

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Thursday, September 20, 2001*

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Agricultural Development Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2000. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
2. Annual audited financial statements of the National Commission for Self-Help Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 1999. [*Hon. R. L. Maharaj*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
3. The Value Added Tax Order, 2001. [*The Minister of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Gerald Yetming)*]
4. The Excise Duty (Tobacco Products) Order, 2001. [*Hon. G. Yetming*]
5. The Excise Duty (Alcoholic Beverages) Order, 2001. [*Hon. G. Yetming*]
6. The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order, 2001. [*Hon. G. Yetming*]
7. The Water Pollution Rules, 2001. [*The Minister of the Environment (Dr. The Hon. Adesh Nanan)*]

**CUSTOMS A.T.A. (ADMISSION TEMPORAIRE/TEMPORARY
ADMISSION) CARNET SYSTEM BILL**

Bill to enable effect to be given to certain provisions of the Customs Convention regarding Carnets for commercial samples done at Brussels on 1st March, 1956 and acceded to on 5th January, 1981, the Customs Conventions concerning facilities for the importation of goods for display or use at exhibitions, fairs, meetings or similar events done at Brussels on 8th June, 1961, and acceded to on 5th January, 1981, the Customs Convention on the temporary importation of professional equipment, done at Brussels on 8th June, 1961, and acceded to on 5th January, 1981 and the Customs Convention on the A.T.A. Carnet for the

Customs Carnet System Bill

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Temporary Admission of Goods (A.T.A. Convention) done at Brussels on 6th December, 1961 and acceded to on 13th March, 1981 and for matters connected with those purposes [*The Minister of Enterprise Development and Foreign Affairs*]; read the first time.

SENTENCING COMMISSION (AMDT.) BILL

Bill to amend the Sentencing Commission Act [*the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[Third 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. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin East*): Mr. Speaker, I have made a careful examination of this budget statement, *One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind*. I have read the text from page 1 to 63; from cover to cover and, for a first budget presented by the Minister of Finance, it is a total disappointment. I have highlighted a number of comments made by the Minister and I will go through each one to show the inconsistencies in the words of the Minister, the truth and the reality.

If we go to page 3, after his political speech about the people wanting the PNM in Opposition—of course, conveniently omitting to mention the fact that about 50,000 of the votes received by the other side were imaginary—he made the statement:

“We must maintain prudent external debt levels and seek to improve our investment grade rating.”

What on earth does the Minister mean by that? If you look in the *Review of the Economy*—I do not have to refer to the page because I am sure that he knows it—he will see that in 1995 when the PNM demitted office, our total public debt was approximately \$17 billion. I know that the Member for Tunapuna likes to pick on numbers. The document submitted by the Minister demonstrates that, in 1995, the country’s debt was in the vicinity of \$17 billion. In his own document the country’s debt is in excess of \$30 billion. It has literally doubled in the last five and a half years. How on earth could that be associated with prudent external debt levels?

In the current budget, we have the Minister's admission that he is going to the market to borrow money. He is borrowing \$2 billion this year. That is a far cry from a moratorium on borrowing and his practising tight fiscal management and tight monetary policy. Why is he borrowing \$2 billion? If we go into the capital programme, we will see that it is to engage in squandermania and mismanagement and the award of corrupt contracts that have so characterized this administration over the last five and a half years. That is what that \$2 billion is for.

I noticed, when the Leader of the Opposition was talking yesterday, that he was making a lot of noise and carrying on, but when he got to the part about corruption, he stayed quiet. I noticed the Member for Couva North, when he was shown a photograph, bowed his head. He did not want to say anything. When they asked him in the corridor if he knew anything about the house, he walked off. He started talking about people coming outside and talking about it. For someone who likes to throw all kinds of big stones at people on this side, the Member for Couva North is very thin skinned. He likes to pelt boulders over here, but when you touch close to home, when you talk about a house that is close to home in England, he gets jumpy. He does not want to talk about it. He wants to sue. He wants to threaten libel action. There are many more revelations which have come out. We will give him a little time to run his run. He has been very indiscreet. There are many bits of evidence that we have, such as the photograph, which will be released on a systematic basis so that people will understand what we are dealing with.

The Minister also told us that by the year 2005 our children will be taught in well-built, non-crowded schools and institutions. Well, certainly that is not taking place now. They crammed children into rum shops, parlours, private homes, garages, all sorts of insanitary and inappropriate buildings under the guise of secondary education for all.

What about the quality of the education? That is one of the issues the current Minister of Education keeps missing. If a child goes to school in a rum shop, what kind of education will he get? Is he going to learn about the percentage of alcohol in Fernandes VAT 19? Is that the kind of education he is going to get? This is the difference between the PNM policies and the UNC's. The UNC believes in quantity. They have no interest in quality. They will spend a quantity of money at Piarco—nearly \$2 billion, endless money was spent—but the quality of the completed structure, they do not want to talk about that at all.

The Minister goes on to say that by 2005 more families will be enjoying the pleasure of living in their own homes with all the necessary amenities. How is he

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

going to achieve this? Is he going to achieve greater home ownership by cutting the budget of the Member for San Fernando West, as he has done, from \$73 million to \$54 million? The development allocation for the Ministry of Housing and Settlements has been cut by almost \$20 million. How on earth is the Minister of Housing and Settlements going to implement his boast of 30,000 homes when the Minister of Finance cuts his budget?

Obviously, as a member of the “Gang of Four”, the Minister of Housing and Settlements is just receiving retribution. That is all that is going on. Look at all the allocations for capital spending in the development programme, in the Public Sector Investment Programme and all four of the gang of four got “zug”. They have cut the budget for housing. They have cut the budget for agriculture, or if they have not cut it, they have not provided enough—just a fraction of the funding required. They have “zugged” the entire Ministry of the Member for Naparima. They left him with a little change and a bit of Ministry. I have not looked inside the Attorney General’s allocation at all. I can only imagine that it is all cut up.

When the Minister tells us that more families will be enjoying the pleasure of living in their own homes, how is this going to happen? Is he saying that the rich people will live in Invaders Bay? Is that what he means? He said by the year 2005 the streets of our cities, towns and boroughs will be cleaner and free from the homeless and the destitute since they would be now residing in their new shelters under appropriate care. What wishful thinking? A pipe dream! Is this how he deals with the homeless and the destitute—provide a shelter? Is he living in Trinidad and Tobago? Does he know what is going on at the shelter for the homeless at Riverside Plaza? They walk in and they walk out. There are no programmes. This Government has no programmes because they have appointed an incompetent as their Minister of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs and he does not have a clue. He just talks and talks but he cannot effect any meaningful programmes because he simply does not have the ability. The only ability he has is to tell untruths. An example is when he commissioned the swimming pool in Couva South and indicated that he could not invite people and did not invite the Member for Couva South and then the Member for Couva South had to produce an invitation and a withdrawal of an invitation by the said Minister. That is his track record—a litany of untruths.

How on earth are the streets of our cities, towns and boroughs going to be cleaned when no allocation of any substance has been provided for local government corporations? When I look at the development programme for the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government, I see a total

allocation of \$247 million. Inside of there, as I am certain the Member for Arouca North pointed out yesterday, the allocation for local government corporations is a meagre \$14 million. Out of \$247 million, \$14 million, less than 10 per cent, is provided for infrastructure in our boroughs and our regional corporations. This demonstrates the backwardness and the empty, barren thinking of the people on that side.

Allocations are given when requested. The fault for this has to lie at the doorsteps of the Member for St. Joseph. Clearly, when he requested \$250 million for his Ministry, he thought it was only prudent to request just over \$10 million for local government corporations.

10 45 a.m.

We have corporations such as my own—Diego Martin—getting less than \$1 million for roads, bridges, drainage projects; for all the development needs of the region of Diego Martin, with a population close to 200,000 persons. The Minister has seen it fit to request an allocation of less than \$1 million. That is \$5 for every resident of Diego Martin. That is what you think of the people of greater Diego Martin? Five dollars, or \$4.00, because it is, in fact, \$700,000. That is all you have requested. Look at the City of Port of Spain, our capital city, \$714,000 out of \$250 million requested by the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government has been allocated to the City of Port of Spain.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, when we look at areas like Chaguanas, last year they got \$2.4 million. This year they are getting \$1.5 million. Are you telling me that the Borough of Chaguanas has more infrastructure in terms of roads, buildings, systems that require a greater allocation than the city of Port of Spain? Is that what you are saying? Look at San Fernando, our second city—\$714,000. It is as if somebody sat down in the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government and said: “Give every PNM corporation \$714,000”. It is a recurring decimal, 714 for Arima, Port of Spain, San Fernando, Point Fortin, and Diego Martin. Where they have interest, however, we have Chaguanas, \$1.5 million, San Juan, \$2 million and so on.

Is there any thought to what you are doing? While the Minister spends \$900 million throwing asphalt on roads, when you translate that \$714,000 into the various elements of infrastructure that are under the purview and are the responsibility of the Diego Martin corporation, in my constituency alone, there are 247 local roads. If we take the three Diego Martin constituencies we are probably talking about 600 local roads in the region of Diego Martin for which you have provided \$714,000 which could probably do two roads. Mr. Speaker,

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

they want to know why people are vexed and why they say they are vindictive and callous. Mr. Speaker, nine councillors and aldermen in Diego Martin. You are giving councillors and aldermen \$714,000, you are giving them about \$60,000 each which could probably pave one back street in Diego Martin. We are not talking about drainage, bridges and all the other infrastructure needs of the region of Diego Martin and the Minister took \$250 million for himself to squander in asphalt all over the place, in an area where it is not required.

While I am on that, Mr. Speaker, it is the easiest thing in the world to just call up a contractor and say pave road “X”. It is the easiest thing in the world to succumb to a cartel of asphalt companies, which have managed to get the price of asphalt doubled. [*Desk thumping*] It is the easiest thing in the world to have a going rate for asphalt of \$150 a tonne and then bring in your new road programme and pay \$300 a tonne. Three hundred dollars is at the lower end. There are some roads in Trinidad where the Minister has paid between \$500, \$600 and \$700 a tonne. Five times the rate of what it was just a couple years ago. It is the easiest thing in the world to do that, you know. Mr. Speaker, you know you have a cartel of asphalt companies; you organize, you say pave road “A”, pave road “B”; that is the easiest thing to do. If you do not deal with the underlying road foundation—

Mr. John: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I would like the hon. Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East to name one road where we have paid \$500 or thereabouts.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, the Member cannot be serious. He should check what he paid for paving Lady Chancellor. Check how much you paid to pave the roads where I live! You do not even know what is going on in your Ministry! [*Desk thumping*] You do not have a clue! You are just signing contracts; you do not have a clue! I will provide you with a list! Since you do not know, you come here and put on record that you have not spent that money anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Come and put that on record! Let me see if you are man enough to do that!

Mr. Speaker, that is not the issue, I am not attacking the Minister, personally. You see they always take these things as personal attacks. That is not the issue! When you are going to repair roads, as I said, the easiest thing in the world is to just call up an asphalt truck and throw down the asphalt. That is not how this should be done and you can ask the Member for Oropouche about that. He knows about that! I saw his comments in the newspapers. He knows! The whole southern region of Trinidad and Tobago, many of the roads there have developed from informal traces with no proper foundation and they have been built up over the years with asphalt.

If the Minister would take a little time to drive around the country and talk to people, he would know what is going on. So that in South Trinidad, you could pave a road today and if you do not deal with the foundation problems of that road or the drainage problems, the asphalt would mash up tomorrow. That is exactly what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago. There are situations like on Saddle Road where the Minister travels every day where they just throw down asphalt. They do not deal with the drainage problems, the land stability problems. There are situations now on Saddle Road where unplanned development is causing destruction of the road surface and there is a landslide next to the Maraval Reservoir. They are not dealing with these issues in any meaningful way. That should have been done before. You do not pave the road first and then find out that there are problems with the road structure afterwards. This is the shame of that \$900 million squandermania, "Have road paving".

Mr. Speaker, I was driving through—and it is in the Minister's consistency too—Caroni East, Frederick Settlement, looking at the quality of workmanship, the entire road is cracking already. The link between the Southern Main Road and the Uriah Butler Highway is cracking already and that was paved a short while ago. Why? Because there is no proper drainage and road foundation in place. That is why you do not just throw asphalt on the road. But of course, go ahead! You know there are some people on that side who want to be Mr. Performer, so they measure their performance by the amount of asphalt they buy, not by the amount of good work they do but by the amount of money they spend. [*Interruption*] He was?

I understand the Member for Oropouche was showing some of the bad work on television the other day when he was becoming a little more candid than he has been. In fact, I understand he is now seeking the national interest. He told me that yesterday but what were you doing for the last 20 years? [*Laughter*] You are now seeking the national interest? September 2001 you are now seeking the national interest? I have read some of the things that the Member for Oropouche has said with great interest. He looked at the squandermania on the stadia and the airport and he kept quiet. He sees these things happening but he does not want to disturb the equilibrium of the Cabinet so he keeps quiet. But it is all inside, it is festering and it is now boiling out. Well, I would say to the Member for Oropouche: "Better late than never. [*Laughter*] All the problems that you have had, being forced to swallow your pride and keep quiet about; talk man, talk. That will be in the national interest. Talk about it man, we need to know. The country needs to know."

As we go through the Minister's speech again, on page 8, he talks about:

"After five years, the circumstances of the elderly, single mothers, the poor, the physically challenged and the socially vulnerable have improved..."

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

On what basis is the Minister making that statement? I could remember his predecessor in one of his first budgets, talking about a \$25 million allocation for single mothers, heads of households and we heard about that year after year. Now this Minister, I mean he obviously did not write everything in here, I am sure he proofread it after it was finished. Unfortunately, however, a lot of the information in here is just cut and paste from previous budget speeches made by his predecessor. “Cut an' stick an' paste an' wen dey done, dey gi'im an' dey say, hol' dat, an' he ask dem, yuh sure every t'ing in here correct?” “Yes, Minister.” [*Laughter*] “Yuh t'ink it easy”. What have you done for single mothers? You have done absolutely nothing!

I have a question for the Minister: “What have you done with regard to the moneys paid to single mothers—heads of households in depressed circumstances—for public assistance? The Member for Chaguanas talked so much nonsense, why have you not increased the public assistance grants? [*Desk thumping*] There must be over 20,000 or 30,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago, maybe more, who are receiving public assistance. Why are you so mingy? Why do you not give them, at least, \$5 more? They are all primarily single mothers and heads of households receiving public assistance.

Hon. Member: Five dollars.

Mr. C. Imbert: You prefer not to give them anything. This is why I have a problem. On the cover of the Budget Speech it says and I quote:

“One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind”

Well, you have left single mothers behind. [*Desk thumping*] I would say single mothers constitute, at least, 25 per cent of the adult population. You have not done anything for single mothers and for public assistance recipients in this budget. I ask the Minister, now, do something! Do something for them! Do something! You could find \$1 billion here and \$2 billion there and a \$100 million to give to all sorts of people. Give the single mothers a little change, “nah”. I am asking you to do that in this budget. Show that you have a conscience.

The other statement that jumps out at me on page 9 is his talk about education. He says:

“...We have abolished the Common Entrance Examination and opened up secondary education to every child. The direct outcome of this decision was that more than 9000 boys and girls who would have been denied access to a basic education are now receiving secondary level education.”

This is inconsistent with the facts. If you look at the number of students sitting the examination—Member for Laventille East/Morvant, about 20,000—you will

see that a large number of persons have just been wiped out. Under the PNM over 30,000 children sat the Common Entrance Examination. Under the UNC 21,000 sat the Secondary Entrance Examination. Where the 9,000 gone? This is the 9,000 you say are now receiving secondary level education? How are they receiving it without sitting an examination? I understand it is a deliberate decision on the part of the Minister of Education—that pious Member for Siparia—to exclude children of a particular age from the secondary school system. Once you cross 14 years or something like that, you are out of the system. [*Desk thumping*]

11.00 a.m.

Is that not so, Member for Laventille East/Morvant? Whereas under the PNM there were all sorts of opportunities for children—you had the 14-plus examination and so on. They have wiped out 9,000 children and taken them out of the system. They like to talk—21,000 sat the examination, your examination. Thirty thousand used to sit the PNM examination and then they would repeat and then they would go into post-primary. They would have a whole series of programmes that would take care of the group of children who could not go on through the normal Common Entrance process, so the PNM was, in fact, dealing with 27,000 to 28,000 children every year. You are dealing with 21,000 and coming and trying to fool the population, but all the chickens will come home to roost in due course. [*Desk thumping*]

In the same way that you have a whole bunch of schools that has only Form Is and so on in them—a whole wash of Form Is in these schools—you know, and now you are taking five, six and seven Form I students who are now in a school and are sending them all over the place. They cannot continue in the same school because there is no planning, Mr. Speaker. It is an education programme for electioneering purposes. So you cram endless children into one school, all of them in Form I, a whole wash of them in Form I, and then next year they have to go to different schools so there is discontinuity, there is break up in the whole process of education. That is their idea of education.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Name one.

Mr. C. Imbert: Name one? Yes. You name one school where all the children who went into Form I going into Form II in that school! You name one school. You cannot do it. [*Interruption*]

Yes, Mr. Speaker, on page 9, too, the Minister started to talk about his fiscal policy and so on, and there are a lot of anomalies here which we really cannot understand. The average price for crude in the last fiscal year was \$25 a barrel.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

The Minister is projecting his revenue based on \$22 a barrel. So if the realized price was \$25 and you got a certain amount of revenue and the price going forward is \$22 and oil production is not changing, or it is going down, how can you get more revenue? This is the kind of maths that we get from the other side; a lower price, the same volume or less but higher yields in terms of income. How is this possible? If you go into the budget documents there are all sorts of inconsistencies.

If you look at the *Draft Estimates of Revenue*, you see total revenue, including capital receipts, \$15.5 billion. On page (Roman VI) of the *Draft Estimates Of Revenue*, total revenue—\$15.5. However, when you go into the Minister's speech on page 9 he is saying total revenue—\$15.8. Where is that \$300 million? Are you hiding it somewhere? You know, you get a clue because you see at the bottom of (Roman V) in this same document:

“Excluded are the Unemployment Fund, Road Improvement Fund, Infrastructure Development Fund and the Green Fund”

[*Interruption*] We do not know. “Dey hiding.” Now, this is the first time or the second time perhaps that a minister of finance has deliberately excluded revenue from his budget documents.

We are calling on the Minister to put on the record of this Parliament the actual and revised estimates of revenue for the Unemployment Fund, which is the oil levy that oil companies use to finance what used to be the Unemployment Relief Programme it is now the—[*Interruption*—whatever, the ETP, the Road Improvement Fund which should generate approximately \$50 million a year, the Infrastructure Development Fund—well we do not know what that is. That was created by a previous Minister of Finance. We do not know what is going on there—and the Green Fund which has taken in about \$100 million or something, whatever it is. We need to know! The country needs to know! So come clean with this Parliament and tell us what money you got from those funds last year because they are all taxes on the population. How can you have a document that is supposed to be an accurate record of tax revenue and it leaves out several important taxes such as the oil levy, the Road Improvement Fund and the green levy? Come clean with us, Mr. Minister, come clean, come clean. Maybe then we will understand your figures.

When we go to page 10 of the Minister's address, we see that he says that the increase in expenditure:

“...will comprise mainly the cost of the recently negotiated public service wage settlement, transfers to households and state entities, lease payments, and general maintenance.”

So the Minister is admitting that any additional money in this budget will count for nothing! In fact, all this budget is, is a “catch up budget”. In the last fiscal year there was an election so the Government hustled and made collective agreements with various trade unions, increased salaries here and there, awarded contracts, you know, spent money like it was going out of style, and, in the aftermath of the election they have not been paying “dey” bills. So that in this budget, what we have is arrears. All those arrears are just going to come in and eat up the current budget so “yuh” not going to have any money for anything new. No. All this budget is doing is paying debts incurred in the election year of 2000. That is all it is doing so that the population could expect no change, no positive change, in the coming year.

In fact, we could very well experience some negative change because the Minister, although he spent three hours—and quite a record for a UNC Minister—talking to us, he maybe deliberately or inadvertently decided not to talk about the global economy. I heard the Member for Tunapuna talking some trash yesterday about the US economy, but I am surprised at him. As a former banker he should know that since the crash of the stock market in March 2000—[*Interruption*] well, used to work in a bank—the US economy has been in trouble and, as a consequence, the chairman of the Federal Reserve, Mr. Greenspan, has made systematic reductions in the Federal Reserve rate, almost once a month for the last 18 months, in an effort to stimulate the US economy.

If you watch CNBC, as I would think that the Member for Tunapuna does, you will see that the US economy is in trouble. “Dey” having problems with “dey” GDP and “dey” having problems with all their economic indicators for the last 18 months. This is why the Federal Reserve is consistently trying to stimulate economic growth by lowering the reserve requirements, by lowering the federal reserve rate. He knows that. I saw some nonsense from him about how there is no problem in the US economy and they will come out of this and so on. He does not know what he is talking about or, if he knows, he is being deceitful, and you have a situation now where America, for the last 18 months, has been trying to climb out of a recession or teetering on the brink of a recession. Everything the federal government has tried to do has not worked or, if it has worked, there has been marginal improvement.

For example, the unemployment figures for the United States in the last month were terrible. I mean, I am sure the Minister knows that as well. The unemployment figures within the last month issued in the United States were terrible. They showed a tremendous decline in employment and hundreds of thousands of

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Americans who became unemployed within the last month or so. He knows all of that and now we have the situation of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, on the Pentagon and so on. Now you have a situation where airlines are laying off 15,000 and 20,000 people—[*Interruption*] Well, “one airline ah talking about”.

I looked at UAL and American Airlines and so on, laying off 15,000 and 20,000 people—one shot! You might have layoffs of the order of \$100,000 in the American airline industry. [*Interruption*] Sorry, 100,000 jobs may go. They are asking for aid, I mean, it is very interesting, and looking on from outside it is very interesting. You have the world’s superpower and there are domestic companies operating within that superpower that are asking for aid and relief from their own government. I mean, that is what we have seen, and we see that the United States government is going to give aid and relief to their own airlines. That brings me to the question of BWIA.

How is BWIA going to survive in this current environment where you have the US government deciding to give billions of dollars to its own airlines to make sure they do not collapse? What is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago doing? I have not heard a word. What are they doing to assist BWIA? Are they doing anything at all, or are they just going to let it crash, you know? It is all very interesting. You know, in the first week after that World Trade Center bombing, a BWIA plane took off, I think sometime last week—Wednesday or Thursday—for Miami and was made to turn back, you know. This is what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago.

Is the Government doing anything? Are they saying anything? No. Is the Minister doing anything about “dat”? Did he say anything in his speech about “dat”? [*Interruption*] BWIA did not ask? Ha, ha, ha! So “dey” have to ask? You know, that is their government. They have to ask? I see. They “ha” to go cap in hand begging. As a proactive government, you do not move in and do something. Let them crash first. Let about 3,000 people go out of jobs. Let it have this effect on our economy and then “yuh go an’ do something”. I understand, I understand.

Moving now to page 11, the Minister interfered with the tax system in terms of reporting. He tells us that he is going to give interest on overpayments of income tax and corporation tax; but, Mr. Minister, I want to ask you something. What about VAT refunds? “Yuh giving interest on dat too?” You know, what is the point of giving interest on overpayments of income tax and corporation tax when you are not giving interest on overpayments of value added tax? This is one of the vexed problems in our system, you know.

I mean, in recent months it has improved but there was a time, a year or so ago, where VAT refunds were taking up to six months before you could get them.

[*Interruption*] Yes, it has improved. I would be first to admit that; it has improved in the last two or three months or so. VAT refunds are coming quicker now, but it is a debt and, as the Minister has recognized that overpayments of income tax and corporation tax are a debt and he is now increasing the interest on that to 10 per cent, why does he not put interest on VAT refunds? I just throw that out to the Minister, think about it. Think about the inequity of your measures.

The other thing I see is that on page 13 he talks about the Revenue Stabilization Fund and he says:

“...the Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSF) was established as a mechanism to promote fiscal discipline in the event of windfall revenues from petroleum, and provide a cushion against any unexpected fall in oil prices.”

Very laudable objective; so you have excess funds, you have surplus funds that you get from unexpected oil prices, you put it in a place which will cushion the country against any unexpected fall in oil prices, but then he goes on to say that he is going to take 20 per cent of that fund, which is supposed to cushion the country against unexpected drops in oil prices, and he put it in a dollar for dollar scam. It does not make any sense. If the fund is to help us deal with problems in the future where oil price may drop below targeted levels, then why are you stealing part of the fund and putting it in this dollar for dollar scam? How does that help the country to deal with the shock of an oil price collapse in the future? It is just a slush fund, that is all.

You know, what hurts me about this dollar-for-dollar thing is, it is not dealing with core problems in our education system. What are the problems? Is there any problem in getting into the University of the West Indies? UWI is full. UWI is full; “John D.” is full; San Fernando technical is full, you know, so what are you trying to achieve with this dollar for dollar programme? You see, when you have a poor student who cannot raise the initial dollar, of what use is another dollar for him? It is dollar for dollar, but if I am so impoverished that I cannot raise the necessary finance for my logic—because, you see, that is the other irony of this whole thing.

The cost of education is not simply tuition. You have books, you have living expenses, you have accommodation, you have all sorts of other expenses that students have to deal with and they could be more than the tuition—probably are. In many instances, when you add up board and lodging, accommodation and books and so on, their cost exceeds the cost of tuition. So a poor student who does not have the initial dollar, how is he going to get the next dollar? So you see, it is inequitable. All this is doing—all the Minister is doing is pandering to the rich.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

That is all he is doing, pandering to the rich. He is pandering to those who already have dollars and “yuh gih dem de other dollar”.

The flip side of that is, he is also pandering to all these schools that are of no standard—I would not even say dubious standard—all these schools of dubious standard that have suddenly sprung up all over Trinidad and Tobago. There is no regulation by the Member for Siparia because she has no substance. It is just a façade, everything she does. There is no regulation of all these tertiary level institutions all over the country. There is no regulation of fees. For example, if someone decides to charge \$100,000 per annum for tuition, is the Government going to say, “Fine, you put \$50,000 I will put \$50,000”? Where is the equity in this whole thing? This thing is for rich people.

There is the problem of scholarships as well. They do not think. A poor person does not need a scholarship. A poor person needs a bursary; he needs a grant. What about the B-class student who is from a poor background? How is he going to benefit from dollar for dollar or a scholarship programme? He does not do well enough to get a scholarship and he does not have enough money to have the first dollar for board and lodging and so on, so that you could provide the next dollar for tuition. How are you dealing with that? That is the bulk—that is the vast majority of students outside there. They either fall into the category of being below scholarship standard or they fall into the category of having no money.

So if the Minister had any sense—but, you see, he is being advised by somebody who has no substance. If he had any sense he would introduce a system of bursaries in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Yetming: Why did you not do it before?

Mr. C. Imbert: You are in Government now; and while we are on that, [Interruption] for the last 15 years a PNM government has only been in office for less than four years [Desk thumping] and I have to repeat that. [Desk thumping] In 15 years, from 1986 to 2001, the PNM has been in government for less than four years. Other governments, including the government of the Minister—his government—were in power from 1986 to 1991 and he did nothing; did nothing. [Interruption] “Ah coming to dat. Ah coming to dat.” He did nothing. He was part of a government from 1986 to 1991 who did absolutely nothing except introduce a cess for university students. That was his legacy. That was the legacy of his administration in 1986 to 1991 before he found new friends in the UNC. That is his legacy. His legacy—introduce a tax on university students in Trinidad and Tobago where, under the PNM, university education was free [Desk thumping] and “yuh asking me why I din’ do it”? [Desk thumping]

I did not put any tax—[*Desk thumping*] I did not put any tax on university students.

Mr. Speaker: Member, Member. [*Desk thumping*] All right, all right, Member, please. The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: [*Desk thumping*] You know, Mr. Speaker, when I hear this utter rot, I have to respond and “dey cyar take pressure, yuh know”. “Dey” in government for nearly six years. That is long enough. Stop blaming previous administrations for your own weaknesses, your own mistakes and your own inadequacies. You have been in government for six years. That is long enough.

11.20 a.m.

I cannot understand. I mean, let me take that back. I understand, when I look at the persons who have been made Ministers of Education in the last six years—first Mr. Para-dig-m and then Madame Douen, sorry, Madame Pipe—I understand there is no coherent thought in anything. Everything is gimmickry. Everything is superficiality. Everything is a facade. Give the poor children bursaries instead of this dollar for dollar foolishness. Give them a grant based on means.

The whole system of scholarships would be revamped so that poor children who are needy, who cannot reach a certain income level, would qualify for bursaries, for grants, and then you would achieve your whole system of increased tertiary education. They just do not know what they are doing. Everything is scam.

There is a set of “fellas” in Trinidad who have become educators overnight. They have no qualifications, or if they have they are bogus. They put up a shack or a warehouse somewhere and then they call the Minister of Education and say, “I am ready to receive students, and I want dollar for dollar! My fees are \$50,000 a year, so just hand it over!” That is what this Government is all about. No regulation, no investigations, no monitoring, no standards and no quality. That is what this administration is all about. Poor quality, substandard approach to everything. They may be producing criminals, and if they are not, they will be producing unemployable people, poorly trained, poorly educated who are of no use to this country. That is your contribution to our education system.

Now I go into the Minister's statements on page 15:

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

“In Trinidad and Tobago, there is a perception that corruption has penetrated some of our public institutions...”

A perception? The gang of four was formed because of that! [*Desk thumping*] There is no perception. Those four guys who have suddenly found their social conscience, who have now decided in 2001 to work in the national interest, have said enough is enough. They have been looking at it all the time. They are talking out about it now. And for talking out against corruption within their own system, for trying to reform the political system, the system of administration, the system of governance in Trinidad and Tobago, it is jackass, corbeaux, “la diablesse” and “batchac”! That is what they call them. I say to them, talk on. They have suddenly found a voice? Well talk.

What is interesting is the Minister says:

“However, during the course of this year...this Government has taken courageous and unprecedented steps to address the scourge of corruption...and to send a clear message to all, that corrupt practices will not be tolerated, and indeed, will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.”

What shameless hypocrisy. Mr. Minister, you wrote that sentence yourself? Somebody in the Prime Minister's office put that in there. They told you to say that and when you say it, keep a straight face.

What is horrible about this is he says, “to send a clear message to all”. There is a fella who is a Member of the other place who cannot get a message. Dr. Tim. He cannot get a message at all. He cannot hear? They have a report on the North West Regional Health Authority (NWRHA). He cannot hear. He said, “They did not call my name inside of there. So I am clean.”

They come now to bring in a firm to do an investigation and audit. They called his name on almost every page. Now that they called his name, he had to say something. He said, “Me? I'll do it again.” The again he is talking about is abuse of power, abuse of regulation, and approval of contracts which have been described as scandalous where he is agreeing to give people tax-free retirement benefits. How could he do that? That is against the law. How could one agree to give people tax-free retirement benefits? It was done, and he will do it again, and he is proud of what he has done, and nobody could move him, and he is the Prime Minister's partner, and that is how it is.

