

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Thursday, October 24, 2002*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

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

1. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Lotteries Control Board for the year ended December 31, 1998. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Lotteries Control Board for the year ended December 31, 1999. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
3. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts and financial statement of the Intellectual Property Office for the year ended December 31, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
4. Report of the Auditor General on the financial statement of the Intellectual Property Office for the year ended January 01, 2001 to December 31, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
5. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation for the year ended June 30, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
6. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Venture Capital Incentive Programme for the year ended September 30, 1999. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
7. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Institute of Marine Affairs for the year ended September 30, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
8. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Institute of Marine Affairs for the year ended September 30, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
9. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1983. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
10. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1984. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
11. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1985. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

12. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1986. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
13. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1987. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
14. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1988. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
15. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1989. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
16. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1990. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
17. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1991. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
18. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1992. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
19. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1993. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
20. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1994. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
21. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1995. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
22. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1996. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
23. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1997. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
24. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Port of Spain Corporation for the period January 01, 1998 to September 30, 1998. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
25. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Couva-Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1996. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
26. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Couva-Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation for the year ended December 31, 1997. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

*Papers Laid*

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

27. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Couva-Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation for the nine-month period ended September 30, 1998. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
28. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Regulated Industries Commission for the period June 01, 2000 to December 31, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
29. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Institute of Higher Education (Research, Science and Technology) for the year ended December 31, 1999. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
30. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the National Institute of Higher Education (Research, Science and Technology) for the year ended December 31, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
31. Report of the Auditor General on the accounts of the Public Utilities Commission for the period January 01, 2000 to May 31, 2000. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

*Papers 1 to 31 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)**

[SECOND DAY]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October, 17, 2002]*

That the Bill be now read a second time a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Mr. Basdeo Panday** (*Couva North*): Mr. Speaker, during the elections campaign, it was said that the difference between the UNC and the PNM is that if the UNC had \$1.00 it would spend 75 cents and save 25 cents, and if the PNM had a dollar it would spend \$1.50, fete all night and borrow 25 cents to go to work the following morning. This budget is a typical PNM budget which encapsulates the attitude of the PNM since its inception. Think not of the morrow, eat, drink and be merry today, for tomorrow we die. The first thing to note in this budget is that it is based on expected revenues from an expected oil and gas boom that is expected to materialize. It is like counting eggs in chickens' belly. This regime seems to have a fixation about the windfall that is expected in the energy sector.

During the campaign leading up to the last election they talked about little else. It was as if the money was already in the Treasury and they had already got their sticky hands on it. It would seem that they have used the time machine and

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. PANDAY]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

transported themselves back into the late 1970s and early 1980s when the country experienced its first oil boom. It is *deja vu* all over again, spend, spend, and spend, regardless of the consequences.

Mr. Speaker, on the other hand, the budget may well be a dishonest sleight of hand intended to buy time by deceit. Using the expected windfall as a plausible rationale the Government may think that it can reasonably project revenues of some \$20 billion knowing full well that it is unlikely to be realized.

On that fictitious revenue base, it can make all kinds of sweet sounding proposals and so give the impression that it is fulfilling election promises knowing full well that it has no intention of keeping most of them. By the time the population catches itself, they would have forgotten the promises made, and it would be time for another budget with even more outlandish promises. They call that living from day to day. But that is a dangerous game, and it is even more dangerous in this honourable House as they would soon find out. Because there is one element that they have not factored into that equation, and that is the presence of the 16 of us on this side of the House. We shall never let them forget and we shall never let the people forget their lies and their deceit.

If one had to ascribe or label this budget, one would call it a “soup kitchen budget”. It is a budget without a vision, without purpose, without direction and without focus. This is not to say that the hon. Minister of Finance does not use words he has gathered willy-nilly from several disparate sources including the UNC Manifesto and campaign speeches, and strung them together to create high-sounding echoes of intent and purpose. But when you examine the budget carefully, you see that it is not only incoherent but that the Member for San Fernando East does not really believe what was prepared for him to echo. The fact that the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance did not even read his copy of the Budget Speech before coming to the Parliament is indicative of the level of commitment to the promises made therein, and the level of superficiality with which he regards them.

Notwithstanding that, the budget is an annual exercise in which the Government must seek parliamentary approval of allocations for the financial year no more, and not notwithstanding that moneys allocated from one year cannot be carried over into the following year, a budget must, nevertheless, be part of a continuous plan for the long term development of the country. It cannot be seen in isolation but rather as the unfolding of a continuum. The Government must have a vision, it must not only know where it wants to go, but it must know how to get there.

The budget before us ought therefore to contain proposals that would logically get us from one stage to another stage until we achieve our goal. It cannot be a mere hodgepodge of fulfilling promises, a kind of shopping list, that you believe would appeal to your supporters. That may be excusable in an election campaign but certainly not in a budget that is expected to take the nation forward on a sustainable basis. This budget lacks vision and coherence, and it is precisely because of this lack of vision that the Minister of Finance slips ever so often into lies, deception, contradiction, confusion and sometimes even downright dishonesty. His first attempt to deceive was when he spoke as if the economic recovery of Trinidad and Tobago began in 1991, went into hibernation mode in 1995 and resumed in 2002. The years from 1986—1991 under the NAR Government and the period 1996—2000 under the UNC Government, for him did not exist. He seems to forget that the catastrophic decline of the economy, which began under the PNM squandermania of the first oil boom, was because of the corruption and mismanagement of the oil boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s of which he was part. The fact is, it was the NAR Government that took the harsh measures that were necessary to put the macro-economic fundamentals in place that slowly, albeit painfully, began the turnaround. And that process was continued by the UNC Government with renewed vigor in the period 1996—2001. In fact, it was the political instability created by the PNM Government in 2000 and their own incompetence that created the slowdown of our economic growth that ensued on their assumption to office.

The second act of deceit is at page 3 of the printed version of the Budget. When the Minister of Finance tried to give the impression that the PNM achieved a budget surplus of \$68.9 million in fiscal year 2001—2002 in the teeth of a budgeted deficit of \$1.671 billion; that is the falsehood.

It is intended to cover up the fact that the PNM Government of 2002 spent over \$18 billion in nine months for which they cannot account, and for which they have nothing to show.

Mr. Speaker, it is a well known practice in this honourable House to come to the Parliament with a Variation of Appropriation Bill to seek approval for variation in expenditure in the previous year before seeking allocations in the succeeding year. But the Government knows that it cannot do so on this occasion without being exposed for stealing election by the muscle of known terrorists to terrorize the opposition voters, and by the use of the funds of the state to bribe electors. But there is a saying, you may run but you cannot hide. Sooner or later the PNM Government would have to account for that act of thievery. Come hell or

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. PANDAY]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

high water, we are going to find out what they did with over \$18 billion in less than nine months with nothing to show for it. We shall insist that the Government complies with section 66(A) of the Constitution which mandates the Government to take all the necessary steps including the appointment of Members, to set up within a month the various Joint Select Committees established by Act 29 of 1999 which Committees would be empowered to enquire into the conduct of ministers and ministries, then they would know what corruption really is. Our first task would be to expose those responsible for the election fraud that took place recently.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance also lied about the debt he claimed that was left by the UNC Government, but my colleagues who are experts in finance will deal with that. The Minister of Finance hypocritically criticized the UNC administration for what it calls off-budget expenditure, and he referred in particular to the use of TIDCO to repair the people's roads. Is that not exactly what the PNM did when it used Nipdec to hurriedly pave roads within the last two months immediately preceding the last election? Is UDeCOTT not being used at this very moment for off-budget expenditure? That is the kind of hypocrisy that has tarnished this Budget. But such are the ways of those without vision. All that matters for them is the acquisition of raw, naked power for power sake. The fundamental difference between the PNM and the UNC is that the UNC has a vision; a vision for Trinidad and Tobago which is to make Trinidad and Tobago the jewel of the Americas, and to achieve that vision we have a mission statement.

Our mission is to transform Trinidad and Tobago into the jewel of the Americas by so mobilizing the diverse talents of our population and the natural resources of our country that ours will be a knowledge-based society with a globally competitive technologically driven and diversified economy that will sustain full employment, equal opportunity, growing prosperity, a secure life and the highest standards of living for all our citizens.

There is no such vision in this Budget. It is a hodgepodge, shopping list of promises as if we were still in an election campaign. The stated theme of the budget is "Vision 2020, People our Priority" and the stated objective is making Trinidad and Tobago a developed nation by 2020. It speaks of people and human development and self-reliance. Sounds very noble indeed, but how is the PNM Government going to achieve this? You read the Budget and you would see.

By the proliferation of "soup kitchens", by increasing food hampers by almost 100 per cent, by adding 21 new soup kitchens now renamed Transformation and Development Centres. When will they learn that you do not bestow dignity, foster self-reliance and engender a sense of self worth by handouts? That is demeaning

and merely fortifies the dependency syndrome and perpetuates the helpless and disempowerment of its victims.

The UNC worked very hard to remove the scourge of dependency, which was the legacy of the PNM. What we are witnessing here today is a return to the culture of dependency, the ushering in of a new generation of victims of dependency, indignity and self-denigration. By no stretch of imagination can this be described as looking forward to the year 2020. Instead, it is looking backward where illusions seem like 2020 vision.

The UNC's approach is totally different. Our vision is to get people out of the dependency syndrome by providing them with opportunities for self-reliance through education and training. That is why we changed the programme from being the Unemployment Relief Programme, (URP) to the Employment and Training Programme (ETP), which included a training element.

When the PNM Government returned to office in the year 2001, they reverted it to the URP and removed the training element from the programme. So it was back to square one again. During the UNC's term of office, it abolished the dreaded Common Entrance Examination and provided free secondary education for all our children who left primary school by simply building more schools to accommodate the thousands who would have been on the streets in the days of the PNM Government.

It also recognized that education and training must begin at an early age and so it built 18 new childhood care and education centres and upgraded 22 more. That is why it built 19 primary schools and refurbished 29 more and that is why it built and refurbished 31 secondary schools.

It was because of its vision of a knowledge-based society that it emphasized the concept of learning as being a life long process, and introduced the Dollar-for-Dollar plan for university students, established a system of community colleges, built the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology, supplied free textbooks to children in primary schools and provided a thousand-dollar book grant for children in secondary schools and translated into reality the concept of distance learning, all because it had a vision of a knowledge-based society. What does the PNM do? Abolish the UNC Dollar-for-Dollar plan with no idea of what will replace it.

That is because they have no vision, Mr. Speaker. Why else would they suggest such a nonstarter as the establishment of a university of Trinidad and Tobago? Like the one in Guyana? That is a retrograde step. We already have the University of the West Indies with a recognized international accreditation. If the

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. PANDAY]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

object is to increase the intake of students at the university level, then the more sensible thing to do would be to expand non-campus teaching facilities in Trinidad and Tobago, with both state and private sector participation where students would write the UWI examinations which would be marked by examiners approved by the university.

When the UNC made this proposal some time ago the PNM responded with the retort that it was proposing that because it wanted to facilitate its friends in the private sector. In addition, the UNC proposed the establishment of distance learning facilities by which non-resident students could obtain degrees from the University of the West Indies or other internationally recognized universities. One senses a similar antipathy towards the private sector in other proposals in the budget. There is a clear tendency in the budget to reintroduce state dependency. When it comes to dealing with unemployment and poverty the PNM seems completely lost. They acted on the belief that what their supporters needed was pay, not work so that they found all kinds of spurious schemes to hand out money without any regard for productivity, or for the usefulness of the activity undertaken.

When the UNC Government came into office in 1995, it found that some 19 per cent of the working population was unemployed with the highest incidence being among youth and women. Most of them lived by selling their souls for a “ten days” here and a “ten days” there. That was the legacy of the PNM perpetuated by the Manning administration of 1991—1995, and in 2002. In less than five years we reduced unemployment to 11 per cent by creating more than 80,000 jobs and we did this not by expanding make-believe work schemes, paying people to do nothing, but by attracting investments in the oil, non-oil and service sectors and training our people to fill the jobs created thereby.

Mr. Speaker, if we are really to improve the quality of life of our young people, we must create well-paid permanent jobs by attracting investments, while we equip our unemployed with the skill to fill those jobs. URP, GAPP, YAPA, CERP, HYPE, CCC, OJT, national service voluntary or otherwise, cannot be the solutions to the problems of unemployment. And handouts of hampers and the setting up of more soup kitchens can never solve the problems of poverty. At best, these must be seen as temporary measures that fit into a larger plan of permanent highly skilled and consequently well-paid jobs. That is how the wealth will trickle down or better still, instead of the wealth trickling down, our people will trick up.

When will the PNM ever learn that problems are not necessarily solved by flinging money at them? This is particularly so with the problem of poverty. The root cause of poverty is helplessness, powerlessness. The poor will no longer be



poor if they have life-long well-paid jobs. We shall succeed and we shall only succeed in seriously relieving poverty by empowering those who are poor and can help themselves to do so. Not by handouts and temporary make-work schemes as the PNM is attempting to do in this budget. It would appear that the PNM is not serious in empowering the poor for fear that in so doing, they would remove the dependency and so lose that part of their basic support that has permanently existed in a state of dependency.

While on the issue of jobs, the labour movement must feel very disappointed in this budget. The UNC introduced the minimum wage of \$7.00 per hour and was about to implement an increase to \$8.00 per hour as agreed by the Tripartite Committee when it was forced to demit office. With typical deceit, the PNM countered with a promise to raise the minimum wage to \$10.00 an hour in the hope of hoodwinking the labour movement. Now that the Prime Minister has succeeded in “conning” the workers. He said that the \$10.00 increase would come but over a five-year period, a total volte-face on his promise—not even an undertaking to complete the process of raising it to \$8.00 an hour that we started. But look at this proposal, from \$7.00 an hour in 2000 to \$10.00 an hour in 2005, an increase of \$3.00 over five years; that is to say, sixty cents per year or five cents per month.

There is not so much as a whisper in the budget about the Occupational Health and Safety Bill which the PNM voted against when the UNC Government introduced it in the Parliament two years ago; not a word about the revision of the employment injury and disability benefits, not a word about the required amendments to the Industrial Relations Act and the laws relating to the recognition of trade unions. No UNC Government could have so callously ignored the concerns of the labour movement as this Government has done, and the labour movement knows it.

Mr. Speaker, it may come as a surprise to you that although unemployment is falling in Trinidad and Tobago, poverty is rising. We have a society not only in which we have the unemployed poor, but one in which we have the employed poor. In the teeth of this new phenomenon, the PNM Government refuses to deal with the issue of a meaningful minimum wage and the strengthening of the rights of workers. In the same breath that the Minister talks of creating jobs, reducing unemployment and promoting agriculture, his proposals for Caroni (1975) Limited, are designed to produce the exact opposite results. The effects of the budget proposals on Caroni (1975) Limited would be to increase unemployment, poverty, and destroy agriculture.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. PANDAY]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

The offer of a Voluntary Separation of Employment Package (VSEP) to all of Caroni (1975) Limited workers is clearly designed to get rid of the workers. If the plan succeeds thousands of workers and their families will go on the breadline. This will bring untold suffering to tens of thousands of families and dependants but the Government does not seem to care about that. Their main concern is to destroy Caroni (1975) Limited so they can grab the valuable lands of the company and share it among their friends. That is exactly what is behind the budget proposal to transfer to the state all lands now owned by Caroni (1975) Limited to a new company called the Estate Management and Business Development Company totally under the control of the PNM Government. The PNM Government would then lease back to Caroni (1975) Limited such lands as, in its opinion, are needed for the pursuit of its core agricultural business, that is to say, the lands on which the sugar factory stands. The rest would be shared out among the friends of the PNM for the purposes of light and heavy industrial manufacturing, agricultural estates, housing and commercial complexes. This is in direct contradistinction to the plan the UNC has for Caroni (1975) Limited and the sugar industry. The UNC's plan for Caroni (1975) Limited, involves not the contraction but the expansion of jobs while reducing, if not eliminating completely, the burden on the Treasury. It is unfortunate that the Government wants to destroy Caroni (1975) Limited, without understanding it.

It must first be understood that Caroni (1975) Limited is not sugar and sugar is not Caroni. To think of the two things as synonymous is to commit a conceptual error. Caroni (1975) Limited is involved in rice and citrus cultivation, beef and dairy herd farming, rum production, engineering works and research. Several of these undertakings, if taken separately, can be viable and become profit-making centres.

I wonder if the Member for San Fernando East realizes that without the sugar industry there is no rum industry, and that more than 120,000 persons depend directly or indirectly on the sugar industry for a living. The UNC's plan for Caroni (1975) Limited (1975) Limited involved the creation of a number of separate subsidiaries, which would take over the several activities of the company. For example, a subsidiary for rice production, one for the rum division, another for beef and dairy farming, another for citrus cultivation.

Having done so, it would then have invited private sector participation with Caroni (1975) Limited in these subsidiaries with the dynamism inherent in the private sector management. These subsidiaries would become profitable and expand, so increasing job opportunities and employment. That is our vision for Caroni (1975) Limited. I can only hope that those involved are prepared to fight to implement it with their lives, if necessary.

A similar attack has been made on the dealers of the foreign-used motorcar industry. It was the UNC that had the courage to liberalize the importation of foreign-used motorcars so that people in the middle and lower income groups who never dreamt of owning a motorcar could do so. We had tremendous resistance from the new car dealers who had been ripping off the helpless population with exorbitant prices and long waiting lines for their new cars. I recall distinctly that when we introduced the foreign-used car to the public, the PNM Government said we were only doing that to help our friends in the Bamboo. The racist implications were clear. Why did the PNM Government impose 75 per cent tax on all foreign-used cars imported into this country regardless of the size of the engine or age of the vehicle? Under the UNC Government there were six bands under which the tax varied with the size of the car. Now, this Minister of Finance has not only imposed an across the board tax of 75 per cent of the tax one would pay on a new car, but he has also banded the licensing and registration of cars which are assembled in Trinidad and Tobago. The intention of that is clear.

The roll-on roll-off business is doing well, too well. Kill the used-car industry so that those who deal in new cars can make a killing. This is pay back time. We all know who the major financiers of the PNM are. We also know that important ones are in the new car business, pay back time has come but the PNM Government has the guts to talk about corruption.

Mr. Speaker, I now come to corporation tax. At first blush the business community may have felt good about the 5 per cent reduction in corporation tax but, on second thought, I am sure that they are beginning to realize that what was given with the right hand has been taken away with the left. For firms in the export business the reduction in corporation tax will be more than offset by the withdrawal of the export allowance. In fact, many exporting companies would be worse off than before. This measure is inconsistent with the stated objective, in the budget, of increasing our exports and so diversifying the economy. There is one thing that ministers of finance do not write into their budget but which is absolutely essential to its implementation and that is, the human resource element required to implement the proposals contained therein. Oh yes, the budget does speak of the development of human resource and makes various proposals for its enhancement, but that is to speak of human resource in a very narrow sense.

When we speak of implementation of the budget we think of human resource in a much wider and deeper sense. We mean not only the academic qualifications and experience of our public servants and Government officials. In order to successfully implement the budget proposals, we need the enthusiasm of an entire

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. PANDAY]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

nation. Without the commitment, enthusiasm, goodwill and support of the entire nation, the chances of successfully implementing this or any other budget are slim.

It is a pity that during the recent interregnum of the PNM Government and particularly during the last election, they thought it to be in their selfish interest to divide and to polarize this nation in the most vicious way. They may have thought that the ends will justify the means. That saying has rarely ever been true. In fact, the ends are always tarnished or embellished by the means. The PNM Government will soon realize that having swirled the wind they will soon begin to reap the whirl-wind. How you win so you must rule. You cannot divide the nation and hope to have a united country when you come to run it. And without a united country, we are doomed to failure; a country divided against itself cannot stand and a people divided within itself cannot prosper.

It matters not how much money we have as a nation or how much more we shall get from this or any other windfall. This imperative is more relevant to Trinidad and Tobago than to any other country or nation. We are a mere 1.3 million souls. Our intellectual and other manpower are very limited when compared to larger countries and nations.

We cannot afford the luxury of a divided nation as obtains in larger countries. We must, therefore, move swiftly to unite our people or our peoples, if you prefer. No amount of exhortations and platitudes would achieve this critical unity. We must embark immediately therefore upon constitutional and electoral reform that will have the effect of bringing our people together as never before. Then and only then will there be peace, harmony, prosperity and happiness in this country. Thank you.

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Colm Imbert)** Mr. Speaker, I must express some surprise at the brevity of the speech of the Leader of the Opposition. I thought he was going for a couple of hours. But I noticed he studiously avoided the budget measures, the figures, the revenue projections and expenditures. As a matter of fact, I find it very hard to pick out anything of substance that he said. But since he did not say it, let me deal with some issues that I have noted in the public domain that we need to correct.

The previous budget, presented by the hon. Member for St. Joseph, had revenues of approximately \$15.8 billion—this is the budget of October, 2000—and expenditure of same amount, \$15.798 with a very small surplus projected at approximately \$3 million. So those were the figures; revenue of \$15.8 billion; expenditure \$15.8 billion.

At the end of December 2001, the efficient, competent UNC administration had spent in excess of \$3 billion and was already running a deficit of close to \$700 million. In fact, the former administration had overspent in terms of its receipts by almost \$700 million by the time it came into office in December 2001 so that gives one some idea of their performance in the lead up to election. They spent as if money was going out of style. So we came into office and we were handed an existing deficit of revenue over expenditure of \$700 million. The revenue was in deficit compared to expenditure. That was the legacy of the competent and brilliant Member for St. Joseph. He overspent by \$700 million. That is what he handed to us in three months. If they had stayed there he would have overspent by over \$2 billion. Now we, however, dealt with that \$700 million deficit given to us by them, and we contained expenditure while implementing a number of new programmes and helping the less fortunate in the society and we managed in fiscal 2001—2002 to achieve a surplus of \$69 million, and I will explain because I keep hearing this foolishness about the PNM Government spent \$18 billion in nine months. That is absolute nonsense.

In the first instance, the budget was \$15.8 billion so we could not have spent \$18 billion. In the second instance, the PNM Government, as indicated in the budget documents laid in this Parliament—he does not even read—we spent \$14.2 billion in the fiscal year of which over \$3 billion was spent by them, so in the nine-month period from January to September 2002, the PNM Government, in fact, spent less than \$11 billion. Those are the facts. They spent nearly \$4 billion in three months, we spent \$11 billion in nine. We were prudent, we were efficient. They were profligate and they were irresponsible.

We are not coming here for any supplementary variation of appropriation to deal with closing off of the accounts of last year. We have come with a variation to transfer from one Head to another where we felt it was better to spend money more efficiently but in terms of the overall sum, we contained expenditure within revenue and we achieved a surplus [*Desk thumping*] and that is meeting a \$700 million deficit which we had to bring down. So that nonsense about \$18 billion—and we would come back to Parliament with the figures; well wait, you will wait there until 2015, to use the words of the Member for Couva North. You will wait there until 2015 for that variation, that supplementary budget that you keep talking about. In fact, once the Member for Couva North is there we will be here, to use some of the words—That is the end of that.

Let me now deal with the budget itself. The previous Minister of Finance had intended to borrow almost \$2 billion—\$1.3 billion externally, \$600 million

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

internally. We again contained our expenditure and we, in fact, only borrowed \$1.4 billion so we reduced the projected borrowing that was in the budget of the Member for St. Joseph by some \$600 million. So, I wish to debunk all of this information—they put out and we borrowed less than the \$700 million that they gave to us. That is our performance, and it would be demonstrated, time and time again, when we bring the closing of accounts and other measures to this Parliament. We would demonstrate that we managed this country properly.

Dealing with the new budget I have noticed comments from the public domain that the quantum of debt servicing this year is \$6 billion which is more than it should be, and I wish to explain but obviously the people on the other side, the hon. Members opposite, have no wish to understand. In this fiscal year the PNM administration will be replacing \$2 billion of high cost interest rates of 11, 12 and 13 per cent which they incurred in the period 1996—2001. We are replacing \$2 billion of high cost debt handed to us by them—the hon. Members opposite—with \$2 billion of low cost debt. We are refinancing. This PNM administration is now getting interest rates as low as 7 per cent and some lower than 7 per cent—6.5 per cent.

That is what this PNM administration has been able to achieve in the last five months so that the extra \$2 billion is money in, money out; taking \$2 billion of high cost debt and replacing it with \$2 billion of low cost debt. There is no impact on the fiscal balance; no impact on the debt stock, except that we will be reducing our interest payments through this measure by almost \$100 million per year. That is management—not this excuse for management that we heard of. [*Desk thumping*]. So that puts an end to that. That is how that \$20 billion is made up. It is \$2 billion of debt replacement, it comes in and goes out. It makes no impact on the budgetary balance. That is the end of that.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to point out that this PNM administration had many challenges in this last nine months. British Petroleum, for example, made a decision to put in this fiscal year cost write-offs for two dry wells that had cost them a lot of money some years ago; for some reason they decided to bring it into this year. The oil price was at a far lower level than the figure budgeted by the Member for St. Joseph. He budget \$22 for the whole year but for several months in the year the oil price was at \$18. So during nine months the PNM Government had to face that challenge. The fact that there were lower revenues because of lower oil prices and the fact that BP put this large tax write-off into its accounts and, therefore, wrote off a lot of tax which would normally have come into the system, that is not going to happen in fiscal 2002—2003. There are no dry wells out there that can come into the system this year.

Oil prices are now \$26 and the Government is confident that it can achieve the revenue projections that it has put in this budget easily. It is confident of that. We have pegged our projections at \$22 while oil prices at this very time are at \$26. So that we have, in fact, been very conservative and we are certain that we could achieve our revenue targets for the following year, so that puts an end to that as well.

So all of this talk about how we are banking on an expected oil and gas boom. What are they talking about? We are not banking on that at all. We are taking account of the fact that we do not have to write off these large expenditures this year, and we are taking account of the fact that we are going to get an oil price of \$22—not \$18 that was there before, so we would easily achieve our revenue target. It has nothing to do with any boom. That boom that you talk about will not come to this country for several years. It is not coming for two or three years. It is not coming in this fiscal year so we are not squandering anything as the hon. Member for Couva North tried to mislead this honourable House, Mr. Speaker, if you will permit me, a little dig. What did the Member for Couva North say? That the UNC Government would spend 75 cents and save 25 cents. That is what was said in the UNC's election campaign, that the UNC would spend 75 cents out of every dollar and save 25 cents. I did not hear that. I heard they would spend 25 cents out of 75 cents. [*Desk thumping*] Let me repeat that. What I heard in this election campaign was they would spend 25 cents out of every \$1.00 and steal the remaining 75 cents. That is what I heard.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, the Standing Orders clearly indicate that no improper motives must be imputed to any Member. I ask that the Member withdraw the statement. Mr. Speaker, we are all UNC on this side—

**Mr. Ramnath:** Let him speak. We will return the compliments. I am back here after 10 years in exile.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Mr. Speaker, someone as experienced as the hon. Member for Siparia, in this honourable Chamber would have heard rulings from former Speakers.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** I would ask the ruling of the hon. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** You were going good all along. Please continue to go good.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the hon. Member would have been the subject of many rulings and would know that when one simply refers to statements made on a campaign—I do not know what this is. Is that post-elections shock syndrome? Hon. Member for Caroni Central and hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, is this post-election shock syndrome? What is the problem? Why is the Member so jumpy that she attempted to derail the whole budget

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

address by complaining it was *ultra vires*? Now the hon. Member is complaining that we are impugning the UNC, a generic entity. I tell you but, anyway, let us go on with some statements made by the hon. Member for Couva North.

I was astonished to hear the hon. Member say that his administration, the administration of the Member for Couva North, gave free primary school books and a \$1,000 school grant. When did this occur? I was part of a PNM administration that came into office based on a PNM Manifesto when the PNM administration pledged book grant and so forth. I was part of a PNM Government that took a Cabinet decision to give a book grant, which the Member for Siparia wrongly criticized. I am confused here that the Member for Couva North seems to be living in some sort of dreamland. It is a time warp. It is the PNM Government that instituted the book grant and free textbooks for primary schools students. Not them!

Mr. Speaker, I also heard the Member for Couva North boast about schools that they built and so forth. He could not be talking about the model school and the Biche High School. He was boasting about that? The model school, the poison pen and the Biche High School, the landslide trap. I see! I see!

Mr. Speaker, what was noticeable about the speech of the Member for Couva North, was that he does not seem to be willing to recognize, acknowledge or accept that he was in Government for six years so all of these things that took place were under him and I know hearing them delving into this “woulda, coulda shoulda” syndrome. I was in Opposition and I used to hear them say “woulda, coulda, shoulda”. Well, he “woulda” “coulda” “shoulda” was going to introduce minimum wage of \$8.00. Too busy with extra curricula activities. Why could they not introduce a minimum wage of \$8.00? The PNM would deal with that, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance would deal with that, so I will not go into that but we are not any “woulda” “coulda” syndrome over here. We are going to do, and that is why we were successful in the last election because while they were in a “woulda, coulda” mode, we were in a delivery mode [*Desk thumping*] We delivered in the last nine months and that is why we are over here and you are over there. [*Desk thumping*].

To hear the hon. Member talk about Caroni (1975) Limited. What was the history of Caroni (1975) Limited in the 1996—2001 period? Disaster—mealy bug wiped out all the crops. The targets achieved for sugar production under the PNM have not yet been achieved in that six-year period. Froghopper killed everything. Caroni (1975) Limited was in absolute decline and to hear the hon. Member for Couva North talk about subsidiaries for rice, rum, beef, citrus, what were you doing for the last six years?



**11.00 a.m.**

These are all money losers under your administration—losing billions of dollars. The agricultural sector lost billions of dollars under the administration of the Member for Couva North—over that six-year interregnum they were in government—and he has the audacity to come into this Parliament to talk about what they are going to do for Caroni. Why did you not do it while you were there? It is a classic case of what is called, in psychiatry, avoidance. Is that not so, Member for Caroni Central? He has an avoidance problem. He is avoiding reality. When you do not want to deal with something, you avoid it. That is the psychiatric term, not so? It is similar to denial.

What can I really say about that contribution from the Member for Couva North? It is obvious he is still in shock. He has not come to terms with the election loss—just withdrawal symptoms on that side. I really cannot say anymore. I took some notes. I was just getting into some speed here, when he sat down.

The last thing I will touch on is this thing about foreign used cars. It was the UNC administration that increased the tax bands for motor vehicle tax for foreign-used vehicles from \$20,000 and \$30,000 where they were, and sent it up to as high as \$90,000. They did that. We now have to reduce that. They sent the tax on the larger engine-sized vehicles up to as high—just the motor vehicle tax alone, you know—as \$90,000, and they are talking about lobby from new car dealers. They were the ones who succumbed to private interest, not we on this side. If they were interested in the small man at all, why did they not leave the tax bands at \$20,000 and \$30,000? Why did they send it up to \$50,000, \$60,000, \$70,000, \$80,000 and \$90,000?

One anomaly that was created by that ridiculous system was heavy vehicles—trucks. The motor vehicle tax on a new truck is just about \$10,000 or \$12,000; it is \$3.00 per cc, so that a truck 4,000 or 5,000 cc, you are talking about \$10,000 or \$15,000. That is the MVT on a new truck, but these brilliant people made it so that all the trucks that had been brought in and assembled using new and used parts, because they had sent up the tax bands for the higher engine sizes, the MVT on a used truck was as high as \$75,000 to \$90,000. That is what they did and it was brought to their attention by their friends in “the bamboo”. We all have friends in “the bamboo”. When the former Minister of Finance raised it—not the hon. Member for St. Joseph, the one before—he put a tax on used trucks as high as \$90,000, when on a new truck the tax was only \$10,000. That is what they did because they cared about people.

I do not want to hear about the foreign-used vehicle market. It was that Member for St. Joseph who announced that they were abolishing the local

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

assembly industry for foreign-used vehicles. Obviously, the Member for Couva North was not listening during that budget debate. As a matter of fact, I do not even know if he was present. He probably was not in charge at that time. The Cabinet was out of control at that time. He obviously was not present for the last budget speech when the hon. Member for St. Joseph announced the abolition of the local foreign-used assembly industry and did not deal with the anomaly with heavy vehicles. Do not tell us anything about the foreign-used vehicle industry. We in the PNM are caring and we will deliver because we care. We are not callous and heartless. We listen to people and we deal with issues based on feedback from the population.

He said we had nothing in our budget about trade unions. He is not reading. If he will go to page 60 of this document, which he probably has not taken out of his envelope as yet, there is a clear statement from the PNM on occupational safety and health and we state that the Ministry of Labour, through the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Bill, will establish the Occupational Safety and Health Authority to address the needs of the industry and to ensure the health and safety of the workers in the Industrial Environment Act. It is a clear statement of policy from the PNM administration. Whoever wrote that ridiculous speech for you did not bother to read the budget documents. [*Interruption*] You can vote for or against, that is okay. You can vote however you want.

Let me now deal with some issues relating to my portfolio. I have heard statements made by previous Ministers of Health about things that were happening in the Health Ministry. We need to deal with it. I heard the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan say that the UNC administration was already providing free medication to people in this country. I heard him say that on television—that they introduced some programme. That is simply untrue. What the former administration introduced was something called a Private Pharmacy Initiative, where they reduced the cost of a basket of medication—I have the document right here—by 10 per cent, 15 per cent. My information tells me that it is about 11 different drugs for the treatment of glaucoma, asthma, diabetes and so on.

They reduced the cost of medication in private pharmacies by 10 and 20 per cent. How could a discount of 10 per cent be equivalent to free? I know that medical practitioners are not good at Maths. I know that Higher Mathematics, Applied Mathematics and Pure Mathematics are not required subjects for the study of medicine, but he certainly did O'Levels, and a 10 per cent discount and free, cannot be the same. For the benefit of the Member for Barataria/San Juan, a 10 per cent discount means that the price is now 90 per cent of the original price and free means it is zero.

I do not know where he learned Maths. Maybe he learned it on the other side where they do all sorts of fantastic things—take an airport costing \$400 million, which ends up costing \$1,600 million. That is the kind of thing they used to do on that side, or spend 25 cents and take 75 cents out of every dollar.

We in the PNM have something called a Chronic Disease Programme where we will be giving free medication at private pharmacies. Let me debunk this other statement that I have heard out there that medication was always free. Yes, if you go to the clinics in the hospitals and sit and wait six or seven hours and they have the drug in the pharmacy, you might get it free. We in the PNM have recognized the inefficiencies and the suffering, especially of elderly and poor people, who should not have to go to an institution and sit on hard benches for six and seven hours to get their medication, only to discover that it is not there. That is the legacy they left us.

When I visited the Port of Spain General Hospital in January and February of this year, that is what I noticed. As I passed the pharmacy, I noticed hundreds of people on hard wooden benches sitting and waiting for hours to get medication. We do not intend to make people suffer like that. We deliver because we care. In our programme, we are going to target the sectors that need it most. We are starting there—with the elderly and the indigent.

We have started off with a group of medicants that deal with diabetes, glaucoma, hypertension and cardiac disease. In layman's language, these are people who have problems with their blood sugar, problems with their eyes, high blood pressure and heart problems. We are going to give all pensioners, in the first instance, and it will be expanded to other groups—you go to your doctor, public or private. He will give you a prescription in triplicate. He keeps one copy for his records, gives the other two copies to the patient, the pensioner. The pensioner goes to any licensed pharmacy in Trinidad and Tobago and he hands the two copies of the prescription to the pharmacist who will fill the prescription free of charge—meaning zero, not 90 per cent—to the patient, give the patient the drugs and the pharmacy will keep the second copy for their records and remit the third to the organization which is going to manage the process, which, in this instant, will be Nipdec. That is how it is going to work.

No longer will poor old people have to go and sit on the hard wooden benches in Port of Spain or wherever and wait six and seven hours only to find out that the drug is not there. They can now just go to their doctor, get a prescription, go to the pharmacy, get their drugs, go home and be comfortable and happy. That is caring, PNM style. I could not explain it more simply than that. I hope that the hon.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Member for Barataria/San Juan understands the difference now between a discount and free.

Of course, with any programme like this, as I am sure the hon. Member for Caroni Central had to grapple with in the Private Pharmacy Programme, we always have persons and organizations who are going to try to beat the system—who will try to introduce some elements of corruption in the system—and that is going to be our challenge in dealing with that aspect in the same way he had to grapple with it. We are confident that we can introduce accounting and reporting systems and penalties for anybody who wants to defraud the system by giving medication to someone who is not entitled to it or is engaging in some other scheme, over-invoicing or whatever. The penalties will include cancellation of the licence of any pharmacy that is found to be involved in any fraudulent activity. We are going to work it through and improve the system as it goes along and expand it to other categories of people in the society who are also unfortunate and in need of relief.

I also want to debunk something that I heard—that most drugs in Trinidad and Tobago were already exempt from duty and VAT. I have some information here. I will read it.

As a result of the decision arising from the speech from the hon. Minister of Finance, over 600 generic names in Trinidad and Tobago, these are mendicants—medication that is available in Trinidad and Tobago—will now be duty free.

No one can tell me that 600 is a small number. I have the list right here of all the mendicants and pharmaceuticals. I just want to debunk that. We have removed the duty and VAT from over 600 medicants in this country.

I am always amazed at what I hear. I heard some people from the private sector saying we should not have cut the tax, but if we had not, they would have been “bawling like 10 Tarzan” for the next five years about how the PNM reneged on its promise to cut corporation tax. It is impossible to deal with these statements. This PNM party, of which I am a proud member, has indicated that it will cut corporation tax since the election of 2000 and we believe in credibility. We promised to cut tax and we delivered. I am certain that 99.9 per cent of the people in this country are happy about that, even the hon. Members opposite, who will now be getting a larger pay packet because of the caring PNM.

I am always a bit surprised at the statements I hear and read after the presentation of a budget. Some of the comments do not make sense. Who can be against a tax cut? They are getting more money for their business operation. How

could they be against that? Once we balance revenue with expenditure; once we foster economic growth; once we stimulate the productive sectors of the economy and, at the same time cut tax, who could have a problem with that?

That deals with the drug issue; what we are doing about medication and the fact that we have removed duty and so on off 600 products. What we met when we came in, we had to wonder what was going on with that government over the last six years.

I have here a report on the surgical waiting list, which gives details of waiting lists of the main hospitals in Port of Spain, San Fernando and so on. I find it is criminal to ask poor people in this country to wait four and five years—and I am sure the Member for Barataria/San Juan will agree with me privately—he may not be able to agree with me publicly—that it is criminal to allow poor people in this country, who need simple operations for hernias and so on, to wait four and five years. That is criminal and that is what we found when we went inside there.

I have to wonder, Mr. Speaker, what was going on under that UNC administration. Did they care about people? I am hearing they had their own private interest, but that cannot explain why poor people were treated in this manner. Just the other day someone called me, a gentleman from Siparia, the constituency of the Member for Siparia. He is 71 years old, needs a cataract operation and went to San Fernando Hospital, where they told him to come back in 2004.

That is inhumane and we are going to deal with that. They had six years to deal with that and they did not and we are going to deal with that. It does not matter where the person is from: whether Oropouche, Tabaquite, Tunapuna or San Fernando West, we are dealing with everybody. We are already dealing with the gentleman from Siparia. We are going to deal with him next month.

I cannot understand that there was no criteria. When you get into your senior years, you are affected by a number of medical problems and one of the most serious problems for elderly persons is problems with eyesight. One would think that you would have a sustained programme to deal with this problem. One would think you would have a continuous programme in place, making sure that these elderly people are not deprived of enjoyment of their last days on this earth by sorting them out in terms of cataract surgery and all of the other problems. One would think that any caring government would put a sustained programme in place to deal with it, but “nah”, from there, two years, three years, four years for a cataract operation. That is the legacy of the hon. Members opposite and we will deal with that. We have a number of programmes as well, which we have already

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

started a month or so ago—subsidized cardiac surgery, angiograms, angioplasty, open-heart surgery.

I know the members over there talked about it, but they did not do it—“woulda, coulda, shoulda”. We took your approvals and implemented them. We did the first subsidized angiogram and angioplasty in this country in nine months. You had six years and you could not do it. We started the programme. We took the prostate surgery programme and we implemented it in nine months.

**Dr. Khan:** Have you implemented the prostate programme, as you just said?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Certainly. We have refurbished the urology ward at the San Fernando General Hospital. We delivered. We are in the process of completing a urology theatre at the San Fernando General Hospital, something you could not do. We are delivering because we care. We are taking the things that were there and we are implementing them.

You all have a lot of things on paper. When I came in to the Ministry, I saw a whole bookshelf filled with documents from top to bottom. I said put that aside because that was all pipe dreams—to use the words of the Member for St. Augustine—just talk, printed letters on paper. You see the difference between this PNM administration and my honourable colleagues opposite is that we are performing. We are providing improved conditions for the poor and unfortunate in this country.

We also have a cancer programme. They had an allocation but they did not give the Cancer Society any money. It is this Minister of Health that gave the Trinidad and Tobago Cancer Society—and just to demonstrate that we are fair and equitable, we also gave money to the South Cancer Support Group, and that group is headed by some high-ranking UNC operatives, if they did not know. We still give them money because we believe that they are a genuine NGO and that they will help in the screening for breast cancer, cervical cancer and all these things.

We also gave the South West Regional Health Authority a considerable sum of money to also upgrade their programmes for cancer screening. This is a continuing programme. You had it there, but you did not implement it. We implemented it and we will continue. We will give the Friends of Radio Therapy Centre funds, too, because we believe they are genuine and committed. We are going to spread it around. We are going to make sure that all the non-governmental associations in Trinidad and Tobago get assistance from the government to continue doing the good work they have been doing in cancer screening and other forms of detection.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

*Motion made,* That the speaking time of the hon. Member be extended by 30 minutes. [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. C Imbert:** Another plan that will be implemented immediately, that had been languishing in the Ministry of Health, is the plan for the new oncology centre. They had it there for years. We implemented it in months. We took the matter to Cabinet. Cabinet made a decision immediately. We entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Canadian Government. We signed the MOU for the new oncology centre. The designs are being done right now as we speak and we will be breaking ground for a state-of-the-art oncology centre at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, early in 2003. You had it in your head, but you could not implement it. You are a “woulda, coulda, shoulda” party. We are doing it. That is the difference between us and you.

I am not a selfish person, I will give credit where credit is due. There were plans and programmes there, but they were going nowhere—just gathering dust on the bookshelf in the Minister's office. We dusted it off and implemented the programmes we felt were useful, progressive and productive and would help Trinidad and Tobago. We did not hold back. Unlike that administration that preceded us, they came in and started to demonize and destroy everything they found in place and as a result they wasted six years. By the time the hon. Members caught themselves, elections were upon them. The PNM administration is not like that.

When we went in there, we took a look at what was in the pipeline. We assessed the pros and cons and proceeded to implement, immediately, everything we found that was considered meritorious. There was no victimization, no witch-hunting, no scandalization. You cannot point to anything within the portfolio of the Ministry of Health. I have discovered one thing. There are little cliques in that health sector. They have all these interpersonal conflicts. I think that the Member for Barataria/San Juan may have been a victim of that in this previous life at the hands of some of his friends.

He called for the resignation of the chairman of the North West RHA—what was the gentleman's name—I cannot remember—when the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan called for the resignation, he said: “Let the jackass bray”, or some very impertinent and insulting remark. That was the kind of behaviour that the country was treated to under the UNC administration. Those were the standards

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

to which they had dragged this country down, where a chairman of a state enterprise could talk about a Minister of Government—no matter what party—no chairman should be allowed to describe a Minister, his Minister, as a jackass, which is what I saw in the last UNC administration.

I understand that the Member for Barataria/San Juan was a victim of little cliques that exist inside that health sector. We will deal with that. We will bring relief to the Member for Barataria/San Juan because he is now back in private practice. I know he is looking for a job. He has made several applications and we will consider them fairly and equitably, because we care.

Let me move on. One of the other things that we in the PNM have done—and I am taking credit for this one—is our Five-Year National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan—draft. We are going to be sending it out for public comment. We hope that the former Minister of Health would comment on this. One thing he did in that six-year period was to negotiate a reduction in the price of medication for persons living with HIV/AIDS. He was very instrumental in organizing the global funds for AIDS. I give him credit for that. I am not saying that everything done by the previous Minister was rubbish. I just looked at it and said we need to build on this initiative and now this PNM administration has taken the work done by the previous ministers because the fight against HIV/AIDS has been going on long before the Member of Caroni Central was made Minister of Health. He simply improved upon it and we are now taking what he has done into the next universe. That is how we have our five-year National HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan where, over a five-year period, we intend to spend up to US \$90 million.

