

Papers Laid

Friday, September 12, 2003

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, September 12, 2003

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received correspondence requesting leave of absence from the following members: Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, (Arouca South); Mrs. Eudine Job-Davis, (Tobago East) and Mr. Nizam Baksh, (Naparima). The leave of absence which these Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for the nine-month period ended September 30, 1998. [*The Minister of Health (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
2. The National Insurance (Benefit) (Amendment) Regulations, 2003. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the Third Report 2002/2003 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the proposal for the supplementation of the 2003 appropriation.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

The Minister of Health (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the report of the House Committee of the House of Representatives 2002/2003 Session.

**COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES REPORT
(Presentation)**

The Minister of Culture and Tourism (Hon. Penelope Beckles): Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table, the House of Representatives Second Report of the Committee of Privileges 2002/2003 Session.

**STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

The Minister of Health (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives 2002/2003 Session.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

175. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation:

- (a) Would the Minister inform this House whether internal examinations for promotion to the ranks of corporal and sergeant in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service were conducted over the past years?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister inform this House:
 - (i) when were those examinations conducted?
 - (ii) whether the results of those examinations are available to the Police Service Commission?
 - (iii) whether the results were available to any other related authority concerned with promotion within the police service?

Mr. Anthony Roberts (The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation): Mr. Speaker, hon. Members are advised that over the past year, promotional examinations for advancement to the ranks of corporal and sergeant in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service were conducted as follows: To the rank of corporal on August 03 and 10, 2002, and to the rank of sergeant on August 17 and 24, 2002.

Approximately 2,700 scripts were submitted for marking. Because of the volume of papers to be marked and the absence on sick leave of one of the examiners, the results have not been finalized as yet. While the Director of Personnel Administration has received corrected papers from one of the two examiners, and an estimated 1,358 from the other, he is unable to provide a definitive time in which the results can be made available to the Police Service Commission, the Commissioner of Police and the candidates.

The Ministry of Public Administration and Information will work with the Public Service Examination Board to review the policy of the board, as it relates to the inability of appointed examiners to produce results in a timely manner.

Oral Answer to Question

Friday, September 12, 2003

Mr. Sharma: Can the Minister indicate to the House, the name of the agency that conducts these examinations?

Mr. A. Roberts: That information is not with me.

Dr. Moonilal: Would the Minister indicate if this delay is regular or normal?

Mr. A. Roberts: I am not in a position to say.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question was asked by Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad):

**Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission
(Rural Electrification Programme)**

- 139.** (a) In connection with the rural electrification programme undertaken by T&TEC for the period January 2002 to April, 2003, would the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment provide the following information: a list of the projects and addresses of each;
- (i) the works undertaken;
 - (ii) the number of dwelling houses obtaining electricity connection under the programme during the aforementioned period?
- (b) The names of the contractors, the work done by each contractor and the cost of each contract?

Vide end of sitting for written answer.

The following question was asked by Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche):

**St. Patrick and Constituency of Oropouche
(Farmers)**

- 172.** (a) Could the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources provide this House with a list of all farmers in the ward of St. Patrick and the constituency of Oropouche who applied for monetary compensation in the aftermath of severe flooding which destroyed agricultural crops in March—April 2002?
- (b) Could the Minister provide a list of the names of all those farmers who received compensation, stating the quantum of compensation and the date of payment?
- (c) Could the Minister provide a list of the names of all those farmers who did not receive compensation and state the reasons they were not compensated?

Vide end of sitting for written answer.

Definite Urgent Matter

Friday, September 12, 2003

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

**Mount Hope Maternity Hospital
(High Incidence of Infant Deaths)**

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Mr. Speaker, can I read the motion that I submitted or the one you—

Mr. Speaker: You have to read the motion as I approved it.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: In accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I wish to seek your leave to adjourn the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely, the alarmingly high incidence of death of infants at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital.

The matter is definite since it refers to the specific issue of infants dying at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital.

The matter is urgent since 13 babies have died at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital within the last month.

The matter is of public importance since over 6,000 babies are delivered at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital every year.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I am satisfied that the matter raised by the hon. Member for Caroni Central qualifies to be raised on the Motion for the Adjournment. I am so satisfied and I am asking whether leave of the House is given?

Assent indicated.

Leave of the House is given. This matter would be stood down to 6.00 p.m.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL

Bill to provide for the supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2003, [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Hon. P. Manning*]

Question put and agreed to.

