; the trade union movement got some employed, then the politicians got some and the activists got some. That is how they replaced the workers in the Tunapuna/ Piarco Regional Corporation; this is a fact. One Member of the Upper House was the chief negotiator.

I know from the trade union movement that, first of all, you apply for a job and if it is a labouring job they take you for a small interview, looking at the capabilities that you have, so that you can move up. You join the trade union movement when you receive a job and not before. These people had to join the trade union before getting a job in the Tunapuna/ Piarco region I will come to that further down. What I am pointing out here is that I always look first at the development programme estimates. The Member for St. Joseph, because it is his ministerial responsibility, I am seeing here under the Development Programme that from the Consolidated Fund, the Ministry of Infrastructure, Development and Local Government received for development \$247,509,000—small money.

6.35 p.m.

I know you have big money, I know you get a lot of money from other sources. But when I go to page 158 of that same document and I look at the allocation for local government, 14 regional corporations with 124 elected councillors, plus appointed aldermen, and what is the allocation for development in the 14 regional corporations? It is \$14,096,000 for 14 corporations. When you work that out, the Minister is now responsible for \$233,413,000 to determine how this money is spent.

Apart from that, when you look at the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), No. 142 on page 30, the sum of \$8.2 million will be allocated to local government authorities to construct box drains and undertake major rehabilitative work in local communities.

Roads and bridges, 17 per cent of the allocations, \$223.6 million. I am just saying that that is a recipe for corruption. When you look at that amount of money for which the Minister will be responsible and he will determine who gets the contracts, then you are looking back at not only—well my colleague from Point Fortin cleared the air and I am certain that the other persons in Tunapuna/Piarco will be able to do just that, because they did work for the money, they did not get it free, and they had the ability to do the work.

I understand that one of the names that was called by the Member for Tunapuna, that was to paint the entire outside of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, and they got \$15,000 to do that. If you have to paint the outside of your house in Maraval, I am sure you will be charged more than \$15,000 to do it. So to ask for \$15,000 to paint a building like the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation is creating mischief, where you have millions of dollars here where a Minister will determine where he spends it, and who gets it.

Why I am saying this, we keep every local government election—we talk about empowerment to local government. You will come next year June and say the same thing you know. You will bring your local government manifesto next year and talk about devolution of powers, decentralization, empowerment and all these things you will talk about, but the reality is that you are not doing that. [*Desk thumping*] The reality is, that you are emasculating the local government bodies, and while councillors have been saying that they are underpaid, very soon people would be saying to this Minister that they have nothing to do.

Councillors will have nothing to do because the Minister is hogging all the responsibilities. Why do we have a local government body? Why do we have an

association for local government? It is because it is necessary to monitor certain things and if you had given what you are giving to pave roads—because you are not doing the drainage anywhere, you do some roads without drainage, without proper foundation, with leaking pipelines. That would not happen if the local government authority had to do it, because what we learnt in local government is that you put drainage first, fix all the leaks, and then you strengthen the roadway before you pave, but your contractors went into Arouca North constituency and—I have seen it all over Trinidad—paved roads that were good, and left out the other roads. When I am speaking about Arouca I will come to that.

You talk about having a first-class nation, and all this quality nation and empowerment for local government and funding local government and giving local government the authority. You have not adhered to Act No. 21 of 1990. The former Minister got himself into difficulties because he did not follow this Act that was first started by the NAR, and when we came in, my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, the Minister of Local Government made amendments here, and the former Minister tried to make certain amendments. I am certain that the Member for St. Joseph has been having dialogue, but the political pressure is on him. So he would take away from this one and give to the other and when you give one corporation \$744,000 for 12 councillors, how are they to divide that?

Since the Member for Tunapuna was Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, he started to have equitable sharing of whatsoever fund we got. So if we had 11 councillors at the time, we would share equally, and up to this point in time, we are sharing equally, but when you give \$744,000 to a corporation for development with 12 councillors, you may have more councillors getting their death very soon, because they have nothing to give.

When they go out to the people all they can tell the people is that they do not have the funding to do it. Then you get on the media and say: Blame Tunapuna/Piarco, blame Laventille, blame Debe Corporation for not doing the work. How are they going to do the work when you are hogging all the money for yourselves to give out contracts? I am certain that it will go the way that it has always been going. One will never forget the headline “Lucky Jogie”. Member for Chaguanas, do you remember this headline? “Lucky Jogie” who got millions of dollars in contracts from the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation and it was brought down and divided into small amounts so they did not have to go for contractors and tenderers. Once it is under a certain sum of money, you do not have to go for tendering. I have all the documents here. If for history’s sake you want to look at them, I will show them to you.

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We also had the famous PR contractors. Do you remember the PR contractors? A paper company in the Chaguanas Regional Corporation gave them four times the amount of money to cut 36 recreation grounds. There were two quotations, not three because Seereeram Brothers did not quote and Saith Park cost \$15,000 to brush cut at that time. The same thing will happen because you are no superman to see that all these things happen. Just as the Minister of Finance is no superman, and they are going to con him every time he puts his auditors out there. These “fellas” real good you know. You now come in here, they have been here for a long time, you understand?

The first thing that happened in the URP, or LID, or ETP was that the checks and balances were removed. They removed the checkers at that time. Call it red tape, bureaucracy, or what you want to call it, but they had reasons for that. In the URP we had stores so that you purchase materials and they were placed in the stores. There would have been pilfering, you cannot stop that. It is when you catch someone doing it—what you do about it: that is what counts.

So when they take things out of the stores they are given a requisition order and it is made in triplicate and the gatekeeper gets one to see that the exact amount of material that left is placed on the job site and the checker on the job site will have that, and at the end of the fortnight they bring the three together and make sure that the materials which were sent to the job site actually went there and not to build houses and roads for ETP people.

The Member for Nariva indicated that they were going to put these labour offices into the Employment Training Programme—national employment service. Are you going to do that in offices where there are fights every day? And people selling drugs and say they are selling it for the big boy in the area and all that? Are you going to do that? No. You are a member of the media that is probably why it is keeping out of the media, but there are still certain reports coming in. [*Crosstalk*] Why you did not tell the police when they beat Boodaye up in Guatapaharo? Why you did not tell the police that? When your councillor beat Boodaye, why you didn't tell the police?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He couldn't remember the police number at the time.

Mr. J. Narine: They do not want to see him in Cumuto and Guatapaharo. He sent a gang there for the executive UNC elections and as election finished they close it down. In Arouca North, Leon Prevatt said he was in support of the Prime Minister. Well brother, he lose so bad! The ETP is the executive of the UNC, 87 persons voted in La Brea, 87 ETP workers; in Arouca, 300 voted: ask him. When you have that removal of checks and balances it will always create a problem.

I am saying that this audit department that is set up by the Minister of Finance, I compliment him for this, and the auditors must get out there and check retroactively. You must go back into some of these programmes where money was spent—four and five times the cost of the projects. This is what you need to do.

I want to talk about the Chaguanas market. When it started, I told your former colleague and Minister, who is now spending holidays in Arouca North, that there was a certain person who started the URP programme; spent \$100,000 and only dug some holes in the market. There were no plans for the market, no approvals, no drawings. That is why he found himself in difficulties that when he got into the market it was inadequate for the kind of delivery that the people had to make because there were no plans. I warned him of that. I came here and I raised a motion on the adjournment. The Member for Chaguanas is shaking his head. I raised a motion on the adjournment and I was told that everything was all right.

Everything was all right because the URP man was fired, he went away with \$100,000 and opened a farm after that. He is still the owner of the farm: I know where it is, and maybe we will talk about that after. But how much money went into that? When you became the Minister he had to pump extra money, \$5 million and more to have it properly done.

The Mayor of Chaguanas, Orlando Nagessar came out there and he did not know about voter padding, so he did not believe it. He said there were only aliens working in the market, only Guyanese. He did not know they voted in Chaguanas. The whole set of Guyanese down there have ID cards and they voted in Chaguanas, so he had to stay quiet after making the statement. He made a false statement saying that the people were Guyanese because he did not find out. Probably he was not involved in your “election scampaign”.

What about Walker Park? I would like to find out from you what work went on at Walker Park in Caroni in the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. That facility should have been under their control. I understand that a contractor was called in to do the job and he is now being paid. If there was a tendering procedure for that project I would like to know. I would like to know who are the three persons or more than three who applied to get that job, likewise, the Princes Town market which was rebuilt just a few years ago. All of a sudden the Princes Town market is rebuilding again, and there was no tendering procedure.

Mr. Valley: What about the Debe market?

Mr. J. Narine: I think that the Minister of Finance will have a lot to check on. Not only on your finances; you need to check on “dem fellas” who have millions to spend.

The Member for St. Joseph has \$1.5 billion of this budget—that money that you have brought for us to approve. How that money is going to be spent has to be monitored, so when you look at Princes Town, Walker Park and you have already had your experiences with the Chaguanas market, you understand what I mean. I know you are trying to help out when people come for virements according to the Act, you are trying to help because they need that.

When money is saved on certain projects, then you need to put it together and allocate it to other projects. The only reason that is happening is because the regional corporations monitor the politicians in local government, although they do not have adequate staff and I am seeing that the only persons that got additional staff was the Chaguanas Corporation; some cashier and someone else to collect revenues in Chaguanas. If you look at the documents you will see it. I notice that you look very surprised, but the Chaguanas Corporation got additional. [*Crosstalk*] I said last year that I grew up on balisier juice, I staying with the balisier, brother, because not too long again we will be over there.

Sometimes there will be waste and mismanagement in some areas, but you are the Minister, you have to keep control of that and your staff is to go out there in the corporations and make sure these things happen because you have gangs in your corporation who are working for two hours. They go out at 6.00 a.m. and by 7.00 a.m. they are packing up. We know that.

Mr. Humphrey: That is only one hour.

Mr. J. Narine: By 6.00 a.m. they are packing up, so they stay another hour on the job site. That is in case the circulatory foreman comes around, you understand? So I am telling you that you need productivity and the only way you will get that is by monitoring these people day and night. Day and night you have to be on them.

Mr. John: Do you want the job?

6.55 p.m.

Mr. J. Narine: I have total respect for the Member for St. Augustine. We worked together as councillors and Members of Parliament. I have total respect for him. What is happening on that side, do you think I need—if it had to happen, it would have happened. It is six years. It is too late now. The horses jump away. It has gone too far to turn back now.

The under staffing of the corporation—if he looks into this—and I am certain that the Minister is quite aware that he needs to deal with certain parts of Act 21 of 1990. There needs to be amendments that he should bring to Parliament. I am certain that if he has discussions with the corporation, that they in turn are going to get us to support the amendment for local government because the PNM is totally committed to empowerment of communities and so on. We have been sayings that all the time. We are still committed to that. We would have a lot to say next year because the local government elections are not too far off. If he is going to squeeze them, I hope he will tell them that when we go on the hustings for the local government elections.

Mr. Speaker, the reduction of funding and the inequitable distribution—I met a councillor from the Chaguanas Borough Corporation at Piarco a couple weeks ago. At that time he was thinking about resigning. He asked me if he resigns if they would have to call a bye-election. So I told him no, and I discouraged him from resigning, because I had eight years in local government and the training that I got at the local government level has served me, not only in Parliament, but in my natural life all around.

Hon. Member: You have to thank Mervyn.

Mr. J. Narine: He had left us and went for a scissors-tail jacket and a tall hat in London.

Mr. Speaker, I go all over this country and last weekend I was in Bamboo No. 3—you know the sewer treatment plant at the end of Bamboo No. 3—you know that area quite well. They used to call it "Jackass Village", now they call it "Bamboo No. 3". It was the PNM, through its upgrading policies for the Ministry of Housing and Settlements, that did the infrastructure work there, when Mr. Ramrekersingh was the Minister, with roads and drains and the sewer system.

Hon. Member: And he still lost his seat?

Mr. J. Narine: Yes, he only got four votes down there. I am just identifying the area. I am not casting any aspersions on the people who live there. I have many friends who live there. It is because I was there that I was able to identify with them, that the sewer plant—they have contracted out the sewer treatment plant and people work there from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. So when they leave at 4.00 p.m. on Fridays, by Sunday afternoon, the system starts overflowing because no one is there to man the pumps. But more than that, the PNM had developed that

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area and the sewer system was really designed for the people. Do you know who is connected to that system? Grand Bazaar alone. Grand Bazaar came in after. The people there have outhouses and cesspits and soakaways.

It was built before 1995 because the PNM thought there should be a better way of life for the people in that village. So we put in a proper sewer system for them, so that they could flush their toilets, like yours, from inside their homes, and they do not have to go to the outhouses where they have to dig cesspits and soakaways. Up come the big shots and connected up the lines and the poor people have no connection.

It is the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government's constituency. I am appealing to him to go and talk to the people. I know he made a lot of walkabouts before their executive elections, but that was looking for votes. I do not mind that, but there are problems there even with the traffic. Now that they have put up barriers to accommodate the Grand Bazaar, they have created other problems for the people who are living there. There are traffic jams for the people to get out of their homes just to the highway. It takes them about half an hour. My advice to him is to get there in the morning during the peak hours, when they have to leave their homes to get into Port of Spain or down to San Fernando.

Because he is a good politician, he is reported by the media as saying that there is a priority for the San Juan Market, knowing that the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation has been behind this market for over six years. While the former Minister was whining to the tassa, he was going to try to help them. I am saying that they need the money and they must monitor the situation there. They must have proper tendering procedures and they would build the market. They have the capability to do it.

(Crosstalk)

He is going to keep it because he has his friends and supporters. Because of political pressure he has to give them the contracts to do certain things and the people are going to end up in zero position where the money is dwindled away this year and they would have nothing to show for it.

Why do they not trust the regional corporations to do their work? Chaguanas has the best builders so they are building things in Laventille and Tunapuna—pavilions and all kinds of things. Can you imagine that? If he really is the kind of Minister that people say he is, and I know that many would probably say that he is the best Minister now, I know of many others who were best Ministers. One is a

Backbencher now and one is on the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway. Be careful! These same people would set you up, so why do you not trust the regional corporations? The responsibility for drainage and irrigation—

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes [*Mrs. Robinson-Regis*]

Question put and agreed to.