We are going to source funding from international agencies. We already have offers from the World Bank and European Development Fund. I think there is a grant from the EDF for that and we also have US \$25 million coming from the World Bank. We are negotiating that at present and will also use our own internal revenues and from other sources.

We have made an application. As the Member for Caroni Central would know, the Caribbean is the area of the world with the second highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Trinidad and Tobago has one of the highest prevalences among countries in the Caribbean, second to Haiti, therefore we are going to access the global funds.

I recently, in my capacity as Minister of Health, just before the election, signed the Caricom initiative, which is going forward to make an application to the global fund, so that we will now deal very seriously with this problem. We have already started the Anti-Retroviral Programme. The Medical Research



Foundation, which is run by Professor Bartholomew, is administering the anti-retroviral drugs for us at this time. Because of the kind of sophisticated facilities that are required we just cannot do this in an arbitrary manner in dilapidated facilities without proper staffing and monitoring. We will then be expanding it all over the country to various centres where we will continue this Anti-Retroviral Programme.

Of the US \$90 million, we will be spending about 85 per cent on treatment, care and support, surveillance, counselling and that sort of thing. That is what we are doing in the field of HIV/AIDS, we are building on what we found and taking it to another level. We are making a quantum leap in the treatment, prevention and control of HIV/AIDS.

Let me come back to the Member for St. Augustine. He made some comment about how we would not have the capacity to implement what we have in the budget. I think that was the only significant point I heard him make, but we have demonstrated in the last nine months that we did more in nine months than they did in six years. That is why we won the election.

If the hon. Members opposite were so wonderful, if as the Member for Couva North has tried to indicate, they were so wonderful, then they would be here and we would be there. The people of Trinidad and Tobago voted for us because of our excellent performance record and for other reasons. They were tired of them. They could not take the standards of behaviour in public life that they had displayed in the last six years. They also felt that we had the best chance of improving the quality of life for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why they voted for us, not all that ol' talk, about your doing this and that and about to do this. I heard all that in the election campaign. Of course, in-between there were all sorts of strange advertisements about irrelevant matters. In-between I heard all that, but they did not vote for them, they voted for us.

Let me now deal with nursing. We will surpass our projections and expectations. We are being very conservative. The total number of nurses required in Trinidad and Tobago is approximately 2,700. The actual number of nurses on the ground is 1,700. We are short of 1,000 nurses in Trinidad and Tobago. When you go to nursing assistants—that is the legacy of the other side—the total number of nursing assistants in the establishment is supposed to be 1,500. We are just over 1,100. We are short of just over 200 nursing assistants. What did they do about that during the six years? The actual output of nurses in Trinidad and Tobago is just below 100—about 95. That is what we actually produce every year, not the number of nurses in training or enrolled in courses, it is the output of new nurses every year. It is now about 95. In order to deal with

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

over 1,200 vacancies that exist, we have to triple that. That is why the Minister of Finance made the statement that we are going to deliver 300 nurses per year. That is where we have to get to—300, 400 nurses per year, at least 300 nurses per year. Output must go from 100 to 300, or we will never reduce the backlog. We lose 100 nurses per year, every year, through migration, retirement, attrition and those raiding parties that come out of Europe and North America every year.

One of the most exasperating things for me in the last nine months was to have persons telephone from North America or send letters asking me in my capacity as Minister of Health, to supply them with a list of names of Trinidad and Tobago nurses whom they can steal and employ in North America and Europe. I am sure that previous Ministers had this experience as well. I find it incredible.

We have a nursing shortage here, yet somebody from overseas is contacting the Ministry of Health saying, “Send us your nurses!”. Nonsense! We are going to increase the training opportunities, the number of centres, the number of instructors, provide more funding, improve the physical conditions, increase the number of classrooms and get it up to 300 nurses per year delivered. That is what we intend to do and we will do it.

I am already told that with the existing infrastructure, human and physical, with a few minor improvements, we can get it up to 150 or 200 nurses. That is what the Chief Nursing Division has told me. We are going to take it up to 300. That is the only way we can deal with these issues because all the institutions are in trouble because of the complement of nurses, who are the lifeblood of the system. The doctors cannot function without nurses. You cannot do surgery unless you have nurses. The wards cannot be established and maintained without nurses.

This Government has taken an initiative to bring in specialized, intensive care nurses from Cuba. I have discussed the matter with the Public Services Association because we do things differently. We do not do things by vaps. I have discussed it with the Public Services Association and their requirements are that the nurses must meet our standards in terms of training. They must be able to speak English and not displace anybody in the system.

The previous Ministers will know that we have 10 intensive care beds in Port of Spain. We can only manage to operate five of them because each bed requires three nurses for around-the-clock eight-hour shifts. At present, Port of Spain’s Intensive Care Unit is running at 50 per cent of its built capacity.

There is the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, which has never been commissioned—there are 16 beds in

it—because there are no nurses to operate this unit. The Adult Intensive Care Unit at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, as well, runs at about 40 per cent of its built capacity. This places a tremendous strain on our hospital because when you do surgery or a patient comes in with severe trauma, they need to go into an ICU bed and without the capacity you cannot deal with the problems we have in this country.

We are bringing in 15 specialized, intensive care, trained nurses from Cuba to supplement our existing stock, to allow us to increase the number of ICU beds by more than 100 per cent, to upgrade the skills of our staff while we increase our training programmes for local intensive care nurses.

**Dr. Khan:** You have spoken to the PSA for the nurses from Cuba, have you discussed it with the Nursing Council and, if you have, what did they say about bringing the nurses in? That was always a problem in our time.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** We do things differently. This initiative has been in train in the Ministry of Health now for the last six months. There have been detailed discussions with the various nursing bodies and we do not anticipate any difficulty. This is why we say they must meet the established standards set down by the Nursing Council. We do not anticipate any difficulty.

I understand the hon. Gentlemen opposite had problems, but we do things differently. We try to get everybody on board, build consensus and move forward. That is how the PNM does things.

We also recognize that the working conditions for people in the hospitals—nurses, attendants, wards maids, nurses aides, patient care assistants, everybody—are terribly unsatisfactory. The working equipment is antiquated, the wards are broken, the elevators do not work. There are all sorts of problems. I would not go into it. I still have to wonder what was done under the Health Sector Reform Programme in terms of physical work in the institutions over the last six years.

They closed down the sterilization department at Port of Spain two years ago. A good friend of the Member for Barataria/San Juan, the former chairman of the North West RHA closed down the department so that the equipment now has to be sterilized at Eric Williams, and if the truck breaks down on the way with the linen and the surgical instruments, well you can imagine. I will get a lovely letter from one of those medical practitioners in Port of Spain. There is one particular gentleman who writes about five letters a day. This is all as a result of the inefficiency of the past administration.

We also have to deal with attendants. One of the benefits I have is that I am not a doctor, so I am not part of that group. I can speak plainly where perhaps the

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

last two Ministers had a problem because they were dealing with their peers and colleagues. It is a fact there are some doctors who do not spend sufficient time in the hospitals. I can say that. I know that the Member for Barataria/San Juan cannot say that because they have to meet these fellows when they leave here. We have to deal with that because it affects the morale of the younger doctors.

When interns come in and they cannot see the consultant and the registrar is never there, it affects their morale. They, in turn, when they become house officers and registrars, pick up the bad habits and turn into the very type of person they found bothered them when they came in. I would say it is not the majority.

There are many committed, decent and hardworking medical practitioners in the system. I have met many of them. As with any situation, one or two people spoil it for everyone else, but I have met many committed doctors. I would say now that over the last nine months the PNM Government would not have been able to achieve, through me as Minister of Health, all that we have achieved if I did not get the help, cooperation and assistance of the people in the system—the doctors, the nurses and people in the Ministry of Health. The vast majority of them gave me yeoman service. Many of them, I know, do not support my political party. In that last two weeks some of them were missing in action because they had to help out. I think one of them was saying prayers on the platform of the Member for Couva South. When he came back to the Ministry, he gave me 100 per cent. I have to say it. I have to say I got 100 per cent from the vast majority of people in the health ministry.

Now there are many, many other things, Mr. Speaker, that I have not touched on. I have not touched on the Health Sector Reform Programme. I will deal with that in due course. There are many projects in the system now. The San Fernando Hospital upgrade has gone out to tender. Tenders are in and are being evaluated for a complete revamping of that hospital. We are putting a new burns unit there and a new lab in the San Fernando Hospital. We are upgrading the theatres and many other aspects of the San Fernando General Hospital.

We will return the Sterilization Unit to the Port of Spain General Hospital, which is going out for tender very shortly, if it has not been done already. We are going to be upgrading all of the systems at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, because we recognize that the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital was built 20 years ago and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex was commissioned 17 years ago. We are dealing with infrastructure that is between 17 and 20 years old, obsolete equipment, obsolete buildings and so on.

One of the major initiatives over the next five years is a complete revamp and upgrade of all of the mechanical and electrical equipment and the physical facilities at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. In fact, during this five years, we are going to commission many of the wards in that facility that have been left unused and abandoned. For example, we are going to be opening a surgical ward at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex very soon. You can apply. We are also refurbishing the Sangre Grande Hospital. We will be spending over \$50 million upgrading that facility which treats people from the whole eastern seaboard, from as far down as Mayaro and all up to Toco.

We will be looking at all the district health facilities that have been built in the last couple of years. Princes Town could have been opened before the general election, but that would have been overkill. We will open it next week. That would have been too much for Members opposite to take.

We are looking at the Couva District Health Facility. I am not taking credit for it. I am saying these were built by you, but we will commission them. We will make sure they are working properly. We will deal with all the design and construction problems that occurred under your watch and make them work properly.

We are also going to be building a new regional hospital in Scarborough. We are going to be building a new hospital in Point Fortin. We are not leaving out any part of Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to be building a brand new hospital in Point Fortin.

We are going to be looking at the Mayaro District Health Facility. As I said on the campaign trail, we are going to see whether we can add some beds to that facility so that at least persons who have critical problems will be able to overnight in the Mayaro Health Facility.

Of course, we are going to be looking at the needs of Central Trinidad. We will be looking also at the St. Ann's Mental Hospital. As Members opposite will know the trend in the world now is not for these large mental complexes, but to a smaller facility in the community and halfway houses, so that we can put people back into the system to be returned to productive life. That is the thrust in mental health the world over.

That is what we are going to be doing. We are going to be looking very closely at that large facility, which is more than 100 years old, if my memory is correct, and we are going to be implementing the new policies that are coming out in the metropolitan countries as it deals with mental health. Mental health is a very serious problem in this country. A lot of people do not realize it, but much of

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

the industrial relation problems we have and problems in the workplace result from persons who have psychiatric problems that are not diagnosed or who are not on proper medication and so forth.

This is the serious thrust we will be looking at over the next several years. We are also going to sort out all the niggling issues with the medical practitioners now that we are here for five years. We believe that people must be properly paid and compensated for the work that they do. In the last year, even though we were put under severe pressure by some medical practitioners, we still increased their salaries. We do not avoid issues. The issue was increased pay; we gave them. Now they have to perform. Now we have to look at the terms and conditions of employment and deal with all the loose ends.

Another thing we are looking at is legislation developed by the former administration to set standards for the accreditation of institutions, standards for medical care, malpractice, patients' rights. I understand the former administration was afraid to bring it because there are some issues that have to be worked out because the repercussions will be tremendous.

When you introduce that legislation for the first time, people will have proper legal channels to make complaints on a medical practitioner or a hospital for not giving them the treatment they deserve. We have to move a little cautiously with that, but we are going to do it. All health care workers must be compelled to comply with established standards because it involves everyone in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I have given you an overview of what we are going to be doing in the Ministry of Health. There are many issues that I have not touched on. There is the question of the ambulance service that was introduced by the past administration as a pilot programme. We are going to make it a permanent programme and we are going to deal with all the problems that occurred when the past administration took a nine-month pilot programme and kept extending it so that it could never reach maturity, where you had a full-fledged ambulance service. We have put that now under the South West RHA, which is given the responsibility to manage the service for the whole country.

We are going to be purchasing 50 new ambulances over this next term. In the immediate short term, we are bringing in 16 used ambulances to supplement the existing fleet because it is understrength at this time. We will also be replacing ambulances—the left-hand drive vehicles they bought, with right-hand drive vehicles. It seems to me that in the last government, they did not know that we drive on the left in Trinidad and Tobago.

An ambulance is supposed to be used for saving lives, but when you have a vehicle where the driver is on the left side and he has to pull out into oncoming traffic and it is a vehicle for saving lives, you see the dichotomy—a vehicle for saving lives is an inherently unsafe vehicle.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have one minute to wind up, please.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** We are going to bring correct vehicles for ambulances in this country. There is so much I can say. I have only given 10 per cent of what we will be doing in the health sector. There are so many areas I have not touched and, over the next five years, it will be my pleasure to educate and inform the hon. Members opposite of how the health sector should be modernized and operated for the good and welfare of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Mr. Speaker, can you advise as to what time you will be taking the lunch break?

**Mr. Speaker:** 12.30 p.m.

**Dr. Hamza Rafeeq** (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much.

I was hoping that the Member for Diego Martin East would have said some new things, but he said nothing new so I had no notes to take.

This budget, especially as far as the health sector is concerned, is one of the biggest con jobs to be perpetrated on the population of Trinidad and Tobago. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance mentioned in the Budget Statement that the Government has programmed an increase of 10 per cent in the health sector's budget to \$1.263 billion. That is totally false and misleading.

The 2001/2002 budget allocated to the Ministry of Health \$1.247 billion, while 2003 budget, programmes an allocation \$1.263 billion. This is an increase of \$15.68 million, which is an increase of a little over one per cent. However, included in this year's budget for the Ministry of Health, is an allocation of \$62 million for the settlement of arrears to public officers, part of the \$600 million payout to public officers mentioned in the budget.

When this is subtracted from the Ministry's budget, since this is a new expenditure, the total allocation to the Ministry decreases by \$46.3 million. This decrease in the allocation to the Ministry comes against the background of a dengue epidemic where many people, including little children, have died and thousands more have been afflicted with the disease.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. RAFEEQ]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

There was an article in yesterday's *Trinidad Guardian* in which the doctors at Mount Hope have complained that they are doing surgical operations by guess because there is a breakdown in the blood analysis machine for the last two months and where basic supplies are not available and where there is a substantial increase in the salaries bill of the doctors since, it was mentioned, there has been an increase in their salaries.

I am, therefore, advising the population that for those who have been conned into believing that the quality of health service that they are receiving will be better under the PNM, do not hold your breath because the quality of service is likely to get much worse in the coming months.

After the PNM was in Opposition for six years and in Government for nine months, I was eagerly awaiting to hear the new initiatives that this Government has for the health sector. However, in the Budget Statement and the accompanying documents, there is not one single new initiative advanced by this Government. The fact that they have only retained the programmes put in place by the UNC administration is an endorsement of the health sector policy of the UNC in Government.

The difference is that this Government does not have the wherewithal to implement the programmes which they do not quite understand.

**12.00 noon.**

Two days ago, amidst much fanfare, the Prime Minister announced that they would introduce a programme of free prostate and cataract treatment as well as subsidized cardiac surgery for the poor. Neither the Prime Minister nor the Minister of Health tells us how this will be done because, at present, prostate surgery and cataract treatment are already available free in the public health sector and I will explain this, Mr. Speaker.

Does it mean that the capacity of the public health sector will be strengthened so that it would be able to provide these services in a more timely and efficient manner? Does it mean the involvement of the private health sector? Let me just point out to you that these are not new programmes but programmes initiated by the UNC administration without much fanfare, and I would like to read into the record, Mr. Speaker, the budgetary allocations when these programmes were initiated last year with a comparison of what is being touted as new programmes today.

In the 2002 Budget, we allocated for gynaecological cancer screening and surgery, \$2 million; in 2003, this Government allocated \$2 million. In 2002 we allocated for prostate surgery, \$2 million; this Government allocated \$2 million. In 2002 we allocated for paediatric cardiac surgery, \$2 million; this year this



Government allocated \$2 million. We allocated in 2002 for adult cardiac surgery, \$2.5 million—the programme that they are boasting about so much—this year they allocated the same \$2.5 million. We allocated in 2002 for renal dialysis, Mr. Speaker, \$2.5 million; this year they allocated \$2.5 million. We allocated in 2002 for HIV/AIDS, the treatment of HIV/AIDS, \$10 million; this year this Government allocated \$10 million.

Where are the new programmes and where is the new money? Mr. Speaker, these were the moneys budgeted for the various programmes in the 2001/2002 Budget. Some of it was spent and, because of the lack of understanding in some cases and total incompetence on the part of the government on the other hand, some of the moneys were not spent and the programmes not started. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me deal with the cataract issue. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Health mentioned cataract treatment. It is not only hypocritical of them to say so but totally misleading as well, and I will tell you why. I would like the Minister of Health or the Prime Minister to point out where in the budget document the allocation is made for cataract treatment. I have perused all the budget documents presented and there is no allocation, not one cent, for the treatment of cataracts. So the statement in the budget presentation is totally misleading.

I say it is hypocritical as well because in 1995, Mr. Speaker, when we came to office, there was a backlog of 2,500 patients waiting for cataract surgery, which is a curable cause of blindness. A 15-minute to half-an-hour operation can immediately restore sight to people who suffer from cataracts. These 2,500 patients were waiting for three, four and five years sometimes and they were put on a waiting list for three to four years. In the past, some of them either went into their meagre savings and had their surgeries done privately and some of them died while waiting for surgery.

During our term in office, we instituted two special programmes and operated on approximately 2,400 patients [*Desk thumping*] thus effectively clearing the backlog. Today, because this Government has done nothing for the last nine months, the waiting list has again begun to climb and people are now waiting, as the Minister said, for two to three years down the road. While promises are being made by the Prime Minister during the election campaign and hope given to these patients, not a cent has been allocated—another broken promise.

The budget goes on to say that approximately 20 dialysis machines will be installed in the major government centres—another PNM con job. In the 2001/2002 Budget the UNC Government allocated \$2.5 million to purchase these machines and, by the time we demitted office, tenders were about to be awarded

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. RAFEEQ]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

for the purchase of these. I would like the Minister to tell us, Mr. Speaker, and the national community, where did the money go and whether the \$2.5 million allocated this year will be for an additional 20 machines or for the same 20 machines that were supposed to be purchased last year?

Mr. Speaker, they also mentioned that the government would subsidize cardiac surgery for the poor. In the 2001/2002 Budget, the Minister of Finance made an allocation of \$2.5 million to commence this programme. In my contribution to the budget debate last year, I mentioned that we had secured the services of doctors, nurses and technicians from abroad who were willing to come to Trinidad and Tobago and commence this programme with little or no cost to the government thereby giving access to as many people as possible. However, this Government took a good programme and made a total mess of it. The first thing they did was to exclude the professionals from abroad who, as I said, were willing to come here and donate their services free or almost free.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, when you are looking for poor people to assist in a programme of this kind, the first place you look is the hospital clinic. This is where poor people seek medical attention because they cannot afford to go elsewhere. In the San Fernando hospital cardiac clinic alone there are over 2,100 patients, many of whom need angiograms, angioplasty and cardiac surgery and I am sure there are similar numbers in Port of Spain hospital. What did the Minister do? He put out an advertisement in the newspapers asking people who need surgery to apply to the Ministry.

Of these 2,100 patients in San Fernando, Mr. Speaker, more than 95 per cent do not read the newspapers, therefore, those who need the services most were virtually excluded from the programme. When representation was made on their behalf by one of the senior doctors in this country, it was turned down. Obviously there has been some measure of discrimination in this programme because the people who this programme was intended to benefit never benefited from it.

Mr. Speaker, we had a similar experience when I went to the Ministry of Health as minister. There was something called the voucher system and this is where some services were available in the private sector or at Mount Hope and, if you were in the public institution, you got a voucher and you had these services. That was one of the biggest con jobs that I met when I went to the Ministry because, do you know what happened in those cases? The friends and relatives of people who were in authority at that time were the ones who benefited, and the same thing happened with this cardiac surgery programme.

When we did our paediatric cardiac surgery programme, the only criterion was whether the child needed to have surgery or not and that programme, as you have heard, has been such a massive success that over 120 patients have been operated on and all of them are alive and well today. That was our programme. [*Desk thumping*] When we did our cataract programme, all the patients were selected from the hospital clinics. I insisted that they be selected from the hospital clinics because this is where the people in need go for medical services. So they have no programmes of their own, no ideas of their own. They copy our ideas and they make a mess of them.

Mr. Speaker, let me talk about drugs for the elderly and the poor. The Minister mentioned that they would be dispensing medications to elderly and poor people who get prescriptions from the private sector or from the public sector in private pharmacies. When we went into office in 1995, we met a drug budget of \$45 million that the PNM Government had increased when they came into office in 1991 to 1995. Mr. Speaker, 1991 to 1995, an increase from \$35 million to \$45 million, and remember that during that period there was a substantial devaluation of the dollar so that \$45 million could have bought what \$35 million bought. So there was, in real terms, no increase in the drug budget from 1991 to 1995.

From 1995 to 2001 when we demitted office, we increased the drug budget from \$45 million to \$100 million. [*Desk thumping*] So we not only provided drugs for the elderly and the poor, we provided drugs for all those who sought services at the public health sector. He mentioned some of the details of the programme and there are a lot more details that he has to give us because when—we would like to know, for instance, what category of drugs will be available in the private sector? Is it drugs only on the hospital formulary or any drugs that a private doctor might prescribe? You said drugs for diabetes, you said drugs for cardiac patients, you said drugs for high blood pressure, but what drugs? [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** He would not understand that, you know.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Exactly! He really does not understand. Will they be drugs on the present hospital formulary or will they be new drugs?

**Mr. Imbert:** Since I know the Member has an interest in a pharmacy, I will let him know after the debate.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Mr. Speaker, I am asking these questions because I want to say to the Minister that this is not a new idea. We had developed this idea in the Ministry of Health some time ago and we had developed it in such a way that I would have been able to give him all the answers today, but Mr. Minister, just let

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. RAFEEQ]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

me give you some advice because I know you do not know. The government purchases drugs at between 10 and 50 per cent of the cost of these drugs to the private pharmacies—10 and 50 per cent. The most effective way to spend your money, therefore, to benefit the most number of people will be for the Government to purchase the drugs and have them distributed in the private pharmacies for a fee; because if you do not think out your programmes carefully, you will be just throwing your limited resources at a problem and getting little or no benefit for it. You will be taking a good programme which we developed and messing with it again. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the shortage of nurses. The budget statement mentions and the Minister mentioned that the Government plans to train approximately 300 nurses per year over the next three years. It is a known fact that there is a shortage of nurses in Trinidad—and he mentioned 1,000—and it is a known fact that there will always be migration of nurses and so on, so the only answer, really, is to train more than we need, so you train for our needs and you train for export as well.

However, do you know what was the response of this Government when they were in office from 1991 to 1995? They discontinued the training of nurses and nursing assistants. This, Mr. Speaker, has aggravated the problem to the extent that today we are still playing catch up. We not only reintroduced the training of nurses and nursing assistants, we accelerated the training programme to the extent that we had our Niherst and apprenticeship programmes running concurrently in order to increase our intake. We therefore—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, order.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** We therefore were taking in 200 nursing students and 200 nursing assistant students a year. In fact, in the year 2000 our intake for nursing was 300. When we demitted office in 2001—and they talk about competence—the interviews and selection of 165 nursing students had already been completed and the training was supposed to have begun in January this year. That programme did not start until June.

After this programme was started, the selection process should have begun again to choose another 200 students to begin training in September or October this year, but because of the gross negligence and incompetence of that Government, nothing has been done so far. [*Desk thumping*] How then can you fulfil your promise to train 300 nurses a year? Not only that, Mr. Speaker; again, do you know that no budgetary allocation has been made to train an additional 300 nurses this year? I have perused all the documents and no budgetary

allocation has been made to train an additional 300 nurses this year. So this budget is really full of a lot of empty promises.

The situation of the nursing shortage, Mr. Speaker, did not come on us overnight. While patients were suffering on the wards because of a lack of nurses, the Minister was trying to see how much public relations he could get at the Ministry. Let me just give you one piece of advice again, Mr. Minister—public relations in that Ministry will not help you. [*Desk thumping*] When patients go to hospitals and they cannot get the kind of care they deserve, when patients get dengue and die of it, when people come to hospital and there are no nurses to attend to them, public relations will not help you. My advice to you, therefore, is, if you really care for people, poor people at that, forget the public relations and get down to some real work.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk about HIV/AIDS. Incidentally let me just remind the Prime Minister that when people write things for him, read and understand it before embarrassing himself before the national community. [*Desk thumping*] Try to read and understand it before you embarrass yourself before the national community. When the Prime Minister announced that the cost of HIV drugs would be reduced through appropriate subsidization and in the next paragraph he mentioned that antiretroviral drug treatment will be provided to persons living with AIDS, they are one and the same thing. So try and understand what you read the next time. Mr. Speaker, again they have taken a good idea and made a mess of it.

In 2001 as you know, as the Minister mentioned, we negotiated a reduction in the price of drugs, but not only that. The Minister of Finance made an allocation of \$10 million to subsidize the cost of these drugs further so many more persons will benefit from the reduced prices. We were also talking to private corporations and state enterprises to buy into this programme so that they could assist in treating their own employees. This programme was supposed to start in January this year. Do you know what happened, Mr. Speaker? We had allocated \$10 million and this Government was only able to spend \$1 million towards that project so far and they now speak of grandiose plans to spend \$500 million in four years but cannot even spend \$10 million in one year for a programme that was already established. Talk is cheap and, as I said, this budget is full of promises that will never materialize.

Mr. Speaker, in the years 2000 and 2001, during the election campaign, the leader of the PNM went all over the country promising that he will build an AIDS hospital if he is returned to office. After realizing how silly that idea was, however, he has now dropped that idea and plans to build instead a world-class

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. RAFEEQ]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

AIDS testing facility in Tobago. I say bravo for Tobago, but what about the thousands of citizens in Trinidad who need testing? Would they go across to Tobago for testing? I say, Mr. Speaker, you cannot run the health sector or the country, for that matter, by picking up a few half-baked ideas here and there and saying that is a plan. To use the words that were used in this Parliament before, that is government by “vaps”. My advice to you, Mr. Minister again, is, do not throw away money all over the place and hope that it will solve the problem. Complete the national strategic plan for HIV/AIDS, which was already in an advanced stage when we left office, with more urgency and approach the problem in a holistic manner.

Mr. Speaker, he mentioned mental health. Let me touch on mental health. The budget statement mentioned that shortly the Ministry of Health would begin implementation of the Trinidad and Tobago Mental Health Plan. The plan, the statement goes on to say, will rationalize and reorient the provision of mental health services using a holistic and integrated approach to mental health treatment, promotion and care. In the *Social & Economic Policy Framework* document it goes on to say that a national mental health committee has been established to provide overall strategic directions and, additionally, regional mental health committees are being set up. This is what I mean when I say hypocrisy.

This Government is sounding as if it cares about mental health when, in fact, they have totally and completely neglected this most important area in health for many years. Mr. Speaker, after years of consultation, workshops and discussions, the mental health plan was developed by the UNC government and formally adopted by the Cabinet of the UNC as a policy document. [*Desk thumping*] Coming out of that plan, a national mental health committee was established by the Cabinet and regional mental health committees were in the process of being established. That was in December 2001.

For the last nine months, nothing has been done and the Government has behaved as if mental health did not exist. This Government has suddenly recognized the importance of mental health and has included it in the budget statement; but I say better late than never. However, Mr. Speaker, since they are so bold to say that implementation of the plan will begin shortly, the least they could have done was to make an allocation in the budget for it and, again, perusal of the budget documents indicate that not one cent has been allocated for the implementation of this plan; but, as I said, talk is cheap—empty promises again.

Let me mention the Scarborough hospital, Mr. Speaker. In the 1991 election manifesto of the PNM, the promise was made to construct the Scarborough

hospital as well as the Couva and the Sangre Grande hospitals. However, between 1991 and 1995 nothing, absolutely nothing was done in respect of Scarborough hospital; well of course neither Couva nor Sangre Grande. It took a UNC administration between 1995 and 2001 to advance this process.

After a long period of haggling and negotiating with the Tobago House of Assembly, we finally were able to sign a Memorandum of Understanding, which was a prerequisite for the IDB loan. Subsequent to that, the IDB required a feasibility study to be conducted in respect of the site, the size and the services to be provided at the hospital; even agreeing on the terms of reference for this study was a long and drawn out process with the Tobago House of Assembly. However, after the study was completed and agreed upon and accepted by the IDB, the design briefs were done, tenders were issued for the designs and I must say that the designs were conducted with the maximum amount of consultation and consensus building at every stage.

Finally, when the designs were completed, tenders for construction were issued and money was allocated in the 2001/2002 Budget to commence construction this year. That was in December 2001. To date construction has not started and the people of Tobago and the tourism industry continue to suffer. I think the national community and the population of Tobago deserves an explanation as to why the process has not moved forward since December 2001.

Mr. Speaker, let me just say a couple of words on the development programme. Incidentally I want to say to the Prime Minister that this is a bogus document. This PSIP document is a bogus document because the figures here do not tally with the figures in the development programme budget that you—they just do not tally, so this is a bogus document and I want you to check it when you have some time. This appears to have been the draft document. This is not the final document. This is the draft. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to say to the Minister of Health that I have no doubt in my mind that the Prime Minister is setting you up big time to get rid of you. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] How else could you explain a 50 per cent cut in your development programme allocation from 2002 to 2003 when you are expected to deliver so much? The development programme budget for 2002 was \$154.7 million. In 2003 you have been allocated \$78.3 million, a decrease of \$76.4 million in your budget. There is a lot of work to be done, infrastructure and otherwise, in the health sector. In last year's budget, as I said, the Ministry was allocated \$154.7 million but because of the ineptness and incompetence of the Government over the last nine months, only \$98 million was spent and maybe when the accounts are finally

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. RAFEEQ]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

reconciled it will be a lot less than that. This is because over the last nine months everything was at a virtual standstill with no new programmes starting and no new construction coming on stream.

For instance, and let me mention this—just one project. We had allocated \$35 million to complete construction works on the new wing of the San Fernando hospital. This was supposed to house the surgical wards in the hospital so that the overcrowding, which is a chronic and long-standing problem, would have been solved. Not one cent has been spent on this project while more than half a million people who seek services at the San Fernando General Hospital continue to suffer. However, Mr. Speaker, let me just remind the Minister of Health of what he is supposed to deliver with the \$78 million in the development programme.

The upgrading of the Port of Spain General Hospital and Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; procurement of equipment for the central sterilization services department, surgical and other departments; construction and refurbishment of 11 health and outreach centres in Diego Martin, Petit Valley, Morvant, Upper Laventille, San Juan, Barataria, Maloney, La Horquetta, Arouca, Tunapuna and Tacarigua; St. James enhanced health facility; St. Joseph enhanced health facility and the St. James and Chaguanas district health facilities; continuation of the upgrade of the new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital; commencement of construction of the Point Fortin district hospital; completion of the Siparia district health facility and 11 health and outreach centres in La Brea, Erin, St. Madeline, La Romaine, Debe, Marabella, Williamsville, Gasparillo, Gran Couva, Talparo and Las Lomas; commencement of construction of the Sangre Grande Hospital and commencement of the upgrading of the Mayaro district health facility.

Mr. Speaker, let me remind the Minister of Health that construction of the Chaguanas district health facility and the St. James district health facility alone will cost \$38 million. So who is fooling whom and who is “mamaguying” whom? I really believe that this Government takes the people for fools. That is why they treat the population with so much contempt. However, I want to warn you that we will be holding you to your word as far as this document is concerned and we will expose you at every turn because I am sure that the projects here will again come under the heading of broken promises. Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Bereaux:** Would the Member please give way?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** I am very—

**Mr. Bereaux:** Would you please give way just for a moment? I would like to advise the hon. Member that the health facility in La Brea is already being constructed. [*Desk thumping*]



**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** I did promise you last year in the budget debate that we will start it during the fiscal year, and I am glad that it has started.

Mr. Speaker, the ineptness and incompetence of this Government is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in its handling of the dengue epidemic. From as early as the beginning of this year, the Minister was alerted that there was likely to be a dengue epidemic with dire consequences later in this year. In typical fashion, this warning was ignored and even when the mayor of Chaguanas pointed out concrete evidence as to the dengue epidemic, he was laughed at and accused of lying to the population. The true figures of that epidemic have not been revealed but the epidemic is far from over, but I can tell you for a fact that several people have died from dengue and thousands more have been infected with the disease with many of them having the complications of dengue hemorrhagic fever.

During the election campaign, several millions of dollars were spent on dubious projects in order to buy votes and hundreds or thousands of people were paid under the guise of employment, yet not one person was hired to augment or supplement the cadre of workers in the insect vector division. Up to today, no one has been hired. That is the urgency with which this Government has treated the dengue epidemic. Mr. Speaker, nobody, and I mean nobody in the Government, treated the dengue epidemic with any degree of urgency.

Today, no matter how much the Minister may want to doctor the figures and bring them to Parliament, the people of this country know otherwise and I therefore say today that the blood of all those who died during the dengue epidemic lies on the hands of the present government. [*Desk thumping*] They have shown no compassion and no sensitivity and, in fact, no concern for the growing numbers of persons who have fallen to dengue and its complications. For those who managed to escape the epidemic, Mr. Speaker, it certainly has nothing to do with the present Government. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting of this House is suspended for lunch and we will resume at 1.30 p.m.

**12.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.30 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Caroni Central, you have 12 more minutes of your allotted first 45 minutes.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, continuing in my contribution, I say to the Minister of Health that I am a bit disappointed in the allocation for the Emergency Health Service

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. RAFEEQ]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

(EHS)—\$36 million. We established the EHS in this country at great cost and it is a service that we are not only proud of but one that gives comfort to our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and one that has been responsible for saving many lives. This service is the envy of the entire Caribbean and even many Latin American countries. [*Desk thumping*] The population has become accustomed to this service and depends on it to a large extent.

When we established this service, we bought used ambulances, fully equipped ones, at a cost of \$150,000 each. Many of them have now outlived their usefulness and the fleet needs to be replaced. [*Interruption*] That is right. It would indeed be a tragedy if such an important and efficient service is allowed to collapse. However, with the allocation at \$38 million, I fear that this is where we are heading, for a collapse of the system. On behalf of all the citizens of this country, therefore, particularly the poor, I implore you to do whatever is required to at least maintain the level of service to which our population has become accustomed.

Mr. Speaker, again on behalf of a special group of persons, I want to make an appeal to the Government. About two years ago we passed the Human Tissue Transplant Act and that is still to be proclaimed. The implementation of that Act has the potential to save lives. It requires, however, that the regulations be made and the necessary infrastructure be put in place. When we demitted office the regulations were being drafted and I am appealing to the Minister, on behalf of the many persons who can get a new lease on life, to publish the regulations and to put the necessary infrastructure in place so that the Act can be proclaimed as soon as possible.

It appears as though, for all intents and purposes, the Health Sector Reform Programme has been abandoned. This is extremely unfortunate because the Health Sector Reform Programme is a comprehensive reform programme. Of course I will be the first to admit that it needs to be reviewed, but the fundamentals of the reform remain sound. The primary health care approach has virtually gone through the window and the emphasis is now on high-tech equipment. This is indeed a tragedy because the whole world has embraced the importance of primary health care as where the greatest gains are to be realized in the health status of the population, yet primary health care got honourable mention in half of a sentence in the budget statement.

For someone who does not have a medical background, it is easy to be caught up in the glamour of high-tech equipment and technology, but you must take advice from your technical staff and do what is correct for the greatest number of people, especially the poor. So I would like you to give serious consideration to

the following 10 points as you plan your activities for the coming year. Mr. Speaker, I am saying this to the Government because health is not a partisan affair but something that affects all of us and if we get the health sector right everyone will benefit and the development of the country would be positively affected, so I would like to give these 10 points of advice.

First, return the health sector to the policies and principles of the Health Sector Reform Programme. You had a consultation recently but you are hardly likely to get much valuable information there. Most people will come to that with their own pet peeves and problems. While the information will be worthwhile, it will hardly assist you in determining national policies. You need to have consultations with much smaller groups of stakeholders and use that as the basis for adjustment of your policies.

Secondly, re-embrace the primary health care strategy. This is not only “ol’ talk”; it works. As I said, the secondary and tertiary care sectors need to be developed but certainly not at the expense of the primary care sector.

Thirdly, before you introduce new technologies in the public health institutions, do proper health technology assessment studies. Not everything we see on TV will be appropriate to our setting where very basic things are missing.

Fourthly, get more aggressive with your health promotion efforts. I notice that you had a very successful health promotion month this year, something we started two years ago, but you need to keep the momentum going. The substitutes for health promotion activities are far too expensive. There is a health promotion council in place. Put them to work.

Fifthly, in keeping with health promotion, begin health education activities in primary schools. We had discussions with the Ministry of Education on this and this should be pursued vigorously, and include in your health education in schools the subject of HIV/AIDS.

Sixth, finalize the national strategic plan on HIV/AIDS with some degree of urgency and begin its implementation. As I said, a lot of work had already been done and you showed us a draft this morning. We are in a position to be the leaders in the management of HIV/AIDS in the region. Work with a little more diligence on this.

Seventh, finalize the White Paper on tobacco and bring it to Parliament as soon as possible. The first draft has already been completed and some consultations have already been held. This is an extremely important document

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. RAFEEQ]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

because in some ways we are lagging behind many other countries in the world in our tobacco policy. We will soon be called upon to do something a little more decisive.

Eighth, complete the human resources manual for the Regional Health Authorities as quickly as possible. A lot of work has already been done on it. Complete it as quickly as possible and begin negotiations with the relevant unions for the transfer of public servants to the Regional Health Authorities. This is a very important exercise on which we were working and we now leave it for you to continue.

Ninth, for greater accountability—and I want you to listen to this one—of the RHAs and to facilitate easier flow of communication both ways, amend the Regional Health Authorities Act to include a senior official from the Ministry of Health on the boards of RHAs. This can be done by laying the amendment for the composition of the board in Parliament for negative resolution.

**Mr. Imbert:** Why you did not do that?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** I took a note to Cabinet. It was approved in November 2001. It just has to be brought to Parliament. That is all left for you to do.

Finally, Mr. Minister, reorganize the Ministry of Health's head office with some urgency. The Ministry of Health is at present not fully equipped to carry out its new responsibilities. Again, a lot of work has been done on the new structure, which is just left for you to finalize and implement. Most of what I have mentioned here are items without too much cost but will go a long way in moving the health sector forward. It is for you, Mr. Minister, to accept or reject.

Mr. Speaker, I have concluded my presentation as far as the health sector is concerned but I want to deal in the next few minutes with some constituency matters.

I was really hoping that Trinidad and Tobago would never again in its history experience the kind of government we saw for the last nine months. I was hoping that we would never see a government that practised discrimination, victimization, favouritism and nepotism on the scale that the last government, the government for the last nine months did, because, at the end of the day, the government is elected to look after the welfare of every citizen in this country regardless of race, colour, religion or even political affiliation. The Government for the last nine months ran the affairs of this country in such a manner that the resources were utilized for the benefits of only certain sections of the population. I was hoping that that would never happen again.

However, in the social programmes that have been mentioned in the budget, there is not one programme for the constituency of Caroni Central. Caroni Central

has some of the poorest people in Trinidad yet, among the 21 transformation development centres in Trinidad and Tobago, not one has been placed in Caroni Central. The Civilian Conservation Corps again will be expanded to several areas; not one in Caroni Central. Information made easy through technological centre, not one in Caroni Central.

Mr. Speaker, I am putting on the record before you: one, Caroni Central has 410 roads, some of which have been paved and some of which are in a dilapidated condition. In fact, in December of last year some of the roads were prepared for paving and all of this was discontinued as soon as this Government took office. I have forwarded a list of these roads, those that are in need of urgent repairs, to the Ministry of Works and Transport and I hope we will begin to see some work started very soon.

Secondly, because of the topography of the lands in certain parts of Caroni Central, there are several landslips to be repaired. I have also forwarded a list to the Ministry of Works and Transport and hope that work will begin soon on some of these.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, just before we demitted office in 2001, the sod was turned for the construction of a community centre in Preysal after representation for the past 20 years. Money was allocated for this and construction was due to begin early this year. For some strange reason, the money was shifted elsewhere. The residents of Preysal are still awaiting commencement of construction.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, the Preysal Government School is in urgent need of rebuilding. I hope that the process to construct the school will begin this year so that, before the end of three years, we will have our new school in Preysal.

Fifthly, Mr. Speaker, in Carlsen Field, a housing settlement is being developed. We hope that the priority for these houses will be given to nearby villagers who are in need of housing. Let me just alert you that we will be monitoring this project very closely.

Sixthly, flooding from the Caparo river continues to be a major problem in the Caparo, Palmiste and Longdenville areas. Some dredging was done by the last government with some relief, however, some substantial works need to be done and I will be seeking an audience with the Minister of Works and Transport soon to discuss the matter.

Seven, there are still a few areas in the constituency without water, and I am aware that the relevant studies have already been completed in order to bring water to these residents. I will be pursuing this matter with the Ministry of Public Utilities.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. RAFEEQ]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Eighth, there are many agricultural access roads in the constituency in need of urgent repairs. I have prepared a list of these and will be forwarding this list to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources for his attention. And finally, we in Caroni Central will like to get our fair share of the 48,000 streetlights that were promised. If we get 1,500 of these we will make do until we come back to office later. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Culture and Tourism (Hon. Penelope Beckles):** Mr. Speaker, as I start my contribution, let me congratulate you on your election to Speaker of the House of this very honourable and distinguished Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. Also, Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance on the delivery of his budget presentation. [*Desk thumping*]

I want first of all to comment on the contribution of the hon. Member, the hon. Leader of the Opposition. It is no secret to many Trinidadians and Tobagonians that over the years the Leader of the Opposition has acquired the reputation of being one of our better orators. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, this was his shortest budget contribution. Many of us were waiting eagerly for the response of the Leader of the Opposition and, if the time is correct, I think he spoke for just about 40 minutes—[*Interruption*—35 minutes. As a matter of fact, this was one of his very, very sober contributions—little or no fire at all. So that, I can only conclude that the budget contribution of the hon. Member for San Fernando East was so excellent that there was very little to which the Leader of the Opposition could have responded. [*Desk thumping*]

He focused quite a lot on the issue of the social programmes and what he referred to as the dependency syndrome that the PNM appeared to be encouraging, according to his interpretation. Mr. Speaker, with your approval I would like to refer to the *Express* of October 23 referring to poverty remaining high in Trinidad and Tobago. This is an article written by Joel Nanton and in that article he indicates that figures from the Central Bank and the United Nations Development Programme show that unemployment was on the decline but poverty continued to increase over the last eight years. It was indicated that the poverty level was 26 per cent, that is some 330,000 persons and that was in the period of 1992.

He further indicated that in the period 1995, 23 per cent of persons were said to be living beyond the poverty line, and in 1996 when the UNC government was in office, the figure at that time—using a figure of \$623 as the figure that they used to decide whether a person was under the poverty line—had reached sometimes as high as 35.9 per cent in certain constituencies. Mr. Pierre of the

UNDP indicated that there are three target groups which are vulnerable—the elderly, the young people below the age of 16 and the single-parent household mainly headed by women. So that the simple reality, Mr. Speaker, is that we are talking about a figure somewhere between 270,000 and 330,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago who are below the poverty line, give or take whatever period is utilized.

During the tenure of the Member for Chaguanas as the Minister of Social Development, a further study was done, together with UNICEF, and that was a multiple indicator cluster survey, and that survey really looked again at issues of poverty but specifically relating to issues of adult literacy, birth registration, infant mortality, early childhood care and education. The results indicated that we actually now have in some constituencies less children attending school. We have had a problem in terms of the literacy rate, and the figures relating to children who are not attending school simply because their parents were not able to maintain them, those figures have continued to increase.

So that when we take together the multiple indicator cluster survey report which is now completed, the recommendations relating to those reports are that more money is be put into child health care, more moneys into education and money into children with special needs, dealing with the School Feeding Programme. Coupled with the survey done by the Ministry of Social Development in terms of the needs, the survey of living conditions done when the United National Congress was in power and the survey also done in 1992, all the indicators tell us that Trinidad and Tobago has a serious problem as it relates to poverty.

Now, you would recall, Mr. Speaker, that in the last campaign, the UNC offered to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I imagine that was one of their methods of dealing with poverty, that every child born would get \$1,500 to be invested in the Unit Trust to mature at age 18. Now, Mr. Speaker, the issue is, what happens to that child between the age of zero and 18? What has been the PNM's policy over the last nine months in relation to the social programmes and in relation to the health programmes?