This Minister comes to tell us that corrupt practices will not be tolerated. How interesting. We have already heard about how they dealt with the report on Petrotrin. Bury it for six months to allow the criminals to cover their tracks and

then send it to the police when everything is gone already. That is how they deal with things.

We had an enquiry into the airport and I was very proud of the Member for Couva North when he came into the Parliament. I was. On that day I was proud when he came into the Parliament and he said, “Let the chips fall where they may”. I banged the table on this side. But no, he got pressure. You see, I think he meant it. On that day I think he meant it, but as he reached home, pressure! [Laughter] [Desk thumping] I do not mean that in any way. I mean somebody called on the phone and told him, “Hear nuh. You see what you are doing there, back off of that. That is not good”. And of course, we saw what happened after that.

I would like to talk to the Minister about certain perceptions. We had a previous Minister of Finance who was associated with a certain insurance company and throughout his tenure, he did things which gave the clear impression he was favouring that insurance company. We have the WINSURE buyout, for example, \$59 million, or something like that, and there were many things that occurred during the tenure of the previous Minister where it was felt that the three boys who had financed the UNC administration of 1995 were benefiting from their joint association.

The current Minister has been a banker with the Royal Bank group for a long time and, as far as I know, he had a distinguished record at that bank. I am cautioning the Minister not to fall into the trap laid by his predecessor. His predecessor had a close association with the insurance company. The Minister is actually a former employee of the Royal Bank, and I am cautioning him that any transaction that has anything to do with the Royal Bank, he should declare his interest, for one, have nothing to do with the deliberations, and let it be open for public scrutiny.

I do not think it is fair to anybody in this society to have all these allegations and perceptions of corruption and so forth, and I say the same thing for the rum division and the teak division sales. Again, we have a Minister who is a former employee—and probably still an employee of CLICO—and there are all these transactions taking place with the divestment of state enterprises, and this veil of secrecy. It does nobody any good.

The Minister made some statement about he will allow the divestment secretariat to open itself to media scrutiny. But this is not what we used to do. I remember the Member for Diego Martin Central, whenever there was divestment of a state enterprise, he would come to Parliament, which is the highest forum in

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

the land, and lay on the table the documents relating to the various transactions and give an indication of the various bids for the various state enterprises and the reasons for the final decision. Correct me if I am wrong. That is what the Member for Diego Martin Central used to do in his capacity as the Minister responsible for divestments.

He would lay on the table in the Parliament all the details of the various transactions and hold it open for public scrutiny. I am calling on the Minister to do the same when it relates to business enterprises that he and the Member for St. Joseph are associated with, otherwise, a perception will grow in this country that there are all sorts of favours being done. As I said, I do not consider it fair to anybody in this society to have this veil of secrecy over things which should be very matter of fact and very routine, and if there is no problem, well we could all move along.

When I hear that the Invaders Bay project, for example, is being done by the RGM Property Development Group, I think the Minister must deal with these issues immediately. They must deal with these issues immediately. When we look at the history of what has taken place over the last six years in terms of projects; when we look at cost overruns and questions that have been asked, I repeat, it is incumbent on the Minister to let us know exactly what is going on.

While I am on that, I heard the Member for Tunapuna make a statement that one should not act on hearsay. Sorry, this is the Minister of Finance who said that one could not act on hearsay, malicious rumours or gaining political points. That is what the Minister of Finance said. [*Interruption*] I am coming to you. Do not act on hearsay, malicious rumours or gaining political points. Yesterday the Member for Tunapuna came here with malicious rumour, hearsay and he tried to score political points. What is the point he tried to make in reading out the names of persons allegedly involved in something in the Tunapuna Corporation? Put all the documents on the table. What happened? Is he afraid? Coward? You cannot have your cake and eat it too. If you have evidence, bring it.

Mr. Assam: I will pass it to the DPP.

Mr. C. Imbert: Put it on the Parliament table. It is interesting. You come and call people's names but you do not want to bring any information. Go ahead. You are discredited! You think you could cover up the \$1.6 billion at Piarco by calling people's names without any evidence? Put the evidence on the table. Come with it. Let us see. You say it is racket and skull. Let us see what is. We want to see. He is the same "fella" who spent \$100 million in Chaguaramas and then closed the company the following day.

As we continue through the Minister's wish list, Mr. Speaker, I am intrigued at what I am seeing here. He is going to give \$21 million to commence the first phase of a four-year programme for the repair and rehabilitation of agricultural access roads through the country. Now, I have several agricultural access roads in my constituency in the area of Paramin. Nice roads, and they are not being maintained. They are overgrown with bush, the drains are clogged. Nothing has been done on these agricultural access roads for years.

What is the point of putting in infrastructure if you are not going to maintain it? The quality will depreciate. That is why I was intrigued to hear the comments of the Member for Oropouche when he talked about that little lagniappe they gave him. He asked for \$400 million, they gave him \$20 million, and what is he going to do with that? He will do what he can.

What is the point of building all these modern agricultural access roads under an IDB-funded programme and then not providing the line Ministry with the money and the resources to maintain these roads? What is the point of that? This is the whole attitude of this Government. I have looked at how they deal with public buildings. They do not maintain them. Look at Mille Fleur. That was refurbished by the PNM administration, I believe it was in 1994. Complete renovation and refurbishment of the Mille Fleur building, one of the magnificent seven around the Savannah; and from 1995—2000 they did not spend five cents on the Mille Fleur building. It is now a home for bees, “batchacs”, rats and rodents. All the money spent on refurbishing that building has been wasted.

But they spent on White Hall. Chandelier and marble tiles. While I am on that, I notice that the Minister is going to spend \$45 million repairing the roof of the Red House. I think that somebody asked the Prime Minister if that is a lot of money. Well, the roof of the Red House is about 20,000 square feet in area. Divide \$45 million by 20,000 square feet, and tell me what you get. You get \$2,250 per square foot. Not even the airport cost that. So, for the roof alone, you are going to spend over \$2,000 per square foot on the Red House? That is performance. That is scam! [*Desk thumping*]

As my colleague from Diego Martin West said, he could see the pigs coming out to feed at the trough one time. Mr. Speaker, \$45 million to repair an existing roof? I have looked. The most expensive roof in Trinidad and Tobago today on some of the most expensive homes in Goodwood Park, Fairways and Ellerslie Park and Sumadh Gardens is less than \$80 a square foot. Slate tile, \$80 a square foot, but these criminals are going to spend \$2,000 a square foot repairing the existing roof of the Red House.

Mr. Speaker: Member, referring to the Ministers as criminals is improper, and I suggest that you withdraw it.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. If it was implied that I was referring to the Minister, I was not, and I withdraw the implication that I was calling the Minister a criminal. I am talking about the criminals who will get the contract. Who will charge this country \$2,000 a square foot for a roof that—

Mr. Speaker: Member, you could put whatever spin on it, but for the record of this Parliament, the reference to the Ministers of Government as criminals, you have withdrawn it from the record. Please proceed.

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course I already withdrew it, Mr. Speaker and, in fact, I said these criminals—I did not say Ministers—but I withdraw it. If that is what you want, no problem. The criminals that will be hired by this administration are going to spend \$2,000 a square foot to fix a roof that should cost \$20 a square foot. [*Desk thumping*] That will do? I never! Anyway, I will ask the Minister to cancel that contract. I do not know who came to him with that. I do not know if that is one of “them bright boys” that came with some design/finance/construct scheme to him. Cancel that now, if you haven't awarded it yet.

Be careful, and be very careful about any contracts that anybody comes to you and says this is a good idea and we could do it so. Be very, very careful. I am cautioning the Minister. He is new. I am cautioning him. It is very easy to hide, and so on. Do not do that. Put everything on the table and people will respect you for that, and you would not have any problems. Let me move on.

I see all kind of buildings that are going to be built in 2002. I see we are going to build a new Inland Revenue building, Customs and Excise building, Ministry of Health building, Immigration, and so forth. It comes back to my point. Be very transparent with what you are doing, because innocent people are going to be tarnished. Be very transparent.

The public must know how these contracts have been awarded. Was it based on an unsolicited approach to the Government? Was it based on invitation of proposals? Was it based on a tendering system? Was it based on a letter, on a phone call, on a meeting? We need to know, otherwise we will find ourselves immersed once again in allegations and counterallegations of corruption on an almost daily basis. There is nothing wrong with the BOLT system. It is a model that is used by countries all over the world, but there must be some form of transparency in the process, otherwise, as I said, innocent people are going to be tarnished.

The other thing I see, Mr. Speaker, as we go through the Minister's speech, is health. It was interesting watching television last night seeing doctors on strike because there is no linen and they have no equipment and they have no instruments.

11.40 a.m.

Then we hear the former Chairman of the health authority boasting about the number of things he has done. What has he done? Why are doctors on strike at the hospital? Why is there some room with equipment, locked up, that people cannot get access to for over a year? Why is there no linen on the beds? Why do the surgeons not have surgical instruments? These are the questions the Minister has to answer. The health sector is a disaster.

You know, Mr. Speaker, there are people on my side who feel that the Member for Caroni Central is a nice man; you must not attack him, but he is responsible for the Ministry of Health. Whether you are a nice man or not, it is irrelevant. We have a crisis in our health care system. We have a situation where regional health authorities have engaged in squandermania and acts of corruption. We have situations where basic health care facilities are not available to the poor people of this country and somebody siphoning it off. All that money going into the health system, where is it going?

I saw pictures last night of the doctors having to lie on the floor. They have to wash wares in some little makeshift sink. Those are the facilities being provided for health practitioners in this day and age, 2001, after six years of this UNC Administration? After \$1.6 billion stolen or wasted in Piarco Airport, you have doctors sleeping on the floor? That is why we feel the Minister should resign, not because he is a nice man, but because he is not effective and under his watch, rampant corruption and squandermania are taking place. By the way, I also think that he is a nice man, but it is totally irrelevant. The Member for Caroni Central is a good fellow, but ineffective. [*Laughter*]

When you look at what is happening here. The Minister is giving \$2.5 million to increase the number of dialysis machines. Health is a funny thing in this modern day; people get all sorts of diseases now that either did not exist before or we did not know of their existence. There are a number of people in Trinidad and Tobago who have kidney problems. There is a significant increase in the number of persons reporting kidney problems. I am sure the Member for Barataria/San Juan would agree with me on this. I do not know if it is because of changes in the climate, changes in our diet, if it is the food we eat, or the chemicals in the food. I

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

do not know what it is, but there are all sorts of chronic diseases which now affect our citizens in increasing numbers.

When out of \$17 billion, the Minister could only find \$2 million for dialysis machines, I would say that you are joking. When I see that there are only seven dialysis machines at public institutions, but there are 100 new cases of individuals with chronic kidney disease requiring dialysis at least twice per week, look at the inconsistency in the Minister's statement. Each year there are approximately 100 new cases of individuals with chronic kidney disease, and only seven dialysis machines at public institutions. You have to wonder.

You could spend \$45 million repairing the roof of the Red House that should cost \$4 million to repair; so \$39 million or \$40 million is going into somebody's pocket, you could do that; \$41 million for the Red House restoration is going into somebody's pocket, but you cannot spend \$41 million to provide cardiac equipment, dialysis equipment or subsidized pharmaceuticals for our elderly, poor and disadvantaged, you cannot do that. You cannot take the \$40 million from the roof of the Red House that is not required and put jobs in the hospitals, put basic equipment in the hospital, provide services where it is required, another \$2 million for adult cardiac disease. Nonsense! One bypass surgery costs about \$60,000 or \$70,000. How is a poor person in Trinidad and Tobago— The number of poor persons in my constituency who come to me and tell me that they have to have a heart bypass and they check Mount Hope and it is \$50,000, \$60,000 or \$70,000 for it.

What is the Government doing about that? You are doing nothing; you are just paying lip service to the whole concept of Government [*Desk thumping*] but you are not dealing with core issues. This is why I am so disappointed in this Budget. The Minister had enough time; he had nine months to look at the real issues facing Trinidad and Tobago. He had nine months to look at the whole concept of a social safety net. He had nine months to develop holistic and meaningful programmes to deal meaningfully with the disadvantaged in our society. He had nine months to do all that.

All we get is little bits and pieces, little drippings here and droppings there and so on. There is no plan and the reason is that you have an incompetent Minister of Social Development who cannot assist the Minister; he cannot help him. So the Minister has to do the best that he can, based on the information available to him and this is why we see this sort of thing.

I have spoken already about housing. How could you have more houses when the Minister has cut the Minister of Housing and Settlements' allocation? I would

love to know. I do not think the Member for St. Augustine has read this budget document. Have you? Let me read some lines and tell me if you approve of this:

“Mr. Speaker, even as we seek to improve housing opportunities for the poor, and regularize those persons who have some length of tenure, we cannot allow the indiscriminate occupation of lands to continue. Accordingly, our anti-squatting measures will now take effect, and persons who have illegally occupied State lands after January 1, 1998, or those who are still literally ‘grabbing’ lands that are not theirs, will have to bear the full brunt of the law. What this means, Mr. Speaker, is that all structures illegally constructed on State lands after January 1, 1998 will be demolished.”

Member for St. Augustine, you approved that? I want to know if you approved that? Your silence betrays the truth; you were not consulted on this. I would say that the first squatter shack that is demolished on State lands in Trinidad and Tobago, the first man you would see in front saying, “Don't knock it down,” will be the Member for St. Augustine, because you have a disjointed Government in place.

Mr. Speaker: Just to caution you, you have three more minutes left.

Mr. C. Imbert: I was about to wind up. Mr. Speaker, you have a disjointed Government in place; totally disjointed. It has emasculated the Member for St. Augustine. They put him in a—well, the building has not even been built as yet, somewhere by Long Circular Mall, but he would go there—in a room with a desk.

You have a Minister of Integrated Planning; they would not let him sit on the board of the World Bank, they say he is crazy. They would not let him sit on the board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). They would not let him sit on the board of the Inter-American Development Bank. [*Interruption*] Yes, he wants to abolish money; that is what they say. [*Laughter*]

So you have a longstanding member of the Cabinet, who is now the Minister of Integrated Planning and Development, a foundation member of the party, they would not let him get his fingers into any aspect of economic planning. [*Crosstalk*] Nothing; no monetary policy; no economic planning, nothing. They just clean him out man.

Mr. Bereaux: Like they do not like smart people in that party.

Mr. C. Imbert: I understand that they so do not trust the Member for St. Augustine, as they “lick” him up and remove him from every position on every multilateral financial institution, they say, “That man cyar speak for Trinidad and

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. IMBERT]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Tobago nuh; we eh sending he dey; come off IMF, World Bank, everything; off!” When they were proposing alternates, they said, “He cyar even be an alternate; we go put a public servant to be an alternate.” [*Desk thumping*] “Yuh” think it easy; that is what is going on in this country.

They took away every one of his projects; they “lick up he arch”; gone. [*Laughter*] He was dealing with some Chinese company to build roads, they mash up the company. They took Invaders Bay, they gone with it. [*Laughter*] They gone with Invaders Bay; they say he “cyar” handle that. They leave him with library services. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, do you know how I know that they “lick up he arch?” [*Laughter*] When you look in here, look at the allocation for the arch; it is about \$1 million in the Development Programme. [*Laughter*] Look under the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government, \$1 million for the arch. The arch costing about \$200 million, but they have \$1 million allocated for it. They mash up Humphrey arch.

Mr. Manning: “Yuh pardner Carlos do yuh that.”

Mr. C. Imbert: I close on this: you have a disjointed Government run by a little clique who have their private interests to serve. They have no interest in the poor people of this country. [*Desk thumping*] They have no plan, except to fill their pockets and they must be removed from office as soon as possible. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Joseph: Super Minister.

Hon. Members: Explain the arch.

The Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government (Hon. Carlos John): Mr. Speaker, as I commence my contribution to this budget debate, I want to add to the outpouring of public commendation and adulation for the fine performance of our new Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] When one considers that it is not only his first budget statement, but that he has only been in this progressive Government for the last eight months, one must confess that such a performance is noteworthy.

Mr. Manning: How much “dey” pay you to say that?

Hon. C. John: I am certain that Members on the other side must look upon this team with envy. [*Laughter*]

In May of this year, the Cabinet along with members of the private sector, along with public servants, along with members of the trade unions, went on a

retreat to Tobago and our mandate then was to examine where we were as a country and where we wanted to go. We decided then that we would examine international best practices and look at the international benchmarks of all progressive nations to see what we should aspire to. Coming out of those deliberations was a document entitled, “Vision 2010” which sought to position Trinidad and Tobago as a first world nation within one decade. It is quite achievable once the governance of the country remains in the capable hands of this side.

In fact, several commentators are already saying or referring to Trinidad and Tobago, under this administration, as no longer Third World but “emerging First World”. It is our objective, it is our vision to position Trinidad and Tobago as the jewel of the Americas. In doing so, we understand only too well that a jewel must have a very attractive investment climate, relevant education and training, effective public institutions, transparency in Government dealings, a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation and participation by all stakeholders. The jewel also calls for first class infrastructure. That is where I would like to focus this morning.

When we came into office in 1995, we found an infrastructure in a country that had gone through a very wealthy period, in shambles. We embarked upon modernizing the country’s infrastructure by first trying to reverse the evident neglect that we had been confronted with, so we accelerated our efforts within the last 15 months. During that time, I am proud to say, that as far as the country’s infrastructure is concerned, we have, to date, completed over 2,000 projects throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

The last speaker was once the Minister of Works and Transport and he may have well not been on the job. The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East may as well have not been on the job. [*Interruption*] No, I have to re-emphasize the point because he keeps saying every day that we are wasting money on infrastructure; we are not doing this and we are not doing that and it is time that this House takes note of all the infrastructural improvements that this Government has done for Trinidad and Tobago under our stewardship. [*Desk thumping*]

I do not want to lose focus, but as it comes to mind, I must say: when you said a while ago that you can do the Red House restoration for \$2 million— [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: No, the roof for \$4 million.

Hon. C. John: The roof of the Red House for \$4 million, please come forward and do it. [*Crosstalk*] But I will tell you something, Mr. Speaker, there is no chance of that happening because this Government has learnt from the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. C. JOHN]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

mistakes of Mr. Emile Elias where the Member is concerned. You cannot build a wall. [*Desk thumping*]

In fact, he has hurt innocent citizens in our neighbouring Caricom islands to the extent where the Prime Minister of Grenada wants to get him—I would say with more anxiety—than the US wants to put its hands on Bin Laden. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] He has taken advantage of poor people in Grenada and they are looking for him. [*Laughter*] So when the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East wants to come here, holier than thou, saying that he can get it done for one tenth of the cost, 10 per cent of the projected budgeted figure, we are suspicious even about that offer to assist us, because we know the substandard work that we will get for that price. [*Desk thumping*] I want to stick on infrastructure though. [*Crosstalk*]

Over the last 15 months, as I said before, we have completed over 2,000 projects to improve and upgrade the national road network. This five-year term will see an entirely new dispensation. We will be here for the full five years, do not worry, and you will be there as well; no we are not so sure about that. This five-year term, we will see an entirely new vision, as far as the country's infrastructure is concerned. In order for us to address in a very meaningful way, an improved and expanded road network, we first propose to tackle management of those projects.

The Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government is being restructured into two divisions: one which handles administration, the day-to-day operations such as human resources, finance, and so forth, under one permanent secretary and a craft project management unit where we would be able to focus and monitor every single project to ensure that the taxpayer is getting value for money. We intend to monitor, on a daily basis, every single project to ensure that the taxpayer is not being shortchanged.

This new project management unit will have full audit capability. We will ensure proper quality control. We will ensure that at all times Parliament, the Cabinet and the country, by extension, will be apprised of work in progress, whether there are overruns and why. Persons who are responsible for certain projects where there are regular overruns without explanation, will be made to account.

12.00 noon

The entire ministry is being revamped into an action-oriented performance-driven ministry of delivering so that the citizens get value for money. It was not

so in your time. My worthy predecessors started the process and laid the foundation, but they did nothing. That is what I am saying.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with this House some of the major projects that we are about to embark upon in the national interest, particularly as we heard so much rhetoric this morning about money being wasted on infrastructure. What my friends on the other side do not understand—and I think the former Prime Minister alluded to it during this debate that money was being wasted on infrastructure and is now on his hit list, it is on his chart. He drives from Port of Spain to San Fernando almost every day and he must confess—and I know he is supposed to be an honest man—to the significant improvement in the road network between Port of Spain and San Fernando. [*Desk thumping*]

We intend to expand the Trunk Road network, mainly the extension between the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Cipero Road for the benefit of you and your constituents. You keep saying we are only doing these things in rural areas.

Mr. Manning: I never said that.

Hon. C. John: You inferred it.

Mr. Speaker, another major project would be the start-up of construction of the Uriah Butler Interchange. I would like to assure the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East that a bond for \$150 million has already been floated for construction of the Interchange. So work on that will start up and make a significant improvement in the daily lives of all those people who traverse the corridor.

We intend to complete the designs for a new, improved and expanded road network from San Fernando to Princes Town, Rio Claro and into Mayaro. We are starting the designs on that. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] Forget what you were thinking of for six years. People do not vote you in on your ideas; they vote you into office on what you deliver, for implementation. The fact that you thought about it is of no consequence. That is all you keep saying to the citizens of this country.

We shall complete designs for an expanded road network along the western peninsula into Chaguaramas. Again another major corridor which is not served by a good road capability. We shall also complete designs for an expanded road network through Saddle Road into Maraval and Boissiere, and I hope the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East is listening. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I plead with Members to keep the noise levels down. The Speaker is required to listen and follow what the Member is saying and I am having difficulty with Members, particularly those up front, at that loud level. Can

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. SPEAKER]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

I appeal to you to keep it down? I am looking at both sides and I am appealing to both sides to keep it down. Proceed Member.

Hon. C. John: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, we shall also complete designs during this fiscal year for an expanded and upgraded network from Santa Cruz into Saddle Road, Maraval and into Boissiere. We shall also commence feasibility studies for the improvement works on the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway from the St. Joseph River Bridge to Macoya and the dualling of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway from O'Meara Road to Demerara Road.

What we have done in the ministry is put the map of Trinidad and Tobago and mapped out a grid starting from Chaguaramas in the West, going to Sangre Grande in the East, and further East along the coast into Mayaro, hooking up with the proposed road network which will come from San Fernando in the south and going eastward to meet it via Princes Town, Rio Claro and Mayaro.

What we are trying to do is to ensure that we simplify, modernize and expand the country's infrastructure all in one fell swoop via planning.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. Is there a national transportation plan by which the Minister has designed this road network, and can he give us some details on it?

Hon. C. John: Yes, to the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East. There is a national transportation plan and we have a land transportation infrastructure plan in the ministry.

Mr. Manning: How old is the plan?

Hon. C. John: The plan was started obviously a few years ago. We have updated it now and we are ready to implement—[*Crosstalk*] Forget what took place in your time. We are not into writing of reports.

Mr. Manning: What the Minister may not know is that he is operating on a plan that was designed in 1967 and the time has come for a new national transportation plan. That is the point I am making.

Hon. C. John: Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure the Member for San Fernando East that we will not implement a 1967 plan, particularly a plan that may have been conceptualized by his regime. So, over the next year, we intend to give adequate attention to the upgrade of bridges, particularly on the North Coast. We intend to commence designs and reconstruction of 40 bridges throughout the country; we intend to look at land slips throughout the country to ensure that the land slips that have already been identified are given attention, and we also intend

to continue with the current road paving programme under the National Road Enhancement Programme which the Opposition assured the country was an election gimmick in December 2000.

I think it is clear for all to see that we promised to deliver and we deliver what we promise. We told the citizens of this country when we started the National Road Enhancement Programme in June of last year that this would be an ongoing project because roads do not decay only at election time, they do not need upgrading only at election time. It has to be an ongoing process of road maintenance to ensure that we keep our infrastructure modern and of First World standards if we want to be a serious global competitor and create a serious business environment.

So that is ongoing and to achieve all this, plans are well in train for the establishment of a National Roads Authority and we have had one stakeholder consultation. [*Interruption*] There he goes again. What was done six years ago? Mr. Speaker, plans are well advanced and we have held one stakeholder consultation to date with the JCC and the Contractors Association and other related stakeholders, and very soon we expect within the next six months or so, we would like the National Roads Authority to be a reality.

The National Roads Authority would concentrate on improved road network throughout the country, improved and ongoing maintenance, and it will also examine the possibility of a toll system for some of the highways that are frequently used by citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to water, in view of the fact that the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East gave this House the impression that our water for all programme had whittled down to water for none. Let me assure you that there is absolutely no truth in that. In fact, the Government continues in the vein of my erstwhile predecessor, the Member for Caroni East, who was singularly a champion of the waterless in this society. [*Laughter*] And we continue to be committed to our objective of water for all.

I will outline to the Member for San Fernando East—who was a former Prime Minister and he should know this, because it is important for me to highlight the neglect this country has suffered under the stewardship of his party. When we came into office in our first term, only 11 per cent of Trinidad and Tobago was served with a reliable, potable water supply. The facts are there, the statistics are there. Today, 81 per cent of the nation is now served with a regular supply of water. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. C. JOHN]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

We are not happy with that and we do not believe we are doing a favour to the citizens. In fact, I did not want to elaborate on it this morning, but I thought it is worthy of mention. I do not have to elaborate on it.

When we give people water, people in the Ortoire/Mayaro constituency, we are not doing them a favour. It is their right to have water and we know that should have been done for them years ago, so we do not come here and beat our chest. That is why you do not see this Minister opening standpipes. When we get a standpipe it is because it is well-deserved and long overdue.

Mr. Speaker, we are still concentrating and focusing on our objective of water for all, and once our desalination plant comes on stream whereby we would be able to divert a lot of the domestic supply from the industrial supply at Point Lisas, we would again have made some inroads in reducing those who fall in the band of the waterless. So we have made great strides. In fact, WASA continues to place emphasis on expanding its development programme to ensure that those who are not now served with a regular supply of water would soon be served with that supply. Tobago is well-catered for and we are looking at ensuring that the rest of Trinidad follow suit.

I want to deal with the matter of water treatment facilities. At the present time, WASA's largest wastewater system is at Beetham but that facility has now outlived its usefulness, it is way below its capacity and that particular facility serves the greater Port of Spain area: Diego Martin, Petit Valley, St. James, Mucurapo, Woodbrook, St. Clair, St. Ann's, the whole city of Port of Spain. There are some 150,000 persons coming in that net.

We have now signed a contract with a firm; By-Water Limited for a new Beetham wastewater facility to address the significant problem of not being able to treat our waste in a professional manner. Again, all in keeping with emerging to a First World nation where sanitation must be looked after, the environment must be looked after, your garbage disposal must be looked after. Every single facet of operation of the Government, every single arm must function in an efficient way if we have to be First World.

I know the Member for San Fernando East does not like to hear the term "Jewel of the Caribbean" or "Jewel of the Hemisphere", but by the time our current term is finished we would have eclipsed that because we intend to deliver on all that we have promised.

I turn now to public buildings. Again, when we came into office in November of 1995, every single Member of our Cabinet was appalled at the degradation, the

unsightly conditions and environment of government offices. We thought that our hard-working public servants and professionals should never be subjected to working under those conditions. Therefore, we set about a plan of action to ensure that we upgraded every government facility making it user-friendly, creating an environment where we can do business with the public who pay their taxes and come there for goods and services.

Accordingly, we propose during this fiscal year to undertake a number of capital-intensive projects that will upgrade government accommodation throughout the country all for the benefit of our citizens. The Minister of Finance has already made provisions in this fiscal year's budget for a new Board of Inland Revenue head office. We intend also to commence work on a new customs head office, the Siparia Administrative Complex. The Red House restoration will commence during this term; a new Arima Magistrate's Court; Sangre Grande Magistrate's Court; Trinidad and Tobago International Conference Centre.

This major initiative will have a significant impact on the construction sector of the economy, as well as in reducing to single digit figures, the unemployment levels that currently exist in the country. On completion of all these projects, there would be a significant improvement in the quality of government accommodation, not only for those who work there, but those who visit the offices on government or private business.

So it is difficult to conceive some of the criticisms that we have received during this budget debate from the other side, when it is clear that we have made and are making every effort to ensure that there is improvement in the quality of everyday life of every single citizen in this country. It is temptingly easy for the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Diego Martin East to say that they thought of this, and they thought of that, and we are wasting money. At the end of the day, our sole objective is to ensure that the citizens are better off and each citizen gets value for money. That is our mission.

12.20 p.m.

We have a very strong social conscience. We are committed to all those who elected us into office and those who did not.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with drainage and flood control. One must admit that despite the fact that we are in the midst of the rainy season, we have not had any problems with flooding of drainage. That is as a result of the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government embarking, in the very early stage of the planning process, whereby we sat down with our officers and mapped

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. C. JOHN]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

out the areas that were prone to flooding and decided since last year to take appropriate corrective action to ensure that recurrences of that nature would be obviated.

To date, all the planning, remedial and corrective measures that we have taken have not been in vain. We have been able, quite successfully, to weather the storm and in every single area throughout the country, we have with success been able to do control flooding with proper drainage, and where not possible to date, plans are in place in our Fiscal Measures 2001/2002 to address that situation.

The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East alluded to the fact that only \$14 million had been granted to local government and that by extension, I suppose, he accused this Minister of having no interest in local government. I want to assure this honourable House that nothing is further from the truth. In my ministry, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Local Government, every single facet is important. The fact is that we have a budget and we have to make allocations. We will ensure, regardless of the funding that has been granted to the local government bodies, that they will not grind to a halt. It is our duty to ensure that they function and carry out their functions in the best interest of the citizens whom they serve.

The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East made some wild allegations—which he is prone to do—about the Government paying in excess of \$500. per tonne plus VAT for asphalt mix. He said there were one or two instances of that. This Minister has nothing to hide. When we first started this National Road Enhancement Programme—and I must say it at the expense of sounding repetitious—the first move that we made in the ministry—I was then junior Minister to my colleague, Mr. Sadiq Baksh—we called in the JCC and the Contractors' Association and informed them what the Government was trying to do. We were trying to address, in a very organized, systematic and efficient manner, the years of neglect of the country's infrastructure. We worked out a price and a method. We standardized the prices. The price then, which was 15 months ago, and the price now that we pay is \$261 plus VAT. The Member for Diego Martin East is free to check with any of his friends in the Contractors' Association to establish that.

It must be very unnerving for the other side—\$.8 billion had been allocated in the last 18 months to upgrade the country's infrastructure and they can find no other fault but to say that we are paying the contractors an inflated sum. We conduct this programme with the greatest transparency and he can say what he wants. Eight hundred million dollars have been spent. Everything going back to

the taxpayer and not a dinner mint coming to the Minister. It is unheard of. That is hard for them to take. They feel when big money is spending that some is going in people's pockets. Do not judge me by your standards or the company that you keep.

I wanted to make that point and put it in the record because I know it is on his hit list. All of a sudden he is a disc jockey. It is on his chart. Yesterday he was a photographer, he brought a photograph here; today he is a disc jockey. All I wanted to do was to assure Members opposite that the way we conduct business in this Government and with this programme is totally professional and transparent.