RELATED MATTERS

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name.

Related Matters

Friday, September 12, 2003

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Third Report 2002/2003 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the supplementation of the 2003 appropriation.

Also on the Order Paper for this afternoon, under “Introduction of Bills” is the Finance Supplementary Appropriation Bill, 2003, which is as a direct consequence of the meeting of the Finance Committee which took place on Wednesday of this week. It is exactly related to the Motion before us.

With the agreement of hon. Members opposite, I would like with your leave and kind permission to speak on both issues at the same time, even though we fully recognize that when the time comes for voting on these issues, voting has to be taken separately.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. Members for their generosity in this matter. On Wednesday, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met to discuss supplementing the appropriation to the Ministry of Finance, under the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund, as a consequence of certain developments that have taken place both domestically and internationally.

When the budget was presented late last year in September, we predicted an oil price of \$22 a barrel which was the low end of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) basket of currencies of \$22 to \$28. That is the range they have set for themselves. At the time in fiscal year 2002, on the basis of an oil production of just 130,000 barrels per day, being conservative as ministers of finance want to be, we anticipated a production level of approximately 127,000 barrels per day. Mr. Speaker, as you and hon. Members are aware, there have been some developments here that have resulted in an increase in the country’s oil production. Two new trains, Trains 2 and 3 of the LNG plant are on stream. Both of them are liquifying gas from fields which have a significant amount of condensate, the exact production of which is not accurately predictable. As a consequence, because of higher liquid production from those fields, we now anticipate an oil production significantly higher than the 127,000 barrels per day on which the budget was predicated. To date, the figure is 135,420 barrels per day. For the month of August, the country’s production had gone up again. It was 143,495 barrels per day.

We are now re-computing our revenue position based on a significantly higher oil production level. In relation to price, we have had a major development internationally, that was threatened at the time, the war between the United States, its coalition partners and Iraq. The market as you know, subject and sensitive as it is to these political vagaries, was the subject of some demand/supply imbalances, both of which lead to a higher oil price figure. While we talked about \$22 per barrel, the figure is significantly higher than that. The overall effect of both issues is a revenue position that is higher than we had anticipated by a figure of \$829,404,577. I am sure that my friend, the Member for St. Joseph would appreciate and agree that when the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund was established—his immediate predecessor did it—the government at the time agreed that 60 per cent of the excess revenues in any one year would be transferred to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. The current Government has not varied this policy. It is something we have been considering and for the time being the policy remains intact.

As our oil revenues increased from approximately \$2,722,389,874, the figure that was assumed as revenue in the budget for fiscal 2003, it has now gone to \$3,551,794,451. Sixty per cent of the difference of \$829 million amounts to a figure of \$497.4 million. In accordance with the current policy, this figure of \$497.4 million has to be transferred to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund and appropriated, which is the Bill that would come before the Parliament at a later stage in the proceedings.

We are merely seeking to keep faith with a policy position that has been adopted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and stabilize the excess revenue in the mechanism that was set up for that purpose, the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Gerald Yetming (*St. Joseph*): Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance wanted to say that he wished to place on record in Parliament, public tribute to the government of the United National Congress under Prime Minister Basdeo Panday, for adopting and introducing two significant policy measures. One was in 2000 and the other in 2001. He did not say it in those words, but I would help him today. Both policy positions, if continued, would have—and we are reassured by the actions of the Government today—far-reaching implications, effects, and benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for generations to come.

These two policy positions had absolutely nothing to do with the traditional short-term gain, vote catching measures that governments usually tend to do. In both instances, in the case of the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund, the government of the United National Congress up to December 2001, put aside \$1 billion in that fund. If the government had wished to be careless and gone the traditional route, it could have spent that billion dollars in any amount of hare-brained schemes in Trinidad and Tobago with the only intent of the next election and getting back into office.

The other policy position had to do with the Dollar for Dollar Fund.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, with respect, the matter before us is the Supplementary Appropriation Bill. It has nothing to do with the Dollar for Dollar Fund.

Mr. Speaker: Bear in mind what we are about this afternoon.

Mr. G. Yetming: The decision of Cabinet which gave rise to this 60 per cent took place in 2001. That is to correct the record from what the Prime Minister said in his opening of the debate. The decision for the creation of the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund was taken in 2000, but in 2001, by Cabinet Minute dated July 18, 2001, Cabinet varied the decision that it took in 2000. That decision was to amend the amount to be used in the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund from 67 per cent to 60 per cent, but it also made provision for 20 per cent of the surplus revenue to go into the Dollar for Dollar Fund. To some extent, that is the relevance of the point I would make on the Dollar for Dollar Fund. I repeat that these two policy positions of the UNC government, if continued, would have far-reaching benefits for future generations in this country.