My colleague, the Minister of Health, dealt with several of the programmes and projects and, as he indicated, he did not mention all the programmes and projects in the health sector. However, what is passing strange is the Member for Caroni Central said that he was hoping that he would not see a PNM Government back in office after the nine months that we have been there, but the 305,000 persons who voted for the People's National Movement had other ideas. [Desk *thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. P. BECKLES]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Just in case the Member for Caroni Central had any doubts, during the period 2001 to 2002, in a period of nine months, the People's National Movement was able to increase our votes by 50,000—thousands and thousands—more votes whilst the UNC were only able to increase their votes by 5,000. So that I think the Member for Caroni Central needs to understand that his vote and his desire of hoping not to see the PNM in office disappeared on October 07 and the PNM is now in Government. I am so happy to see that they have now accepted their responsibilities as hon. Members of Parliament [*Desk thumping*] and are here sitting, as they should have done last year, so that the many things they are asking for this year could have been started. If I might just educate the Member for Couva South about votes from last year—[*Interruption*]

I would not let you distract me, you know, but the candidate whom you sent to Arima was severely given a political licking of more than 8,000 votes. [*Desk thumping*] When the Leader of the Opposition talks about programmes and projects to improve the self-esteem of the young people, it is unbelievable that a person who left Diego Martin Central, having been given a severe political licking by my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, and then being sent to Arima, 8,000 votes, and then being imposed on the public of Trinidad and Tobago in the Senate—that is self-esteem.

My friend from Caroni Central talked about the PNM doing a con job in the Ministry of Health. What he did not tell us is that over the last six years, in relation to the dengue epidemic, 80 persons died between the period 1996 to 2000 and he is talking about the blood of those who have died recently being on the hands of the Minister of Health and during that period, no equipment, no vehicles, no chemicals. What has my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East done since he assumed office as the Minister of Health? Purchased 25 new vehicles, employed 75 more persons working in the Insect Vector Control Division and, as a matter of fact, the recent statistics for the month of September have now showed that there is a decline in the deaths due to dengue by 50 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] Please continue your good job, Mr. Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

He talked about the Health Sector Reform Programme initiated by the PNM in 1994 and expected to be completed in the year 2001. To date, when the UNC left office six years later, only 30 per cent of that Health Sector Reform Programme has been implemented. The other 70 per cent will now be implemented by the Minister of Health, the Member for Diego Martin East. [*Desk thumping*]

I recognize that there is a difficulty on the other side in terms of understanding basic mathematics and interpretation of the budget. The Member for Caroni



Central is saying that only \$10 million has been allocated for HIV/AIDS in our budget. I hate to have to take my time to repeat this again but I will do so. The Minister of Health indicated that the allocation for HIV/AIDS will be supplemented by the \$150 million loan from the World Bank, together with a loan from the European Community Fund and I hope that will be put to rest since they did not seem to understand exactly what was taking place.

The Member would have us believe that, as it relates to the Scarborough hospital, we did not want to build the hospital but everyone knows about the continuous fight that took place between the UNC government and the Tobago House of Assembly, then under Hochoy Charles. If you recall correctly, it was the same Tobago at that time that had put the United National Congress into government and then they simply neglected, rejected and did not even want to pay the many bills of the THA. Therefore, for this 2001 election they could not even go to Tobago and send any candidate to contest a seat under the United National Congress; could not even show their faces in Tobago.

I again just want to remind my colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, who is now a certified marriage officer—congratulations—that he needs to be very careful about not speaking the truth and misleading people about things, because you are now going to be marrying men and women and telling them to do the right thing. So please, when you come to Parliament, do not mislead people about good things that are being done by the PNM. So at the end of the day, we in the PNM and the Minister of Health will ensure that all the corrupt practices and activities that have been taking place over the last six years will be no more and we will ensure that our money is well spent and the people of Trinidad and Tobago will once more be delivered with adequate and proper quality health care.

So, Mr. Speaker, I now return to dealing with some of the programmes in the social sector, and, as I said, we have used evidence, the research done and commissioned by the United National Congress, by the international agencies and by some of our own research in order to decide about the importance of implementing the many social programmes. Whilst the Member for Caroni Central said that his constituency will not benefit from those programmes, I would just urge him again to read the budget carefully and to understand that the People's National Movement is a party for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So that, I just highlight the many programmes that have been put in place over the last nine months and I can say again that the Member for Chaguanas in 1999 set up the review of the public assistance programme and the review of many of the programmes in the social sector with a view to doing precisely what the PNM

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. P. BECKLES]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

had the will to do in 2002. Having gone to that Ministry, and the Member for Chaguanas will agree that the majority of calls to him at that time as a minister was in relation to the increases in public assistance and increases in the disability grant, most of those programmes that have not been increased over the last 10, 15, sometimes 20 years.

The programmes that would have been increased are the emergency grants and some of those other programmes. Okay. But in terms of the disability grants—

**2.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Would you give way? Mr. Speaker, this is misleading the House. The UNC increased public assistance from \$151 to \$222 in 1999.

**Hon. P. Beckles:** I thought that you all are the same people who are saying that \$100 is no increase.

Yes, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, a lot of these programmes over the last couple of years have not had increases, and even if my friend got up to say there was an increase, the fact is—[*Interruption*] I said there were no increases in all the programmes. Okay?

And, it is as a result of the said report initially commissioned under the Member for Chaguanas and utilizing the data collected and doing our own review, that we recognize the importance of having the increases in those many social programmes. So that you would have had the increase in pension during that time, and there were increases in other social programmes.

The fact is that the increases in the programmes to a large extent would not have brought it up to a figure where the 300,000 or 270,000 odd persons who are below the poverty line would have been in a position to have a better standard of living or to improve the quality of life. The PNM, therefore, set about to look at those programmes, review those programmes and increase the allocations for the disability grant, for the public assistance and for the many other programmes for which persons would benefit under the social sector. So that the total increases would amount to \$164 million having effect on the public assistance grant, the disability grant and the urgent temporary assistance grant.

Mr. Speaker, one of the requirements of those increases is that persons who are now beneficiaries both of these programmes and of the Social Help and Rehabilitation Effort (SHARE) programmes must agree to be part of at least the microenterprise grant in some instances. In other instances, they must agree that

whilst they are on that programme they would seek to do some form of rehabilitation, to seek to make efforts in terms of job employment. The Ministry is now placed with the responsibility of developing some form of training programme so that when those persons are either off the SHARE programme or off the public assistance that they can now find some method of employment.

This idea and this suggestion that it is just a handout, I urge my colleagues to read very carefully and to listen very carefully to exactly what the objective of the programmes are.

The SHARE programme—yes, we have increased it now from 8,000 to 15,000 families, and the simple issue, Mr. Speaker, is that there are many families all over Trinidad and Tobago—whether it be Caroni Central, whether it be Siparia, Arima, Chaguanas, Port of Spain—we can leave our homes in our respective constituencies and recognize that there are a number of people in Trinidad and Tobago who simply do not have food to eat. That is the reality of the situation. And as a responsible government, any government that cares or any government that wants to deliver for the people, it was our duty to ensure that we find some mechanism to make sure that people's concerns are dealt with. [*Desk thumping*]

Moving off the SHARE and the public assistance and those other programmes, we also introduced, Mr. Speaker, the adolescent programme for young mothers, and that is an improvement on the CHOICES, Happiness, Organization, Ideals, Communication, Education, Self-Awareness (CHOICES) Programme. The CHOICES Programme that existed before, simply dealt with young women, some school dropouts and beefing up that programme and ensuring that those who want to, could continue their education in school. That programme was started by the Child Welfare League and that is a programme that we have recognized as having great value, and we have continued to give them the sort of assistance and support.

That programme was also supported whilst my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas, was there and we have developed on it. We have increased the allocation for it and we are giving them all the appropriate support that is necessary for that programme to run properly.

So, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, the philosophy of the PNM as it relates to the social programme and the social policy is that the focus of the Government, as we have said in the social economic policy framework, is on achieving the goals of a high level of human development and an improved quality of life for the population. It therefore embraces a broad spectrum of initiatives and intervention across all sectors of the economy and is intimately integrated with the policy agenda to achieve economic progress and to protect the natural environment.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. P. BECKLES]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

There is a two-pronged approach, Mr. Speaker, and one approach recognizes the importance of providing direct and immediate relief to the impoverished and the vulnerable groups in the society. As a consequence, priority is being placed on the provision of effective social intervention programmes that protect the human dignity of these individuals and their families.

The other approach is based on the view that social policy must be more preventive and developmental in its intent in order to secure sustainable advances in human and social conditions, and in this regard, high priority has been placed on the fundamental pillars of human development, particularly education and training, health care, shelter and the provision of basic amenities, as well as economic security through sustainable employment.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make it absolutely clear that though the impression is being created by the other side that our intention is simply to have handouts, that is not the situation and it is a question of recognizing a need to be filled, and our responsibility is to fill that need. And in so doing, the PNM and the Government have dealt with virtually every area in the social sector which will, in terms of the social intervention programmes, cater for the young people, cater for the old, cater for the women, and also cater for persons with disabilities.

We have had our consultation on aging. We are going to have our consultation on social development. We have had the consultation on mediation, and arising out of all those consultations, we are continuing to develop other programmes and projects that would enhance the life of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

So that when my friend from Caroni Central seeks to point out his constituency and to suggest that the PNM is discriminating, all these increases, some that were started under the former Minister of Social Development and some that we have reviewed and developed, those programmes are in some instances being continued, some being enhanced and some new programmes coming about.

Just again to indicate to my colleague from Caroni Central, another programme, 1992—1995, was the Social Services Delivery Programme, again, the Member for Chaguanas, whilst he was the Minister of Social Development, that was a project that was reviewed but not implemented and, basically, what that social services delivery is saying is that the delivery of services needs to go closer to the people, whether it is in Caroni, Los Iros, Barrackpore, Mayaro, or Toco.

This Government has employed the services of a consultant to look at the delivery of social services closer to home, and that report would be ready later this year to be implemented so that persons who want to get public assistance,

who want to get any form of programme or benefit from any programmes in the social sector, can go closer to where those programmes would be, where those deliverables would be, and they would not need to come into Port of Spain or San Fernando, as the case may be, but can go closer to home.

That programme, Mr. Speaker, is going to be in all 36 constituencies. The first area where that has actually been implemented as a trial project is in the constituency of Couva South. There is a family centre there offering at this point in time mediation services, public assistance services and all the services that we would want to offer in a social service delivery programme. That is a pilot project and that is where that project was started. That actually was a project that was born and started from the Member for Chaguanas and we have continued that project.

What is clear is that the People's National Movement, this Government, has reviewed projects and programmes that are good, that have started, that are beneficial. We have worked on these projects and we have implemented projects which the United National Congress, whilst they were in Government, did not implement, and we will continue from time to time to review those projects.

But, Mr. Speaker, dealing again with the social sector and the youth, there were several projects for young persons again, affecting issues of the quality and standard of life: the YTEPP programme, the Civilian Conservation Corps, that they are now on the On-the-Job Training, that the Member for Caroni Central is now asking for his constituents to benefit from. Those programmes were in place between the period 1992—1995 and as soon as the United National Congress came into office those programmes were all stopped. They are now back on stream and the Members are now asking to benefit from those programmes. We give them the assurance that as a responsible and fair Government those programmes are for the benefit of all the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope that having specified and given more details about those programmes—it was mentioned in the budget, the figures have been mentioned, the allocations have been mentioned, there have been explanations in the social and economic policy framework—there would certainly be no need to go over them again.

We know that Trinidad and Tobago continues to have economic growth, and we know that over the last nine months the Government has been particularly concerned to ensure that the economy continues on a sound footing and that we are there to continue the take-off for the next five years to ensure we deliver quality service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. P. BECKLES]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Very often, Mr. Speaker, on the campaign trail one would have heard Members on the other side say that over the last “how much” years while the PNM was in office that they did nothing for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I just want to read here from an article entitled A Capacity for Resilience, from *The Caribbean Investment Profiles*. It is a book written by them specifically for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Independence of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is 2002. At page 22 it is stated:

“I think Trinidad and Tobago clearly has the largest economy and strongest financial sector in the Caribbean region. There has been a phenomenal change in the country over the last 40 years. In the first oil boom there was the investment of the surpluses to build an infrastructure including petrochemical and iron and steel waste. Subsequently, there has been use of market forces to encourage these things and there has been a continuity of policy since 1986 which has been very important.”

And this quote is from the Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. Speaker, if I may just now very briefly move on to two important areas. Specifically, some comments on the area of tourism and culture. And the Member for Tunapuna will deal much more in detail with those areas.

We are aware that at this point in time when we look at the statistics that there has been a decline post-September 11 in terms of occupancy rate at the hotels, in terms of the arrivals at the Cruise Ship Complex, in terms of overall arrivals, in terms of occupancies at the guest houses and, therefore, we recognize that the critical issue in terms of persons visiting Trinidad and Tobago is that of safety.

We are aware that the impact on September 11 means that a different approach has had to be taken with respect to the tourism sector. The Prime Minister has recognized the importance of the tourism sector to Trinidad and Tobago and is chairing the Tourism Sector Committee, and not just only because of the decline in, as I said, the cruise ship arrivals, the yachting arrivals, the occupancy and visitor arrivals, but the recognition that there has been negative growth in this area in 2002 and therefore, the three-year rolling plan for the tourism sector is now completed, is now put in place.

The investment of the \$300 million over the next three years for the tourism sector is an indication of the Government's commitment to ensuring that the tourism sector gets all that it deserves, and this is the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago that so much money has been allocated to the tourism sector

and all persons who over the last couple of years, particularly since September 11, have been expressing their concern, have recognized the Government's commitment.

We also are aware that with respect to the issue of the Tobago airlift that measures have been put in place. There is the commencement of the *Monarch* service from London to Grenada, as well as the introduction of the *Caribbean Star* service from Barbados and Tobago and, therefore, we are very hopeful and we are saying that with the activities and with the initiatives and the intervention of the Government in those areas that the tourism sector is now poised to continue to have growth.

At this time, the contribution for GDP is just about 4 per cent and we want to move from 15,000 persons being employed to as many as 75,000 or 80,000 persons in the next five years. Therefore, that injection of capital and those continuous meetings of the tourism sector and forging that very close relationship with the Tobago House of Assembly, we are of the view that the tourism sector is going to see much better times notwithstanding those challenges that have taken place post-September 11, 2001.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the products that will be packaged, we are looking at the resort tourism at the lower end mass market, resort tourism at the upper end, festival and event tourism, ecotourism, sport tourism and health tourism. Specifically in terms of the three-year marketing plan, we are looking at the airlift development, the onshore promotions, the offshore promotions, advertising, brochure and Internet development, standard product development, staff training and industry training. We know that with the three-year rolling plan and the continuous activities the tourism sector will continue. There has been development and there have been increases in visitor attendance notwithstanding the decline in the last couple of months, but we have had almost a 75 per cent increase between the period 1990 and 2001.

Mr. Speaker, as it relates specifically to the issue of the culture and the art form, again just to say that the Government is committed to ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago's unique culture is preserved and celebrated, and our policy objectives are to preserve and protect the national heritage, to facilitate cultural development by providing a supportive environment in which the creativity of all citizens can be nurtured, and the creative arts can flourish, and to promote a viable culture-based industry.

We know that there have been challenges over the years in terms of the Centre for Performing Arts and the continuous cry over the years by the steelband industry for facilities that are geared towards that specific type of music. The

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. P. BECKLES]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

commitment is to the Centre for the Performing Arts and to work very closely with all the players in the sector: Pan Trinbago, TUCO, and all the cultural icons and cultural groups and NGOs to ensure that the level of participation will continue.

The Government, therefore, will embark on several initiatives that are targeted at school children, community groups and the population, and these programmes will focus on developing a strong foundation of family values, artistic expression and cross-cultural programmes. Over the next five-year period, through the implementation of the Pan in the Classroom Programme, the steel pan will be phased in as an instrument of choice in the music curriculum, in primary and secondary schools, and this initiative will be followed up with a similar programme for the introduction of the harmonium in schools.

Mr. Speaker, the objective certainly is to continue to upgrade our cultural facilities and the upgrading of those facilities is not just in Trinidad alone, but also in Tobago. We are looking at the conversion of the Scarborough market into a concert hall and also to the establishment of the performing arts.

Some of the other concerns that have been raised by others in the art form are the development of the Nelson Island as a heritage site, the refurbishment of the Naparima Bowl, the establishment of the San Fernando Museum, the restoration of the National Museum and, as I said, the establishment of the Academy for the Performing Arts, the National Arts Gallery.

The programmes and projects mentioned in our Social and Economic Policy Framework in the budget document of the Prime Minister and the different incentives for persons who are going to assist in the art form, as I said, would be further developed by my colleague from Tunapuna.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to end my contribution by saying again that particularly in terms of the social programmes, that the Government's policy and objective, recognizing the fact that in some instances we have as high as 39 per cent poverty, in some constituencies as low as 26 per cent, it was absolutely necessary to have the type of intervention that would ensure that all the people of Trinidad and Tobago benefit from our hard earned oil dollars and to ensure that all our citizens benefit and have a better quality and standard of life.

Thank you very much.

**Mr. Gerald Yetming** (*St. Joseph*): Mr. Speaker, recently in the newspapers we had appearing two Members of the Government in these events they call Men Who Could Cook and Men Who Cannot Cook. One of them was the Member for Diego Martin East who appeared in the one called Men Who Can Cook, and the



Member for Diego Martin East stood behind his dish pretending that it was his and fooled everyone that was present that this dish was his.

That is typical of the Member for Diego Martin East, Mr. Speaker, because he went before the Commission of Enquiry into the EBC and told them all kinds of things. He said the Chief Chemist said this, the Chief Chemist came the following day and said not so. He said the Chief Elections Officer said something else and the following day the Chief Elections Officer came and said not so. This is typical of the Member for Diego Martin East.

Then we had the Member for San Fernando East appearing in one of those events, Mr. Speaker. He appeared in one that said Men Who Can Cook and he stood before his dish and he made the admission—different from Diego Martin East, Mr. Speaker—that he did not prepare it. It was prepared by the household. But nonetheless, he stood before it and he dished it out. This is exactly what happened on Monday, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] He had other people prepare this dish and he stood before it and dished it out. He did not have a clue what was in it. His did not taste it before, but he dished it out.

I want to let the Member for San Fernando East, the Minister of Finance, know that he was extremely and seriously misled by his key cooks around him. That is why, in fact, Mr. Speaker, it reaffirmed his position that the Member for Diego Martin Central should never be Minister of Finance in this country. [*Laughter*] He confirmed his position from 1991 that the Member for Diego Martin Central must never be Minister of Finance in this country, because the Member for Diego Martin Central ought never, ought never to have allowed the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance to come to this Parliament and before the nation and have him embarrassed like that. You cannot let him do that to you.

**Mr. Manning:** You come back with this blouse!

**Mr. G. Yetming:** I would reserve comment, Mr. Speaker, on the other assistant, the other Minister in the Ministry of Finance. I would leave that for another time, because the Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, ought to know what these guys have done and what these guys are capable of doing, and if he continues to be guided by them it is going to bring embarrassment to himself as it did on Monday.

The dish, Mr. Speaker, had a lot of gravy, no meat. [*Desk thumping*] And the question that arises is whether this dish that was being served out will benefit all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because you see, in the budget speech it

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. YETMING]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

speaks of upholding and advancing human dignity of every individual irrespective of race, colour, religion, culture, ethnicity and so on.

I want to know, I want to be assured that when this dish, when this budget dish of \$20 billion is being distributed, that everyone in this country, regardless of race, colour, ethnicity will benefit. Because you see, Mr. Speaker, I need to ask: What has happened over the past eight months? Because there are a lot of concerns in this society that over the past eight months not everybody benefited. Not everybody benefited, and by the admission of the Prime Minister during the course of the campaign, he said his only political mistake was not having taken care of his supporters. I assume that he was speaking during the period 1991—1995, and he said, Mr. Speaker, that he will never make that mistake again.

I am concerned that with him not making that mistake again and in sharing out this dish, this \$20 billion dish on Monday, that every individual in this country, regardless of creed, race, ethnicity will benefit. I, in fact, am going to challenge the Government Senator Persad, esteemed pundit, that he perform his role not as a token in the Senate, but looking after all the people and challenging every single decision that is made on the other side. Because it is not good enough to say that 1,000 people applied to MTS for jobs and we did not tell them to apply and therefore we developed a programme, borrowed \$15 million from the bank to execute a programme to pay the thousand people moneys for doing something, whatever it is.

If we were to question who were these thousand people that applied for these jobs at MTS, suddenly applied, we may be shocked, and Sen. Persad might be shocked to know who those people were. I am calling on him. I am calling on him in the interest of peace, harmony and fairness and equity in Trinidad and Tobago, to challenge every single decision that is made on the other side to ensure that everybody benefits from the dish that was served out on Monday. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, a lot was said about the economy. In the budget speech it says:

“In 1991, the start of my administration, the economy had experienced more than a decade of almost uninterrupted decline in growth and international reserves, high unemployment and an acute external debt crisis.”

It started in 1991.

He said in 1991, in fact, and it started 10 years ago, which would suggest to me that this decade of uninterrupted decline, this high unemployment, this acute external debt started in 1981. And who was in Government in 1981, Mr. Speaker? Started in 1981. Who was in the Cabinet of 1981 when this thing started?

You know, Mr. Speaker, this thing came immediately after the oil boom of the late 1970s, early 1980s. This decline, this decade of uninterrupted decline started immediately after an oil boom of the 1970s and 1980s when there was a systematic rape of the public purse, unprecedented waste. They never created anything like the Revenue Stabilization Fund to say that with all of this billions of dollars passing through this country we should save some for a rainy day, as a result of which, when the price of oil declined we were immediately put into the hands of International Monetary Fund (IMF). Immediately! And, Mr. Speaker, we are heading in that direction again. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance gave the impression during his budget presentation that 1995—2001 did not exist where the economy is concerned. As far as he is concerned, everything happened between 1991 and 1995, except that between 1991 and 1995 the economy grew by an average of 1 per cent. By an average of 1 per cent!

Inflation averaged 7.4 per cent and, in fact, in at least one or two years it was double digit. Unemployment moved from 18.5 per cent to 17.2 per cent. A 1 per cent decline in unemployment in that four-year, five-year period. Taxation was increased, Mr. Speaker. Taxation was increased! Mortgage interest allowance was decreased substantially, between 1991 and 1995.

In that period, Mr. Speaker, there was absolutely no concern for senior citizens, the elderly, the poor, the unemployed. Absolutely no concern, because if there was, then the old age pension would not have moved by a mere \$56 over a four, five-year period; \$300 a month to \$356 a month over a five-year period, Mr. Speaker.

So at the time, not only was there no concern for the party supporters, but there was no concern for the poor, there was no concern for the elderly, there was no concern for anybody, because in fact, the economy was in a state of stagnation. Mr. Speaker, in the period 1995—2001 the rate of growth moved from an average in the previous period of 1 per cent to 5.4 per cent. What could suddenly happen between 1995 and 2000 that did not happen between 1991 and 1995? The difference was the people in Government! [*Desk thumping*]

Inflation, Mr. Speaker, averaged in that period about 3.8 per cent. Compared to—[*Interruption*] The truth is offending, Mr. Speaker, because I am quoting facts. I am not calling airy-fairy things from the air. Inflation averaged 3.5 per cent compared to an average of 7 per cent the year before. Unemployment moved from 17.2 per cent to just over 10 per cent at the end of 2001. [*Desk thumping*] From 17.2 per cent to just over 10 per cent! Gross international reserves moved from US \$652 million. In fact, between 1991 and 1995 it moved from US \$400

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. YETMING]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

million to US \$600 million, an increase in that four-year period by only \$200 million. And in 1995—2001 it moved from US \$650 million to US \$2.4 billion, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

I will quote. [*Interruption*] This is not the UNC speaking, Mr. Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** It is you!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. G. Yetming:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the Article IV Consultation in 2001 had this to say. It might have gone on record already in Parliament, but I will put it here again. The IMF in its Article IV Consultation Report on July 06, 2001 following a visit made, I believe it was in March of that year, said:

“We are greatly impressed with the economic development in Trinidad and Tobago in the past two years.”

They further went on to say that the UNC Government brought the economy onto a more stable and healthy path in terms of robust growth, more job creation, low inflation, balanced fiscal and external trade accounts, as well as poverty reduction. These remarkable achievements have placed Trinidad and Tobago among the strongest performers in the region. This was the IMF speaking.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I wonder if he would be kind enough to tell us what month of the year 2001 is the date of that report, please.

**Mr. G. Yetming:** The report is dated July 6, 2001, Mr. Speaker. Following a visit that they made, I believe it was in March 2001. And they went on to say:

“We commend the Trinidad and Tobago authorities for their strong track record of economic performance in recent years.”

You see the impression being created or attempted to be created by the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation was that everything was done by the PNM administration in 1991 and 1995, and he went on to say that in the nine-month period this year, and I quote:

“...we have demonstrated an extraordinary competence to manage the economy...”

And he goes on to support that by saying that:

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

“...Standard and Poor’s upgraded our economic outlook from stable to positive and maintained our investment grade rating. This outlook was later confirmed by Moody’s Investors Service.”

Standard and Poor’s came to Trinidad and Tobago in March 2002, Mr. Speaker. They had not as yet settled at their desks in their respective offices and, therefore, anything that Standard and Poor’s had to say about Trinidad and Tobago about the rating, and anything that Moody’s would have had to say would have been the result of considerable work put in by the UNC Government between 1995 and 2001. [*Desk thumping*]

The point I am really trying to make in all of this, Mr. Speaker, is that it is a little dishonest to come and try to convince the population and discredit the strong economic performance of the UNC Government. I will deal a bit with the numbers, because a lot of time was spent criticizing—in fact, the Minister of Finance posed a question, not in the published report, when he was criticizing the debt of the government, of the previous administration, and he said, “Who was the Minister of Finance?” I want to let him know that Gerald Yetming, Member of Parliament for St. Joseph was the Minister of Finance at the time, and he knows it. And he was the only Minister of Finance. Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, he did not have two support Ministers with him. [*Laughter*]

Criticism was levelled at this Minister of Finance on the basis of the overly optimistic assumptions for oil prices and non-oil tax collections. Mr. Speaker, when I presented the budget on September 14, 2001 it was just three days after the events of September 11, 2001 and at the time it was impossible, impossible for me as Minister of Finance, or for any of the support staff within the Ministry of Finance to have done any revision to the budget that I was to present on September 14, 2001 on the basis of an event that took place on September 11, 2001. And even by September 14, 2001 many of us did not know what happened and what the implications of those actions would have been for this world.

Therefore, when I presented the budget, I acknowledged the events of September 11, 2001 and I indicated that there could have been implications for the numbers that I presented. In fact, the third Minister in the Ministry of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin East, made reference to it when he said, “For the past nine months we had to grapple with the problem of the reduction in revenues because of lower oil prices and because of an unexpected claim by a large oil company for a tax write-off. He acknowledged that. That is absolutely correct!

At the time that I did the budget, Mr. Speaker, and at the time the technical people supporting me at the Ministry of Finance prepared the budget, none of us

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. YETMING]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

knew of this unexpected tax write-off. So that the problem that was acknowledged on the other side by the third Minister of Finance [*Laughter*]*—the fourth—of reduction in revenue is exactly what happened. That is not unusual, but I do not think, on the other hand, it is honest to say that wait a minute, when we came into office in January we called on a team of people to evaluate the state of the Treasury and they said that the new projected outcome to the end of the year was a deficit of \$1.6 billion.*

The price of oil went down and on the basis of the new price at the time, the team, the technical team or the team appointed by the Government computed—and I really do not know, Mr. Speaker, I cannot challenge the \$1.6 billion because none of us had been privileged to receive a report or evaluation that was conducted by this team to know exactly on what basis they anticipated a \$1.6 billion deficit to the end of the year. But the fact of the matter is that the price of oil increased during the course of the year; increased to the point where you are hitting \$28 a barrel, way in excess of the \$22 budgeted price, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, it is of no merit. This is no big performance to come to the House and say, “Well, you know, somebody in the fourth month told us that we could now anticipate a \$1.6 billion budget, and now I am coming with a balanced budget so, therefore, we did a great job. To me that is a bit of false credit.

**Mr. Ramnath:** “Ratchiffee”!

**Mr. G. Yetming:** Then the fourth Minister of Finance went on and they criticized the maths. He said, you know, the UNC government in the first three months of the year spent \$4 billion. Look at those bad fellows! And he went on to say, “But in the last nine months, we great guys spent \$11 billion”. You know \$11 billion divided by three is \$4 billion. So they spent exactly at the same rate in the nine months as we did in the first three months, and he tried to come and convince us that we bad guys spent \$4 billion, and how could you do that and want to give the impression that this \$11 billion that they spent in nine months is so—contains so much prudent spending.

They continue to try to fool this population with their lies and their deceit, Mr. Speaker. They could come and shout all they want, but this is indicative.

**Mr. Manning:** That language is unparliamentary.

**Mr. G. Yetming:** I would only say, Mr. Speaker, these guys on the other side have a problem dealing with numbers. I want to deal with the debt of the Government, because a lot of comment and a lot of criticism was levelled against the UNC Government on the borrowings of this Government, and I, in responding

to the charges on the debt stock, had a choice of coming and giving all kinds of details on how this debt was configured and why and so on.

Unfortunately, I do not have access to all the information they have within the Ministry of Finance, and I could not comment on every single dollar that was borrowed as a result of the letters of comfort, through the letter of comfort mechanism, except, Mr. Speaker, I am going to give to this House statistics, information, facts on the debt stock of this country.

Before doing so, I would want to strongly suggest that the Government, in presenting the debt stock of the Government at any given time—and I refer to the *State of the Economy* document, Appendix 22, where they list the debts of the Government over the past couple of years, but they make a reference, they put a little footnote that says that the figures that they quote do not include debt by letters of comfort and the OMO operations, on leases, and so on.

I want to give the information to this honourable House on the debt in the period September 30, 2001, which was the last year, complete year of the end of the UNC administration. I will give the debt as of March 31, 2002, which would be after three months of the PNM administration, and I would give the projected debt to September 30, 2002 for the purpose of the record, because I do not think that it is necessary to come and work out that in the last three months of the government of the UNC administration, that we borrowed \$21 million a day and quote those numbers which mean absolutely nothing, purely for drama and purely for public relations purposes. But let me quote the numbers for you, Mr. Speaker.

As of September 30, 2001, the total public sector debt was \$31.425 billion. As of September 30, 2001, Mr. Speaker, the total debt was \$31.425 billion made up as follows:

Domestic debt, direct, \$11.4 billion;

External debt, direct, \$9.7 billion; For a total of \$21.17 billion.

Off balance sheet items, leases, \$781 million.

Contingent debt, which is guaranteed debt both for statutory authorities and state enterprises, \$8.755 billion

Contingent debt, letters of comfort, \$717 million. That is at September 30, 2001.

Now if they want to argue that those numbers will not include debt that was incurred up to the end of December when we demitted office I will give you the figures as of March 31, 2002 which would also have included borrowings that

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. YETMING]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

they did in the first quarter of the calendar year 2002, but I will give it to you anyway.

Total debt, \$20.929 billion.

Total direct debt made up of domestic debt, \$11.364 billion.

External debt, \$9.565 billion.

Off balance sheet, \$759 million. These deal with leases.

Contingent debt guaranteed, \$9,053 million, up from \$8.7 billion to \$9 billion.

Contingent debt, letters of comfort, \$1.766 billion versus \$717 million a couple of months before.

For a total public sector debt, inclusive of everything under the sun, which is, in fact, the numbers that the IMF would use, Standard and Poor's would use, Moody's would use. They do not come and just look at the direct debt and not look under the carpet to see all the letters of comfort that might have been signed. They look at everything. That debt totalled \$32.507 billion. In terms of debt to GDP, as of September 30, 2001, that figure stood at 56.3 per cent. That figure stood at 56.3 per cent, and at March 31, the figure went to 58.2 per cent.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when I delivered my budget speech and, in fact, far earlier in the year, on the basis of a presentation that I made to Cabinet, the Cabinet agreed that I could announce the fact that we have put a moratorium on further borrowings, that Government's position was that the debt stock ought to be reduced by the year 2005 to 50 per cent of GDP.

Policy position—and it was as at March 31—58.2 per cent which was below the 60 per cent that we were concerned about. But as of September 30, 2002, Mr. Speaker:

Domestic debt, \$14.9 billion direct; External debt, \$9.366 billion; For a total of \$24.276 billion.

Off balance sheet moved from \$759 million to \$1,047 million.

Contingent debt guaranteed went to \$9.7 billion, up from \$9 billion.

Contingent debt, letters of comfort, went from \$1.7 billion to \$2.568 billion. Same letters of comfort that we were being criticized about for a figure of \$37.628 billion with a debt to GDP, Mr. Speaker, of 66.133 per cent.

**Dr. Rowley:** Nonsense!



**Mr. Imbert:** Rubbish!

**Mr. G. Yetming:** Mr. Speaker, that is factual information, and that is why I urged the Minister of Finance, not to listen—

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. Member would inform the House of the source of his information. My information, Mr. Speaker, is that at the end of December last year, the public debt stock stood at \$34.9 billion, or really \$35 billion as of December 2001, and as at September 30, 2002 it is \$36.5 billion, Mr. Speaker. That is the information.

**Mr. Ramnath:** What is your source?

**Mr. Valley:** The Ministry of Finance

**Mr. G. Yetming:** I would only ask the Minister of Finance to ensure that when he gets information from his junior Ministers that he does not allow them to mislead him, as they did with the budget statement.

Borrowings for the past couple of months, Mr. Speaker. Over the past six-month period, they borrowed \$1.1 billion for budget support—\$1.1 billion for budget support! They criticized us for borrowings by TIDCO for road paving. They borrowed in the last quarter ending September, Mr. Speaker, \$250 million through Nipdec for road paving. The same Government that criticized us for borrowing through TIDCO, particularly in the last period before the election of December 2001, is the same Government that allowed Nipdec to borrow \$250 million, not for road paving throughout the country, but in selected areas.

You know, the Minister of Health boasted about the settlement to doctors. Borrowed money! Their solution! When they had a problem with the doctors at their throats, instead of negotiating and dealing with the issue, the simplest thing was to capitulate, borrow the money, pay them off and we will deal with that tomorrow! They borrowed \$40 million to deal with arrears to RHA doctors.

**Mr. Imbert:** A UNC liability!

**Mr. G. Yetming:** And they borrowed, Mr. Speaker, \$90 million for the programme—you know the brush cutter programme? The brush cutter programme where they are handed hoes and brush cutters, and so on. They borrowed the money! So they borrowed \$90 million for a short-term programme and they borrowed to repay those loans over some long period of time. I do not know where the fiscal prudence is being exercised.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. YETMING]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

**3.00 p.m.**

You know, Mr. Speaker, the anticipated borrowings to the end of fiscal 2003 is in excess of \$4 billion and the anticipated debt to GDP to the end of fiscal 2003 is 77 per cent. We are fast being put back into the hands of the IMF as was done to us in the early ages. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with some of the elements of the budget statement, because when I talk about the dish being full of gravy and no meat and when people criticize the budget for lack of vision and when people say that the budget was really only a delivery list to satisfy campaign promises, they are absolutely correct; there is no vision in this thing.

This budget was a lot of things extracted from all over the place, including the UNC manifesto and my budget statement of last year. I am going to draw some comparisons, because I think it is important that this population understand the differences between the two and where we are going.

In my budget I announced that a critical element of the government's policy was the diversification of the economy. We have been talking in this country since the bust of the early eighties, about the critical need to diversify the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and we have been talking about it year after year. The UNC government in the year 2001 took a serious and conscious decision that it was a critical issue that we had to address. We had to address it in the context of our goal of having full employment by the year 2010—not 2020, but by the year 2010. If we could have reduced unemployment from 17.2 per cent in 1995 to just over 10 per cent in 2001, taking it down to 2 per cent unemployment, which is no unemployment, for all intents and purposes, it would have been no problem, but you have to have a plan. What my budget was strongly predicated on and, in fact, the five-year term of the UNC was intended to do, was to seriously diversify the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and I had announced five planks on which we were to do that.

Mr. Speaker, in the Budget statement that the Prime Minister delivered last Monday, nowhere in the areas that are relevant—and maybe nowhere in the budget statement—is the word “diversification” of the economy present. Nowhere! You had to go to some document. For those of us who would read it and I am sure that few on the other side would have read it, in this *Social and Economic Policy Framework*, the word “diversification” appears. Nowhere in the budget statement does it appear.

The fact of the matter is that the budget statement is your blueprint; it is not about numbers. It is about the map to take us from a point A to point B and

nobody should have to go—the young sixth form student wanting to understand how government functions and what the budget is all about ought not to have to read 14 different books to find out where is this government that we want to support or that we have voted for, where is this government taking us; it should be in the budget statement. Yet nowhere in this budget statement does the word “diversification” of the economy appear, but it does have, like the pot that was being served, all the ingredients but not in the right quantities and not knowing why they are there.

In fact, outside of diversification, the budget statement contains a lot of talk about the energy sector, none of which is new. We knew about Trains 2 and 3 coming on stream in 2002/2003; we knew that there were going to be negotiations for Trains 4 and 5; we knew about the various projects in ammonia and methanol that were on the table and some of them with ground to be broken. We have been talking about the ethylene complex; we have been talking about aluminum; we have been talking about gas to liquids. We have been talking about all of these things and the talk was repeated—all of this pretty talk that I hear being criticized—in the budget statement that the Prime Minister made on Monday. All that is fine, but we talk about diversification.

In the budget statement delivered by the Prime Minister it says under agriculture:

“A strong agricultural sector is important to Government's Vision for 2020 and we are laying the ground work that will fully develop the potential of that sector.”

And he talks about some airy-fairy things about the use of technology and introducing significantly higher levels of mechanization in cultivation—I really do not know how he intends to do that;—and automation in manufacturing—I really do not know how he intends to do that;—and greater reliance on agro-processing—I do not know how he intends to do that. The point is, that it was paying, in my respectful view, lip service to the whole emphasis on agriculture as one of the major planks for driving this economy.

I had, in fact, announced last year that there would have been tax exemptions, specific measures to say that if you were interested in the pursuit of agriculture, these are some things that the government will give to you to encourage you to get into it; not talk about airy-fairy things like technology and agro-processing. I made reference to tax exemptions in respect of interest on approved loans for agricultural purposes. I spoke about an initial capital allowance of 60 per cent in respect of approved new capital expenditure incurred in respect of approved agricultural projects. We also spoke about \$21 million for access roads.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. YETMING]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

In fact, you know, Mr. Speaker, we spoke about access roads and we put aside \$21 million for that year for access roads, because we were serious about helping that industry. The PNM comes, talks about agriculture in their budget and allocates \$5 million for access roads. They cannot be serious! They cannot talk in one breath about this airy-fairy, fancy story about interest in agriculture and do nothing for the sector. We announced that agriculture was one of the five major planks for the diversification of the economy and we were prepared to put our money where our mouths were by providing fiscal incentives and funding support to the sector.

Then they speak about the manufacturing sector. You know what they said for this manufacturing sector? *[Interruption]* Set him up bad. They said under the manufacturing sector:

“...our manufacturing sector the strongest in the Caribbean.”

They are boasting; they did nothing for the sector between 1995 and 2001, but they were boasting about the manufacturing sector being the strongest in the Caribbean. They go on to say:

“We need to further strengthen the sector to deal with the challenges posed by globalization...”

So it is not that they do not understand it. They do understand it and they talk about, in particular, the Free Trade Areas of the Americas. They understand it; the problem is they do not know what to do with it. They go on to say:

“...the objective is to position Trinidad and Tobago as the manufacturing centre of the Caribbean.”

They are right you know.

The budget goes on to say:

“Accordingly, the manufacturing sector has been earmarked as one of the principal generators of growth in the economy.”

Great; at least in language I am going to give them credit *[Laughter]* but, Mr. Speaker, when you examine the budget to understand, “Well how are they earmarking this as a principal generator of growth?”

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. G. Yetming:** So, Mr. Speaker, when you begin to examine the budget statement about how they intend to make this manufacturing sector the giant generator of growth in the economy, what do you find? You find that the export allowance under the Corporation Tax Act will be removed as of January 01, 2003.

In the context of jobs and the local manufacturing sector, which has done a tremendous amount for this country, a sector that has reached out to external markets with considerable success and which, in fact, should really be, as was stated in the budget statement, “the strongest in the Caribbean”, instead of helping them—because they acknowledge that with the Free Trade Areas of the Americas coming, they are going to face new challenges, they acknowledge that, and instead of giving them the further help they need to be competitive, to grow, to create more jobs, they remove the export allowance.

While it might be true to say that you have maybe some obligation under the World Trade Organization to do it, the question is: When do you do it and what do you replace it with? The statement I am going to make now also touches on this balanced budget that they talk about. In addition to all of that, the Government is owing to local companies pretty close to \$1 billion in VAT refunds. If they had paid those VAT refunds, they were certainly not going to end up with a balanced budget. If they had paid those VAT refunds then the local manufacturers would not have to be carrying overdrafts in their bank, paying high rates of interest.

There are other mechanisms I had proposed in my budget and I am going to plead with the Government to introduce these measures because there is still time. I spoke about expanding the first schedule of the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act to include all manufacturing activities conducted in Trinidad and Tobago. I also spoke of increasing the initial allowance relating to machinery and plant under the Act from 50 to 60 per cent. I will urge—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, let me just inform the hon. Member that all those measures will be in the Finance Bill in aid of industry provisions extended to manufacturing. At the same time, I want to inform him that it is his government that had deemed 2002 to be the final year for the export allowance. He ought to know that.

**Mr. G. Yetming:** Mr. Speaker, there is an accompanying document to the Budget statement which outlines all the things, the Fiscal Measures Appendix, which outlines what I believe to have been all the measures that they were intending to legislate on to make effective. In this Appendix it includes a host of things that I announced in my last budget. I will deal with that at the end of my contribution.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. YETMING]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

I do not mind giving way, but I do not want people to be taking my time and coming with some dishonest statements to this honourable House.

One of the five planks was the Invaders Bay project. Somewhere in the back of the budget statement under “Infrastructure”, they talked about the Invaders Bay project. It is not infrastructure, it is more than infrastructure and it is not just good enough to copy Invaders Bay because they might have heard something about it and it might sound good. Invaders Bay has the potential for being a significant economic driver for many years in this country. It is a case in point. The point I am really trying to make again; it is taking things. They do not know why they are taking it; it sounds good; it might taste good; put it in.

Under tourism, the budget statement says:

“...this Administration views the tourism sector as one with tremendous potential for promoting economic diversification,...”

Well there is the word.

“harnessing the skills of our people, generating foreign exchange and more importantly, for directly creating a substantial number of new and sustainable jobs.”

Correct language; he speaks of the rich cultural diversity, ecotourism and the tremendous potential for the development of such niches as sports, festivals, cruise, and conference tourism. But when you read the body of the budget statement, there is absolutely nothing in it that supports that lofty goal; nothing and I am going to draw reference.

On the other hand, when we announced the conference centre, the project at the waterfront in Port of Spain to deal with convention/conference tourism, they stopped it. So on one hand they are using the right language and talking about convention and conference tourism and what have you, but on the other hand they say nothing, they put no measure in place to make that a reality.

We had argued that this 400-room convention/conference hotel on the waterfront in Port of Spain, which would have included, apart from the hotel tower, a conference centre, offices, shopping mall, car park, performing arts centre and what have you, would have transformed Port of Spain. The economic activity from this 400-room hotel, which Marriott claimed they could fill throughout the year and they confirmed it post-September 11, 2001 that they could fill this 400-room convention hotel throughout the year, could you imagine what that would have done? Apart from the look of Port of Spain when this tower

went up, what that would have done for the economic activity in Port of Spain, for ecotourism throughout Trinidad and Tobago; and it would have dealt with the multicultural and all those fancy things that they talked about in the Budget.

We had argued that this would have complemented Tobago tourism, because nobody would come to Trinidad to a convention for three days and not go to Tobago for three days. Therefore, Tobago would have benefited considerably from such a venture in Port of Spain.

Then there was criticism. I heard a Member on the other side say, “Well, you know when that project started it was \$500 million and now it has gone to \$1.2—implying, because that is the wickedness of some of their statements, that somebody was probably trying to steal something. The fact is, all that has to be done is that if the idea is a good one, a beneficial one in the development of the same tourism that they are advancing, if they are concerned about tourism in Tobago, all they need to do is to evaluate the project. In fact, this project was evaluated by the economists within the Ministry of Finance and they gave it full marks for proceeding, because this project would have involved a private sector investment of between \$450 million to \$500 million; but they do not want that.