Hon. Member: You cannot say that. Talk for yourself.

Hon. C. John: I am talking for us. Mr. Speaker, I was really taken aback when the Member for Diego Martin East had the temerity to come here today and give me advice about road paving. I do not believe that you need an engineering degree to execute a programme of this magnitude. I believe that once you have very good staff, professionals working with you and you have management skills at your disposal and a track record of good management, you can effect that level of efficiency for the public good.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have done is to ensure, even before it was proclaimed, that the components of the Fair Share Bill come into effect. We ensure as far as possible that there is trickle down. Entrepreneurs and small businesspeople are given an opportunity to bid and to tender for small contracts throughout the system. The records of the Ministry would show that we have been fair as well as fearless in doing so. I believe that the Member for Diego Martin East should take note of our modus operandi, for things have changed. I am not sure what existed while he was running the Ministry, but things have changed since he left there—all for the better.

[*Crosstalk*].

I am not a one-man show. I work as part of a team. We have a team in the ministry and the team possesses a shared vision. We have a team of dedicated professionals—public servants as well as some private sector expertise.

Mr. Speaker: We will take our break for lunch. The House is suspended until 1.30 p.m.

12.28 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The Member for St. Joseph has five more minutes. You spoke for 45 minutes before the break.

Hon. C. John: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At this part of my contribution I wanted to again emphasize my Government's commitment to a modern first time infrastructural network and that commitment will remain one of our priorities during our term of office. That upgrade is total egalitarian.

I am sorry that the Member of Parliament for La Brea is not here at the present time, but those on the other side would admit, including the Member of Parliament for St. Ann's East, that within the last few months significant infrastructural improvements have been evident in such areas as St. Ann's East, La Horquetta, Maloney, Malabar, Macoya and throughout Diego Martin.

So this particular project is in keeping with the Minister of Finance's theme for this budget, wherein we are leaving no one behind. A significant benefit from this national programme would be the elimination—and I say, elimination—of traffic backlogs on all corridors. Our citizens have waited much too long for this relief and we are not going to disappoint them by abdicating responsibility at this time.

In addition to what I have already articulated, rehabilitation works will continue throughout the country on an ongoing basis, for we believe that attention to maintenance and upgrading must not be done in cycles, but must be done on an ongoing and phased basis. Added to that, you will notice particularly in the East/West Corridor, that we are now paying attention to school crossing areas with overpasses, to ensure that we eliminate the incidence of road fatalities, particularly among school children.

The Member of Parliament for Tunapuna has dealt with some of the concerns of regional corporations, in particular, the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, as he has suffered at the hands of that corporation. I just want to add my own concerns, because he has articulated them very well. I know that my colleague continues to be a thorn in the side of the others, but we have to recognize his forthrightness in bringing these matters to the attention of the House. I will tell you why you do not like him too much; why he is despised by the other side.

Hon. Member: Despised?

Hon. C. John: Yes, despised is the word, because we see the contempt on their countenances when he is addressing them. In 1995, the current Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, through diligence, was able to eliminate a safe seat from their fold—one of their safe seats—because at that time he was victorious over Mr. Ramrekersingh. That was then St. Joseph. Then again a mere few days before nomination day, he was called to add another seat from the other side to our kitty. We put him in Tunapuna, and you see what has happened. So he is

moving eastward. We may be coming for Arouca North and Arouca South afterwards, because he is on a growth path; he is on a winning streak. The only reason we would not venture into Arima is because we like the individual who currently resides there.

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. [*Dr. F. Khan*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. John: Thank you very much to all my colleagues on both sides. The Member for La Brea, I am I am sorry he arrived late. I was just elaborating to this House on the massive upgrade that is clearly evident in his constituency of La Brea. Not only that, the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin's constituency has not been left unscathed.

Mr. Hinds: Where is the voter padding; the cell phones, the \$500 and so on?

Hon. C. John: That does not exist.

Mr. Breaux: Would the Member give way?

Hon. C. John: Certainly.

Mr. Breaux: I intend to ask about a number of roads in the La Brea constituency. I know that the main road has been fixed, part by the Government and part by—[*Desk thumping*] Listen, please—Atlantic LNG. I intend to ask about others. So if the Minister is going to do anything about it, could he please address it for me, so it would save me having to—

Hon. C. John: I am glad the Member has endorsed the point. The point is that there has been some significant improvement since we are in office. That is the point I wanted to make. Once my point is accurate, that is all that matters to me, for the *Hansard*.

Mr. Breaux: I am not dealing with the *Hansard*; I am dealing with the people outside.

Hon. C. John: Mr. Speaker, I have tried to put in perspective our plans; what we have done and our plans for the future in terms of the country's infrastructure. Added to that—and one of my other colleagues will deal with it—we intend to move with alacrity in launching our new mass transit system which is so sorely needed, particularly in the East/West Corridor. My colleague, the Minister of

Transport and Minister of Tourism and Tobago Affairs, Sen. Jearlean John, is now working with a team conceptualizing plans for that mass transit system, again, to further alleviate some of the obvious problems that are experienced by the citizens of this country on a daily basis.

I want to wind up by placing a disturbing matter on record, because I have heard the chorus from the other side, primarily from the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, and to a lesser extent, the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin.

1.40 p.m.

I would place on record, that after a period of due diligence, on March 8, 2000, prior to this Member of Parliament and this Minister's entering government or the Parliament, the divestment secretariat had considered a report of the evaluation committee and had proposed the firm of CL Financial as the preferred bidder for Caroni (1975) Limited. I place that on record to simply put in perspective for the wider national community, lest one be fooled into believing the lies and innuendoes of the other side, that this individual participated and coerced a decision in favour of one of his past employers.

In addition, the firm of Tanteak, Trinidad and Tobago Forest Products Limited which was up for divestment in May 2000, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago accepted the recommendations of the evaluation committee. Sorry, I made a mistake there. I want to correct the *Hansard*. In May, 2000, the firm of Angostura Limited was selected by the Government as the preferred bidder for acquiring 49 per cent interest in Caroni (1975) Limited. For the record, in March 2000, the divestment secretariat, having considered the report of the evaluation committee, had selected the firm CL Financial as the preferred bidder, to commence negotiations for Tanteak.

I just thought that I should put it in perspective because in the national community, there seems to be a growing perception that this Minister operates as an agent or mole for other business interests. I assure you and this honourable House that I have never participated, neither will I participate, in any discussion that involves my former employers. I do not have to do that to get anywhere. By virtue of my upbringing, by virtue of my principles, I will never subscribe to that. I just thought that I should rest that on the table.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Minister will give way. I congratulate him for making that statement. I think that is the sort of thing we expect from Parliamentarians. I wonder in the same vein, whether he will inform the House—there is another allegation that he is still on the payroll of his former company.

Hon. C. John: I was coming to that. I also want to state categorically for the *Hansard*, those on the other side and those on my side—because my colleagues must have confidence in me—that I am on the payroll of no one at this time except the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I say that categorically!

I would also say as well, and it is minuted and can be checked and verified, that having had directorships with my former employers; having been entitled to stock options, bonuses and commissions, there are certain remuneration levels due to me and being paid to me over a period of time. But absolutely no salary! I am not on the payroll of any company or any individual in Trinidad and Tobago, regionally, internationally or otherwise. Categorically, and without fear of contradiction, I can swear on my Bible for that! I can swear on my Bible for that.

I found it very unfair for you to be making those inferences without even checking your facts. You have not said this jocularly. You have made this point time and again, believing it as Gospel and influencing others to believe it. I have absolutely nothing to hide. I came into government for national service. Nothing else! I have never had a government contract. I have come into government to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to the best of my ability, in keeping with my oath of office.

On that note, I would like to rest my case. Thank you for the opportunity to make this contribution.

Thank you.

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for La Brea, you know that that conduct is not acceptable in this House.

Mr. Bereaux: He was interfering with me.

Mr. Speaker: I am here to protect you. If he is interfering with you, just call on the Speaker and I shall protect you.

Miss Pennelope Beckles (Arima): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues and you the Speaker, for the opportunity to make my contribution in this debate. I start by congratulating the Minister of Finance on his first budget. [*Desk thumping*] Having said that, there are just a few areas I want to deal with.

The first of those areas has to do with that of local government. I refer to the manifesto of 1995, of the United National Congress. The same sentiments were expressed in their manifesto for 2000. Page 27 says:

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS BECKLES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

“The UNC will empower local government bodies through a process of meaningful decentralization to enjoy a substantial measure of autonomy in the conduct of their affairs. This is absolutely necessary if we are to make the best use of the allocated resources for servicing local communities for expeditious decision making.”

I am reading that because my impression may be wrong, but certainly the evidence that I have had is that there is not as yet meaningful decentralization, and the local government bodies are not enjoying that measure of autonomy to which they referred and enunciated in their manifesto.

Last year, the Arima Borough Corporation was allocated the sum of \$50,000 for road improvements. This year there is a further reduction in terms of the overall allocation to the corporations and not just Arima, but even in some of their borough corporations. Therefore, I would like the Minister to indicate what exactly is the Government’s policy as it relates to the issue of autonomy for the local government bodies. That is not an issue that has been raised only in 2001, but a matter that has been debated maybe over the past two decades, as to what is the role and function of local government.

From time to time, the elected local government representatives have raised concerns over their inability to properly service their respective districts. Whenever any particular government is in power, the accusation is always raised by whatever party is in opposition that those respective corporations, boroughs or cities, are being victimized. I think that once there is a particular policy that is very clear, as it relates to that, most corporations would be very satisfied that they are given the type of autonomy they deserve and which has been enunciated by this Government.

Whilst I am on the issue of local government, it is no secret—this matter has been raised by all councillors, both UNC and PNM, as it relates to salaries to the local government council. I have raised that issue because I have been a local government councillor. *[Interruption]* Yes. I was elected local government councillor for the Arima Borough Corporation. The salary then was \$795, Mr. Minister of Finance. When I left in 1995 it was \$1,125. I think now the salary is about \$1,795. At the end of the day, it is the extent to which we value local government that determines how the issue of their salaries is treated.

The Member for Tunapuna and the Member for Siparia who have been local government aldermen—if I am correct—can confirm what I am saying, that local government councillors and aldermen work very hard and their responsibilities are very serious. I ask you to look at that issue. I imagine that salaries of all

representatives, both local and parliamentary, need addressing. I say no more on that.

On the issue of sports, whilst my colleague for Toco/Manzanilla would deal with that in greater detail—he spoke already. There are just two issues. I do not think that he would have raised those issues with which I would deal. One has to do with the issue of maintenance for the recently constructed four stadia. I know that the Minister of Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs already has something in place, I will share my concern as it relates to the stadium at Malabar, Arima. I have observed that when it rains, the water runs from the football field onto the recently laid down Mondo track. A considerable amount of money has been spent to build those stadia and, I would hate to think that within a short space of time those tracks might be damaged. I ask the Minister to address that as a very urgent concern.

I can say that because the Arima Stadium that was built many years ago has a Mondo track that has been permanently damaged. They would have to put down a new track. When the cycle track was constructed, no drainage facility was put down between the cycle track and the Mondo track. All the water runs from the cycle track onto the Mondo track. I hate to think that after spending all those millions of dollars, that in a year or two, the water would have seeped under those tracks and they would be of no use. If the intention is to hold national track and field meets, those tracks would not meet the required standard because of the fact that the proper drainage is not there.

I know that there is a special type of porous soil that has been laid particularly in the area at the edge of the football field. That is not sufficient for the water to run into the soil and not on the tracks.

As far as I know that does not apply only to Arima. That situation is in all four of the recently constructed stadia.

1.55 p.m.

This brings me then to the issue of maintenance as it relates to those four facilities. The Arima Stadium falls under the Arima Borough Corporation. In terms of the annual allocation for maintenance, it is not sufficient for that facility to be properly maintained.

I had an experience at the Hasely Crawford Stadium, which has recently been refurbished at quite a few million dollars. Those of us who attended the recent opening of the FIFA Under-17 Football Championships would know that we were sitting there when it started to rain. Even my colleagues on the other side had to

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS BECKLES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

move from where they were sitting to avoid the rain that was pouring into the recently refurbished Hasely Crawford Stadium.

Mr. Ramsaran: That part of the facility—the roof—was not refurbished. From then to now, we have asked the contractors to repair the leaks. That has been done.

Miss P. Beckles: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for that very prompt response. However, my point would still be that I would want the issue of the maintenance of all the facilities to be addressed as a matter of urgency and certainly a bit of public education, as it relates to the importance of the facility, be factored into whatever cost is attributed to the repair and maintenance of all the stadia.

Most of us who have attended football or any other activity from time to time hear persons talking to those attending about where they put their feet. I think it is time that we take the bull by the horns and be brave enough to say to our citizens that when we spend millions of dollars to construct facilities, they are our facilities and, when we damage them, we do disservice to ourselves and those who have to use them. I want to include a plug for public education as it relates to football fields.

The next item I move to is that of crime and the court system. Today's *Express* indicates that the Port of Spain courts—NIPDEC House—is closed for the week because of a problem with the generator. This is not the first time. I know that the Attorney General actually visited the courts, because I was there last year. It is really a crying shame for the court system to be closed at this point in time because of some problem with the generator.

Mr. Speaker, only three courts operate at NIPDEC House. All the other courts were moved to the building at the corner of St. Vincent and Knox Streets, just across the road. We know that almost a year ago—if I recall correctly—there was a handing-over ceremony of that building at the corner of Duke and St. Vincent Streets. To date, that Magistrates' Court has not been occupied for whatever reason.

So, while persons with cases are languishing in facilities that have really reached to a deplorable state, there is the building, supposedly open, that has not yet been effectively put into a state that it can be properly utilized for what it was intended. I hope that the Minister of Finance would indicate whether or not there are still things that need to be done; whether issues as they relate to the Attorney General and the Chief Justice; whether issues as they relate to implementation and administration have been dealt with. We ought not to have a building costing

millions of dollars sitting there idle and, for whatever reason, cannot be opened while we have a building that is closed because of a situation with the electricity.

Whilst I am dealing with the issue of crime, I refer again briefly to the concern raised by the Director of Public Prosecutions that at least 60 or 70 attorneys are needed to run that department and not even 50 per cent of those posts are filled. Mr. Speaker, when, in another place, I heard reference being made to magistrates not functioning properly, some people need to understand that the situation is not as simple as it appears because if we do not have sufficient attorneys working at the DPP's Office, it means that many cases have to be adjourned. It also means that the length of time the matter is likely to take to be completed is increased.

The DPP himself referred to death threats. When we talk about the magistrates not working hard enough, I think some of us need to understand as well that the issue of security in the courts is even more important than it was five or ten years ago. I need to remind us that a month ago, a prisoner was on the roof, just over the head of a magistrate, swinging. Earlier this year, filth was thrown at a magistrate. I recall last year, both in Princes Town and Arima, prisoners threw chairs at magistrates. It is not just a question of looking at the work that they do, but at the circumstances under which they function and the extent to which the issue of constructing Magistrates' Courts and improving the security of Magistrates' Courts has become a matter of urgency.

On any given day—and I know my colleagues from Princes Town, Caroni East and Siparia can confirm this—a magistrate can have as many as 200 or 300 cases on his list. Of course, sometimes by 12.00 noon, they have not even completed that list. With all the will in the world, with the Magistrates' Court still having a system where notes are being taken by longhand, it is not possible for them to move with the speed with which we would want them.

In Arima, for example, for security reasons, they keep most of the prisoners in the van and, from time to time, they would bring in 10 or 15 prisoners because of the difficulty they have had with sometimes having as many as 100 prisoners in a cell that would normally hold only 50 persons.

Mr. Speaker, whilst those problems might sound almost Herculean, the reality is that they exist and we need to do all that is in our power to ensure that those matters are dealt with expeditiously.

Several task forces have been set up: this Government had set up a task force earlier this year, the President had set up a task force; there have been task forces set up by the PNM and the NAR. So many persons have given their own suggestions as

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS BECKLES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

to how these matters can be dealt with, but to date we have not really found the solution. The problem is not just one of money, it is a question of our really understanding the complexity of the matters and taking decisions to take us to where we want to go.

The Minister spoke about the whole issue of rehabilitation, which is also linked to the issue of crime and the whole legal profession and legal issues. I imagined that by now we would have the kind of statistics to tell us about repeat offenders and why so many of our prisoners who enter Golden Grove or other places return to prison within a few years or months. As a society it is not just a question of rehabilitation, but it is a question of employment for persons coming out of prison. How do we, even in terms of education, in terms of our own personal decisions, decide as a society to treat some of those persons? We know they are not going to be able to work in the public service and in most companies and departments. When we talk about rehabilitation, those are issues that we need to address because it is quite obvious that they would be restricted in terms of some of the places that they would want to work.

I am sure that when the Attorney General speaks, some of those issues would be addressed. In terms of the allocation that has been made for CAT reporters and some of the issues raised by the Chief Justice, both in terms of the functioning of the High Court and the Magistrates' Court, those matters will be dealt with.

We do know that with some pieces of legislation that have been passed it has become more and more incumbent that police officers, who are prosecutors in the court, be trained in some of the very sensitive and complex issues as they relate to evidence. It is one thing when we talk about paper committals, but many police officers who are prosecuting in the courts are expected to conduct prosecutions and they themselves have never had the benefit of any type of training as it relates to those legal issues.

I ask that some sort of allocation be placed in the budget specifically for issues of training, not just for the police officers but for magistrates who, from time to time, when legislation is passed, are not even aware of them. They are expected to implement and to adjudicate. In some instances, we have found that the litigants inform the magistrates that there have been changes in the law. That has happened in relation to the recent Domestic Violence Bill. Quite a number of the magistrates were not even aware that new legislation had been passed.

That brings me to the point that in most jurisdictions—in England, in Canada, in Australia, in the United States—they are required from time to time to do training. I know that, certainly in another place when I was there, the Attorney

General brought up the fact that the issue of training was serious and that he would look into it. If we are to ensure that the legislation is implemented in the way we want, we should factor in the issue of training for magistrates and judges and prosecutors and continuing training even for the attorneys who practise in the courts. In some countries it is compulsory that you do that training so that we can have the level of representation and attorneys that we all want.

2.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, just a simple thing happened again today, the photocopying machine in the Court of Appeal is not working, and they do not know when it is going to be working. That might not sound like a big issue but the fact is, there are books and documents that one may not be allowed to take from those departments and therefore a simple thing like that would very often keep back persons from preparing their briefs. Mr. Speaker, even persons working in the court system would need to have documents available to the judges and other attorneys. I would ask that that also be addressed.

Earlier this year we dealt with the issue of the Forensic Science Centre, and as far as I know, even though that was a matter we exhausted in terms of our debate, there is still only one scientific officer working in that department. Therefore, when there is the situation as we have in Trinidad and Tobago, which is an increase in drugs coming through the airport and other places, it still takes almost a year before the Forensic Science Centre could return the forensic report to say whether or not an item was cocaine or marijuana. Until such time as we seriously train persons, and seriously expedite those issues, we are not going to be in a position—notwithstanding all the will in the world—to be able to have those matters dealt with expeditiously in the court.

The Minister of Finance raised the issue of the length of time women are expected to wait in lines to collect maintenance money. I would like to say that I am extremely happy that that is a matter that is being addressed. I have raised that matter before and what I think is the worst, is when one has to wait in line—as has been the case sometimes—for three hours and then the cashier would say: “There is no money,” we need to understand the extent of humiliation and stress that takes place then. Mr. Speaker, it is no money from two angles. Sometimes the respondent or the defendant may not have put any money, and sometimes it is no money because it is missing from the court, as has been the case on more than one occasion.

Persons have gone to collect maintenance money, which the husband or wife may have paid to the court, and lo and behold when they reach to the cashier they would say: “We have no more money.” Mr. Speaker, it is not that your money

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS BECKLES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

was not paid, it is that the money is not there to be paid to you. I would like the Minister to also examine those issues. It is a question of the persons who are accountable for having received those moneys ensuring that, subsequently, those moneys do not disappear.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to deal with the issue of the transportation system. This morning I spoke with one of my constituents who indicated that the recent measure passed by the Minister of Finance—as it relates to free transport for aged persons on all buses—has created a very interesting situation. I think that needs to be cleared up that when this issue of free transportation was introduced—it was introduced by the PNM and that was before the ECS buses came on train. The ECS buses came during the tenure of the NAR, but prior to that, the system of free transportation on buses always existed. It is with the coming into being of the ECS they decided that because of the cost incurred and the actual objective of this ECS transportation system, that those buses would not be available to be used as a medium of free transport.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

What has happened now is that some of the citizens who are paying \$4—or in some instances, \$7 or \$8, coming from San Fernando or Arima—those of us who would have been listening to the call-in programmes would know that there is some objection on their part to the merger of those paying passengers with those persons receiving pension. I think it would be very interesting if the Minister, in his winding up, would give that sort of analysis and explanation to the persons who are using the ECS buses, and to those who would have been accustomed to, and used the buses for a certain level of comfort. There is a particular rationale by this Government as it relates to opening up the use of the bus transport, for both the old aged pensioners and those who are paying for a particular type of service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to add my bit to the issue of the Dollar for Dollar Programme as it relates to education. In substance, the programme and the objective is not a bad one, if only because any effort to assist our young men and women or anyone who wants to improve and progress educationally, is certainly a benefit. If it is that a parent or a student is asked to pay 50 per cent of the cost of that educational activity, the question we need to ask ourselves is: What sector of the population is most likely to benefit from that Dollar for Dollar Programme? That can be easily answered by saying that that would not benefit the lower income and middle income persons who are unlikely to have that kind of money, either set aside for education or they are unlikely to access a loan to pay those

tuition fees every year. Whilst in essence the objective is a commendable one, I would challenge the Minister of Finance to still look at the programme to see where it is possible for persons in the lower income and lower-middle income to really benefit from that programme. Mr. Deputy Speaker, even if any one of us here today is given that opportunity where you say if you produce 50 per cent, I would give 50 per cent, it really is not that simple. What it very often means is that some of the most intelligent and best students, coming sometimes from the rural or even the urban districts, would not be able to benefit from that programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, since I am talking on the issue of savings and finance, I would then want to deal with the issue of the Minister's comments on the credit union movement. I refer to the Government's manifesto as it relates to the issue of savings, on page 11 it says, and I quote:

"Savings and Investment

A critical factor in the development of any country is the amount saved by its population and the manner in which those savings are invested. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the domestic savings ratio has been consistently low hovering between 12%—16% in normal times, whereas a domestic savings ratio necessary to simulate an adequate level of investment and growth would be in the order of twice the above."

Having accepted the fact that savings in Trinidad and Tobago is low, then the real issue is that having removed the 5 per cent tax on savings, the Minister would then need to tell us whether or not the position on savings will then bring us closer to what is accepted.

The Minister of Finance has made several statements as it relates to the credit union movement. I refer to one particular statement in his budget speech, he said, and I quote:

"Mr. Speaker, it will be irresponsible of me to allow Credit Unions as a whole to expand the range of their services until I am satisfied with their financial condition and that the appropriate regulatory and supervisory regime is in place."

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is where I have a concern. I think the Minister of Finance knows very well that as Minister of Finance, when he makes particular statements, as they relate to any financial institution, the population is listening very carefully to what he is saying, and certain interpretations and impressions would be formed based on the comments that he has made. Over the last couple months, several statements have been made by him, in relation to credit unions. Whilst it is true that we may have had certain credit unions that may have gone

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS BECKLES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

under for different reasons, that is not exclusive to the credit union movement. We have had banks in Trinidad and Tobago that have gone under. I would like to say that in terms of what is said to the public, whether or not there is the confidence that one would want as it relates to the credit unions it is very important that one is very cautious about what one says, because like everything else people can become very frightened, and feel that your statement in the budget, suggests that the credit union movement is not strong, or that it cannot take care of itself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has been said that the Minister of Finance is a banker, and therefore he would see things in a particular way and that is why he is not seeing things in a particular way as they relate to the credit union movement. I just want to enlighten this House with some facts. I remember a few years ago when I was in the Senate, the then Minister of Finance spoke about levelling the playing field. I am referring here to the document: *Housing Finance Mechanisms for Lower Income Households*, a discussion paper prepared by Minister of Housing and Settlements, Hon. Sadiq Baksh, which says:

“The financial sector in Trinidad and Tobago is well developed with a variety of financial institutions offering a diversity of financial products. Six commercial banks with some \$28 billion in assets, five trust companies, with nearly \$5.9 billion in assets, and 109 credit unions with some \$2.5 billion in assets.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is this fear that the credit union movement is giving the banks competition, \$2.5 billion, compared with \$28 billion in assets, and five trust companies compared with \$5.9 billion, tells a lot. At the end, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is in dispute that the credit union movement has been known to be the movement that is utilized mainly by some of our poorer class citizens.

2.25 p.m.

That I know would be one of the factors that would influence the statement made by the Minister of Finance. That is to say, he has indicated his concern that the moneys ought to be secure and safe. If that is the case, Mr. Deputy Speaker, then what I would want to suggest is that if statements are made that would suggest that the movement is not as stable as it is or as he would like it to be, then you have certain concerns that would be raised by some of the very small depositors that might do certain things that could cause a run on the movement.

Therefore, my suggestion and concern would be that whatever the Minister says or does, it does not impact negatively on the credit union movement, but that he does all that is within his power to ensure that that very important movement

continues to develop and be accessible in the manner in which it was intended for some of our poorer citizens who cannot often pay the rate of interest that is asked for by the banks and some of the trust companies.

I would just want to give some statistics on the credit union movement worldwide, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The savings in US dollars of the movement is in excess of US \$466 billion; the loans \$371 billion; the reserves, \$55 billion and the assets, \$536 billion, and this is the most recent document from the World Council of Credit Unions which I would give to the Minister of Finance—he may or may not have a copy. Whilst I share your concern about the importance of setting up regulatory systems and ensuring that the level of supervision that is needed is in place, I would want to suggest that that can be easily dealt with by discussing, working and consulting with the wider credit union movement and ensuring that some type of regulatory and supervisory system is set in place where all are comfortable.

This is because I would like to believe that on both sides, that is to say, the credit union movement and the Minister of Finance, there is a conviction that what is important is that the movement is sound and stable and that the savings are there for the benefit of the members where, come what may, whether it has to do with the circumstances happening recently in America or global—whatever situation—those systems are solid.

There is always a concern as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about issues of the number of credit unions, issues of mergers, and I know those matters have all been occupying the attention of the cooperative credit union league. I feel certain that these are matters on which the Minister of Finance and the league can sit together and work out a situation where both parties can be reasonably satisfied that, at the end of the day, what we want to do is ensure that the savings, the security of the system is in place. I am aware that the Government, together with the IDB, started that strengthening project of the movement. It has been on the way for some time.

I recently attended, just last month, a World Council of Credit Unions meeting in France and the credit union movement of itself worldwide has been addressing some of those issues with which you are concerned. Several credit unions worldwide have dealt successfully with the whole issue of regulation—supervisory—and some other matters, information that I have in my possession which I am willing, of course, to share, as it relates to how the World Council has assisted some of the movements in other places to deal with that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just like to come a little closer to home and deal with—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy 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. J Narine*]

Question put and agreed to.

Miss P. Beckles: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would just like to come a little closer to home to deal with some matters in Arima. I know that the Minister of Sport reminded me, I think it was last week, that the question I raised as it relates to the indoor facility is now in the allocation; so I would want to thank the Minister of Sport for that. Of course, what I would look forward to is that this project would actually start, that it is not going to be one of those projects that would be on the books from time to time and that it would not materialize. So that, Mr. Minister of Sport, I would be liaising with you to ensure that that project starts.

The other issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that there is an allocation in the budget as well to deal with issues of reforestation, particularly as it relates to the North Coast, and, in a considerable part of my constituency, the forest has been destroyed and damaged over time. I know recently that the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government would have passed across the Blanchisseuse road and realized that within a very short space of time we are going to lose a considerable portion of that road if some serious work is not done, particularly in the field of educating some of the citizens about the dangers of cutting down and destroying the forest. There is a particular area in which for an entire part of the Blanchisseuse road the trees and so have been cut down and there is no shoulder, probably for almost a mile, and I know the Minister of Finance too is very familiar with the area of the La Filette—the Blanchisseuse area where that area has now become one of our most important tourist areas.

I raised the issue of transport a while ago because it costs a tourist as much as \$400 to go to Blanchisseuse. The Minister of Transport indicated that the transport system would be restored next month, so I am looking forward to that coming into being, but more important is the issue of the removal of the forest, the destruction of the forest and the extent to which many of us citizens do not understand that there is a relationship between the destruction of the forest and our climate as it relates to the whole issue of overflowing and the whole issue of the watersheds, that from time to time the river courses are changed and from the mountains those, as I said, are affected, not just in the area of Arima but those

rivers go all the way down to Caroni and some of the central areas and the extent to which that destruction is taking place, Mr. Minister of Finance, is amazing.

The Leader of the Opposition dealt extensively with the setting up of the science park in Wallerfield but I would just like to say that, as it relates to the persons living in Wallerfield, I would think that considerable consultation should be had with the citizens, the persons living there, because there are certain implications, having regard to the acreage that I have seen in your budget speech where it is obvious that, if it is to be implemented there would have to be relocation for several of the persons living there.

You referred, on page 26, to 1,100 acres and that would obviously mean removal of some of the persons in Wallerfield and, Mr. Minister, you would know that there was the previous issue of the lead in Wallerfield. Several persons had to be moved from the Demerara area to a different part of Wallerfield. My information is that, whilst it is said that all the lead was removed, in some areas there is still that very dangerous issue of lead poisoning. I hope that, since that is an area that you are considering, the issue of the removal of the lead would again be on the front burner so as to ensure that the issue of the health of the persons living in that area or the persons who are to come subsequently, that matter would have been dealt with extensively.

As I said, I am coming closer to home in Arima, again to the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government. In particular, I looked in the budgetary allocations for the Aripo road and I do not know if you spoke about it before but the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government visited the area earlier, I think in the month of June, and gave an assurance that construction of the road would have commenced in July of this year. I have not seen the allocation and I am hoping that it is somewhere and that I just have not read sufficiently, I have not read in detail, and that is why I have not seen it. That is an area where I would like very much to have that road completed.

On the issue of the Arima Magistrates' Court, I filed a question earlier this year. The Attorney General indicated that construction work on that court would have started in August, last month, 2001. I have not seen any construction work as yet. I have seen in the allocations again the Arima Magistrates' Court, but that is not the first time I have seen that allocation. I have seen it even when I was in the Senate that there was allocation for the start of the construction of the Arima Magistrates' Court and I am again asking that that matter be given some urgent attention.

The last matter that I want to raise as it relates to Arima is the issue of the continuation of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from O'Meara to Wallerfield. I

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MISS BECKLES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

raised that matter when I was in the Senate sometime ago and the then Minister of Works, Mr. Baksh, indicated that that was not a matter that was given urgent attention at that time. I filed that question and was told that that construction work should commence sometime next year, and having regard to the expansion of Arima, on any given day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we seem to have reverted to what it was, I would say 15 years ago, where, if you leave Arima half past six in the morning, it is not going to take you anything less than an hour and a half to get to Port of Spain, which is a normal 30-minute drive and it can take you, depending on the time that you leave, as much as two hours.