In the case of the Dollar for Dollar Fund, it was intended to provide the opportunity and assistance so that every child who qualifies for university would get there by the Dollar for Dollar Fund, with the intention of increasing the university's intake from 8 per cent out of secondary school which is the current percentage, to hopefully 50 per cent by 2010. I think that the Government has attempted to articulate a similar type of objective. I know they are now flushing and detailing their 2020 vision and the road map they wish to use.

In the *Article IV Consultation*, the IMF said that the current reserves of energy resources of this country could be depleted in 20 years and that is not a long time. If we take probable reserves at best, we might be talking about 40 years from now. This country would not have the energy resources on which to depend. The intention of the government of the United National Congress was to ensure that when the oil and gas are depleted 20 or 40 years from now, the only hope we

would have had in this country would have been on the brain power of its people. Maracas and the lands in Caroni would not be able to sustain this country on a sound economic footing for years ahead. That is why we invested in this Dollar for Dollar Fund.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am giving you a little leeway, but bear in mind that we are not on dollar for dollar. I wish you would come back to the matter before us.

Mr. G. Yetming: Allow me to complete what I am saying on this point, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The relevant Standing Order is No. 70(1). It says inter alia:

“...the said Bill shall be strictly confined to the matter for which additional expenditure is required;”

Mr. G. Yetming: I asked to finish the point I am making. If the Government were to apply the decision they referred to in 2001, in Cabinet Minute 950, 20 per cent of the surplus revenue that we are talking about today would have gone to the Dollar for Dollar Fund and that would have amounted to \$165 million. At the other committee we were told that the Government was putting \$50 million into that fund. I am only making the point that if they had adhered, as they are seeking to do now, with the Cabinet’s decision of 2001, \$165 million would have gone into that fund to meet the objective of education in Trinidad and Tobago, to prepare for the depletion of oil and gas in this country.

I think that in piloting this Bill, the Prime Minister ought to have withdrawn what he said in the past about this Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. Not having publicly paid tribute to us, the least he could have done was to withdraw his previous statement. This is what the Member for San Fernando East said on September 19, 2001.

“Let it be clear that the PNM considers the establishment of the so-called Revenue Stabilization Fund without the required parliamentary approval to be illegal.”

Here we are without the required legislation and the Government is perpetuating this illegal act without clarifying or withdrawing. He went on to say that the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund was a “hare-brained scheme”.

In piloting this Bill the Prime Minister should have been guided by a number of things. Up to earlier this year, when the latest *Article IV Consultation* was being done by the IMF, the Government continued to reject the idea of a revenue

stabilization fund. There has been no indication from the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance on what has prompted at this last minute, the change and adoption in policy position of the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund and by so doing, the acknowledgement of a sound policy position adopted by the United National Congress. If the Prime Minister had read *Article IV Consultation* of 2001, of the IMF which he ought to have had—I am not sure if the fact that he had not read the 2003 report up to the time he was interviewed on television is an indication that he did not pay too much recognition to the findings of the IMF. In that report the IMF was very firm on the Government's decision to establish this Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. Page 11.18 states:

“The staff welcomed the government's decision to set aside windfall energy-related revenues in a revenue stabilization fund,…”

Page 17. 36 states:

“The government has responded prudently to the latest round of energy price surges by taking the decision to set aside a significant proportion of windfall energy-based revenue in a transparent, rules-based revenue stabilization fund.”

Their comments were clear, very positive and were used by subsequent international agencies doing due diligence reports on Trinidad and Tobago to which I would refer, in recognizing that this fund would be beneficial to this country. It went a long way in enhancing the ratings that some of the international agencies apply to Trinidad and Tobago. The Prime Minister acknowledged during the last budget—when I was speaking about the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund and I made reference to the rating agencies and the fact that we could qualify for improved ratings if we would legalize the fund—across the floor that was the only argument I had advanced which gave him comfort on this Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. What we said on the fund did not sway him; what the IMF said at the time in 2001 did not sway him and what subsequent international agencies said did not sway him. I do not know what swayed the Government within the past period to cause us to be here taking kudos from the Government for introducing this measure.