I want to deal with the financial sector for a minute, the financial sector dealing with credit unions, savings, pension in the country. I welcome the statement made by the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation about the introduction of legislation that would integrate the supervision of insurance companies and pension funds with that of the banking sector. I welcome the move to establish the financial services ombudsman; all that was work in progress when they went into office. I welcome the statement, a one-liner, but I welcome it because it was not consistent with the public pronouncements on the Revenue Stabilization Fund made by the opposite side. I welcome the statement that they are going to institutionalize the Revenue Stabilization Fund through the passage of appropriate legislation.

I am anxious to know whether the Revenue Stabilization Fund will be on the basis of the formula that we had prescribed in the draft legislation, that had already been in the Ministry of Finance when they went into office, will be respected. We on this side welcome the comprehensive pension reform for which a tremendous amount of work had been done, including with consultants from the IMF. I welcome the fact that the actuarial evaluation of the NIS is going to be soon completed and that, hopefully, there will be that rationalization between the NIS pension and the old age pension, which is required.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. YETMING]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

I am concerned about the credit union movement. I am not too sure what the credit union development bank announced by the Minister of Finance exactly is intended to do, but I am more concerned about that \$10,000 per annum tax deduction for shares bought in a credit union. I am not concerned about it as a measure, I am concerned about it because of the absence of appropriate regulatory legislation, and a supervisory regime for the credit unions, knowing that of the hundred and more credit unions in this country, not all of them are absolutely as sound as they ought to be.

I am not saying anything that is not reasonable public knowledge, because credit union members, while I was Minister of Finance had written to me many a time asking for protection. In fact, I had announced, I believe in my budget statement, that we were going to move to have the supervisory regime for credit unions put under the Central Bank. In fact, I believe the Canadian consultants who are here at the moment, looking at the regulatory regime and the legislation for pension and insurance companies, their mandate was expanded to include the same for credit unions, because the credit unions, controlling in excess of \$4 billion of deposits in this country, ought to come under a financial supervisory regime that could withstand international scrutiny.

If it is that the credit union movement at the moment needs support, I think it is wrong to encourage average citizens of this country to be investing \$10,000, notwithstanding the tax allowance, into these credit unions, until such time as they are properly supervised and the industry as a whole was reasonably healthy. But my time is running out and I want to take the opportunity to plead with the opposite side, the Minister of Finance, to introduce the following measures when he amends legislation to come to Parliament to make some of his measures effective.

I want him to remove the 5 per cent tax on interest income which I had announced in my budget and which no mention was made of in this Budget, because if we are serious about encouraging savings, we must remove that tax. I want him to increase the personal tax allowance from 30,000 to 36,000 for resident taxpayers 60 years and over. These things I am calling out are measures I had announced in my budget of September 14, 2001. I want him to remove the tax on maintenance allowance, separation allowance, and alimony payments in the hands of spouses and former spouses. We need to do something about these single parents.

We need to introduce the tax exemption in respect of interest on approved loans for agricultural purposes. We need to introduce the initial capital allowance of 60 per cent in relation to capital expenditure on approved agricultural projects.



We need to increase the rate of interest payable by the Board of Inland Revenue on refunds of overpayment of income tax or corporation tax from 4 per cent to 10 per cent. It is inequitable to tell a man if he is late in making his tax payment that he has got to pay an interest rate of 10 or 12 per cent and at the same time when the Board of Inland Revenue owes him money they pay him 4 per cent interest. It is inequitable.

Mr. Speaker, I had announced that we need to reduce the environmental levy paid by companies from .1 per cent to .075 per cent and eventually remove it completely. I want to caution that if this Government continues to proceed on the path that it is on, apart from considerable social spending, with which, fundamentally, we have no problem, but if it is not done in context and we do not put measures in place to increase economic activity and not continue to be dependent on the oil and gas sector, then there is no way we are going to reach the goal, whether in 2020 or 2040, of full employment in this country and this place being a fair and equitable place and a place where we will all be happy to live.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Minister of Agriculture Land and Marine Resources (Hon. John Rahael):** Mr. Speaker, how good and how sweet it is to be on this side of the House [*Desk thumping*] so I can sympathize with my friends, the Members for St. Augustine and St. Joseph, who are going to be there for five more years to come.

Today I am very proud to be standing on this side of this honourable House as a Member of this distinguished team to support the 2003 fiscal measure articulated by the Hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the Member of Parliament who has served this country for over 32 years, who served as Leader of the Opposition, Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and once again Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, you may be aware that the major policy goal of this administration is to achieve the status of a developed country by the year 2020. In order to do this, one of our major challenges is to ensure that the development we seek is environmentally responsible and socially acceptable. We on this side are also convinced that growth and development in agriculture are essential preconditions to achieving the targeted objectives of sustainable economic and human development in Trinidad and Tobago.

We also recognize that to be a developed country, whether like the United States, Canada or countries in Europe, we must be able to feed our citizens; so we have an objective. We have a goal to increase the productivity of agriculture. We

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. RAHAEL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

have a plan and we have a strategy, unlike the former administration that paid absolutely no attention to agriculture. They totally ignored agriculture, not one programme was in place for the past six years. As I develop my contribution, I will point out the decline that took place in agriculture during the years 1996—2001.

Let me say how pleased I was to have been offered that portfolio, because I felt that I would have been put in a portfolio where I would be able to make a difference, where I would be able to make a contribution. One of the first things I did when I assumed the portfolio of Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is that I immediately set about getting the necessary information and analyzing the status and position of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago. I am not very happy to report that our review of the sector revealed that the performance of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago was less than satisfactory. In fact, our review revealed a general declining trend in the performance of the sector.

We on this side appreciate the integral role of agriculture in the overall development of this nation. Mr. Speaker, you will recall that since 1956 the successful PNM administrations implemented appropriate development policies as articulated in a series of five-year development plans. Our domestic agriculture sector is important, not only in providing food security in Trinidad and Tobago, but we also provide employment and income for a large number of rural people. Many of the country's poorer households are, incidentally, located in rural districts and they rely heavily upon agriculture for their livelihoods.

One would have thought that a UNC administration, having come from the bowels of agriculture in the rural areas, would have focused and would have been able to make significant strides in agriculture, but instead they turned their attention to mega projects and totally ignored agriculture because there was no money in agriculture; that is why they ignored it. They went into mega projects like the Airports Authority or InnCogen, those kinds of projects. That is where they directed their energy so that they and their friends would have benefited instead of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what happened. [Desk *thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we consider it our responsibility and, indeed, our duty to formulate and implement the necessary policies and to make necessary investments to further develop this vital sector.

The agricultural sector is critical because it also provides resources for sustaining other industries such as agro-processing. The Member for St. Joseph wanted to know about agro-industries; well agro-industries, for his information, are industries that would make use of agricultural products into a finished product. So what we need to do is to provide our agro-industries in Trinidad and

Tobago with the raw material. I have made this point to the manufacturers who are involved in agro-processing, that they must look inward and see what they are importing that can be produced locally. Let us identify what they are importing so that we can direct our farmers to produce those types of commodities and so they will be able to purchase what the farmers produce. That is the benefit and the linkage between the farmers and agro-processing.

The agricultural sector also provides critical linkages with the rest of the economy. With regard to tourism, for instance, I have already started discussions with the Tourism Industrial Development Corporation with respect to the cruise ship vessels that come to Trinidad. Where do they purchase the food that is required for the 3,000 to 5,000 passengers? That is an avenue that we can look at, to ensure that we can assist our farmers so that they would be able to produce and sell to that type of industry. I wish to assure this honourable House that this Administration and this Minister will spare no effort to ensure the sustainable development of the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Human Development Report of 2000, published by the United Nations Development Report 2000, reveal dramatic increases in the level of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago between 1996 and 2000. The report acknowledged that the most poverty exists in the rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago. It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude that rural development fueled by the neglect of agriculture has significantly contributed to increased poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.

The 2000 human development report also showed that between 1995 and 2000—and again, the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph alluded to the increases in the national gross domestic product during that period, there was a lot of money in the country, but what this information tells us is that while the economy was expanding, the level of poverty was increasing. *[Interruption]* I am quoting from the *Trinidad and Tobago National Human Development Report 2000*, you can get a copy, where it says that poverty grew between 1996 and 2000 in Trinidad and Tobago under the UNC administration while the economy was expanding. Mr. Speaker, that seems to be the UNC version of equity. *[Interruption]*

Yes, poverty increased. Sorry, let me just correct that for the *Hansard*. The 2002 Human Development Report shows that between 1995 and 2000 there was a significant increase in poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. The document is here for the Member to read. *[Interruption]* Read it.

One of the more critical objectives of the 2002/2003 fiscal policy is to achieve a reduction in the level of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. RAHAEL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has a critical role to play in achieving this noble objective. Again, it was very unfortunate that in the past six years the agricultural sector has been virtually overlooked and totally ignored. There was general neglect and the deliberate lack of focus on agriculture and rural development by the UNC administration. They had three ministers during their period of administration. One minister felt that he knew more than everyone else in agriculture and he almost destroyed the sugar industry, if you remember. Then there was another minister who said that he was the Minister of Pumpkin and Bhagi; he did not want to be there and he had a junior minister who occupied the office next to him and they were not on speaking terms. So you understand, Mr. Speaker, why there was a decline.

**Mr. Partap:** Like Rowley and Manning.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** That is what happened. Let me also go on to summarize the domestic agricultural performance over the period 1996—2000. [*Interruption*] I am talking to you. The contribution of agriculture to the national GDP decreased from 5 per cent to less than 2 per cent between 1995 and 2000. The crop sector moved from an annual growth, I repeat, the crop sub-sector moved from an annual growth between 1991 and 1994—it was growing by approximately 2 per cent, at a time when the hon. Member for Diego Martin West was the Minister of Agriculture, there was an annual growth in the crop sub-sector, but between 1996 and 1999 they eroded that growth and went into a decline of 1.8 per cent.

There was a general declining trend in the production of traditional exports. Cocoa—Trinidad and Tobago is world renowned for its cocoa, yet it declined from 1.4 million kilogrammes to 650,000 kilogrammes between 1995 and 2000. Do not talk about the sugar industry. The six years that they were in government it declined from 131,000 tonnes to less than 90,000 tonnes. It is only in this crop we were able to carry it back up to 100,000 tonnes.

Coffee production declined from one million kilogrammes to 410,000 kilogrammes. Citrus production declined from 10.4 million kilograms to 3.9 million kilogrammes between 1997 and 2001. I heard the Member for Couva North talking about citrus, asking why we do not do this and that with citrus. During his watch, it declined from 10.4 million kilograms to 3.9 million kilogrammes; these are all facts.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Where you get them from?

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Check the Central Statistical Office. The record also show declining production patterns in food and vegetables; throughout the agricultural sector there has been a decline.

Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? With the decline came a loss of jobs in the agricultural sector. Employment in the agricultural sector in 1995 was 51,800; in 1999, these are the latest statistics I have, I am sure it is worse now, it declined from 51,800 to 39,300, a loss of over 12,000 jobs. Do you understand that? That is what happened in the agricultural sector under the UNC watch. There was a general lack of interest, that is what it boiled down to. Indeed, there was no investment in the agricultural sector during their term. Do not talk about food imports.

In 1995 the import bill for food was \$1.3 billion, they took it up to \$1.8 billion, an increase of almost \$500 million. Meat and meat products increased from \$105.3 million in 1996 to \$161.2 million in 2000. Imports of dairy products and eggs increased from \$272.7 million in 1996 to \$326 million. Vegetables, foods, coffee; because of the decline there was loss of jobs and higher importation.

Mr. Speaker, during the past six months we have been able to put measures in place to halt this decline because we were focusing, we were paying attention. We recognized that there were innovative strategies that must be employed to overcome these challenges and revitalize our agriculture. During the last nine months our attention has been focused on addressing some of these challenges. The Ministry formulated a number of strategies and put a number of programmes in place.

Having recognized that our cocoa is in demand, whatever we produce we can export. The price of cocoa on the world market today is the highest it has ever been. So we commissioned a committee headed by Prof. John Spence and other stakeholders in the industry to come up with an action plan to put at least 1,000 new acres under cultivation of new cocoa. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, because of our pronouncements and our efforts, already, without having implemented this programme, I wish to report that at least 400 new acres of land are now under cocoa cultivation. [*Desk thumping*] We will achieve in excess of 1,000 acres of cocoa under cultivation within the next two years.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Where? Where?

**Hon. J. Rahael:** While we do that, there will be intercropping, so while the farmers are waiting on the cocoa trees to bear, they will be able to do farming of other ground crops so that they will be able to sustain themselves. That is not the only area.

Do you know that Trinidad's honey is one of the best in the world? Well, I was surprised to learn that, because it seems that it was a best-kept secret. I am talking about honey from bees, apiculture sub-sector. [*Laughter*] Trinidad and Tobago has won two gold prizes in 1998 and 1999 for the quality of its honey.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. RAHAEL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

But, Mr. Speaker, do you know that it has been declining? Do you know that right now we cannot export our honey because the quality is not up to the European standard because of the condition under which it is being produced? So we are putting things in place to ensure that we will be able to export our honey to Europe.

It is not only that industry, but also the poultry industry. It is the PNM's vision that an investment in the poultry industry is in the [*Inaudible*] that now it can satisfy the needs of Trinidad and Tobago. We do not import the birds anymore. The poultry industry is such that it cannot only satisfy our local requirements, but has the potential for export as well. Again, September 11, 2001 was a rude awakening for the poultry industry. For two weeks there were no flights from the United States to Trinidad and Tobago. Since 95 per cent of our hatching eggs are imported, that industry almost came to a standstill because of the non-importation of hatching eggs because there were no flights from the United States.

As a matter of fact, in the early 1990s, we produced quite a large percentage of hatching eggs in Trinidad, but because of the actions that were taken by the UNC administration to reduce the duties on hatching eggs, it became more feasible for them to import the hatching eggs before developing the industry in Trinidad and Tobago. That industry employs 10,000 persons.

We have now finalized the recommendations from the stakeholders in the industry and we are going to integrate the industry backwards and forwards. You will be able to get parts precooked in the groceries and other products would be available, so that you will be able, not only to buy the whole birds, but precooked parts and other upstream value added in the poultry industry. We are going to integrate backwards into hatching eggs. Thus, incentives have to be put in one area to ensure that the industry integrates backwardly so that we would be able to be fully sustainable in the poultry industry. So we move on.

In visiting the farmers, I also recognized that some of them, although they increased their production to a large extent, the local market could not absorb all that they can produce. Take pumpkin for instance, one farmer told me that he has acres of pumpkin, all ripe and ready for picking, but he is not going to pick them. The reason is that there is a glut on the market and the price that he would be able to sell them for is less than what he would pay to pick and transport them, but there is an export market for pumpkin. So a new board has been put in place in NAMDEVCO and it has been told quite clearly, "Your responsibility is not to run a market; your responsibility is to market the farmers' produce." That is their challenge. [*Desk thumping*] We said let the regional corporations manage the local markets. Let NAMDEVCO now look at marketing, not only to the agro-

processors and the Trinidad and Caribbean markets, but also extra-regional. So they have been mandated that they must get an international marketing expert who would be able to tell us where we have a competitive edge.

Therefore, instead of closing down NAMDEVCO and the Agricultural Development Bank as was proposed by the UNC, in fact, what we are doing is strengthening the ADB and NAMDEVCO and bringing them back in line to what they should really be. That is what we are doing in agriculture, Member for St. Joseph. It is not a matter of just throwing money at agriculture; it is all about management and providing the encouragement and the market.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I have visited many farmers throughout Trinidad and Tobago; I did not just sit behind a desk. In visiting the farmers in Trinidad and Tobago I realized that they are an aging community. The average age is over 50—60 years old. So I said, “Well, we need to do something about that.” What is going to happen in the future? We came up with an innovative and creative idea, to get young people involved in agriculture. How are we to do that? We had a pilot project where we introduced a Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture named YAPA. [*Desk thumping*]

This programme provided the opportunity for young men and women to be able to be exposed to agriculture. We encouraged them to be on board where they will be given a stipend. Farmers and agro-processing plants were selected where we were able to send these young people to get the proper training and understanding of agriculture. At least we gave them the opportunity to be exposed. We are hoping that this programme will continue. We are also hoping that we would be able to identify the youths who are involved and would like to make agriculture a business, not a sideline, not something that you do because there is nothing else you can do. As I said earlier, agriculture is big business; it is all about your approach and your attitude towards it.

We are taking these young people and training them, exposing them and advising them. Those who are really interested, we shall make the lands available to them. [*Desk thumping*] We shall assist them; we shall hold their hands and walk with them so that they will be successful. That is how you are going to get people involved in agriculture. That is what we are doing with respect to agriculture and much more.

I am sorry that the Member for Couva North is not here with us this afternoon, because he talked about Caroni. Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand here a report of a tripartite committee, December 1992. That was a committee that was set up

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. RAHAEL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

between the government of the day, the management of Caroni, the board of Caroni and the union all coming together to formulate a plan for Caroni (1975) Limited.

It was the PNM Government that wrote off over \$2 billion between 1991 and 1995; \$2.14 billion at that time, to give Caroni a new bill of health and so this committee was formed. I will just identify some of them:

- “5. That steps be taken to decrease the ratio of tonnes cane to tonnes of sugar by the following strategies:
  - a. payment to growers by quality”

And that still has to be done.

- “b. a review of existing cane payment system known as the Seemungal Formula”

In other words, we needed to change that formula.

- “d. increasing farmers’ direct delivery of canes to the Company's milling facilities”

So you have the farmers delivering the cane directly to the gate of the factory, so that Caroni would not have to be concerned about maintaining all the tractors and the trucks and the delivery of cane from the farmers to their gate. You will have to pay them a little more, whatever it cost, but whatever you pay them would be less than what it would cost Caroni for them to operate it.

It goes on:

- “7. That the labour force be reduced through enhanced pension and new retirement arrangements...”

And there was a lot more.

Do you know who signed this tripartite agreement, Mr. Speaker? Do you know who are the signatories to this tripartite agreement? There was the Chairman of Caroni (1975) Limited, Dr. Kusha Haraksingh and other members of the board, the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Agriculture, the management of Caroni (1975) Limited, there were representatives of the permanent secretaries of government and the union’s representative. The union President General representative who was on this committee agreed to this tripartite report; the President General of the ATS&GWTU, All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers’ Trade Union, Mr. Basdeo Panday.

**Mr. Ramnath:** What is the point of it?



**Hon. J. Rahael:** Between 1996 and 2001, not one thing was done and you want to come here today and talk about Caroni and to lecture to us about Caroni. When you were there for six years you did absolutely nothing. [*Desk thumping*] As a matter of fact, during that period, you incurred a debt now of almost \$2.6 billion, in six years. Do you know what it is now to run Caroni (1975) Limited? The requirements for 2002 on the side of the receipts/revenue, sugar sales export, \$152 million, sugar sales local, \$251 million; other sales \$88 million; total revenue, \$495 million. Operating expenses: Wages and salaries and staff-related costs, \$369 million; local and foreign creditors were owing \$158 million; cane farmers, \$109 million; contractors, \$31 million; imported sugar payment—because do not fool yourself, Caroni imports sugar as well—\$119 million; operating payment, \$786 million; operating deficit, \$291 million, and it goes on. Bank interest, \$43 million; pre-export finance and mercantile loan repayment, \$128 million; special projects \$3 million; financing payments \$175.6 million.

Ladies and gentlemen, Members, Mr. Speaker, total operating and financing requirement, the breakdown of operating requirements for Caroni (1975) Limited for the year 2002, a deficit of \$467.5 million

**4.00 p.m.**

And you want to come here and talk to us about Caroni (1975) Limited? You know they wanted to close down Caroni (1975) Limited, they are the ones who wanted to close down Caroni (1975) Limited. In February of this year it was pointed out to me that in fact, if we do not get additional funding—because they did not budget the necessary funds and he is referring to his budget. He did not provide the necessary funding for Caroni (1975) Limited in the 2001—2002 budget. That is the Member for St. Joseph who earlier was talking so much about his budget, yet when I pointed out at the end of February that unless we had increased the subsidy to Caroni (1975) Limited we would have had to close it down and so we had to go to the bank and borrow \$277 million in order to keep the company afloat. And we need to restructure Caroni (1975) Limited, our intentions were never to close down Caroni (1975) Limited, but certainly it was the UNC's instruction.

Here it is, Working Group Report recommendation:

“An objective analysis of both internal and external environment confirms that the local sugar industry cannot become financially viable.

A total shut down of the sugar industry is inevitable.”

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. RAHAEL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

This is a UNC report. I am going to give you the date, it is May 2001 you understand? So let us get our facts right.

There are other areas here. They actually talked about a marketing plan; they had a marketing plan for the shut down of Caroni (1975) Limited you know. One thing you have to give them, they know how to fool people. Shut down things, close down things. Communication and Marketing is the heading. Here it is: A well-crafted media strategy to capture the national community and targeted audience must be developed. The strategy would include the following: speeches, announcements by Government officials e.g. Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers; feature articles in printed press providing positive reviews; radio, television and print advertisements profiling successful Caroni entrepreneurs.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Minister, on a point of information. Could I ask on a point of information, from what document you are quoting?

**Hon. J. Rahael:** I want to get the page so I could show you the page too. A *Working Group Report Recommended Option TSEP* dated May, 2001. A copy could be made available.

So Mr. Speaker, we said we are going to go to the tripartite agreement and restructure Caroni (1975) Limited in a way that it will not be such a burden to the Exchequer and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We really have to admit that any board that has to run Caroni (1975) Limited as it is now, would not be successful.

Caroni (1975) Limited has an asset of 77,000 acres of land and they want the same board to manage 77,000 acres of land to be in the sugar industry, they want to be in rum, citrus, shrimp, cattle. Come on! Mr. Speaker, that is why you see what has happened in the past six years.

We are saying look, let Caroni (1975) Limited focus on the sugar industry. Let them pay attention and concentrate on the sugar industry, let them become more efficient so that they will be able to compete with Guyana which is now selling sugar into our market. So we said, whatever land is required for Caroni (1975) Limited to continue in the sugar industry, albeit in a reduced scale, we would provide land for them, but the rest of the land will be vested back into the State. An Estate Management Company which will have the expertise, the personnel, will manage the whole question of land development, similar to what happens at Point Lisas; Plipdeco is managing the estate. Plipdeco is not into any one of the manufacturing plants at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and so that is the way forward.

We said also when we offered the VSEP which is an enhanced VSEP, that those who accept it and are still interested in agriculture, they would be given first preference for the land that is going to remain in agriculture when we develop the agricultural estate. There are four components: agricultural estate in addition to the sugar industry. We are going to keep the lands that are most suitable for agriculture in agriculture. We are going to develop an industrial estate.

As it is right now, I have applications on my desk from local entrepreneurs. No five star 1,000-room hotel, no paper mill, or glass plant, all pies-in-the-sky which were indicated by the Member for Couva North. I am talking about local entrepreneurs, successful entrepreneurs who wish to expand. Some of them located in the east/west corridor, but there is no room for expansion so they are looking to go into a new industrial estate and that is going to create jobs and when you have people working in an industrial estate, you need housing. So we say we are also going to provide housing estates, yet they get up and say PNM want to put their people there. Well, I do not know who is PNM people, everybody in Trinidad is PNM people, [*Desk thumping*] everybody in Trinidad and this concept that the PNM only have one set of people— There is a letter to the editor headed “Indian, but I voted PNM.” It is a very interesting. Mr. Speaker, it is on page 12 of the *Trinidad Express* dated October 18, 2002.

The point I want to make is that there is no PNM people and UNC people, or NAR people. It is the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and when we say we are going to be developing housing for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it is for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is very interesting, you should read this article because she herself—

**Hon. Member:** Who is that?

**Hon. J. Rahael:** Ms. LK Ragoonath from Talparo. “Yuh” want to know, look it right here, from Talparo. You see, you are missing the point. Read the article and you will understand what she was saying.

Mr. Speaker, just for Members to be aware that the ministry is not only the Ministry of Agriculture, but also Ministry of Land and land usage. I want to tell you that sometimes I sympathize with the farmers who have been waiting on their leases for so long and have not been able to have access to loans so that they can improve their estates because of the lack of their lease. Although approval has been given, they “chop up” the ministry, so to speak; they put Director of Surveys under the Ministry of Housing, they put something else under another ministry, but now, this administration has brought it all back together and within the first

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. RAHAEL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

nine months, we have been able to execute about 200 leases for the people in agriculture. And, therefore, we will continue to ensure that our objective is to put agriculture on the front burner, our objective is to be able to reduce the import bill for food in Trinidad and Tobago. It will take sometime, it will not happen overnight, but once you give people the encouragement—I indicated to the Member for Nariva that I am willing to come into Nariva and help the farmers of Nariva. Not so, Member for Nariva?

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Hon. J. Rahael:** So it is not a question of one area or another, it is all of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, with these few words I want to thank this honourable House for the opportunity to make my contribution.

Thank you.

**Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche):** Mr. Speaker, may I also take the opportunity, before I begin my response to the budget statement, to congratulate you on the elevation to the high office of Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Mr. Speaker, what is evolving this afternoon is the unfolding of a drama of deceit, lies and conmanship.

**Hon. Member:** That is unparliamentary language.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** What is also evolving is a certain restlessness on the part of my colleagues on the other side, as those on this side continue to unmask this conspiracy to fool the population by several budgetary measures which are either not implementable, which they have not budgeted for in the strict sense of the term, and which they are just posing at this moment to continue an election campaign that will run us into the next local government election.

**Mr. Boynes:** So you admit it is a good budget? Confession is good for the soul.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And that is the aim of this budget, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to take as my point of departure a quotation from the editorial of the *Trinidad Guardian* of Wednesday October 23, 2002 that says:

“The Government's generosity must not be translated into a national ‘freeco’ with the end result being a nation of loafers expecting a handout or hamper every month-end.”

I think that the term “freeco”, and the description of “loafer” should be introduced at this time to describe measures which are aimed at fooling people.

They have presented a budget as their campaign Vision 2020 which this morning was aptly renamed the “soup kitchen budget” by the distinguished Member for Couva North. The soup kitchen budget has come about as Vision 2020 with very little philosophical depths. It is an attempt to cut and paste from several UNC documents; it is an attempt to cut and paste in the most incoherent way that is disjunctive.

Apart from the very minor grammatical and typographical errors and so on, the fact that this document does not clearly spell out at all a compelling vision for this country, is a weakness in the budget document. That is the first point I wish to make.

When we presented our budget more than one year ago, we gave the population a compelling vision and a crisp and precise statement as to where we intended to take this country. You will recall we spoke of a knowledge-based economy, we spoke about prosperity for all, and we spoke about a competitive and diversified economy. We said that our vision is for our country to become a knowledge-based society with a globally competitive, technologically driven and diversified economy that will sustain full employment, equal opportunity, growing prosperity, a secure life and a higher standard of living for all our citizens and so we attempted to bring the population together and mobilize it behind this vision.

There is no such vision in the budget document and that is abundantly clear and as the *Trinidad Guardian* of yesterday pointed out, not only is there no compelling vision, but the budget really can be reduced to dealing with freeco, loafers, and campaigning by Vaps.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to spend a couple minutes talking about their employment policy and I want to begin with a categorical statement that the employment policy of this Government, what they are practising is calculated to bring about a measure of community apartheid in Trinidad and Tobago.

Their employment policy has been defined by discrimination, favouritism, and nepotism. Their employment policy is one that favours their political party, their supporters and their family. [*Interruption*] Thank you, Member for Arouca North for pointing out that. It favours their family and over the last few months, the population has looked on at this orgy of discrimination that took place in this country, that no wonder our colleague for St. Joseph pointed out that there is a real risk now that the country will not be mobilized behind public policy because of discrimination on the part of the Government.

It is very instructive, Mr. Speaker, that under the administration of the United National Congress, we took the unemployment level from over 17 per cent in 1995 to a remarkable figure of 10.1 per cent in 2001 in an expanding labour market.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, please. At the end of 2001, the unemployment rate was 11.7 per cent, the unemployment rate at the end of June 2002 was 10.1 per cent.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Let me rephrase that, Mr. Speaker. The UNC administration took this country's unemployment rate to the lowest figure in 27 years. You may now go and find what that was, and that is the distinction of the UNC Government that created over 80,000 new jobs. Whereas in that period 1995—2001 we embarked upon only one programme of short-term employment provision, namely, the Employment and Training Programme. It was formerly the Unemployment Relief Programme. We recrafted that programme into the Employment and Training Programme to provide valuable training for our young people. It was the only programme for temporary employment for our young adults who were lacking in skills and so were unemployable. We had one temporary programme.

This administration has no less than six programmes running like that and when we had one, we created 80,000 new jobs. So it could not be that we used temporary work to create employment, employment came in the manufacturing sector, in services, tourism, in several areas, and these are spelt out in the Review of the Economy.

Over the last eight months or so, those on the other side used a figure which we are not sure from where they got it. They told the population that there was 40 per cent poverty in Trinidad and Tobago as a rationale for embarking upon half dozen make-work programmes. That is what they were doing. While in the document, for those of us who read this document, *Social and Economic Policy Framework*, they indicate that the national poverty level is estimated at 21 per cent, this data is based on a document by the World Bank *Trinidad and Tobago Poverty and Unemployment*, based on data collected in 1992. So we do not have any data in 1995, far less 2002 and the last figure, 21 per cent, but they continue to say that there are communities for which the poverty rate averages 35 per cent, which is 1992 data.

They told us in the last eight months that poverty was 40 per cent, it was really to set up this half-dozen make-work programme to provide jobs temporarily for, by and large, young people to buy votes and that was the motive. It was sinister and diabolical.

Now, Mr. Speaker, having emerged after October 7, 2002 they continue that pattern of enlisting our young people into temporary make-work programmes and they have now—apart from the Unemployment Relief Programme—the YAPA, Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture. In this programme—interestingly

enough the Minister of Agriculture was telling us about this programme—our information is that during the period July 24 to August 06 of this year, they employed 565 persons of which 62 persons came from County Caroni. Then the Minister went on national television to invite Caroni (1975) Limited workers to take the Voluntary Termination of Employment Plan and they will be absorbed in YAPA. That is how they intend to deal with Caroni (1975) Limited, but I will come to Caroni (1975) Limited later, I am not ready for them yet. I am focusing on their programme of employment.

This explains why having spent the majority of our post-independence period in office, 80 per cent of the population in the jail is youth, young people. Six out of 10 coming out will go back, that is their youth policy in action. That is a policy from weaning young people in a dependency syndrome. They have ushered in this budget, the second phase of a dependency syndrome. The first phase emerged in the 1970's, this is the second phase of a dependency syndrome.

When a person is 18 years old and goes into these several programmes to develop vocational training whatever it may mean; learning plumbing, mechanics, whatever it is, they will also learn according to documents, military discipline so they will get military discipline and so on. When you emerge from these programmes after six weeks, you certainly cannot get a job with six weeks of plumbing and mechanics, you will then crave to go back into the programme and that will become a sort of an addiction of going back into these programmes.

By 2020—because I want to focus on 2020, this is the key year, the vision—at the age of 36 that young person will be unemployable, untrained for the global market place. Will those persons coming out of the Conservation Corps, YAPA, and there is another one with a big name for it, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme be getting the jobs in the global market place, the jobs in information technology, in information management, in science, in technology? Or will they be getting that at the University of Trinidad and Tobago? We will talk about that in a while. So you are continuing a process that is dangerous for the young people of this country.

What will happen, Mr. Speaker, is that there will be a stratification among our youths and that may also carry class and ethnic dimensions, where some young people will stay in the formal education system and move on to supervisory levels, managerial levels, professional levels and so on, and others, because now there is a big basket to collect what they call dropouts, those persons will get skills that will not be useful for the market.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. MOONILAL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

When you train people and you acquire your military discipline, I imagine you will be adsorbed in the private security industry and there are only so many jobs to be created. It would have been useful, Mr. Speaker, if the planners could have offered as well, a labour market analysis to tell us what are the jobs that will come on stream, what are the jobs we must train our young people for. So if we know we are training our young people for the energy sector, for tourism, for information management and so on, we are clear on the focus rather than taking thousands and thousands of young people and really training them in using a mop, a broom and a cutlass and brushing cutlass equipment and so on. That is the issue, that is the fundamental issue, employment and youth.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC on the other hand has an all-encompassing vision for our young people. We do not cater and put in our plan policy for dropouts and so on. We believe in education and training, we believe in investing in young people by skills that are marketable, useful, and relevant. This is a fundamental approach between both political organizations, so that on the one hand, the UNC has an obsession with education and training, and those on the other side have an obsession with YAPA, HYPE, GAPP.

There is something called GAPP, and GAPP is interesting. Earlier this year, Mr. Speaker, one evening there was a dramatic news item on the national television, in which a young lady came on the screen and told us that she was employed with GAPP and she was not paid, but that was not the issue, not being paid. The issue was, she said, she got that through a PNM party group and they came and enlisted her through the party group, and now they put her there and she did not collect her money, and she was blue. It tells you their recruitment strategy. That is their recruitment strategy. [*Crosstalk*] I want to tell you as well, Mr. Speaker, that when we listen to the other side and the language, we hear of fairness and equality; those types of words they use a lot, but they must be known, not by what they preach, and they really do preach, they must be known by what they practise.

They introduced another programme, On-the-Job-Training Programme, (OJT) and we compliment programmes that will give our young people experience for the work place and so on, we compliment those programmes. But the On-the- Job Training Programme was never advertised in the national newspapers of this country. Nobody knew except their friends, their supporters, their party groups, but people are employed. You go to the ministry and so on, you see a number of young people there, they are employed. How did they know of these jobs? They got them through the party connection and I want to clarify this completely.



We understand the need for young people to have that training and experience at the work place, but what we want is equality. The issue is equality, it is fairness. Everyone should have the opportunity to apply and benefit, not just their supporters. I know it must hurt them when they hear this, but it is the truth. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, as we move forward, one of the biggest issues we will face as a nation is discrimination, and I want to put on the record now that the country is suspicious of their employment practices when they take care only of their party supporters and exclude everyone else. Why the failure to advertise these job programmes? The OJT, why it is for a job at the Airports Authority—earlier this year—we have the data, we have the news clippings. For a job at the Airports Authority you apply to a political appointee. A former PRO of the PNM is now the Executive Assistant to the Chairman of the Airports Authority, and to get a job as an estate constable, they put an advertisement in the newspaper that you apply to the political appointee. Now, that is fairness, that is equality! Everyone will be treated equally when you apply to the former Public Relations Officer of their party. That is equality for you, and that is why this nation must be suspicious of this type of policy, and I have not begun to talk about WASA and so on yet with jobs and recruitment there. That is a different story.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5:00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, before the break, in my contribution on the budget statement I was raising matters that deal with governance, matters that deal with the practice of the Government as far as they relate to employment, to youth policy, and as far as they relate to sustainable development. A few of these issues, of course, are uncomfortable, understandably so, for other Members because they also involve issues of discrimination and unequal treatment of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

We noted as well the use of several makeshift employment programmes to enlist young persons into jobs that are not sustainable for political purposes. I want to move on and address the issue of Caroni (1975) Limited. There has been a lot of misconception and misleading information presented in this honourable House as it relates to Caroni (1975) Limited and the position of the United National Congress government, and indeed our actions as they relate to Caroni (1975) Limited. It is sad to echo the views of others on this side when Members

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. MOONILAL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

on the opposite side seek to use data from all types of sources and so on, really for high-sounding statements and sound bytes, to paint a picture as if the UNC was involved either in corrupt practices, or the UNC was involved in promoting unfair practices, and with Caroni (1975) Limited that is also a key issue.

Our friend for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West dealt with Caroni (1975) Limited and agriculture and he quoted from a document, and in that document he indicated that it was the policy of the UNC to shut down Caroni (1975) Limited. The document from which he quoted, and I deliberately asked him to tell me what document he was quoting from. He quoted from a document I have in my hand, Mr. Speaker—and I walk around with research material because I am always wary of this attempt to mislead people—and he indicated that it was the intention of the UNC to close down Caroni (1975) Limited. Then he quoted from another section, page 37 “Develop and implement a comprehensive communications and marketing programme.” He said the UNC was about closing down Caroni (1975) Limited, that our objective was to close down.

This document from which he was quoting is a *Working Group Report of Recommended Option*, May 25 2001, that was compiled by a group of technocrats including technical people from Caroni (1975) Limited and senior technical officers from the Ministry of Finance. So when you quote from a report compiled by the technocrats from Caroni (1975) Limited and the technocrats from the Ministry of Finance and you hold it up and say this was the UNC's policy, it is wrong, it is misleading, and it is a continuation of this pattern of seeking to misinform this House and the country on key national issues.

This is also a pattern of their governance and we have picked this up at several points this afternoon in our contributions. This document, *Working Group Report Recommendations* compiled by technical people from Caroni (1975) Limited and the Ministry of Finance does not constitute the policy position of the United National Congress Government 1995—2001. So I thought I would raise that as I begin my discussion, my concern with Caroni (1975) Limited, as I raise other matters dealing with Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Speaker, the story of the Government and Caroni (1975) Limited is one defined by discrimination, by terror, by intimidation. In February this year, when it became clear that Caroni (1975) Limited needed further subventions from the Government, that was so because it is the long established practice that in the national budget you will budget “X” amount for Caroni (1975) Limited and then discuss their continuing needs and provide more by letters of comfort; and they

know it. The day the letter of comfort was issued, senior people in the banking sector said that was the normal thing to do, issue letters of comfort. We have the data. I could find the news clipping of the day they issued the letter of comfort. So when it became clear that Caroni (1975) Limited needed further subventions they then embarked on a campaign to intimidate the workers, the families and the communities of Caroni (1975) Limited by going to the country and indicating that unless the UNC had supported them on another occasion to constitute the House, unless the UNC would support, Caroni (1975) Limited would close down, that was their objective. They wanted to intimidate and the Prime Minister said that Caroni (1975) Limited would suffer if UNC does not cooperate. The Prime Minister was then addressing members of the Woodford Square Committee on February 06, 2002 and I quote from the *Wire* February 07 on page 6. It says:

“Caroni (1975) Limited workers will suffer if Parliament is not convened as soon as possible.

...the longer the UNC took to accept its position as the Opposition, the company would continue to struggle.”

And this is what they were doing. They wanted to force Caroni (1975) Limited workers into a position to rebel against what they believe to be the political party that had the support of the Caroni (1975) Limited workers. That was what they were doing.

They did not need to intimidate other workers; they then found the money, \$35 million for the OJT programme, \$70 million contribution to the environment. They paid all their Ministers, all their advisors, but they needed Parliament to pay Caroni (1975) Limited, so that was their campaign of terror. So you had Caroni (1975) Limited workers feeling every single day that this company will close down, they will have no jobs; Caroni (1975) Limited workers with families, with children in school, in university and so on, thinking that every Monday morning Caroni (1975) Limited will close down. That is the campaign of intimidation that I talk about.

On February 21, 2002 the Prime Minister at one of the post-Cabinet press conferences indicated that WASA was in a worse position than Caroni (1975) Limited financially, but they did not do anything at WASA, they needed no voluntary termination at WASA, they needed it at Caroni (1975) Limited. They just wanted to get rid of the former CEO at WASA. So WASA was worse, but they wanted to introduce a Voluntary Termination of Employment policy at Caroni (1975) Limited to get the workers out. So they continued on that path and the

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. MOONILAL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

union objected. It was only when the union made a strong campaign against this Government that they buckled, they signed the letter of comfort and allowed Caroni (1975) Limited to receive the subvention. It took worker protest for them to do that, and it would take worker protest again to stop their plans for Caroni (1975) Limited and this is why we are using this opportunity to alert the national population of what is to come. So I am outlining their policy on Caroni (1975) Limited.

They now want to seek to convince the population that the UNC Government had no vision or plan for Caroni (1975) Limited, that we did nothing for Caroni (1975) Limited, this is what they seek to convince.

We are proud, Mr. Speaker, that between the period 1995 to 2001, not one job was lost at Caroni (1975) Limited due to government policy. We are proud of that record. We maintained employment levels as we restructured and that is critical. I want to say boldly that no Government in the history of Trinidad and Tobago has offered a more visionary, expansionary, transformational, wealth-creating and labour-friendly approach to Caroni (1975) Limited than the government of the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] That is a fact, and I say this having being involved in both government and labour.

I also want to say that our vision for Caroni (1975) Limited involves using its vast potential for agricultural, commercial and industrial development. That is our vision, and with all the known good capacity of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, this is the direction we must take Caroni (1975) Limited in; expansion, industrial development and maybe that Minister really deserves a junior Minister. It is a pity the Member for Tobago East turned down the offer to become junior Minister of pumpkin and bhaji. I mean it was really an insult for such an intelligent Member.

Mr. Speaker, we were implementing a policy of the phased private sector participation in Caroni (1975) Limited. I want to repeat in the budget statement that we have an example of cut and paste. It says that Caroni (1975) Limited would be strengthened by the introduction of the private sector into the non-sugar operations of Caroni (1975) Limited. The rum distillery, rice, citrus entities and the dairy and cattle enterprises. The same approach, but when we were implementing it, they went throughout the country, including the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, my friend, attacking us. And he is a vibrant, dynamic speaker, well qualified to be a Cabinet Minister in this country, but his time will come because he has to wait, he is not ready yet. I tell you if my Prime Minister had done that to me—

**Mr. Valley:** What you “woulda” do?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** I would not cross the floor. I would hang myself. [*Laughter*] I would hang myself, I “ain’t” crossing no floor.

**Mr. Valley:** I know you were suicidal.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And if I was blessed with his elegant hairstyle, I would use my locks and hang myself. Seven years in the nation’s Parliament, speaking, attacking the then government, fought three elections, brilliant son of the soil, not ready. Maybe he should cross temporarily until you are ready, but that is my friend, Mr. Speaker, I can take that kind of liberty with my good friend.

So, Mr. Speaker, returning to the matter beforehand of Caroni (1975) Limited, they went up and down the country saying we were selling out the rum division to our friends in big business. Recall that we wanted to divest 51 per cent of the rum distillery to the private sector so that we would increase productivity, production, efficiency levels, training, we would increase jobs at the rum distillery. We were divesting, not selling out. They say selling out to friends. At that time it was very interesting. I have my quotations because I have all my research materials. I want to quote from the *Trinidad Guardian* of September 2, 2001, page 17, and I am quoting the headline:

“Rum stocks now worth \$907 million says Manning.”

I imagine that would be the Member for San Fernando East. When we pointed out that this would not be so, they went up and down. Caroni (1975) Limited stocks worth over \$900 million says then Opposition Leader. We are asking them, they had this information then, we are asking them to go now and find the rum stocks and sell it for \$900 million or \$1 billion. Find it now. You have an opportunity, find it.

When people were misleading—and I come back to this issue of misleading—when they were misleading this country on a political campaign, they were more about politics than ethics. This is also the issue of corruption. Corruption is their weapon of mass distraction. They remove attention and so on—[*Interruption*] They investigate me already you know, your turn coming. They close the file on me. That is how they distract this population, by corruption, but this is a political party and a Government which issued a broadcast licence to one of their friends in 48 hours. That matter is before the Commissioner of Police, we will hear more about that in the coming days. They talk about corruption, they talk about violating the law—La Brea, we will talk about that. The Government

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. MOONILAL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

appointed a Board at the Cipriani Labour College. The court ruled on June 21<sup>st</sup> that they acted illegally and their actions were contrary to the law. The court ruled that. The Citadel licence is before the police, but that is their destruction. That is part of the pattern of conmanship, Mr. Speaker.

We go back to Caroni (1975) Limited it is very important. In our plan— [Crosstalk] Well, several of them are before the court for thuggery and all that, but I do not want to get into that at all, Mr. Speaker.

In our manifesto, we outlined certain plans for Caroni (1975) Limited and our plans were consistent with a submission from the union, from the workers. The workers submitted to the UNC government a proposal for Caroni (1975) Limited, we were implementing this plan. We talked in our national manifesto about VMCOTT using the field engineering departments of Caroni (1975) Limited in central and south to get into vehicular maintenance, maintaining vehicles of both the public and private sector; expanding the workforce, creating more productive jobs.

When you expand Caroni (1975) Limited field engineering department, they have a lot of equipment there and labour and technical people and so on. When you expand, you create permanent jobs; that is not environment protection, it is something else. That is not that, that is creating productive, permanent jobs and the UNC spoke to this issue of Caroni (1975) Limited. We were going to develop the lands, allow Caroni (1975) Limited to develop their lands for commercial and industrial purposes. They have the capacity for the management of their own property.