7.05 p.m.

Mr. J. Narine: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to Members for allowing me some extra time.

The development of recreational facilities: Although the Stadia were built and cost approximately five times what they were supposed to cost—I, too, played sports in my young days and I know the communities. When you put a facility, you bypass the stadium in Arima, the Velodrome in Arima, and do not put down a mondo track there for them, and you go into Malabar, what is happening in Arima is that there is adequate space there for parking and everything, and that was already built.

I am appealing to the Minister who is responsible to put down a new mundo track there which will accommodate more people. Because when you build these facilities, you need proper grounds to feeder persons into those facilities. Because if you have 2,000 persons around Arima playing football, they will play on the streets—lack of facilities. At any given point in time, the Larry Gomes Stadium in Malabar can only take 22 persons for a game, and you cannot over-use those grounds. I went there to look at games. It was just built, nice and everything, but when it is overused, you will start seeing the bare patches coming up on the outfield and so on. You need some rest for those facilities.

You are not going to use those facilities for, say the Arima Football League. If you are going to use it for that, well, I feel it is for the professional league, and those facilities should be used in that manner, but the persons who are playing for the small clubs, must have the opportunity to play on proper facilities.

Mr. Ramsaran: I thank the Member for giving way. The Member said he was well educated in local government; he spent eight years there. Is he aware that the grounds in Arima and all these other areas are under the control of the Ministry of Local Government and not the Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs?

Mr. J. Narine: Exactly so. You gave them \$774,000 and the cost of repairing that facility is about \$2.5 million. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister has the \$233 million pack up there. Take \$2.5 million from him and let him give it to the Arima Corporation to fix the Velodrome. You cannot fix grounds with \$500,000. It is like the road they had to pave. Last year when we were paying \$152 for a tonne of hot mix, it went up suddenly to \$382. You would just get one-third the amount of work that you are supposed to do, to pave roads, for that.

When I was working in the Ministry of Works and Local Government, the ministry's technical staff said that it would take \$750 million at that time—which was 1994/1995—to develop, strengthen, drainage, every roadway in Trinidad. That is how the 5 per cent tax came about. It was \$50 million a year and it would have taken about four years to complete. We spent about \$800 million. Probably we could have paved the whole of the West Indies for that, and there are still roads in Trinidad which are not paved. I am sure the whole of Grenada would have been paved with that same money as well as every road in Trinidad.

When you pave the Arima Old Road in Arouca North constituency—ask your people; they went and paved Martinez Trace, which was paved six months before. But the local government representative lives there, and I do not know if they were playing some politics with him, because local government election was coming up and they paved it, and then went back and paved it, to make sure to say that, “My councillor paved his road twice and left all the other roads.”

When we were in Government, I had two roads, one just before the Comprehensive school called Payne Lane. We did the drainage; we put in new water lines; we strengthened the roadway, and up to now it is not paved. I am saying to you that when I wrote you earlier last year when you became a minister, asking that the roads in our constituency be taken care of—this was July 6 last year. I met you at the Prisons grounds for the Clico sports games. I told you I have written letters every year. I am a Member of Parliament for the last ten years. I make sure I write all the Ministries asking for what I need for the development of Arouca North. Over the last six years, nothing has been done.

The police station started in my time. It was completed and opened very quietly, because they were expecting Jarrette Narine's voice to come around with the balisier and say, “We start the police station; doh try that.” We asked for a fire station and when I wrote the former Minister of National Security and indicated to him that we had already allocated the lands opposite the Prisons, he wrote back and told me, “Yes, the lands are there; it is costing \$11 million to build a fire station for Arouca.” Because about 3,000 new homes came into Arouca: Bon Air

West; Sunrise, the Castleton area, Paradise, and you have Tunapuna to the west, Arima to the east, Piarco not coming out anyway, and it is very important and critical that the people in Arouca receive a fire station.

I am appealing to the Minister, because I know that my records were there in the Ministry of National Security, but I am not expecting anything from the Member for Couva North. I felt more comfortable when Brig. Theodore was the Minister of National Security. I do not feel comfortable with the security of the nation under him.

I am saying when we asked for these roads, even for the elections, you would notice that the UNC in Arouca North had a full-page advertisement of all the roads that were going to be paved in Arouca. Half of them are still not paved. The first road in Five Rivers which takes you straight up to the Junior Secondary School, this was on their programme for paving to win elections in Arouca. I am saying, they could pave every road in Arouca, they are not going to win any election in Arouca. Tell Roy that; I say so.

Hon. Member: You will see.

Mr. J. Narine: You will see? You cannot see. You are UNC.

So you have all that here. When I wrote that time and the reply was given—let me thank the Minister for doing some work on the Lopinot Road. But there are 23 landslips on the Lopinot Road. So paving the landslips would not make a difference. What they did was, they paved the road and they put a little mound of hot mix by every part that was slipping so that the water will run around it. That is the modern way of paving roads under this Minister—pave near the landslip and put a little thing for the water to pass around.

Lopinot has one road in and one road out. A major landslip is going to maroon everyone inside there. It is only when Lopinot heritage comes and they want to have culinary experiences that they go to Lopinot. Let the poor people make some pastelle for them to eat, while the big shots are stealing all the money in the country. They can make farine, toolum and sugar cake and other people could draw the fat salaries in Tidco. That is what is going on. That is why they would not win any elections in Arouca North. It was a box culvert that was built for the last six years, nothing else.

The Prime Minister came about nine times. Every time he goes to the Orisa place; every time he goes to open something. They turned the sod for the Jit Samaroo Cultural Complex. What happened after that? Election finish; Jarrette

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won; no building. There is nothing in the PSIP for the Jit Samaroo Cultural Complex; nothing is anywhere for anything in Arouca. I have searched the whole of the PSIP. It is not there. If they want, probably they can take some of the money that they are going to keep for themselves and not give to local government and we can talk of some of the projects.

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I also have a difficulty with how labour is being treated. I have with me a letter from the Siparia Regional Corporation, dated June 13, 2001, from a worker, Mr. Ian Moore, to Miss Sandra Marchack, Chief Personnel Officer. This letter is indicating that Mr. Moore is senior to other persons and is being victimized because they said that he is a PNM. The man worked so long—this is his record. If you look at this record you would see that junior people were given preferential treatment and he is not employed. This is what is taking place in the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government. My neighbour, Malcolm Antoine, worked every year since 1981, and a UNC activist, with no service, got the job in front of him. Look, the man's record of service is here. This is the kind of industrial practice that is being carried out by the Government. That is why the Minister of Labour, Manpower Planning and Industrial Relations can stand here today and say absolutely nothing. He was talking about trade unions uniting and all sorts of nonsense. Which trade union is uniting? *[Interruption]* Yes, they cannot even invite them. *[Interruption]* Well, he has to get another lady to blow whistle and boo.

Mr. Speaker, local government has its responsibilities. Under the Act it is clear what their responsibilities are. The health department should have, by now, a medical officer of health. That is not happening. They are not filling these vacancies and this should happen. I would just give an example. The Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation starts in Blanchisseuse on the north, it ends on Munroe Road on the south and then from Wallerfield and the Valencia River right down to Hutton Street, St. Joseph. Can you imagine 12 councillors in this area; a vastly populated area within the East/West Corridor? There is only that part from Arima going to Blanchisseuse that is unpopulated. It goes to Munroe Road. They would not have any service when the Minister is giving them—for disaster preparedness, do you know what the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation would get this year? They would get \$10,000. What are they going to do with \$10,000 for disaster preparedness? I feel the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government should review these figures and give them a supplemental vote from what is there. That \$233 million can

work well for local government. He would become the most popular minister. He would be a minister that they would never forget. Local government has always been depressed and during the last six years, more so because the minister before this one took the opportunity to harness everything. If this Minister is going in that direction he would have the same difficulty because it is getting worse.

I am urging the Minister to sit with the corporations—I am certain that he has chairmen and mayors meetings every month—talk to them; ask them about their priorities even if he does one significant project per year: the Mondo track at the Arima Velodrome so that same Phoenix would not have to take Darrel Brown and Mark Burns to Malabar. They have over 100 persons who run and they all cannot use Malabar.

Mr. Ramsaran: Where does Mark Burns live?

Mr. J. Narine: Mark Burns live in the Arouca North constituency, but we have no facilities there. There is the Larry Gomes Stadium now that he can probably access. Do you know where he learnt to run? In the Arima Velodrome on the “burst up” Mondo track, but the boy has ability. If we are to develop our sportsmen, then the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government needs to look at the facilities all over the country. Yes, the stadium is there and we can use it, but he needs to look at the facilities. Munroe Road is nice because the Member of Parliament for that constituency is closely connected there and had the strength to do things as a minister. There are places like Squadron Sports Club that is 60 years old; Horrace Kingston recently died. I was able to put in a facility there for them in the form of a clubhouse and after that, nothing. Preysal, the same thing. We, the PNM, built that pavilion in Preysal. After that, nothing.

Mr. Ramsaran: In every budget debate you say that.

Mr. J. Narine: Because that is the fact. I am talking about support facilities. Now that there is the Mannie Ramjohn Stadium, do you not need support facilities? If you allow Preysal, Alescon and all other clubs to go down, then you will have no support for these facilities. We need to understand that.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and hope that what I have said here would put some light into the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government. I know that the ETP would be no better during the next year but, at least, the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government, in conjunction with the Minister of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs, can look at these areas in local government to help the burgesses and citizens of this country.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of the Environment (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan): Mr. Speaker, let me compliment the Minister of Finance, Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming, for his forthright and comprehensive Budget Statement 2001/2002. This budget addresses all sectors of society and, as a consequence, every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit from the measures presented. It is indeed a people's budget. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I do not respond to asides, but I would respond to that one from the Member for La Brea. [*Interruption*] Asides, I said.

Mr. Speaker, he mentioned Guaracara/Tabaquite Road and I want to refer him to page 59 of the Budget Statement, where it states that individuals over 60 years would have free bus passes. In the constituency of Tabaquite, we were not able to benefit because of rural neglect under the PNM but, because of the United National Congress Government, Minister Carlos John and the Road Improvement Programme which they condemned in this House—[*Interruption*]—I am able to stand here and say that \$26 million is being spent to rebuilt that same road which the Member for La Brea talked about to make it one of the best roads in the country. [*Desk thumping*] Constituents would be able, for the first time, to have a bus in that constituency and would be able to utilize this facility of free bus passes. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with another issue on page 58 for the benefit of the Member for Arouca North. I refer to the provision of free hearing aids to all hearing impaired persons who are so assessed by DRETCHI with immediate effect. I want to recommend that the Member for Arouca North take up this facility. [*Desk thumping*]

7.25 p.m.

In my contribution this evening I want to give you the situation with respect to the Ministry of the Environment; what has happened over the last fiscal year and how we are moving into the next fiscal year, 2001/2002. [*Interruption*] I am six years in Parliament. You cannot distract me like that. I will continue.

We have seen the expansion of the Ministry of the Environment. I would deal with the legislative agenda and framework for the Ministry of the Environment, through the Environmental Management Authority (EMA). Over the last year, we have seen new headquarters for the EMA. We have seen the environmental legislative framework facilitating the situation with respect to the citizens and the problems they have encountered in the past. You know that we have brought to Parliament the noise pollution rules for negative resolution and it was passed. We

have the environmentally sensitive areas rules which are separate from the environmentally sensitive species rules. For the next fiscal year, we also have on our legislative agenda, the water pollution rules. This would soon be brought to Parliament for negative resolution. We have the actual formation of the environmental commission.

In terms of environmental management, we have sustainable development, side by side with economic and environmental preservation and conservation. If you look at the Government's objectives, you would see sustainable growth in the first of the nine national objectives. In terms of sustainable growth, the Government's vision is to move in harmony and synergy with economic and sustainable development.

You would recall in 1992 at a conference in Rio, Agenda 21, there was the importance of sustainable development. Ten years later, there would be a summit in Johannesburg dealing with a Rio Plus 10 Update. It is very important in terms of sustainable development and the environment. I listened to the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin who spoke about the destruction and impending destruction of a beach in Point Fortin. I want to ask him if he did not read on the newspapers that British Gas is applying for a certificate of environmental clearance for that pipeline. Part of that certificate would be an environmental impact assessment. He must be aware in terms of when he speaks about these things and how the environment is being impacted upon. The Government has taken the initiative to provide the legislative framework and now, we are implementing the certificate of environmental clearance under the Environmental Management Authority.

Over the past year, the Ministry of the Environment had and still has a programme called the Protect Our Beaches Programme. It is private sector driven and there is a steering committee that looks at all the beaches around Trinidad and Tobago. We started with the clean-up drive on the nation's beaches. We are now going to Macqueripe. We are partnering with British Gas to provide infrastructure. We have had a request from Atlantic LNG through hon. Carlos John to remedy the situation on the west coast of those beaches. I wanted to make reference to that.

Over the last year, the Forestry Division which is another part of the Ministry, has been tremendous with the reforestation programme. The division has been doing much work in different areas of the country, especially on the mountainous areas and hilly slopes. I put on the record that I visited the St. Joseph nursery as well as the Cumuto nursery, where there were many projects in place, especially

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seedlings for the reforestation programme. The Forestry Division is also responsible for the management of parks.

I refer here to the Caroni Lagoon and bird sanctuary facility. We saw negative reports coming from that area. I report to the House today, that the roof of the facility has been completely repaired. We are preparing for a new bumper season of tours to that facility. The Forestry Division is also responsible for the management of Fort George and there has been an upgrading programme. We have seen the strategic development and implementation plan of the Palmiste Park area in San Fernando. Of course, we are also managing the San Fernando Hill where there is another big initiative on the projection plan.

I turn quickly to the *Public Sector Investment Programme*. On page 31, you would see that in fiscal year 2002, there is a provision of \$4 million to the Environmental Management Authority. That is significant because it will provide the opportunity for the authority to carry out its mandate. This will include the processing of certificates of environmental clearance. You would recall that in the processing of these certificates, a facility is provided where technical experience can be sought from outside, with respect to assessment of environmental impact.