If the Prime Minister had read the report that was prepared by the committee he appointed and established under Dr. Mahabir from the university, including people like Ken Henry, Judy Chang, Jerry Hospedales and Louis Saberto Rodriguez, to review the current state of public finances in Trinidad and Tobago, in their report dated January 2002, he would have seen that they made reference to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund and reminded the government that the

Finance Committee Report
[MR. YETMING

Friday, September 12, 2003

fund should not be used for general expenses. They went on to recommend that the fund be established immediately by way of legislation. I do not wish to go back to the argument or issue of the legislative agenda. This was since January 2002; we are in September 2003 and the legislation still has not been forthcoming to this House.

Forgetting the legislation, if he had not read the 2001 IMF report, he would have seen from his committee's recommendations that they recognized the importance of the Revenue Stabilization Fund and urged that the immediate legislation be brought to the House. I would not quote from them because I do not want to rub too much into the wound.

If you look at the Standard Report of Trinidad and Tobago, one agency that comes every year and gives us our credit ratings, they made reference to the Revenue Stabilization Fund and this report is dated February 2002. Immediately after the report of the local committee, this agency made reference to it and had a whole section dealing with the Revenue Stabilization Fund. In August, 2002, several months later, Moody's Investor Service, another international agency providing people internationally with information on Trinidad and Tobago and recommendations on its economic performance, also had a full section on the Revenue Stabilization Fund and endorsed it. They recommended it highly.

Locally, we had Republic Bank issuing a warning to the Government. In the *Republic Economic Newsletter* which is also on the website, there is an article captioned, "A Sluggish Start 2003". They talked about windfall gains from higher than budgeted oil prices, that were going to mainly recurrent expenditures which are largely consumption oriented rather than investment oriented. In terms of oil and gas windfalls, they cautioned that this cannot be the best practice going forward. They also said that the need for revenue stabilization and sustainability remains paramount. The danger is that with billions of dollars expected in additional revenues, it will not take much convincing to commit equal amounts in public sector wages or transfers and subsidies to schemes of dubious long-term benefits. This is a financial institution in Trinidad and Tobago issuing a warning. Both locally and internationally, we have been warned and the question of the Revenue Stabilization Fund has been promoted highly.

We have the *Staff Report for the 2003 Article IV Consultation* of the IMF which was issued in July this year, after a visit to Trinidad and Tobago in March. I would quote some sections from this report. It is important that we view the Revenue Stabilization Fund in the proper context and not as a mechanism for stabilizing prices and preparing for when there is a decline in prices. There are

other tremendous benefits to be derived. The IMF also issued some sound serious warnings to the Government. Page 4 states:

“... the underlying fiscal situation has deteriorated steadily, masked by higher energy related revenues.”

They advised on page 4:

“Rising energy revenues should facilitate budget surpluses, part of which should be invested offshore through the revenue stabilization fund (RSF).”

They cautioned that the proven reserves would be depleted by 2020.

Page 10.18 states:

“In the context of the required fiscal adjustment over the medium term, staff suggested that a stabilization fund could be a useful tool of fiscal management. The current RSF... can help to preserve the competitiveness of the non-energy sector as well perform a stabilization function in the event of negative shocks.”

Apart from the negative shocks, they also talked about a fully-operational revenue stabilization fund to build reserves offshore for future generations. This is not for cushioning shocks. There are many other reasons for the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

The IMF was concerned that in the absence of fiscal surpluses, the Government was unable to transfer any of the higher than budgeted oil revenues to the Revenue Stabilization Fund, as the windfall is being used to finance spending in priority areas. The Bill before us is a welcome move by the Government.

Page 13.20 states:

“The staff raised concern that the planned use of projected energy revenues would lead to excessive growth of the government sector and crowd out the non-energy economy. The government needed to avoid the pitfalls from previous oil booms (wasteful, inefficient spending) and consider sustainable consumption in the context of the country’s energy wealth.”

They went on to warn that there is a risk that public spending may be inefficient and unproductive, as occurred in earlier oil booms and crowd out the unemployment generating non-energy sector.

I think that we should say that we are relieved that the Government had reviewed its objection to the Revenue Stabilization Fund and has acknowledged it, notwithstanding the fact that the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance did

Finance Committee Report
[MR. YETMING

Friday, September 12, 2003

not want to come outright and pay the tribute that he ought to have had. He made reference and said that we would do this in the meantime. I think that this should be more than in the meantime. We look forward to the required legislation coming to Parliament in the shortest timeframe possible, to make this important tool legally binding.