So that I heard the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government talk about the fact that he is constructing the type of facilities that would make life, movement to and from the different parts of Trinidad and Tobago, much easier. That has not been my experience. We have to look at the issue of the increase in cars over the last five to ten years and certainly, if you have a situation where most families have two or three cars in some instances, the issue of everyone coming into town means that you continue to have that backlog as it relates to the transportation system. So that, once that road is constructed, I know that it could avoid some of the bottleneck from those coming from Toco and Sangre Grande and other parts, so that I do hope that that project would start.

The other project, of course, is that of the Mount Pleasant Road that I was given the assurance would start again next year. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other side could be assured that all those issues that I have raised I am going to certainly make every effort to continue to be in contact with the respective ministries to ensure that those projects are started and completed.

The Minister of Finance indicated that, insofar as the Heritage Festival—and I think I do not remember the two others, San Fernando and I think it was Point Fortin—those would now be classified as a Heritage Festival and, therefore, certain benefits would derive. I will ask the Minister, in your final decision, to please consider the Arimafest and borough facilities of which, in truth and in fact, Arimafest was the first. Arima was the first borough to start those activities and, since then, all the other corporations, San Fernando, Point Fortin, Couva, you know, Tobago would have followed in its footsteps. So I think since we were the ones to start that activity, we should be given consideration as one of the boroughs to be included in the Heritage Festival.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I come to the issue of the Arima health facility. As you know, that facility opened, I would say, anything like about 10 years ago—five to 10 years ago. It is underutilized. For most of the different disciplines in the

hospital, there is not sufficient equipment, and when most of the residents go to the Arima health facility, inevitably they are sent to Mount Hope or to Port of Spain. Quite a considerable amount of money was used to construct that facility, it is a good facility and I think that a lot more effort should be put into upgrading it and putting the equipment into that facility to make it a first-class facility for the residents of Arima and environs.

I have heard that they intend to close down some of the facilities around and persons from Blanchisseuse, La Filette, Toco, Sangre Grande, Nariva, a lot of them come to use the Arima facility and then find out that, you know, they cannot at all. The health facility does not offer even some very basic services and they have to go to Mount Hope. So that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the last of my contribution. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health (Dr. The Hon. Hamza Rafeeq): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think that it is a pity that, because of our parliamentary system, which is by nature adversarial, Members opposite find it necessary to oppose and condemn and criticize the budget. In another system I am sure that the Members opposite would have joined with the rest of the population in applauding the Minister of Finance and the budget that he has presented. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I was in Jamaica as a medical student I looked at the television during the presentation of a budget and, soon after the budget was presented, some members of the Opposition came across to the minister of finance and congratulated and applauded him because of the measures that he had put in the budget. [*Interruption*] I wish that I can see that happening in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I deal with health sector issues and the health sector, I would like to respond to the Member for San Fernando East, the Leader of the Opposition, when he said yesterday that the Minister of Health should resign. [*Desk thumping*] There were allegations of corruption at the North West Regional Health Authority. These were investigated by the Auditor General. The report was laid in Parliament. It was the subject of further consideration for implementation by Personnel Management Services Limited, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Martin Daly & Partners. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the board of the North West Regional Health Authority was replaced as a result. Four managers were dismissed. The report was sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions and the fraud squad. Investigations are still ongoing into the conduct of other members of staff there. A legal opinion at this point in time has been sought on recovering some of the moneys that have been overpaid, and some of the contracts are either being terminated or renegotiated, some of the contracts that have been awarded.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is swift and decisive action to the allegations of corruption [*Desk thumping*] at the North West Regional Health Authority but, in the past, there have also been allegations of corruption against the government that was led by the Member for San Fernando East, and I would have really liked him—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: When?

Dr. Rowley: When?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: In the past. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: When?

Dr. Rowley: When?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: In the past between 1991 and 1995, and I would have liked him—[*Interruption*—I would have liked him to name even one instance in which there was such decisive action against allegations of corruption.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, the report shows that there has been mismanagement and overstepping of authority at the North West Regional Health Authority and these have been dealt with. During 1991 and 1995, 14 helpless, innocent patients at St. Ann's Mental Hospital died under the watch of the Prime Minister at that time, the Member for San Fernando East. No one resigned at that time even though a commission of enquiry was established. That commission of enquiry reported and the report was never made public. More than that, when we came into office in 1995 the commissioners approached us because the previous government had not paid them. We had to pay them. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East asked the Minister of Health to resign.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would really like to deal with what is happening in the health sector—the plans, programmes and policies that we have. The vision and mandate for the health sector remains the same, that is, to improve the health status of the population by promoting wellness and providing quality health care to all.

The health status of our population in Trinidad and Tobago when compared to many other countries, and when compared with ourselves 10 years ago, it is, indeed, very favourable. The indicies, for example, life expectancy, infant mortality and access to basic healthcare services have all improved and continue to improve.

However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are some trends which, if they are not arrested, can have the effect of reversing and eroding some of the gains that we

have made during the past decade. The world has eliminated small pox; the region has eliminated polio and in Trinidad and Tobago we have eliminated measles. We have not had a case of German measles for quite some time, and even though there are sporadic cases of tetanus and chicken pox, these do not pose major threats at this time. We have done well in these areas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we in Trinidad and Tobago have a high incidence of diabetes, hypertension—which is high blood pressure—a high incidence of heart disease, cancer and HIV/AIDS. Our emphasis, therefore, must be to consolidate the gains that we made over the last decade while, at the same time, launching a sustained attack on those diseases which are prevalent and which contribute to high degrees of morbidity and mortality in Trinidad and Tobago. While these diseases cannot be eliminated as easily as infectious diseases by a vaccine, their impact can be significantly reduced by lifestyle changes.

Our approach, therefore, is two pronged: first of all, health promotion and health education. These must be aimed at positively influencing lifestyle changes in order to prevent and control these diseases; secondly, providing quality healthcare services for the population when they become ill. We have seen that through our efforts the population of Trinidad and Tobago has become, and continues to become, more enlightened about health matters than they have ever been. This is borne out by the fact that they are now very vocal and are not prepared to accept standards of care that they accepted as the norm in the past. When we came into office in 1995 the population was quite prepared to accept a blood test and an electrocardiogram as adequate investigation. They are now demanding CAT scans and MRI as routine investigations.

In 1995 the population accepted medical treatment for heart diseases as the norm. Today, they are demanding angiograms, angioplasty and coronary artery bypass surgery. Five years ago the population accepted chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatment with cobalt machine as adequate treatment for cancer. Today, they are demanding sophisticated drugs and radiotherapy with linear accelerated machines. Not so long ago the general surgeons performed surgery on almost any part of the body. Today, the population wants access to specialists in subspecialty areas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is nothing wrong with this, except that all these services are extremely expensive. If we are to satisfy the demands—and I really want to put this on the record—of every patient for state-of-the-art investigative procedures and treatment with the best resources, our entire national budget would need to be spent on health. However, fortunately, our population is

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

beginning to realize and acknowledge, because of our health education efforts, that it is possible to do something positive about all of this by taking responsibility for their own health and changing their lifestyles. It is a slow, long and difficult process but the records are showing that more people are exercising, our AIDS messages are gradually getting through and, despite the proliferation of fast food outlets, more people are becoming conscious of good eating habits. More people are seeking attention for their diabetes and hypertension and more people with these diseases are taking steps to control them.

We, therefore, will continue to accelerate our health promotion and health education efforts in the coming months and years. The target would be the entire population but, of course, emphasis would be placed on the vulnerable groups and, of course, the children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, towards this end, I want to mention two specific strategies: one, the Government recently appointed a health promotion council, comprising of representatives from the Ministry of Health and health authorities, representatives from the ministries that impact upon health and from health-related non-governmental organizations. The mandate of the council is to advise the Government on issues of health promotion and to implement, within their own agencies and organizations, health promotion strategies. The council has been officially launched and the members are working feverishly in order to carry out this mandate. As an example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they would be recommending, in consultation with the appropriate bodies, the acceptable fat content in meals and other appropriate measures to promote good health.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, last year and this year the Ministry of Health and the Regional Health Authorities hosted a very successful health promotion month in April. There was widespread participation by all sections of the community and the highlight of this year's observance was an essay competition on health promotion for the national community in different categories which received wide participation. Following this, there was the distribution of 50 cholesterol-testing machines to health centres by a private company for use in screening for high cholesterol. The health promotion directorate at the Ministry of Health would be coordinating all these activities and the regional health authorities will be implementing them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, secondly, primary health care. In our Health Sector Reform Programme we are placing a lot of emphasis on primary health care. Early detection of disease, disease prevention and control, as I mentioned, are key strategies in our programme. A lot of these can be achieved through our primary healthcare approach.

2.55 p.m.

So far, four of the seven district health facilities have been constructed and 22 health centres and outreach centres have either been rebuilt or refurbished. In all of these centres, additional services have been added with a heavy emphasis on disease prevention and control. The facilities that have been reconstructed or refurbished include Penal Rock Road, Moruga, Lengua, Indian Walk, Cedros, Granville, South Oropouche, Fyzabad, Laventille, El Socorro, Maraval, Blanchisseuse, Brasso Seco, Las Cuevas and Cumana. Several others are on target to be completed by the end of this year. These include Santa Cruz, Cunupia, San Raphael, St. Helena and George Street Health Centres.

Additionally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Princess Town health facility, which I am sure you are familiar with, is expected to be completed by the end of next month. Design for the Siparia district health facility is about 70 per cent completed. The St. James district health facility will be constructed during the new fiscal year. Designs have been completed for an enhanced health centre in St. Joseph.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, total expenditure in fiscal 2000—2001 for design construction and supervision works amounted to \$44 million, and approximately \$17.4 million have been expended on the procurement of equipment and furniture for these health facilities. In this year's annual budget, funding has also been allocated to refurbish and upgrade Maloney, La Horquetta, Arouca, Tunapuna and Tacarigua health centres. These centres fall within the purview of the North West Regional Health Authority, but funding has also been provided to continue refurbishment and rebuilding of Marabella, Gasparillo, Williamsville, La Romain, Ste. Madeleine, Todds Road, Flanagin Town, Claxton Bay, Tabaquite and Debe Health Centres. In the eastern region, Mayaro, Guayaguayare, Valencia, Manzanilla, Matura, Grande Riviere and Matelot health centres will also continue construction work.

Some renovation works will also be done at the Mayaro district health facility.

Mr. Bereaux: I saw in the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) that there is a health centre carded for La Brea. I have not heard you speak about it. Is it just there to show PSIP and not to be done this year? The next one. Is it correct that the Ministry intends to close down the Palo Seco Health Centre?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: The Palo Seco Health Centre will not be closed down. The La Brea Health Centre, I will have to check on that together with the Regional Health Authorities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to support these health centre upgrades and the delivery of services there, doctors will soon be graduating come January from the Family

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Medicine Post Graduate Programme which is run by the University of the West Indies for the Ministry of Health, and for which the Ministry has been supporting most of the participants. In addition, the district health visitors courses are also continuing to prepare nurses for these centres.

Side by side with these physical works taking place, there is a new team approach to primary care where the community is also involved. One exciting development that has taken place is a pilot project in two areas which has already begun to pay rich dividends. It involves the establishment of a community board to oversee the operations of the health centre. This arrangement is working successfully in the pilot areas, and it is planned to introduce these in all health centres where possible.

The board plays a key advocacy role for the health centre and monitors the services provided by the health professionals; that is the doctors, nurses and pharmacists, and they have also been instrumental in raising funds and providing small amenities for the health centre. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, we plan to expand these in different areas.

As much as we would like things to be different, the hospital is still seen as the centre for health care in Trinidad and Tobago. With our thrust on primary care, however, we are already seeing more utilization of healthcare services and a consequent decrease in hospital attendants, both in the accident and emergency department and the clinics.

People are beginning to have more confidence in the health centre services and, in addition, in an effort to have proper integration of services, we are also introducing specialist medical services at some health centres. This is also proving to be quite a success as patients do not have to travel to major hospitals to see a specialist for a simple problem, but can have access to a specialist at the health centres. This has started in certain areas, as I said, with good results and it is planned to extend these to other areas as well.

The hospital, however, retains its importance. As you are aware, managing a hospital is an extremely difficult task, especially in an environment such as ours. With all the money and systems in place, there are always those who are bent on sabotaging the system only to the detriment of the patients we serve. Just two days ago, you would have read in the newspapers that certain persons are hiding packs and selling them to private nursing homes, and I would just like to mention that I have asked both the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health and the Chairman of the North West Regional Health Authority to investigate this and

deal with the matter expeditiously. The point I am making is that managing a hospital is a very difficult and challenging exercise, but we at the Ministry of Health are giving all the support to the Regional Health Authorities to run their institutions properly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a lot of refurbishment works have taken place at the major hospitals, and this will continue in the years ahead, but because of the extremely dilapidated condition in which we found most of our infrastructure, a lot of works had to be undertaken in an ad hoc manner in order to bring some measure of relief to staff and patients. However, the improvement works now will be undertaken in a more structured and planned manner over the next few years.

The same applies to equipment, over the last few years we have had to inject tens of millions of dollars worth of equipment just to keep the institutions functioning. Now we are taking a more critical look and structured approach to the introduction of new equipment and new technology at our institutions, particularly our major hospitals.

In terms of pharmaceuticals and supplies, our major hospitals are now online with our supply centre at Chaguaramas. On a real-time basis, the centre at C40 that is in Chaguaramas knows the status of the requests and disbursements that have been made to the different institutions. Systems at the hospitals are now being upgraded to manage their inventory in a more efficient and transparent manner. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just like to mention—that this may be dealt with elsewhere—that the designs for the Scarborough Hospital have been completed and the tender documents will go out soon for construction to contractors who have already pre-qualified.

Our major challenge, however, remains our human resources. Although the staffing arrangements in terms of doctors have improved tremendously at our hospitals, there still remains shortages in some areas. That is as far as doctors are concerned. While we continue to have foreign doctors in our system, we are also conscious of the fact that our university is producing 40 local doctors annually, and we would like to give them preference to work in our hospitals.

As far as our nurses are concerned, we continue to suffer from aggressive overseas recruitment. We continue to accelerate our training programmes and, as I mentioned, negotiations are ongoing for an enhanced remuneration package for nurses in the Regional Health Authorities. In addition, several other initiatives have been taken to increase the manpower on the wards, including the introduction of patient care assistants and scrub technicians to assist in the operating theatres. To

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

support our nurses training programme, we have sought to satisfy one of our critical needs by training 30 nursing educators at the University of the West Indies. We are also involved in the training of dental nurses to support our primary care strategy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the burning issue remains the transfer of staff from the public service to the RHAs, and this is being addressed. Two major developments have taken place in that regard. One is that the pension plan for the Regional Health Authority employees has been established. The RHA Act was also amended to preserve the service of the employees in the public service so that they would not lose benefits on transferring to the RHAs and, secondly, a human resource procedure manual has been developed which deals in detail with procedures for hiring, transfer, promotion and discipline of workers. This has been adopted by the Regional Health Authorities as a policy document.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, our Health Sector Reform Programme is indeed a very thorough one, and places equal emphasis on both physical infrastructure, as well as the delivery of quality service received by our clients. To this end, our quality improvement programme is becoming well positioned to ensure that international standards, regulations and policies are always adhered to and upheld in both the public and private health facilities.

The implementation of this programme is paramount to instituting the Health Services Quality Act. As a fundamental step towards this, a legal brief on the Health Services Quality Act was approved by Cabinet just one week ago. This Act and the by-laws will set out the regulatory framework to support the introduction of health care standards throughout the entire health sector, both in the public and private areas.

Mr. Bereaux: Who is drafting that Act?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: This Act is being referred to the Attorney General for drafting. Mr. Speaker, the Patients Charter which deals with the rights and obligations of patients was also recently published for public comments, and so far we have received positive feedback.

Mr. Speaker, essential to this quality improvement programme is ensuring that our health facilities are internationally accredited. So far, an accreditation policy survey at nine health facilities, both private and public, is being conducted. Additionally, 11 physicians, nurses and managers have been trained for conducting accreditation surveys, while 16 doctors, managers and nurses were trained in standards methodology.

A risk management system is also being developed for the sector, and risk management procedure manuals are currently being prepared for dissemination to all healthcare facilities before the end of this year. In support of this programme, manuals are also prepared for orientation and training of all staff. Key training programmes for improving staff attitudes at health facilities will commence in November of this year.

Mr. Speaker, if we are to develop a first class health sector, a quality improvement programme is necessary and should never be underestimated. If we are to strive for quality, systems must be put in place to measure standards and to ensure they are always upheld and our patients can demand their rights as proclaimed in the Patients Charter of Rights.

A critical factor in the provision of health services is that the population must have access to emergency health services. We took steps to introduce the emergency health service which has added a new dimension to healthcare in Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is probably the only developing country in the world which has such a service where ambulances with trained emergency medical technicians respond to emergency calls at home and on the road. The EHS is now responding to approximately 100 calls per day, and the process has saved and continues to save many lives.

We are now in the process of reviewing the arrangements to integrate the service with other existing providers such as the Fire Service, the St. John's Ambulance Brigade, and others. We are also in the process of integrating the ambulance service with the Accident and Emergency Department at the hospitals so that emergency care can be provided on a timely basis when patients arrive at the hospital.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to deal with some of the critical illnesses I mentioned which contribute to the largest portion of our disease burden. There is, as I mentioned, a high incidence of diabetes in Trinidad and Tobago where we are now ranked in terms of prevalence, the fifth highest in the world in terms of our adult population. Not only the diabetes itself, but the complications of the disease which include blindness, renal failure and other vascular diseases which can result in amputation of legs, consume a significant percentage of our health budget.

Patients with diabetes and its complications occupy the greatest number of beds at hospitals in the medical and surgical wards. While we have had some success with our programmes so far, we will intensify our efforts in the coming months and years aimed at decreasing the complications of the disease, thus allowing these patients to live as normal and productive a life as possible.

Emphasis will be placed on the following areas:

(1) Screening and monitoring.

Screening and monitoring programmes will be conducted nationwide at our health centres and in conjunction with the Diabetes Association and other non-governmental associations and community groups in community settings.

(2) Drugs

Efforts will be made, and are already being made, to make available either in the public health facilities or through our private pharmacy programme, all the drugs that are needed to control diabetes.

(3) Education.

The Ministry and the RHAs will collaborate with the Diabetes Association in a nationwide education programme aimed at people in all groups. The Association has already begun this exercise. They have gone to the University of the West Indies, the Ministry of Infrastructure, some of the banks, and I am told they had a very successful session here with the staff of the Parliament.

We will partner with them to carry this education and screening programme throughout the country. Together with professionals in the field of nutrition, we will embark on a media campaign on proper nutrition, not only for diabetics but also for healthy living generally, and for diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. We will support the Diabetes Association in a school competition which they are planning to run to raise awareness in our school population on the subject of diabetes.

(4) Foot care.

We will train a group of health professionals in the field of proper foot care. These persons will then administer care and educate patients with diabetes on proper foot care in order to prevent amputation of their feet or legs.

The second area that I like to deal with is cancer. Cancer has become the second leading cause of death in Trinidad and Tobago. Patients are treated with chemotherapy and radiotherapy at the St. James Radiotherapy Centre and with surgery at the General Hospitals. However, these facilities at St. James have become inadequate but we are in the process of establishing a national oncology centre at Mount Hope. Our activities related to cancer care include the following:

- (1) Our screening programme for common cancers is being strengthened, and this is being done by the Ministry and the RHAs in conjunction with the Cancer Society and the South Cancer Support Group.
- (2) A consultancy firm, Cancer Care International of Canada, has been contracted under our Health Sector Reform Programme to conduct the Techno-economic feasibility study for the new oncology centre. This study will give us information on the site, size, staffing requirements and equipment needs, and a business plan for the centre.

They are on the job as we speak and will submit their final report by the end of December this year. Thereafter, we will prepare the documents for a turnkey contractor to construct and equip the centre.

- (3) We have purchased a new cobalt radiotherapy machine for the St. James facility at a cost of \$3 million. This is expected to be installed and operational at the centre by the end of October this year, which is next month. This would substantially reduce the waiting time for treatment of patients.
- (4) The cost of drugs for treatment of cancer is very expensive. The Cancer Centre supplies a limited quantity of drugs, but not sufficient to treat all patients who need them. The Minister of Finance has made a special allocation of \$8 million for the purchase of drugs for cancer treatment. This will go a long way in satisfying this need.
- (5) The treatment of cancer cannot be administered properly without the service of well-trained professionals. There is a shortage of oncology, which is cancer treatment, staff all over the world. As a result, the Ministry of Health recently sponsored 12 nurses to commence training in the field of oncology; a one-year course in oncology nursing.

These studies are being pursued at the McMaster University in Canada. The Government has also awarded three two-year scholarships to students in the field of radiation therapy. These scholarships are tenable at the Michener Institute in Canada. These programmes will cost the Government over \$6 million, and the recipients have been bonded to serve the Government for five years.

3.15 p.m.

In passing, I wish to compliment the Minister for increasing the taxes on tobacco which have been shown to cause cancer and a list of other diseases. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago we have been performing heart surgery for children at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. Previously, the parents of these children would have had to raise an exorbitant amount of funds to send their children abroad for surgery or let them remain home and die.

The programme so far has operated on 110 children, free of charge, and I am proud to say that all of them are alive and well and this must be something of a record. We have given new life to these 110 children. We have significantly reduced the backlog of children waiting for surgery and funds have been provided for in this year's budget to continue this programme. May I just mention, that there are some complicated cases that still have to go abroad for surgery.

In the case of adults, and this was mentioned this morning, there is a programme at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and at a private institution, where surgery is available at the cost of approximately \$100,000 per surgery. This, of course, is out of reach of many members of our population who need cardiac surgery. The Ministry of Health through its Medical Aid Fund assists many patients with a contribution towards the cost of the operation. The Minister of Finance, however, has made an initial allocation of \$2.5 million towards the treatment of patients with heart disease.

We have made contact with health professionals from abroad who are willing to come here and perform some procedures for us and to donate their services free of charge. We are therefore developing a programme to use this allocation to ensure that the maximum number of patients benefit from this allocation.

Our population has a high incidence of hypertension, that is high blood pressure. This untreated, as you know, can cause heart disease, kidney failure. Just as we did with diabetes, we intend to go on a nationwide screening and monitoring programme using the non-governmental organizations and the regional health authorities. In addition, we intend to use the media and the health centres to educate our population and to disseminate information on hypertension. We also intend to make available through our public health institutions and our private pharmacy programmes, all the drugs in the hospital formulary required for the treatment of hypertension among our population.

Concerning renal failure, Mr. Speaker, it is most heartbreaking whom you cannot help. In Trinidad and Tobago there is a high incidence of renal failure because of the prevalence of diabetes and hypertension. Persons suffering with chronic renal failure need to be dialyzed by a machine six hours twice or three

times a week, and this is an extremely expensive procedure, even if the machine is available. Most members of our population cannot afford to pay for this treatment. In addition, even if you are willing to pay, the services are not widely available.

Dialysis is done at the Port of Spain General Hospital, the Mount Hope and San Fernando hospitals. Many of the machines, as mentioned, are old and need to be replaced. The Minister of Finance has made an allocation of \$2.5 million with which we will purchase some machines and utilize some of the funds to assist persons through the Medical Aid Fund to access dialysis.

Mr. Bereaux: How much does a machine cost, \$1 million?

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: More than that. Mr. speaker, I just want to emphasize the point that having a dialysis machine is like having a stove: a dialysis machine alone cannot give you dialysis. A dialysis machine requires a lot of consumables, just as you cannot get food by having a stove alone.

Mr. Narine: Why only \$2 million? [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. The Hon. H. Rafeeq: I want to deal with the question of AIDS and I would say what this Government is doing for the treatment of AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago. Before I say that I just want to correct something that was said by the Leader of the Opposition. He said that the Minister of Finance said that he will be providing money for the treatment and cure of infected persons, that is, persons with AIDS. The Minister of Finance said no such thing. He said that he will provide money for the treatment and care of infected persons, not the treatment and cure. I just wanted to correct that for the sake of the record.

Mr. Speaker, HIV/AIDS is posing to be a major development problem for countries all over the world and Trinidad and Tobago, of course, is no exception. While it is considered to be an important health issue, it has evolved into a complex social and economic emergency since it primarily affects young adults, cutting across society's most productive layer.

I just want to give some statistics: it is estimated that there are about 18,000 persons who are living with HIV/AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago. Our statistics indicate that the number of female infected with HIV is greater than males in the 15—24 age group. In the 15—19 age group, the male to female ratio is now 1:3. In the 20—24 age group, the male to female ration is even. According to our National Surveillance Unit the percentage of HIV infected women increased from 0 per cent in 1983, to 33 per cent in 1990 to 45 per cent in 1999. Approximately 82 per cent of all HIV-infected women are within the age group 15—45 years.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Since these women are of childbearing age, this highlights the significant risk of mothers passing on their infection to their babies through mother to child transmission.

As a matter of fact, at the end of 1999, 7 per cent of the total number of reported cases were pediatric cases. If this disease is allowed to continue its increase at the current rate, eventually it will raise our level of dependency at various levels and diminish our human capital. A 1994 study predicted that by the year 2005 a typical Caribbean country could lose 1.2 to 3.2 per cent of its gross domestic product if present trends continue. Vigorous measures taken now to reduce the rate of HIV infection will pay substantial dividends in years to come.

I would like to mention what the Ministry of Health and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago are doing:

- (1) Our Rapport Programme—this is a youth counselling programme targeting young persons who are vulnerable. This programme which currently operates out of Port of Spain and has been very successful, will be expanded to other areas in the country;
- (2) Our education programme—sensitization programmes have been held with various groups including the media, the business community, trade unions, youth groups, persons living with HIV/AIDS and the Inter-Religious Organization;
- (3) Secondary schools are being visited and students are being exposed to lectures by trained staff;
- (4) Mother to child transmission—we have introduced a programme to interrupt the mother to child transmission of HIV/AIDS in most of our public health facilities and hospitals. This is already having a positive impact;
- (5) We have also deregulated the sale of condoms so that they can now be sold at any outlet, including shops, groceries and so on. In addition UN/AIDS will embark on a social marketing programme for condoms in Trinidad and Tobago early next year.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, Treatment—recently we had the privilege of a UN/AIDS expert heading a team of experts assisting us in Trinidad and Tobago to identify our needs and to make recommendations in order to prepare us to commence the treatment of persons living with HIV/AIDS with drugs. A very in-depth action plan was submitted and we at the Ministry of Health have already begun implementation of the plan. In another two to three weeks we will begin negotiation with the

major drug companies for the combination of drugs to treat patients with HIV/AIDS.

This budget allows for \$10 million for the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS. We acknowledge that \$10 million cannot treat all our HIV/AIDS patients so, in this regard, we are proposing to start treatment on a phased basis. Currently, as mentioned, the Ministry of Health has in place the reduction of perinatal transmission. This programme which is almost on a national scale is available to HIV-infected expectant mothers and allows a 60 per cent chance of delivering an HIV-negative infant.

This programme will be extended to all health centres in Trinidad and Tobago during the fiscal year. The Ministry of Health will then be commencing the treatment of mothers who are HIV positive, in order to allow them to care for their children so that they will not become orphans. Then the next group targeted for treatment will be our pediatric cases, which are our children. At last some realistic hope is being offered to these children who would otherwise face the inevitable. Eventually, however, as resources permit, adults with HIV/AIDS will be also treated with drugs.

Later this year, Trinidad and Tobago will be hosting the tenth international conference for persons living with HIV/AIDS. This is a big event and is expected to attract about 600 participants from all over the world. This is an important conference for us as it will assist de-stigmatizing the disease in an environment where persons living with AIDS are still ostracized to a large extent. The Government will be contributing \$250,000 towards hosting this conference.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, a policy document on AIDS in the workplace has already been developed. Recently we circulated this document for comment, which we have already received. We are collating the comments at this point and within the next two to three weeks, the document will be taken to Cabinet for adoption.

I would just say a few words on the question of mental health. Mr. Speaker, the area of mental health will also continue to be a priority for the Ministry of Health in the upcoming years. Plans and initiatives in this area must be well thought out and coordinated and so, to this end, Cabinet approved a mental health plan and the major activities have already begun. Plans are currently in train for the inauguration of a national mental health committee by the end of next month.

The South West Regional Health Authority and the Tobago Regional Health Authority have already established regional mental health committees and appointed their sub-committees. A draft mental health promotion plan has also

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[DR. THE HON. H. RAFEEQ]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

already been formulated. Discussions are taking place with key individuals and agencies in order to introduce training programmes for general practitioners in the management of mental illness. Twenty-seven members of the protective services were recently trained in mental health issues and are now expected to impart their skills to new entrants into the service.

I would say a couple words on the National Health Insurance which was mentioned by the Member for San Fernando East. I mentioned last year in the last budget debate that the National Health Insurance would have commenced this year with a pilot project. Subsequent to that, we had advice from competent persons in the field, that a pilot project would not yield the information since all the systems would not be tested. We have been advised that we should set up all the systems first and implement the National Health Insurance nationally.

The National Health Insurance, as I mentioned on previous occasions, is an entire reform in itself and cannot be implemented until all the systems are in place, that is, the information technology system, systems for monitoring and quality assurance systems. I mentioned some of the quality initiatives that have been undertaken. The National Health Insurance is now under the purview of the Ministry of Finance and they are working closely with the Ministry of Health, but later this year, in fact, in October, there is going to be a workshop with participation from all major stakeholders in order to make some critical decisions to move the process forward.

The Ministry of Health as the policy-framing and regulatory body for the public health service is conscious of the fact that there is urgent need to establish formal structures within the regional health authorities in order to provide for greater levels of accountability, efficiency and transparency. In this regard, a private consultancy firm, Ernst & Young, was contracted and has been working with senior officials from the Ministry of Health and regional health authorities to develop appropriate systems for our financial, human resource and information technology components of the health sector.

These systems which will also monitor productivity and ensure that regulations are adhered to, will first be implemented in the North West Regional Health Authority early next year in order to ensure that the new structures are achieving their objectives. After that, they will be instituted in other regional health authorities.

There is no doubt that there has been substantial improvement in the health sector over the past six years: infrastructure has improved; the availability of

equipment has been improved; staffing has increased in most areas; pharmaceuticals and other supplies have increased; new services have been added and the population is now aware of health issues and need for lifestyle changes. Of course, more needs to be done. The Medium Term Policy Framework outlines the major goals for this term in office and every year we will be moving incrementally towards achieving the goals. I will end by repeating the theme that we had during our last year's health promotion month, which says that health is everybody's business.

The Ministry of Health, the regional health authorities and the Government cannot do it alone; we will all have to take responsibility for our health and the Government, certainly will play its part.

Thank you.