Now we know of the plan of the other side to take that control from Caroni (1975) Limited, but you know why Mr. Speaker? It is critical to understand another point. When Caroni (1975) Limited makes a decision on the allocation of land, it would be made by the board of directors where there are workers' representatives. It is critical. So workers representatives will participate in making decisions on the allocation of Caroni (1975) Limited lands. When decisions are made on the allocation of Caroni (1975) Limited lands at a regular or non-regular meeting of the Cabinet, Friday evening, Monday night whenever they meet, Caroni (1975) Limited lands will go and we are very concerned about this, concerned where they will go, to their friends.

Given the pattern I outlined earlier, it is expected that there will be corruption in the allocation of Caroni (1975) Limited lands as well. The Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee has been charged historically with developing lands

for housing for those people, and earlier this year, the National Housing Authority reduced the number of lots allocated to the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee from 200 to 100. Then they went further and informed the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee that no lots will be given for the development of housing. The Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee was set up by their Government as well, decades ago, to assist with housing for the sugar industry, the workers, their families and so on.

So there is a pattern, talking about their governance there is a pattern, you see it at Caroni (1975) Limited, you saw it at WASA, you saw it at MTS, you saw it at the Airports Authority, you see it everywhere, this attempt to feed their own. Biased, prejudicial and it should not be surprising because it has come to the attention of people now, people reflect on this matter that Members on the other side—and I am reflecting the views of members of the national community. Members on the other side have as their custom to take their oath of allegiance in which they pledge to be fair and unbiased and impartial and so on. They take their oath of allegiance wearing on their chest their traditional symbol of partisanship. What will we expect from them? That may be a symbolic expression of partisanship, but symbols are important. I wear my university tie. So they wear their tie that supports their party.

Mr. Speaker, returning to the matter at hand of Caroni (1975) Limited. This attempt to seize lands of Caroni (1975) Limited and redistribute via Whitehall, this attempt to inflict upon the sugar industry what they are calling now involuntary termination of employment, but they have said in a newspaper quotation I have that if the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited do not accept the involuntary termination, they would then move to the next phase which is termination.

**Mr. Rahael:** Where was that said? Who said that?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West had his turn, Mr. Speaker. I will proceed. So that what is going to happen, Mr. Speaker, is some measure of convulsion and conflict in the sugar industry. That is what I am pointing out at this stage. I am pointing out as well, how they go about attempting to con the population. So they want to implement the same policy as the UNC, but blames the UNC for having no policy. If we have no policy, they have no policy. That is the issue. Attempting to mislead. They conjure up figures for how many persons would go and how many would not go. They have begun to implement what they call a four-year plan where over 9,697 workers will no longer be employed with Caroni (1975) Limited.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. MOONILAL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

They like to hear quote, so I quote. *Sunday Express* of June 23, 2002. It is said:

“VSEP Plans will go into effect in July 1, and government has been advised to set aside \$188 million in anticipation that 2,072 persons will accept the offers.”

Where that figure comes from we do not know. More workers will follow. Over 3,495 workers. But when they are saying that, there is a contradiction in the policy. We really want to expand sugar to find what is called niche markets. I think I heard that term, niche markets in the world.

Now anyone who has studied the political economy of sugar understands that sugar is a product that is treated in a particular way, a preferential treatment. One cannot just go and find these markets all over the world. It is done within certain trading regimes and they talk about expanding this trade, but sending people home at the same time. So we are going to expand and send people home.

They speak again about mini technologies, whatever that is. Mini technologies in the sugar belt and so on, but we do not know about that. So this is the approach and I wanted to point out this to the honourable House notwithstanding, .

Mr. Speaker, another issue I wanted to raise before I close, is the issue related to jobs and employment.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, my friend, the Member for Diego Martin Central whom I thought I dealt with on national television already, but it looks like that was not enough.

Mr. Speaker, on the issue of technology we heard the UNC Government had made technology a centerpiece of our developmental effort. We had analyzed the world, we looked at the world, the labour market, and understood where business was going, where investment was going and we spoke about the creation of a technology park where we would attract investors to go into software development, hardware development, business services linked to information technology and so forth. This was what we were about. In the budget statement



we hear nothing about that. We hear about a technology and manufacturing estate and so on, light manufacturing, something to that effect, but we heard nothing in detail about the technology park, about developing that technology sector.

One area that I humbly suggest, one area that is missing from our budget statement is this concentration on technology. Other speakers will deal with other shortcomings and flaws and issues of “ratchiffee” with the figures and claiming a surplus and not paying VAT to business people and so on. Other people will deal with that. The issue of technology is missing. To what extent is technology the bedrock of our developmental effort? That has been a serious concern for the UNC as expressed in our policy, as expressed in our plans and in the budget statement. We do not read with any detail at all, issues as they relate to technology and development. We do not read that. We spoke in our manifesto when we went to the length and breadth of the country, we spoke about community Internet Cafes, of bringing technology closer to villages in rural areas. This is an important policy pillar.

We believe that children in poor and underprivileged areas should have access to technology, not only in schools because some children in rural areas live far away from schools, like in Nariva. They live far and travel miles and miles to get to a school; when schools are built in their own area, they still travel miles and miles. Some children in these communities do not spend the hours in schools in the formal education system and they require other institutions that are community based for their own education and training. In our manifesto we dealt with that issue where we were going to create these cafes linked to community centres and run by the community where the community benefits as well by employment so that we hire the young people who are trained in IT to teach other young people from poor and depressed areas and so on. That was one of our many brilliant ideas that we shared with the population.

### **5.30 p.m.**

There are several as outlined in our visionary document: Strong leadership for a strong Trinidad and Tobago. When we were talking about a nest egg of \$1,500 for babies, they were talking about a free birth certificate, and that is really the difference in vision that we face today.

So in summary, the issue is one of governance, the issue is what can we expect in the short-term from this Government. We are convinced, and I think the majority of people in this country are convinced, that those on the other side do not have the solutions for the development of our country and it is only a matter of time before the United National Congress is returned to Government within

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. MOONILAL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

five years. It is only a matter of time before we are returned; it is only a matter of time when the population wakes up and discovers that all the promises will not materialize; when they wake up and discover that all the short-term jobs will not sustain them; when they wake up and they discover that you need much more in life to get ahead than the 15,000 soups, the 15,000 hampers, and so on. We need much more, Mr. Speaker.

The UNC remains committed to developing our country for all. We made a massive investment in infrastructure. They are fond of talking about big projects and small projects, but the big projects are critical to develop the infrastructural stock of this country. That is why you go into big projects. You have to go for the big projects to develop the infrastructural stock, to get to your developed country status. That is why it is important. That is why we talk of an interchange. An interchange has to do not only with commuters, not only with the vehicles, 100,000 in traffic, but with business, with thrift.

When we were there, as others have said, we created an environment where there was prosperity. People had a new car. They enjoyed their car. Today you cannot drive a new car. Today driving a new car is a hazard.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Hansard Reporter is having difficulty in hearing the hon. Member of Oropouche. I ask you to please be quiet.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will not discuss that, but that is also another difference between the two parties.

We created an environment of prosperity where a citizen can own a car and drive around. Today you cannot own and you certainly cannot drive around in a new car. We put street lights where you can walk in the night. Today you cannot walk. As the Member for Caroni Central has said, this is a Government that has failed to protect our citizens from a mosquito. Can we expect them to protect us from the criminals? That is the fundamental issue. They would not protect you from a mosquito, far less a criminal.

They will not create the jobs. Already we are seeing signs of this. They talk about the labour and social policy and they want to be known as a Government with social care and so on: "We care" or "we deliver", something like that they always say. In fact, we need to add another one from the Member for Caroni Central: "We messed up."

They want to promote themselves as caring. It took a UNC Government to introduce a minimum wage; it took a UNC Government to introduce maternity

protection; it took a UNC Government to bring protection to our workers. That is what it took. We have a lot of promises. The country knows what to expect. And this is the difference that I wanted to take this opportunity to highlight to the country. But in the coming months more will be said and more will be known about them as they continue a path of governance that is defined by discrimination, by high-handedness, by nepotism and by treating our citizens unfairly.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**The Minister in the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs (Hon. Eulalie James):** Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to congratulate you on your elevation to the position of Speaker in this honourable House. I pray that God will continue to bless and guide you. Let me thank you for the privilege to join this debate on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, after six years of UNC rule, after six years of oppression, after six years of corruption, after six years of mismanagement, the country is now back in the safe and caring hands of the People's National Movement. Mr. Speaker, Monday last, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and Political Leader of the People's National Movement, gave this country a people's budget that caters for all regardless of colour, class, creed or race. The budget's theme is an appropriate one: Vision 2020—People, Our Priority.

As Representative of Laventille West, I wish to congratulate the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for one of the best budgets in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] In listening to the talk programmes, I am hearing people praising this budget. The man in the street understands, and the man in the street is saying it is a good budget. If the man in the street is saying that, I do not know why they, on the other side, will not understand that. It is a very good budget, and there is something in it, as my Prime Minister said, for everyone.

On a personal note, I want to congratulate the Member for San Fernando East, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, for being the longest serving Member in this honourable House of Representatives. [*Desk thumping*] History will be kind to our Prime Minister. I further want to commend the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance for his focus on the young people of this country, for transforming and developing the nation's youth. Even though they on the other side will condemn the programmes, the young people are very happy.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. MOONILAL]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

During the election period when I walked around, one young guy said to me in the Belmont area: “Mrs. James, you don't worry, the young people happy. We feel good.” Because they were all getting jobs. I do not care whether they say temporary or what, I know we are going to make them permanent jobs.

These young people had not been working. They had been suffering all through the six years, particularly in Laventille. Even though they said they had URP or ETP, whatever it was, you were not seeing any jobs around. Nobody was working! Mr. Speaker, if you walk up and down Laventille now, you see people busy, busy going to work, and that is what they cannot take.

I heard the Member—but before I go to that, let me read from the editorial of the *Newsday* of October 23. It is on page 10 of the *Newsday*, Mr. Speaker:

“Budget for youth.

The special needs of our young people, particularly their education, seem to be extraordinarily well served in the Budget presented by the Finance Minister on Monday. The range of measures announced by Mr. Manning is noteworthy not only for its scope and variety but also for its relevance in providing the special opportunities for personal development, having regard both to the level of deviance among our young people and the importance of familiarising them with the modern-day world of technology.”

And it ends by saying:

“Perhaps no other Budget in our history has addressed the needs of our young people with such a comprehensive, timely and relevant range of measures. It is now for all our youth to respond in their own interest and development; the opportunities are there.”

This is what is said in the editorial. I heard the Member for Oropouche talk something about the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme where some young girl said some party group gave her an application form, or something like that. Mr. Speaker, all of our Community Development offices in Trinidad and Tobago had forms and the people could have gone there and accessed the forms. It was not employment; it was a training programme. Community Development was treated like a bastard child under that UNC Government.

The accounting system—and he talked about the girl saying she did not get her money. Bear in mind it was a stipend. It was not a job; it was training. It was not employment where you get a salary. So you got a stipend to assist you to come to work, and so on. But the accounting system, because of the previous

arrangement, prevented us from processing those cheques as we would have liked. Bearing in mind when we came into office, we met the Geriatric Adolescent Programme with two centres—two centres in the whole of Trinidad and Tobago with 60 persons in each centre—the PNM Government introduced 100 young people to the programme in seven centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

So you could understand the difficulty in processing 700 pay cheques. That is why we had some difficulty in getting them paid on time. It is not that they were not going to be paid. They were paid. I believe by now everybody has been paid. But we had some difficulty because of the arrangements, and that is what we would like them to understand. So telling us about the girl and the difficulty she had, that is why she had that difficulty.

I want to say that the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme came into being under a PNM Government in 1992 and we were happy that they continued it, but they played it down—60 people in two centres in the whole of Trinidad and Tobago; 120 persons? Just think about it. We did our best because we believe that our young people were worth more than that and we wanted to help the largest number of young people as we could, and we increased it to 700.

The Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs is a people-centred Ministry which has an important role to play in national development and consequently in the realization of Government's vision to lead our nation to developed country status by 2020.

The Ministry recognizes that effective development cannot take place if people are not part of the process and, more importantly, if their views and ideas are not considered when programmes and projects are developed for the benefit of their communities. This knowledge of significance of people's participation in development will guide the activities of the Ministry during the fiscal year 2002/2003. We are fortunate to have two divisions of the Ministry which are in direct contact with people at the community level and which are accepted by the people as legitimate agencies for consultation, guidance and resource support.

It is therefore incumbent on the Ministry to strengthen these two divisions so that they will have the capacity to cope with the expected increase in demand for services. Proposals have already been formulated for:

- (i) The recruitment of additional technical and administrative staff and the filling of existing vacancies on the staff establishment;
- (ii) the establishment of supportive structures to provide research, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation services;

- (iii) the development of systems and procedures for the efficient acquisition, allocation and distribution of resources;
- (iv) the expansion of training opportunities for members of staff.

The Ministry also intends to institute capacity-building measures for community organizations. Priority attention will be given to village and community councils so that these organizations will be equipped to perform the desired functions:

- (i) making representation on behalf of the community for resources and services;
- (ii) liaising with social services and other supportive agencies;
- (iii) facilitating collaboration and cooperation among community groups;
- (iv) expressing the views, sentiments of the communities at the regional and national level.

Training will be provided for village councils and community groups in leadership, project management, conflict resolution and financial management to prepare these organizations for a greater role in managing the affairs of their communities.

In addition, the Ministry will provide technical and financial support to assist all community groups in the implementation of their programme and the promotion of community services. The annual subvention of the Federation of Women's Institute and the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Village Councils will also be increased.

In keeping with the community development philosophy of promoting development through a partnership between the Government and people in local communities, Government will provide direct funding for programmes, as well as making available funds under the CARE Programme for assisting groups with projects which they initiate and will manage.

The programmes under direct Government funding have been expanded and enhanced. These include:

- (i) The Community Education and Support Programme which includes skills training, leadership training and educational lectures on social problems.
- (ii) The Best Village Programme.

- (iii) The Community Concerts.
- (iv) The Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP)
- (v) The Transformation Centre Programme.
- (vi) The Export Centres Programme.

In expanding and enhancing these programmes the Ministry will institute the necessary measures to ensure that there is the widest possible participation and that all segments of our diverse population are catered for. However, as a result of its mandate, the Ministry will give special attention to gender issues.

I just want to elaborate a little on some of the programmes in the Ministry, and I deal with the Gender Affairs Division. The Gender Affairs Division is critical to the development thrust of the nation as all policies, programmes and projects would have varying impact on different groups and this includes the effects as they are felt by both males and females.

Over the fiscal year 2001/2002, the division has sought to strengthen several existing programmes and implement new ones. However, of most interest to the division was the development of a National Gender Policy and Action Plan which will provide direction in terms of the work of the division as well as provide the opportunity for gender mainstreaming in other governmental agencies and ministries.

Mr. Speaker, a Cabinet Note 1924, dated September 5, 2002 agreed to the development of a National Gender Policy and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has contributed the sum of \$154,000.00 towards this process. This exercise will be undertaken jointly with the United Nations Development Programme, which has contributed the sum of US \$20,000 and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) which has contributed the sum of US \$40,000. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) will also be providing technical support for the project.

We have already done a few things and some of the activities to be undertaken in the fiscal year 2002/2003 will include:

- Contracting of a consulting agency.
- Development of a concept paper.
- Conduct of stakeholders and community consultations.
- Development and execution of media/publicity campaign on issues of gender.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. E. JAMES]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

- Research and preparation of policy document and action plan.
- Cabinet's approval for National Gender Policy and Action Plan.

Mr. Speaker, there is another project that we undertook in the Ministry. This project, under the UNC, was called Women's Second Chances, and we thought that we would make a name change, because we felt that Second Chances denote something else. We called the programme Women in Harmony.

The programme had two aspects to it, which were, with the last administration, the care for the elderly and an agricultural programme.

During the period August to September 2002, the Gender Affairs Division has trained 104 persons in elderly care at five centres, and the centres we have enlisted are:

Port of Spain (St. Vincent De Paul);  
San Fernando (J.C. Mc Donald Home);  
St. Augustine Regional Complex;  
Couva (Family Services Centre);  
Sangre Grande Civic Centre.

By that you can see we tried to spread it throughout the country. The agricultural aspect of it, however, you had to look where you had the lands available and so we had it in two areas. We had 51 persons benefiting from the agricultural project, and we used for that project the areas of Chaguaramas and Point Fortin.

Trainees were exposed to modules on landscaping, container planting, vegetative propagation, the pot and trough, open bed and grow box methods of cultivation as well as agricultural craft.

I had the opportunity to visit those trainees one day and it was amazing how they all felt about the programme. Everyone had something good to say and the only thing they told us, they felt it was too short and they hoped that we would bring it back and at least allow them to have a second try at the programme, because they all felt that they were doing something worthwhile and they saw in it an avenue where they can become self-sufficient. All of them, as I said, were in high praises for that.

Mr. Speaker, there was another programme we met in the Ministry and it continued down to the end of September. It was the Non-traditional Training



Skills for Women. That, too, was a very useful programme and we continued it. In that programme, you had young women who were trained in:

- a. Construction industry—carpentry, masonry, plumbing, electrical installation, painting, tiling, brick-laying and site clerking.
- b. Woodworking/furniture—joinery, cabinet-making, wooden toys and tourist items, upholstery.
- c. Auto-mechanics—mechanical fitting and machinery.
- d. Computer repair.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of seeing the work done by these young women and it was of a very high standard. We even joked with those who did the furniture and said to them they can put “Courts” out of business, so good was the furniture. Some of them told us that a few of them would get together and open their own business. All of these are avenues for young people for self-sufficiency and self-employment. Again, that programme had been very, very useful.

Indeed, it was undertaken as well in Tobago—Bon Accord and Roxborough. Some of the centres we used were Point Fortin Vocational Centre, John Donaldson and the San Fernando Technical Institutes.

So our Ministry, the Community Development and Gender Affairs, did quite a lot in the period under review, that is the eight or nine months we had been there, and I think what we did bore fruit.

Another programme that is very dear to my heart and the Member for Chaguanas knows this, the Best Village Programme, which they tried to kill, but you cannot kill a good programme that had its grounding long ago in the PNM under our first Prime Minister who saw the need for it. It was well put together. It is a programme that you cannot kill. I understand they had some consultation and a lot of paperwork was done, and so on, but we had no time for paperwork. We had to jump right in and get the Best Village Programme going. We went to it and we had a very, very good Best Village Programme this year.

The programme was designed:

- To bring the people of Trinidad and Tobago together.
- To empower communities.
- To provide an opportunity for communities to be more conscious of their environment and to participate in exercises that will enhance their surroundings while at the same time developing a sense of self-worth.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. E. JAMES]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

We named the programme Best Village 2002. We entitled it GAYAP, which means the empowerment of a people, pride of a nation.

It was the first time since 1991 that a steering committee assisted in the running of the Best Village Programme. This committee came into being on March 19, 2002.

We had, on Friday, April 12, a very fantastic occasion where we launched Best Village 2002. We called it “Signal to Best Village.” We marched from the Savannah. Of course, we gave God thanks first. We had a service in which we thanked Him for bringing the Best Village Programme back on stream and bringing it out with a bang, so to speak, and we had over 2,000 people, marching the streets from the Savannah to the Brian Lara Promenade, and all had a wonderful time.

We even honoured the elders of the Best Village Programme because there were many persons who served in the Best Village Programme from all over the country and who are unable to do so now, but we had to give them thanks for their contribution that they made over the years. So we took the opportunity on that day. The Mayor of Port of Spain hosted a function for them and some of them were given the keys of the city on that day.

We also had the representative to Miss World with us on that day. Mr. Speaker, it was really a fantastic day, and if you were there you would have seen how people were just enjoying it and they were happy that the Best Village Programme had been back on stream.

Our Folk Fair this year was enormous. Thousands and thousands of people, over 30,000 came out to the Folk Fair. Our hon. Prime Minister was present and before the Folk Fair we had a—I think it was a 5K which was won by Curtis Cox, and a female, a young girl who has made several strides in this event, Pilar McShine—she is accustomed to winning events like these—she was the winner on that day.

We even added a special section to that programme. We had a Children’s Corner for the first time. We had traditional Carnival and Folk Characters. That day was really, really fantastic. We were all proud that we were able to bring back the Best Village Programme in such a grand way.

We had Village Olympics, and that took place between June and July. We had 153 entries in football, 165 in cricket, 101 in basketball, 46 in netball, 49 in folk games, which was another novel idea, which included track and field as well as fun events.

I always used to talk about the Village Olympics and the great part it can play in the Best Village Programme, and I was happy that we were able to recognize that and bring it back so that everyone who participated, enjoyed.

There were other dimensions to it. We added a Village Chat—

**Mr. Ramsaran:** You added to what? You said there was nothing there. You added to it? Make up your mind.

**Hon. E. James:** You hush, because you did not do one thing. You are the one who tried to kill it, but I am showing you today that we brought back the Best Village Programme.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** From where?

**Hon. E. James:** You went with it! What you had was a consultation to make changes, but it did not need any changes. You had to work with what you had and expand on it and let the people be happy. It is a people's programme and you tried to keep the people out of it. [*Desk thumping*] But the PNM has brought back Best Village to the peak and even beyond and it is here to stay! [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Would you take a lie detector test?

**Hon. E. James:** You could hush. I do not lie!

Mr. Speaker, our La Reine Rive was also fantastic. In fact, I think the queen was from Point Fortin and our Representative from Point Fortin was very proud to know that his queen won. The winners of the competition were Barataria.

Another thing we did, there were persons who contribute to the Best Village Programme and on the night that we launched the concerts at the Savannah, we paid tribute to these people. We gave them awards for their contribution to the Best Village Programme. They were:

- Mr. Phillip Simmons
- Mrs. Allyson Hennessy
- Ms. Allyson Brown
- Ms. Sharon Imbert
- Ms. Yvonne Popplewell
- Mrs. Jean Coggins
- Ms. Jean Inniss
- Ms. Wilma Woo.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. E. JAMES]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

That is what we did with Best Village. Everybody was happy and the *Trinidad Guardian* opined in an article on Thursday 26 that Best Village 2002 could be deemed to have been the best ever. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the Best Village Programme and to know that it took a PNM Government once again to resurrect it. We had, throughout the country, what we call community concerts. The Community Development Division implemented 22 community concerts throughout Trinidad during the period May to September.

The programme of community concerts was named Anaculture by the residents of Manzanilla where the concert was first held. The project is designed to:

- (i) discover latent or hidden talent in communities;
- (ii) provide training and exposure to assist in the development of their skills
- (iii) to enhance self-worth and the potential of growth.

Anaculture was used as a strategy to assist in reducing the incidence of crime and criminal activities since the solution to the problem of crime and deviant behaviour must be supported by community action. The community support for the concerts was outstanding in each of the following communities. I want to name the communities, because it was not only PNM communities.

We went to Manzanilla, Biche, Maloney, Mausica, Tacarigua, Blanchisseuse, Santa Cruz, Maraval, Bagatelle, Carenage, Laventille, Enterprise, Caparo, Mayaro, Moruga, Marabella, Barrackpore, Debe, Penal, Cocoyea, Santa Flora and Erin.

We spread the concerts out. Approximately 14,000 persons attended these concerts with over 300 artistes and groups participating. The programme was complemented for sponsorship by Radio 100, NBN 100, 1.95.5FM, First Citizens Bank, Eastern Credit Union, National Flour Mills, Petrotrin, bpTT, National Gas and Steve Mahabir Sawmill.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege again to launch a few of these concerts and I went to places like Mayaro; I went to Barrackpore; I went to Penal; I also went to Blanchisseuse, and the participation was fantastic. Nobody studied that “I am this and you are that”. Everybody came together and gave of their contribution.

**Hon. Member:** Even Gypsy.

**Hon. E. James:** Yes. When I was at Mayaro, the Representative then, Mr. Winston Peters, we allowed him to come and say a few words to the people—

[*Crosstalk*] Yes. He came and he said a few words. Another person who was also included in the programme—I think it was in Barrackpore—was Mr. Baksh. He was happy to come and say a few words to his people. We did not discriminate. Everybody was invited to take part.

We found that the community concert was a very good programme and it is something that we would keep and we would use from time to time in various communities. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak about one other thing before I take my seat. This Opposition that was in government before does not understand—to me like they do not understand it—is that government is continuous, and even if you had programmes that we had to continue, you should be glad. We did not throw them all out the window. We worked with them.

The same thing happened when they came into power in 1995. They met programmes that they continued and we were grateful for that. But look at the problem they gave us with the library. Look at the problems we had with that library. But thank God it is completed. And you know it is a PNM Government that will open that library. It was started under the PNM and the PNM, God has put it in a way—maybe they do not believe it, but God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. We are going to open that library.

So you have to understand that regardless of who is in power, there are some things that the previous government did that you will continue. What is wrong with that? So do not come and tell us, “yuh take meh programme; yuh tief this; yuh tief that.” Oh gosh! If we seek to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that is what Government is about. We have to continue. It is service to the people. So let me not hear this ol’ talk about, “you take this; you doing this and you doing that.”

I am saying this to preface what I have to say now, because the Member for Chaguanas went on radio—I think it was on Tuesday—and spoke about how we took his programme. What was it called? Adopt a Community Programme.

He is saying how the PNM took his Adopt a Community Programme. That is a programme we met there. We did not follow the philosophy of that programme. We sought to integrate it with a programme that we instituted called CERP (Community Enhancement and Regeneration Programme).

Mr. Speaker, I could tell you that I was part of that Adopt a Community, because anything that happens in Laventille, I always jump in, because I want to

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. E. JAMES]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

know what is going on. When that programme came to Laventille, I went to the meeting to hear what was going on. [*Interruption*] I did not wait for an invitation. It is in Laventille. I said to myself, here comes another community group.

Mr. Speaker, they had, I think, two companies to work with the group. I think it was Angostura and the National Lotteries Control Board. I do not know exactly what they were trying to do, but I think what really came out of that was that Angostura did fund a few scholarships and after that Angostura pulled out. National Lotteries Control Board pulled out long before. So they left the group on its own, and what that group does now is like after school lessons, and so on, because they got no real help from the Government.

If it is that they were hoping to alleviate poverty, the way they structured that programme, they could have never achieved that. That is why we are proud of our Rock City Programme. You heard my Prime Minister speak about it.

I could remember when I came in, in 1994, I met a water programme that was not going and I asked the National Commission for Self Help to resurrect that programme. It so happened that we lost power in 1995. And for six years I got problems to get that programme moving—it was a water project—to get it going. I got problems here; I got problems there. I could not get a backhoe. All you were getting from them was: “I have no money; I have no money.”

So I was happy when the PNM came into power and we looked at that programme and we went in there. Thank God that the Government had the foresight and everything to do what they did for the people there. You should have seen how the people were all involved in that programme.

We even met a church that was unfinished and the people were getting problems to finish it and we asked the National Commission for Self Help to assist. That church is completed and they are hoping to work along with the Government to put programmes to service the people of that community; social programmes that would bring an ease to the poor people in that community.

We are very proud of our programme and to let the Member for Chaguanas know, yes, we met your Adopt a Community Programme but it did not suit us. We included it in what we were doing, the integrated projects initiatives, and we moved on. Because the intention here is, when you go into a community to help it, when you come out of there, that community must be better than when you went in there first.

In Rock City now, people have water; they have lights; they have playing facilities; they have roads that they never had; they have drains, and if you go in

there you would see how the people are really trying to lift their heads up and to do what they can to bring their community to a standard. If you see the lovely homes that some of them are building there.

So they really needed that help. Some of them cannot build a home all in one like a month, two months and they are finished. They are sacrificing day by day. When they could buy a couple of blocks they put it down; when they could buy some sand, they do so, but eventually they would build a nice, lovely home. And they are not building any small house. They take their time and they are building a nice, big home.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am very happy that our Government had been able to help those people in Rock City. It was a pilot programme and it will not be only for Rock City but anywhere throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and it is being undertaken through the CDF (Community Development Fund) and the National Commission for Self Help.

In fact, when they were in power, all our projects under the National Commission for Self Help were shelved. We did not get help for any. We did not get help for one. But we are going to show them that we are a Government for Trinidad and Tobago and regardless of where the jobs are needed, we are going to help. Wherever the projects are needed, we are going to help. Do not be afraid. We are an equitable people and we are going to service all of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to thank you very much for being able to add my piece to the budget debate and I hope that everyone will understand that we deliver because we care.  
[*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Nizam Baksh** (*Naparima*): Mr. Speaker, let me take the opportunity to congratulate you on your elevation to Speaker of the House of Representatives. I am grateful also for the opportunity to be here in this very august Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, the budget presentation here, its main premise was the delivery of the social services. Let me take the opportunity to read from the *Express Business* of October 23:

“Millions Spent on Social Programmes but Poverty Remains High in TnT.

UNDP officials put the poverty level at close to 26 per cent of the population which works out to be an estimated 330,000 people who now live below the poverty line.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. BAKSH]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Shielah Solomon, former senior adviser in the defunct Change Management Unit, said the fight against poverty must be multi-pronged and focused on 'empowerment' as opposed to simply alleviating.

She put it this way:

'Poverty is ultimately the most visible symptom of powerlessness over one's own life. Powerlessness is the root of poverty that must be removed. Poverty therefore needs to be addressed holistically and within a positive framework for building community well being.'

But the UNDP's Neil Pierre, deputy resident representative for Trinidad and Tobago argues that even before strategies can be designed and implemented fresh data must first be collected to reveal the true state of poverty in the country.

'That is where the problem of poverty eradication begins. No one knows what are the true facts.'

Shielah Solomon continued by saying that she,

"...is convinced that poverty eradication is an achievable objective which should be 'very much the interest of the business community.'

'What is required is systemic change at the level of Local Government, which is closest to the problem. A decade of international research has established that when people at "grassroots" level are allowed to participate actively in planning the development of their own communities, their proposals are invariably cheaper, more effective and more sustainable...than top-down solutions devised by experts.'

'...Communities cannot be restructured by a variety of central agencies tripping over each other: Local Government restructured to involve community and regional stakeholders, is clearly the most appropriate vehicle,' she argued.

'We cannot afford another five years of avoiding the root issue of poverty eradication. Most importantly, the entire national community needs to be assured, in advance, that the wealth of Trinidad and Tobago will in future be managed to promote the well being of all citizens, equitably throughout the nation.'"

Mr. Speaker, this gives us a signal right away. To me, it is an indication that the Government's social programmes are not right. Mr. Speaker, you would know, as the leader of a family you would have certain plans for yourselves and the



other members of your family. You sit and discuss your plan with your children and your spouse. You may want to have a new home; you may want to have a car; you may want to ensure that your children have education, beginning from the pre-school then on to primary school, secondary school, tertiary level and onwards, if possible.

Similarly, just as a parent would plan for his or her entire family, I believe, too, the Government should be planning in similar manner. And today we have a king and queen to lead us. I think that they would have been in the best position to tell us what is good for this nation. How can we develop plans and strategies to move this nation forward and upward?

We have to understand that, yes, we are saying that we are embarking on many programmes. What we are actually seeing is that a lot of money will be spent, but how much of it will take our people upwards, will prepare them for generations to come?

I want to just reflect on some words here in the budget, that the social programme has a two-pronged approach; one, providing direct and immediate relief to the impoverished and vulnerable groups in the society and the other approach is based on the view that the social policy must be more transformational and developmental in its intent.

From what we have seen in the budget, it only addresses the first aspect of it. We are not assured, or we are not seeing any signs, except words, that we are going to embark on the second intent. It is my view that the social programmes which are aimed at targeting the poor, will not achieve its desired objectives and as a consequence, this segment of our population will continue to be dependent.

The budget statement for social services contained a lot of flowery language which is vague, unclear and lacks proper perspective. I am prepared to examine some of these programmes and projects and show their deficiencies and to make suggestions for their administration.

The PNM's social programmes are ensuring that we continue to travel the super highway of development of a welfare State. In fact, what we should be focusing on instead is carrying ourselves on that super highway of information technology. Close examination will reveal that most of the social programmes are duplicative. Most programmes purport to address idleness, moral and spiritual values, but what they are actually doing is encouraging idleness and destroying the work ethics.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. BAKSH]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

The social programmes are designed to keep the under-privileged and less fortunate in poverty for generations to come. You know, we can very well address this, like it is giving us hope, but we will die in despair.

I wanted to build a chart here to present it to show that if you look at these programmes here, from birth, you start getting assistance; more like financial assistance. You move on into all the programmes where you say you are creating employment, but it is only temporary, short-term, with no vision in mind.

Then you graduate from that, and you know, they are not specific as to how long these programmes are going to last. Someone working there, is really there on a day-to-day basis. You are not sure whether next month, or two months from now, three months from now, that you are going to still be receiving a salary.

So what you are going to see here is that after the end of these programmes, or the employment on these programmes, they are going to graduate to public assistance. It is designed like that. You are there for a number of years then you go on to old age pension, or disability grants, and then you die and your family or relatives look for a funeral grant.

This is the cycle that these programmes are going to take us around. We need to address these programmes for employment generation which is targetting our young people a little more seriously.

**6.30 p.m.**

Most of our social programmes become entitlements. They do not address the problems and the objectives which are stated and therefore people are there on a perpetual basis. We need to address them. Other than that, at the end of whatever period we decide—they talk about 2020—when they intend to take this nation to greater heights. I think by 2020 we will become a full-fledged welfare state. I think we need to monitor these programmes regularly. We need to look at efficiency and effectiveness. Anything we do, after a period of time, we need to re-examine. We would have that opportunity to review and change if necessary. I see that in many of these programmes, we need to make adjustments immediately.

I look at the Community Action for Revival and Empowerment Programme (CARE). This programme was originally designed for community-based organizations, community development organizations and non-governmental organizations to assist in improving the quality of life in community projects. My understanding from discussions with a number of voluntary organizations and

community organizations is that groups no longer are the primary focus. I will give some examples. I understand that a US \$20,000 from the CARE Programme which is meant for community organizations was given to a friend to pay school fees in the United States. I understand that the fund is being used to pay medical bills of people in the communities. I understand too, that when members of staff made requests for assistance they were turned down; and they are talking now. On a flight to New York I heard a calypsonian boasting that he got a first class ticket from the CARE project to go to Labour Day celebrations in New York. Apparently, CARE is now turned into a travel and entertainment club. We need to review this.

I will give you an idea of some of the categories of programmes that were undertaken under the UNC. They are as follows:

<u>Programmes</u>	<u>No. of Projects</u>
Sales and Exhibition	3
Community Concession Building Workshop	8
Religion	22
Establishment of Parks for Children and the Elderly	7
Preservation of Indigenous Dances	4
Health Education of Fitness	12
Culture	12
Skills Development	20
Upgrade of Office Equipment	13
Senior Citizens Appreciation Programmes	10
Education and Literacy	6
Sports	20
Provision of Furniture and Equipment	37
Youth Camps	5
Provision of Musical Instruments	6
Agro Based	2
Sports, Family and Special Days Events	8

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. BAKSH]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

I will give you a breakdown of administrative districts.

<u>Districts</u>	<u>No. of Projects</u>
St. George West	29
St. George East	20
Caroni	29
St. Andrew/St. David	19
Nariva/Mayaro	11
Victoria East	11
Victoria West	31
St. Patrick	13
Head Office and Non-Governmental Organizations	36
Tobago	1

It is a total of 200. They spent \$2.8 million. That is 100 per cent of funds allocated for those projects. Under the UNC we treated everybody fairly in the programmes. This is important, unlike what we have seen over the last nine months. I dare the line minister to give us a report on the CARE Programme for the last nine months. Let us see who are the beneficiaries of those. It is indicative that the focus has now moved away from community groups.

Under the UNC administration we continued to build community centres. We redesigned the community centres to accommodate classrooms and conference rooms. We renamed them community facilities in an effort to reflect the true functions of these centres. We also introduced the community management facility teams. What we saw in the past is that when village councils had control of the community centres, there was always conflict with other organizations having the use of the community centres. They controlled the centres as though they were their personal property. We formed these community facility management teams that comprised representatives of all the community organizations. When requests were made for use of the facilities, people on the Board were able to give guidelines and support it. There was no difficulty with regard to that.

We also appointed over 16 wardens to facilitate the use of the facilities by all organizations. The role of the warden was to also develop programmes. Very often we found that the community organizations came to use the facilities for

specific programmes only. The warden had the authority to develop new programmes such as inviting the health educator, the nurses, people from the Small Business Development Company and various government agencies to talk to the community about their respective programmes. We were building the community, unlike what is happening now. The PNM has now reverted to this situation where the village council controls the community centres. Immediately, you find that interest is waning in these community centres. As you move on you will recognize and experience that fewer people will remain in these community organizations. You always find that the village councils have very small membership.

I like the Rock City example. I would like to see that this is spread across the country, not only one in five years. Let us see in quick succession that a number of communities could have these facilities, not necessary to the extent that you have upgraded Rock City. I am sure that other areas would have a number of facilities in place. Therefore, you need to put and develop recreational parks. When we travel to the USA and Canada, we see those recreational parks with much greenery and trees and we admire them. We take the opportunity to walk through. The time is right that we should start embarking on some of these programmes. Let us see them and we will support them when they come.

I want to look at the transformation and development centres. They started off as soup kitchens and then they became relief centres. We know the PNM is famous for changing a lot of names. Now we have many acronyms attached to everything, but the contents of the programmes remain the same. It is cosmetic dressing with regard to the name. I know this programme was fully established in 1995. When you look at this, it is duplicative of the Social Help and Rehabilitation Effort Programme (SHARE). It is targeting the same people in the communities.

When I look at the Budget Speech it says that they are targeting a number of centres, we are not really addressing the problem of poverty seriously. I cannot see if you put a programme or a project in a few communities, how you will address a national problem, when it is not across the board. We need to address that because to me it is very critical and serious. You take it to a few communities and the rest of the country is starved. We need to reassess the impact of these programmes. Is this programme practical, realistic and feasible? In most of the programmes, you are looking at two phases of it. It is a two-pronged approach. The second part of it is non-existent. We have seen this for years. I am not convinced that this will come on stream as well.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. BAKSH]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

They have said that 14,000 persons were trained to do different skills. I ask: what sort of follow-up work was done to find out whether these 14,000 persons are still on the breadline, in the soup kitchens or if they have any permanent jobs? We need to evaluate these programmes. It is always essential to determine the effectiveness of these programmes.

There are 21 centres to be established in Trinidad and Tobago with 17 in Trinidad. They are located in Mayaro, Sixth Company, Torrib Trace New Grant, Basseterre, St. Joseph, San Juan, Barataria, Aripo, Arima, Tunapuna, La Brea, Ste. Madeleine, Carolina, Sangre Grande, Maracas, San Fernando and North Manzanilla. There are four centres in Tobago. What criteria were used in determining these villages?

I will pull that same report on poverty which was based on all the local government areas to show the percentages and to compare them. In Marabella there is a 45.2 percentage of poor. There is a programme in San Fernando which has 20.8 per cent. Marabella is doubled that. In Arima, the poverty percentage is 16.7 per cent. In O'meara Road, there is 25 per cent and Tumpuna, 50 per cent.

**Mr. Narine:** All that is in Arima.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** You name it a village. It goes on as follows:

<u>Place</u>	<u>Per cent</u>
Barataria	19.1
D'Abadie	17.3
St. Joseph	5.8
Tunapuna	7.7
Freeport	35.9
Gasparillo	17.9
Charlieville	21.4
Charuma	23.1
Cocal	23.1
Cumuto	17.3
Sangre Grande	5.8
Toco	17.3

This is not the benchmark that was used. It has to be some other criterion that was not made known to us. I also want to enquire about the criteria for selecting the beneficiaries for these programmes and whether they are well advertised so that people can access them. Who will be choosing these beneficiaries? Would it be free from political interference? Is there some institution that an aggrieved person can complain to and get redress. I suggest that the selection of these people should be done by the public officers and not contract officers of whom we seem to have an abundance in the public service now.

I suggest the group of people selecting must show a racial composition so that you can have equality. This should be applied to all the social programmes. I put to this House that the transformation and development centres and the SHARE programme are similar in terms of approach and target groups. I recommend that we merge these two programmes because of their similarity. It would cost less to administrate these programmes. We would have a saving which in turn we can spend on the national community.

I want to look at the SHARE programme. This is another programme initiated to alleviate poverty. We are not achieving the objectives. It looks like merely a handout to people in various communities. We do not have any clear criteria and objectives for these programmes. This is another programme which will have a developmental component. Page 18 of the Budget Speech states:

“The Social Help and Rehabilitation Effort (SHARE) programme has made a significant contribution towards filling a gap in the system by targeting needy persons between the ages of eighteen (18) and sixty-five (65) who do not receive Public Assistance or Old Age Pension.”

I want to find out how we determine and who determines who are needy persons. This is very important to the programme. I would like to see us put more emphasis on the training aspect of it. I know this has been left to the non-governmental organizations. These non-governmental organizations do not have the resources, both human and financial to administer these programmes. We need to address them in a different manner to ensure that the beneficiaries get something more substantial out of it.

It is also important to have effective monitoring which is essential to ensure efficient targeting and equity in accessing these programmes. We need to look at the cost efficiency of the food baskets which are given out. I recognize that a number of high priced and foreign items are placed into these hampers. We need to look at that as well. When we say that we are increasing it to \$200, we could

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. BAKSH]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

end up getting less. This programme is also duplicative of the transformation and development centres.

I want to look at the adolescent mothers. Will this programme not encourage the existing undesirable trends where young unwed girls give birth to children? This was mentioned in the Budget Speech. Have we looked at the undesirable social consequences of the situation which are obvious? There are unwed mothers whose lives are destroyed. Development of the mother is stunted. Children grow up without fathers' support. Children in such circumstances can present problems to the country. We are experiencing this now. The major interest of programmes should be education to discourage young girls from having babies. We are not addressing those problems. I was shocked to learn in the budget presentation that 13-year-olds are having children. Who are the fathers? Is this not statutory rape? This creates very serious social problems. I think legal intervention is necessary. The budget statement appears to accept this illegality. We speak about moral and spiritual values. I ask: is this our moral and spiritual value? When the UNC spoke about the nest egg, we got much criticism. How do you compare that with this programme for adolescent mothers? People are still calling for this nest egg programme. We have no problem if the Government would accept that. It is a good idea. You are looking at it differently.

I want to look at the Community Education and Support Programme. This will focus on skills training, group leadership development, management skills, community awareness and entrepreneurial development. I heard my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant, speak about these programmes. They said 9,000 citizens have benefited from the programme. What enquiry was made whether these people are employed anywhere; whether they are still on the breadline or whether their training meant anything to them? That is a very important aspect in all these social programmes that we need to follow up. Somewhere midstream, we could start assessing the impact of these programmes. I will strongly recommend that an assessment be done before any of these programmes are expanded. That is a critical element.

Who are the trainers? What qualifications do they have? As a family member you would want to take your children up. You want upward mobility. Are these programmes geared towards achieving these targets, as stated in the Paper here?

**Mr. Manning:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way. One of the first things that we did was to begin a reassessment of every social programme. That reassessment is not yet complete. When we introduce new programmes, we first conceptualize them properly, so that we are sure they conflict with no other



programmes that we have and then we implement the programmes. I hope that the Member could be appropriately reassured.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Thank you for the information. You will realize that I am right on target. It would be advantageous if the information becomes public knowledge.

I want to talk on the Civilian Conservation Corps. This programme has a history. The UNC administration is charged with removing this programme from the system. If this was done, information would be revealed why this was so. I understand that this was because of the kind of actions that took place in those programmes, the way the females were treated, I am not sure that some of the 13 to 18 year old mothers did not come from there. We understand that some of the youths were engaged in smoking marijuana while they were on the training programme there. It has a debilitating effect on the people who are involved in it. We need to look at it so that it would not recur.

We talk about instilling discipline and patriotism. I strongly feel that the State is not the one that should be instilling discipline in people. It should be left to the family, parents and the churches. I feel that when this is done by the State, it could change the perception and people's religious belief because of their own views.

I want to look at the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP). Page 22 of the budget states:

“The Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP) is aimed at fostering stronger intergenerational relationships between older persons and adolescents between the ages of seventeen (17) and twenty-five (25)...It will now cover seven (7) centres throughout the country. This programme has traditionally enjoyed 90 percent success rate and benefits some 560 trainees annually.”