Thank you.

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on the Third Report 2002/2003 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the proposals for the supplementation of the 2003 appropriation which is taken together with the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) Bill.

As my colleague, the Member for St. Joseph, indicated, it is clear that both this report and the Bill are approbation, recognition and belated acceptance by the current Government of the appropriateness, relevance and currency of UNC policies, with respect to the Revenue Stabilization Fund and the concept of funding tertiary education entitled, the “Dollar for Dollar Fund”. We on this side have no problems taking paternity for both policy initiatives. We know that in other instances they have problems establishing and taking paternity. You can do a DNA test on this Revenue Stabilization Fund and the Dollar for Dollar Fund and you will see UNC, at every bit of the genome.

It is clear that when we conceptualized the fund it was meant as a way of putting away savings for a rainy day having regard to the recognition that we have in many instances, so much emphasis on oil and gas, but we can be exposed to external shocks to the economy, as happened during the post oil boom of 1973—1981. It was a saving for future generations so that we can create a buffer against the volatility of external shocks.

The hon. Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East is on public record as saying that the Revenue Stabilization Fund should be used for infrastructural works and no money should be put into the fund. He is Prime Minister and in another capacity as Minister of Finance and he owes us an explanation. I do not buy this two-prong approach that he is taking because of production and price increases, the revenue position is higher than anticipated and that is why it is perhaps appropriate to put into the Revenue Stabilization Fund. It is clear to us that the *Staff Report for the 2003 Article IV Consultation* of the IMF had a great deal to do with the change of mind of the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. It is interesting, as my colleague indicated, that the period of

consultation and discussion that took place with the IMF was during March to April of this year. It is important that we place on the public record the policy advice of the IMF arising out of this consultation. Page 4 under Executive Summary states:

“Rising energy revenues should facilitate budget surpluses, part of which should be invested offshore through the revenue stabilization fund (RSF). A strengthened RSF could help dampen inflationary pressures from the large foreign exchange inflows in the energy sector from spilling over into the non-energy sector, assist in building a stock of wealth for future generations from peak earning years; and reduce vulnerability to external shocks.”

This is something the UNC was quite aware of.

On page 10 of the report, once more, we see the kind of advice being provided to the current Government by the IMF. Page 10.18 states:

“In the context of the required fiscal adjustment over the medium term, staff suggested that a stabilization fund could be a useful tool of fiscal management. The current RSF needs to be strengthened to enhance its flexibility, transparency, and accountability. Given such changes, however, the RSF can help to preserve the competitiveness of the non-energy sector as well as perform a stabilization function in the event of negative shocks. As in other countries, the RSF may be seen as contributing to the achievement of fiscal sustainability in the long run by encouraging national savings.”

This is consistent with the approach of the UNC in government.

Page 12 states:

“In FY 1999—2000, Trinidad and Tobago’s government put in place an interim Oil Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSF) with the aims of promoting fiscal discipline during oil booms; cushioning the effects of unexpected drops in oil prices; and promoting public saving. The fund, however, has not yet been formally approved by parliament, and after a one time transfer of nearly TT\$1,000 million in 2001, it has remained inactive.

According to best practice criteria, developed by FAD and outlined in the table below, the RSF’s rules, operations accountability, and asset management strategy could be improved. The fund’s current operational structure is based on rigid rules. Deposits and withdrawals to the RSF are to be made when quarterly petroleum revenues exceed or respectively fall below the quarterly revenues anticipated in the Budget by ten percent or more. Deposits should be at least 67 percent of the difference between realized and anticipated

petroleum royalty and tax revenues, and withdrawals are to be equal to the lesser of: (a) the petroleum taxation deviation for the quarter/year under reference; and (b) 25 percent of the balance of the RSF at the beginning of the quarter/year. It is advisable that the current rules of the fund be modified to allow for greater flexibility, and that portfolio management, transparency and accountability be improved along the lines of the Norwegian State Petroleum Fund. Deposits to the fund should comprise all energy revenues, including oil and natural gas exploitation and refining, not only oil revenues, as is current practice. The budget should transfer all net energy revenues to the RSF, and drawings from the fund should only be used to finance budget deficits (via a reverse transfer) arising from expenditures and revenues approved under the normal budget appropriation process. The amount of funds available to the government from the RSF in any one year could be subject to 'sustainable income' guidelines,... Furthermore, the investment strategy of the RSF could be improved by putting in place clear and conservative rules regarding the portfolio composition of the fund, and transparency and accountability should be enhanced. Finally, the RSF should operate within a prudent fiscal environment."