Mr. Nathaniel Moore (*Tobago East*): Mr. Speaker, I feel humbled for this opportunity to spend some time in the business of our country, particularly, the business of Tobago. Let me first contribute my share of congratulations to the Minister of Finance for his first attempt at a national budget in this country. It is only as we try, we can know to what extent we can succeed. I am hoping that with this short period of time I have at my disposal, I will be able to do justice to the cause for which I am sent here.

In listening to the comments on the street and in homes about this budget, in terms of the quality of the budget, I heard comments like: it is a good budget; this budget is good for a start; it is good for a poor man and it is a poor man's budget. Some people said that it has some assistance for the aged and the poor, but some people are disappointed that old age pensions have not reached to \$1,000 and the minimum wage has not gone up to \$10 per hour. Others said that this budget is an election trap. Some said it did not sound like a budget, it sounded like an election campaign speech or statement. I heard others say also that this is another in the poor budget presentations we have been having for the last five or six years.

These comments I make here, have nothing to do with what I heard here between yesterday and today. These I heard outside before yesterday. So these are some of the comments we have heard about the budget. For me, Mr. Speaker, as I sat right here and the presentation started, it sounded to me like another of those declarations of solidarity and support for the leader of the UNC.

For as I listened, I heard a quote like this. In fact, let me read it from the text on page 3 of the Budget Statement 2002.

“The United National Congress, under the leadership of Basdeo Panday, is the only political party capable of uniting Trinidad and Tobago today.”

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. MOORE]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

3.35 p.m.

It sounded to me as some bit of eulogy. I do not know if I was right—[*Desk thumping*] So that emphasis was placed upon “this Prime Minister” and the “Panday Administration”. So that, to me, was truly a statement of support, if not of flattery. I noticed that recently there was a struggle for people to flatter the leader of their party. I do not know how he took it in, whether he swallowed it or whether he has it like those ruminants we call it, somewhere there to bring it back up sometime later on.

That counsels us here to build our organization upon and around the principles and programmes, and not around the leader’s pride, or his ego. Let us all show that we are leaders here in our own right, only that we know our place in the hierarchy of leadership. I think that is why we are here. If any of us are here in these seats who have not considered ourselves as leaders, then we could get up right now and walk out because we are misfits. You must always know where you fit in the hierarchy of leadership.

To me, a budget is to see after the needs of the people, to cater for the orderly growth, for stability, security, dignity and even prosperity of the people. And at any time when we reach the stage that the budget is simply to give us what we want, then we are either very well-off and very enlightened, or we run the risk of pampering, indulging, or misleading our people. I say this because the presentation ends something like this:

“Mr. Speaker, we will give the people what the people want.”

And I heard this echoed by the Member for Tabaquite in his contribution yesterday when he said: We will give the people what they want.

Mr. Speaker, if we follow the habit of giving the people what they want, we may end up ruining the people. Of course, if the people are well enlightened and they have all the opportunities and information, then it may be that you give them what they want. Not that I am saying that people do not necessarily know what they want, this is very often the case sometimes, but when we have limited means and many ends, we have to consider needs more often than we consider wants.

So in his conclusion, the Minister gives a list of what he proposes that the people want and we have it on pages 62 and 63.

“In summary, Mr. Speaker, I propose to, among other things:

- Reduce Corporation Tax;
- Reduce the Personal Tax Rates;

- Zero rate more items from the VAT schedule;
- Increase Old Age Pension;
- Remove the tax on interest income;
- Provide more support to manufacturers;
- Give more support to the agriculture sectors;
- Establish a Technology and Science Park;”

And so we have it down the road.

- “Provide shelter for battered women;
- Provide free hearing AIDS;
- Encourage local cultural productions.”

If I remember, and people made mention of it here today, and there are also things like—and I heard the Minister of Health mentioned this—putting a tax on tobacco and alcohol. I do not know if this was one of the achievements, but it was not mentioned here. The Minister of Health thinks that is an achievement.

I see a certain gentleman smiling at me, very composed, and I think he is thinking also that is an achievement because he used to be a terrible smoker once but, he has, very wisely, given it up.

Mr. Speaker, I am very much—I do not know if to use the word in “sympathy”—with those people who smoke and are so addicted to the habit that they cannot give it up, and I am hoping here that we, as legislators, try to set an example in this respect because, you know, that is one of my strong points that I think that people learn things better by giving them an example rather than giving them precepts.

If we set the example here by quitting smoking, then we do not bother about whether the price goes up as a result of tax, and if we do the same thing with alcoholic beverages, then we would have helped ourselves and the country as well.

Another achievement was the expansion of the prison. We heard here that the prison would be expanded. We understand also that 100 vehicles would be bought for the police. These are achievements that are not mentioned here so, Mr. Speaker, we see that the Minister has done much more and has achieved by way of proposition than he has in this final list.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. MOORE]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

I wish I had the time to make a comment on some of these things especially the tobacco, the alcohol and the prison.

Hon. Member: You have time.

Mr. N. Moore: I have so many other things to say, I cannot spend all the time on them, but I believe I have said enough on them and I hope that people could benefit from the few moments I am on my feet. I know that not everyone of the propositions of the Minister will come to reality, as with one, I want to remind us here about and somehow somebody else in this Chamber and I was thinking the same way. I think it was the Member for Diego Martin East and I have the stuff here and I would like to quote it.

This is the budget statement of 1998 and the Minister of Finance says on page 32 of the document as it is compiled in the Library.

“I therefore propose to allocate initially the sum of \$25 million to be utilized in programmes such as education, job readiness and skills development for single mothers. A committee to be appointed by Cabinet will begin the task of designing and implementing such programmes early in the New Year.”

And the year was 1998. I imagine he meant the new year which was 1999 and I read this to say that some of these proposals or propositions—I do not know how you call them—that are written here may never see the light of day, but we are still hopeful. Somebody is yawning on me already.

So, there are provisions made in our budget for universal secondary education. Of course it is made also in this budget and we are concerned whether this will be a reality. It sounds good, but at the time when the idea of universal secondary education was being mouth about, I thought about it because I used to be a teacher for more than 30 years.

Mr. Assam: You could have fooled me.

Mr. N. Moore: Yes for more than 30 years I was in the classroom and I know the way in which this thing was implemented it cannot bear fruits in the way we would like it to bear, and in fact, I think it was so hurriedly done that there was too much that was unadvisable about implementing the measures as they were implemented.

We did not have a transition period and because it was politically expedient that we make such declarations, and as the oil money was flowing a bit faster than sometime in the past, and we had it, we could speak about implementing some of these measures without being prepared for them.

As I move around to the schools, I am pained. In Tobago, we have to make shifts. We have to put students in places that we did not like, and with a programme not well thought out, implementation was difficult. So that many of the students are suffering and many teachers are being frustrated along with the students every day. So we have things like low levels of achievement for both teachers and students who were not prepared for the programme as one of the fall out from this hasty decision.

I am not saying that the decision was a bad one to implement the universal secondary education. I do not think anybody would be so unfair to say that. I am saying that it was so badly thought out and we will not get the benefit from even the thought or the money we are throwing after it, and it will take years before—in fact, I am not sure that with the premature start that we had, we will ever gain the maximum we ought to gain from the measure and from the resources we are putting into the venture.

So whenever we are doing something, we should, as much as it is humanly possible, approach it properly and attack it well. We cannot always think about political expediency. In fact, we can almost say it is cruel on the part of those who do it because some of the evils of the past are still going to be continued, where the people who are perhaps better off will benefit from the system, and those poorer people who we say we are trying to help, if we do not have measures, are going to continue to suffer and suffer twofold because they will not be able to benefit well from the system. Perhaps, they will become—I do not know if he is only frustrated or jealous, or whatever it is—and maybe in the end, some of us may not enjoy the benefit that we think we are going to enjoy from such a programme because those who are unable to enjoy it will make sure that we do not enjoy it. We who feel we can benefit from it, I am saying that because your eyes must be open in the community to see what is really happening. This is a fact.

Mr. Speaker, I am speaking in all sincerity and with the intention that we should learn something if there is anything to learn from it. And when I hear Members trying to interrupt me about this foolish talk about Hochoy Charles and this kind of nonsense, where does he come in? He is not here. Is that all you could think about?

I heard a very good contribution from the Member for Chaguanas yesterday. I was impressed, Sir, to a great extent. I believe there was some sincerity about what he said and it would be unfair if I did not say that. I cannot say the same thing of the other contributions I heard from there. You see, I used to sit there too, and I know some of the problems so I sympathize with you in a way. I do not

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. MOORE]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

want you to lose courage; you may have the chance to say something. I used to be bored sitting there too, but I knew how to contain myself.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps with the attempt to provide universal secondary education, we should have had a transitional period. Even with the switching from the Common Entrance Examination to the Secondary Entrance Assessment, there should have been a transitional period to get people benefiting from the programme, but when we do it for expediency and we do not care who benefits from who does not benefit, then whose good are we seeking? I think that is what we are here to do: to see after the benefit and good of the people who elected us to see after their business. [*Desk thumping*]

In this same educational programme, I want to make reference to the education of parents because when the results came out a few weeks ago I sat with some members of staff in a secondary school and we were looking at the results, and looking at the background of the people whose results we were studying and we came to the conclusion that what we needed most now, for a start, is not so much educated children, but we need educated parents. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as I move around and hear the way parents treat children, sometimes I am appalled, and we wonder why there is crime and poverty and so many of the great ills that we see in society. Sorry to say—uneducated parents. Of course, I spoke about uneducated leaders the last time, did I not? So I do not need to say that again.

3.55 p.m.

I want to refer to myself, not because I think I am the greatest exemplar but because I know my experience. I have a library and I love to buy books. I say, not as a boast, that I do not gamble nor drink. I do not spend my money for foolishness. They tell me I am mean when it comes to spending. I do not smoke either and I make no apology for that. When I go to buy presents, I buy books and tools; things to assist in living because I came from a very poor background. I used to go to school barefooted. I knew every cent was important. I never spent a cent wastefully. So when I had my family, my children grew up and saw me reading. They saw a stack of books and education matters. So that when they grew up and I sat at the desk reading, they would take their books and sit by their desk and read.

When we sat and looked at the television, we discussed some of the things we saw. We did not discuss the neighbours' problems and the gossip around. I am

happy to say—I do not think my children are all angels because I am not—but they grew up liking to read too and somehow they got through their studies.

I am saying to parents that if they are ignorant and misled, it is quite unlikely they may be able to help their children to any extent. Their children must see them read; they must discuss with them important things; they must play with them, they must pray with them and they must work with them. If we are not willing to do this with our children, our children will not benefit from the provisions that we are making here for education for all.

So that hand in hand with provision of education for all the children, there must first be a plan for education for all the parents. I know that we are late because the time for the parents to have learnt was when they were children, but we are not too late because I know persons who learned to read in their 30s and 40s. Somehow, if we set up adult programmes, we might have more of these children benefiting from education because their parents would have been enlightened and educated.

The picture that I am painting here is one which involves not only the Minister for Education—I heard her say “the Minister of Education”, but I am saying the Minister for Education but it involves also the Minister for Community Affairs, the Minister for Finance and so on. What I am saying is that it should be a concerted effort by all of us. What we have to start to do now, in the light of what I have said, is to prepare parents so that we could get better parents and children. And we have to do something to cater for the backlog.

Somehow in our country, and I believe in many other countries—and it is easy to happen, we have minimum qualifications for certain jobs, but I cannot remember us having minimum qualifications for parents. There is the need for educated and trained parents and somehow we have to do something about it. The odds are against something like that succeeding since people do not have to know anything but an instinct and then they get children, but we cannot use that instinct to get parents, or the total parent we should have. I have spent too much time on that, so I think I have made the point there.

So this brings me to Tobago, for it is the people of Tobago who sent me here. The budgetary allocation for Tobago in a budget totals \$708,792,833. If I add \$7.1 million to that—and I add that because I see scattered in the pages of the Estimates, development projects in Tobago under the responsibility of other Ministries besides the Tobago House of Assembly. When I work it out in terms of percentages, I work the \$708 million plus to 4.07 per cent. If you recall, this

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. MOORE]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

would be about .4 per cent above the minimum, which the Dispute Resolution Committee recommended. So we have to commend the Minister and his ministry for being within the recommended minimum.

Hon. Member: Exceeded.

Mr. N. Moore: You should be ashamed to say “exceeded”. The recommended minimum that was given by the DRC; the \$7.1 million in addition would bring it to 4.1 per cent. So this is a little above the minimum. Why does the Minister of Finance think that instead of walking somewhere to the centre of the road, he feels safer at the edge of the road and the lower edge, the edge to the precipice—4.07 per cent. I described such behaviour in this House some years ago as stinginess. I am wondering if the DRC did not recommend this minimum, if we would have had a figure like this.

I want to give this House an idea of what the percentages were over some years. I am beginning from 1994—2.4 per cent—the total allocation to Tobago from the national budget; 1995—2.5 per cent; 1996—2.7 per cent. This is not PNM now, so stop rapping yourself. In 1997—3.7 per cent; 1998—2.8 per cent.

4.05 p.m.

Do you remember the problems around this year? I remember it. I was around here. We are talking about an average, a percentage; we are not talking about a sum. I continue: 1998/1999, 2.6 per cent. Are we going up? I think we are going down: 1999/2000, 2.4 per cent. To me as though we are going down, like the Hilton. [*Interruption*] I taught every subject besides French once in a certain school over time. I go on: 2000/2001, 3.2 per cent. This was the time when we were expecting to—after giving Tobago the severe punishment because of its rudeness in trying to assert itself. Because an election was imminent; we had a man from Tobago East whom we were not sure about. We wanted him to return and to continue supporting us. We did not know what would have happened from the Tobago end, so the development budget came up to something like \$98 million. Then finally, as I said, 4.07 per cent or 4.1 per cent, according to how you look at it.

So this is the story of Tobago. The 4.07 per cent or 4.1 per cent came as a result, I believe, because of the admonition and advice of the Dispute Resolution Commission. Because the people of Tobago were very unhappy over the allocations over the years, they cried out like the people in Egypt and, fortunately, there was this provision in the law which allowed them to have this DRC to sit on the case and advise, and they gave the advice. Unfortunately, the present Government is very unwilling—I stand to be corrected. Although they accepted in

this House some time—I cannot remember the dates—the recommendation of the Dispute Resolution Commission, they are still very reluctant to allow Tobago to have a reasonable allocation in the budget.

Because you remember the question I asked last time about the allocation. I was told that we get more than 4.0 or over 5 and so on, and I said a faulty formula was used to make that answer. I am quite aware that there are people in the Ministry of Finance who have had a long experience with Tobago and financing for Tobago and so on, and we discovered that many of them are not too kind to Tobago, and I am hoping they are not influencing the Minister. I am not going to say anything more on that.

This is why the Dispute Resolution Commission was asked to intervene. How do the other people in Tobago think about this? I could say the people in the street, generally, are unhappy, but they are hopeful. In other words, most of them will tell you the Minister could have done a little better. But it is not a bad start. Let us see how he will continue.

I heard the secretary for finance in here one day when he was asked by the press, a question about the budget, and I discovered from what he said—I do not recall his own words—that he was a bit disappointed himself, but he, too, was hopeful. In fact, he said it was a hopeful start. The Chief Secretary in the Tobago House of Assembly—and I put it like this—he is looking at the forest; he is not seeing the trees. The Minister advised us here last week that he sat with the Chief Secretary and some other team from Tobago and they worked out a package, and so I believe it is the package that the Chief Secretary is seeing.

But I understand, somehow, the situation, as I said in reference to other matters, because I was sitting on that side too, and what had happened is that I sat there, very burdened sometimes, because we were in a coalition, and I could not persuade my fellows on certain things relating to Tobago. I had no choice. So in many cases I had to go along. I remember even on one or two occasions, the man who is the Chief Secretary now in the Tobago House of Assembly, used to throw some “picong” at me when I was over there. But I believe now the situation is the same with him. Now that he is over there, he is in a certain position where he cannot persuade the Government to do anything better for the time, so he has to go along.

The NAR in Tobago is not happy with these budgetary allocations because, as I said before, the Minister is skirting the lower level of the recommendations of the DRC which we were not even happy about, because although we thought that

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. MOORE]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

it was a step in the right direction, yet what were the considerations taken. The Tobago House of Assembly Act spoke about things like the removal from the main growth centres and the impossibility of the people in Tobago sharing the facilities provided in Trinidad, and other considerations. I am not sure how much of that was taken into consideration when these awards were being made.

But the point again, we, too, think that it is a step in the right direction, but in two ways we are not satisfied with it: First, with the quantity; we think that the allocation is too small. I will say more about that; and, secondly, the quality. As I mentioned some time ago, not too long, that I am seeing some allocations which seem to be dealing with projects in Tobago and should fall under the fifth schedule but not under the allocation for the Tobago House of Assembly. This is why there is an extra \$7 million which I mentioned a while ago. But while it is additional spending, and deservedly so for Tobago, I am saying that the people who are NAR in Tobago would not look on this so favourably, because we were the ones who were pioneering and still advocating increased autonomy for Tobago.

We think that what is Tobago's due Tobago must get, and we think that Tobago is well able to do its duty. Tobago could see about its business. We do not necessarily need any help in some of these areas. For this reason we are saying that the quality of the budget is not to our meeting—I should put it another way, Mr. Speaker. The quality does not satisfy us fully because we still think that the central government is trying to trample on the autonomy that this Parliament gave to Tobago.

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. [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

Question put and agreed to.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. N. Moore: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. I must hasten. People said from the start that I have a lot of time, but I speak very slowly so I cannot cover a lot of ground. I am not like some people who read very quickly. I did not write down what I had to say verbatim.

Mr. Speaker, a minimum was given to Tobago in spite of the fact that there are several areas where there is urgent need. I want to mention some of those areas in which there was urgent need that was not attended to. For example—I cannot remember where I put my notes, but from my head I can find it in the interest of saving time—the establishment of the Cove Industrial Estate. That is

an item which was on the budget of the Assembly which was not given attention. We thought that was something to which priority should be given for the fermenting of small business in Tobago.

Then, there is the case of the port in Charlotteville. The Assembly asked for some allocation to extend the existing facilities at the jetty. I do not have time to speak at length on this particular project but, I am thinking also that this was a deserving project that should have gained the attention of the central government and the minister. Something should have been done to improve the facilities there. It is the port.

Mr. Speaker, I think this was mainly because the people in the area did not really ask for the port, as far as I can remember—I do not purport to know everything about it. However, this UNC Government, for some reason—it was a bit of a mystery too—declared Man of War Bay a port of entry. I know the villagers complained about trying to establish a port there without the facilities to service the port. That is a natural deep water port and many yachts come in. Having declared the place a port, yachts keep coming day to day, in and out and we are not sure if they are coming and going legally.

Mr. Speaker, up to recently—I do not know if the situation has changed during this week or so—there was no resident personnel there from the customs or immigration divisions to process these entries and exits. So, we are exposed to a lot of evils; no control. I thought this would have been an opportunity for the central government to say, “This is a situation we have created, let us step in and do something about it.” They have “blanked” the Assembly’s request for a location to extend the facilities there. I know some excuse would be found for that and I hope we could hear it. We hope it is a good excuse.

Then, there is the Skills Development Centre that was started. In fact, I want to leave that for a while and mention the development of a fishing port in Scarborough. Again, the Assembly had this item in its local budget. The Government and the Minister of Finance saw no need to pay any attention to it. Fishing is one of the economic activities in Tobago on which the population relies a great deal, but there is a deaf ear and a blind eye.

The point I am making is that we have been given the minimum, as we see it, of the possible allocation to Tobago, but yet, there are so many worthy projects that were left out and not attended to. I am saying then, that the Minister of Finance should not then look at the Tobago House of Assembly’s budget item by item. That is what I see they did. In the Tobago House of Assembly they itemized their budget and sent it to the Ministry; the Ministry in return, when they drew up

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. MOORE]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

the national budget they itemized it as well. The impression is that when they are giving a reduced financing, they have to leave out some projects. Is it the idea that these projects must not go on? Then, the impression is given that the central government still dictates what projects should and should not go on in Tobago. That is not satisfactory. We expect that the Tobago House of Assembly representatives are mature enough to know what the people of Tobago need and they should set the priority and not the minister. *[Interruption]*

Of course, I am not ruling out the idea of the process of consultation between them, which is a healthy thing, but, in the final analysis, allow the Tobago House of Assembly to take care of its priorities. I advise the Minister, who is not here now, that in the future he should avoid itemizing the budget for Tobago and give the lump sum. *[Mr. G. Singh laughs loudly]* Oh, Tobago people are apes? I know that and I said it here long ago. They have no sense of responsibility. So, the Member is going to laugh there and they cannot decide what is their priority and cannot use a sum of money. They are not more block headed—sorry, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to go there. But what is the meaning of that abandon and hilarity in conduct? *[Interruption]* There are so many ministries down here and Tobago, as a unit, is a solid part of this country with several secretaryships too. There are secretaries responsible for certain areas and they see after their area too. *[Interruption]* I know that is the mania. It is, “That little place over there with a set of little children, let us control them to the greatest extent because they cannot control themselves.” We take objection to this. This is not the kind of conduct that we expect in the 20th Century from civilized people.

Then, what do you say about St. Kitts/Nevis? What do you say about Montserrat? What do you say about Grenada and these people? Can they not establish their own priorities and see about themselves? Do you think you have a lot of apes and so on in Tobago? *[Interruption]* Well, I am putting it to you that we have Tobagonians operating here. As I turn now, I am seeing them and over the years, in my experience—I am here for over 60 years—I have seen so many of our sons and daughters from Tobago come here and make Trinidad feel happy and establish systems here to keep the country going.

4.25 p.m.

We still have the potential and quality up there. What are you laughing at ha ha, about Tobago setting its priorities? It is the same mentality that is upholding wrong. You feel that one or two people have sense and with all the heads that God would put, you must always use your head to push it against the other man’s head to keep him up. Do we not all have heads like leaders here? That is what I said when I started. We are leaders.

I am coming to the other point. I am timing myself because I know that I am going up to 4.45 p.m. Many of the allocations given in this national budget for Tobago are so small for the projects mentioned, that I do not know what they will do with them. I could give you one of them. The putting down of hard courts in several areas, some do not think is important because we have a stadium. I heard that on Wednesday, so do not tell me that again. Some people think we have stadium. In the Tobago budget, they requested \$150,000 for each of several hard courts in the villages. Do you know what the Minister of Finance did? He has given \$10,000. What would you do? Tell me! If you are going to build a hard court, what will you do with \$10,000? I did a little renovation on a house and it cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, to put down the floor alone which is equivalent to the kind of thing you would do with hard court. What will you do with it? You give \$10,000 to a village to put down a hard court.

The point I am making is that some of the allocations were not wisely given. Somebody would think that Tobago does not have the ability to prioritize its matters. It means that I would take \$6,000, \$10,000 to \$60,000 and fix one court. It would not even finish it. What can that money do the court? Do not try to pull wool over our eyes and tell us that you give something, so you give \$10,000 to build a hard court. That is going beyond reason.

This brings me to another aspect of the quality of the commitment of this administration or the Panday administration, as the Minister of Finance calls it. The former Minister of Finance used to call it so too. I do not know why. We have Grantley Adams Airport and other things named after people, so we could say the Panday administration. *[Interruption]* I never said that. If you notice, I believe in the collective wisdom of people. I do not believe in any superman or polymath. I believe in the superiority of people. I believe the wise man who says in the Bible, that two heads are better than one.

The quality of commitment of this Government is reflected in the inter-island ferry and air bridge between Trinidad and Tobago. Check on the quality of commitment this Government has for Tobago in the way they deal with those projects. Generally, people in the island of Trinidad would not tolerate this kind of behaviour from anybody else. We would not have tolerated it from England in dealing with our internal affairs, as we are dealing with the transport facilities between Trinidad and Tobago. I can go through the documents, but my time is limited and I do not want to go through them. How many times does a minister of finance stand here and speak about providing a bridge. I must read one—

Mr. Speaker: Member, could you read that after the tea break? The House is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.02 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: You have 15 minutes left.

Mr. N. Moore: Mr. Speaker, the point I was making just before the break was that I noticed the quality of commitment exhibited by the Government in relation to Tobago. I was talking about the inter-island ferry.

Reading an excerpt on Tobago from the budget delivered on August 28, 2000, the Minister said these words:

“Mr. Speaker, let me begin by addressing an issue of immediate concern, that is the ferry service between Trinidad and Tobago. Cabinet has decided to have a new ferry added to the service no later than the end of October.”

This was the year 2000.

I want to mention also that on October 8, 1999, there was another statement on page 36 of the budget:

“Therefore, in this fiscal year, we will ensure that there is an adequate sea transport between Trinidad and Tobago.”

We hear echoed another sentiment in this budget. The point I am making is that we have been having promises of a firmly established link between the islands. We hear descriptions like “new” in terms of a ferry. It is still not a reality.

The second point is in relation to the Scarborough Hospital. Again, this is in the budget. It was in last year’s budget and nearly every budget of this administration since it took office in 1995, undertook to construct a hospital in Tobago. That is still to be realized. We are still hopeful. It is in the budget, therefore it is forthcoming.

The Mason Hall Secondary School was the same street. It appeared in nearly every budget since I came to this Parliament. There was the promise to Tobago that this secondary school would be built. I know. I was part of the planning for this project. This is a project that has been on the board for a very, very long time. It has not yet come to fruition.

The promise of access to loans and grants made by the former Minister of Finance and renewed by this one, is another case. We expect of course, and we

are very hopeful, that this time the promise will be fulfilled and the present Assembly will be able to access loans and grants, especially perhaps as the Chief Secretary this time is a nice fellow and may be more easily dealt with.

The Tobago Skills Development Centre has been on budgets before as a promise to Tobago. There was talk about the Hilton Hotel in 1999. However, the project has experienced its share of problems, most of which are linked to the absence of adequately skilled workers despite being the largest private sector employer in Tobago. The projects have not been able to attract the necessary skills in the island. This is due to the acute shortage of professionals such as engineers and other trained and skilled labourers.

In an effort to rectify this problem, Government has approved the construction of the Tobago Skills Development Centre in Roxborough. It goes on to say that the construction is expected to cost \$11 million and so forth. You can take my word, Mr. Speaker, this is still, according to friends of mine, in the womb of the future.

The Lanse Fourmi/Charlotteville Road is one with a very long history. This goes back to the time of the NAR government—its last year, when it was demitting office; came through four years of the PNM reign and has gone through an entire administration. It is still there. I want to say that really there have been two or three starts to this project but it has been abandoned. It should have been started with a grant. It has gone through so many vicissitudes that it is difficult to say everything in this brief time.

Again, we are hopeful that this project will be realized for Tobago during this term. It is one that is of great importance to Tobago. It has to do with an alternative route connecting the east of Tobago with the west. As it is now, we have one reliable route we call the Windward Road. If, for any reason, like what happened in Big Hole, the road goes away, it would be very difficult for certain people to move from Tobago East into Scarborough. I would not say that this is an alternative. This is a necessity and we are hoping to get this road during this term.

I end by saying that Tobago is still committed to autonomy, in spite of the fact that we see the creeping tendency of the central government to come over to do work in Tobago. I do not know if it is an attraction; if there is something pleasurable about doing work in Tobago, but the Government should resist the temptation. We would be better friends if they allow us to do it for ourselves.

We are committed to seeking greater autonomy for Tobago. There is no reason why it cannot be permitted, as an integral part of this two-island State, to have its own administration and to do all of its internal business. Trinidad is permitted to have its administration and to do all of its internal business.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. MOORE]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Then there is a body linking both of them, as this Parliament at a different level, seeing about the common good of both. I do not see that we can attain any greater happiness than that. Of course, it would not solve all our problems, at least it will prevent us passing blame and some feeling inferior to the others.

They will tell me this is not a unitary state, but up to now no prophet—as we have in the Bible or the Qu’ran or any other religious books—not even Nostradamus has read any prophecy which says that Tobago and Trinidad must be together in a unitary state structure. No place! I am not talking about secession.

We as people with brains in our heads can sit and work out a system that could satisfy us under the conditions of the highest possible degree so that we would live together, see about our affairs and be a part of the western world. God has not decreed that we should have this kind of constitution. We made it. We can change it to suit ourselves. If it suits them to have us as underlings, it does not suit us. So, for our mutual happiness and goodness, I suggest that we get together and hang out a system that will take care of all our needs and bring satisfaction to us. Our children will be happy. This is on the agenda for Tobago and we invite you to join with us to make this a reality.

Although the NAR started it, at the front the PNM did not go along with us, now they have the administration in Tobago to see about. It is inevitable that they pay attention to that and eventually love it. Even if it happens that they would be at odds with their friends in the central government, they will have to see to it that some level of autonomy is maintained in Tobago and that we attain the highest level possible. So, the whole of Tobago, whoever it may be, PNM, NAR, PEP, will now have the vision of autonomy in Tobago and as Tobagonians will strive to wear that even if it means that we have to be at variance with other people.

This is there. The NAR started it. The PNM have come into it now and there is no way we can get away from it. Tobago will be demanding its fair share. As good citizens, we demand it.

I thank you.

5.15 p.m.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to join with others in this honourable Chamber to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for his presentation with respect to the 2001/2002 budget. This is clearly his first budget but the seventh budget of the Government of the UNC. This budget has clearly shown and continues the progressive trend that was set in the other budgets, a trend, which

puts us well on the pathway to sustainable development, which is the benchmark, the hallmark, of the UNC Government. So I will join with others in congratulating the hon. Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that at the end of this debate Members of this House will support this budget and pass it in this Chamber. I cannot see any Member of this House voting against a drop in personal income tax; I cannot see any Member of this House voting against a rise in old age pensions; I cannot see any Member of this House voting against measures which deal with the advancement and improvement in the quality of life for women of this country; I cannot see any Member of this House voting against mechanisms and measures which this budget proposes for a better quality of life and education for the children of this nation. I cannot see Members of this House voting against the financial architecture that has been described in the hon. Minister's presentation of the budget. So I have no doubt that at the end of the budget debate that this honourable House and Members within it, would unanimously support Budget 2001/2002.

I have listened to the debate coming from the other side and with respect to the Member for Tobago East, we share some of his concerns, but I really have to remind him of the whole fiasco with the scholarships. Under the THA—Hon. Minister of Finance, was it \$72 million in scholarships—when here in Trinidad, only \$15 million of the budget was allocated for scholarships, in Tobago, \$72 million was allocated. Whilst it is for the first time we see an allocation for Tobago above \$700 million, it seems to me that Tobago also has to put its house in order in terms of how the moneys are used for the greatest benefit of the people of Tobago, as for Trinidad. It cannot simply be that the Minister of Finance—and those of us on this side would say that it is for us to manage how that money is spent; it has to be also for the people of Tobago.