Recently, the noise pollution rules have come under criticism from certain quarters. It is new and the environmental inspectors are doing a tremendous job. In today's newspapers you would see the kind of work that is being done with regard to the complaints and response. The inspectors are going around with noise meters where they record the level of noise. According to the rules, a certain level of noise is permitted in certain areas. These things have to be told because people are saying that the rules are in place and nothing is happening. Meters are being bought by the Authority and the inspectors are going out and testing the level of noise that is emanating from certain areas. That programme is ongoing and would be reaping tremendous success as the process goes on.

The Authority is also undergoing change in job descriptions of certain personnel. You would have seen applications in the newspapers and soon there would be interviews. The Authority would also be expanded to include people of the calibre that is required there.

The designation I spoke about earlier with regard to the environmentally sensitive areas and species rule is very important. You would recall that I laid in Parliament, the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan For Trinidad and Tobago. This is part of the whole process of sustainable development and environmental preservation and conservation. The Government is moving forward

in terms of the approach. These rules would become very important as we implement that strategy and action plan. You must have a public awareness programme and education programme when implementing these particular regulations, rules and policies. We intend to have that kind of public education programme in the next fiscal year, to make sure that people understand what is going on.

Of course, there must be effective enforcement of the environmental laws. I am happy to report that the environmental inspectors are following up all the complaints, notwithstanding people who are calling to say that they are not getting any response from the Environmental Management Authority. The telephone number has been given out and the Authority has been responding. Complaints are coming forward and there is positive feedback from the inspectors.

Another area of very significant importance is the additional sum of \$2 million for the provision of the National Park Wildlife and Conservation Authority. This is significant for protecting our biological diversity. This is the first time that we would have that kind of approach with management of our parks and protected areas.

I also report to the House the situation—the Member for Toco/Manzanilla would be happy to hear that. Government has approved the establishment of three national parks, one at Matura, one at Maracas and the other in Tobago. These parks and the establishment of the institutional framework which would be the National Parks Wildlife and Conservation Authority would be dedicated to managing the parks and wildlife, in such a way that you maintain the national biodiversity, as part of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. This is in keeping with our national environmental policy and for the medium-term framework.

This programme will provide increased human resources for wildlife protection, management of endangered species, game species and threatened habitats. It will also provide a framework for the management and recovery of declining native species and habitats. It represents the nation's first comprehensive system of protected natural areas developed primarily for the purpose of protection of this country's biological diversity. A key feature of this programme would be its emphasis on community home management, an increased involvement of non-governmental organizations and CBOs. I think that the Member for Toco/Manzanilla would be very happy to hear that.

Mr. Boynes: I do not know if the Member would give way for one small point that relates to that? Would that also entail the establishment of the Matura National Park Headquarters and where exactly would it be built?

Dr. The Hon. A. Nanan: There is an entire management and strategy plan for Matura, which would take that into consideration.

It is important that as we implement the infrastructural and economical components of this country's development strategy, we place due attention to the conservation and protection of the nation's life support system. It is in recognition of the need for such a balanced approach to development, that the Government has decided to invest significant resources in the management of the biological resources of this country.

I refer now to the Green Fund. The purpose of this fund was to enable grants to be made to community groups and organizations, primarily engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment. The hon. Minister of Finance has proposed a reduction in the levy from 0.1 per cent to 0.075 per cent. In addition, an amount not exceeding 20 per cent of annual receipts under the levy would be allocated to the EMA to finance expenditure incurring all programmes and projects other than its operational expenses.

The purposes of the Green Fund have been expanded to include the grant of moneys for the purposes of environmental research, education and training with respect to environmental concerns and environmental infrastructural development. This will assist the EMA in implementing major capital projects in 2001–2002, that are necessary for the development of a national water pollution controlled programme including the development of national water quality standards. Capital projects for air pollution and control and noise pollution would also benefit from this measure.

With respect to the establishment of the Green Fund, I am pleased to announce to this honourable House that with the assistance of the IADB, an environmental management consultant was recruited to help the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, define the objectives, scope and operating procedures of the fund, with a strong focus on administrative and procedural issues. The consultant met with a wide cross-section of stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago and has since submitted his report for the Ministry's consideration.

7.40 p.m.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, in addition, a Green Fund Board has been appointed to implement the recommendations of the consultants, which have been accepted by the Government. It is expected that following the amendments to the

Miscellaneous Taxes Act, the Green Fund Board will be expanded to include three environmentally-related non-governmental organizations and/or community-based organizations as proposed by the hon. Minister of Finance.

This initiative is intended to strengthen the management of the Green Fund and to allow for added community involvement in the management of the Fund. With the appointment of the board and the collection of the levy, the board of the Green Fund will soon be inviting proposals from qualifying NGOs and CBOs for evaluation and approval.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance made reference to the use of lead in the production of gasoline. You will recall that the use of lead in the production of gasoline has been a cause for concern at national, regional and international levels for some time. The health hazards associated with lead by inhalation or vehicular emissions and ingestion through the food chain are widely documented.

Scientific evidence has shown that there are adverse effects on the brain development of children during exposure to lead, even at the lowest concentration. Lead retards the mental and physical development of children causing reading and learning disabilities, hearing loss, hyperactivity and the reduction of attention span. In adults, exposure to low concentrations of lead results in elevated blood pressure and hypertension, increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease.

In the fiscal year 2001-2002, the EMA held discussions with National Petroleum and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to discuss the phase out of lead and gasoline and to examine the environmental, technical, financial, social and legal issues involved in implementing such a programme.

The Authority will pursue a programme to address the promotion of cleaner burning fuels like CNG and LNG and the phase out of leaded gasoline. Working with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Tourism and Tobago Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, Petrotrin and the National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited, the Ministry of the Environment will implement a schedule for the phasing out of leaded gasoline and diesel fuel.

Mr. Speaker, another important area which falls under the Ministry of Environment is the management of solid waste. The management of solid waste has been an area of growing concern in recent years due to the rapid growth in the overall volume of waste being generated and the increase in the proportion of non-biodegradable and hazardous waste.

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Population growth, increased urbanization and industrialization, as well as changing production and consumption patterns and the lack of effective waste reduction strategies have all contributed to this alarming trend. Available data indicate that approximately 420,000 tonnes of solid waste are generated in Trinidad and Tobago annually. As a consequence, severe stress has been placed on the capacity of the existing solid waste management system. This has resulted in a significant reduction in landfill capacity, reversion to the official landfills at Forest Park, Beetham, Guanapo and Studley Park to virtual open dumps, and the increase in the volume of waste improperly disposed of in natural environments such as water courses, the verges of the roadway and vacant lots.

These developments have contributed to fires that have occurred at the Forest Park and Beetham landfills, resulting in environmental and public health risks to our citizens, particularly those living in close proximity to these landfills.

In this regard, I am pleased to announce to this honourable House that the Minister of the Environment has been given the approval by Cabinet to invite proposals from suitably qualified national and international firms for the establishment of a national solid waste system in Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of the Environment has prepared terms of reference for the development of proposals by the firms bidding for the development of a national solid waste management system. This project will be implemented during the coming financial year and will target the environmentally sound treatment of municipal, commercial, industrial, agricultural and medical waste, using the most appropriate technology.

Mr. Speaker, the measures proposed in the 2002 budget for sustainable growth must be supported by sound environmental practices if it is to succeed. The Ministry of the Environment remains committed to the preservation and conservation of our environment.

In conclusion, let us give the people what they want and what they deserve—a clean and healthy environment for present and future generations. I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: We will suspend until 8.30 p.m. We will take a break for dinner.

7.47 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

8.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Roger Boynes (Toco/Manzanilla): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for recognizing me. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Member of

Parliament for San Fernando East for his contribution today and for the disclosures that were made to the national community. I do not know if it fell in anybody's yard but, from what I understand, a certain person in this Chamber denied it outside. Needless to say, Mr. Speaker, let me deal with what we are here to deal with, the budget.

The Member for Tabaquite mentioned in his contribution, and referred to the free bus passes that are now made available to the elderly throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. He was quick in praise for that, and indicated to all of us here that his constituents would be very proud. What I want to indicate to him, through you, Mr. Speaker, is that the people in the Toco area are in a difficult position to even access these free bus passes. The reason for that is that before December 11, 2000, there was the rural bus transportation available for them but immediately after the general elections that service was stopped. Today they are experiencing tremendous problems in getting transportation via PTSC in that particular area.

I know the Minister of Transport and Minister of Tourism and Tobago Affairs is not here but, certainly, her colleagues are. So I am asking the Members on the other side to use their good offices to appeal to the Minister to help the people of Toco. We would really appreciate that.

In his contribution he also mentioned that a certificate of environmental clearance would be required at times when companies want to engage in certain projects which affect the environment. I also want to draw his attention to the problem that arose when the Government tried to establish a Toco port and ferry service in that area. The people came forward and they objected to the establishment of the port and ferry service in that part of the country, primarily because they did not know what impact it would have on the environment. People said all sorts of things about them, but the fact of the matter was, at that time, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was not done. What is interesting, is that the preferred developers brought an EIA to the people of Toco.

Well, the people of Toco, in their wisdom, got some experts; they paid for the experts, and they assessed this EIA, only to find out that it was flawed. The experts ripped it to shreds. Members of Town and Country Planning Division were ashamed of that EIA. So I am signaling a warning, whereas it is there on paper, just be mindful that when you are talking about an EIA, let it be a professional one that is accepted by all the relevant standards in the industry. Do not try to come with an EIA through the backdoor, in one's attempt to take the people's land from Toco for one's friends, and to try to create an "Eastmoorings",

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in that particular part of the country. The people do not want an “Eastmoorings”. They want the place developed in a certain manner that would afford tourism. That is what they want. The place is beautiful and the natural beauty is second to none in the Caribbean.

I was heartened to hear the Member for Tabaquite mention that the Government has approved the Matura National Parks project, and for those of you who do not know, that project would establish a natural park from Matura to Grande Riviere, taking into consideration the beautiful flora and fauna. It is also the natural home of the endangered pawi, not to mention the endangered leatherback turtles on the beach side. That was long in the making and I am glad the Government has approved it. It also goes to show the need to protect the environment in that particular part of the country.

I also wish to indicate that the people of Toco are very vigilant. I understand the Prime Minister said that he is going to revisit that prospect of the Toco port and ferry service. The people were very professional in how they assessed that project in the past and they intend to be very professional in how they treat with it in the future. There has to be consultation with the people, and proper environmental assessment must be done. One does not want any oil services to be done in that area, whereby it may affect the ecology of that part of the country. So those are some of the things the people have indicated they are concerned about as they relate to the environment.

Mr. Speaker, let me just indicate, immediately, that we on this side welcome the world to Trinidad and Tobago. We on this side, as the Opposition, are not here to oppose for opposing sake, but we are at present hosting the world. *[Interruption]* We are! Trinidad and Tobago is not yours! Trinidad and Tobago is ours! We are hosting the world!

Mr. Valley: That project was approved in our time. *[Interruption]*

Mr. R. Boynes: Precisely. Mr. Speaker, as we host the Under 17 World Youth Cup, we are on record as inviting the world to see the beauties of Trinidad and Tobago. We hope that every team have a good and safe time here and experience all the beauty Trinidad and Tobago has to offer. We ask the national community to support the football and our footballers, as they attempt to raise the standard of football in our nation, and as they participate in the World Cup. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Please, please! I am trying to hear the Member.

Mr. R. Boynes: Mr. Speaker, having said that, let me also take the opportunity to congratulate the Warners for the many contracts that they have been able to achieve. [*Desk thumping*] I come here to praise them! [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, we would have spent close to \$500 million from, I believe, \$164 million. To build the four stadia and to renovate the fifth one, I believe we went up to \$500 million. I wish, as a result of that expenditure, to congratulate, in particular, one of the Warners for establishing the US \$1.9 million contract for the establishment of, I think, five kiosks. Sources have told me that the cost of construction of one is approximately \$300,000. So I wish to congratulate him for being such a good businessman. He is a very good businessman! He got the contract for \$12 million and he probably spent about \$1.5 million to construct them. He is a good businessman! [*Desk thumping*]

I also wish to congratulate the other Warner for getting all the concessions as they relate to the five stadia, via the Coal Pot Restaurant. I wish to congratulate him. The man of the moment, I wish to congratulate him, in particular, Jack, for getting the television rights for the length and breadth of this World Cup. As I said, I wish to congratulate him in particular. You see, Mr. Speaker, the Warners certainly have not been left behind. [*Laughter*] So much so that we in Trinidad and Tobago have spent \$500 million, and I am glad to see that persons have not been left behind. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I wish to also mention—and this goes to the Member for Chaguanas—when we look at the four new stadia and the fifth one, the Hasely Crawford, they are there. Let us ensure that they do not become white elephants.

Let us ensure that there are proper programmes so that they will be in use on a regular basis, so that at the end of the day we could utilize those facilities to improve the talent of our young men and women. Let us ensure that. Regardless of how it has come about, the fact is that these stadia are there and let us make sure that we utilize them properly, Mr. Speaker.

8.45 p.m.

Now, one of the things I would also direct the Minister's mind to deal with is looking at the whole aspect of sports tourism. While we have these stadia developed to an international level—because the surface is pretty much, you know, decent; the football is playing very well on the surface. In my humble opinion, you know, the stadia are up to an acceptable level, an acceptable standard, so much so that we could try to get as many competitions, or we can invite many teams from abroad so that we would be able to stage several competitions and games here in Trinidad and Tobago.

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In this way we will be doing two things. We will be exposing our sportsmen and women to playing that game at an international level and we will also be advertising Trinidad and Tobago as a whole and causing people to come to buy from our local people, our local businessmen, et cetera. So in a way we will be turning over money and we will be bringing money from outside into Trinidad and Tobago. So I urge him to look at the whole aspect of sports tourism and we need to encourage that with what we do in fact have.

Now, the thing is, Mr. Speaker, however we look at the recreational facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, I am a bit saddened because, whereas we may have four or five stadia, what about the rest of the recreational facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago? I was appalled to hear the Member for St. Joseph mention that the recreational grounds in his constituency—*[Interruption]* Tunapuna, sorry—in his constituency, are very high. The grass is about 10 feet high in Tunapuna. He mentioned that.