The IMF went on to deal with a series of best practices at the level of the operational aspects, asset management and with respect to transparency and accountability. I think it is appropriate to put into the record the best practices that are obtained worldwide and what is currently in operation in Trinidad and Tobago. Page 12 states:

“Coherent integration within the budget;
Flexible rules, such as the fund financing the overall budget balance;
The fund’s assets should constitute the net savings of the government;
Parliament should approve expenditures;
Countercyclical fiscal policies should be adopted;”

These are the comments the RSF staff made with respect to what is currently taking place in Trinidad and Tobago. Page 12 states:

“RSF is in the form of an account at CBTT;
Rigid rules; deposits and withdrawals occur when oil revenues exceed budgeted revenues, which are based on a discretionary reference price;
Withdrawals authorized by MOF;
Fiscal policy appears procyclical;”

With respect to best practices at the level of asset management, page 12 states:

“The central bank or private investment managers may manage the fund’s assets;

Assets should be placed abroad;

Explicit consideration of mix of assets, currencies, liquidity and maturity of assets;

Explicit restriction to borrow, lend, make capital expenditures directly for use fund’s capital as collateral;”

This is what obtains in Trinidad and Tobago currently.

“CBTT manages RSF’s financial assets; it may appoint professional investment bankers;

Assets are denominated in foreign currency and are to be invested in foreign currency securities issued by sovereign countries;”

Transparency and accountability (best practices) are:

“Transparent rules and operations Regular and frequent (inter-year) reporting of the fund’s operational guidelines, its asset flows, and the allocation and return on assets should be submitted to legislature and made publicly available;

Clear assignment of responsibilities and accountability;

Independent external audit of investment performance.”

This is what currently obtains.

“CBTT submits an annual report of the operations of the RSF to the MOF; no inter-year reporting, not made publicly available;

No clear assignment of accountability;

Annually audited by the auditor general or by another auditor authorized by it.”

It is clear that notwithstanding the fact that this Government has been in office for a year initially, which was a grant and a gift and now for over one year by virtue of an election, there has been no step forward in progressing the issue of the necessity of putting transparent legislative agenda in place, to deal with this Revenue Stabilization Fund.

Page 13 deals with earlier discussions with the current administration in March and April this year. It was headed by the hon. Member for San Fernando East. Page 13 of the report says:

“They hope to achieve developed country status by the year 2020. The government’s priority is to invest a large portion of the energy wealth to transform the economy into a knowledge-based one.”

You cannot transform this economy into a knowledge-based one, until you begin to deal with the issue of how you deal with tertiary education and the whole uncertainty that surrounds dollar for dollar.

“They emphasized that in the absence of fiscal surpluses, they are unable to transfer any of the higher-than-budgeted oil revenues to the RSF, as the windfall is being used to finance spending in priority areas.”

Where is the spending in priority areas? With this Government, spending in priority areas is CEPEP. Clearly, it is not higher or tertiary education; it is the frittering away of the national purse in areas like that. It is a dole out distribution system.

Page 13.21 states:

“While agreeing with the staff’s concerns on the use of energy revenues, the authorities differed on the timetable for generating fiscal surpluses...their view diverged on the fiscal path, preferring to spend in priority areas now to build a more productive economy, rather than to begin generating surpluses from the current increased energy related revenues. Hence, they were noncommittal about reactivating the RSF.”

As of April this year, the Government did not have a clear path as to how it would proceed with the RSF. It was noncommittal.

In dealing with the effective use of prospective energy revenues this is what page 21 states.

2.30 p.m.

“The authorities’ plans to achieve developed country status by 2020 through establishing a highly educated work force...”

You cannot have a highly educated work force if you do not deal with the concept of dollar for dollar or if you do not invest in education in this country. [*Desk thumping*] The role that is currently part of the Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSF) is an allocation of 20 per cent of the Revenue Stabilization Fund for the Dollar for Dollar Plan, yet there is uncertainty about that programme.

Mr. Speaker, I will demonstrate to you the outcome and the increase in terms of enrolment of the 20 per cent of the revenues that went into higher education in

Trinidad and Tobago from the Revenue Stabilization Fund and the impact that the Dollar for Dollar Plan had as it is directly related to funding from that fund.