Whilst the allocation has been tremendously increased, and whilst the Ministry of Education is putting more resources into Tobago with respect to the construction of schools, I want to remind him that prior to the same universal secondary education he spoke about just now—he spoke about it being so cruel and that the children were not benefiting—one out of every two children in Tobago, up to last year—that is to say, if there were only one of us; your child and my child—only one of us had a place in a secondary school. It was because of that universal secondary education thrust of the Government that every child in Tobago, as in Trinidad, was able to get a place in a secondary school. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Moore: I did not say that anything was wrong with giving them the opportunity, what I stressed—perhaps the Minister was not here—was that

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. MOORE]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

adequate preparations were not made so that the people could take advantage of the provision. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: The hon. Member spoke about the cruelty of the provision. The hon. Member would recognize, the same Member for Laventille East/Morvant who is thumping his desk, that it was their white paper which talked about Universal Secondary Education and planned it. Today, the Member for Diego Martin East is telling me about no planning. They planned and they are still planning and they never took action and they never got it done. You know what is the problem—and it is so sad, Mr. Speaker—it is because we got it done. That is what is the problem with them. It is a question of sour grapes. They could not do it and because we did it, it is bad.

When you listen to the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin East, for example, he picked up the budget statement—he had absolutely no contribution, it should have been a non contribution—and he went through it line by line, paragraph by paragraph. He got to Ministry of Health, he said, “Incompetent, fire the Minister”; he got to the Ministry of Infrastructure Development and Local Government, “incompetent”, he got to Community Empowerment, Sport and Consumer Affairs, “incompetent”; Ministry of Labour, Manpower Development and Industrial Relations, “incompetent”. That is all he could say. There is a word for that. You talk about attacking the messenger; *ad hominem* attacks, attacking the person and failing to see the policy and the measures. He had no contribution to make, expect to come here and attack people personally. He made absolutely no contribution to this budget debate.

He talked to us about cramming children in schools. If anybody crammed children in schools it was that government. We have taken a policy decision that we will reduce class sizes from the 40 and 45 children that were in a class under their regime. I will show you the statistics. In 1995, when we came into office, in all these schools, every one of them, they crammed the children into classrooms because they failed to build any secondary schools. So at the Chaguanas Junior Secondary, in 1995, there were 647 children placed there in Form 1. Under the this Government in 2001, this year, far from cramming, we reduced that number to 456 [*Desk thumping*] a difference of 29.5 per cent. That is the pathway we are on to reduce class sizes so that our students can benefit from the teaching they get in the schools.

Couva Junior Secondary, 1995, 649 children placed; under this Government, 530 in 2001. Mucurapo Junior Secondary, 726 in 1995; under this Government in 2001, 420. It is the same throughout the country, from the 600 and 700, we have

brought it down to 400 and 500 children, and we will continue to decrease the class sizes. So when the Member for Diego Martin East talks about cramming schools—Mr. Douen, himself—he does not know what he is talking about because he has not looked at anything. It just sounds good to say negative, negative, negative. That is all he can do; he has no facts. It became very clear when he said, “you cram children into Form I and now you are picking them up from Form II and sending them all about.” I asked him to name one school where that was happening; he could not name one school, because it is not happening.

If he went to school, and I think he did, he will know that you cannot put Form II's before Form I's. So last year we put the Form I's in and they have now become Form II and we have brought a new Form I in. That is how the school will grow. It is not a question of cramming children; it was a question of making sure and in keeping with our policy and with our vision, that no child will be left behind. In keeping with this budget statement, none shall be left behind. Yes, there were teething problems, but every one of those was worth it to make sure every child got placed in a secondary school.

Last year it was the same debate. Last year we went through all of this; the way in which we were able to place all the children; the fact that we were able to reduce the class sizes. We gave all of that, but they come back again this year and they repeat the same things, but they failed. In 2000, last year, after they had done all of that, the citizens of this country still gave a mandate to the United National Congress to come back on this side of the Bench. It is a repetition of negatives they come with.

Mr. Speaker, on top of all that, the only thing that we have been hearing about throughout this entire debate, is corruption. They cannot attack us on our policy; they cannot attack us on our performance, so they cast innuendoes, they make inferences, they try to muddy people's names.

The Member for San Fernando East went publicly and said that a minister of Government has a substantial shareholding in the Ibis High School—a minister of Government; typical cowardice. When I asked him to name the Minister, he said “We would see about that”. I challenged him to name the Minister and to bring the facts. If he knows who it is, say who it is. That is the strategy they use. They do not name any single one; they say: “a minister” so it is anybody and everybody. It happened yesterday in this House, when one of the Members talked about a minister collecting two salaries, a minister collecting \$30,000—\$50,000. Mr. Speaker, when they say “Minister”, they are tarnishing the whole Cabinet,

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

without naming the person and that is being a coward. If they knew the truth and had the facts they would name the person.

With respect to the Ibis High School, I wonder what happened. [*Interruption*] After we publicly challenged the Member for San Fernando East to bring his facts and name the Minister with shareholdings in Ibis High School, and after it is—my friend from Laventille East/Morvant is a lawyer, there is another legal luminary from La Brea, they are lawyers. They know that you can go to the Companies Registry at any time and search the record and you can see the entire record of ownership, of shareholders of any particular company. They knew that! In fact, one of the reporters—a very good investigative reporter, I must say—did the research, published the news and showed the ownership that from as far back as you want to go, it was clear that not a single Member of the UNC Government or any relative of the UNC Government, on these Benches and the Senate Benches, not a single one of them had any connection whatsoever with the Ibis High School.

The Member for San Fernando East still said: “We will see about that when the time comes.” What was so interesting is the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, as a lawyer, he knows the public record, he came thereafter and filed a question in Parliament to give lineage of ownership, which we did. It was so strange because it seemed to me that he was going totally against the Member for San Fernando East by filing that question because it allowed us in this House to set the record straight and to make it very clear. He must be supporting the Member for Diego Martin West; I do not know what it is. [*Interruption*]

You have not spoken yet; you will have time to speak. Mr. Speaker, similarly, with the construction of schools they have repeatedly attacked this Government with respect to the cost of construction of those schools. Up to when the Member for San Fernando East spoke on Wednesday, he put it on his hit list—according to Minister John, his hit parade, he is on there as the “DJ”. He has put it as No. 10 on his list. Again, that aspersion of corruption.

They spoke on the platform all of last year and continued to speak, each time they said the schools are \$300 million, \$400 million, \$500 million. I want to clear it once and for all what those costs were, so that they would have the facts and therefore would not continue to mislead the public. So we constructed the 10 SEMP schools:

- Brazil High School, 525 students.
- Biche High School, 525 students.

- Tableland High School, 525 students.
- Debe High School, 525 students.
- Coryal High School, 350 students
- Manzanilla High School, 350 students.
- Matura High School, 350 students.
- Valencia High School, 875 students.
- Waterloo High School, 875 students

Creating a total, 4,900 new school places.

The total cost for those schools; for construction, the budgeted amount was \$181,238,387.60. The actual amount was \$203,707,779.30.

Two hundred and three million—“not no \$300 million, not no four, not no five; and by de time dey done it might be \$10 million dey saying.” Two hundred, for cost of construction, a cost increase above the budgeted amount by 12 per cent, and that cost increase is very clear. When we went in—you see, because they did not build any schools in those areas—no schools in Matura, in Brazil, no schools in Coryal, in Manzanilla, no school in Tableland. No school for those children, none whatsoever.

5.30 p.m.

In those areas, infrastructural works had to be done. So that the cost is not just the cost of construction of schools. You are talking about infrastructure costs that should have gone to the Ministry of Infrastructure, but because we wanted to get those things done in time; parts of those were given within the contracts. So, for example, we did construction of a roadway at Brazil in addition to the work there that had to be done. With each of them on a dollar—what you say—“value for dollar”, if you carry out value for dollar, these schools have been well worth every single dollar that has been spent; but you see, again, it is the imputation—the allegation of corruption—everybody corrupt.

We built the schools; somebody made money. I want to make it very clear in the words of one of our Ministers who said, “I did not get a dinner mint from the construction of any of these schools.” Not a single cent came into my hands. These schools were built by MTS at the time under the purview of the hon. Minister—Sadiq Baksh, the Member for San Fernando West was the line Minister for MTS. The Ministry of Education contracted MTS to do these schools. After the schools were constructed the Minister of Finance, with his project unit, has done

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

the audit and these are the costs that I have gotten from the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Education does not build schools. What we do is have our specifications of what we want the schools to be and those are done by the ministries with their technical expertise to build those schools, and that is the cost.

I really want to clear that up, again, no \$500 million, no \$400 million—\$203.7 million. These are the numbers provided by the Ministry of Finance, that has to pay the bills. These are the numbers. [*Interruption*] You will have your turn, Member. You will have your turn.

So, of these 10 schools, nine are open and functioning as I speak. One of those is not. It is the Biche High School and with the Biche High School, as you know, we had problems because of the gas emissions there. I must thank the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, the Minister in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, for the work that he has done with respect to the Biche High School. Because of his intervention, on our request, work is taking place now on the Biche High School that will allow us to open the school very shortly for students to enter that school. So thank you Member for Pointe-a-Pierre for the work you have done for us at that Biche High School.

So, each time they speak about the placement of children in the schools, Mr. Speaker, it is because they failed within their term to provide those extra spaces that were needed. They failed to provide those spaces and I would not be uncharitable. I would admit that, yes, they talked about free PNM education. One of the Members talked about free PNM education but it was free PNM education for some. It was some. The difference between that government and this Government is that this Government takes care of all—not some all, all. [*Desk thumping*] None—not one shall be left behind. That is our policy—not one shall be left behind. So whilst you provided for some, it took this Government to come and ensure that every child got a place.

That is why during the period 1995/1996—2001, the UNC Government has constructed over 50 new schools—five zero—over 50 new schools, Mr. Speaker. Ask them how many they did in the four years they were there. We are talking within our five-year period—50 schools. How many did they do? Not a single secondary school within their time—not one, not one! Last year alone this Government established 25 new secondary schools and this year we established six more new secondary schools and, from 2001 counting, we will be building another 14 secondary schools, and within this five-year term another 50 schools in total, Mr. Speaker. So within that period, within our first term in office, over 50, in the second term in office, another 50. We will be looking at about 100 schools, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Point Fortin asked about the school at Icacos and I feel he did not really read the document. If he read the development programme in the draft estimates he would see very clearly that for both the Point Fortin AC and the Icacos primary, moneys have been allocated within the budget. When he raised the question in Parliament some time ago this is what I said. I said to him, we have the plans, we have the designs and we were awaiting the allocation of moneys within the budget. The budget document has come to him and he stands to speak of those schools without seeing that the moneys had in fact been allocated. So those schools are in line to come on stream.

In school construction the words we have used, Mr. Speaker, are that we have been spending a lot of time on the hardware with respect to education—that is the schools themselves—the plant, the furniture, the equipment. At the moment, some of our schools still have a shortage of furniture. Because we are building so many schools so fast, the furniture industry is taking a little longer to keep abreast and keep apace, but we will keep working to ensure that all those schools have the furniture they need. The computerization of the schools, the hardware—but the hardware is not sufficient. What we need is the software in education, which is what will give us a better quality of education.

Mr. Speaker, if there was any single thing that I should have said in this presentation budget and then just sat it was to give you the results of the Advanced Level Cambridge examinations this year. That alone is sufficient to show that within the education system something good is happening. Something good is happening in education. Therefore, whatever measures, whatever procedures over the last six years, six years—you see, what he wants to say, it happened. It happened in 1995 but it is almost six years now that this Government has had the mandate with respect to education and others.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to use this opportunity to congratulate the parents, the teachers, the schools and, of course, the students who have made Trinidad and Tobago so proud. I have already disclosed the results for two of the students, the names of two of the students, but there are many others. It is 16 students writing the Cambridge A'level examinations this year who have topped the world coming in the first five in the world—*[Desk thumping]* 16 students in various subject areas.

In management of business the first place went to Titon Ali, Holy Faith Convent, Couva. In first place, a tie in French—I had mentioned before—Mariel Ganpat of St. George's College. In further mathematics, Mr. Speaker, in third place—Premesh Toolsie from Presentation College, Chaguanas. Our Member for Chaguanas would be very proud of that. In third place—a tie for third place—

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

again in further maths, Trisha Mor of Presentation College, Chaguanas, and in fifth place in maths, Deepak Maharaj from Presentation College, Chaguanas. So we got the third place tie, two students and the fifth place in further mathematics.

In physics, the fifth place went to Deepak Maharaj, again from Presentation College. In management of business I told you we got the first and we also got the fifth place. What is very, very good about this, Mr. Speaker, is that this student, Ria Mohammed, came from the El Dorado Senior Comprehensive School. [*Desk thumping*] In English literature, Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago came second, third and fourth. The second place in English literature went to Sheba Mohammed of St. Joseph's Convent, St. Joseph, the third place to Suzanne Bhagan, St. Augustine Girls' High School and there was a fourth place tie to Andre Bagoos of St. Mary's College.

In geography, Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago came second, third, fourth and fifth in Caribbean geography. [*Desk thumping*] The second place went to Chanelle Fingal of St. Joseph's Convent in Port of Spain; third place to Kerry Brendon Nagee, Naparima Boys' College; fourth place to Andre Bagoos, St. Mary's College and the fifth place, which was a tie, to Elisabeth Abraham, Holy Name Convent, Port of Spain. In history, Mr. Speaker, the second and third places went to Trinidad and Tobago. The second place was Tavernelle Wells of Bishop Anstey High and the third place to Chike Pilgrim of Queen's Royal College.

What I find to be most outstanding, Mr. Speaker, is that Trinidad and Tobago placed first in the world in non-Spanish speaking countries for Spanish at the A'level Cambridge examination [*Desk thumping*] and so, this is the quality that we speak about. If you want to judge what we have done you judge it by the results. Something good is happening in education. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, the comment, "What we have to do wid dat?" Mr. Speaker, it is very clear, this never happened before. It did not happen before. [*Desk thumping*] It took six years under a UNC Government for 16 students to top the world at the Cambridge A'level examinations and we will continue to do better. I know the Members opposite would feel proud of the students as well, I am sure. [*Interruption*] I am sure they are very proud of the students. Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the students, I am very proud of the teachers, of the schools and of the principals and once again I congratulate all of them for this outstanding performance. [*Desk thumping*]

Whilst there are those who are performing so well in the system, there are many within the system, Mr. Speaker, who need help for various reasons. They may have learning challenges or they may have challenges because of peculiar

economic and social criteria and social factors. They also, therefore, have challenges in order to cope within the education system but we have not left those students behind either. We have brought them forward and we will continue to help them. How have we done it? We have done it over the years by continuing to increase the School Feeding Programme, the budget allocation for the School Feeding Programme, and this year once again the Minister has been kind enough to further increase the allocation for the school feeding programme.

Mr. Speaker, everyone knows, we have said it before and we repeat, “Yuh cyar learn on hungry belly”. You cannot learn on “hungry belly”. So it is we have put in the lunch programme, we are expanding that programme and we will be going into expansion of the breakfast programme—food, Mr. Speaker. However, it was not only just with food to help those who are socially disadvantaged—free school transport. We have continued to increase the free school transport. Yes, so you get the food, you get the transport to come to school. For the children who did not have books we also put into place a system of free textbooks within the primary school system for those children who cannot afford it. [*Desk thumping*]

Next year it is our intention to put into place for needy students free textbooks for the secondary school sector, but first we are working with the textbook committee to standardize the secondary school textbooks in the same way that we had standardized the primary textbooks. In that way we will be able to bulk buy and we will be able to provide free textbooks to needy children. So again I am saying free meals, free transport and then the free textbooks through the school— [*Interruption*—free nutrition the Member is reminding me.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying we have helped in this way for those socially—but those with learning challenges we also have to help, and that is why, despite all the flack that I have received and despite all the negative comments that have come with respect to the Ibis High School, I am still committed to ensuring that children such as those who were placed in the Ibis High School, that they too have a place and a chance in the education system. The results coming out of the Ibis High School have been so encouraging. Out of the 487 students we placed there last year, who were the students who needed the greatest help, those students have been assessed—124 of them—as ready and have been moved into regular Form Is. [*Desk thumping*]

Contrary to what the Member for Diego Martin East was telling you that we put them all over the country—totally untrue. They have remained within the school in a regular Form I. We gave them the option and only about 12, maybe about 18 of those students—of all those students, only about 18 of them took the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

option to relocate to another school—took up that option, perhaps because for some of them the transport arrangements would have been better at either the Diego Martin Junior or the Mucurapo Junior. The majority of the students said—I remember when we visited that school. When we went to them, we visited with the parents and the children. We said, “Look, these are your results. If you wish, you have the option to go to another school where space is available.”

As I said, I gave them the option because there had been so much negative about that school. I gave them that option and it was so heartening and encouraging when the students and the parents stood, almost unanimously, and said they did not wish to leave the school, they felt at home in the school; they felt they belonged to the school. Mr. Speaker, that school has not been easy. We have faced a lot of difficulties with it, but nothing good comes easily. So it is we have spent a lot of money on that school.

I have asked the Minister of Finance, through his programme unit, his project implementation unit or project coordinating unit, to do an audit with respect to the moneys spent on conversion of the school. I believe the amount of money spent on actual conversion is about \$11 million. My friend from Laventille East/Morvant is telling me something about \$23 million. Let me disabuse him of that. About \$11 million has been spent, just above \$11 million, I am advised, with respect to the conversion costs, when it was estimated that the conversion costs would be less than that. I have, as I said, asked the Ministry of Finance to do the dollar for value audit with respect to expenditure.

Again, the Ministry of Education does not build schools. Our business is with respect to the curriculum, with the placement, with the teachers, with the training. The agency responsible was the MTS, the line minister was the hon. Minister Baksh and I have asked the Minister of Finance to do that dollar for value audit. If the dollar for value audit shows this has been done within what was supposed to be done, what the engineers and the architects say, then there would be nothing for the others to speak about. If it is shown that it went over, then we will have to find out why, Mr. Speaker. We have absolutely nothing to hide. Just as we said, no minister of government had any shareholding in that property, again, no Minister of Education collected any money with respect to the conversion of that property.

If it is they cannot, as I say, challenge the policy, then they have to look for what they allege to be corruption, Mr. Speaker. Time and time again, with all the allegations that they have made, the intention is clear. If you “pelt it” long enough and hard enough, it will stick. That is why at each opportunity we need to put the facts so that they do not continue to mislead people. So in school construction we have gone way ahead.

With respect to providing for students who are challenged, I am saying we have made spaces not just at the Ibis High School but throughout the country. For the first time last year, we dealt with students who were left behind all the time by that administration. These were the students who would not have been given a place in secondary schools. We placed them into Form Is special, we created a programme of work—an operational framework for them. We did not have the perfect framework last year. It was the first year. We have learned from that experience, and this year an entire operational framework has been provided for all students in the Form Is special to cater for their special needs.

All children do not learn at the same rate and in the same manner. It is just human nature that it will not happen. What is important for the system is to provide for those, whether they are on the top of the curve or on the sides of the curve—the brightest, the middle and at the end. All students need to be catered for and there is something very interesting we are doing with respect to the Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP). Again, within this budget, allocation has been made for the system-wide phasing in of the CAP. That really is very crucial. We have done it to a limited extent but it is very crucial in terms of the final assessment for movement, a transition into the secondary school. So with the CAP we will have a better instrument in the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) for that movement and transition to the secondary school.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when they are saying that all children should not go to secondary school, in the United Kingdom, every child from 11-plus moves into secondary school. In the United States, every child moves into secondary school. What is wrong with students of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Interruption*] In Canada. What is wrong with Trinidad and Tobago? Why should we continue to be a country of the Third World, of the underdeveloped world, and say only some, only a selected few would have a space to go to? Why should we do that?

Mr. Speaker, for the first time this year, the budgetary allocation for education, not just the Ministry of Education—education plus human development which is for the tertiary level aspects of education. For the first time we are moving closer to developing and First World countries because, in this budgetary allocation, for the first time 17 per cent of the budget—compared to 8 and 9 per cent that the PNM used to allocate—has been allocated to education. Why? Why is that so, Mr. Speaker? It is very clear that the world we live in now is no longer one where you can deal with living by your hands and living by muscle and brawn. This is the world of knowledge.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

You know, we talk about a knowledge-based society. We have moved. It is not just a knowledge-based society, it is a knowledge society that we look for. It is a knowledge society we want to create. It is a knowledge society we work for. In terms of providing the jobs, in terms of providing the kind of work force, a cadre of skilled people who can take up the jobs in this kind of world, the education sector is vital. If we fail within that sector, we cannot have the sustainable development that we want.

5.50 p.m.

It is vital that we put our money where our mouth is when we talk about a knowledge-based society; an intelligent nation. We must put our money where our mouth is, and that is why the education budget has been as it is this year, Mr. Speaker. Because the vision is very clear. The way forward is exceedingly clear, to develop and to build an intelligent nation. When we talk about software, what are the ways then, that we are doing all of this, building all these nice schools, putting all the multimedia labs, the science and technology labs, putting in the computers, and paying teachers more money.

Contrary to the view that our teachers would have fled and gone to the United States, it is only a tiny percentage of teachers who took up the offer to go to the United States, and I am sure those who did not go must be very happy that they never took up that offer to go to New York. It is only a tiny percentage because this Government—they talk about teachers being demoralized. They never sought to give teachers a proper compensation package. It took a UNC Government last year to give a proper compensation package. In fact, part of this budget is not just for that increased compensation package from last year, but it is to meet the increments; the increases the teachers will get this year and they will get next year again.

So, in terms of the software, paying the teachers a proper compensation package, how do we manage this? What we have done is put into place, finally, the allocation for something the hon. Prime Minister has been speaking about from day one, myself as Minister of Education and my colleague from Tabaquite. The hon. Prime Minister was talking about the local school boards. In fact, it was the Member for Tabaquite, as then Minister of Education, who brought the first pieces of legislation and documents relating to the establishment of local school boards and, as all of us in this House know, this became law earlier this year.

We could not implement it without money. It takes money and so, in this budget, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy and very pleased to say that \$15 million has been allocated for the establishment of local school boards throughout the country. [*Desk thumping*] The proposal was sent for the moneys to be put into the

budget, but we were not sitting idle. We had begun our work within the Ministry for implementation, so it is just a matter of time for these local school boards to be put in place.

Mr. Valley: What? What do you need \$15 million for?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: What do we need \$15 million for? It is very simple. If you put a local school board in place to assist with the management of schools, the running and the maintenance of the schools, instead of taking the repair grant that we spend on the schools and centralizing it at headquarters in the Ministry, what I asked the Ministry of Finance to do is take some of that repair money and maintenance money give it as a grant to the schools that the local school board would assist in helping. That is part of the money.

Another part of the money is with respect to the report that the persons be paid some kind of stipend. Persons serving on the local school boards to be paid a stipend. That is where some of the money will be going, Mr. Speaker. So, we will be putting that into place.

We will have the local school boards, but that is not enough. What we have also put into place for management is with respect to school supervisors. Mr. Speaker, since 1962 to now, the secondary education sector has grown by 500 per cent, but the number of school supervisors has had little or no growth whatsoever. That is why we experience so many problems within the school system. I know the Prime Minister spoke about school inspectors. So where are the school inspectors we used to know when we were growing up? The school supervisors are, in fact, the persons who were once called inspectors.

When you have no growth in that sector in terms of the number of school supervisors from 1962 to now, and the number of schools has grown, the number of students has grown, the number of teachers has grown, you cannot have that level of supervision that is necessary. So, we took a proposal to Cabinet to increase the number of school supervisors that was approved by the Cabinet and, so, within this budgetary allocation again, we will be able to fill more positions of school supervisors. So that is the school supervisors and the local school boards.

Within the school itself now, we will be implementing—and again, moneys are now put into the budget for a system of heads of department and deans of studies. The head of the department will be the one to help monitor the curriculum and the teachers and, therefore, give us a better quality of education. The deans of studies will assist and give pastoral care to students within the system.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Mr. Speaker, can you imagine a school with 1,500 students, one principal and one vice-principal, about 100 teachers, and of the administrative structure within that school. It is very clear with that kind of structure why we have so many problems in some of our schools. One principal, one vice-principal, 1,500 students, 100-plus teachers; not to mention the ancillary staff. This is why we have put in the heads of department so, therefore, the teachers will be broken up into smaller units with a head of department who can then monitor those teachers in a better manner for more efficient and better quality teaching strategies.

Then the deans of studies can then take these 1,500 students, and I think we have placed about 200-plus students per dean. So one dean will have that pastoral care. A student who has a problem does not have to wait until he could see this one principal. Mr. Speaker, 1,500 children waiting to see one principal and one vice-principal will never happen. We talk about indiscipline and violence in the schools. They have no one. And so, if we go to the 200 students per dean, there will be a greater teacher/student interaction that could allow, again, for more efficient use of the facilities of the education sector. So, heads and deans to give us a better management structure.

I am saying that we have gone for the hardware. We are looking now to the software. The point being made always about quantity versus quality, our emphasis has always been on quality, but you cannot have quality if you are outside the school, so we had to create the school places to put the children in schools. We had to put the children in.

When they left the children out, I heard the Member for Diego Martin East again when he spoke this morning—the callousness with which he talked about where are the 9,000. That we were fooling people, because this year there were 21,000 writing and last year 30,000 writing. Mr. Speaker, that is the 9,000 that they failed to give a place every year, but because we picked up all the children last year, now we have the 21,000 to deal with, and next year it will be about 21,000 and thereafter.

That is why they could not believe. I remember someone talking to me when we said we had placed all the children and, in fact, not only had we placed all the children this year, we have reduced the class sizes, reduced the numbers we were putting into the schools and they asked, how did we do that. They could not imagine, they did not have the vision, they did not know it could be done. Again he is saying I crammed Form Is into a school.

Mr. Speaker, there is a school with a capacity of 875 students. A brand new school. A capacity of 525. There are the 10 new schools I talked about last year;

capacity of 825, 350 and 525. So what do you do? You put form Is and leave the rest of the school totally empty, and you tell 9,000 children there is no school place? No vision, no imagination. They had none, and that is what we did with our vision.

We are saying you have empty school plant. All we had to do was to utilize that plant, and that is what we have done. That does not stop the ones coming in each year. They felt the whole thing would collapse. From that 10 we did last year, we have another 12 that is to come on track. When those 12 come on track, not only would we be able to have reduced class sizes further, but we would be able to do something that is drastically needed in the education system. That is to de-shift all those schools on that side when they put those children in the shift system. They had children going to school one o'clock in the day.

I have relatives who went through the Junior Secondary system, and up to this day, Mr. Speaker, they cannot start to function in the morning. They have always been used to starting to function from one o'clock in the day. We hear within the school sector now there are children when they leave the Junior Secondary going on to the Senior Comprehensive, they have no sense of belonging. There are problems they encounter when they go into a normal day school.

Research has shown it. Because of the shift system in the Junior Secondary School they could not leave anything in their desks because another shift had to come, you see. So they are accustomed walking with this book bag on their backs whole day—this is fact—and when they entered after the three years into a regular school, they continued to walk with the book bag on their backs, even though there was no need.

Research has shown the effects of that shift system in the Junior Secondary School. Totally evil shift system, and they are talking about us putting all the form Is. I had that option last year. When I had 30,000 children to place last year, I could have done what they did. I could have said I would put 15,000 on the morning shift and 15,000 on the evening shift, but we did not do it because we knew the dangers of placing the children in the shift system. So, when we construct these further secondary schools, if there is one thing that we would want to do, it is to do away completely with that shift system. Shift away from the shift system. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Your time has expired. Would you want to wind up or do you want an extension?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Yes.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, all this is good. Academia is great, and from the A' level results we see the outstanding performance academically, but that is not enough. We have seen and we know very clearly that you cannot simply go and do the bookwork. Again, we have seen the dangers and the problems we have encountered.

What we did was to introduce, as you know, a period of worship in every school in Trinidad and Tobago. We start the day with a period of worship, the religious education component has been there. We have begun the programme of morals and values-based education in the schools and we are continuing to train our teachers within that programme—an infusion of morals and values education.

We have also developed a code of conduct for our students. That code of conduct met the approval of all the stakeholders, and it is with the printers now to be distributed in the school system. What the code of conduct does is very clear. When we came to this Parliament, every Member in this House who was in that Parliament voted for a Bill to abolish corporal punishment in schools. Yet, after they all sat here and passed it, they went out there and complained that we had abolished corporal punishment, but every one of us sat here and passed it.

Since then, the question has been, yes we have abolished corporal punishment. What do we do in its place? What we have done is the code of conduct which sets sanctions for various types of behaviour. The student would, in effect, know that if you breach a regulation or a rule, this is the sanction. That code of conduct would go to all the schools, we will build on it based on the experiences from the schools to make a better document in terms of the code of conduct.

One of the most interesting things is that in spite of all the allegations, in fact, with respect to violence and indiscipline in the schools, no research, no scientific research, has ever been done. So what you know in your head, you know it in your own head and mind as educators and persons in the public, but no scientific research has ever been done as to the causes and what you could use or not use to combat it or to deal with it.

Whilst it is in 1989 there was a whole National Consultation on Violence in Schools and a whole host of recommendations and, again, in 2000 last year I had asked the task force to pull all the documents together and tell me what are the main recommendations, this year we began to implement some of those

recommendations. We are still doing it without any real scientific research, so that whilst yes, we may succeed to some extent, you need scientific data, you need the empirical research in order to know what you are doing, if you are attacking the right things and going in the right direction.

In the budget statement, you will recall when the hon. Minister of Finance spoke, he talked about an area that is a top priority for the Ministry of Education, because I think in terms of the training, in terms of the teaching, in terms of the management structures, we are doing very well; but we have to tackle the issue of violence and indiscipline in the schools.

When the Minister of Finance spoke about the research that the Ministry of Education has put forward to be done with the Centre for Criminology and Criminal Justice, a project to examine the extent of youth deviance in schools, its genesis, its implications for the educational system, this will assist us towards quality education, developing an appropriate database that will help us in policy making. In particular, the research will seek to understand the processes to which social, psychological, economic and physical factors contribute to such deviance and then help us to develop appropriate intervention programmes for deviance reduction subsequently.

Implementation of the intervention programmes will involve the major partners in the system: teachers, parents, community and Government. But we have not sat still. This research has already begun. We are not sitting still waiting for this. As I said, my friends on the other side must get the plan. We are not waiting till then. We must do something now, and we have already begun a number of school intervention strategies using the community with parents together with the Ministry in order to reach parents, in order to reach out to the community. Some of those are already in place within the budgetary allocation; \$3 million has been placed for school intervention programmes for dealing with indiscipline and violence in schools.

Together with the Ministry of Health, we have done something else that will again assist us, not just with the academics, but with a way of life and a better quality of life. We have developed a framework for health and family life education in our schools. The Ministry of Health, ourselves—and UNESCO has given us some funding—and the Ministry of Community Empowerment. So the three Ministries are jointly working on this programme for health and family life education.

Within the school structure, we are talking about the curriculum and the syllabus that has the core academic areas but, in addition, we know that we need

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

more than that. That is why we have gone to morals and values education, health and family life education, and religious education. All to be components of the school curriculum.

With respect to curriculum development itself, Mr. Speaker, they talked so much about quality education. Do you know that there was never a written curriculum for the secondary schools or the primary schools of the country? No written curriculum. It took a UNC Government to develop and to write that curriculum, and so at the primary level we have completed draft curricula in science, in language arts, in maths, in integrated arts, in Spanish, and the science programme for the primary schools was developed.