I want to re-emphasize the 90 per cent success rate. A total of \$3 million has been allocated to this programme. Let me look at this. We are saying 90 per cent success rate. I do not know what criteria we use to measure the success. I see this as an opportunity where unemployed people and perhaps unemployable people have an opportunity to get some pocket change. Most of these programmes have similar benefits. When you look at up to September 30 2002, over 3,000 youths were exposed to the programme. I want to let you know that less than 5 per cent of people obtained employment. There is a whole section there to look after employment, but less than 5 per cent success rate in gaining employment.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues.

I was making the point that over 3,000 persons were trained, but the employment agency where there is a cadre of officers, the success rate is under 5 per cent in the employment sector. At what cost? My view is that even while you are training people, the Ministry of Labour should deal with the employment of these people. This programme is aimed at training people as caregivers to the elderly. When you look at it, after these people receive their stipends—it has been increased to \$50 a day making it look a little more attractive—they did not really go for the training. If you look at last year when these people were protesting that they were not getting their wages, they sent a signal. They were not too concerned about the training. They could have continued and made a sacrifice while they were waiting for the wages to continue the training. They were outside protesting. This is going to be a failure in the context that if we are training people to look after the elderly, when I start to receive a pension of \$1,000, I would not be in a position to employ a caregiver. The minimum wage is over \$1,000. These people who are recipients of old age pension are not in a position to pay a full time caregiver. It poses a problem there for employment. If they want to volunteer their services, that is good. If we could train people in voluntary organizations, they might be able to offer some assistance in their locality.

Another group of people we can target with this training is people in the old-age homes who are employed. We would not have to give them a stipend. Those people are already employed and they have a livelihood. They would have the interest there. If we could target these people, we could offer the training and the success rate would be higher. We have to look at the institutions to take this training there as well.

I want to look at the Community Development Scholarship Programme. A community development scholarship programme under which bursaries would be awarded to young persons to undertake programmes of training and a study in traditional and non traditional areas. I think this is very vague. How are we going to implement this? We need to get some more details. When we are embarking on this, it should be advertised, so that every citizen of this country would be eligible for this training and scholarship, once he/she has the necessary qualification and

criteria you are asking for. The people interviewing the applicants should be public officers and not contract officers. I have my reason for saying that. The names of persons receiving scholarships must be advertised in the daily newspapers.

I move on to the poverty class. In our manifesto, the UNC indicated that persons receiving old age pension who are not contributory recipients are receiving more than those people who are contributing to a pensions scheme. That is NIS. We have suggested that we reduce the pensionable age from 65 to 60 years. People who leave jobs at 60 years of age, like in the private firms, do not usually get any lump sum on retirement. These people have to go on NIS benefit. I can tell you, many of these people are very frustrated. Some of them die during that period because of this frustration. When many people go into retirement, they do not plan for it. This is something we should be addressing as a social programme, that is, preparing people for retirement and aging. By reducing the age to 60 years, we would wipe out an anomaly which occurs with the NIS. This is something that could still be addressed this year.

In our efforts to eradicate poverty, nothing is said about the vagrants whose number seems to be increasing daily. The cities are filled with vagrants. The budget failed to address young boys and girls who are seen begging on highways at the stoplights, shopping centres, car parks and busy streets. We have also seen the handicapped begging on the roadside. We need to address some of these programmes as well.

I want to address the specialized youth programmes. The budget presentation will target students who did not complete their secondary school programme. They will be trained in technical skills at the Army Camp in Cumuto. The second will target secondary school students who did not graduate with a full certificate. They will be housed in dormitory facilities utilizing existing schools after regular school hours. This is a duplication of YTEPP.

My greatest concern is those housed in dormitory facilities. We had youth camps in this country and we used to house these people there. We know how expensive it can be to put up these buildings to house these people. You have to look at the provision of meals which would be costly. You have to provide furniture and equipment and training facilities. You have to employ administrative personnel. Look at the cost factor in the preparation of these physical amenities. Why do we not focus on developing existing training development centres like John S. Donaldson Technical, San Fernando Technical and other training centres? Let us put some emphasis there so that people can

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. N. BAKSH]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

travel from home. People can travel every day so there will not be this overhead cost which would be more than the actual cost of training these people. I have a great concern when you take these people at the Army Camp in Cumuto. It is like what happened in the Conservation Corps. We need to decentralize this training so that it would be easy.

On the National Social Development Programme, I understand that through this programme, the Community Improvement Company, contractors are going to the community centres to repair these buildings without the village councils and the various organizations having any knowledge of what is happening there. They ask them what they want done and start to work and nobody could tell them what is the scope of work they are going to undertake and who is undertaking these programmes. We need to know what tendering procedures were used, whether it is open or selected tendering and what evaluation and selection procedures were used in hiring these contractors to undertake these programmes. It is being done in a number of counties in community development.

I want to briefly look at public assistance. This seems to be an entitlement for life. This is indefinite. This is meant to help on a temporary basis. I suggest that once people get onto that programme—we need to look at the criteria for getting on it. Very often you go to a doctor—I do not mean to disrespect the doctors—I have seen some of the letters that state they have hypertension and heart condition and they get on to these programmes. That condition has been removed. That is why the Board was introduced to determine—the Board has the final say.

When the office was at Salvatori Building, you would see a fellow walking up all those stairs and saying he is disabled. We need to ensure that when these people get into the system, they get out of it after some time. We could allow them the opportunity to find work while they are on public assistance. Once you find work under the present condition, you lose your grant. You have neighbours who do not have the job as yet, but they get a report that they are working. If you allow these people to seek work while they are beneficiaries of public assistance, then we can gradually take them off the programme. We find these people are indefinite. The old social structure is to graduate from one stage to the next and the next stage is old age pension. There is a virtual absence of counselling and rehabilitating services. This could help get our people off the Public Assistance Programme on a long-term basis. Allow them to work.

I am also looking for information made easy through technology centres. What the PNM is doing there is reinventing the wheel. Under the UNC administration, you had the community based distance learning centres. That is

the same thing. Nine months ago these were virtually closed down. The facilitators at these centres were not receiving pay. Those that are surviving now, it is through their initiative and the board of management. Under the UNC administration, 17 such centres were established. I shall name them. They are: Toco, Munroe Road, Cedros, Couva North, Couva South, Arima, Todds Road, Arouca, Mayaro, Brazil, Barrackpore, Carenage, Cocorite, Laventille East, Fifth Company Moruga, and Les Efforts in San Fernando. Excellent distribution! Over 12,000 persons were trained. This programme has facilitated people in the rural communities to access computer literacy at a very low cost. If you look at the advertisement on the newspapers, you would see a number of schools advertising this training at very high costs. We know today, that when you go for a job, the first thing they ask you is whether you are computer literate. This is an important aspect of the training. They stopped them nine months now. We trained people from five years to 75 years. There was no age restriction. These distance learning centres throughout the country have been brought to a standstill since January. The facilitators who looked after these centres have not had their contracts renewed. The facilitators are very important because they run the centres on a day-to-day basis. They come from the community as well.

There was no indication from the present Government that they were going to close down these centres. I know they have named a number of areas where they would introduce these programmes. There are 17 centres in existence. Why close them down? To have these centres established you must have an air-conditioned room for the computers. I request that you upgrade these computers.

**Mr. Bereaux:** There is no indication that they were going to be closed down.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** They are closed. Nine months now they have not been operating. We could look at it. It is worthwhile. Let us see that it does not fall down the drain. We are talking about technology.

I read from the *Express* dated Saturday, October 19, 2002. Page 6 states:

“Montano sings praises of Israeli technology

Newly appointed Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, Danny Montano, said Israel could help this country become engineers of technology rather than simply users...

They have a very advanced and sophisticated pool of technology there.”

I want to know if some of those equipment that came down recently under disguise is some of those sophisticated equipment. I understand they are already located in the Twin Towers.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. N. BAKSH]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

“The Science and Technology Minister said Trinidad and Tobago could benefit from assistance in the areas of ‘agriculture to medicine to rocket science...

This ministry will do what it thinks best in terms of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We will go anywhere.”

**7.30 p.m.**

“...Ambassador Tenne told reporters that there was a need to establish embassies in both countries ‘to get to know each other better’.

He said: ‘We would like to increase the number of Trinidadians that come to Israel, not just tourists, but experts and professionals who want to learn from us.’”

So if we are not tourists, we could be anything else.

“Tenne said Israel has had a ‘very violent relationship with the Arabs, particularly, with Palestinians’”.

I did not see the need to make reference to that but it sends a signal to me. It sends a signal! [*Interruption*] Well, I am not talking as a Muslim here; I am talking as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] If we are sending people there, and they are talking about sophisticated equipment, and he is making reference in a very cool and quiet country and talking about violent relationship with their neighbours, I am wondering whether their training, experience and their expertise would not want to be transferred and shipped to Trinidad. It talks about the Mossad tactics; we have to look at that. This is something we have to look at.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on LABIDCO, you know. [*Interruption*] I am no geologist or engineer but as a layman, when you look at the history of the La Brea area, with all the shifting, we see on a daily basis, those of us who travel there, the area, the roads, the houses, they are always shifting, moving and tilting and the same thing will happen on the seabed, that same movement we are seeing there. If you are talking about dredging this as a deep-water harbour—

**Ms. Seukeran:** It is a deep-water harbour.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Yes, but the same growth you have on the land there, you are going to have the same upward movement. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I have discussed this with a representative of one of the companies that worked in that area—in dredging. They say that they will refuse any contract to go back to dredging. If you are using a suction pump to dredge, it is risky because when you

are pulling that soft pitch, it gets into the machine, it clogs it and the whole thing shuts down. It is very expensive to repair. If you look at the clam shell system of dredging, this, too, will not solve it thoroughly, because when you take up with the clam shell there, it does not do a clean job, you remain with broken pieces of pitch and silt. This is a problem with the growth there in the basin itself what we call the natural port, you find that you have ridges coming up there. So that when you have high tide a boat might be able to come in but once it is in port in low tide and it has to leave, you have some difficulty. So in doing that, this is something we have to look at.

We may say that we have to spend money for maintenance; it is not the maintenance cost—which is usually smaller, a complete dredging—so you have to do this on a regular basis at high cost, to maintain a deep-water harbour there. This is something we need to look at. I thought I would just make a small intervention.

**Mr. Valley:** You do not know what you are talking about.

**Mr. N. Baksh:** Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I want us to look at some of our training programmes. I know that we would like to say that we are assisting the young people and the poor in this country but we need to review most of these programmes. We need to focus and after a short while we need to revamp some of these. We have looked at some of the past performances of some of these programmes and have realized that it has not been a success story, so we need to change and we need to do this very quickly.

I want to let you know that the problem of poverty will never be eradicated by these programmes. A large percentage of the population of Trinidad and Tobago genuinely fears that selection of persons for these programmes will be influenced by political circumstances. I also need to say that we need to put clear perspectives with regard to the duration of these programmes and to have needs and assessments done on a regular basis.

Poverty alleviation needs to be addressed in a holistic approach and to guarantee equity. We need to provide empowerment through education and lifelong jobs. These social programmes should not be allowed to appear as slush funds. I hope that the suggestions made will be taken on board because we all would want to support the alleviation of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much.

**The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Jarrette Narine):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. May I join my colleagues in congratulating you to your

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

position as Speaker of the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago, for the next five years. I know that you are going to do a good job in keeping order in this House.

I would also like to congratulate our Prime Minister for his Vision-Statement in the Budget Statement 2003—[*Desk thumping*—]—and his team that worked very hard to have this budget and on which the debate started today. What is amazing is that the Prime Minister spoke for almost two and a half hours, and there are only about two points, within the budget, that I have heard being debated by the national community and from some of the contributions from Members on the other side. So my assessment is that the Prime Minister did an excellent job with his team. [*Desk thumping*] I also want to congratulate my colleagues on this side for the contributions that they have made during the sitting today.

Mr. Speaker, you would realize that when we took office in January of this year that the Ministry of Local Government was an annex of the Ministry of Works and Transport to become the Ministry of Infrastructure. It was annexed, it was taken out; it was taken out and joined to another ministry, and workers of that ministry went in various directions: some went to the Ministry of Labour; some went to the Ministry of Works and Transport and other areas. And they made the Minister of Infrastructure and Development a super minister. Of course, history will tell us that the super minister that you all sent in Tunapuna is now a non-super minister and will never resurrect himself in politics. [*Interruption*] There are 52 million reasons why he would not return here. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like to thank the Prime Minister for his vision, for giving back the Ministry of Local Government its rightful place. We have 14 regional corporations in Trinidad, and as far as I can remember, the Ministry of Local Government was always a ministry that was separate from the others. At one point, probably, one Minister was in charge of two ministries but the ministry remained separate. I can say to you, Mr. Speaker, that over the last 10 months it has been very rewarding to look at the workers who were demoralized because they had to join a ministry that they felt they should not join. They were senior officers and there were workers in the Ministry of Works who were given authority over them and so on. They were very demoralized before and now they are happy to be back in the Ministry of Local Government. Immediately, we started to develop the ministry and started a training programme. We also looked at our human resource capabilities and what was needed.

At that time we had employed, on contract, from January throughout the 10 months, a legal advisor to the Ministry of Local Government; a Project



Implementation Officer; two Municipal Accountants; one Municipal Accounts Officer and recently, an Assessor for the Chaguanas Borough Corporation. We created the following critical human resource positions: one Director of Human Resource; one Senior Human Resource Officer; one Human Resource Officer III and three Human Resource Officers 1.

We also went about filling 14 posts of Road Officer 1, which were vacant since 1992. I found a ministry where most of the persons—when I visited all 14 regional corporations—were acting in positions for the longest while; some of them for 20 or more years. I came from Local Government and left that situation there in the 1980s and we are still in a position where there are persons who had the experience and who were doing the work all the time were acting. We went ahead and filled those vacancies.

We also provided training for our employees. We did: Events Management and Protocol; Mediation Skills Workshop; Computer Training; Conflict Resolution; Project Management for Local Government Bodies; Basic Auto CAD, that is computer assisted drawings; Registry Systems and Procedures; Human Resource for the Public Service; Train the Trainer, that was one of our sessions; Supervision for Supervisor Results; CIDA Training, where the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) a Canadian-based organization invited six persons—and I met that in the ministry. They were supposed to leave and CIDA came down here and conducted the interviews. We allowed six of our local government workers to attend that six-week seminar in Canada. We also had the Leadership Team Building and General Team Building exercise.

From there, I can tell you that the ministry really settled and worked well. Training and putting the human resource in place was most critical for the Ministry of Local Government. We also held training for the lifeguards at Mayaro and Maracas—we have lifeguards with us. I know that there is a lot more to be done. There was a tragic situation on the weekend in Salybia in Toco, three persons drowned but the reports coming out was that they were there on the day that lifeguards were not there. That is not good enough, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to do better than that. While the corporations are in control the ministry takes the responsibility and I think we will focus this year on facilities, training and equipment. What we met there—even in Mayaro—were dilapidated conditions and no training equipment. The ambulance that was supposed to be there in emergency cases was not there. We need to do something about that so we have had some training.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Participation of Senior Life Guards in a one-month skill enhancement training programme: We had sent the senior persons out there to be trained. We recognized the contribution of councillors that went for three terms and more. As a matter of fact, when we went to the Crowne Plaza to recognize the contributions of persons who were working in the Ministry of Local Government as politicians for many years and were not honoured in certain cases—I recollect Mr. Mohammed Haniff from the Princes Town Regional Corporation who has a long history of being a local government representative, although he was debarred by his political party from attending the function and all the councillors of the United National Congress were also told not to attend. We had a good function. We were happy to honour these people and out of that we got—the chairman from Sangre Grande did attend, he had no service, as a matter of fact but he felt he should attend because we were there to honour persons who had given service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and we did exactly that.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Mohammed was the longest serving person in local government that is still serving. [*Interruption*] I am the Minister of Local Government, Sir; Local Government systems must be upgraded because they are not pensionable. I served eight years in local government, received nothing for it. I started at \$540 a month stipend. We had no other allowances, no travelling, no telephone, and no other allowances. Over the years both the PNM and the UNC, I know, did a lot to upgrade local government. I am thankful for that, for I came from the local government system and my reason to be happy to be in local government is that I can do something to help the people in that. So we recognized the contributions made.

We also commenced an integration of the UNDP/GOTT Second Country Corporation Framework into the ministry's programme for governance and institutional strengthening. As far as Management Information Systems were concerned, we were able to implement for the Siparia Regional Corporation: Local Area Network Computerized Programme; Upgrade network infrastructure at head office; In-house Training in Office Productivity Tools; Transition of Unemployment Relief Programme, Information Systems from the Ministry of Labour and Local Government. You would realize, Mr. Speaker, that it was on February 18 this year that the programme, which was known as ETP, was transferred to the Ministry of Local Government. As a matter of fact, the Leader of the Opposition in his reply today did mention the ETP and later in my contribution, I would like to say something about the training aspect of the Unemployment Relief Programme. We commenced the implementation of a File

Registry Database System at the ministry. We also provided IT support for the Human Resource Integration System.

General Administrative Services: We implemented the recommendations of the Salaries Review Commission with respect to the increased salaries to mayors and chairmen. You would realize that earlier this year when we implemented the Salaries Review Commission's Report that my colleagues on the other side decided that they would not take the back pay and they had resolution within their political organization.

**Mr. Imbert:** They took it, do not worry.

**Hon. J. Narine:** When did they cash it?

**Mr. Imbert:** Long time! About six months now they took that.

**Hon. J. Narine:** I remember once there was a young man who was fasting outside the Red House and during the afternoon period Kentucky brought some chicken for him, which he had ordered earlier in the day. So you say something and do something else, that is regular with the UNC, Mr. Speaker. What I can tell you is that the local government representative on that side—and they have seven corporations and we have seven out of the 14—said that contrary to what our party said we are pleased that we are getting an increase in salary and a retroactive payment, and immediately they called to ask—when they saw it in the newspaper next morning—when they would be getting their back pay.

As a matter of fact, that first month we had to work overtime to implement that Salaries Review Commission's Report. What we did at the Ministry of Local Government—in January—contracts for scavenging were due in June and at that time I felt that since I belonged to local government, it was a fact that some areas that were now developed with housing and so on, the scavenging contracts were inadequate and that there must be an assessment of the entire situation. So I went to Cabinet, I got a three-month extension for that scavenging contract and immediately I approached my chief executive officers and the public health officers of the ministry and they came up with a plan. The first thing that they said to me, as the Minister, was that we have done this before and we hope that there will be no political interference in this. You all would know that the reason local government was given to the Minister of Works and Transport was that we had Ministers there during the last regime—the last six years—that could not function; knew nothing about local government. I would not say any more because I know some of these matters are in court and I should not say more. But

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

immediately they took an interest in doing this report for me and when it came we sent it to the Central Tenders Board.

Some officers from the ministry—as a matter of fact, the Mechanical Engineer was part of that team that joined the Central Tenders Board and they visited and, recently we have awarded, through Central Tenders Board, scavenging contracts. Up to now I have received no bad reports. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that some of the areas are working better than they did. Preliminary reports have told that we paid \$86 million a year for scavenging and that we should save at least \$10 million this year, which is excellent.

As far as my officers are concerned I must commend them and congratulate them for doing that exercise and creating that saving. Probably if somebody had done it before now we would have saved money so that we could have done other things in the Ministry of Local Government. You know how difficult it is to come by funding for local government. So that we had that matter implemented.

We also completed the distribution of truck-borne water. And as I say truck-borne water, I cannot help looking at the Member for Caroni East who said “Water for all in 2000”. It did not happen. What I can say to you is that this year the water trucking was well managed by the ministry and we were able to save \$5.750 million. Never before has this happened in the Ministry of Local Government. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] “Water for all.” What a lie. It is only recently—there are three areas in Arouca North, Lauren Hill, Bertie Road, Manimore Road, Kandahar in the Tunapuna constituency—during the last 10 months that we got lines run up there. It is the first time we got a water supply with communal tanks. They never got a truck-borne water supply. Never, because you all were incompetent for six years, and fed the nation with a set of lies. “Water for all”, what! You better stay quiet, as you have been doing today. Stay very quiet because I know what will happen in the future. [*Interruption*]

We eliminated the backlog in the renewal of leases in the Port of Spain City Corporation, the Arima Borough Corporation and so on. What I can tell you is that when persons in Woodbrook and other areas—The Port of Spain City Corporation has a lot of lands and when these leases are due and they have to be renewed, they must come to the Ministry of Local Government; they must get the approval of the Minister; it must go to Cabinet for approval and then it goes to the President, for the President’s hand. There was that whole backlog—why? People were saying that they were being asked to pay to have that done. A whole pile was left in the ministry where people had mortgages that they had to refinance

and all that; it was difficult. And in other cases who paid got theirs, got it done and who did not pay did not get it done. What I am reporting to you today—

**Ms. Seukeran:** Official or unofficial payments?

**Hon. J. Narine:** You do not have to pay for them. The city corporation sends it to the Minister of Local Government, the Minister of Local Government approves it, sends it to Cabinet, and after Cabinet's approval, it goes to the President for him to renew the leases. What has happened is that at this present time we have no leases pending in the Ministry. We have cleared the backlog and we have been to Cabinet every time this happened. [*Desk thumping*] So that we have worked well during the last 10 months.

Decentralized Reform and Initiatives: The Charlotte Street Mall and the New City Mall in Port of Spain, over the years, belonged to the city corporation, obviously, it was within the city. But a former Minister in the Ministry of Local Government decided that he was going to put a board in place—spending holidays in the Arouca North constituency. He went ahead and formed a board to manage these two malls. What happened? He brought a councillor from Princes Town placed him on that board.

**Mr. Imbert:** In Port of Spain? A sitting councillor?

**Hon. J. Narine:** A sitting councillor. He brought a sitting councillor from Couva/Talparo/Tabaquite and placed him on the board. [*Interruption*] Yes, I know some of them. I know how competent they are. And I will tell you what happened. The board—and I am very sorry that I did not bring the Auditor General's Report on that board. It is preposterous. I have never seen people operate in that manner. They bought tickets to go to cricket; to go carnival events, to go to football; they took contracts—it was ridiculous!

**Ms. Seukeran:** From the mall?

**Hon. J. Narine:** The mall in Port of Spain. They took the money from—

**Ms. Seukeran:** The vendors.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Not the vendors. The vendors pay a rent; they get a grant. The Port of Spain City Corporation maintains these areas, so they pass money and buy tickets to go to football, to go to carnival and to go to cricket, you understand, and this is what they did. So I fired the board, Mr. Speaker—[*Desk thumping*] And we have now placed those malls into the City Corporation and they are going to put a management team in place to deal with them.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

We also established advisory committees for the administration of municipal corporations pending the holding of local government elections. I can say to you that—in some cases, my colleagues call me dictator—I am now in total control. The records will prove that I am no dictator. I have worked together with all 14 regional corporations with equity and honesty and I deal with them on a one-on-one basis. Now that we have been placed in this position—and I am sure local government elections will come very soon—I can announce here that we are going to win at least 10 corporations this time. We are certainly going to control Sangre Grande Regional Corporation and Siparia; for sure. We have the majority already in Siparia, Mr. Speaker. It is just a matter of time.

We also conducted interviews for the hiring of municipal police sergeants and corporals. You would note that with respect to Act No. 21 of 1990, for years now, since that Act, the regions have suffered for their municipal policing. The city corporation is the only corporation within the municipalities that is adequately served and still I think that it needs upgrading at this time. What has happened is that today we are having interviews for inspectors. We have also commenced a 10-week training programme for municipal police constables and they are going to be completing that 10 weeks tomorrow. Very soon there will be the passing out parade and you will see that the municipal police in Trinidad and Tobago would look similar to the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago. They have been trained at the barracks. They are going to be uniformed. They are going to be out there helping the police do their jobs so that the police will have time to do other things. We know that with respect to the crime situation in Trinidad we have done a lot during the past 10 months but we need to do much more. [*Desk thumping*]

We have commenced discussion with respect to the formulation of regulations for municipal police. We have completed the Port of Spain City Corporation Urban Cities Project with successful relocation for steelbandmen. You would realize that the city of Port of Spain recently decided that it had prime property on the Western Main Road, near the Roxy Cinema but in getting the place developed, it had to relocate two steel orchestras. Mr. Speaker, steelbandmen for the longest while have suffered because when something had to be done they were just put out. We did not do that. We found room for them just by the Stadium in Mucurapo and they have nice space now, they have built their pan tents and so on and they have moved to that area before the city decided to do the Development on Western Main Road. That was one of the things we were successful with.

The Overseas Technical Corporation: We had attendance at the Urban Management Programme, Global Partners Retreat and Forum which was held in Nairobi in Kenya over the period April 25 to May 5. The Secretary of the Caribbean Association of Local Government who belonged to the City Corporation attended. I am pleased to announce that at that conference we were able to lobby and ask that section of the Urban Management Programme that belongs to the Caribbean—UMPLAC—they call it—the Urban Management Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean. Their headquarters for Latin America is in Quito, Ecuador and they were looking at somewhere in the Caribbean to place their headquarters—Our representative did lobby and he was able to get a special meeting at the Hilton. Recently, in the absence of Parliament, we went to Cabinet with a Note, and I would like to thank the Prime Minister today because we are going to get the Urban Management Programme in Trinidad and Tobago and the headquarters will be in Port of Spain.

A little more about this programme, Mr. Speaker. The Urban Management Programme is an effort by the United Nations family to strengthen the contributions that cities and towns in developing countries make towards economic growth, social development and the elimination of poverty. Their immediate goal here in Trinidad is to attack urban poverty eradication, improving urban environmental management, promoting participatory urban governance, achieving gender equity and addressing the HIV/AIDS issue at the municipal level.

A lot of work has already been done with this programme, but I can say that because it is the United Nations programme we will benefit from the funding. They were also happy to note that at that time the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago was saying that over the next five years, we are going to put half a billion dollars—\$500 million—to help with the eradication of HIV/AIDS problems in Trinidad and Tobago. This organization has been helpful to us. They have offices in Africa; all over the world, and they have experience in treating with HIV persons. I am happy that we were able to get the headquarters here and very soon it will be opening. We have already received some funding for the City Corporation here for part of this programme and it is really nice to have their headquarters here in Trinidad. They are willing and eager to work with us. We also had our councillors attend the Caribbean Conference of Decentralization of Local Governments in Guyana from June 25—28th where we had participation from the various corporations.

Services and Physical Infrastructure; Local Roads and Bridges: With the meagre sum given in the last budget—and I will come to that—the allocation

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

which we have this year—and Local Government is really thankful to the Minister of Finance and his team—we are getting more funding for local government, which we really need. [*Desk thumping*] You would remember last year that the allocation was something like \$744,000 per corporation; some corporations got a little more because they had to pay for markets. Chaguanas got some more because they owed the contractors for the Chaguanas Market. Debe/Penal got something more and San Juan/Laventille, but basically they got \$744,000 each. Out of \$250 million last year in that ministry, local government got \$14 million for development. Out of that we were able to develop 2191.3 metres of roadway at a cost of \$835,175. We constructed 37 metres of box culvert at a cost of \$50,000; the construction of 60 metres of curb wall at a cost of \$75,000; the construction of 40 metres of retaining wall at a cost of \$104,000; the repairs and construction of two bridges at a cost of \$160,000.

Mr. Speaker, when I looked at what went before and the amount of money that was placed to fix bridges—I am one of those persons who feel that in this year 2002, we should not have a single wooden bridge in Trinidad and Tobago; all should be concrete bridges. We got Pres-T-Con to do one of those bridges in Cumuto and it cost just—as a matter of fact, the crane to put the slabs in place cost more than what we had to do. We did a bridge in San Francique in South and we got a contractor there to help us with the equipment and that bridge just cost \$15,000. The bridge in the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, the cost was just \$20,000 but the equipment cost a little more, so we were able to do bridges for that money.

In the development of local road network via the Road Improvement Programme—well, it is history now that we have been able to distribute the funding for the Road Improvement Programme, very equitably, to the various regional corporations. I would like to point out to you, Mr. Speaker, what went before so that we can appreciate that when we speak about equity—Member for Naparima—the PNM knows about equity. When you speak about Arouca North; for the last six years nothing was done. We had Mr. Jack Warner inviting the Prime Minister on about 10 occasions. He said he would win Arouca North; only turning sods and putting up signs. I can tell you, because when you look at Trinidad and Tobago and you talk about putting something in Arima, O’Meara Road, is within the borough of Arima; part of Tumpuna Road is within the borough of Arima. Let me tell you something, opposite the Printery in Arima—that is where you call “Printeryville”, it is a squatting area where the PNM put roads and drainage and so on. The people are very poor; that is why you are



seeing those figures turning up. So when you say, Arima, it is just \$1.00 to get to the centre in Arima by a taxi from O'Meara Road.

Another thing is, you have called some villages in Trinidad that have 200 persons living, so if they have a population of 60 per cent are you going to spend millions of dollars to put a centre in that area? Come on, have some sense. I understand that the Member for Naparima worked in the service for years—over 30 years. It is amazing, as you leave Government, you have all the answers; all the time you had no answers. I can tell you when you are asking about vision—the Prime Minister has a committee dealing with poverty and the Permanent Secretary of our ministry is on that committee. The UNP has also spoken to us. We have had a meeting with all the mayors and chairmen and we are using local government to help in that poverty eradication in Trinidad. Mr. Speaker, listen to the two areas chosen; the two areas chosen are Laventille and Caroni. Equity, PNM style, not UNC style.

I say this to bring reference to what I am going to say here now, Mr. Speaker. The Road Improvement Fund to the ministry, which is approximately \$25 million per year, I would like to tell you what happened to the Arima Borough Corporation: 1998—zero, not one cent; 1999—zero; 2000—zero; 2001—zero; [*Interruption*] you boast to be a UNC Member of Parliament for Naparima. Would you agree that overall for these years, that not one cent of the Road Improvement Fund went to the Arima Borough Corporation? Do you agree with this? [*Interruption*] No, I am asking you, you are talking about equity. If anything should be equitable, you should leave that side, when I am finished talking here today and walk across here and find room to sit.

**Dr. Rowley:** Diego Martin is the same thing.

**Hon. J. Narine:** I am telling you? That is only Arima. Chaguanas \$420,000 in 1998; \$6.671 million in 1998/1999; \$1,874 million in 1999/2000—I am saying this to you because—and I am not calling specific figures, I am just rounding off the figures—2000/2001, \$6.698 million. You are talking about almost \$7 million. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, 1998, \$6.056 million; 1998/1999, \$9,843,850; in 1999/2000, \$17,176,529. Would you believe this? In 2000/2001, \$8.249 million one corporation, and you talk about equity, and Arima got zero. Diego Martin Regional Corporation 1998, zero; 1999/2000, zero; 2000/2001, zero. That is equity? That is the equity you all are talking about? Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, zero in 1998; \$1.850 million in 1998/1999; \$650,000 in 1999/2000; 2000/2001, zero.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

I can tell you that this year, we have given the Mayaro/Rio Claro Corporation \$2 million, based on what they have asked for. They were able to do five roads at \$200,000 equitably distributed. That is why we are here and you are there. You had somebody knocking desk in front here and getting on with fancy talk; a calypsonian who was in this House before and this is how they treated him? I repeat, this is how they treated him; one of their own corporations, give them zero. You understand? *[Interruption]* Yes, the pampers and baby bottle man no longer exists. Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, \$2.335 million in 1998; \$1.3 million in 1998/1999; it does not make sense going through all 14 corporations— *[Interruption]* At San Fernando; zero; zero; zero; zero; nothing over that period. I can tell you that for this year from the \$28 million, which we had: Diego Martin \$1.884 million; Siparia, \$1.5 million; Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, \$1.7 million; Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, \$1.967 million; Point Fortin Borough Corporation, \$1.610 million; Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, \$1,965,000; San Juan/Laventille, \$2.276 million; Arima Borough Corporation, \$1.570 million; Port of Spain City Corporation, \$1.856 million; Chaguanas Corporation, \$1.629 million; Mayaro Corporation, \$2 million; Princes Town Regional Corporation, \$1.476 million; Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, \$2.795 million; San Fernando City Corporation, \$1.811 million; Street lighting was given \$1 million. That is equity, PNM style. *[Desk thumping]*

I am saying to you all on that side that when we came here for the past six years and asked for anything, we would be asked to cross the floor. I asked a Minister who was on this side for a wheelchair; I was supposed to pay \$1,100 because the grant was \$1,500 and I wrote a letter to the ministry saying that I would pay the \$1,100; up to this time no wheelchair because it is for Arouca North.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Before you rise, I will take the motion for an extension now and direct that the time will commence at 9.15 p.m. I will now hear the motion.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** This sitting is suspended until 9.15 p.m.

**8.28 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**9.15 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Hon. J. Narine:** Mr. Speaker, when we took the break I was speaking about equitable treatment as far as this Government is concerned, and I was drawing reference to the Road Improvement Fund and that was under Services and Physical Infrastructure. I will continue under Drainage and Irrigation.

“The construction of 2123.5 metres of box drains at a cost of...”  
\$2.138 million was done during this 10-month period.

The development of recreational facilities:

“Improvement work was done to 7 recreation facilities”

and they are:

Point Fortin	Sherwin Julien Recreation Ground
	Guapo Recreation Ground
	Woodford Land Basketball Court
	Techier Recreation Ground
Diego Martin	Sapphire Park
San Juan	La Fillete Recreation Ground
	Gran Curacaye Park
	Barataria Children’s Playground
	Belmont Recreation Ground
	San Juan Hill Hard Court
Sangre Grande	Four Roads Tamana Recreation Ground
	Manzanilla Recreation Ground

The upgrading of markets:

Sangre Grande Market

Sangre Grande Abattoir

Fyzabad Market

La Brea Abattoir

Local Government Building Programme:

We

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

“Obtained Cabinet’s approval for Design, Finance and Construction arrangements with UDeCOTT for the construction of municipal complexes”

Mr. Speaker, I would say that there are a number of regional corporations that are renting facilities. For example, San Juan/Laventille and Sangre Grande are still renting. There is also a situation at the Penl/Debe Regional Corporation where they are to vacate the premises and we have been struggling to get better premises for them. They have lands available and we have already had discussions with UDeCOTT to design, finance and construct.

Mr. Speaker, during this period, we completed the signing of the permanent cadre for daily-rated employees between the National Union of Government and Federated Workers and nine municipal corporations. We also completed the signing of the daily-paid cadre for the Amalgamated Workers Trade Union in the city of Port of Spain Corporation. We have regularized the status of the Chief Executive Officers employed with the Statutory Authorities and Service Commission. We met with the respective unions on industrial problems and we have solved most of them at this time.

In signing the permanent cadre, Mr. Speaker, you would realize that by filling these vacancies caused by attrition, resignation, death and other reasons for leaving the job, workers are promoted to higher positions, facilitating security of tenure so that when you are a permanent worker, it means that you have job security. To ensure that workers receive maximum terminal benefits—that is when they receive their severance benefits—it was very important that these cadres be signed every two years according to the Memorandum of Agreement. This also creates employment for new workers coming in at the lower level.

Mr. Speaker, under the development programme for 2003, corporations’ allocation, which includes head office, the total allocation for development programmes for the Ministry of Local Government for 2003 is \$8.8 million, compared with \$20 million for last year’s fiscal year, an increase of almost \$9 million. The allocation for municipal corporations has been increased from \$14.1 million in 2002 to \$25.6 million in 2003, an increase of approximately 82 per cent.

In 2002 each municipal corporation received an allocation of \$714,000 except for San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, Chaguanas Borough Corporation and Debe/Penal Regional Corporation which received additional sums for payments for their markets. You would realize that the Debe/Penal Market was under construction and they are owing the contractors. Likewise, San Juan and Chaguanas. So we had to make those payments available.

In 2003 there will be more equitable distribution of funds as corporations will receive allocations in accordance with their need and not their size. For example, the City of Port of Spain will receive an allocation of less than \$2.1 million, the Borough of Chaguanas will receive almost \$2.4 million and the region of Sangre Grande, \$2 million.

In keeping with our thrust towards good governance, allocations were not made ad hoc nor by some predetermined formula. Rather, they were guided by the specific request of each corporation. Members would realize that prior to the budget, we sat with the Ministry of Finance and discussed these matters. Giving cognizance to the fact that dengue poses a serious risk and that local government bodies are charged with the preventative health function, each municipality received ample funding this year to treat with drainage problems which will help the Ministry of Health. In recognition of the need to improve public safety municipal corporations also receive funding for street lighting.

The PSIP's allocations are:

- |                                       |                 |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| • Drainage and Irrigation             | \$5.250 million |
| • Recreational facilities             | \$3.570 million |
| • Markets and abattoirs               | \$3.730 million |
| • Cemeteries and cremation facilities | \$1.175 million |
| • Roads and bridges                   | \$8.250 million |
| • Electrification programme           | \$0.800 million |
| • Local government building programme | \$4.170 million |

The strengthening of local government system:

- Interim classification was obtained for the posts of Chief Officers for the municipal corporations;
- A Decentralization Unit for the Ministry, comprising a Decentralization Coordinator, two Decentralization Officers and a Senior Planning Officer, with a view to facilitating the decentralization process.

Mr. Speaker, apart from that, there has been an equitable distribution of goods and services, for Port of Spain. As a matter of fact, we have received an increase in water trucking because there are areas that we need to supply water where there is no pipe borne water. As a matter of fact, the distribution was equitably done and I must congratulate the Ministry of Finance for that.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Port of Spain, upkeep of vehicles and supplies, \$900,567; San Fernando, \$1.029 million, approximately; Arima had a decrease because it is a very small borough; Point Fortin, \$140,202 for water trucking, an increase of \$10,270; Chaguanas got an increase in water trucking of \$100,000; Diego Martin got an increase in water trucking to \$77,770, that is to include materials and supplies. San Juan/Laventille got an increase in water trucking of \$41,250; Tunapuna/Piarco—

I am calling these figures to show that we have done an equitable distribution in the allocations in the budget. [*Desk thumping*] A fair Government. A Government that cares about the people of Trinidad, and we are the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, not the Government of Caroni. This is what has been taking place over the last six years. The PNM is here to stay because we are going to continue making equitable distribution. [*Desk thumping*]

If we look at Siparia Regional Corporation, their water trucking and upkeep of vehicles has been increased by \$168,000; Debe/Penal— increase of \$793,836 for water trucking, materials and supplies and upkeep of vehicles. Princes Town— water trucking, upkeep of vehicles, materials and supplies, an increase of \$269,498. Never before have we seen equitable treatment like this in budgetary allocations for any fiscal year. [*Desk thumping*]

Under Recurrent, all 14 corporations got almost the same amount; San Fernando, Port of Spain and Chaguanas got an increase: Port of Spain, \$1.099 million for vehicles; San Fernando, \$1.099 for vehicles; Arima got \$283,000; I am just calling some figures so that you will understand. Chaguanas, \$1.126 million for vehicles and office equipment. So, it goes to show that we did not discriminate in the context of good governance for Trinidad and Tobago, we did what we had to do. I can tell you that we have made funding available to all corporations. What I can say is that we need to monitor and see that these programmes are dealt with in a most equitable fashion.

Mr. Speaker, we had the opportunity to retrieve the Unemployment Relief Programme and I can tell you that we still cannot ascertain how much money we are owing for those years. My figures show \$52 million. An Unemployment Relief Programme, which was designed to put food on the tables of the underprivileged people, to send their children to school, buy books and clothing for them. Contracts were given out carte blanche; left right and centre.

Investigations by officers in the Ministry say that there were no contracts. This document here, which was the first document passed by the Cabinet—rushed

through Cabinet before last year's election—marks here, “Outstanding Payments for Service Undertaken Without Contract” and “Audit Approved”. I will come to this, but I would like to read part of the report that I got.

**“Having perused...”**

and this report is on “Outstanding Payments for Works Carried out by URP” over the last few years.

“all these accounts and made exhaustive enquiries from all the relevant authorities my findings are as follows:

**Special Projects**

All these projects were handled as special projects. All projects were handled by the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation.”

So, apart from what the former Minister of Finance was talking about, they had a sub-treasury down at Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.

**Mr. Imbert:** A sub-treasury?

**Hon. J. Narine:** A sub-treasury is what I call it because they collected all the funding from URP, dispersed it, took funding from the Ministry and did the same thing.

I will tell you something, Mr. Speaker. In the very near future—the Auditor General has been down there—the report will be made available for the Honda River and the Caparo River on work that was done there. They took money from the environmental ministry, they took money from the Ministry of Local Government, they took money from URP to do the same work, and it will come out. It will!

**Mr. Imbert:** They paid three times for the same job?

**Hon. J. Narine:** Well, I do not know how you could divide three different agencies to come in to do the same job. I really cannot understand it.

**“Contract Documents**

The contract documents were not prepared in accordance with any known standard or format. In some cases none were seen or could be found.”

This is what is taking place.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

**“Agreement**

No agreement was found...between the Ministry of Local Government, and the contractor for any implementation of the works. Some contractors were sent a letter from the Director of U.R.P....”

And I will not call names.

“informing them that they were awarded a contract; the award however was not seen.

Tenders

No details of invitation to tenders to any contractors for carrying out works are available to indicate if or how many contractors were invited to tender for the various projects.”

Now, obviously you must have a minimum of three tenders for any job you are giving out. If you are buying supplies on the Open Market you need to do that. They had none.

**“Breaking up of contracts**

It is noted that projects were broken up into packages to enable each package to cost less than a hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000.00). In most if not all the projects the same contractor was given the packages.

So that they broke up the contracts and gave the same person, which is against the Financial Regulations.

**Mr. Imbert:** Smith did that?

**Hon. J. Narine:** I will tell you who did it.

“In some cases payment was made, the documents submitted for payment did not appear to be in conformity with the financial regulations; but somehow the accounts were passed. Some of the accounts submitted for payment by the various contractors seems to have vanished and letters of indemnity were prepared and resubmitted by some contractors.”

I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker—

**Mr. Ramnath:** Who wrote that?

**Hon. J. Narine:** This is a report, but I have the facts here which I will go through after. I told you it was just smoke, the fire is to come.



**“Value for Works Done**

A site visit to some of the projects (eg) (1) Fullerton Fishing Centre (11) Burkette Corner Sporting Facility would indicate that the cost of the project in relation to these size, material use, services and workmanship, is out of sync – in other words the cost of the project is astronomical. No detailed estimate could be found to substantiate the cost of the works.

Some projects (e.g. Repairs to Government Quarters Penal – Opposite Penal Market) work was done by two different contractors on the same building, and the value of the work done could not be ascertained.

Materials supplied

Material supplied cost twice as much as the marked price for eg...”

dressed pitch pine

“lumber at \$13.00 per board feet; 6x8x16 concrete blocks at \$5.95 each.

No details of materials requested; vouchers only stated ‘Amount due to...for goods and services supplied as per attached’ the attached is the Bill from the supplier.”

And I have with me here some of the documents as samples.

I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is the report, but hear the reality. I am not going to call the contractors’ names for obvious reasons, but I will call some of these projects. I will tell you that the officers went to Gherahoo Trace looking for a sports and cultural centre which was built for \$230,000. No sports and cultural centre could be found.

I am only saying this because this is reported to me by the Ministry’s engineers. The fact of the matter is that it is the MP’s office in Siparia. Hear what has been taking place there. The sum of \$230,000 was given out as a contract to repair the Government quarters opposite Penal Market, and when you look lower down on the next page you are seeing work done on MPs office for \$279,450.

So, I am saying to you that it is the same building. I am a person who goes all over Trinidad and I understand that opposite the Penal Market—what they are talking about—is the same building, the MPs office in Penal; two separate contracts were given. One little house renovated for all this money. It is here, \$230,000 in one instant and then \$279,450. Anybody passing there would realize that there is no value for that money. I am saying to you that \$115,000 was spent

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. J. NARINE]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

to repair the government centre in Fyzabad, “near health centre”. This is how they put it on the document, but I am told that this is the MP’s office in Fyzabad.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That is an official report you have?

**Hon. J. Narine:** This is the report; a documented report. This went to Cabinet. This rushed through Cabinet. I am saying \$191,144.50 to construct a taxi stand at Chin Chin Road, Cunupia. I have seen the taxi stand. They put oil sand by that place by the gas station—that is for taxies to go in and out—and that was the cost for it. That was the cost.

**Mr. Ramnath:** If you do not like it go to the police and report it.

**Hon. J. Narine:** This is in the Ministry’s hands and it will come up. That is why you were forcing elections so we could not investigate anything, but we have five years and we are going to do it. We are going to do it.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Instead of complaining, go to the police.

**Hon. J. Narine:** I am putting it on the record of *Hansard* so it will show the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we really had a corrupt regime for the last six years. [*Desk thumping*] This is the point.