The thing is, Mr. Speaker, in some of the constituencies, for instance Toco/Manzanilla and other constituencies throughout the country, one has to appreciate the fact that there has to be a link between these recreational facilities. The Ministry of Sport—because one has to be able to train people from every aspect of the country if you are to go into the big yard. We could use the stadia as the big yard, but you have to be able to train people in each of the areas, each of the pockets of the country if we really and truly have to focus on sports properly.

So that when I hear the Member for Tunapuna coming to this Parliament and agreeing and saying that the recreational grounds in his constituency are not up to standard, that is very alarming. It is very, very alarming and I ask: if we are serious about sports, we have to ensure that the various recreational facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, not just in those areas where we have these stadia but throughout Trinidad and Tobago, are in an acceptable standard so that we could encourage young men and women to develop their talents and go on to make us proud, because it is not as though we do not have the ability or the talent in Trinidad and Tobago.

When you look at Brian Lara, when you look at Ato Boldon—I mean, the only sore thing with Ato Boldon is that the Minister of Finance did not want him living near to him. *[Laughter]* “Da is de only t’ing, in de same building by him.” I mean, when you look for instance at the type of talent that we have here—Hasely Crawford, for instance—but then the Member for Chaguanas and Mr. Crawford had a war of words in the newspapers concerning housing.

Mr. Assam: What did you all do for Crawford?

Mr. R. Boynes: Yeah, but he had his integrity. He had his pride. He felt good as a man. He was not embarrassed the way the Member for Chaguanas embarrassed him. He was embarrassed.

Mr. Assam: “All yuh pauperize de man. All yuh pauperize the man, eh. All yuh make de man an indigent.”

Mr. R. Boynes: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, we have tremendous talent in Trinidad and Tobago. We have Neil De Silva from Valencia. We have Samuel Stafford from Cumana. That young man under the age of 20 went to Japan and defeated the Japanese in a karate competition and he became the world karate champion in his particular field. Japan has never been defeated in its history. Do you know how he was treated in Trinidad and Tobago? How was he treated? He was given nothing, nothing at all. I saw him last week and “he still quarrelling” how this Government has treated him badly, badly. I referred him to the Member for Chaguanas, so he will be coming to you shortly.

You know, Darrel Brown and our athletes made us very proud recently at the world games and they brought joy to all of us. The unfortunate thing is that when Darrel Brown came back to Trinidad and Tobago, do you know he was not even met by anyone on that side? You see, these things go a very long way, you know. How we treat our sportsmen is very important. They remember that. They sacrifice their life, they sacrifice their time, their sweat and sometimes their tears in order to bring glory to this country and when we do not treat them properly, they have a problem with that and they start to feel very negative towards the country, towards the leaders of the country. So I am saying that we should try our best to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: Thank you very much for giving way. I just want to correct something there. It is not true that nobody went to meet Darrel Brown. I personally was at the airport to meet Darrel Brown and, quite apart from that, my Ministry, the Ministry of Human Development, Youth and Culture, hosted Darrel Brown. When he came back he had a programme. So I just wanted to correct that just for the record. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Boynes: Perhaps what Darrel was referring to was the Minister of Sport, then. I do not know if you were there. [*Interruption*] “Yuh could stan’ up?”

Mr. Ramsaran: I thank the Member for giving way and I want to let him know that at that time when Darrel came back to Trinidad I was out of the country.

Mr. R. Boynes: So who was deputizing for the Minister of Sport? [*Laughter*]
[*Interruption*]

I would like the Member for Chaguanas to indicate to us whether or not the sport and culture fund has any resources in it; how many NGOs benefited from same; what was the criteria utilized for the disbursement of the resources in that fund, and if you could name the national sporting organizations that received and benefited from that fund in the past three years. I would appreciate that. You see, when we look at the whole aspect of developing sports in the various communities, one has to take into consideration that the club structure in some of the communities in Trinidad and Tobago is dying. As a nation we have to ask ourselves, what can we do to bring back that structure to encourage people and the youth to form clubs in various areas in their towns, in their villages? What can we do to encourage it?

Very often you will find that when a club gets going it always ends up having a problem with funding. It has been my experience that, instead of a club trying to hold a barbecue or trying to raise funds, you would find that they would go to a businessman for a sponsor. Sometimes when they do not get the sponsorship, that marks the end of the club. We have to come up with an idea and plans and programmes geared towards encouraging the formation of clubs. One of the things we could look at is the whole aspect of the maintenance of recreation grounds because, you see, more often than not, you would find that a club is normally formed around a recreation ground. If the club could be given the contract to maintain the recreation facility, what you will find happening is, the recreation facility will be properly maintained and the club can then look forward to having some resources and having some of its members employed as the case may be. So I think, you know, if we could look at that together with other aspects of encouraging the formation of clubs, and sporting clubs, in fact, it will go a very long way in assisting our young people.

We also need to make sure that we give whatever resources needed to the various national organizations because I wish also to go on record as commending—is the gentleman Mr. Bovell? I think he came fourth in the world championships in swimming. He is dynamite and we can see him going a long way in the future. So hats off to him and hats off to the athletes in Trinidad and Tobago. We know, especially in the four by one, you all will do very well in the future and we are right behind you. I wish that the Member for Chaguanas could indicate to us some of the programmes that he will have in place to raise some of these other sporting disciplines, like netball, back to the standard that we had enjoyed, as world champions at one time. Could he indicate some plans and

programmes that his ministry has so that we can get back our rightful position as number one in the world? That is in the field of netball, and there are other disciplines.

Boxing, for instance—I mean, when you really go into some of these areas you would no doubt appreciate that some of the persons who are training in the art of boxing do so on concrete, I mean, and when they go in the ring it is of a different type of material. So that, one has to be mindful that if one is to encourage that whole aspect of boxing and whatnot—I know that you had some Cuban coaches coming into the country and they went around the place and whatnot, but what are the long-term programmes that you have in order to encourage this sport of boxing? I can go on and on.

Let me just indicate that we in Trinidad and Tobago are blessed with a lot of talented young people and I think we need to not just have a sports policy on paper but we need to execute it throughout the length and breadth of all our constituencies and get the young people involved in it, get everyone involved, get the Members of Parliament, get local government—get everybody involved. Let us not play politics with sports. Bring everybody on board. [*Interruption*] Bring everybody on board so that we could be able to encourage the young people because the field of sports has many benefits in it. So that I think everyone here should be on board in terms of how we approach the whole aspect of sports and the execution of the sporting policy.

Let me just indicate immediately, Mr. Speaker, that our greatest resources are our young people and, regardless of all the other types of resources that we have, be it agriculture, natural gas, methanol, ammonia, steel, beautiful beaches, et cetera, in my humble opinion I think that the greatest resources are our people. Our young people in particular are in need of so much guidance from our older folks in this country. You see, the young man, Mr. Speaker, has an energy that is second to none. He has talent. The young man has so much energy. Sometimes he hears the roll of thunder in his ears and he sees the fire of lightning in his eyes. He has energy, but what has to happen in order for our country to go forward is, we have to marry, we have to shape and we have to focus the energy and talent of the young using the wisdom and experience of the old. We have to use it. We have to make that link; and if we can only get it right, Mr. Speaker, our nation with all its other resources will not be second in the world. It will be number one.

Mr. Assam: What “yuh” doing for Toco and Cumana? What “yuh” doing for them?

Mr. R. Boynes: I will reach there shortly. So this basically is what we need to do because some of the other countries to an extent have done it. I know the Singapore model is what has been bandied about throughout this country, but even though the culture may be different—and I remember when the bomb was dropped in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the country rallied together to rebuild Japan but if it is—[*Interruption*] I have the History Channel—but if it is, Mr. Speaker, that we can get it right, you would find that we can build a nation that is one of the greatest in the world, and we must stop playing the games that we play.

We play games, you know. I know the Member for Chaguanas—you are sports minded and you know about games, but this is serious business, Mr. Speaker. He brought out a youth policy for consultation, and up to now we have not got it right. He has not got it right up to now with this youth policy. The last youth policy document that was submitted for consideration was too vague, it just was not getting it right for the young people and the young people rejected it. So I am saying to the hon. Member for Chaguanas, if he could, just do the consultation as quickly as possible and really go down into the trenches, go around the country where the young man and the young woman are and they would tell you what they want. You cannot just stay in our office and expect to know—to draft up a policy.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to find out where in this budget there is stated anything for encouraging and facilitating the young man in business. I would like to find that out.

9.05 p.m.

I am not seeing anything that could go towards empowering the young man and woman. I know that the Minister of Finance has indicated that he will hold discussions with the banks to get preferential rates as they relate to small business, but that is the type of ol' talk that we have been hearing year after year after year. It is rather unfortunate, because we really do not have a plan or a programme to really empower the young man. We do not have a plan, but we do have a plan to empower some of our friends. Not so? We do have that plan and that programme to empower some of their friends and families.

What I want to indicate, Mr. Speaker, is simply, what are the plans and programmes that we have in place to try to stop the young man from smoking? Simple as that. Raising cigarettes? That is the plan? He is asking if that is not good enough. Raising the price of cigarettes? We need to go on some serious campaigns; serious advertizements in this country. We need to have the Minister

of Health go on an ad and say, “Look young man and young woman, I want you to stop smoking.” We need our athletes like Ato Boldon and all of those who are role models to our children to tell them to stop smoking.

Mr. Ramsaran: Thank you very much for giving way again. I know you look at television. We have had these campaigns for more than two years now with all the athletes of this country—Dwight Yorke, Ato Boldon—all advertizing against drugs.

Mr. R. Boynes: I am not talking about drugs. The Member for Tabaquite was talking about some deaf something? He was talking about somebody being deaf. Apparently I am not talking loud enough. I never mentioned anything about drugs. I was talking about cigarettes.

That is why you find that the young man and the young woman would not really and truly come off of cigarettes, because they do not see the cigarettes as drugs. There is a distinction between tobacco and marijuana, for instance—and drugs. There is a total distinction. Once there is a campaign geared at telling them to not use drugs, that is not telling them to stay off of cigarettes. You have to be a bit more direct than that if you want to save the lives of our young people, because too many of them are smoking cigarettes.

Do not take my word for it. Go on a Friday evening to any part of Trinidad and Tobago and one will see how many young people are smoking cigarettes. What does that tell you about the health of our country in the future? We need to be a little more serious when it comes to the young people, because if we are not serious, the young people will not be serious. They are looking at us as leaders and role models. They will never see us as role models, because you know what they see? A Minister of Finance coming into this Parliament wearing a shirt. Everybody else comes in jackets, according to the rules of Parliament, but they see the Minister come wearing a shirt! If I had come in on a Friday evening at 1.30 with that shirt on, the police might have escorted me and carried me outside. That is what the young people are seeing.

Do you know what they are also seeing? They are also seeing the Minister of Finance with the highlight of his budget. Remember when he talked about salt fish and tampons, and he put up his mouth like that at the Member for San Fernando East? That was the highlight of his budget. All the time he was in a monotone. From the time he reached salt fish and tampons, he got some excitement. That man! That was not right, because the connotations of it—the young people are not foolish, you know. They are listening to every word and

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looking at every action we make, so when we come in the honourable House, we have to conduct ourselves in a certain manner. [*Interruption*]

No, Member for Tunapuna. I did not say I hate salt fish. You know, Mr. Speaker, when the young man and young woman look at our Parliament and look at all of us as leaders, do you know what they see? They see a Prime Minister fighting an Attorney General. That is what they see. How do you expect them to feel? They hear all kinds of talk about corbeaux, they hear talk about suckers, they hear talk about Judases, “la diablesse”; that is what they are hearing. How do you expect them to consider all of us?

That is exactly what is going on. We hear about a gang of four. Mr. Speaker, it was September 11—not September 12, as the Member for Tunapuna was saying during his deliberation—that the bombing of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington took place on and that terrorist action was something that all of us abhorred, but I was so stunned when I heard the Member for Couva North mention outside this Chamber that if he does not get the support from the four, that amounts to terrorist action.

It was rather unfortunate, because there are a lot of young people in the United States of America whose parents did not come home, and they felt hurt and there was no joke or no game. That is not something to make game about or to use as a political tool. It is not that. If we are really, really sad about the event, let us demonstrate to the whole nation, to the world, that we are really and truly sad about it and not play games. That is what we are doing.

The Minister of Finance could try to disguise it how much he wants. Trinidad and Tobago has been sold lock, stock and barrel with the idea that this is an entire corrupt bunch. That corruption has plagued this country from captain to cook! That is how the country sees it. Young child walking from school, “Is corruption! Is corruption!” Little child. That is what is taking place in this country right now.

If it is that you come here and you say that you are so much for corruption, hold a commission of enquiry. The Member for Naparima asked them to hold it, they do not want to hold it. The Member for Couva South talks about corruption. You do not want to hold a commission of enquiry. The Member for San Fernando West talks about corruption. You do not want to hold a commission of enquiry. And the Member for Oropouche. Oh God! He said it all. There was nothing more he could have said. He said everything and they still would not advise the Member for Couva North to hold a commission of enquiry, but they come here to this House talking about how the Government did so much for corruption.

What are they afraid of? Hold it! And this Bob Lindquist report, Mr. Speaker, I am asking you to intercede now on behalf of the nation. We want the Bob Lindquist report. Taxpayers' money was spent to get that report. Why can we not get our hands on that? Why is it not laid in Parliament and let the chips fall where they may?

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

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. C. Sharma*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. R. Boynes: I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and, in particular, I want to thank my learned colleague from Fyzabad and all Members of the House that have decided to give me an extension.

I was just mentioning a few things. I listened with rapt attention to the Minister of Finance when he presented the budget recently on Friday. Really, I personally felt it was a bunch of ol' talk. It is just ol' talk and more ol' talk. That is what John Public is saying. Talk, talk and more talk! I hear about a science and technology park.

Mr. Assam: That \$800 for old age pension is talk?

Mr. R. Boynes: Science and Technology Park, Mr. Speaker. Member for Tunapuna, there are people all through the constituencies who were hoping and telling themselves that they were getting the thousand dollars. They were saying that. They say they were fooled into believing that they were getting the thousand dollars. That is a fact. You all miscalculated that. They thought the thousand dollars was coming. I want them to know, Mr. Speaker, that the next budget will be presented by a PNM Minister of Finance, and they will get their thousand dollars! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Assam: If they get \$15 in four years, they will get a thousand?