These are being worked upon. Some of them are already out there—the language arts and the maths—for the SEA, and with respect to the secondary school curriculum, we have done several of the subjects: secondary level science, maths, visual and performing arts, technology education, physical education, social studies, English and we will continue with the other core subjects.

We are putting a core of subjects, and there was the whole debate about tech-voc education and whether this Government was moving tech/voc education out of the schools. It is still a moot point, but it is very clear that we cannot continue with the traditional craft subjects, and that is what the tech/voc education was about. Craft subjects, because the world has changed before our very eyes.

What we have done instead is bring in the new curriculum of technology studies which allows you to deal with the kind of world in which we now live and the world of tomorrow. The technology studies will be industrial arts. It will deal with food technology, but we are dealing with it with respect to technology rather than the hammer and nail kind of scenario of the craft subjects. So, core subjects within the curriculum, and then there will be those other subjects students may wish to take up in greater depth and in greater detail. Curriculum is also being worked upon.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much happening in education. There is so much still to happen. As I say, I will always admit that we have not done enough. We still have so much more to do and we will continue to do that work. We are looking at preparing future leaders. We are looking at preparing our future scientists, our future teachers, our future politicians. We are looking at the future of this country when we look at the children in the schools.

6.10 p.m.

That is why our vision for the future of Trinidad and Tobago has to be firmly grounded in our school system. This Government has not shirked its responsibility.

We will not shirk our responsibility and we will continue to put our best foot forward and our best effort in the education of the children of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Eulalie James (*Laventille West*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to join this debate on the Appropriation Bill 2002. The Bill seeks to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2002, by authorizing the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sum of \$16,494,57,953.

I join with my colleague from Arima in congratulating the Minister of Finance on the presentation of his first budget. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, when I look at the figures quoted here, I cannot help but wonder how much of this will reach the constituency of Laventille West. My concern is great, when I look at the treatment meted out to the constituency of Laventille West.

I am always one who maintains that regardless of party politics, constituencies should be serviced. You must recognize the representatives of these constituencies and assist where you can, because you are not assisting the representatives, you are helping the constituents, those who would like to seek a better way of life. I hope that some of the Ministers in the Government would take a different approach during this year to assist the constituency of Laventille West in a more meaningful way.

When I look at the dollar for dollar programme which, in itself, might be commendable, I can see quite a number of the students who are very brilliant—and make no mistake about it, we have very brilliant students in Laventille. We have just recently produced a doctor and we have students studying law and so on. But it is a fact that some of them, as bright as they may be, will never be able to access this programme, because the fact is, their parents are not working. In fact, in some cases, those students who have progressed, went to seek jobs in order to put themselves through university and we have to commend them highly. I am wondering how this dollar for dollar programme will impact upon them. It is a real concern.

I listened carefully to the Minister of Education a while ago and while I listened I threw my mind back again to my Laventille situation. I do not think she knows the half of what is happening in some of those schools where some of our children from Laventille have gone. It is not just a mere question of pushing a child in a school. The Member for Tobago East alluded to the fact of readiness; many of them were not ready. Quite a number of them were not ready and that is why there was the system of post-primary and all that kind of thing, no matter it is

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

condemned so much. It assisted greatly, because what we found is that students who failed the Common Entrance Examination and were given second chances, made it to higher schools. The programme was a very good one and it assisted them, because they worked hard for it.

My daughter used to go to St. Catherine's, a private school on Pembroke Street and when she sat the Common Entrance Examination we all expected her to pass for a very good school, because it was a prestige primary school. She was placed in the Belmont Junior Secondary School, but she had a second chance. I said to her, "I am not going to ask anybody to help you to go into a secondary school, you have to work for it; make up your mind to go back to school."

She went back to school and she passed for the Woodbrook Secondary School and I was satisfied that she passed for a secondary school. So you see, Mr. Speaker, that system was not bad, in itself; the children must be prepared. You have to be sure that they know what they are doing, because many of them would go to the school and would not understand what is before them. Understanding what is before you is important as a student. If you do not understand, you will never be able to do the work.

Mr. Speaker, I am very worried about the way some of those students were just placed in secondary schools, and not the secondary schools or the prestige school, but those other schools. I am very worried, because already I am seeing the effect of it. Parents are speaking to me about their children not doing well. One year has gone and we are going to see the effect of this four years later. I am not saying this to bring down the programme or anything like that, but it is a fact.

The Minister spoke about the Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP). Mr. Speaker, if that programme had been in place before, the programme that they have put in place now would have done a lot better. This is what they should have done before and not put the cart before the horse, but bring CAP in place and then move on. But they were in a hurry and we understood why. As I said before, I am very concerned and I just pray for my children that they would do well.

Right now we have the Morris Marshall Foundation and we give scholarships to many of those students and that is why I can boast about the doctors and lawyers from Laventille. Many of them we have assisted because their parents could not afford, so we have been picking up the slack. In addition to that I would go out of the way and ask for donations to help them and this is how they managed. I am very proud of them. They go out there and work hard and succeed.

Mr. Speaker, I rose to speak on two very important areas; important in the sense that they are people-oriented. Not very much is being done at this stage for

those two areas. I speak of the areas of culture and community development. The areas of community development and culture are significant contributors to our national heritage. Our national heritage is comprised in part of the arts, culture, entertainment and sport. These disciplines are created, nurtured and developed in our communities. It is in this context that any government must view its policies, programmes and fiscal allocations, as it relates to the true development, preservation and protection of what is our major asset: our national heritage.

What we consider unfortunate is the fact that there is no provision whatsoever to showcase, to enhance the raw skills or to commercialize what is a significant national asset. In my political leader's reply yesterday he mentioned that a PNM government will focus on an academy of the performing arts, for it is important to look at the all-round development of people in the cultural arena which must include, not only performances, but some aspect of training to ensure continuity in the performing arts and so on.

My political leader alluded to the fact that the PNM recognizes the vital role culture must play in inculcating in a people strong feelings of civic pride, patriotism, dignity and self-worth. We further recognize that in the context of cultural industries, culture may generate products that can be marketable and exportable and, in the process, be instruments of major economic activity. We in the PNM believe that culture should be given more prominence than it enjoys at present. Culture right now is very low-key.

We have a Minister of Human Development, Youth and Culture who has three areas to cover in his Ministry. I cannot even remember all of them—human development, youth and culture. These three areas are heavily people-oriented, so one has to suffer. Apparently it is the area of culture, because we are hearing about the other two, but culture is not given any great advantage in the situation. Therefore, I am appealing to the Minister and, of course, his junior Minister, to pay some more attention to culture.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask some questions. What is the status of the National Carnival Commission? Some months ago, two board members resigned of which the Chairman was one. The Vice-Chairman was asked to hold on for a month, if my memory serves me right. I also heard that the Minister responsible was seeking some high calibre person to fill his place. To this day, I do not think such a person has been found and the committee seems to be just operating in a sort of ad hoc manner with just the Vice-Chairman holding on.

Carnival is one of the greatest shows on earth, coming out from Trinidad and Tobago, of which we are proud. It is not far away; it will be held in February I

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

believe. What is the Ministry putting in place to ensure that carnival will be a great success? They have just recently, as they would say, empowered the three interest groups, but every year these interests groups have problems; they never give them sufficient subsidy to see them through.

In fact, I believe the time has come when they must review, because we are in a different age now, an age of thinkers. We have human resource managers and many high-tech people and so on and we have to change the way that we are doing things. If these bodies have a year in advance to plan, they would be able to match whatever subsidy they are getting from the Government and do what they have to do in order to make their programme successful.

I believe the time has come when we should not now be planning for 2002, but for 2003. They should have already known what they would be getting for 2002, so all now they should be busy just finalizing the plans, because they already know so much money is allocated for 2002 and they have to look for this amount of money. So very early in the game, they would have been looking for their money to put alongside what they would get from the Government.

I want to throw this on the table and see if the Government would look at it. In the first period that they would do it, it would take a lot of money but, in the long run, it would be beneficial for both the Government and the three interest groups. I am tired of hearing the problems that they face: who they owing or people running them down. It is our culture; it is our people and we should not treat it in that way. We should have a culture of which we are proud.

Mr. Speaker, I just threw that out for what it is worth and I hope that some little thing would be taken into consideration to ensure that such a change is made.

I have another question that I want to ask. What is happening to the National Carnival Institute? If I am wrong tell me, but it is my understanding that it is closed down. I understand that Dr. Hollis Liverpool who was heading the institute is now out of the country doing something else, somewhere else. Nobody else has been put in place. In fact, as I said, I understand that the place is closed down; it is not working at present, but it is a very good idea to have a carnival institute.

There is where we will document things to preserve our national heritage. Remember, we have been losing great calypsonians and their history must be documented for the future generation. I really like the idea of the National Carnival Institute, not only for our calypsonians but to document the history of carnival, the steel band, Desperadoes, the greatest steel band on earth, among others. The children must know about these things.

Let me tell you of something that happened to me years ago. Rain was falling very heavily and I was sheltering under a shop. Some young people joined me there to shelter and we got into singing and whatnot, so I turned to one of them and asked, "Sing a calypso for me." They did not even know a calypso. They started to sing this dub thing and I stopped them one time. I said, "I do not want to hear that, it is a calypso I asked you for." So it is from that, that our children would know about our culture, steelpan, calypso and our carnival. The National Carnival Institute would assist in bringing this to bear so that our children will know about it.

I am asking the Minister if it is a fact that that institution is closed down, if he could review it. I noticed that there is some little allocation in the budget for it, but not very much, which means there is no great importance in it again. I hope that he would look at it and revive it so that it could serve its useful purpose.

The other issue that I know that they spoke about sometime ago is a national cultural council. I do not really know the status of that and I would like to ask the question, whether it is functioning. How far are they with this national council? Again, it is a very good idea, because I understand that it will act as a sort of umbrella organization and you could have the various aspects of cultural, perhaps, under this national cultural council. That would serve very well, again, for the children of our nation and other persons who might not know very much about the culture.

6.30 p.m.

So if that too is not up and running I hope they would do their work, because, as I say, Mr. Speaker, I am not hearing much of our culture and there are avenues that you can do things so that we would know that you care about the culture. Remember the culture is our people and I am not speaking about only Best Village, I am speaking about the Chutney and all the other various cultures we have, because we are a cosmopolitan nation and we are mixed. In fact, we are said to be a rainbow country and, therefore, we have various cultures that we should encourage in our country.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that they will do something about those two areas that I asked about whether they are up and functioning. I suppose when they reply they will let me know the status of them.

Another thing I am very concerned about and I talk about it all the time. When it was coming on stream, I was one who was not so much for it and I spoke about it because I thought we were not ready for it and we were doing it in a sort of *ad*

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

hoc hurried manner, and that is the national steel band. What is really happening to the national steel band? Is it that you are only finding accommodation for them? Right now you are studying to buy a building for them, or build something for them. Is it that they only are to be trained to read music? I even understand they have some programme to deal with COSTAATT at some time to come which means all they are doing is training these people. For what purpose?

Mr. Speaker, we just had two very important events happening in our country. Our Independence Day Celebration and the opening of the International Under-17 Football Tournament. The Independence Day Parade could have used the national steel band as an extra piece of the instrument there, because much of the uniformed groups that march were not accompanied by any music. Where was our national steel band? Where was our national steel band when the Under-17 football was opened? Where was it? We are speaking about the national steel band, you are only training and paying these “fellas”, but to do what? What is the policy of that national steel band? How long are you going to keep that group of “fellas” in that national steel band? Until they are old, or grey? What is really the plan for that national steel band? These are some of the concerns we have.

Now I saw in the budget a big allocation for National Carnival Commission to the tune of \$32 million, but I wonder how much of that would be given to the interest groups. I hope that some light could be thrown on that and we will hear whether the sums would be more substantial or not.

Mr. Speaker, as I say, culture is a very important part of our society and we have various cultures that we could bring together. In fact, culture on the whole, whether it be Best Village, Chutney, and you have the Sugar and Energy Festival and all these things which can serve as such a unifying force in our society. The politics will not unify us; culture, sports, these areas will unite us. The politics seek to divide us because we are at one another's throat and we are looking to upstage each other, and the Government does not recognize the Opposition and *vice versa*. Politics will not unite our country and do not believe the hon. Prime Minister could do anything about it. He will never be able to unite this country, but culture, if they use our culture, sports and all these things, they would recognize how much we could come together as one.

Mr. Speaker, the other day when I asked a question about the Best Village, I asked it because Best Village in particular, is very dear to me. I am a product of the Best Village and I know of the enjoyable times I used to have practising and getting ready and it was a real nice time in our communities to get ready for the Best Village.

The Minister said that he was planning to hold a symposium. A symposium was held in 1996, did it not serve the purpose then? Did you not find out what kind of restructuring you needed to do at that time? What happened to that symposium? Did anything good come out of it? Why do you want to hold another one now? To what end? It may turn out the same way. So it means that we may never have Best Village, but is it because there was no allocation for Best Village for this year why it was not held? Can we know the truth about that?

Mr. Speaker, first and foremost for us is the cohesive function of culture in all its forms, from a variety of cultural heritages. We can, as I said a while ago, reinforce and unite Trinidad and Tobago. We are in a society which spans various aspects of our culture whatever their origins and as I said before, whether it be Chutney, Hosay, Sugar and Energy Festival, Best Village, whatever and they are mutually respected, imitated, co-mingled and cross-fertilized with each other.

Mr. Speaker, culture is not an instrument of threat, fear or anxiety. It is appreciated by all, irrespective of ethnic or religious origins. Culture in this country provides a common ground for all, irrespective of ethnic origin and that was the intention of the founder of the Best Village Programme, Dr. Eric Williams. It is the vehicle that would act—and I repeat again—as a unifying force for all of us, because it is not just for people of African origin as some would want you to believe. It was meant for everybody in this country to get involved and if we do this, Mr. Speaker, you will see the difference in this country. Some people opted not to come in, not because it was not open to them. So maybe now they should take the opportunity and join with others to make this work. The Best Village is a very good opportunity and the same foundation and the various programmes are still the way to go.

The other day the Minister talked about bringing new aspects into it like Village Olympics and so on. I would have him know that is an integral part of Best Village. I could remember attending Village Olympics. We had the “best garden” and all that sort of thing, and everybody knows that the Folk Fair is a regular feature as well. Just as the programme is—you do not have to change. Maybe you could modify here and there, you could add if you want, but the basic is still the way to go.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to make bold here today to say to the Minister, stop killing our Best Village. Do what you can to bring it back on stream as it was before, as I said if you want to add anything, no problem. You are the Minister,

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

you may have different ideas and so on, but this thing can work for us. It worked in the past and it can work in the future.

I could remember attending Best Village Programmes and you could hardly get a seat. If the programme started at 8.00 p.m., one had to be there by 4.00 p.m., or 5.00 p.m. in order to get a seat. Why can we not seek to bring back those days? When you get there sometimes the person you are sitting beside had a basket of food, with all kinds of things and it is a whole picnic and you are having a good time, and you used to enjoy that as we got to know one another. That is what it is all about, you make friends and it does not have anything to do with ethnicity, religion or anything like that. All of us make friends regardless of who we are, or where we come from. That is what Best Village is, that is what our culture is.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very grieved about what is happening to our culture in this country. I am really very grieved and I hope that something would be done to improve this situation. Quite a number of our prominent artists came out of the Best Village. I would not try to mention all of them because they are numerous, but one comes to mind because she passed on recently, “Lady B”, Beulah Bobb and she will never be forgotten for her excellent contribution to calypso. As I say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have several of them.

I am hearing that “Gypsy”, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, came out of it too. I do not know if it is true, but somebody is whispering that to me. If he did come out of that, look how good he has done. That is somebody we used to listen to and enjoy his calypsoes, whether it is “Sinking Ship”, or whatever. We used to enjoy his calypsoes. I used to enjoy his calypsoes, do not talk about his “extempo” styling. There was nobody to beat him, but he shelved all of that. [*Desk thumping*] I hope there will come a time again, whether he is a parliamentarian or not, when he will entertain people again, because just yesterday he was asking why parliamentarians cannot entertain and sing calypso. So I want him to take up what he said yesterday and start entertaining.

Nothing is wrong with that. I sing at different functions. Up to two Sundays ago we had a gospel concert and I sang. People who know I could sing, wherever I go they want to hear me sing, and I sing. I love to sing.

Mr. Sudama: Do you sing for the PNM? They need some music in their soul.

Mrs. E. James: Yes, and I could sing for you here if you want. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that just goes to show the amount of talent we have in this country and we should not allow it to go to waste.

Right in Laventille, there is an abundance of talent, and it is not only the elderly people, the children also. You just name the field and we have it whether it be basketball, football, calypso, steel band, folk, whatever, we have it in abundance, and very good because we have one of the best folk groups in Laventille, the Northwest Laventille Folk Performers. Do not talk about the best steel band and I mentioned it a while ago—Desperadoes—and we have others coming up close to Desperadoes because our young people are just filled with talent. Our culture must not die. Do something about our culture, let it unite our people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I turn to some concerns in my constituency. Let me talk first about the roads, and in talking about the roads, I cannot dismiss the fact that Laventille has been assisted greatly by the Minister of Infrastructure Development and Local Government. I admit he has helped us. [*Desk thumping*] But he too will realize that there is much more to be done and, as a matter of fact I have spoken to him recently about some other areas, and one area which I omitted to mention is Crichlow Hill, which is very, very bad.

I have another concern and probably the Minister could tell me whether anything could be done for Maryland Hill because that is one of the arteries when you come off the Lady Young Road, you just come through there and you reach into the city via Belmont. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: It is a local road.

Mrs. E. James: You are not sure, and I am begging. I would like him to give it some consideration because I am sure he has heard me raise this many times. It was not properly done, and maybe if he looks at it. He has to go into it, he has to go below and see what is wrong and try to correct it.

Another thing, Mr. Minister, because of the meagre allocation given to the region in which I operate—the San Juan/Laventille region—we are unable to get quite a number of things done, and I would like you to look at the allocations given to the San Juan/Laventille region so we can do much more.

Laventille is a constituency that is fraught with problems and if we have some money that we could use—when people ask for certain things to be done, if you cannot do all at once, at least you can do one this year, one next year. We are unable to do anything at all.

Mr. Minister, for several years now and even before you became the Minister we have been asking for money to put new lights in Laventille and we are not able to get that, and people complain to me as I go around the constituency about

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

criminal activities. A lot of people cannot come out of their houses after 6 o'clock.

Hon. Member: Why?

Mrs. E. James: Because they are afraid to come out, and there are no lights, the place is dark and they do not want any harm to come to them.

I would like the Member to consider the lighting situation that is very critical to see what can be done. I see some allocation for lighting but it always comes and nothing is given. So if the Minister can look at that to see what can be done to improve the situation in Laventille.

6.50 p.m.

Some time ago the Minister came here with the list of centres to be constructed and among them was the Eastern Quarry Community Centre. I am sure he remembers it very well. To date nothing has been done and that area is without a community centre. I would like to ask him to look at that. I noticed he has several centres to construct—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Member has five more minutes.

Mrs. E. James: Of my normal time, Sir?

So that if he would look at the Eastern Quarry Community Centre to start some construction on that so that the people in that area will be able to enjoy community life. That is what it would generate; togetherness, unity, people coming out to meet one another in the centre; doing craft, cooking, even pre-schools are held in these centres. I would like him to look at it to see what can be done.

Just recently we had an unfortunate accident in the Gonzales area, where a truck carrying gas—LPG I think it was—was blown up and it destroyed the centre. It is my understanding that the people of Gonzales have approached the Minister, by letter, to ask for assistance but to date he has not replied. Hon. Minister, I ask you to look at that and see what you can do to assist them. They have been given some money from the company that did the damage, but it is not enough to restore that centre.

Job creation in Laventille is a problem. That is an area of concern. I do not know what programmes this Government will like to institute so that the people in Laventille could gain employment. Consider our situation. We are a constituency that has no large industries; we do not have land for agriculture; we are not even near the sea so that the people can fish. The ETP programme as it is—I heard the

Minister say that the San Juan/Laventille region has the most jobs, but Laventille West has very few out of that. The people complain all the time that they do not get any assistance and they come to me asking for help and I cannot help them. If it is the Minister's belief that Laventille West has its full share of jobs, I would like to know where they are, or perhaps he could put me on to somebody who can help these people.

Mr. Deputy 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. W. Peters*].

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. E. James: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Recently I met with groups in my area to find out about some of their concerns in the constituency. I always believe that I do not know everything, even though I have been in the constituency for some time. So I need to ask questions and try to get acquainted with some of the problems that I do not know about. So I had a meeting with these concerned persons, and I want to raise some of the concerns that they raised with me.

There is a group in the Pelican Street section along with the Laventille Rhythm Group, whose desire it is to have a school in the Pelican Extension area. I do not know whether—the Minister of Education is not here—she can perhaps look into it and maybe send her engineers or whoever, because they were looking at a particular area, to see whether it is feasible to put a school there. As you know, the rate at which we are getting children, the existing schools are not enough, and some of them have to travel very far to get to a school. So I would like her to look at that.

There is a networking group encouraged by this Government to form themselves into a group to oversee some of the needs of Laventille. They were to be sponsored by Angostura and the National Lotteries Board, I think. They were to assist them to put certain things in place and to ensure that certain things are done in the area. These two groups no longer assist this networking group and they are left to fend for themselves. But it is not a problem because they are a bunch of dedicated persons who are bent on helping to improve the quality of life of the communities they serve and they are doing a number of things that give such manifestation.

What they are asking for now—and I approach the Minister of Transportation and Minister of Tourism and Tobago Affairs on their behalf—is some

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MRS. JAMES]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

accommodation in the old PTSC compound so that they can have one or two buildings to do some of the programmes that they would like to bring on stream to help the youth, the middle aged, or whoever in that area. They have plans, very sound plans. I wish some consideration could be given to that.

7.00 p.m.

We have another group, the Jubilange People's Community Co-operative Society Limited, right in Gonzales. It is my information—I forgot to ask them which ministry, but the Government has a copy of this strategic plan, 2001/2005. They have very sound plans in this document. As a matter of fact, they do very good programmes in Gonzales. They train people to become computer literate; they teach people to sew; they have accessed heavy-duty machines from embassies and so on; they got some assistance from some agency of the Government, but they need much more assistance.

If you go through this document carefully, you will see the need to assist this group because, here again, you have people who have committed themselves to improving the quality of life. If they are given the kind of assistance they need—because they are not really sitting down and not doing anything; they are helping themselves. The kind of task that they have, they need a lot of help. I hope that whichever ministry has this document, that they would go through it with a view of giving some kind of positive assistance to this group.

There is a group in John John that raised some concerns. They were looking at the development of the youth and so on, and they were saying that programmes that were in place for the youth are no longer there. They are wondering whether the Government would look at them again. Even though some of the youth camps are open, there are a number of them that are not functioning, and this is one area that assists the youth quite a bit.

I understand that there is some aspect of the Conservation Corps in place; they talked about that, and the YTEPP, and so on, but these things are not really making any impact in their communities. They need some assistance so that their young people could be trained and so on, to take their place in the world of work.

These are some of the concerns that they have raised with me. I know that there are funding agencies which they alluded to as well, like FUNDAid, Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC), and so on, but even though they want to go into business, the percentage of interest is so high. I know of groups that have accessed such a facility and had to fall through, because they could not continue with the payments and they were not making any money. So you need to

look at these communities—they are struggling to make it—and see how you can make it easier for them to survive.

I hope that considerations would be given to some of the things that I raised.

I cannot sit before I raise the problem of the Port of Spain East facility right in the Desperadoes pan yard. I keep bringing it up in this House over and over. It is six years now since this Government has been in power. That facility has not been commissioned and it has not been commissioned because there are several things still to be done. One of the errors that was made was to remove the security from that building and they have not put anything else in place. It is the people in the community who have put in their own security because of what they had seen taking place. There are no lights in the building; no proper water facility; the place is yet to be landscaped; there is an access road that needs to be built, and the drainage is yet to be done.

I would like to know what steps the ministry concerned is taking to ensure that this facility is operational. We have seen what that facility can do, because in spite of it not being commissioned—and you know the people of Laventille; they are not going to sit back; they have such a beautiful facility, because it is in a way that it can be used—they go in there and they use it. They get lights, whether from the neighbour or wherever, and if you see how the lights could be so beautiful. They go in there and they had, I think it was, some revival thing, because probably they feel prayers will help. So they go in there and they hold this thing. Just recently the Desperadoes people had an award ceremony, I think it was, and you should see how nice that place was transformed.

I am pleading with the Minister to hasten and do the works that are left to be done in order that that beautiful facility, initiated by a PNM government—

Hon. Member: Oh my God.

Mrs. E. James: Do not say, “Oh my God”. I have a problem, you know, because what this Government must understand, where Trinidad and Tobago is today did not come about because this Government came into power.

Mr. Ramsaran: Will the Member give way?

Hon. Members: Sit down! Sit down!

Mrs. E. James: Do you want to tell me about the East Port of Spain facility?

Mr. Ramsaran: Yes.

Mrs. E. James: Okay.

Mr. Ramsaran: I thank the Member for giving way. I have received a report on my desk and I understand that everything that was put there was vandalized. Could the Member shed some light on that?

Mrs. E. James: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure I said earlier that the mistake they made was to remove the security. When they came in they removed the security. That was the first sign of not caring. [*Desk thumping*] They have shown that they do not care about the people of Laventille. If they had kept the security there and did what they had to do, right now the facility would have been well operational.

I am going back to the point about this Government believing that the earth stood still until they came in. [*Desk thumping*] It is only fair to recognize what other governments did in this country. They must not feel that it is they alone. We recognize what they are doing, and I am sure when we take over after them, we will not say the UNC did not do anything. It would not be right.

So I am appealing to them to stop this nonsense talk about the PNM not doing this, and it is 30 years they were in government and they did not do that! Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is unbelievable. That is what irks me with this Government. I sit here, Friday after Friday, and I listen and it hurts. But now that I have gotten it off my chest, I hope that they would understand where I am coming from, and recognize that it is the efforts of various governments, and moreso the PNM, that brought this country to where it is today. I hope that some of the concerns that I have raised would be really thought through and that some improvements made, especially in the area of culture and moreso in my constituency.

I want to thank you for the time that I spoke and I hope that something good will come out of it. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

7.10 p.m.

The Minister in the Ministry of Human Development, Youth and Culture (Hon. Winston Peters): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I rise to make my maiden contribution [*Desk thumping*] in this august Chamber I would, first of all, like to thank the people of my constituency, Ortoire/Mayaro, [*Desk thumping*] for placing their faith in this calypsonian despite the best effort of some people who would try as hard as they can to ensure that they do not get the best representation that they ever had in their life. To the people of Ortoire/Mayaro, I want you to know that you are wise and, indeed, your name would be forever etched in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. Because, when the history of this country is written, it would be said that you are the first constituency to elect a

calypsonian [*Desk thumping*] the “Extempo King of the World”, to represent you. [*Interruption*]. I could sing it if I am given the opportunity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, no, no. [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Peters: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to extend my condolences to the entertainment fraternity of Trinidad and Tobago that, over the last year and a half, has been losing many artistes with alarming frequency. I would like to extend my condolences to all my fellow artistes. I would also like to take this opportunity to extend my personal condolences to the many people in the United States of America who have lost their loved ones, and, in particular, to all people of the United States of America, my condolences go out to you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was a fellow calypsonian friend of mine who made a song in which he said that in Parliament “dey kicksing”. As a matter of fact, I want some of the people who sit on that side to know that their names are in it. I thought it was a regular calpyso until I came in here and realized that it is true. I realized that it is so true. There are many people in here, as far as I am concerned, who seem to think that Parliament is a place for kicks. I want you to know that I know when to kicks and when not to kicks. [*Interruption*] And where to kicks, you are right, Member for San Fernando East. I would like to say to you—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to have some protection, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Address the Chair.

Hon. W. Peters: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I guess I must be a very unique person, indeed. I must be very unique because it is the first time, I believe, that a person is making their maiden speech and is being interrupted in the way that I am being interrupted. [*Interruption*] I do not need your help. I am very capable of helping myself.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me begin by congratulating my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance on his excellent budget presentation. [*Desk thumping*] I am pleased to report that my ministry, the Ministry of Human Development, Youth and Culture, and in particular the Culture Division, has already been embracing the theme of this year’s budget package. I could not coin it better myself, “One people, one Nation, Leaving No One Behind.” [*Desk thumping*]

As the hon. Minister of Finance indicated in his budget presentation, we share a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural environment; the diversity of our strength. This Government of Trinidad and Tobago views culture as a vital force in the society. The policy of the Government is to encourage the arts and, despite what a lot of people would tell the artistes out there, it is not to control the artistes. As a matter of fact, I am here to say to you that the Government, through the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. W. PETERS]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

Culture Division, would continue to promote and preserve the cultural heritage of Trinidad and Tobago and support culture and the arts so as to motivate and empower citizens to achieve their creative potential.

Government has adopted a philosophy equity and cultural freedom must be integral to the promotion and preservation of our cultural heritage. To this end, the Cultural Council of Trinidad and Tobago operates as coordinating and implementing body, having at its core function, the development and growth of all art forms and promotion of our culture.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want you to know that while this is a budget debate, I am here to explain what my ministry had been doing and what we propose to do in the future. *[Interruption]* I think I have a perfect command of the English language and did not come here for any—*[Desk thumping]*

Development and support of cultural groups and organizations: The division has worked closely with cultural groups and organizations and maintained close contact with them through visits to enhance their development. In addition, cultural officers acted as the liaison between groups and international bodies who either sought to get artistes for entertainment or needed advice about particular individual groups.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is to say that not only do we function as a ministry but, in a lot of ways, we function as an agency.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: For extempo.

Hon. W. Peters: Well, we extempo too because in a lot of ways you have to continue to extempo. *[Interruption]* The Member likes when I am not reading. Since you like that, I want to displease you so I would continue to read. *[Laughter]*

Assistance to groups and individuals: In addition to financial assistance, groups and individuals benefited from the technical expertise of the cultural department officers. They were assisted in the composition of calypsoes and chutney songs; and in the playing of instruments such as the guitar, sitar, tabla, steel pan, keyboard and the harmonium. In the production of mas for carnival, through wire craft and costume design techniques, in dance choreography and techniques, in drumming and in steelpan tuning. Some of groups we assisted financially in 2001 include—I want the House to know that since I have been where I am, we have been doing much assisting in our ministry. We have assisted the National drama Association, National Parang Association, National Dance Association and the Santa Rosa Carib Community.

Cultural exchanges: The cultural division was instrumental in arranging for a number of cultural exchanges between Trinidad and Tobago and other countries.

7.20 p.m.

Government will continue to seize every opportunity to effect cultural exchanges and trade in cultural products for the enhancement of our national heritage. Cultural exchanges were arranged in several countries. I can mention a few of them such as South Africa, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, Nevis and Belize. In addition, the division facilitated attendance of local elders at the World Congress of Orisha Traditions and Culture in Nigeria. The Government contributed \$50,000 to assist the five persons who attended the meeting. One might wonder why after all these years people are now feeling so happy with the cultural ministry that truly represents culture. It is because we have cultural minded people running the ministry.