I am not calling all the projects. I am only picking out some. Your office, Member for Couva South, \$250,000 to build that shed where you park your car in Balmain. Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the construction of Couva South Shed.

**Mr. Imbert:** For a garage?

**Hon. J. Narine:** Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, that is cheap. [*Interruption*] Construction of Mungal Patessar Centre, \$157,000; Honda River Works is inside there—I do not know what other agencies took up work for that—\$494,730; almost half a million dollars.

Underprivileged and poor people in Trinidad and Tobago could not get anything, and our MPs have said it. You are hearing that people got paid over the last six years, nobody worked but they got paid. When we took over URP this year, there was a line up for pay and a taxi driver told me something is wrong by the office. I said to him, “Nothing wrong, today is Friday, they are paying.” He said, “I have been driving up and down here for the last few years and I never saw any crowd there. Nobody came for pay.” But they were paying. [*Interruption*] I do not know where they got it. They used to walk with briefcase.

I am not saying that the entire thing has been unclean, but I am telling you that I am going to work my skin off to get rid of the corruption in this Unemployment Relief Programme. This programme is not for contracts. I am telling you and I can go on and on. I am seeing here, “Maintenance of Waterloo Cremation Site...”. I do not want to call names, as I said—\$10,000 and \$36,500. What maintenance? Sweeping around the place? Do you understand? “Sporting Facility—Burkette Corner...”. People say Bucket, but it is Burkette; going to Rio Claro. You would understand that a chairman of a corporation lost his life for investigating that Burkette Corner—that cost \$700,000 which is left to be paid. I understand they have already paid \$700,000. So that facility is there and everybody can pass and see it.

On Burkette Corner there is just one hard surface court where they built some bleachers. Because of the landscape they dug into the hillside and built some bleachers, Member of Parliament for Ortoire/Mayaro. They got used drill pipes from the oilfields, made some bleachers on the other side and put dressed pitch pine on it. They did not even put mora so that it could stand up to the weather. They put up some lights and a toilet facility that dug inside the wall and an unsightly urinal on the outside. The sum of \$1.4 million, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, Fullerton Fishing Complex, Cedros, \$846,000. All the reports that I have heard are that it is a little place for fishermen.

**Hon. Member:** Do you think they are feeling ashamed?

**Hon. J. Narine:** No, they are not. They say, “Go to the police”. Well, the police ready. I would tell you something—[*Interruption*] Well do not talk about the rest. We have it under audit and the rest, we are going to do it. When you have people coming to you—and I am not going to say this to make the Ministry look good, but some of our officers have been offered bribes to get this thing passed. They were told, “If this pass, Jarette Narine could get \$2 million.” This is why I carried it back to Cabinet and it is now with the Ministry of Finance. I am not going to have any part of that. This Minister of Local Government, the Member for Arouca North, will stand here and report to the nation every year; year after year. It is 19 years now that I am in politics. I have had eight years in local government and 11 years in this Parliament and I can tell you that the money of the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago is important to us and we should never have a Government that will spend the taxpayers’ money as they well like, giving out contracts with poor people’s money. Unemployment levy funds, it is ridiculous. It is really ridiculous.

What do you expect from the others?

**Mr. Ramnath:** What proof do you have?

**Hon. J. Narine:** Proof? Let me tell you what I have. I have all the Minutes from all the corporations meetings and I take them home, sit and read them. If you want to find out, look I have them here and I marked them out.

**Hon. Member:** Propaganda!

**Hon. J. Narine:** “Propa” what? A mayor bought a gun with the corporation’s funds. That is propaganda? [*Interruption*] It is a good thing it did not go down to his ankle; he might have been killed with the people of Tunapuna. I am telling you that.

I would like to go through this document, but I feel that my time is not right. Do you think that a man who had applied for a Firearm User’s Licence on December 14 could have received it on February 14 and go to a corporation in January and moved a motion to buy a gun for himself? If you see the ridiculous prices. He moved motions for that. I am telling you that the same day he got the gun the same day he got the Firearm User’s Licence saying that he is fit to use a firearm.

They did not say whether he was trained for one hour, one week or one day. Nothing. All the Minutes are here. The Minutes are here where the councillor said that the gun should be his private property. The Minister, after the receipt of the gun, approved the purchase. They received the gun before and then the Minister approved it. This is joke to what has taken place down there.

I would like to deal with one other matter that has been surfacing all the time. Would you believe that the corporation in Chaguanas, in April, 2002—and I am referring to the Minutes:

“The Mayor said that a bill from Kampo’s Restaurant for lunch...has not been paid. He would like to know whether it was a deliberate act to accumulate those bills. He asked that the bills be paid regularly.”

Then he went on to say that—

“He sought approval for payment of a bill in the sum of \$2,500 in respect of a Training Seminar for sixty Councillors.”

What 60 councillors? It was 60 councillors in the UNC using government’s funds to have a seminar. This was not approved by the Ministry. I can go on and on.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That is cheap, it is only about \$40 a person.

**Hon. J. Narine:** Yes, but you could not use government's funds to do that. The party cannot afford \$2,500 after \$52 million and \$10 million in banks?

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I feel that I have much more to say, but I have five years to say it. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you very much.

**Dr. Fuad Khan (Barataria/San Juan):** Mr. Speaker, first let me congratulate you on your ascension to the high office of Speaker. I know, from my relationship with you over the last couple of years, that you will command the respect of this House in the same manner that our previous colleague has done. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, today, first let me congratulate the Member for Arouca North since he is my preceding speaker. After such a deposition I have come to believe that, most undoubtedly, I live in a blessed country. I live in a country where there was no electoral fraud in the marginals. I live in a country where a lady was not kidnapped yesterday and there was not a headline in the national newspapers that kidnapping had started back. I lived in that country, Mr. Speaker, when there was a truce called during an election period by persons close to Members on the opposite side and a truce was developed into no kidnapping after a certain day and it has started back again and nobody knows who is doing that.

Mr. Speaker, this blessed country of ours is such a country that I received a phone call today from a businesswoman we all know, who expressed her fears after reading what had happened in some daily newspaper in a different country where some lady was kidnapped in Chaguanas.

As a Member of Parliament I had to fight a marginal seat in the last elections and not only was it a horrible period, but it was filled with a lot of inequalities. The Member for San Fernando East may not know about this, but there were many inequalities. A lot of programmes that have been mentioned here, the GAPP, the YAP, the BAP, whatever it is, were used on the constituents. I am speaking of Barataria/San Juan—I do not know of the others—where people who are known supporters of the United National Congress—or who were thought to be known supporters of the UNC—were told that in order to access the programmes and obtain jobs in the programmes, they should not wear any UNC emblem, go to any UNC meetings or partake in any UNC activities, but they had to partake in activities of the People's National Movement, being bussed to any part of the country wearing the PNM tee-shirts.

I am saying this today in this House because the Member for Arouca North has brought documentation, et cetera, about certain allegations and he says he has

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

five years to do it, But I am saying that I have not yet heard anyone in this House stand and apologize for the level of intimidation and victimization that occurred in the marginal seats. [*Interruption*] They have been.

Mr. Speaker, I seem to have touched a hornets' nest. We are all trying in this honourable House to pretend that electoral fraud did not exist. As much as I have known in my life that when you turn a blind eye to criminal activity, it comes back to haunt you, and, if you are part and parcel of that you cannot do anything about it because they hold you to ransom.

So, I say to you today, Mr. Speaker, that it makes me feel uncomfortable, as a citizen of this country and a Member of this House, to be standing in this House, the highest court of the land, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, when I know for a fact—I cannot bring it, as the hon. Members of Parliament for Arouca North or Diego Martin East, but it is intangible evidence, that people had guns pushed in their faces while in their cars on election day and told to get back home because they were marking them if they came to vote.

There were areas where the UNC had strong polling divisions. It happened in Tunapuna. It happened in Ortoire/Mayaro. [*Interruption*] It happened there. [*Interruption*] This is what occurred. And there has not been any condemnation of that kind of activity.

**Mr. Manning:** Mr. Speaker, it is the first time I am hearing the allegation that has been made by the Member for Barataria/San Juan and I would like to suggest that if he has any evidence of activities of that nature he should go to the police forthwith with the matter and I will assure him that if there is any substance to the allegation it will be investigated to finality.

**Dr. F. Khan:** I thank you for that, Mr. Prime Minister. I will try to get the people who came to me with these problems. What they are afraid of, Member for Diego Martin West, is that if they are identified by doing it, the people who were intimidating them will go to their homes and deal with them.

**Mr. Imbert:** Nancy story. Bring the people.

**Dr. F. Khan:** It is not a nancy story, Member for Diego Martin East.

Mr. Speaker, we could scuff at it, we could laugh at it, we could call it what we want but at the end of the day all of us have to live here; PNM, UNC or whoever it is. If we have to live under these circumstances in this country, it is a frightening thing. People who are swing voters have come to me, in different circles, and have expressed concerns that while these allegations have been

spoken about, nobody seems to give a hoot about whether there should be some sort of investigation. People are even afraid to go to the police with this information. So, what do we do?

I am quite certain the Member for Diego Martin East cannot really say he does not know about this.

**Mr. Imbert:** Of course not. I know nothing about that. Bring the people.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleagues on the other side, but something that touches every one of us in some form or fashion should not be scuffed at, even if it means that you may be there by default. This occurred in different parts of the marginals. Whether or not I can bring the people, I would like to bring it to the national attention and the attention of the Prime Minister that this did occur or else we would not have been saying it.

Mr. Speaker, one has to ask another question: Why is it that kidnapping stopped at a certain time and started back yesterday? Why is it? At the end of the day we ask ourselves who is next and why? It is an uncomfortable feeling, Mr. Speaker. So, after I hear my colleagues and friends from the opposite side, I say to myself that I live in a blessed country where there is nothing going on.

In the last nine months the health sector of the public service was the most perfect place to be in because we did not hear anything from the Public Services Association president. Jennifer Baptiste said nothing. The Ministry of Education was the best place. When I put these points forward about what occurred in the nine months—I also put on the record what occurred in my Barataria/San Juan constituency with our people—all I ask this time is: We have five years and in some form or fashion, two things—and I see the budget has addressed them—that we put the past behind us, as you have said, and we cannot change what has happened, but equality of job and job security should be. You may say it here, hon. Prime Minister, and you must trickle down that information to the people below you and make sure that they understand that fact.

I stand today, very emotional about that, because an election in a marginal seat is not an easy thing. You saw what happened to the Member for Tunapuna and it was emotions that caused it. Marginal seat elections are very emotional. I have always believed in fairplay. I have never done anything on any campaign to the other side, so I expect a certain amount of fairplay from my opponents.

As the Member of Parliament for Barataria/San Juan, when I was in government, as little as I had I made sure there was equality: equality in URP,

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

equality in everything and I would expect, hope and would love to get the same for the people of Barataria/San Juan.

I have heard about the inequality of the Road Improvement Fund that the Member mentioned earlier, but I was told, after I had questioned it, how the corporations got discrepancies. I was told that the Road Improvement Fund was better managed by the Ministry of Works and Transport, but I think somebody else will deal with that.

**Mr. Narine:** Thank you very much for giving way. I will take just one example, because the Act, which was really for the Ministry of Works and Transport to use the Road Improvement Fund—the 5 per cent tax collected at the pumps, \$50 million—during that six-year period your government came to Parliament and divided the Fund and put 50 per cent in the Ministry of Local Government. When I say that Arima Borough Corporation got zero, they got zero.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I want to turn a little to the Ministry of Health. [*Interruption*] I am not saying anything wrong, do not worry.

The Member for Diego Martin East—after nine months I have to commend him for being able to grasp a lot of the movement of the Ministry of Health. I think he gave a good account of himself for the nine months.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you, thank you.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to suggest a couple of things. The Health Sector Reform Programme was in 1994 and at that time there were different health assessment needs that were required. I saw \$2.5 million have been budgeted for access to cardiac surgery. The access to cardiac surgery of \$2.5 million is just a matter of paying \$2.5 million, if I understand it correctly, and the patient pays the other half; a sort of 50 per cent overall thing.

Mr. Speaker, there are people who cannot afford that half and they are the people whom my colleague from Caroni Central was talking about. The vision that we had for the cardiac surgery is that—there was an agreement signed at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex where it disallowed the entry of anybody—even if it was at a cheaper rate—into the cardiac categorization lab or the operating theatre or intensive care. [*Interruption*] You could check the agreement.

The agreement is such an ironclad one that one has to change one's name or something else for a poor person to access cardiac surgery free at Mount Hope, if it is at all available. What we had in mind was that at the Caura Hospital, which



was once designated under the early PNM days as a cardio pulmonary hospital, there are operating theatres and sterilization units. The whole system there is geared to change that into a cardio pulmonary hospital so that one could teach and train our nationals to do that procedure. At present there are not many nationals being trained in that procedure. If somebody has a cardiac problem today, and cannot afford it, if he/she goes to the public health institution there is no hope in hell that he/she would ever be given a cardiac bypass or angiogram because it is too expensive.

However, if we train our people—I am stepping out of the Health Sector Reform Programme a bit here—there must be an institution for that type of care in this country for research and development. Mount Hope was the Mecca for that and medical tourism, but it has gone haywire, but there is an institution in Caura to do it.

That is just one part of it. The other part of it I would like to recommend now. The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin East, the Minister of Health, said that he intends to train 400 nurses per year to make up for the nursing shortage. I have had a lot of meetings with the Nursing Council and I am going to suggest something to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, in the private nursing homes there is the use of a nursing body that is not in keeping with the Nursing Council, but persons have been trained to such an extent and at such level that they are efficient, and sometimes more efficient and willing than those in the actual nursing body. These are people who were not able to pass the three and four o'levels because of some problem and they were able to get private nursing tutoring—the Nursing Council does not like me to use the word “nursing”—and they were able to get jobs in the private institutions under a registered nurse who guides them. Some of them were given the Patients Care Assistants at the hospitals.

There are hundreds of those young people outside, and if the Government is concentrating on the youths, they are young people who have been trained to some level, in the nursing business; they have been trained further in the private nursing sector and they are willing. These are people, if given the opportunity, with examinations et cetera, and quality control, could rise to a level better than the nurses we have now, and one basic factor, most of them will not leave here because they have to stay here.

The nurses that you are training in NIHERST, the diploma that they get is in demand, as you know, in London, the United States of America, Canada and so

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

forth and the nurses raiders do not care from where they come. So I would like to suggest to the Member for Diego Martin East, since he has such a good arrangement with the Nursing Council, he should pursue that. Not only will he be giving the young people of this country a chance, but he may tread on some toes with the Nursing Council, but it is the way to go for the nursing shortage over a period of time. No matter how you train here, once there is a corporate nursing radar, they are going to go because we cannot compete with the exchange rate.

And such a good grasp for health sector.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker—I am staying on health because I am not a local government person—the Regional Health Authorities have been a bugbear for a while. The Regional Health Authorities in London have been changed to such an extent that the boards of the regional health authorities no longer determine and control the managing area of the regional health authorities. Their job is to monitor and regulate the functions of the financial and management aspect of the managing level, which is the CEOs and so forth and they are responsible to the Minister of Health.

I think it is time that we should look at that, because what we do, is that the Government puts a board in position—people who they know and will do a good job—and yet they hire managers with stringent qualifications: accountancy, management, financing, nursing care or whatever it is. Yet, the board determines how those people operate which does not make sense. They are better qualified to manage a system than a board, but a board is better to monitor and regulate them.

So I throw out the suggestion to the Minister of Health that another paradigm shift could take place at that level where the Ministry of Health will monitor and control the financial aspect at the managerial level and the chairmen of boards and so forth will also be monitoring the administrative activities. It is something to look at.

Mr. Speaker, for too long, as I said, our waiting lists have been elongating with cataracts, prostrate and so forth. It is wise and good to cut the waiting list down, but for every waiting list that you cut down, the next day brings more and more. So, you never really get a grasp of it unless you really have a sustained effort, as you say.

The national health insurance that you are looking at over a period of time, unless the infrastructure is built to such a level it will be a little difficult to produce a national health insurance system that people of private and public will go to because the people will choose private instead of public and the Government will lose money.

I would like to suggest to you, Member for Diego Martin East, that if ever you could look at the aspect of where the private health insurance system—which is already in place and doing its job already—could be, as you say, brought into the movement, you will get a faster movement with the national health insurance. So, the Government pays the basic level, as you determine, and people can top it up if they want to for higher level services.

These are just simple suggestions which, being a person in the medical field, I have seen at the administrative level and I am also doing it at the worker level. Combining both, sometimes the health sector reform that you have put in place, would not be the total way to go.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn a little to my constituency and as I am here today—I am sorry the Member for Arouca North is not here but at least the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is here—there is a dire need for the Ministry of Works and Transport to place a walk-over on the highway by the Solo factory on El Socorro Extension. I ask, quite humbly, if that could be done during your tenure, in some form or fashion. The highway has been made into a six-lane highway, almost, and people cross that back and forth to school and the population has increased and they have been lobbying for that walk-over. I see we have a new Minister of Works and Transport and it might be a help if he can just look into that for me.

The Member for Arouca North has gone and there are two main bugbears and the Member for St. Ann's East was once the Chairman of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. We had our differences because we both belonged to different political disciplines, but I would like to ask the Member for Arouca North if he could look into the fact that the scavenging person, Mr. Deosaran, for years he has parked his scavenging trucks next to the El Socorro Islamic School and the children suffer as a result of the diesel smoke, the rats infestations, et cetera. Whatever he can do to assist in moving that facility into a more external facility away from the schools and households would be appreciated.

Another thing, the Member for St. Ann's will know, is that for years we have been trying to work on the obstruction with Mr. Geelal and I would like him to take a look at it.

Mr. Speaker, this budget, as people have said, is a populace budget. It has been argued back and forth for the day. It is a budget, as they say, for the people and my dear friend from Tobago East—I could never not listen to her, good budget—but I would like to say that we still have to see how it is going to work and we just have to be willing to give it a chance.

**The Minister in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Diane Seukaran):** Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Government and the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the Minister of Finance and his staff ought to be complimented upon the budget that has been presented. Far from being a populace budget, it is a budget in which, for the first time in a long time, one sees the holistic aspect of planning. It is not populace, it is popular—yes, thank you, Sir. It is a popular budget.

In this budget, what you find is vision, you see foresight, you see holistic planning and a practical approach to development to take a country to developed nation status by the year 2020. In fact, it has 20/20 vision. It recognizes that development is driven by people and therefore it puts people at the centre. If that is what it means to be popular, then I think we on this side are very proud of the fact that we are popular in that sense. [*Desk thumping*]

It is a planned approach to narrowing and, indeed, entirely eliminating the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots”.

**Mr. Ramnath:** We should end the debate then.

**Hon. D. Seukaran:** Mr. Speaker, in that sea of poverty that exists in the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots”, a human being, a person who is poor in the pocket becomes poor in the mind and in the soul. We all know that a man without a soul is not a man at all. So that we seek to make sure that people remain people by removing poverty. Indeed national security and developed nation status are only possible and can only be achieved when poverty is totally eradicated.

**10.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, on all of the election hustings, and sadly here in this august House, we have listened to the Members on the other side pour scorn upon poor people. They continue to do that, and it is sad, particularly when I heard the Member for Oropouche point out that 80 per cent of the prison population was young. If he was here, I would ask him whether he really thinks that someone steals and lashes out against society because he is inherently bad, or because he is poor and finds himself in a position where he has no other choice? And having once taken that choice, it leads on to more and more that is negative. Why is he pouring scorn upon poverty? Indeed, the Member for Oropouche and all his colleagues say that the PNM is creating a dependency syndrome, Their words are “freeco, loafers, and vaps”. Those are the words that I heard being used. [*Interruption*] I am taking him on because I object to it. I do not pour scorn upon

poor people and I object to anybody else pouring scorn upon the poor. [*Interruption*] He said so. He was quoting them. Whether he was quoting the *Guardian* newspaper or not, he brought it into this august House and he has ensured that it has been put into the record of *Hansard*. He must apologize.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the hon. Member, and indeed all of them who are on that side, are against the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago. I believe that they are against the people who need the support of the soup kitchens, of food hampers, they are against people who are using brushing cutlasses and brooms. Those were the words he was using. They show contempt for anything that has to do with agriculture and the creation of new farmers, or those who beautify our environment. How sad it is, that these are elected Members in this House, and they are people who open and continuously manifest such contempt for the many poor people in our society. I have a deep, deep objection. I had it on the election hustings and I have it when it is brought into this honourable House, that one would pour contempt upon the poor, particularly when hon. Members on the opposite side come from and are supposed to represent the workers of this country, particularly the workers in the agricultural and in the land sector.

It seems to me that it does not matter to them at all if it is one out of every five persons, or in some areas, two out of every five persons we know. Can you imagine that? If there were five persons sitting here; one, two, three, four, five, one of them would be living under the poverty line and in some areas two of them would be living under the poverty line. That is a disgusting fact [*Interruption*] I have no doubt, Sir, that you live well above the poverty line. It is a disgusting fact that in this land plenty people are living below the poverty line, and that the people across on that side are pouring scorn upon people who cannot help themselves, and then tries to call himself a poor man!

Mr. Speaker, given their very evident contempt for poor people and for workers, is it any wonder that they want to keep Caroni (1975) Limited as the barren entity on whose back they would continue to ride? Because, if Caroni (1975) Limited became rich and fertile as we on this side want, that would not suit them at all. There would be no backs to ride!

The Members of this honourable House opposite are masters of semantics. They play on words. Indeed, they are very good at playing to an audience just as they are at dividing the society by creating fear. And I note, with great regret, that the Member for Barataria/San Juan brought into this honourable House the whole concept of the fear that they have used in an election campaign to divide this nation, right down the line, regardless of the consequences. And I am very

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. D. SEUKARAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Surprised, Sir, that such a distinguished Member on that side should bring it to be recorded into the annals and history of Trinidad and Tobago. Let us leave it on the election hustings. That is where it belongs. It does not belong in this House. It must not exist in our country.

I heard the hon. representative for St. Augustine do so well what bankers normally seem best to do; have a difficulty with figures, particularly when those figures suit only the client and do not suit their own interest in banking terms.

We on this side recognize that job security can no longer be guaranteed by enforced might. We recognize that it can only be ensured by continuous and effective skills development, by the creation of a vibrant economy which generates wealth. And while it creates jobs we can eliminate poverty effectively. Our objective is the elimination of poverty. You see Sir, we on this side, far from pouring scorn, recognize and know what it is to be poor, and we care about people. Indeed, my Government has declared war on poverty. It is a war that every citizen in this country must be joined in reciprocal support. Or else this small and very diverse nation of ours can explode. That is what poverty does in the long-term and we must stop it now.

I hope that eventually when we have finished the “ramajay” that goes on, the Members on the other side will become leagued with us in reciprocal support in the war against poverty. It is only when all the peoples of a nation come together to fight a common enemy, particularly the enemy that is poverty, that we can achieve national unity in its fullest sense, that we can become a nation. That is how you become a nation. [*Desk thumping*] It is not by words.

I think—and the representative for Barataria/San Juan particularly, given the fact that I am shocked at what he brought into this House—it is time to stop dividing this country just for the attainment of power and self-aggrandizement.

To get down to the business of the budget. Sir, the 2002 Budget seems to be a tool kit containing all the tools to wage a war against poverty. Whether it is one in five or two in five, that lives below the poverty line, it is a shame that it exists. [*Interruption*] Eventually, I have no doubt that my political leader will consider it in the course of time. First, one must learn.

And because my Government is cognizant of what poverty actually means and our budget is people-centred, it is geared to the individual’s development. It emphasizes education, training, skills development, since these are the very first steps that we must take in the actual eradication of poverty—enough words, time to get down to action. We are committed to advancing the human dignity of every

individual, and the ability of each person to promote his own development. Our budget evidences that commitment, and that we plan as we implement, holistically. In fact, this Government, our government, is one team in which each arm of the Government, every Ministry is committed to involvement in a team effort to realize national self-reliance in our people, leagued in support to develop a climate of entrepreneurship in its fullest sense. Each arm of Government, every Ministry is involved, whether it is agriculture or local government, trade or labour or public utilities, or education or science and technology. Whatever the Ministry we are all holistically joined in the implementation of policies that would eradicate poverty by the creation of a true entrepreneurial climate in this country.

Trinidad and Tobago has a number of budding entrepreneurs with economically viable ideas that have the potential to benefit our society, and we on this side do not pour scorn on the small man. We want to help transform his business ideas into a reality that can and will benefit this country; we want more people and all the people if possible, to be independent; we want them to explore and to benefit from any talent they may have, whether it is in sports, whether it is agriculture, in manufacturing, in services. Whatever the talent that a man has, let him explore it and let us on the Government side facilitate his development. That is what a Government should be doing.

The medium-term strategy as expressed by our Prime Minister in his budget presentation reiterates my Government's commitment to the creation of an economy that is internationally competitive and knowledge-based. We reiterate a commitment [*Interruption*] we have stopped using words, we are actually doing. There has been nine months of an implementation that has been going on, which is why there is no dengue. We are using, where you had no money allocated to local government, other agencies to cut land—all that tall grass in San Fernando—and cleared it. Yes, that is what we are about, delivering services to people. I have no hesitation in saying it, whereas the Member for Arouca North and the hon. Minister of Local Government, pointed out that San Fernando West was given no money, our Government has found ways and means to come around that to deliver service to eliminate dengue. That is what we were doing.

Our Government places emphasis on small business development and the expansion of the non-energy sector. We do not only say words, we are actually doing it. Much has been done and continues to be done for our existing private sector. But we believe that we must widen that band by nurturing growth in the small business sector as it can help diversify the country's economic base and

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. D. SEUKARAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

enhance competitiveness even while it creates employment. You will note, Sir, that some of the measures contained in the social and economic policy framework of Trinidad and Tobago are the development and monitoring of the implementation of an entrepreneurial business incubator and mentorship programme; the design and implementation of entrepreneurial programmes within the school curriculum and adult education programmes. The development of programmes geared towards increasing the level of awareness of opportunities for producers inclusive of youth, and small and medium manufacturers capable and wanting to export, and the development and implementation of a comprehensive internship programme for technical, vocational and tertiary education.

Our objective on this side is to reach out and to include the population as a whole from childhood upwards. We want to create a true climate for investment in this country. As one arm of the Government, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is assiduously working towards helping Trinidad and Tobago survive in the “New World.” And that is how and why the Ministry is preparing our private sector for life without trade barriers. In so doing, it is building the platform to eliminate poverty and achieve developed-nation status by the year 2020. It all comes down to planning.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind this honourable House and all of us, sometimes when we sit in august chambers such as these, when we get too busy with our own small interests, we forget what we are actually facing out there. So let us remind ourselves that this year—we are in October, 2002, in just two years, in the year 2004, we will sign the agreement that signals the Free Trade Area of the Americas. We have already begun negotiations on our European Union and African Caribbean and Pacific commitments with a view to the establishment of economic partnership agreements by the year 2008. Sir, that is six years from now. In 2008, we would have also completed negotiations with the World Trade Organization. That is just six years from now. So time is of essence. Yet, we have lost six years during the last regime as they focused on narrow self-interest. We have no time to waste in preparing our people because here we are in the year 2002. We must prepare our people for reciprocal free trade and the onslaught from competition that comes from it. It is now or never—which is why the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this Government of Trinidad and Tobago is absolutely sure that it will deliver everything that it promises. We recognize that time is of essence.

Our private sector base must be widened and be prepared for life in a fully liberalized and globalized world. A world that has no protection—not even the paucity of that which exists today! Trinidad and Tobago is part of the world. We do not and cannot survive outside of it. And, if it has always been true to say no



man is an island unto himself, then now more than ever, it is true to say that no country is an island unto itself. That is why my Government, through the Ministry of Trade and Industry, is aggressively promoting domestic and inward investment. It is implementing a trade assistance programme, promoting information and communication technology as business enablers, ensuring that there is a macro-economic framework which encourages competitiveness, productivity and sustainability of enterprises. That is also why another central theme of the Ministry is the creation of a facilitatory and supportive environment for local businesses and the creation of an outward looking, resilient business class. [*Desk thumping*]

Our manufacturers do very well in Caricom, but they must develop market share in non-traditional markets by exploiting access to North America, to Europe and to our neighbours in Latin America and South America. This has to be done expeditiously in the looming face of total liberalization.

Mr. Speaker, it is that looming face of total liberalization that is the real enemy. We should be united in the face of it, but it is sad to say that so many on the other side continue to do everything to divide this nation. Unfortunately, they succeed so often and in the course of it, dissipate the energies that we need to fight the common enemy, which is liberalization in its total sense.

The truth is that, however painful it is, Trinidad and Tobago's domestic trade policy must be, and is determined by the ongoing processes and time frames for globalization and liberalization in the world economy. Those processes and time frames are determined by more powerful and larger international entities, much like in the oil price. But our Government is sensitive to the effect that some of these measures and their time frames have upon our local producers.

We recognize the critical importance of the manufacturing sector in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly the role it plays in job creation, in foreign currency earnings and the nation's economic and social development. My Government is committed to the development of a competitive private sector and the many jobs they can assure as well as the revenues that they earn. The Government recognizes the potential impact of the elimination of the export allowance on the manufacturing sector. However, and unfortunately, Trinidad and Tobago is subject to World Trade Organization Rules. The Members opposite understand, particularly the Member for St. Augustine. Trinidad and Tobago is subject to countervailing duties by any country which deems the export allowance to be an export subsidy, and that is something that is no longer allowed.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. D. SEUKARAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

The export allowance was established in 1976 to help producers to grow and to develop market-share so as to encourage long-term economic development with the spin-off benefits of reduced unemployment and the eradication of poverty. It allowed a tax credit to manufactured products exported outside of the Caricom region. But very unfortunately, we in Trinidad and Tobago must comply with the WTO agreement on subsidies and countervailing measures that compels all countries to phase out export subsidies. All of us have to phase them out, whether we are big or small, whether we have energy or whether we are banana producers, or whether we are the mighty United States of America, eventually all of us will have to phase them out. And the time is now for Trinidad and Tobago, since I am told, it was the Members on the other side, the UNC government of yesterday that agreed to a time frame for Trinidad and Tobago of the year 2002. [*Desk thumping*] If it is that our Prime Minister was forced in his budget presentation to comply with WTO rules, it was because the UNC government of yesterday, which fortunately is no more, agreed that the manufactures of Trinidad and Tobago be forced to comply with the cutting off and elimination of that export subsidy. We did not do it. They did it. We simply obey the law as we always do.

But let me assure you that although we have done what we have had to do, we will continue to lobby the relevant WTO committee for any favourable consideration for extension of time frames for export subsidies allowed by the Doha Ministerial Declaration to developing countries such as ourselves.

Additionally, in the Ministry of Trade and Industry we continue to develop new policy prescriptions within the context of global limitations. We continue to promote and to develop new initiatives that support our industries. Indeed, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is conducting a comprehensive review of the incentives available to industry in order to continue to nurture, but not subsidize industry.

It must be noted that the previous government had promised to deliver on the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act which gives certain allowances to industries. They had promised to amend this legislation, but as usual, they never delivered. Sir, Members opposite know, and I know, and the nation knows, this Government not just and only promises, when it promises, it delivers. [*Desk thumping*]

I assure the national business community outside there that we will—as the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry has indicated—deliver on that particular piece of legislation and we would do it in the year 2003.

As the Member for St. Joseph said, the export allowance only applies to those producers exporting to extra Caricom markets. We will deliver on the Income Tax (In Aid Of Industry) Act, because it will extend to a much larger number of investors including small enterprises. Since what he says is true, it is the greater pity that given his understanding of the issues, he did not do what he was supposed to do, at the time when he was in the position to do it—for the last “X” number of years. That was the Minister of Finance. He was not just the Minister of Trade, he was the Minister of Finance, and as one could say, his background lends to business, not as a chopper, but as a developer. So it is an amazing fact that he brings it to this honourable House to haunt us, to accuse us—when he had the power yesterday to do exactly what he says we are not doing today. Let me assure him that this Government will do what it must do to help and to nurture business.

My Government places true importance on harnessing the entrepreneurial spirit in Trinidad and Tobago, since it would undoubtedly foster self-help and self-reliance which are the driving forces behind poverty eradication. The fact is that Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the WTO and the coming into force of multilateral trade agreements such as the FTAA, does mean that the protection that the Government could once have given its producers is no longer available, particularly when you are a small country. So our Government is forced to act in accordance with international regulations, and, our private sector must be prepared for participation in the global economy. We must accept changes, as difficult as they are, if our country is to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We have to recognize that far from being insensitive to business needs, my Government acknowledges and applauds all the producers of wealth in our country. In fact, it seeks to create an environment in which such production—indeed, the producers themselves, and their contributions to national development, are welcomed and emulated by all sectors of our people. This budget document evidences my Government’s clear intention of the promotion of a wider, new entrepreneurial citizen-base even as it continues to foster growth in all sectors of existing business and in all our people.

If the Member for St. Joseph questions Government’s ability in the budgetary allocations to do this or to do that, let me assure him that it is because our Government, my Government, recognizes that its role is not running business. It is in facilitating and nurturing others to operate business. It is not the business of Government to operate businesses. It is for other people in the private sector to do so and for Government to facilitate that ability.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[HON. D. SEUKARAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Mr. Speaker, as I end, may I say that the difference between this side and that side grows every minute of this late hour—indeed Sir, notwithstanding the fact of my newness to this honourable House and my undoubted ignorance of recent parliamentary procedural norms, I find it more than somewhat disconcerting that, even inclusive the Member for Naparima, so many of the seasoned Members on the other side have wasted so much time knit-picking a very forward-thinking budget as presented by my distinguished leader and Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is even more disconcerting to me that the Members opposite, despite having just so recently lost an election, continue to prove once again to be hard headed, obtuse and willful in their disregard of the nation's well-being, that they continue to waste time when they have already cost this country one year with their own infighting, and one year of contempt of the very people who elected them when they refused to sit in this Parliament and do the people's business.

Mr. Speaker, it is extraordinary that they are complaining that we are not doing things that they ought to have done in the last six years. What were they doing for the last six years? Were they ever doing the people's business? Not from what the hon. Member for Arouca North has been saying; and not from the records he has been reading. Evidently, it was not the business of the people, it was the finances of the people they were interested in.

Mr. Speaker, given your background, you understand what the phrase "time is of essence" means, and given the looming nearness of global competition, of total competition that lies in the FTAA, that lies in the European Union ACP countries Agreement—given all these things, you understand that time is of essence. Given the fact that I am a novice, you will forgive me if I wonder if perhaps you might have some influence on the other side, that you might express some thought that might reach into that obscure and obtuse quality that we find so evident on the other side, so that you could impress upon my colleagues that the nation's business is their business, and that the nation's business must take precedence over hurt feelings, over lost elections and over "ramajaying" that keeps us here so long. That expresses what we have heard! Wasting hours and time that takes us into long hours! All that is found is a lot of sound and fury that signifies nothing and wastes the people's and our valuable time.

I thank you, Sir.

**Dr. Adesh Nanan** (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, I join the debate on a Bill to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. Member for San Fernando West on her maiden contribution in this honourable House. But, in another breath, I am saying at the outset that this is a “mamaguy” budget giving crumbs to the poor. The heading for this budget statement “Vision 2020: People...Our Priority” is a misnomer. It is really a myopic view of progress for the alleviation of poverty. The Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister, in his budget statement spoke about the Green Fund on page 37—and I know he would go to that particular section.

“The purpose of the Green Fund is to enable grants to be made to community groups and organisations primarily engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment.

However, disbursements from the Fund have been delayed due to the decisions made by the UNC administration regarding the composition of the Board.”

Mr. Speaker, I will now put on record the truth, the sequence of events leading up to the revocation of appointment of the chairman of the Green Fund.

A total of 10 calls were made to the Permanent Secretary, Anthony Bartholomew, by the chairman of the Green Fund. Eventually, a meeting was scheduled between the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment, the Permanent Secretary and the Chairman.

A meeting of previous board members was requested by the Minister. The meeting took place on January 7, 2002. The board meeting was held on January 8, 2002. Subsequently, there was a meeting with the Permanent Secretary on January 11, 2002—do not look so surprised Member for Diego Martin Central. There was a presentation made on the operationalization of the Green Fund. On January 18, 2002, at 1.00 p.m., there was a one-hour presentation by the Chairman of the Green Fund to the Minister.

The discussions involved the selection of a legal officer, the formulation of eligibility criteria for the Green Fund, and also to revisit the action plan. There was also discussion for location and space requirements. It was agreed that World Environment Day would be the launch of the Green Fund, that is, in April.

Mr. Speaker, the EMA’s representatives discussed the 20 per cent contribution in the budget speech of the then Minister of Finance. There was also discussion on

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

the opening of a bank account. The last board meeting was held on February 26, 2002. The letter was written by the chairman on February 28, indicating failure of the Permanent Secretary—I put this on record—to treat with the board with respect to opening a bank account. The hon. Member needs to know that. They had already indicated the preference for First Citizens Bank, and there was no other communication. In March the chairman was informed of a package dealing with restructuring of the organization. No such package was received. Subsequently, on October 10, 2002 a letter was hand-delivered and signed by the Permanent Secretary revoking the appointment of the chairman. The letter was dated October 02, 2002 and it was dispatched on October 03, 2002. His Excellency, the President, Arthur N. R. Robinson, signed the revocation of the appointment on September 26, 2002. That is why I put it on the record. The kind of vindictiveness and spite of the PNM Government.

Mr. Speaker, on page 38 of the *Budget Statement, 2003* the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister, read and I quote:

“One proposal we are reviewing is the harmonization of the Green Fund and the Environmental Trust Fund by changing the governance structure of the Green Fund so that they are both managed by the Trustees of the Environmental Trust Fund appointed by His Excellency, the President.”

It was said earlier this morning by the Member for Couva North, that the hon. Member for San Fernando East did not read his Budget Speech before he came in. I inform the hon. Member for San Fernando East that the Trustees of the Environmental Trust Fund are part of the EMA board, and appointed by His Excellency, the President. How we operate is that the board would be appointed by the Minister, the Minister would bring it for Cabinet’s approval and then it would be sent to the President for rubber stamping. The President makes the appointment based on Cabinet’s decision, so it is a political appointee. [Interruption] So that does not dispute the fact the trustees are part of the EMA board. I just wanted to clear that up. [Interruption] I have my thought patterns, and I am not giving way. You could say what you want Member for Diego Martin East.

The Member for Diego Martin East chanted in this honourable House about caring and delivery. I will now turn to the Draft Estimates of the Development Programme for the financial year 2002.

The Ministry of the Environment: Mr. Speaker, I want them to listen because they must understand. He spoke about delivery. The budget allocation was

\$500,000. In the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme for 2003*, let us see how much money was spent.

Forestry Access Roads: \$500,000, 2002 estimates. How much did they spend? Revised estimates—\$259,471. How much did they budget in 2003?—\$500,000.

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing, and I will go on to show in terms of the Public Sector Investment Programme of 2002 and the performance of the PNM Government, the money that was spent in 2002.

Mr. Speaker, forestry access roads are very important especially when there is clear felling of teak and pine. They gave out contracts for the clear felling of teak and pine but the people who were to access these plantations had extreme difficulty, because the forestry access roads were not upgraded. That is why the \$500,000 was budgeted for in terms of the upgrade of the forestry access roads, so those persons who would be doing the clear felling of the teak and pine plantations would have easy access.

I will also go on to show in the development estimates—there is a programme on National Parks and Watershed Management Project—\$500,000 was the estimate in 2002. How much money was spent? The sum of \$99,589.00. And that particular programme was for the development of recreational parks in Trinidad and Tobago. Nothing was done.

I do not know if your Members recall this document. *Public Sector Investment Programme, 2002*. I do not know how many of your Members read it but, I will show exactly what was supposed to be done and what was not done.

National Parks and Watershed Management Project—\$500,000 voted—Establishment of Protected Areas and Wildlife Unit in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Food Production, and establishment of three national parks and two protected coastal marine areas.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for San Fernando East in his budget presentation on page 37—I know he did not know but they should have informed him—said:

“We have therefore held discussions with the World Bank with a view to accessing Grant Funding in the amount of US \$4.2 million under the Global Environment Facility (GEF). These funds will be used in conjunction with counterpart financing from the Green Fund to finance a National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Project. Legislation will soon be brought before Parliament to enable the creation of a National Parks and Wildlife

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Conservation Authority, and the creation of national parks at Matura, Maracas and Main Ridge, and other protected areas.”

Mr. Speaker, this was a programme in the *Public Sector Investment Programme 2002*, when I was the former Minister of the Environment, that we put in place. We were going to get US \$5 million from the global environment facility. In the budget statement it is quoted as US \$4.2 million. Probably, it was just changed so that one would not say it was copied wholesale from the *Public Sector Investment Programme 2002*. I will show that not a single full stop, comma or semi-colon was changed from the UNC document to their social and economic policy framework later on.

“An additional sum of \$2.0 million has been provided for institutionalization of the National Parks and Wildlife Authority.”

The sum of \$2 million was already allocated in the 2002 PSIP, and it came back in the 2003 PSIP because they said that the legislation was not in place. While the legislation was not in place, there was a \$500,000 allocation that I spoke about for the National Parks and Watershed Management Project and part of it, your constituency in Matura—do you remember Matura, Maracas, and Main Ridge in Tobago? It was supposed to be during that period that the boundaries of those particular areas would have been designated so that the work could have been done but nothing took place. [Interruption] That had nothing to do with the hon. Member. The legislation is a separate aspect from boundaries determination. That is the kind of performance, PNM style that we saw over the last nine months in that particular area.

Another burning issue is the allocation of \$4 million. [Interruption] You could joke as much as you want but it is an important issue. We allocated a certain amount of money to the EMA for certain works to be done over the last year, but nothing was done, and that is why there is a backlog at the EMA in terms of the environmental impact assessment for the drilling of oil wells. Environmental impact assessment is required for those wells.

I turn to page 31 of the PSIP dealing with the environment:

“Greater emphasis will be placed on environmental issues including enforcement and compliance in the 2002 work programme of the EMA. The sum of \$4.0 million has been allocated to the EMA to undertake the following:

to process approximately one hundred (100) applications for Certificates of Environmental Clearance (CEC) to new development projects;



to process 2000 applications and 100 permits for regulatory compliance to Air, Water and Noise pollution;

to provide for the designation and protection of environmentally sensitive areas and species;

to educate the public on environmental issues through awareness programmes; and

to ensure the effective enforcement of environmental laws.”

When we looked at the PSIP 2003, the Draft Estimates of the Development Programme, the expenses of the Environmental Management Authority—\$4 million budgeted for 2002; 2002 Revised Estimates, \$281,373 spent. No wonder they cannot process the environmental impact assessment for the drilling of the oil wells, but that is the performance PNM style, that we have witnessed over the last nine months. A waste of taxpayers’ money.

The Social and Economic Policy Framework 2003.

“ With respect to National Parks and other similar protected areas for existing wildlife management, the Government will negotiate with the World Bank with a view to securing grant funding of US \$4.2 million under the Global Environment Facility (GEF). These funds will be used to finance the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Project. Legislation will also be drafted to enable the creation of a National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Authority.

For your information the legislation is already drafted and is waiting to be brought to the Parliament—

“...and the creation and maintenance of National Parks at Matura, Maracas and the Main Ridge in Tobago, and other protected areas.”

We have no problem when you use a UNC policy or UNC programme, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Will you raise your voice please?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** I will repeat:

“With respect to National Parks and other similar protected areas for existing wildlife management, the Government will negotiate with the World Bank with a view to securing grant funding of US \$4.2 million under the Global Environment Facility (GEF). These funds will be used to finance a National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Project. Legislation will also be drafted to

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

enable the creation of a National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Authority, and the creation and maintenance of National Parks at Matura, Maracas, and the Main Ridge in Tobago, and other protected areas.”

As I said before, this is a plan, a programme of the United National Congress. We have no problem with you using our plan because we are a party of true national unity, and recognize that it would benefit all of Trinidad and Tobago once these parks are established for recreational purposes.

As I said before, in the PSIP document of 2003, while there is mention of US \$4.2 million, in both documents, the Budget Statement 2003 and the Social and Economic Policy Framework, apparently the correct figure is US \$5 million and that is in the PSIP document of 2003. Although they tried to mask it in the Budget Statement 2003 and in the Social and Economic Policy Framework, it showed up in the PSIP document of 2003. As I said before, we have no problem with them bringing forward our programme because it would benefit the whole of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for San Fernando East, stumbled and bungled his way, when he read about the beverage container deposits and the pollution situation. I want to remind the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, what is really taking place here with respect to deposits. In addition to reintroducing lapsed pieces of environmental legislation such as those covering water pollution and beverage container deposits, we also brought before Parliament other pieces of legislation concerned with industrial pollution and the recycling of wastes.