Mr. R. Boynes: They will get it. I hear about this science and technology park. I want to find out if discussions are taking place with potential clients, or is it that somebody must be pinching the Minister of Finance and whispering to him that a science and technological park is a good thing for up the road in Wallerfield, so he said "Bam! Let me put that in the budget."

I want to find out through you, Mr. Speaker, whether or not the discussions are taking place with clients. I want to know whether or not discussions have been

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held with the University of the West Indies because, you see, for something like that you need a cadre of brains. You also need to have aggressive entrepreneurs, because what you are setting up there is something major.

Are discussions being held with insurance companies aboard? I am sure the Member for Tunapuna must be aware that there are insurance companies which will have their data processing done right here in Trinidad and Tobago. It could be done right here in Trinidad and Tobago. Once the telecommunications has been expanded in a way, they could do their work here; and especially as this incident has taken place in United States of America, a lot of the companies in the States may very well want to go offshore. They may very well want to use Trinidad and Tobago to establish their companies here.

I remember I did some negotiations at one time with Toys “R” Us in the United States of America, and I will inform you that Toys “R” Us wants to establish their distribution outlet in Trinidad and Tobago. They want to do it. They want to be in a position to distribute throughout the whole of Latin America and to use Trinidad and Tobago as a site.

Mr. Assam: We have Elsa’s already. Elsa’s is better than Toys “R” Us.

Mr. R. Boynes: I want to find out if we have the requisite infrastructure, if we understand we have to put the requisite infrastructure in place. You know, the optic fibres. We have to put the requisite infrastructure in place if we are serious about developing that, or is it just ol’ talk? I want to find out.

I also heard, Mr. Speaker, the Minister mention an aluminium smelter plant. Well, I think the Member for Caroni East will bear me out on that. This is the fourth time we are hearing about this aluminium smelter plant. Pronouncements were made three times already and nothing happened. It is ol’ talk. It is just ol’ talk. Ethylene Complex—twice already that was mentioned. Pronouncements—this is the third time again, ol’ talk. Gas to liquids—that is gone. It is gone. They are not going to establish that in Trinidad. It is gone.

Mr. Assam: Where has it gone?

Mr. R. Boynes: Ask the Minister of Finance where it has gone. Perhaps he did not get the little “cacada”. That is why it has gone. Mr. Speaker, our position is simply that all these things that we are hearing, we have heard it before. The nation has heard it before, and we are asking them to try to be very considerate. Do you know what this does? When you make your pronouncements and you say that aluminium smelter plants are coming, and you say that gas to liquids is

coming and you do not deliver, and they do not come, not only do you affect your credibility, but you affect the credibility of the country.

Potential investors are looking. They say, “Look, we cannot take this Government seriously.” It is not your image that I am concerned about. It is the country's image. That is what we are all concerned about, but, Mr. Speaker, you remember when the PNM developed this energy industry, just be mindful that every pronouncement they made, they delivered. Every last one, they delivered. So do not come and make pronouncements and say things that you know you cannot do because it affects our image internationally.

That is what the young people are saying. I am asking Members on that side, through you Mr. Speaker, for us all to sort of change the whole attitude and the way we do things. When we reach to the stage of an election, let us battle each other on the platform but, other than that, let us think about our country and its image. That is the most important thing in the history of our lives in this country.

Mr. Assam: I think you better prepare for your side.

Mr. R. Boynes: So I am just suggesting that, Mr. Speaker. Let me just indicate a few things that I would like to see addressed in the constituency of Toco/Manzanilla. I did mention already, the rural bus transportation service. I would like to see that come on stream, and the establishment of beach facilities throughout the length and breadth of the North East Coast and Fishing Pond area.

Mr. John: Sen. Als has provided us with that information already.

Mr. R. Boynes: Well, he is the Member of Parliament, not so? As the Member of Parliament who was elected by over 10,000 people—and who will be elected again by over 13,000 people—I would like to put on record what I need for my people. As the Member of Parliament representing over 43,000 people, regardless of what race, regardless of what creed, social background, economic background, geographic background, where you are from in the constituency or what political affiliation you have, as the Member of Parliament, I represent every citizen of Toco/Manzanilla and these are our complaints.

9.25 p.m.

We would like to see, according to the Member for Oropouche, more funds being allocated for the agricultural access roads. We are from a very poor community, Mr. Speaker, and we depend on the agricultural access roads for our daily bread. The farmers have to spend so much money in pulling out their stuff, in carrying it over bridges, the roads are dilapidated and some of them cannot

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even get into their estates. If it is that we can have an emphasis on the agricultural access roads in the constituency of Toco/Manzanilla, I would appreciate the same. According to the Member for Oropouche, he does not have enough money.

I am grateful for the Member for Tabaquite's announcement today about the Matura National Park project. I wish also to indicate that I remember about three budgets ago, the Member for Tunapuna had indicated that funds were already in place for the construction of the facility in Toco/Salybia; that is the one at Toco. I said, "Okay, no problem." I went back and told the whole of Toco that the Minister, who is now the Member for Tunapuna, said that the beach facility will be coming shortly.

That was many, many years ago, but I do think one has to acquire the lands first of all, because the lands are in the Wharton Estate. The lands belong to private owners. The Government has to enter into some discussions with the owners of the lands to acquire same and then construct the beach facilities. If I may just advise, that should be the way to go.

I have taken the opportunity of speaking with the land owners and they are very much interested in entering into some sort of arrangement, discussions with the Government and they are prepared to have the Government acquire the lands, because that beach is really the whole of Toco. That beach is the whole of Toco; that is the Toco Beach really, the beach at Galera Road after the Toco Composite School. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Assam: I will tell my colleague, the Minister of Tourism, for you.

Mr. R. Boynes: I am sure you will. So, Mr. Speaker, I am looking at that for the people of the Toco area. I am sorry that the Member for Couva North is not here, the Minister of National Security, because whereas we have in the budget, Matura Police Station, Matelot and Manzanilla police stations, we did not take into consideration the Toco Police Station, because it is in a very dilapidated condition. You cannot ask police officers to work under those conditions. [*Interruption*]

If any one of you come to the Toco area, I invite you to go into the Toco Police Station; it is really in a totally dilapidated condition. Policemen could fall through the ground at any given moment. I did not see it in the budget though, but if the Minister could scrape up some funds to do some refurbishment on that building, it would really go a long way in assisting the people of that area.

I would also mention that what is required in that particular area is a fire station or a substation. If there is a fire in the Toco area, we would have to get a fire tender from Sangre Grande and by the time the fire tender reaches to Toco the

facility is burnt to the ground. So if the Minister of Finance could utilize his good office to liaise with the Member for Couva North, the people of the Toco area would be certainly very pleased if they could get a fire substation.

There is still a quarrying problem, Member for Tabaquite, in Sangre Grande and the environs and that has caused a lot of flooding in the eastern part of Sangre Grande. There is a place called Vega de Oropouche. As a result of the river that is polluted continually by all the quarrying companies, like National Quarries, Wills and a few of the private quarries, every time it rains heavily, the entire village—*[Interruption]*—you went up there once in your life and you are telling me that—that entire part of the town of Sangre Grande floods.

I am asking the Member for Tabaquite to use his good office to sort of treat with the quarrying problem in the area, because we are trying to make arrangements with the relevant Ministries to have the rivers cleaned. But we do not want when the rivers are clean in that part of the town, we have the same problem again, the quarries just pollute them again. I am asking the Member to use his good office. I will be writing him soon on that, so that he could look into it.

I am also indicating to the Member for St. Joseph, if he could look at the situation with the Cumana pavilion. That was started sometime in 1995 and it is about 50 per cent completed. We did, in fact, have a commitment from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre sometime in 1997, where he committed to having the Cumana pavilion completed but, to date, nothing has been done on it, so I said I would just bring it to his attention during the course of this debate and I am sure that he will address it.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to ask the Member to also look at the Manzanilla fishing depot that is about 50 per cent completed. No work has been done on that since 1995. New City Valencia is a National Housing Authority development that is missing connection with water. The problem is just to get somebody to negotiate between NHA and the Water and Sewerage Authority. All the infrastructure is in place for the connection of water to the residents of New City, but it needs someone to pull those two departments together, WASA and NHA.

I have tried; I have met with persons at WASA and NHA and I am in the process of talking with them. I have written to them, but I am also asking the Minister in charge if he could look at that as well, to give us some assistance in that area.

There is a pavement missing at the Valencia High School; that is the new school that was constructed. The only difficulty is that when the students are leaving the school, the road is so narrow, trucks are passing on such a regular

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basis because they go to a quarry, and it is very dangerous for the children. It is a very dangerous situation. I would not like to know that a child has lost his or her life because there is no pavement. We were, in fact, promised that there would be a pavement when the school was constructed. I am asking the Minister to use his good office to have that pavement established for the good of the students of the Valencia High School.

Let me also take the opportunity of indicating to the Minister of Health the need for attention to be placed on the Sangre Grande Hospital. I think he knows all the problems about that hospital; I have always raised them.

Dr. Rafeeq: The Cumana Health Centre is finished?

Mr. R. Boynes: Yes. I have raised the problems of the Sangre Grande Hospital and whatnot with him and he has given me the assurance that he is looking into the matter. I want to put on the record today that the Sangre Grande Hospital is, in fact, in a state and that the Minister will address the problems of the hospital and he would attempt to clear up all the problems that obtain with that particular facility. I have had to stop the residents from marching on that hospital on two occasions within the last two months. I said that I would bring it to the attention of the Minister.

Concerning the Non Pareil Estate, Member for Oropouche, the last I heard was that there was a bid. A proposal for the acquisition of the Non Pareil Estate was put up for all and sundry to make his or her proposal. Five companies submitted their proposals to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources for the acquisition of the Non Pareil Estate. To date, we have heard no word as to status of the bids from the five companies. One, in particular, was made on behalf of all the cooperatives in Toco/Manzanilla.

We assisted them in getting all the expertise. We paid for all the expertise and we made an application available, but it came from all the cooperatives from Toco/Manzanilla. We applied for the acquisition of the Non Pareil Estate. In other words, it is the people applying for it, so I do not know where this matter has reached to date. The people have asked me to mention it in this Parliament: Where has this application reached? They have spent over \$200,000 on preparing the application for the acquisition of the Non Pareil Estate. I said that I would bring it to the attention of this House and I will await a response from the Minister in charge of that particular proposal.

I would mention one last thing before I take my seat, Mr. Speaker. What is taking place at the moment in Toco/Manzanilla, is that there is a smear campaign and graffiti being placed all over the streets. [*Interruption*]

Mr. John: The people are rising up against their representative.

Mr. R. Boynes: No, I will tell you who is doing it. My sources have indicated to me that the stencils were made in the Employment Training Programme office, and the paint and the resources were used from the ETP as well.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Which ETP office?

Mr. R. Boynes: Sangre Grande. *[Interruption]* Yes, they made a stencil. It is a big stencil and whatnot. People told me that it is as big as the road.

Mr. Assam: What is the smear campaign?

Mr. R. Boynes: They have been going from street to street smearing the name of the Member of Parliament. Now my sources have indicated to me that workers from the ETP are utilized to do this. One of the good things is that a few of the workers, when they paint it, they rub it off and they have told me what is taking place.

The people in some of the streets in Sangre Grande confronted some of these workers on Tuesday, September 4th, around 3 o'clock in the morning and it almost turned ugly. The matter was reported to the police. I intend to write to the Attorney General for him to deal with the matter, because quite apart from the smear campaign and whatnot, it does not matter, but when you utilize public resources that could be used to fix a drain—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Paint to fix a drain?

Mr. R. Boynes: You could say paint, you could say workers, you could say whatever it is, it is public funds being used to do a smear campaign in Toco/Manzanilla.

Mr. Assam: What is it?

Mr. R. Boynes: The strange thing about it is that the young people in L'Anse Noire caught them on Wednesday night, that was the 5th, at 2.00 a.m. They caught them painting up the streets. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you who was doing it. There were two persons who work for the Toco Foundation who were involved in it, utilizing the vehicle that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) gave to the Toco Foundation. All that went to the police.

It is rather unfortunate that the UNDP's resources that were donated to the Toco Foundation were being utilized by these individuals to smear the name of the Member of Parliament for Toco/Manzanilla.

Mr. Assam: What is the smear campaign?

Mr. R. Boynes: You see, I understand—*[Interruption]* “sit down nuh man”—that that is the level of desperation that they have to descend to—

Mr. Assam: What is the smear campaign?

Mr. R. Boynes:—in order to try to smear the name of the Member of Parliament.

Mr. Assam: What is it?

Mr. R. Boynes: But the people of Toco/Manzanilla do not care about that, because it has backfired. The people of Toco/Manzanilla has taken offence to the low standard that you have dropped to.

Mr. Assam: What is it? Tell us now.

Mr. R. Boynes: Go up to Toco and watch it! Go all over the place and watch it “nuh man”.

Mr. Assam: I must go to Toco to watch you?

Mr. R. Boynes: The fact of the matter is, ETP resources have been utilized; workers have been utilized; they made the stencil at the ETP office and they are only doing that because they are so desperate *[Crosstalk]* that that is the low level they have to descend to.

I will tell you something, Mr. Speaker, as night is night and day is day, your “licking” in Toco/Manzanilla is sure! So pad or no pad—hear what “ah telling yuh”—is “licks like peas”!

Mr. Assam: What is the smear campaign? Tell us now.

Mr. R. Boynes: I want you to go to the streets of Sangre Grande and you will inform the Parliament. The fact of the matter is that this matter will be reported to the Attorney General, because he is the self-appointed—he said that he is the defender of the public interest, so that the misspending of the public funds at the ETP will be dealt with.

I understand that the Attorney General made similar comments when he said that vehicles were being utilized during some internal election campaign. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: You have three more minutes to wind up.

Mr. R. Boynes: So if they could do it in an internal election campaign, who is me? The fact of the matter is, the Attorney General said that he reported it to the

Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP); so I am also going to send the information to the DPP.