In keeping with the Government's desire to promote our cultural heritage, the Cultural Division also marked the country's national days of festivals by holding functions for two of our major festivals, namely, Emancipation Day and Indian Arrival Day. The division also facilitated and assisted in the organization of all national days and festivals. The following figures reflect the assistance given to organizations with respect to celebrations. The Government spent \$214,519 in assisting Indian Arrival Day, so that the celebrations could truly reflect a celebration. For Emancipation Day, the Government spent \$325,410. It is a day that reflects a true celebration in Trinidad and Tobago. Baptist Liberation Day—prior to five years ago, you could not even hear that day being celebrated. This day is now celebrated and the sum of \$64,989 was spent on that day. For Divali, a sum of \$186,601 was spent for that. For Eid Ul Fitr a sum of \$75,000 was spent and for Ramleela, \$60,000.

The Cultural Division also assisted several communities financially through the organizational skills of cultural officers in the promotion of community festivals in Point Fortin, Toco, Sangre Grande, Moruga and Couva. As you would very well know around Trinidad and Tobago these days, we are really serious about culture and our cultural heritage. We are not just giving lip service. The Government is spending money to ensure that these festivals are celebrated in a fitting way. Cultural officers, Best Village officers and steelband development officers work tirelessly along with the festival organizers to ensure the success of these festivals. As the Minister of Finance indicated, the Culture Division will explore the potential of making these festivals sustainable products for tourism attraction.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. W. PETERS]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

I must commend the Member for Laventille West for the way she made her contribution. There are two contributions that I heard here today that impressed me, or since I have been in this House. They were made with a view to correcting things they believe are not going so right. They came from the Member for Arima and the Member for Laventille West. It is the kind of contributions that could make people feel like doing something. I appreciate that.

Having said that—[*Interruption*] I would miss it. I would not miss this House. I would be in this House for five years. She wondered about the culture of the country. She asked, “Where is culture going? I tried a while ago to explain some of the things we have done. I am not through because there is so much this Government has done for culture in the time it has been here. Keep in mind that this Government has not been here for 30 years. It has been here for only six years.

Mrs. James: Would you give way?

Hon. W. Peters. Yes I give way.

Mrs. James: I went out for a while, but while I was returning I think that I was picking up that you were indicating how much funding was given to various organizations. That is a continuing thing. I was in the Ministry of Culture and those are the same things that we did. If there is any additional, maybe, you should tell us. It is something that governments do all the time. The new things I would like to know about.

Hon. W. Peters: Thank you, Member for Laventille West.

I was trying to point out to the Member that I know that governments do that, but at what quantum and with what regularity the government did it? It was the NAR government that decolonized the broadcasting system in Trinidad and Tobago, so that our culture could get more exposure. PNM stayed here for 30 years and it was not done. We had one radio station and something called Radiofusion. This Government has done a lot. We picked up the mantle and ran with it from the NAR.

In an effort to bequeath to our children and youth with their cultural patrimony, the cultural division continues with the implementation of cultural emergence projects. The projects target school aged children, especially those at risk with practical workshops on their customs, practices, skills and values associated with our national heritage. The programme seeks to build self-esteem, respect, appreciation of our culture, diversity and assist students to adopt the skills necessary to better cope with their formal curriculum subjects and life circumstances. Culture is a progressive thing. It is not just singing, dancing or composing.

Culture is a way of life. How do we get an appreciation for our culture? We get that by ensuring that our children—if this was done a long time ago, we would have had more people doing more cultural things and building the country culturally. That did not happen a couple years ago. It is only now that much attention is being paid to these things.

We had the Hemispheric Conference for First People. The Culture Division supported the hosting of the conference in Trinidad with great success.

We come to the World's Steelband Festival. At this point in time, I am so happy that we recognized the steelpan as our national instrument.

Mr. Manning: Who did that?

Hon. W. Peters: It was you and I thank you for doing that. I give credit where credit is due. I did it as a calypsonian and I would do it now. What I want to say to you is that making a child is one thing and not nurturing it is something else. You gave birth to it and then you did nothing with it.

Mr. Valley: A boy in Cocorite said that that happened to him.

Hon. W. Peters: A boy in Cocorite said that happened to him. That is so bad. I am sorry for him. I wish that there was something I could do to help him.

Mr. Valley: You can.

Hon. W. Peters: If I can, I will. Believe me.

As I was saying, making a child is no big thing. He named the instrument and we appreciate that, even though Trinidad was called the Land of Steelband and Calypso. I am not taking it away from you. I have already given it to you. I do not take back things. I give credit where credit is due, unlike a lot of people. Credit is due to you for naming it. After you did that, you must admit that you did nothing else for the steelpan. Before you named the steelpan the national instrument, you spent 30 years there and named it nothing. That is okay.

The cultural division assisted in the organization and facilitation of the first World Steelpan Music Festival that took place during the period October 9 to 12, 2000. Eight international, five regional and ten local steelbands competed. The competition showcased the cultural heritage of our nation in a meaningful way to the rest of the world. I am here to say that this Ministry and this Government funded that World Steelpan Music Festival to the tune of \$5 million. I dare say to you that under my stewardship, from where I stand and from where I would be standing for a long while, when next the festival is hosted, it would be better

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. W. PETERS]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

planned, better executed and more money would be spent on it, to showcase our steelpan to the world.

Given the historical significance of Nelson Island to our nation, a jetty has been built at Nelson Island Heritage Site at the cost of \$958,000.50. This jetty is part of the first phase of a project to develop Nelson Island into a museum of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to project the five islands as the historic gateway through which pass many of the makers of modern Trinidad and Tobago.

For years the artistes of this country have been clamouring for some kind of fund to be set up to help the artistes in whatever way. As an artiste myself, I am here to say that the artistes in this country have been the most neglected people in Trinidad and Tobago. Under the PNM government, I dare say we got nothing. To bring in a record in this country was difficult. If you had to get a record in the country, you had to go through about 25 different phases before you could get it. We had no facility to do it. Today, it is opened up and the artistes are finally feeling a kind of relief that is brought about by this Government.

The Ministry of Human Development, Youth and Culture would be hosting a telethon for the arts in October. A telethon committee has already been established to oversee and ensure the production of the telethon. The telethon committee has estimated pledges in the sum of \$500,000. It is proposed that the Government would equally match the fund generated at the telethon. The funds generated would be used to establish a foundation of the arts which will provide a source of funding to assist our artistes in their time of need.

7.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, too often the artistes of Trinidad and Tobago have been promised—there have been too many broken promises. I do not know what kind of glue we would have to use if we ever have to put together those promises made to the artistes of Trinidad and Tobago. These were vague promises that did not mean anything. The artistes have a representative in the Parliament who truly represents them. *[Interruption]* He would have done something, but more things will be done now.

I want to speak a little about the National Carnival Commission. A while ago the Member for Laventille West asked about it. I want to tell her that the National Carnival Commission is well, alive and running and everything will be in place and running well for Carnival 2002.

The National Carnival Commission has also undertaken major initiatives over the past financial year, including these initiatives:

Appropriation Bill (Budget)

Thursday, September 20, 2001

- (1) Fostering, harmonizing and development of the interest groups through greater support in financial management and marketing as evidenced by coordination of seminars for TUCO and NCBA under the aegis of the National Gas Company.

Mr. Speaker, you know that the artistes in this country for years have been making money, but many of them do not know what to do with it. They were never taught how to spend their money or how to invest their money wisely. *[Interruption]*

We do not have to check him, Mr. Speaker. We are having these seminars where the artistes can put their ideas together, where we can show them how to invest their money so that they would not be a burden, even though we are providing for them if they become. Try as you may, there will always be people who will fall through the cracks and would not be able to support themselves. For these people, we are putting things in place, but in the meantime, we are teaching them how to do things and how to invest their money.

- (2) Pursuing the development of promotion of traditional mas'—implementing, achieving, training and cultural preservation through the Carnival Institute.

I refer to the Member for Laventille West because she was very pertinent in her questions. I commend her for showing concern and asking about things that need to be done. I am going to tell her about the Carnival Institute.

We have sourced a person because Dr. Liverpool is no longer with the Carnival Institute. *[Interruption]* He has taken up a job in the Virgin Islands. He is working for U.S. dollars and, unfortunately—*[Interruption]* I know he has resigned, but he is working in the Virgin Islands as a lecturer. We have sourced a person from Canada, a man called Mr. George Maharaj. I do not know how familiar you are with him. *[Interruption]* He is from Trinidad. He is from San Fernando. He lives in Canada. He has been in Canada for 35 years.

Mr. Valley: May I ask a question, please? I just want to ask a question if you will give way.

Hon. W. Peters: I want to know if you are not asking me to give way. You just get up in my “thing”. I hear you ask everybody else, but what is this? Ask me “please”.

Mr. Valley: Please.

Hon. W. Peters: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Valley: Thank you very much.

I want to understand the logic. You said that Hollis Liverpool has left to earn US dollars.

Hon. W. Peters: He has resigned. I did not say that.

Mr. Valley: He has gone to the Virgin Islands to earn US dollars. How is it that Mr. Maharaj is leaving Canadian dollars, which are just as good as US dollars in most ways, to come to earn TT dollars.

Hon. W. Peters: I am tempted to answer that question by telling the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central to ask Mr. Maharaj that for himself. However, I would not be that callous and would try to answer him in a polite way by saying that Mr. Maharaj is returning home because, like myself, he wants to come back to Trinidad and Tobago to make a tangible and meaningful contribution to our society. [*Interruption*] That, you will have to ask Mr. Maharaj. When I said “like myself” I meant like my returning to this beautiful country of my birth, Trinidad and Tobago. I want the emphasis to be on “this country of my birth”.

- (3) Leading the initiative to reform the presentation of carnival shows embracing the international fraternity and pursuing unification of goals through initiative towards a world carnival body.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the initiatives that we have taken through the National Carnival Commission.

- (4) The Trinidad and Tobago National Steel Orchestra.

Based on Government's desire to advance our national instrument, the National Steel Orchestra has been operationalized and is managed by a board. The question was asked earlier, again by the Member for Laventille West. Of utmost importance during this financial year has been the development and institution of contracts for the musicians, which means that we have signed contracts with all the musicians of the National Steel Orchestra. They are now working on a permanent basis.

Community concerts in Tobago, Chaguanas and Arima have taken place. The orchestra also completed a highly successful tour of Martinique. With the support of the Information Division, a documentary has been prepared on the Trinidad and Tobago Steel Orchestra. In addition, the orchestra has also done two recording sessions for the orchestra's CD scheduled to be launched later this year.

In keeping with the Government's stated desire to optimize the potential of our citizens, especially those in the arts, in October 2001, over 90 per cent of

musicians of the orchestra will start training for an associate degree in the performing arts and music. This will empower who we used to call the steelband man in Trinidad and Tobago. Today, we are empowering him and giving him a different outlook on life. Now he will have a degree and he will be called a musician. *[Interruption]* “Pannist” will be too narrow for him. It narrows his ability. He is an accomplished musician with a degree in music. Pan might be his speciality, but he is a musician.

We are in the process of finding a permanent home—a place that they can truly call home—for the National Steel Orchestra.

Let me speak a little about the Best Village—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before you go on, the House will be suspended—*[Consultation]* We will go until 8.15 p.m. They are not ready for us yet. I apologize. Please continue.

Hon. W. Peters: Thank you, very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to go a little to the Best Village. It was rightly stated that I am also a product of the Best Village competition. I was only 12 years old when I wrote all the songs that Mayaro performed at the Best Village Competition and won Best Musical Village that year. *[Interruption]* I am multi-dimensional and I am able to function in many different ways unlike some people who, if one door is closed, will have to stay outside for the rest of their lives. If any door is closed to me, I would most certainly find the next one.

Mr. Speaker, like everything else, things have to change and the Best Village Competition is no different. When I was a little boy I was eager to participate in the Best Village competition. Now, in order to find people in the villages to participate in any way the first thing they ask is how much you are paying. There is a paradigm shift where we have to find ways to pay them to perform or find new ways to enhance the Best Village Competition, which we are trying to do right now, so that the competition will fit into the 21st Century.

Let me speak a little about one of my departed colleagues—Lady B. God rest her soul. She was a Best Village officer. It was this United National Congress Government—I do not know how long the people on the other side recognized she was a talented person—who gave her the scholarship to attend the University of the West Indies. It was unfortunate that it was a week or so before her graduation that she passed away.

This Government will do whatever it takes to ensure that culture remains at the top of the list in Trinidad and Tobago because we know that no country in the world can exist without its culture.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. W. PETERS]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

I want to speak a little about the Trinbago Unified Calypsonian Organization. It was this Government which gave the interest groups the autonomy to go out there and be themselves; to do the things necessary to take their organizations and the culture forward. This Government found it fit to finance the group. I heard the Member for Laventille West say, a while ago, that the subventions are not sufficient. I am here to say to the Member for Laventille West that it does not matter how much money you give to any group to do whatever, it will not be sufficient. If they are given a billion dollars they will want a billion and one.

The Government has made and is making a diligent effort to ensure that the groups get their subventions on time to keep this business going. I dare say that TUCO successfully managed six calypso tents—four in the East, South and North and two in eastern and western Tobago.

These tents serve the dual purpose of taking calypso entertainment to the remote villages of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as providing exposure and experience to over 180 calypsonians and other artistes.

7.50 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the running of these tents, it is not only the calypsonians who benefit but, there are lots of by-products. We have involved in that the employment of musicians, sound technicians, maxi-taxi drivers, printers, vendors and a host of associated entrepreneurs.

The Member for Laventille West asked a while ago, why there was no steelpan at the opening of the Under-17. Or did she ask why the National Steel Orchestra was not there? The reason the National Steel Orchestra was not there is because, even though it is the National Steel Orchestra, they cannot be here, there and everywhere at the same time. So what if you do not have the National Steel Orchestra there and you have another, like in the case of the Under-17? We had a steel orchestra, not only a steel orchestra, but there was a mixture of steel and brass showcasing the versatility of the Trinidadian artiste. So the steelpan was really represented down at the Under-17. We had steelpan there even though we did not have the National Steel Orchestra; we had the national instrument.

I dare say to you that I marvelled—well I should not say marvel but one always has to marvel sometimes—when I heard the rendition of the Croatian National Anthem by our steel orchestra. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] Well, you might be a little biased in saying that. I could say that “Cadanza” is the best steelband in the world because they came from where I live. In this case, however, you might be right. They are one of the best.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it might be a good time to tell you that, through the office of the Attorney General, we are drafting new legislation that would radically change the way broadcasting is done in Trinidad and Tobago as far as our culture is concerned. We are drafting legislation that would give more prominence to local culture, music, plays and movies. This would encourage people to get involved. As a matter of fact, we have a good one going on right now; Westwood Park. We are trying to encourage more people to do things like that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my ministerial colleagues and I support the 50 per cent airplay for local music of every kind. [*Desk thumping*] Some people believe that, in Trinidad and Tobago when we refer to local music we mean calypso. Yes, indeed, we mean calypso, because calypso is our national music, but we have local music of every kind. I do not care what format a radio station takes; we have the local music to supply, at least, 50 per cent of their play list. We have local rock, reggae, chutney and Indian music. We have everything local and so we support 50 per cent local music.

The Junior Roving Tent groomed young calypsonians by presenting them to both the schools and adult population, nationwide. Junior calypsonians have been frequent guests at many of the Trini-style carnivals in the Caribbean and North America.

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

Motion made, That hon. Member's speaking be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. G. Singh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. W. Peters: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In keeping with the theme of this year's budget "One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind", I want to speak about the National Museum and Art Gallery. In the past year, there has been some noted improvement in the National Museum. A number of important exhibitions and other activities have been mounted, and greater access to the national heritage has been encouraged. The National Museum's role as custodian, research institution, educational institution and centre of entertainment have all been heightened. Museum development and heritage preservation have also been encouraged at the community level.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the achievements within the Museum Service during this period, include the creation of an Integrated Museum Service. This has resulted in the following benefits:

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. W. PETERS]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

- a. The development of museum collections that is representative of the whole country.
- b. The activities of government with respect to priorities of communities and complement their objectives in heritage preservation.
- c. The sharing of responsibility between government and communities, as partners, in the assembly, conservation and preservation of our cultural heritage.
- d. The greater accessibility of citizens to their natural culture.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to the development of new museums, in addition to the Museum and Heritage Site at Nelson Island, plans have been developed for a museum of the City of San Fernando, a mobile museum service and community museums at Mayaro, Siparia and La Brea.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying here this evening that, this Government and my Ministry is paying attention to the culture of Trinidad and Tobago in a holistic way from actually creating a certain kind of culture to preserving it. This is something that was not done in the past in any tangible way.

With respect to exhibitions and educational activities, programmes mounted at the museum sought, primarily, to enhance public awareness, access and understanding of the museum and its collections and, by extension, the national cultural heritage. These programmes largely involved development work, exhibitions and educational activities; with serious attention being paid to promotion and marketing. There is no sense having a product and not marketing it. Marketing is an important component of any product; whether it is the museum, steelpan, calypso, limbo, "Moco Jumbie" or what have you. I do not care how skilled you are, if it is not marketed, then you might as well not have it.

The CARIFORUM Cultural Centres Programme is a joint initiative between CARIFORUM governments and the European Union, funded under the Seventh European Development Fund. This regional project involves the establishment of three cultural centres in Jamaica, the Dominican Republic and Trinidad and Tobago to promote CARIFORUM cultural identities and cultural exchanges, and to strengthen and preserve national and sub-cultures. The Trinidad and Tobago Centre has the responsibility for training in the museums, archives and libraries components.

To date, CARIFORUM has implemented the following:

- Authority files for libraries have been circulated throughout the region.

- Contracts for hardware and software have been awarded and the CARIFORUM countries have already received their computers and printers.
- Licensed software for libraries has been distributed to all sites.

As I said before, every aspect of our culture is taken care of. This Government and my Ministry seek to do exactly that. *[Interruption]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am a lyricist so if I have lyrics, that is no big thing. As long as you like my lyrics that is nice.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a building that used to be very beautiful, and it served us well in the past. For some reason or the other, we left it to run down, to find itself in a state of disrepair. The Naparima Bowl is such a place. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Naparima Bowl continues to provide facilities for training and development of young people in South Trinidad and in the technical aspects of theatre: lighting, sound and stage. The Government is working towards the upgrade of the Naparima Bowl so that the facility could effectively serve as a veritable art centre, which could accommodate performances of international standards from both local and foreign artistes. Members on the other side might be wondering what projects we have. *[Interruption]* Well I am sure that the Member for Laventille West would want to know because she has been asking the questions.

With respect to the 2000/2001 projects, given Government's commitment to the preservation and promotion of our cultural heritage, several projects were carried out under the purview of the Ministry of Human Development, Youth and Culture in the 2000/2001 Development Programme. *[Interruption]* She likes me. *[Laughter]* These include the refurbishment of Queen's Hall. Queen's Hall is currently being upgraded so as to bring the facility to internationally acceptable standards for a cultural facility. The refurbishment includes the enclosure and air conditioning of the Hall, improvement of acoustics, refurbishment of stage area and dressing rooms and building new offices.

8.05 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I might say that this would serve the artistic fraternity of Trinidad and Tobago well. I remember performing at Queen's Hall, in the Best Village again as a little boy, and saying what a nice place it is, but, like everything else it has outgrown the—time; time has passed it by and so we need this kind of refurbishment. The site work began in May 2001 by the contractor NH International Limited. I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are making sure that we tell them who the contractors are so nobody would come here and say after that "we hire"

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. W. PETERS]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

contractors and that they did not know and then ask me “Who are these contractors?” and “Are they your cousins or your uncles” or whomever. So I am here to say that the contractor is NH International Limited. [*Interruption*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am told that the contractor is whomever uncle, I do not know. I am saying I am told. I am not.

The work completed is as follows, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

Demolition	100 per cent
Foundation	80 per cent
Tunnels	70 per cent
Promenade west	60 per cent
Promenade east	60 per cent
North extension	30 per cent
Lobby	20 per cent.

The allocation for the hall for the period 2000—2001 was \$7 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All that to NH International Limited, right?

Hon. W. Peters: The sum of \$6,124,306 has been spent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the balance of \$875,694 has been requested and is to be released this month for payment. The project is to be completed in August 2002 within the next fiscal year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, refurbishment of the national archives: the national archives remain an important arm of the preservation of the rich history and culture of our nation, giving our citizenry evidence of their roots and providing students and researchers with material for their study project. However, in order to effectively fulfil this mandate, it is imperative that the refurbishment of the national archives be completed as a matter of urgency. Cabinet has agreed to the upward revision of the budgeted estimate for the refurbishment on the national archives building situated at number 105 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain from \$10,300,000 to \$18,869,548 in order to facilitate the proper housing and protection of our national archives.

I hear some people yawn, and some people “squinge dey face”, but I am here to say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I believe that no amount of money is enough to spend on our national archives. I remember going down to Chaguaramas some years ago when I did not even live in Trinidad at that

particular time to take a picture. When I went down there to take this picture, it was raining, and I went under the awning of a building and when I looked in there I saw a lot of papers in a lot of water in a building in Chaguaramas. When I asked, “Well, why all these papers inside here?”, they said to me that that was the archives. They said to me that that was our national archives. It was very appalling. So today, no amount of money is sufficient to spend on our national archives.

The provision of the additional funds needed to complete the final phase of this project will definitely facilitate the provision of upgraded service to our clients in a fairly ultramodern facility. This phase is extremely critical to the needs of the national archives since it includes the refurbishing of the conservation laboratory and a microfilm unit, the two units that are significantly responsible for the preservation and conservation aspect of the archives collection. The conservation lab is responsible for the restoration of paper documents housed at the national archives repository and the microfilm unit is responsible for producing the only other acceptable long-term medium and archival storage and access. This second phase of the project also includes the provision of adequate accommodation for the staff of the national archives.

Mr. Chairman—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sorry. I am so used to saying Mr. Chairman. You know, “dis is mih first speech” so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have to excuse me if every now and then I call you Mr. Chairman. I get so used to saying that. Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, other projects undertaken by the Ministry include the establishment of the Carnival Institute, establishment of a mobile museum as well as the Trinidad and Tobago CARIFORUM cultural centre. In the next financial year a number of key projects will be undertaken. Some of these projects include the establishment of a millennium centre. [*Desk thumping*]

I heard the Member for San Fernando East speak about an academy but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am here to say to you that the millennium cultural centre is intended to provide the physical infrastructure necessary to develop creative and expressive aspects of our culture. It will provide facilities for performance and training. In addition, it would also provide hostel accommodation and retail facilities for continuous transfer of cultural information, traditions and skills of all our people.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro for giving way. I just want to let him know that the concept of the academy includes all of that; in addition to which, it has a significant academic side to it where, in fact, you upgrade the skills of people. In our case, in the model

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. MANNING]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

that we have advanced, you upgrade the skills on the basis of talent alone but not on the basis of any academic qualifications. It is based on talent alone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. W. Peters: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see, what the hon. Member for San Fernando East is saying is, the academy would develop the raw talent, the raw skill, or continue to develop that raw skill. I do not know if I understand you to be correct but what I am saying is that our people, people who have skill already have that skill. What they need is a place. The academic side of that is already taken care of at the University of the West Indies. There is a creative arts centre at the University of the West Indies but what we need now is this kind of facility where people—because Queen's Hall has become inadequate.

The proposed site is the old Caroni racetrack facility. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would remember where that facility is and what took place down there. It would be finally put into proper use that would benefit the artistic fraternity of Trinidad and Tobago. It is anticipated that the following would be housed: a national theatre and steelpan concert hall; a black box/flexible theatre; rehearsal workshop and studio; national dance studio; commercial concession, administrative accommodation and hostel accommodation. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this would ensure that the artistic fraternity finally has a place that it can call its own.

Upgrade of the Naparima Bowl. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Naparima Bowl is to be upgraded to the standard that allows it to effectively promote and give expression to both local and international cultural forum. The project is expected to span four years and 10 months, at the end of which the Naparima Bowl will be redeveloped and expanded. Additional facilities will include an upgraded amphitheatre, accommodation for the visual arts, provision of the multimedia art library and information centre. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to speak a little about the centre for the performing arts. The international conference centre on the Port of Spain waterfront will include a national centre for the performing arts. This facility will comprise a main theatre, concert hall, national conference hall, rehearsal workshop, studio and to accommodate the wide range of indigenous expressions and multicultural traditions of Trinidad and Tobago, namely, dance, music, literary arts, paintings and sculpture. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago will provide financial support by way of a contribution of \$200,000 for the staging of the Trinidad and Tobago music festival to be held over the period February 17—March 13, 2002.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in closing I would just like to thank all the—I would like to thank Members on both sides, but I would like to especially thank my

colleagues on this side. I would also like to thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my first contribution in the House of Representatives in Trinidad and Tobago and I could assure you that, over the next five years, it would not be the last. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member. The House is now suspended until 9.00 p.m.

8.17 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

9.03 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Stanford Callendar (Tobago West): Mr. Speaker, I too would like to join my colleagues on this side in congratulating the Minister of Finance on his first budget speech in this Parliament. I also would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro on his maiden speech.

I sit in this Parliament in a unique position. I sit in this Parliament as the PNM Member for Tobago West, and I sit on the Opposition. But in Tobago, as a PNM, we sit in governance. [*Desk thumping*] That puts me in a unique type of situation.

I listened to the Member for Tobago East as he spoke about the views and the utterances of some people in Tobago with respect to the budget. I want to say that in Tobago, there is a local cable company, TRICO industries. They have a channel five that they use for local news, and in that, at the end of the news they have a sector that says, "What Town Says". Maybe some of the comments made by the Member for Tobago East might have been some of the comments on what the town says.

I want to put another twist to this thing. One of the stronger perceptions in Tobago is that this Minister of Finance is a good man, but he might be in bad company. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] Maybe their comments about this Minister of Finance might be attributed to the fact that when the PNM took charge of the Tobago House of Assembly about eight months ago, we had a serious dilemma where this present administration in the Tobago House of Assembly was faced with a serious situation of dealing with a debt in the vicinity of \$150 million. With some negotiation and some accommodation by this Minister of Finance, that situation was dealt with, and dealt with effectively. [*Desk thumping*]

I think the people in Tobago recognize that this Minister of Finance is one who is prepared to allow the Tobago House of Assembly to function according to the Tobago House of Assembly Act. Therefore, I want to give what is considered a Tobago perspective on this budget. I wish to say that the budget reflects the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. CALLENDAR]

Thursday, September 20, 2001

process of a continuing successful dialogue between the central government and the Tobago House of Assembly. Tobago sees this as the first phase in a continued process that will guarantee Tobago's development.

We are encouraged that the letter of the law has been satisfied with respect to the recommendations of the Dispute Resolution Commission due to the minimum level of 4.49 per cent. We also welcome the fact that the estimated cash releases of the Tobago House of Assembly are higher than they have ever been in recent years due, in no small measure, to the skilful performance of the Tobago House of Assembly and the Chief Secretary and the assistance of this Minister of Finance over the past eight months. [*Desk thumping*]

There are several important areas of concern. The fact that the estimated cash disbursements to the Tobago House of Assembly fall well short of the legitimate request of the Tobago House of Assembly. It means that the Tobago House of Assembly would have to resort in part to borrowing to finance its development needs. Without such borrowings, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Tobago's current development needs will again be retarded. It is therefore incumbent on the Minister to facilitate and accelerate the current discussions with the Tobago House of Assembly, such that the level and the conditions of Tobago's borrowing can be expeditiously set.

Moving forward, Tobago needs urgent resolution of outstanding issues relating to borrowing authority in order that its special development needs, as recognized by the Act, can be addressed. While the Minister—and we applaud him for this—indicated in the budget speech that the Government agreed to allow the Tobago House of Assembly to access grant resources from multilateral financial institutions, as well as to borrow under specified conditions still to be determined between the Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, I want to also encourage the Minister and the Government to take a closer look also at the other aspect of the DRC recommendations.

I hope that by now the Minister would be in possession of the new financial regulations of the Tobago House of Assembly. Because those financial rules prescribed under section 52 of the Act, we are requesting that it be enacted as a matter of priority, since such rules are necessary for the proper management of the finances of the Assembly. That the present arrangement for the collection and the deposit into the fund of taxes and duties, as indicated in paragraph 7.11 of the DRC recommendation, be continued.

With respect to revenue to be collected in Tobago, that the revenue sharing arrangements should be worked out with the Board of Inland Revenue and appropriate administrative arrangements be made to give effect thereto as a matter

of urgency. Mr. Speaker, for Tobago to advance, it cannot do so on recurrent. If Tobago is to achieve its development objectives, the main policy initiatives must be human resource development, entrepreneurial development and business creation, the revitalization of agriculture, institutional strengthening within the Tobago House of Assembly, provisions and upgrading of key infrastructural needs and, of course, governance.

This budget with its theme, “One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind” is laudable, but I am going to attempt in the next few minutes, Mr. Minister, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to indicate some observations in the budget which, if we do not address clearly, the people of Tobago will be left behind. I look forward that within the 10-year development plan spoken about, I think, by the Member for St. Joseph, we need to begin to address what is considered economic imbalance in an attempt to level the playing field for the people of Tobago.

Let me give you some examples, Mr. Minister. I know it is not a serious task, but it is something that we must attempt if the people of Tobago are not to be left behind. For example, teachers, policemen, firemen, prison officers, public servants, health workers, and the man on the street. Once you live in Tobago as part of the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago, your salary does not give you the spending power as your brothers and sisters in Trinidad, although you work for the same salary; because the cost of living in Tobago is much higher than exists in Trinidad. Therefore, by extension, the people of Tobago technically pay a higher level of VAT.

So, until we are able—and I am sure that with your flexibility and your willingness to consult, the Tobago House of Assembly and the Government can sit and come up with some mechanism that can level the playing field in terms of the spending power of the dollar—Tobagonians will always be at a serious disadvantage with respect to the cost of living. Everything in Tobago is much higher than exists in Trinidad. I am hoping, Mr. Minister, that situation can be given some serious attention.

While we agree with respect to the diversification of the economy, the Tobago House of Assembly in its budget preparation attempted to focus on the diversification of Tobago's economy.

ADJOURNMENT

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj): Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry to interrupt the hon. Member for Tobago West, but what has happened is that some of our Members and some

Adjournment

Thursday, September 20, 2001

[HON. R. L. MAHARAJ]

of the other Members have been looking at the television. There are very important events in the world and it is unfair to us who would like to look at it also. So, in the circumstances, I would ask that the House be adjourned until tomorrow morning at 9.30 a.m. when we will continue the debate.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, if I may, I know there is the question, but I just want to ask a question, please. In these circumstances, would it be possible for our Member to start from the beginning? Because he has only had a few minutes and I think in order for the flow to continue—

Thank you.

Hon. R. L. Maharaj: I will have no objection.

Mr. Speaker: The Member spoke for 10 minutes of his time. If he wants to repeat, he could repeat. We could grant him an extension, but he has spoken for actually 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.14 p.m.