Mr. Speaker, the IMF goes on to say:

“There is a risk that public spending may be inefficient and unproductive, as occurred in the earlier oil booms, and crowd out the employment generating non-energy sector.”

I want to repeat that.

“There is a risk that public spending may be inefficient and unproductive, as occurred in the earlier oil booms, and crowd out the employment generating non-energy sector.”

In the context of the layoff of over 10,000 people from Caroni (1975) Limited in the agricultural sector, which is non-energy; do you understand the unproductively, Mr. Speaker? There is no catchment, no transfer, no job creation for the 10,000 persons laid off in Caroni (1975) Limited.

“Public expenditures should be tempered to what can be effectively and efficiently spent, consistent with the country’s absorptive capacity,...”

Mr. Speaker, the Dollar for Dollar Plan demonstrated the absorptive capacity of the tertiary level of state institutions in this country and the need for tremendous investment in plant and equipment to expand the tertiary level sector. The IMF goes on to say:

“while the non-energy deficit should be reduced over time from current high levels through expenditure restraint and broadening the tax base. A significant part of the rising energy revenues should be used to build up fiscal surpluses, which should be invested abroad in income earning assets to provide income for future generations.”

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to us that because the Revenue Stabilization Fund had its paternity in the UNC government, immediately, the Member the hon. Member for the San Fernando East, took a certain position against it. Good sense has now prevailed and he accepts, recognizes and approbates—belatedly—the merit of the Revenue Stabilization Fund. Mr. Speaker, it took the IMF to lift the mote from his eyes! So you see, Mr. Speaker, there are times when consultations are important as to how we direct the future planning in this society.

I see the hon. Member for San Fernando East is now in serious consultation with the Member for Diego Martin West because they do not talk otherwise. Mr.

Finance Committee Report
[MR. SINGH]

Friday, September 12, 2003

Speaker, \$240 millions was allocated from the Revenue Stabilization Fund for the Dollar for Dollar Plan in the year 2001. The UNC administration had recommended and it was accepted, so that when in the finance committee it said that the dollar for dollar allocation was a one-off arrangement, and it is not in fact so, I brought the information here that the UNC had planned to allocate \$303 million for the Dollar for Dollar Plan for higher education in 2002/2003; \$366 million in 2003/2004; \$430 million in 2004/2005 and \$495 million in 2005/2006. All those moneys were to be drawn from the Revenue Stabilization Fund. How are you going to build an intelligent nation and a knowledge-based economy if you do not provide the funding for it? What is required for certainty in the higher education sector is revenue stream from the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

Mr. Speaker, my good friends on the other side said a lot of things, they indicated, with respect to the Dollar for Dollar Plan that it was pure gimmickry. This is what the hon. Member for San Fernando East in the budget debate on September 19, 2001 said and I quote:

“Moreover, on no account should political gimmick such as the dollar for dollar scam taint such a fund.”

So here he is making the linkage between the Dollar for Dollar Plan and the Revenue Stabilization Fund. Mr. Speaker, now that I have his ears I will read what he said. I quote:

“Moreover, on no account should political gimmick such as the dollar for dollar scam taint such a fund. Quite frankly, this plan is a failure. I advise the Government to withdraw with grace now.”

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to the political gimmickry, the so-called dollar for dollar education plan.”

The Prime Minister continues:

“Mr. Speaker, in addition to the inequity implied in the dollar for Dollar gimmick, it suffers from demand-side disequilibrium as it fails to consider the current space limitation at the University of the West Indies. We find it amazing that, in championing the Dollar for Dollar Programme the Minister speaks about increasing the number of students who will go to tertiary institutions, particularly UWI, while totally neglecting among other things to address the need that the actual intake capacity of the institution needs to be increased.”

Mr. Speaker, sometimes it is laughable. The hon. Member for Diego Martin East who cannot run his ministry; killing babies in the hospitals of this country, this is what he had to say about the Dollar for Dollar Plan on September 20, 2001.

“Everything is gimmickry. Everything is superficiality. Everything is a façade. Give the poor children bursaries instead of this dollar for dollar foolishness. Give them a grant based on means.”