Mr. Speaker, let me close by saying that I find—as I am on that note with the Attorney General—that the Minister of Finance made a mockery of our system of governance when he told the Chamber of Commerce that he has hired a private firm to draft financial legislation. I find that that is an insult to this Parliament. It is an insult to an elected Attorney General by an un-elected Member. How could the Member say that he is going to hire a private firm to draft financial legislation? I find that that is an insult to the nation and he should apologize and pull that back forthwith.

I thank you.

The Minister of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs (Hon. Manohar Ramsaran): Mr. Speaker, let me sincerely congratulate my Cabinet colleague, Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming, the Minister of Finance, on a budget presentation that seems to have been designed to specifically address the circumstances of the most vulnerable groups in our society, the target population of my Ministry.

The theme, “One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind”, embodies the commitment expressed by this administration since 1995, of securing a better quality of life for all. [*Desk thumping*]

The present budget seeks to accelerate the people-focus trend that this Government established when it assumed the mantle of leadership in 1995. I am pleased to say that since that time, with concerted efforts, we have made great strides in improving the circumstances of the elderly, single mothers, the poor, the physically challenged and the socially vulnerable in our society. The 2000/2001 Budget pays particular attention to the elderly and the socially displaced.

During the period 1995/2001, the old age pension grant was increased four times—not by \$10, \$7 or three cents—thereby doubling the grant from what it was under the previous administration. [*Desk thumping*] Remember that old age pension was there since 1954. In addition to increasing this grant, the Government also instituted measures to allow more senior citizens to qualify for the receipt of the grant by twice raising the income ceiling from \$5,000 per annum to the current figure of \$8,640 per annum.

The provisions made in the 2001/2002 Budget for older persons will undoubtedly increase their disposable income and spending power, thus allowing these citizens to enjoy greater income security and maintain a more comfortable

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standard of living. Moreover, these provisions will also provide for additional numbers of senior citizens to become eligible for old age pension.

9.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I refer to the following measures: The increase in personal tax allowance from \$30,000 to \$36,000 for taxpayers 60 years and over. An increase of \$80 in the old age pension grant to \$800 for individuals 65 years and over with no income or less than \$100 per month, and \$700 for people receiving between \$100 and \$720 per month.

The removal of the 6 per cent insurance premium tax for any individual 60 years and over and bus passes for all citizens 60 years and over on any Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) bus.

Mr. Speaker, add this to people in this age bracket who will not have to pay airport exit tax and you will understand that this Government is caring and would always take care of the senior citizens in this country and we must put this on record. So when we listen to those on the other side and we hear the Member for Toco/Manzanilla talking about the people expected \$1,000, what was said on our election platform was that in our next term we are going to assure the people that old age pension would be \$1,000. Nobody said when, but during the next term.

I want to tell hon. Members that the Government has a track record of doing what we say and we have done it over the last six, seven months. Almost all our election promises that we made on the platform have been realized. I am sure before the next general election in 2005, the old age pension will be \$1,000.

So when we talk about this budget—and again I congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance—we have made significant progress in poverty reduction. We are securing homes for all our citizens, access by all persons to quality health care; accommodation and appropriate care for the homeless and destitute and improving on the standard of education at all levels and access to the technology of the day, the Internet.

Mr. Speaker, while education is not the specific mandate and responsibility of my ministry, it can serve to alleviate the plight of many of my ministry's clientele who have lived in difficult circumstances for generations.

Investments in education will remove many of our children and young people from risks as better education will lead to securing better jobs, with the end result being a better quality of life for thousands in our population. I therefore see the

Dollar for Dollar Plan as a critical mechanism in ensuring that children and youth of poor circumstances are not denied the opportunity to be part of this process.

Mr. Speaker, I almost said the distinguished Leader of the Opposition, the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East—when he said there is no safety net, Mr. Speaker, does he understand what is a safety net? I think not. I checked the *Collins Dictionary* and I found two meanings for the term “safety net”:

- (1) any means of protection from hardship or loss
- (2) a net used in a circus to catch high wire and trapeze artistes if they fall.

Mr. Speaker, I feel that the Member for San Fernando East was referring to the circus, because what we heard this afternoon is really actors in a circus. They were jumping all over the place and not really concentrating on this budget. I am sure you have gathered that they have no answer for this budget and they will just keep filibustering and trying to mislead the nation.

If one reads the *Hansard*, Mr. Speaker, one sees that the Member for Toco/Manzanilla says the same speech that was said here for the last six years. I am sure if anyone checks the *Hansard* they will see that. Talking about the youths as if he cares about the youths and I will attend to some of his concerns in a while, but I will start with the Member for San Fernando East.

The Member said that rich people use breeze and salt fish. Mr. Speaker, I am sure that is indeed insulting to the poor people in this country because salt fish has been the way of life—as far as I can remember—a meal for the poor people in this country. Today when he said that breeze is used by the poor people, Mr. Speaker, we do not want to keep people in poverty as maybe the Member for Toco/Manzanilla when he says that he is opposed to Westmoorings as an “Eastmoorings”. I want to tell you that that Member has resisted many attempts to bring the people of Toco/Manzanilla to improve their quality of living by the various projects which he has opposed. Today I am convinced that he would like to keep his constituents in a state of real poverty and try to keep them from being educated so they might continue to vote for the PNM.

Everybody knows that once you are educated and you understand right from wrong, good from bad, you will definitely vote for the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] So he wants to keep his people in poverty.

The Member referred to our zero rated VAT as if it is just breeze against soap, and salt fish against chicken. Mr. Speaker, I want to put it on the record—because apparently people are being misled out there—the schedule for the zero rating of

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VAT in this country and what has been done over time to remove VAT from basic food items, and I will read a list for you.

Any unprocessed food of a kind used for human consumption; for example, potatoes, garlic, onion, rice, milk in any form including processed and skimmed milk, margarine, bread, baby formula and baby milk substitute, cheese and curd, corned beef, curry, fresh butter, peanut butter, table salt, salted butter, tinned sardines, smoked herrings, toilet paper, yeast, baking powder, pasta, whether cooked or stuffed with any other substances otherwise prepared such as spaghetti, macaroni, lasagne and so forth. Then we added in this budget, salted fish, deodorant, toothpaste, feminine napkins, tampons, laundry soap in bars and baby and adult diapers.

Mr. Speaker, what this is intended to do is to bring down the cost of living for the poor people of this country, and when the Member for San Fernando East could come here this afternoon and be so careless about the poor people of this country, it hurts me as the Minister of Social Development and what we have been doing over time to improve the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And he must apologize to the nation for this—trying to mislead our people.

As I said before, it was a circus parade on the other side. When we listen to these people, are they serious about governance in Trinidad and Tobago? You hear them giggling about serious issues as if everything is turned into an old mas. Corruption, corruption, corruption, but I am sure if we go and talk to the people of this country and remove the scale from their eyes—and I am glad, I am extremely happy that the Minister has given hearing aids—and I hope next year we will give glasses too—for people to hear and see what is happening in this country with a progressive Government under the hon. Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, as we continue to fight poverty and give people a better living.

The Member for San Fernando East talked about the difference between PNM and UNC. The difference between PNM and UNC, Mr. Speaker, is that the PNM has been callous and careless with our revenue over time, has ensured that we do not move forward as a country, whereas the UNC, on the other hand, took people on board, offered them a better standard of living and we are taking them into the future with dignity and pride.

The Member for Toco/Manzanilla has said this afternoon that he is proud to be a Trinidadian as we host the world—and that is what we are about; taking this country forward. That is the difference between the PNM and the UNC. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Arouca North in his normal style—somebody said keskidee or parakeet—talked about having more money for councillors and allocation. I do not want to be facetious, but I have never really heard councillors from the PNM asking for more allocations. What I have heard many times is that they want more pay. They are always talking about not getting enough money, and they planned a coup against their Leader, the Member for San Fernando East, and this is where their interest is. They want more money for themselves. I would like the Member for Arouca North to tell me when any county councillor would have written to the Minister to ask for more money for his corporation. They are more interested in what they could get for themselves because I am very close to my councillors and this is what they tell me.

Mr. Narine: Member, would you give way? Are you aware that all bodies for local government visit with the Ministry of Finance before the reading of a budget? Thank you.

Hon. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I will go on. Then he talks about a stadium. Apparently their eyes have been opened because we have five of the best stadia in the world. I say five, not four, because it is under this administration and over the last couple of months that the Hasely Crawford Stadium is now completed. It is now an all-seater stadium and when one goes into the dressing rooms, one sees the marked improvement we have made to have quality sports played in a quality stadium.

I heard people are asking for a stadium in almost every constituency, and I am happy for that, but we have to understand that we spent years suffering. Today my heart bleeds for our Under-17 team that was beaten this afternoon by Brazil. When we look back to the quality surface that we are using now—you see he is laughing, we lost today, six. That is not the issue, Mr. Speaker. We have suffered over time—and they admitted to it this afternoon—poor grounds, poor quality surface, and it is only now that we have quality surfaces. I want to assure this honourable House—because they cannot be reassured, they have gone past that—that in the next four to five years you would see the fruits of our labour when our country would be accustomed to good surfaces, good playing conditions and we would be among the best in the world in football and athletics. I want to assure this House about that because of what we are providing now.

I went to Point Fortin and La Brea yesterday and sports have died in that part of the country. I remember the Point Fortin Civic Centre, I remember the names Wilfred Cave, Bobby Sookram, Leroy Steadman, Leroy De Leon, Warren Archibald and these “fellas”. When I go there, they are now trying to rebuild

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sports in that part of the country, and I was there with some elementary school children who have been coached by Muhammed Esau, former Minister of Sports coach, together with ALNG, and this programme has been quite successful where all the elementary schools have been brought into a coaching programme to help Point Fortin regain its former glory. We are talking about development in that part of the country, and I would not discriminate. I want to tell everybody where young people are concerned, I will go to every part of this country to make sure they develop properly.

If you check the PSIP, Mahaica Oval will be given \$1 million to return that ground to its former glory, and I spoke to people yesterday and I asked them why was sports neglected in that part of the country and they pointed fingers at the politician, and especially the fighting and what is taking place in that part of the country that sports has really taken a back seat.

I want to assure this nation again that I am going to do all within my power to bring, not only Point Fortin, but Toco/Manzanilla—I was in Toco/Manzanilla over the weekend. Roger Boynes knows this. When I went through the constituency there, they assured me that they do not see Roger Boynes. The people who spoke to me—and this was in the Matelot area more or less—said that next election they are waiting for Roger Boynes because he did not do anything for them and they were fooled once more, but they have a good representative in Terry Rondon, the councillor and they say without Terry Rondon, nothing would have been done for the people of Toco/Manzanilla, and they now have confidence in Michael Als.

This is not politicking. What I am saying is that we must not fool our constituents. We must represent them properly, not wait for one year. Do you know the Member for Toco/Manzanilla threatened me three years ago to introduce Stafford to me? He comes back three years after saying he will come next week. Is that how he represents people, Mr. Speaker?

The Member talks about wanting to help the young people, he wants to help Stafford. If you read the *Hansard* you will see it, three years ago he was introducing Stafford to me and up to this time I have not seen Mr. Stafford, I do not know him. What I do know, Mr. Speaker, is that we are producing world class athletes at a pace and I will go into that a little later.

To continue with the Member for Arouca North, he talked about the Larry Gomes Enclosure. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you know, being an Arima boy yourself, that the Larry Gomes Enclosure was destroyed by the Arima Borough

Corporation and the people from Arima, especially the politicians who would have parties, “limes” everything there except sports, and the people refused to play any sports there because of the broken bottles.

Parties and all other activities destroyed the Larry Gomes Enclosure and I want to warn the nation that none of the sporting facilities built under this administration, or under my purview, will be used for parties and so on, because these are for the young people of the country to develop their sporting aptitude. So I am assuring the Members that there will be no more parties. So if they are thinking about parties in the Larry Gomes Stadium, forget it. This is built for sports for the young people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I assure the Member for Toco/Manzanilla that we are going to have sports programme to continue there so we will have no more white elephants because we have plans to ensure that our stadia are properly used. I think that is enough said for the Member for Arouca North.

I move on to the Member for Toco/Manzanilla and the rural bus. He challenged the Member for Tabaquite that “I do not have buses in my constituency”. You have! The road about which the Member for Tabaquite spoke was neglected for years and I know long ago there were buses running into Tabaquite and Rio Claro and because of the conditions of the road, bus transport was stopped almost 15—20 years ago and it is because of this Government, and Mr. Carlos John, that we could even dream about rural transport in the neglected constituencies in Central.

I heard the Member for San Fernando East say earlier today that he made Caroni a rich place. Mr. Speaker, this is careless, callous and calculated to mislead the people of this country. How could he claim that he has strengthened Caroni? When we came into office five years ago, the County of Caroni had nothing. The County of Caroni includes Tabaquite, Caroni East, Caroni Central, Couva North, Couva South, and parts of Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Speaker, it is since this Government came into office we have opened up central Trinidad, built infrastructure to encourage businessmen to come to Trinidad. I remember when PriceSmart came, they were getting problems for land and when I said why not try Chaguanas, they were led to believe that Chaguanas was 200 miles away from Port of Spain because they had created in the minds of people a mental block between Port of Spain and the rest of the country; the East/West Corridor and the rest of the country.

It is this Government that has destroyed that myth and Trinidad and Tobago is but a small place and it cannot be—in the words of Minister Humphrey—urban

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development and rural development. Trinidad and Tobago must develop as one. Today we are doing that, and for the Member for San Fernando East to tell the Parliament and the national community that he enriched Caroni is telling an untruth and I will not stand here and allow that to go without commenting on it. The people of Caroni have had guts and determination over time and they have stuck together, stuck with their guns, so to speak, and Chaguanas and Caroni could now be proud, and with no help from the People's National Movement.

I could talk about URP and ETP, the champion for URP. The Member built one pavilion in his term of office and every debate in Parliament for the last six years, he mentions the Preysal Pavilion trying to say he built a pavilion in a UNC county.

Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about UNC and PNM. When we build facilities it is for Trinidad and Tobago, and he claims that pavilion and if he could claim that for five years, then I could resign and claim that I have built five stadia for this country and go home and sleep. But we have more work to do and we will continue to work. The neglect that they have inflicted on us I think is what has caused the strength of the people that were neglected over time.