Mr. Speaker, may I read this part of the *Social and Economic Policy Framework* on page 111:

“Through the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, a National Solid Waste Management System will be established with the following objectives:

- conservation of energy and natural resources;
- reduction in waste generated;
- environmentally sound treatment of municipal, commercial, industrial, agricultural and medical wastes, using the best available technology;
- development of the most cost effective systems for disposal of solid wastes; and
- protection of human health and the environment from the potential hazards of waste disposal.

Steps will also be taken to strengthen the database for environmental decision-making by introducing the use of sustainable development indicators. This will enable the Government to better ascertain impacts, plan remedial action and benchmark performance against other countries.”

Mr. Speaker, this programme was in the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment in 2002. We did everything for this particular programme. All they had to do was to go out for tender. That is all that Minister had to do. Everything is there. We did all the work. But he was too busy with other things, collecting money and not performing in the Ministry. Everything was in place.

As I speak about that, it was really a burning issue in my constituency because the Forres Park Landfill, part of it is in the constituency of Tabaquite, and affects thousand of people in my constituency and other parts of Couva South. This particular programme is engineered to remove these open dumps like the Forres Park Landfill to provide assistance to a new National Solid Waste Management System that would remove the harmful effects that are taking place presently in that particular landfill.

Mr. Speaker, the Solid Waste Management Company Limited, that particular agency, was used questionably in the last general election. While the Solid Waste Management Company was responsible for the Forres Park Landfill and other landfills, the road to the Forres Park Landfill is strewn with garbage. The road leading to the landfill is impassable and the people who transport the garbage drop it along the roadside before they reach the actual dump. I want to put this on the record. They are using the Cedar Hill Road leading to the picturesque village of Tortuga. I know that some Members know the village of Tortuga because they would have PNM contacts in that village, where there has been the recent refurbishment of the Tortuga Roman Catholic Church. That particular road—another entrance is being used to access the Forres Park Landfill and they are dropping garbage along that particular area and blocking off the road. That particular area where they are dropping the garbage is becoming a new dumpsite, the road is being blocked off. There are a lot of vultures in the area, along the Cedar Hill Road leading up to this picturesque village.

I call upon the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment to deal with that matter, as it is a health hazard in that particular area. It is a village which thousands of people inhabit. In fact, as I speak about that particular community, I will mention that there is a water project that was completed early in 2002. The road was supposed to be resurfaced. That road was programmed under the

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

National Road Enhancement Programme for upgrade and is now in a totally deplorable condition.

**11.15 p.m.**

I am appealing to the Minister of Works and Transport because that particular village has so much history in terms of the Tortuga area. In fact, at some time, a movie was shot in that particular village.

I also want to speak about another part of my constituency which is the Tortuga/Mayo Road link up. As you know, in the constituency of Tabaguite, there is a lot of state land and my friend the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, will be visiting me shortly on the upgrade of cocoa estates. On the link between the villages of Tortuga and Mayo there is a serious landslide that is cutting off the villages of Tortuga and Mayo.

There was a water project in the Tortuga area and the road was programmed under the National Road Enhancement Programme but nothing happened in terms of road upgrade. I am appealing to the Minister of Works and Transport because a number of farmers utilize that road. There are a lot of farmers and there are serious landslips. I am sure the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources will understand the plight of the farmers in that particular part of the constituency, which is the Mayo area.

In the *Public Sector Investment Programme* of the budget of 2003, there is certain allocation for upgrade of roads, so I hope that, in terms of equality, the Tabaguite constituency will see some kind of work taking place in terms of road upgrade. We saw nothing taking place over the last year. I do not know if we have been marginalized because we have over 12,500 persons voting for the United National Congress. I do not know; I am just speculating.

I move to another area, which is page 32 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme, 2002*.

“The sum of \$21.3 million will be invested to continue the diversification of the economy in which tourism will play a major role.”

This is the Public Sector Investment Programme of the United National Congress, Mr. Speaker. I just want to remind you of the situation with tourism. No other Caribbean island is blessed with anywhere near the incomparable natural attributes of Trinidad and Tobago. Long ago, the PNM haughtily intoned that Trinidad and Tobago was not to become a nation of bus boys and waiters by embracing tourism.

From that moment, we have been missing the proverbial boat and for that matter, the tourism plane as well; not for us the inflow of foreign cash, the fillip to agriculture, craft and culture that tourism delivers. So, Mr. Speaker, a generation not yet born when that utterance was made, has been robbed of untold benefits because of the PNM's rejection of tourism as a generator of jobs and fuel for the economy.

Other regional governments were less shortsighted. With a lot less than we have going for us, their citizens have benefited handsomely from tourism. Barbados, the Bahamas and Bermuda, are prime examples of how natural assets can be converted to economic assets to the enduring benefit of all. Tragically, the PNM, in four decades of government, never had a viable tourism policy. The Member for Diego Martin Central knows that. When I held up the Tourism Master Plan, he was not even aware of it and they commissioned the Tourism Master Policy. This has denied Tobago and Tobagonians the economic opportunities the citizens of smaller, less appealing destinations now enjoy.

One of the major anomalies in global destination management is that tourism development for our two islands was never a concern of the owners of BWIA. The unique and invaluable benefit of ownership and control of an international air carrier yielded no particular benefits to Tobago's tourism over the years.

I turn to the Budget Statement 2003, on page 13. This is a shocking statement.

“The tourism sector has floundered and declined as a result of a lack of strategic vision on the part of the former administration, which was manifested in its poor financial support for the tourism industry.”

This is a cover-up for a non-performing Minister of Tourism. Who was the Minister of Tourism at that time?

In the 2002 PSIP, page 32:

“The sum of \$21.3 million will be invested to continue the diversification of the economy in which tourism will play a major role. After a hiatus in the year 2001, the IDB assisted Tourism Action Programme will re-commence with an allocation of \$5.0 million to undertake the following studies and infrastructural works:

Studies:

Ocean Outfall Study (North Coast)

Recreational Preference Survey and Policy

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

Shoreline Plan for the North Coast

Infrastructural Projects:

Sand Barrier (Maracas Beach)

Camp Site at Maracas Bay...

Camp Site at Manzanilla

Scarborough Waterfront Beautification”

It also includes—and this is the part I want to listen to—a campsite at Tabaquite.

I ask the question here tonight. Was it because there was a campsite at Tabaquite that this entire programme was shelved? Not one single cent of this \$5 million allocation was spent. I do not know if the former Minister of Tourism is aware of this particular \$5 million and not a cent spent. They spoke about equality and that is why I am talking about equality and this particular campsite.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando West, in her contribution, mentioned the word “entrepreneurial” several times. We recognize the importance of an entrepreneurial spirit, but I want you to recognize that the thread that was going through the debate on this side was “meaningful employment”, not a dependency syndrome. As I speak about dependency syndrome, I go back to this particular social and economic policy framework. I did my work in this debate. I researched all the documents that were before me because I recognize the importance of a debate.

I also brought with me Budget Statement 2002, *One People, One Nation: Leaving No One Behind*. What you are saying in your Vision 2020 is work in progress.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, the *Hansard* reporter is having great difficulty in hearing the hon. Member for Tabaquite. I would ask the hon. Member to raise his voice and Members to allow him to make his contribution.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Probably I am too tall, Mr. Speaker.

In the 1998/1999 Budget Statement, *A Platform For Progress—Security For All*, you see that thread running through our budget statements. It is not like *Vision 2020*, something you just pull out of the sky. What you have seen from 1996 onwards is a platform for progress—security for all; one people, one nation, leaving no one behind.

On page 15 of 1998/1999 Budget Statement, *A Platform For Progress—Security For All*:

“...another major area of focus for this Administration is the Tourism Sector.

This sector...continues to increase its contribution to the domestic economy and reflects our successful strategy to develop niche markets in preference to targeting mass tourism.

Positioning Trinidad and Tobago as a destination for leisure, nature adventure, sports and cultural diversity, has generated a 7 per cent increase in arrivals in 1998.”

We heard from the Member for San Fernando East in terms of decrease in arrivals in the year 2002. In 1998, there was a 7 per cent increase in arrivals in 1998.

“Government is intent on generating even further growth in the Tourism Sector. The first draft of the new Tourism Development Bill has been completed.”

Of course, you know that bill was debated in this House and passed.

“The issues that have been addressed include:

- treatment of the cost of bridging finance for tax purposes;
- fiscal incentives for the refurbishment and expansion of hotel projects;”

So what I am seeing in this *Vision 2020* is nothing new in terms of the capital investment.

- “development of incentives for integrated resort project; and
- vehicles for the tourist trade.”

[*Interruption*] We need to inform you and the national community because somebody said that we did nothing for five years. We were doing the people’s business.

“Additionally...prospects are good for continued growth in tourism and we expect increased interest from the trade following a number of welcome developments.

Some of these developments include:

- The resumption of British Airways service into Tobago;

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

- The commencement of Canada 3000 service to Tobago;
- The introduction of additional flight by Condor Airways of the United Kingdom to Tobago;
- The completion of the first phase of the Tobago Hilton project which is scheduled to open on October 1, 1999;
- The continued development of local sites and attractions and a vibrant base for domestic tourism; and
- Increased marketing of the destination, which is already bearing fruit with increased arrivals from the South American Market.”

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member’s speaking time has expired.

*Motion made,* That the speaking time of the hon. Member be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. G. Singh*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. A. Nanan:** I thank you, my colleagues for extending my time.

Mr. Speaker, increased marketing of a destination which is already bearing fruit will increase arrivals from the South American market. We are not against increased funding for tourism, but we are saying that it is work in progress.

I also want to put on record that Trinidad and Tobago is carving out its own niche in the Caribbean tourism industry. You will recall that at that time we had been shortlisting for the Caribbean Hotel Association prestigious Crystal Palm Award, the winner of which would have been announced in London in November and we won that Crystal Palm Award.

When one discusses tourism, one must refer to Tobago. I will discuss Tobago in the 2003 PSIP. In the Budget Statement of the Minister of Finance, the Hon. Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East made reference to, on page 4, debts backed by letters of comfort of \$104 million at end of 1995, when he demitted office. At the end of fiscal 2000, this debt stood at \$373 million and jumped to \$770 at the end of fiscal 2001. I do not know if he read the *Review of the Economy 2002*, but let me refresh his memory. These are your documents on page 66.

“The debt service obligations of the Central Government decreased by 36 percent from \$4.7 billion to \$3.0 billion during fiscal 2001/2002. This decline has been attributed to a 33 per cent reduction in the internal debt service,



largely on account of the Government's 2001 restructuring exercise, which involved the refinancing of loans totaling \$701 million, plus repayments of \$498 million on the final tranche of the two-year emolument bonds for public servants, which matured on January 31, 2001

The Government's external debt service obligations also decreased by 41 per cent to \$1.2 billion. This decrease is primarily due to the repayment of a US \$125 million Eurobond issue during fiscal 2001 and the fact that there was no repayment of similar magnitude during fiscal 2002."

I want to put that on record in terms of the debt servicing and the prudence of our then Minister of Finance so that you will know what we did.

I turn to the Member for San Fernando West because in her contribution she talked about entrepreneurial spirit. She talked about taking us to a developed national status. I want to let her know, in terms of the contribution from the Member for Naparima and what he did in the social sector, he did a clinical dissection. He showed the hollowness of what you put forward in your budget statement. It is very hollow and empty vessels that make the most noise. I do not have to remind you of that.

I prepared myself to deal with the environment and tourism but I also brought in certain aspects in terms of financial prudence by our Minister of Finance and in terms of what we have seen over the last few years in infrastructural upliftment. You cannot go to a developed nation status if you do not have the kind of infrastructure required. That is why, when we put forward a plan for a new airport, it was part of the tourism thrust in terms of having an international style airport.

The Member for St. Augustine spoke about the conference centre project that was shelved. I know they will reconsider because they recognize the importance of the conference centre to tourism. That is a kind of driver for tourism. When I spoke about the UNC's plans to strengthen the tourism sector, no amount of injection of capital—you must have the human resource base in the tourism sector and a training component, that is why we trained so many people in terms of the hospitality sector when we were in government so that we could have the human resource capital and the kind of people trained in delivering services.

We recognize, in terms of marketing of Trinidad and Tobago, that it is very difficult to compete with countries like Jamaica where a large percentage of their budget goes into the marketing of their destination. We have been able to utilize the resources available to us to market the destination. We are an upscale market

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

in terms of niche marketing. We are not going for mass tourism. It is an area that can contribute a significant portion to the GDP. That is why an airport was a necessity in terms of bringing people to the country. When people are coming into the country, we must have an airport of international standard.

We also had an airlift in the 1998/1999 budget coming into the country, so we recognized that we must have the airlift, the airport and the trained people. In the Budget Statement 2003, reference was made to guesthouses and a capital investment. I want to caution the Government in terms of guesthouses. I am sure the Member for Toco/Manzanilla recognizes when he had made his request for eco-lodges that the figure he had asked for—and we said we did not want to go below a threshold figure before we have brothels and not guest houses. We did not want to drop the standard and that is why I caution the Government, as they approach guesthouses, to facilitate more accommodation for tourists.

I want to deal with a certain section of the Public Sector Investment Programme because I saw in the 2002 PSIP of the Government that they are going to spend money to deal with the Guaracara/Tabaquite Road. I remind the Minister of Works and Transport that that particular road was in a dilapidated state and it was upgraded under the United National Congress. That road has a kind of panoramic view. The Minister of Culture and Tourism is not here but I appeal to him. It is one of the best roads in the country and the scenery can be used for drive tourism. You can start at one point with a bus and just drive through the area. It is about eight kilometres of road that traverses a very picturesque area. It leads from the Williamsville area up through Tabaquite.

I get back to the Minister of Works and Transport because the road has a very severe landslip about six kilometres before Tabaquite. The Member for Diego Martin East is very talkative this evening. I do not know why he did not speak as much when they were debating health. It is a good thing he did not put up that particular roadway because the whole road might have collapsed by now.

I remind the honourable House that the design consultants for that Guaracara/Tabaquite Road was Trintoplan and we are seeing a certain kind of erosion taking place. I do not know if it is because of poor design. Like My Friend there, I am not an engineer who builds walls and they fall down. I am a dentist by profession. There is urgent need for that particular landslip to be repaired. That particular road—nine kilometres—can be used for drive tourism, but we need the landslip to be repaired. There are two bridges that need to be widened. We are talking about equality. We are talking about taking Trinidad and Tobago to developed nation status and I am sure in my contribution you would have seen the

performance of the PNM over the last nine months. I showed you in the Public Sector Investment Programme that the allocation of \$500,000 for forestry access roads was not used. A small portion was used and because of that the roads were not upgraded and people had extreme difficulty in getting the teak and pine [*Inaudible*] out from the forest.

I also spoke about the EMA. They gave them \$4 million to be spent and they did not spend it and that is why they are having tremendous problems in terms of getting the environmental and [*Inaudible*] assessments done. It is affecting the revenue base of the country because it is part of the 40 oil wells to be drilled.

Mr. Speaker, the EMA did not use the \$4 million, that is why they are plodding along. I am sure if we were in government we would have speeded up the process and they would not have had that problem.

We looked at the tourism sector and we saw, in terms of the allocation, that an allocation of \$5 million was made in the PSIP as part of the IDB loan and nothing was done. I said before that probably because Tabaquite was mentioned, it was just cut from the programme. I remind this honourable House of the importance of tourism, notwithstanding the PNM's mantra of "no bus boys and waiters". We recognize the importance of tourism in this country and we want them to reconsider that waterfront project and conference centre because it was very important to the tourism thrust in this country.

I spoke about debt refinancing. I make a special appeal to the new Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment because I know the other one was not working. There are certain parts in my constituency where they did a feasibility study and they said it was not feasible for a water supply. I want them to reconsider. I will give you an ironic situation. There is a village in my constituency that is located in a certain mountainous area and the people can see the Navet Dam from where they are but they cannot get water.

The particular feasibility project was done and it was not feasible. I remind this honourable House: was it feasible to put water on the train line in Marabella without permission? Why can my constituents not get water in that part of my constituency? Why was it feasible to put it on the train line? I did not want to cause any commotion in the House, I just wanted to remind of the situation in my constituency with water.

There are other parts of the constituency where we do not have water. I saw in the PSIP a lot of money being put for street lighting. I appeal to the Minister of Local Government, the Member for Arouca North, for street lighting in certain

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

parts of my constituency. I will write him formally and I am sure he will reply to me.

He mentioned the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation [*Inaudible*] and said that the Environment Ministry had some dealings with the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Corporation. In your investigations you would have found out, Mr. Speaker, that the Ministry of the Environment carried out a programme for re-naturalization of rivers and we used that regional corporation because we had to spend over \$1 million on the Solid Waste Management Company Limited if we had used them. We used the regional corporation and he said there was duplication of effort.

Let me tell you what we did. In the re-naturalization of rivers, it was part of the E2K—a particular programme where they removed the old fridges and stoves from the rivers, we took the programme even further and we did the re-naturalization of rivers. That particular programme had tremendous impact. In fact, there was no flooding when there was rainfall that particular year. The re-naturalization of rivers was cleansing the river as well as planting trees along the river banks. We took the programme even further because we recognized if you are re-naturalizing a river and you have a wooden bridge—I am so glad you talked about wooden bridges there are so many still in my constituency. I am sure he will take special note because he said all should be concrete. I will be writing him shortly in terms of putting concrete bridges.

What we did as we were re-naturalizing the river, we actually rebuilt wooden bridges. We put new bridges on those rivers. We did not divert any river because that is not part of our jurisdiction as Ministry of Works and Transport. We cleaned the rivers and put the bridges and that particular programme was carried out by the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.

I just wanted to put that on record so that if there is any problem with the Member for Arouca North—[*Inaudible*] There is a programme as part of the Ministry of Environment's thrust for the environment and we have seen in the year 2002, that is why I took it upon myself to say I will do environment. We cannot have an unclean country and attract tourists here. Over the last year, we have seen a programme where people in my constituency come today and use the weedwackers and clean and tomorrow they clean the same area. That is what they are perpetrating on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I remind you, when you are revising that programme, the people who are cutting the grass on the verges with the weedwackers are causing soil erosion. You must be aware of that. When you are revising your programme, part of it

should be the planting of trees so that there would not be this massive soil erosion taking place in the area. You have spent \$75 million on that particular programme but you need to revisit it because it is not having the effect that you thought it would have had and you have to move away from the dependency syndrome.

As I look through the PSIP the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources speaks about the cocoa plantation. On page 28, you spoke about rehabilitation of cocoa estates:

“The rehabilitation of the cocoa industry will continue to be funded from grant resources in the sum of \$1.2 million for consultancy services in the establishment of a Cocoa Monitoring Unit and for training of farmers in improved methods of cocoa farming.”

Was that Cocoa Monitoring Unit put in place? He spoke about nothing being done in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, but let me tell you that it is here in the document on page 27.

“The major component of the investment programme of this Ministry is the IDB funded Agriculture Sector Reform Technical Assistance Programme (ASRP TAP). Funds totaling \$7.3 million are provided for:

technical assistance on the restructuring of the Ministry of Food Production and Marine Resources under the Agri-sector Policy and Public Administration Reform component; and

agri-business development by funding projects geared towards stimulating new investments in agri-business and in re-orientating existing products processes for markets both domestic and international.”

I also want to ask a question here. In terms of the Water Management Flood Control Programme in 2002, “the sum of \$10.0 million is provided to rehabilitate a forty-foot drainage trench, construct the sluice gates at Duck Pond Oropouche Basins plus the provision of water management infrastructure for the farmers of the Moruga Food Crop Project.”

Did you take a whole year to do that? And you are talking about delivery.

Mr. Speaker, it was a pleasure participating in this debate. I give you the assurance that we on this side are for the development of Trinidad and Tobago. As I have said before, this is a mamaguy budget with crumbs for the poor.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security and**

**Rehabilitation (Mr. Anthony Roberts):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a new Member of this honourable House, I am extremely grateful for exemplars like my colleague, the Member for San Fernando West. I must congratulate her on her maiden speech. I am also indeed grateful for the intermission between her contribution and mine.

Mr. Speaker, I extend congratulations to you on your ascension to the office of Speaker and I join with my colleagues on this side of the House to express our utmost confidence in your judgment and your ability to discharge your responsibility fearlessly and with dispatch.

I, as well, extend my sincere congratulations to the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago on his budget presentation for the fiscal year 2002—2003 in which he clearly demonstrated the PNM's intention to keep faith with the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I do not know if you had the opportunity, as I have had, to listen to the widespread acclaim to this year's budget which bears testimony to the acceptance of the measures put forward by this Government. However, I never thought that in my lifetime I would witness a national budget presentation with an opposition finding great difficulty to criticize. They seem not up to the task. The Leader of the Opposition was pathetic in his response, so that I can appreciate the kind of problems my friend from Barataria/San Juan had.

I sense that they are only hoping at this time for a vote to be taken to put an end to their agony, but, Mr. Speaker, this Government has demonstrated without a doubt that it has a social conscience. It has demonstrated that its primary concern is about the welfare of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This Government will demonstrate over the five years that Trinidad and Tobago has quite a lot of resources, more importantly, that the resources of our beautiful twin-island state must be utilized for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I emphasize "all the people".

That is why the measures brought by the honourable and distinguished Minister of Finance are able to touch the lives of every citizen of all walks of life in a positive way. After all, it is the PNM taking care of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

My colleague and Member for Arouca North dealt with the ridiculous and shameless claims by Members on the other side about inequity. I have had the opportunity before coming to this honourable House to be a member of a local government body—the Chairman of San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation. It

is unfortunate that we find here today that they are using themselves as a yardstick to measure other people.

Coming out of the local government system, I can attest to what the Minister of Local Government presented here today. The UNC government instituted, while I was at the regional corporation, a street lighting programme—I think it was under the Ministry of Public Utilities. At that time I think it was some \$5 million for street lighting. I want to indicate to this House that not one cent went to San Juan/Laventille. So, after tonight and the disclosures we have had here, I ask my friends on the other side to keep their mouths shut and witness good governance and try to learn something.

Our PNM Government, a responsible government, will adopt a responsible approach to dealing with crime in Trinidad and Tobago. We recognize that crime is not a partisan issue; it is a national issue and we are convinced no ad hoc approach will bring relief to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why the Ministry of National Security has taken on as one of its priorities the question of rehabilitation, carefully analyzing the criminal justice and recidivism and on reducing youth defiance in schools.

Our analysis has started in the ministry and it has shown that at present there are approximately 4,200 inmates incarcerated in the prisons of Trinidad and Tobago. It is estimated that at the end of this year, if the trend continues, we could cross some 5,000. An examination of incarceration rate reveals that the unconvicted inmates comprise 34 per cent of the prison population. What is painful about that is that included in that bit of statistics is a former government minister who found himself in bad company and the unfortunate thing is that he has now been abandoned by his friends.

That aside, the examination always revealed that the Tobago convict depot, furbished to accommodate a maximum of 20 inmates in its three cells, accommodated a total of 57. What is startling is that there is evidence that while first-time offenders are sentenced more severely than second and third-time offenders, yet 61 per cent of the first-time offenders go back to prison for a second and third time despite harsh sentences. It is clear that harshness does not work.

Research has shown that 65 per cent of persons incarcerated are for minor crimes while 35 per cent are for more serious crimes. That is why this government is committed to the criminal justice philosophy, which promotes a shift from retributive to restorative justice.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. ROBERTS]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

High rates of imprisonment are frequently an indicator of the breakdown of society's sense of community values. This is borne out by descriptions by the police and prison officers on the recent anaconda arrest. We find that the general profile seems to be young males, unemployed and economically deprived, especially having to endure the period under the UNC government.

These youths have rejected the normative behaviour of the community and have adopted a subculture of their own. They feel alienated and have little respect for society's laws and values and may be further excluded in the prison. I am saying to you tonight that this Government is deeply committed to rekindling the ideals of rehabilitation of offenders.

We are of the view that all citizens are equal, so offenders must be given an opportunity to be integrated into the society. Having paid their dues, they can then make a positive contribution to society and avoid the world of crime. That is not to say that persons who have been affected as a result of the misdeeds of these offenders will be forgotten. They, too, will be part of this Government's comprehensive programme.

The task force on prison reform and transformation is nearing completion of its work aimed at introducing a restorative justice system within the process of penal reform. Integral to this process will be the introduction of a parole system. I must tell you as well, Mr. Speaker, that the restorative justice system is based on a set of principles, which will shape our response to crime based on balancing the concerns of the victim, the offenders and community. So to support this rehabilitation programme, this PNM Government has made budgetary allocations not only to the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation, but also to the Ministries of Social Development, Sports and Youth Affairs. So the Government has made adequate provisions in the budget of 2003 to pursue its programme on crime.

With respect to the prison service, the sum of \$3.5 million has been allocated for its development programme and the sum of \$3.25 million has been allocated for projects under the rehabilitation programme. The following projects under the Public Sector Investment Programme for the prison service will commence during this fiscal year and they are:

- the construction of a remand centre for girls;
- the construction of the correctional facility in Tobago;

[*Interruption*] At least I can still read.



the construction of a workshop at Golden Grove Prison;

the construction of a training college at Golden Grove;

work at the Sewerage Treatment Plant at the Maximum Security Prison at Golden Grove will continue during this fiscal year.

So the process to transfer the inmates to this modern correctional facility is to be conducted on a phased basis until full occupancy.

This move will assist in alleviating the chaotic, overcrowding situation in the nation's prisons. The training of personnel to command this facility has started as well. As of yesterday, October 23, 375 officers have been trained as well. This will continue on a phased basis to manage the facility.

Mr. Speaker, training for officers will not only focus on security measures, but emphasize a rehabilitative approach to management of the prison. In so doing, a range of already established programmes at the prison would be augmented, programmes such as tailoring, barbering, electrical, art and craft, carpentry, plumbing, welding, upholstering, auto mechanic and food preparation. Inmates will be further exposed to the daily routine of managing laundry and food services under the direct supervision of trained personnel.

Mr. Speaker, in the field of academics, the inmates are tutored, not only to post primary level, but are also exposed to adult literacy and numeracy programmes. Where their capability is pronounced, they will be allowed to go on to secondary and even tertiary levels.

Assistance for these programmes has been sourced to supplement the above-mentioned skills and tutorials through organizations such as the non-governmental organizations, namely Rotary Club, YTEPP, Servol and the University of the West Indies. In the Ministry of National Security, our intention is to establish a prison industry, thereby catering for revenue earning capacity in the system.

**12.15 a.m.**

We will elaborate on this programme when it is fully developed. Given the positive attributes of the restorative justice system, my ministry will undertake to expand the cognitive development programme to encourage offenders to develop the power of thought and analysis—maybe we could introduce the same to the Member for Tabaquite—which will enable them to make moral distinctions. In this regard, a number of officers have been trained to address these problems.

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. ROBERTS]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

With respect to the question of the parole system, the relevant steps will be taken to establish a parole introduction committee and to place the issue of legislative drafting for such a system high on the ministry's agenda.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, there is the issue of rehabilitation. In this ensuing year, the relevant department of the Ministry of National Security will be committed to upgrading and maintaining the infrastructure of the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service and to motivating its personnel by providing them with the necessary tools, equipment and training. Most of all, the ministry, through its various inmates' training programmes, will be committed to preparing offenders for re-entry into the society and so avoid the world of crime. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Subhas Panday** (*Princes Town*): Mr. Speaker, they call me the nightwatchman. I want to congratulate you on your elevation to high office and because I know you, Mr. Speaker, I know that you will live up to the high ideals of your predecessors. [*Desk thumping*] Also, I want to really congratulate the Member for St. Ann's East on his maiden contribution. He started very well, but shortly after, unfortunately he went back into his old local government type of behaviour, but he will learn as time goes along. I want at the same time to congratulate the Prime Minister for making a good selection of putting someone like that to be a junior Minister in the Ministry of National Security. He, having regard to his speech, is certainly a Member who deserves full ministerial office, unlike the person sitting next to him.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Ann's East talked about the prison population and the number of persons in prison. He said that 34 per cent of the persons in prison are young people, and indeed that is so and we, as the budget has indicated, must deal with this in a holistic and a non-partisan manner. We really need to look at that issue of too many young persons in prison and should look at a system where, instead of putting them in prison and trying to rehabilitate them there, we try to keep them out of prison and rehabilitate them.

For example, when you send young persons to prison, they get involved with hardened criminals and in a very short time, Mr. Speaker, they learn all the habits of prison and you find them going back to prison on a regular basis. Maybe the bail system needs to be reviewed because many of those persons, as the Member has indicated—the Member for La Brea, who is practising, will agree with me, and I have heard him in court making these representations there are many poor persons who commit minor crimes, Mr. Speaker, and they are given bail with a surety to be approved by the Clerk of the Peace. That is a tedious process and

many poor people cannot access bail. As a result of that, many poor persons go to prison for very minor offences. As I say, maybe the bail system needs to be reviewed so that matters like maybe even having a little “joint” or assault and battery, obscene language or resisting arrest, the bail system could probably be set where you say those matters should be mandatory—own bail—rather than send these young boys to prison and “suffering them”.

The hon. Member also spoke about the parole system. No one can condemn that. You cannot quarrel with that. The parole system is important, in that, in order to prevent them from going into prison and being brutalized there—because when a first offender goes to prison, the moment they see him they say “Ah ha, she looks nice.” From the moment they see him they say, “She looks nice” and they take advantage of them and they become so disgusted and they hate society so much that they come back as vicious people. So we really need, Mr. Speaker, to deal with that issue of parole.

Further, we should go into community service in that we should put a certain number of offences where the magistrates—sometimes there are magistrates, they get them on the wrong side and they just—for no reason, they probably find they have a heavy list—Member for La Brea—and they just send you up. They are “too hurry”. The lists are so long, 150, 160 cases, that by the time they get to you, they are brain-fagged and they say “Man, I doh have time. Go to prison and come back next week.” What is necessary, we must say that for certain types of minor crimes the magistrates—we must tame them a bit and ensure that for minor crimes we do not send people in remand, in custody.

You probably could bring the parent and have them take the bail. A mother or father could bring their identification card, come to the court and say, “Look, this child probably has had one aberration in life and in those circumstances I will take care of him while he is outside”, and allow him or her to use the ID card. These little boys who are deviants usually come from single parent homes. Fathers, you cannot find them, and if you see how the mothers cry when they come to court when they cannot deal with them. They can take their ID card, give the court an undertaking that “We will make sure that he does not get in trouble pending the trial” and allow those mothers to take care of the children, take them out.

At the same time, they could ask them to report to the police station and have the police working with the single parent to help the child go along. So I believe that sending people to prison for these minor offences is really overcrowding prisons and if we have the parole system and the Community Orders, 40 to 50 per

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. S. PANDAY]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

cent of the persons in prison could be outside, those who are not really hardened criminals, and that, Mr. Speaker, will also reduce the cost of running the prison.

The Member for St. Ann's East spoke about trying to make the prison a place of revenue earning. Well it takes about \$48,000 per annum to maintain a prisoner. If we take half of those young persons—or that 34 per cent as you said, hon. Member—out of the prison, look at the amount of money we will be saving. Also with the community service, what will happen is that you could have the community, as you said, the Rotary Club, the Lions Club and other voluntary groups, working together with the child in community development so that the whole society now nurtures that child and for that one aberration that that child or that young person has committed we do not condemn him for life and I am certain, as I say, Member for San Fernando East, this is the way we have to deal with it, from a bipartisan position—

**Mr. Manning:** Restorative justice.

**Mr. S. Panday:** Restorative justice. Nobody could be against that.

The Member also spoke about training prison officers. Well you have seen on the papers where they have killed a few persons. “In jail is hell”. It is hell. There are prison officers who themselves carry out illegal activities in the prison. There is a whole criminal system in the prison where drugs are being traded, homosexuality is rampant, violence against prisoners is high and you will hear that sometimes they line them up, send them naked to bathe and watch them and laugh at them while they are bathing. When they come back and they say “You have a minute already”, if you do not leave, they start beating you. When that person goes back into society with that kind of treatment in prison, he hates society so much he wants to “lick down” anybody the moment he sees them. Although they have committed the offence and they need to be punished, we need to put a human face in dealing with those persons. Mr. Speaker, we on this side have no problem in assisting and making contributions in the reformation of the penal system. I am certain that when the Bill on the reformation of the police service comes to the House, we will make our contribution in that regard.

It is midnight and, as I say—sorry.

**Mr. Manning:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Are you suggesting that you all are prepared to work with the Government on the development of a restorative justice system?

**Mr. S. Panday:** We will work with anybody because the UNC, when they were in government, had already started when they brought the Mediation Bill, the community—the family court, so that we had started it and if the PNM—compensation for victims. Plea bargaining is another way to deal with it and if we go to that other area of plea bargaining, what will happen is you will be able to solve crime much easier in that if you plea bargain with someone and you do not want him, you really want the major or the main perpetrator, you could make a deal with him so you deal with the core of the crime. So that, plea-bargaining is something that—I think there is the legislation there, it is passed, but we are not implementing it and we need to implement the laws. [*Desk thumping*] There are many laws for restorative justice and all we need to do is to implement them. Mr. Speaker, as I said, that was a very good contribution by my friend from St. Ann's East and I am certain that the Member for Laventille East/Morvant could not have done better than that.

I come to the budget presentation now. Some persons have claimed, Mr. Speaker, that certain sections of the budget appear to be based on the system of the plantation economy. Give them handouts; keep them dependent upon you so that they will believe that they have to keep you in government so that you may continue to give them handouts; so you are creating a dependency syndrome. Although they have indicated that some of these social programmes have a training element in them, when one looks at the training element, one cannot see, as a matter of fact, what training is in that element to make them employable. There is nothing in those social programmes that could indicate what kind of training one will be getting to make you employable and to have sustainable employment, and that is our concern about the kind of handouts which are being given. It would appear to be giving you the handout, not making you a fisherman but continuing to give you a fish, continuing to give you a bread but not making you the proverbial fisherman or the proverbial baker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to advise this honourable House that the other side is creating a monster and it will be a monster which will come back later on to haunt them. For example, you said that you have this soup kitchen in Sixth Company and you are having this thing in Tableland. Of course, that is in the Ortoire/Mayaro constituency and everybody knows the reason for that, but while you are working there, while you are giving them this handout, the Sixth Company area is a very fertile place.

In 1812 when the persons returned from the American Civil War, they were given those lands, and Member for San Fernando East, you have gone into the

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. S. PANDAY]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

“mang” we call Sixth Company, and you have seen how fertile the land is and you have seen how all the lands there are abandoned. Only now and then you see some smoke coming from the bush like Red Indians where they are making some “babash”, but they are not utilizing the land, fertile land. [*Interruption*] You pass through Sixth Company Circular, you pass through the Sixth Company road. In these programmes, why did they give them the soup kitchen? If they need it, give it to them. Nobody has any problems with that. However, during that time, are you training them to use the resources which are around them so that they could develop these skills in order to have sustainable employment? As I look at the system, I say no.

I had tried for a while to set up the growbox system in the Sixth Company area. However, because of the political antagonism, I could not have reached there because when I go there, Mr. Speaker, I see girls, ladies, from Sixth Company Circular, 20, 23 years—four children—you feel sorry for them. You give them some help but you are seeing nothing to develop them. I tried. I want to promise the other side that I am the representative for Princes Town and I represent every single person in Princes Town. Whether you voted for me or not, I represent you [*Desk thumping*] and I intend to go back into the “mang” and advise them.

As a matter of fact, when you speak to some people they understand what you are telling them and then I say, “You see these people here boy, they have a mentality. You cannot reach them.” There is such a feeling of hopelessness in the “mang”. When I saw the soup kitchen come out and I went to talk to them, they said, “Doh talk to me, boy. I ge’in’ free food. You doh come near me.” This is why I feel so sorry for them. [*Interruption*] As I say, we are making the point that we are creating monsters and we are not really doing them a favour because in the year 2020—this budget speaks about vision 2020—the way we are going, after 2020 those people and their children will be in the same position unless we give them guidance to pull them out.

Mr. Speaker, in further answer to my friend from St. Ann’s East when he spoke about crime, I see here in the budget presentation that he said that the way they will deal with crime among other things is to introduce the anaconda. However, Mr. Speaker, you would have realized that in the year 2000, the last 11 months, this country was under siege at the hands of the criminals and that anaconda really did not solve anything. Anaconda really consisted of a few roadblocks on certain nights. They “ketch” one or two “fellas” with a little piece of “weed” or motor vehicle offences, no insurance and said it was a big thing. But anaconda has really not taken one single big criminal. They say here that:

“...Operation Anaconda brought immediate relief to our citizens who were literally under siege.”

The only part I could agree with is that indeed they were under siege but "Operation Anaconda" brought no immediate relief. They also said:

“We plan to continue the Anaconda Programme but on a strategic and as-needed basis.”

Well as I said before, these were really one or two roadblocks and I feel that that will not be able to deal with the problem. As a matter of fact, anaconda was a failure.

In the last 11 months we were under siege, but when did the crime situation show up? As a matter of fact, the hon. Member for San Fernando East had indicated it seems as though the kidnappings were political and lo and behold, after he said that, suddenly we saw a drop in kidnappings. How did that occur, Mr. Speaker? That occurred when the hon. Prime Minister announced that he would address the nation on a Wednesday to deal with the issue of crime. The Tuesday, the day before the Wednesday, a certain gentleman went on television where he called a meeting of leaders of gangs and announced that the kidnapping and killing spree should cease.

Anaconda could not have done it. That Minister of National Security could not have done it. That person went on television that night, announced that there should be a ceasefire and lo and behold, there was indeed a ceasefire. They solved it, but that was after the Prime Minister indicated it was political. So they stopped it for political purposes and he also said there were a number of meetings at Balisier House on these issues. So when the hon. Prime Minister came the Wednesday, the following night, all the wind had been taken out of his sails and all he could have said was, “The land issue in Mucurapo we will give them to solve this matter.” One sees a kind of connection, only to see a few days after, with public pressure, the land issue was rescinded. So we are saying that the PNM history has been, it has been unable to really deal with crime and one “fella” dealt with it.

The election has come. They say they have won the election. They have been installed as the Government and what has one seen? The kidnapping “start back” yesterday. So that when you really want to deal with crime, “you doh have to have no roadblock. You doh ha to bring anaconda. You know which part the deer is. You doh have to bring anaconda to put him on the road to ketch him.” You know where the culprits are. But having said, “I need your support, I need your

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. S. PANDAY]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

support”, it seems to me that although the hon. Prime Minister made a statement in the budget speech, “We will not tolerate crime”, it seems that we do not have the will to deal with it. We are caught up and we cannot deal with that issue.

Kidnappings are not carried out by those “lil’ fellas” without the driving permit and those “fellas” who do not have insurance. Kidnappings are executed by organized criminal and terrorist gangs and, as I said, we need to find a way to find them, and they are not difficult to find. As a matter of fact, you do not have to put so many resources to deal with crime. As I said, there is a simple way to deal with it.

Mr. Speaker, we also saw on page 32 of the Budget that he said:

“We will construct five (5) new police stations in Manzanilla, Mayaro, Matura, Cumuto and Brasso;”

When one looks at the budget document, however, one would see in the development programme that none of these stations were mentioned as in the budget. When one looks at the *Public Sector Investment Programme 2003* one sees that \$4.9 million will be spent and it mentioned that it would be spent on the expansion of the E 999 Rapid Response System. I think Roxborough is the only one mentioned in the draft estimates, and outfitting new facilities in the *Mirror*. So one really wonders if, having regard to what we are seeing, they are really serious when they say that they are going to build all these police stations or is it that we are just “mamaguying” the population.

Mr. Speaker, my friend, the Member for St. Ann’s East, talked about rehabilitation of offenders and we have dealt with that and, as I said, we will deal with that further in the future. The budget presentation went on to speak, and I am sure that all the Members in this House will agree with me, about corruption in public life. On page 33 they speak about:

“...corruption in public life is another area of serious concern for the people...

Towards this end we will seek to amend the relevant legislation to substantially increase...penalties...”

We have no problems with that. However, Mr. Speaker, this is really after the event. What has happened is, we must use the mechanisms which are in place to deal with it before it happens or immediately, when you suspect it is happening, so that you can nip it in the bud.

In that regard I say that Parliament must be given its full power. Parliament must be permitted to function so that it will act as a check on the Executive. What



has happened is the hon. Prime Minister spoke about the fact that he saw the Westminster system operating, but the Westminster system really creates the dictatorship of the Executive. For example, we spoke about borrowing and said that we did not know when moneys were borrowed. I am not defending anyone but we should have legislation in this place giving the Parliament the power and the authority to demand that before any borrowing takes place it comes to the Parliament.

If it is like a state of emergency before the borrowing takes place, come here, let us know what is going on, so that you would not have to say somebody borrows, they go and perform something and they come back and say, “Well you did not know when I borrow it, but I paved so and so road. I did that.” Come to the Parliament before, let us know what is happening so we will have transparency and every Member of the House would have an opportunity to look into the matter. [*Interruption*] No. Hold on, hold on—and if there is an emergency and you have to do it, we must say within one week after it is done come to the Parliament and let us discuss it. The Parliament must perform the role for which it has been created.

What has been happening over time is that the importance of Parliament has been diminishing and the power of the Executive has been increasing so much that the Executive is like a runaway horse, and I am casting no aspersions on anybody. [*Interruption*] No, but what I am saying is, we could pass laws to control the Executive. The Executive is too powerful vis-à-vis the Parliament. That is what we are saying. We are not casting aspersions on anybody now or in the past but we are trying to put mechanisms in place. We need to put mechanisms in place to prevent things like that happening. The House must have that authority to harness the Executive, because we are here, all of us are Members—Member for Tobago East, Member for Laventille East/Morvant—of the House, all of us are representatives of the people, all of us here are equal. Come before this House and let us deal with the issues.

What has happened, Mr. Speaker, the last government by Act 29 of 1999 amended the Constitution. Remember, section 66A of the Constitution had been amended, and what the government had done at that time was to set up joint select committees of Parliament which were different from the PAC and the PA(E)C. Yes, it is okay. We have no problems with that. We will be happy if those committees come because what it says is—if you think that you want to chair it, we are happy because that, Sir, will endorse the point I am making. We are giving the House the authority it deserves. We do not mind who chairs it, because when one looks at

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*  
[MR. S. PANDAY]

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

the PAC and the PA(E)C, they really deal with accounts, but this legislation that deals with the joint select committees, is to enquire into the method, functioning and any criteria adopted by ministries in the exercise of their powers and functions. We could do that.

So it is not only finances we are dealing with but anything that we feel is untoward, you can deal with it and you do not have to wait until, say, the end of the financial year or, as you say, July 31 to deal with it, you can take complaints from members of the public, and those are the people to whom we are responsible. When those members of the public report, the committee can immediately kick into gear and deal with it. You could summon ministers. Suppose that committee sits; that committee could sit in public, that committee could summon you, that committee could summon persons, it could bring them before the committee, make them produce their papers, and that committee, unlike the PAC and the PA(E)C can sit in public so there will be transparency and the public can see the government or the system in operation.

They will deal with government ministries, municipal corporations, statutory authorities and state enterprises and instead of complaining and complaining, if we put these systems in place and we work them together, we can assure you that there will be no room for anybody to go off course without the Parliament having knowledge and without the Parliament dealing with it. After those committees sit, they report to Parliament so you have a few people in these committees, you have these subcommittees or whatnot, but when they produce their report to the Parliament, then the report could be debated so that everybody could have a say in the report, this side and that side, so that when we do that we will really be telescoping to the wider society how the government is performing.

As I say, Mr. Speaker, we do not have to keep on crying and calling people “t’ief, t’ief t’ief”. All we need to do is to enhance the role and function of Parliament and, when we work like that, I am certain that whichever government comes into office and fulfils the objective as stated in this budget presentation, we could ensure that we have accountability. When I was the last chairman of those committees the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central indicated he was not sitting on them because of some reason. I think he said because there were some people in the Senate—[*Interruption*—himself to himself, and also he was saying there were people in the Senate who did not face the poll or—[*Interruption*—himself to himself, okay.

We say, now that you are in office, we are willing to go that way. Himself to himself will be on those committees, right? So you want to go with himself to

*Appropriation Bill (Budget)*

*Thursday, October 24, 2002*

himself? Go with it and we promise you we will be there to ensure that the people's business is taken care of. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

*Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to Friday, October 25, 2002 at 10.30 a.m. [Hon. K. Valley]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House accordingly adjourned.*

*Adjourned at 12.50 a.m.*