Thanks to this Government, we have opened up Trinidad and Tobago and we are proud to be part of a Government where any part of this country would never be neglected again. We are going into Toco/Manzanilla and every part of this country to ensure that we have quality development. When we increase old age pension, disability allowance and all the social assistance to our country, we do not discriminate whether it is Toco/Manzanilla.

When people come to this House and try to give the impression that we discriminate, I want to say when we do something in this Parliament it is for the entire population of Trinidad and Tobago, and we must understand that. We must not become partisan; we must not try to divide this country again, Mr. Speaker. It is too late for that. As they say: We have come too far to turn back now. It is forward.

The hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla talks about the next budget being presented by the PNM. I have heard that so many times and today when we sit here, we are discussing among ourselves, you hear the rhetoric from the other side, allegations of corruption and we are getting so fed up with it now that it does not make sense anymore.

Worse than that, when the hon. Minister of Finance was reading the budget to the nation and he mentioned that he is doing certain things to deal with corruption, people opposite scoffed at that. Do you know why? I am convinced

now that they are not serious about corruption busting, they are interested in having the allegation of corruption so they could continue to speak because that is all they could talk about.

10.05 p.m.

All they talked about was corruption. Nobody got up here today and said what they did for their constituents, except the Member for Toco/Manzanilla. All they talked about was corruption, corruption, and corruption. They were elected to serve their constituencies, do that. Make sure that they get things for their people, make sure that they serve the people well. Do not hide behind the balisier, try to serve their communities. When they do that and retire from politics, the people would say that they did a good job.

I have heard the Member for Arouca North in another place complaining that he could not do anything for Arouca North because the UNC is in Government. When the Members for Couva South and Couva North were in Opposition, they got things for their constituencies. Even my predecessor got certain things for Chaguanas because of her constant asking and getting people to do things in the constituency. When the Member for Arouca North said, "I could not do anything for you because I was not in Government", that is a poor excuse.

I am hoping that with our Dollar for Dollar Tertiary Education Plan, that when our people are educated that they would reject people who come here Friday after Friday, year after year, pretending that they represent them. That people would wake up one morning and smell the coffee and PNM would be no more because they cannot continue to fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So he spoke about rural bus—I got carried away there—he asked us to request the Minister of Transport and the Minister of Tourism and Tobago Affairs for the rural bus in his constituency. The Member for Port of Spain South is here. I advise the Member to ask his campaign manager to help him. I think he has a very senior position in the Public Transport Service Corporation and maybe he can get some help from that area. This is how I operate—I do not only harass the Ministers, I go to the senior technical officers in the ministries to get things done. So he has a direct line to the Chief Executive Officer of PTSC.

Then he talked about Westmoorings. Mr. Speaker, I would welcome a "Centralmoorings" any time in central Trinidad. You know why? I want the people of my constituency to improve their quality of life, to own quality houses. When that Member said this evening that he does not want an "Eastmoorings", he

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is telling his people to live in abject poverty; do not improve the quality of their lives. But I would welcome a “Centralmoorings”

Mr. Boynes: Would the Member give way? Is it that the Member is saying that the people of Toco are presently living in abject poverty?

Hon. M. Ramsaran: What I am saying is that he does not want to improve the quality of life of the people of Toco/Manzanilla. And you know he would go boasting, that he will win any time, but I am convinced he wants to win any time but he is afraid of educating his people; he is afraid of giving them meaningful representation and meaningful development. I want to repeat, as he is here, that if you read the *Hansard* over the five years, his speeches have not changed, except maybe a comma here and there.

He spoke about an insult to Hasely Crawford. I want to put this on record and I hope I can remember the sequence correctly. He said that we tried to embarrass Hasely Crawford. Hasely Crawford wrote to the Prime Minister of the day, George Chambers. He said he was building his own house and he wanted \$107,000 to finish the house. The reply from the Prime Minister was no help for Hasely Crawford, none. When Mr. Manning came into office, Hasely again wrote the Prime Minister asking for assistance to pay off the credit on the loan he had taken from the Workers’ Bank. Again, the Prime Minister of the day wrote to Hasely Crawford and said nothing for him. It was when Mr. Panday took charge of the Government, that he said, let us recognize Hasely Crawford and give him what he wants.

There was this misunderstanding in the media, when they called Hasely Crawford and said I said certain things about him and he reacted. When I met with Hasely and I asked him what was going on, he apologized to me. Today, Mr. Speaker, Hasely and I are on good terms and we have settled this misunderstanding. I still respect Hasely Crawford as the greatest ever athlete produced by Trinidad and Tobago. We honoured the man. If you give somebody \$3 million and then they insult you, I would like insults like that.

He talks about sports tourism. Yesterday I spoke to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, telling him that with this tremendous success—you know why they are supporting us now, Mr. Speaker? It is because of the tremendous success of the Under 17 Tournament. Had it failed, he would have been crucifying us today. We spent about \$369 million—that would be discussed at another time.

We are successful in hosting this tournament so he comes today with “praise”—of course with praise in inverted commas and tarnishes the names of

people in their absence, and being sarcastic. That cannot work. They cannot fool anybody with that. There are 30,000 persons in the stadium and more people outside, I was told, to look at Trinidad/Brazil and Croatia against Australia. People supported this tournament and that is why they come today—proud with mouth. Had we failed, they would have called for the Minister's head. This country is so unkind that today is the first time, and it was said officially, they did not come unofficially and say, "Minister you are doing a good job". For the first time, they praised the country for hosting this tournament.

I want to talk about a conversation I had with the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yesterday, I said, "Minister, with this success and with the availability of scholarships to our people"—because I have been hearing a lot and I have been talking to different people who are in Trinidad and Tobago at this time—"Why not set up a sports desk or a sports attaché in Washington to assist our young people in getting scholarships?" The Minister readily agreed and I am sure he would act quickly to ensure that a desk is set up in Washington to ensure that the young people of this country would get scholarships across the United States of America.

Sports Tourism: What is sports tourism? How do we develop sports tourism? It is not by building stadia alone, it is by promoting our country and we have started. I have already established a web site that would be going across the world advertising all the sporting facilities of this country. People were able to access our web site from last week Monday, which is when it was launched. Of course, we did not see it in the media. They were invited but sometimes the good things do not make news. That is another casualty of the media.

I am sure we are going to expose Trinidad and Tobago to the world, if this competition has not already done that. Mr. Speaker, I understand that 115 countries across the world are looking at the Hasely Crawford Stadium and those two matches that are being played there this afternoon.

People would talk about the Miss Universe Pageant and question us as to why we did not do this or that with the money. That would pay off. I am confident that things like these would sell Trinidad and Tobago in a positive light, not only negative. There are people across the world, who, because of what is being said by the Opposition on corruption, despite the fact that we are making so much strides forward, because of their negative influence and innuendoes, people are looking at this country askance and I have to defend this country wherever I go, that whatever is being said is purely political rhetoric.

A country cannot develop with the kind of corruption that people are talking about. That is impossible. It does not add up. We have growth in the economy, we

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have kept down inflation, we continue to give social services to our people; we have increased old age pension. How then can this add up? It cannot; and people with intelligence would know that it is just pure political rhetoric and they must stop that.

They should do like the Member for Tobago East and ask for things for their constituencies, not beg, ask, demand. We are all Trinidadians and Tobagonians, but do not come here week after week; day after day and talk about corruption and use the divide and rule attitude. That cannot work anymore. I am not saying that everybody is perfect, but let us cast our minds back to 1995 and before and remember what type of country we had and what we have today. Look at the sporting facilities, for example, five of the best sport stadia you can find in any part of the world and to find all in a small country like Trinidad and Tobago. Everybody said that this is the best set of sport facilities ever to be found in a small country like ours. So we are developing this country and we would continue to do it despite their rhetoric and criticism of what we are doing.

10.15 p.m.

He spoke about club structure. We have already started in that regard. We have our sports policy in place and we are going to work on that as the year goes by. The Member said that had he been in office—and God forbid—that old age pension would have been \$1,000. I want to remind him, when we were on the campaign trail we said we are going to take the old age pension to \$1,000 in our next term. What they said—and we have to remind the population—is that they were going to review the old age pension. Review could mean anything. Mr. Speaker, do you know what the meaning of review is? It could drop; it could be taken away; it could be increased. But, you know, with their track record, they would never increase anything for the poor people of this country, because their track record has shown that they never cared about the poor people of this country. Actions speak louder than words. They must examine their consciences and they will see what I am talking about.

So to say that their Minister of Finance would have increased old age pension to \$1,000—we do not know which Minister of Finance. The Member for Toco/Manzanilla has to be very careful with what he is saying. I mentioned again, when he was outside, that Toco/Manzanilla has no worry. Michael Als and Terry Rondon are there to represent the people of Toco/Manzanilla.

As regards the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Toco Foundation, this is smear campaign. He spoke about some graffiti on the road,

what he said today is propaganda and a smear campaign. He is bringing the UNDP and the Toco Foundation into the dirt of his dirty politics! He is trying to smear that relationship between the Toco Foundation and the UNDP; trying to smear the good name of the Toco Foundation, because I am sure he has no evidence. He said somebody two o'clock in the morning told him. This sounds like La Diabliesse, really.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be careful of what we say. The UNDP has been a friend of Trinidad and Tobago for many years and we must be careful of bringing them into the dirt of local politics. We have to be careful of that. I want to put on record that I have the greatest respect for the UNDP and I know the permanent representative in Trinidad and Tobago would never believe a story coming from that side, especially the Member for Toco/Manzanilla. We must ensure that we do not bring our international agencies into disrepute.

We could go on and on. The Member spoke about drugs and children. Before I go into that, let me talk about some of the successes we have had. He mentioned a few: Darrel Brown; 100 metre—gold, junior world track; John Bovell, fourth place, 200 metres; Asiquila Keller, bronze, world cycling championship in China. The Trinidad and Tobago under-15 team, first place in regional tournament, 2000/2001; and under-19 team, a creditable second place in the Caribbean one-day tournament. Volley ball: Trinidad and Tobago girls under-17, first place in the Caribbean Junior championship, 2000. Netball—you see, apparently he does not know, because he does not spend his time looking after the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago—Trinidad and Tobago girls under-16, first place in the Caribbean tournament held in Trinidad, December 2000. Of course, all of this was assisted by the Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs. We are given \$1 million to assist these teams to go abroad.

So for people to come here without information and try to criticize what we are doing—he is talking about cigarettes sold to the young people. Again, had the Member been here a year ago, we spoke in the budget about children not being sold alcohol and cigarettes and we are making it mandatory now that cigarettes and alcohol must not be sold to children 18 years and under. The Minister said that. So when he comes here as if he is the guardian angel for the young people of this country, he does not have the facts.

Mr Assam: He needs a hearing aid.

Hon. M. Ramsaran: We are working to ensuring that our children live in a society where they could be protected.

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The children—of course, the Minister of Education has done more than anybody else to ensure that our children are given proper education, and I have said that many a time when I go to Adopt-a-Community Programmes. One of the pillars of this Adopt-a-Community was education. I said it then and I will repeat it for you, that education is the surest way to end poverty. What we are doing in the field of education is exactly that. So be careful, Member for Toco/Manzanilla. You cannot fool the people of Toco/Manzanilla for too long. They would be educated shortly.

As far as the children are concerned, we have instituted legislation as follows:

- The Children's Authority Act (2000)
- The Children's Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries Act (2000);
- The Miscellaneous Provisions (Children) Act (2000);
- The Children (Amdt.) Act (2000); and
- The Adoption of Children Act (2000).

Mr. Speaker, these pieces of legislation might sound very simple to you, but Trinidad and Tobago has been one of the few countries in the world to adhere to the UNICEF rights of the child. Today, as we speak, we have not put all the systems in place, but we are pointing the country in the direction of respecting the rights of our children. So when the Minister of Finance announced that no alcohol and cigarettes are to be sold to people under 18, I felt, yes, this is the first victory in ensuring that our children are protected.

The Member for Toco/Manzanilla could assist with that. He said he saw people smoking. What did he do? Did he speak to them? Or did he note it to come and make noise in Parliament? We cannot be everywhere. That is why we have an MP for Toco/Manzanilla, to deal with his constituency; to talk to them, to train them.

Mr. Boynes: That is the point. Every one of us has to recommit ourselves to doing that. Is something wrong in coming here and asking every Member to do it?

Hon. M. Ramsaran: I want to tell him something today. The days of politics of drain and roads must be over. Yes, we must concentrate on that, but we have to develop our human capital; we have to ensure that our people come out of the poverty trap; we have to ensure that our people become educated; we have to ensure that we create a society where our people would want to live in a beautiful

country. So politics of drain and Best Village—I do not have anything against this, you know, but we have to bring our country into a quality state that we would love. We will expand all the resources we have. People must come here to experience a Trinidad and Tobago that is united.

A lesson was taught to me and I must share it with you, coming out of those atrocious acts in the United States last Tuesday, September 11, 2001. I want to tell you that what came out of that is something that I am proud of, that could happen in Trinidad and Tobago. You know, we could have really closed ranks for this World Under-17 Tournament and bring the world here with dignity, but instead we continue our cheap politics. What has happened in the United States after those atrocious acts, we saw there was one Congress. The Republicans and Democrats came together to defend their country, to ensure that they give the country what they want. Sometimes we must do that. But you know, we are so coward. We always want to guard our political turf, that we could not say, “Fellows, Minister of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs, Prime Minister, we have the Under-17 Tournament here, could we bury all our differences and welcome the world to us?” Why did we not do that?

Mr. Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago at this time we have many social problems. I will touch on a few of the other areas. I will touch a little on drug abuse.

While poverty is a pervasive and debilitating social ill that challenges nations throughout the world, so too does the harmful effects of substance abuse. Sadly Trinidad and Tobago is also victim to this scourge. I would not deny that. Under my Ministry’s division, called the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme (NADAPP), this division continues to play a co-ordinating role to effect Government’s drug abuse prevention initiatives, as well as to foster and facilitate the efforts of NGOs that are involved in the struggle to rid the nation of drug abuse.

Recently the Prime Minister and I went to Antigua to attend a meeting on drug demand reduction as well as supply reduction. What happened in that meeting was really a turnaround in the way we in Trinidad and Tobago and the West Indies deal with drugs. In the past, the focus was on the supply of drugs—

10.25 p.m.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, in this country we are always quick to criticize people without knowing the facts. We talk about social displacement in this country and the vagrancy problems, so today I am really proud to announce, and it was stated in the budget—and I said people with eyes to see will see—that we will be finishing stage three of the Piparo Empowerment Centre. This centre will give the best drug rehabilitation as in any part of the world. We started in July of this year and by the end of this month we expect to have 60 inmates in this facility to deal with the drug rehabilitation problem in this country. We are also looking at the Caura ward where we have 45 more beds to deal with the whole question of drug rehabilitation.

Mr. Speaker, we would also be building a facility at Laventille and Chaguanas and we are seeking to have the drawings done for one in Arima. We are going to have places to deal with this question of vagrancy, as we hear many people, from time to time, talking about vagrancy. Yes, we know it was new problem. When we came into office in 1995, I looked for solutions and there were none. We had to start from scratch. Today, I could promise that within the next six months to a year we would see a drastic reduction—if it is not already drastically reduced. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant said he has a solution that I used, but I would not repeat it here; it is too much for me to say really, he would have to say it himself.

We would be taking about 105 people off the streets every six months. I am sure, before long, the vagrancy problem will end in Trinidad and Tobago. As it stands now, it is just about 130 people on the streets. We have people in recidivism and we know that we cannot deal with the problem in total, but we are getting there and getting there slowly, but surely. I assure Members that we are working in that regard and we also work with the NGOs. They have taken 74 people off the streets and are assisting us in keeping them clean and rehabilitating them.

We also have an independent live-in programme where we take people from the Riverside Car Park, train them for independent living, and so far, as at the end of last month we have taken 74 people off the streets. We give them \$200 per month to rent a cheap apartment and try to get a job for them so they can come back into society. This Government is not about quick fix solutions. As we said when we started the programme, it is how we deal with this problem in a manner to give dignity back to the people. We are doing that; it is quite successful and we would continue.

Mr. Speaker, Gender Affairs is under the purview of my Ministry. I want to tell this House—I may have to repeat everything the Minister of Finance said—

that we are continuing to take the women's problems in our country seriously. I would just name a few of these quickly:

- The establishment of a committee to develop a national gender policy;
- Gender-sensitivity training groups in youth gender relations and AIDS and gender relations;
- A National Outreach Youth Caravan to address non-violent conflict resolution techniques and the enhancement of communication methods in a bid to harmonize youth gender relations;
- The implementation of an Integrated Approach to Domestic Violence which constitutes:
 - Training programmes for domestic violence service provides 119 community members and 20 members of staff of the Domestic Violence Unit and National Family Services Division;
 - Facilitating more than 45 requests for lectures and workshops on domestic violence issues;
 - The establishment of 19 Drop-in and Information Centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago—issues such as rape and juvenile behavioural problems were addressed in addition to domestic violence issues and more than 2,500 clients accessed these services;
 - The continued operation of the Domestic Violence Hot Line which was accessed by 4,807 persons during the period January—July, 2001, with 119 of these being male callers;
- The Women's Second Chances Programme which comprises an agricultural component and an elderly care programme. Under the agricultural programmes, 400 single mothers and other women in needy situations were trained in agricultural methods, thereby acquiring skills with which to improve their social well-being.
- The Elderly Care project has been instrumental in the process of breaking the cycle of poverty, violence and dependence in the lives of 250 women aged 35 years and above who are socially disadvantaged. Seventy per cent of these women graduated successfully and are currently employed locally and abroad.
- The Gender Affairs Division also operates a Male Support Programme which includes gender sensitization for males, the formation of male

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- community groups to address a range of issues and the provision of trained male counsellors at the Information Centres.

Mr. Speaker, as you may be aware, Consumer Affairs has recently come under my purview and in this area I thank the Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs for the work he has done in that division. I want to tell this House that, at this time, Trinidad and Tobago is poised to, again, be one of the leading countries in the world as far as our consumer protection is concerned. Some of the things we have done recently are:

- The development of a National Policy and Regulations on Bio-safety Protocol;
- Development of standards in the poultry industry;
- Intensified monitoring of commercial activities by focusing on breaches of legislation;
- The resolution of 63.7 per cent of consumer complaints received by the division.

In the area of consumer empowerment:

- Commemoration of World Consumer Rights Day via a two-day symposium on the theme: "Globalisation—a Challenge for Youth". One hundred and eight persons, mostly youth, attended the event;
- We conducted a Theatre-in-Education project in 20 primary and secondary schools to introduce the concept of responsible consumerism in schools; and
- Developed a teacher's manual and a children's consumer workbook to be used in schools by children in the 5—7 age group.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to sports to mention some of the areas in which we have been very active. Before I do that, I want to say that in my Ministry, of course, with the blessings of Cabinet, the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, we are approaching the whole question of poverty eradication and improving the quality of life in a coordinated manner. I was very pleased to hear the announcement that \$30 million would go towards poverty eradication in this country. We are treating with that problem seriously and we would continue to work despite the fact that the Member for Toco/Manzanilla would not like it. We would continue to work to get people out of the poverty trap and we would have programmes all over.

I want to tell this House that the Micro Credit System where we are lending money to poor people at a very low interest rate, pilot projects are in Guayaguayare, Mayaro and Tamana where we have NGOs lending money. We are going to establish three more during the next financial year so that we can get the poor people at the so-called grassroots level to be able to access loans even though they may not qualify for the small business loans so that they can start their own businesses and get themselves on their feet and not depend on people.

Mr. Speaker, despite what people say, that Trinidad and Tobago would not be ready to move off of a welfare system, I am proud to announce that we have success stories upon success stories in the form of people who received small loans and are now no more on the ETP. The Minister was showing me a list this evening—I am sorry he did not read it out—where people who were trained in the ETP are now working in Trinidad and Tobago and abroad. The same could be said of the Micro Credit System in my ministry. I am sure the Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs would tell you that his small business system is geared towards assisting the small people of this country.

What angered me today is when I heard the Member for San Fernando East talking about poverty. They do not understand poverty. I am sure that people do not understand poverty. Poverty is something we have to get people to think out of. We cannot just pull them out, they have to think out of poverty. Some of us suffer from mental poverty; we want to remain poor for the rest of our lives. I hope this is not what I understood the Member for Toco/Manzanilla to say who is inflicting poverty on the people of Toco/Manzanilla by not wanting Westmoorings in Toco/Manzanilla. I would love my constituency to become another Westmoorings because that would mean more employment and more houses of a Westmoorings-type setting.

10.35 p.m.

The Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government was talking to me about a concept of building play parks across Trinidad and Tobago. When you do these things you get people to live healthy lifestyles. You get people to think that they can come out of abject poverty. We could get people to start to think about a First World nation. The politicians and the business sector might be doing that, but if we do not get people on board we cannot move this country forward. I assure you and the public that we are doing all in the ministry to ensure that we win this battle against poverty.

Let me quickly touch on some of the initiatives that we have taken in sport.

Mr. Bereaux: Before you take your seat, sorry to disturb you. Would you talk about the Palo Seco velodrome that is closed down?

Hon. M. Ramsaran: I am glad that the Member asked that. Six months ago, he threatened to write me about this Palo Seco velodrome. Up to now I have not received a letter on my desk. How then could I act? This is not something under the purview of the ministry. I understand that this is a problem with Petrotrin. Of course, I will intervene. I am not like a bull in a China shop to rush in Petrotrin with a gun at somebody and say, "Wha yuh doing with dat?" If you write me on behalf of the residents, I assure you, Member of Parliament for La Brea, that I would have the ministry check on that immediately to see what we can do.

I have said it before, that I would not discriminate against young people in this country, once we are doing something to improve the quality of life for them. I assure you that once you do that, you would hear from me as soon as possible.

We have constructed swimming pools at La Horquetta, Paria and Couva. We have refurbished the swimming pools at Diego Martin and Sangre Grande. We have constructed indoor sporting arenas in major communities. We have created a national hockey centre. We have built multi-purpose youth sport facilities. We have created many sporting programmes, such as the Super 5 Programme. We have built four stadia and refurbished one. We have installed community pitches across Trinidad and Tobago.

Since I have assumed responsibility for the Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs we are building turf pitches across Trinidad and Tobago. Within the next two or three years, almost all cricket in the country would be played on turf pitches. If we got some help before we would not have had to do so much. Now, the expectancy of everybody is so high. *[Interruption]* No. They did not do it. I know that. I played the opening match on that ground. That was a community effort. Do not bring that. *[Interruption]* This is what this Member is about. He built one turf pitch and he is beating up his chest. I must have built 100 turf pitches and I am not beating my chest. We are going to build turf pitches across Trinidad and Tobago. We would get our people accustomed to playing on good and true surfaces. This Government is about delivering quality surfaces to the people.

We have a Community Swimming Programme; Sport Training Enhancement Programme called STEP and Schools Coaching Programme. We are working with the Ministry of Education to get all the school children into coaching programmes. We are serious about developing the young people of this country. The Clerk of the

House and Mr. Jaggassar are also involved in our District Coaching Programme. Together with the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board of Control we have established coaching schools throughout the country to coach the young people to play cricket. We will continue our rural coaching programme

There is a very innovative programme that I asked my coaches to go into. Where we have the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board competitions being played, I have asked the ministry to go into other areas deeper in the countryside. We have discovered three or four good cricketers who played in the recent Under 15 Competition and they never played for a club before. There are three youngsters from Mayaro in the National Under 15 Team. This is because of the excursions made by the ministry in these areas. I can talk for about three or four hours. It is a pity that I only have 75 minutes.

Let me go quickly to some plans for the next year. The programmes and projects planned by the ministry for the 2001–2002 fiscal year reflect the national objectives of the Government as well as the key priority areas in keeping with the ministry's mandate to pursue and obtain community empowerment throughout the country. Through these measures our citizens, especially the socially vulnerable groups would be provided with skills and resources to promote their well being and more importantly, to secure their economic independence.

We could talk about people with disabilities and what we are doing for them. We have to repeat this time and time again. I am extremely happy again to hear the announcement by the Minister of Finance. Apparently, Members on the other side were not listening to these programmes that would assist the unfortunate and less privileged people in the community. Five buses were approved for people with disabilities for their use. This is something both sides of the House should have applauded when the Minister said it. If you care about people, whoever brings the facilities should be applauded. I applaud the Minister of Finance for making this a reality. We would have buses specially made for the disabled people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I mentioned the transportation system. We would also focus on the facilities at the City Gate Bus Terminus for persons with disabilities, access to supermarkets and the customer service industry, access to telecommunication. I am sure that you are aware that recently we launched in the new TSTT directory a page with special number in braille for the blind people of our country to get telephone numbers in case of emergency. This was done through the kind courtesy of TSTT in collaboration with the Ministry of Consumer Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs.

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I am sure that you would be proud to look at TTT. You would see that now, there is sign language after the news summary. This is again courtesy the ministry and Government of Trinidad and Tobago to get the people with disabilities to be part of the system. We have to understand that even here, there are people on the other side with hearing disabilities. We are encouraging people with disabilities to be in the mainstream. More than 10 per cent of the country have disabilities. We must cater for them. If you read the budget you would see that special schools would be built for the hearing impaired and people with other disabilities. We would move forward with everybody hand in hand.

As I mentioned before, we would continue to work. The year 2004 would be the “Year of the Family”. I ask everybody in Trinidad and Tobago to get together to celebrate this very important occasion. The family is the basic unit that we must continue to build. Over time, without knowing it, governments have encouraged the breakdown of family. I will go into that another time. We must make a conscious effort to encourage family life. When we were youngsters growing up, I remember—I heard the Member for San Fernando East spoke this morning about a day of prayer, but he divided the country between Muslims and non Muslims. Do Muslims not pray on Sundays? He said Friday for Muslims and Sunday mornings for the other religions. People pray at any time. If we call for a day of prayer—I hope it was done with a clean conscience. I would ask my colleagues and our constituents to join in a day of prayer on Sunday 23. We believe that Trinidad and Tobago could do with a day of healing and prayer. I am sure that I would have the support of my colleagues to say that we would support the Member for San Fernando East in his call for a day of prayer on Sunday. We think that this country and indeed the world—when we look at what happened in New York, we could really sit and reflect on what could happen to this world in a couple of minutes.

Recently, when I was in New York, I had a thought: Would Manhattan ever sleep? I asked myself that question. Could you imagine the United States without an aircraft? All this happened in the twinkling of an eye. America slept. There were no planes in the sky. I support the Member for San Fernando in a day of prayer. I hope that this is not only mouth and we would see people come out and support this day of prayer. We must not talk with forked tongues.

We would be calling a family first media campaign. We would also look at conscious parenting. There would be a domestic violence awareness month. We would be celebrating this over the next couple of days. I mentioned international day of the families and international day of the children. There would also be

activities relating to Trinidad and Tobago such as the commemoration of the decade of the international year of the family, which I mentioned before. That would be held in 2004. Across the country we would establish daycare centres for the elderly. Of course, we would continue to improve and expand activities related to reducing drug and alcohol abuse and continue with our sport related programmes. We are also consciously looking at sports against drugs programme to ensure that we produce quality people to live in a quality nation which is Trinidad and Tobago.

I would end by answering this question for the Member for Toco/Manzanilla. I recommended to Cabinet that we approve an interim committee to treat with the upkeep/maintenance of public recreation grounds. This committee has met and would submit its recommendations. The committee is made up of officers of the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government, the Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs as well as one or two of the cricket and football organizations. We are looking seriously at upkeeping the grounds of Trinidad and Tobago whether they belong to the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government or the Ministry of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs. We would continue to implement the national sport policy and ensure that we develop quality services for quality people that live in Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank the Minister of Finance for an excellent budget presentation; one as he entitled, "One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind". I assure the entire Parliament that this Government is not about sectoral development. We are about developing Trinidad and Tobago. Once you come to any one of us on this side we would work with any Member of Parliament and any county councillor as long as we have the available funds to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago becomes a total quality nation.

Thank you.

Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to Thursday, September 20, 2001 at 10.30 a.m. [Hon. R. L. Maharaj]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.49 p.m.