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. The matter before us is not the Dollar for Dollar Plan. The matter before us is the appropriation of \$497.4 million to the interim Revenue Stabilization Fund from excess petroleum revenues.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have heard the hon. Prime Minister, and as I have advised the Member for St. Joseph, I am advising you to come back to the Bill before us.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, it is my intention to debate both the Committee Report and the Bill. The Committee Report deals with the Dollar for Dollar Plan. [*Desk thumping*] I do not know if the hon. Prime Minister is usurping the functions of the Speaker but he cannot tell me, in this House, what I can debate in the context of a Committee Report and a Bill! He cannot tell me that! [*Interruption*] I have demonstrated to this honourable House the nexus between the fund and the Dollar for Dollar Plan. The hon. Member, when he was on this side, dealt with the Dollar for Dollar Plan. [*Interruption*] I have the Finance Committee Report here and it is very clear that the dollar for dollar issue—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the hon. Member for Caroni East is on his feet. He alone is entitled to speak! Other Members ought to keep quiet and listen to him.

Mr. B. Panday: Apparently, he is not entitled to speak. He seems to be not entitled to speak, that is what is happening.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva North, please! Hon. Member for Caroni East, please continue.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, this Dollar for Dollar Plan has now become a very sensitive issue because there is great uncertainty with the non-committal, as demonstrated by the IMF's Report of the Government as late as April of this year, as to the role and functions of the Revenue Stabilization Fund, and the revenue stream that the Dollar for Dollar Plan draws to support higher education. There was a great deal of uncertainty in this country amongst the student population at the tertiary level therefore we need to use the opportunity, in this Parliament, to clarify the Government's position on the role of the Dollar for Dollar Plan and what is going to happen to it; whether or not they are going to stop the funding of the dollar for dollar mechanism from the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

I have demonstrated to this honourable House that the initial allocation was \$240 million and then a subsequent allocation was planned for a subsidy of \$303 million and then \$456 million. Mr. Speaker, it went on like that; it was all drawn for the Revenue Stabilization Fund, so I will not be distracted by the hon. Member for San Fernando East because the Dollar for Dollar Plan has worked and worked tremendously too. Mr. Speaker, I want to read this into the record because I want the Government to get the benefit—In the same way they have recognized, belatedly, the benefit of the Revenue Stabilization Fund, they, too, must recognize the benefit of the Dollar for Dollar Plan.

Mr. Speaker, I continue to quote from the hon. Member for Diego Martin East's contribution on the budget debate on September 20, 2001 with respect to the Dollar for Dollar Plan.

“There is a set of ‘fellas’ in Trinidad who have become educators overnight. They have no qualifications, or if they have they are bogus. They put up a shack or a warehouse somewhere and then they call the Minister of Education and say, ‘I am ready to receive the students, and I want dollar for dollar!’”

This is what the hon. Member for La Brea had to say on the *Hansard* of September 21, 2001:

“So when they come and offer 50 per cent for only the first-year students, with their dollar for dollar gimmick, they need to come again.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to put that on record because this dollar for dollar gimmick, they are selling the people short. They are only doing 50 per cent of what the PNM did. They still have to do some more.”

I want to deal with the whole question of how this Dollar for Dollar Plan has worked; how the money from this Revenue Stabilization Fund has impacted upon the growth and development of tertiary education in this country; how the money from the Revenue Stabilization Fund has been utilized for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago as they engage in this path to create a knowledge-based society and an intelligent nation.

We have to understand and appreciate that the Dollar for Dollar Plan was initially meant for all the state-run institutions, the University of the West Indies, which is the regional campus; COSTAATT; the Cipriani Labour College; Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology; the Hospitality Institute of Trinidad and Tobago. All the state-run tertiary level institutions participated in the Dollar for Dollar Plan and that was the intention.

I have before me the growth of enrolment in two institutions. I specifically requested the enrolment figures of these two institutions because a director of the Central Bank—in the repository of the Central Bank lies the Revenue Stabilization Fund—has accused these two institutions of engaging in racial practices. Mr. Speaker, this is where the moneys are there for safekeeping, over \$1.5 billion.

In the academic year 1999/2000 at the University of the West Indies the total number of students who were registered was 6,660; the Dollar for Dollar Plan had not kicked in as yet. In 2000/2001 where the Dollar for Dollar Plan kicked in for the first time, 6,967 students were registered; a marginal increase of 1.6 per cent. Now that the Dollar for Dollar Plan had gained currency in 2001/2002, Mr. Speaker, 7,670 students registered; an increase of 9.2 per cent. In 2002/2003, 9,200 students registered at the University of the West Indies, an increase of 20 per cent. Mr. Speaker, do you understand the impact of the Dollar for Dollar Plan, the impact of the revenues from the RSF? In 2003/2004, so far 11,327 students have been registered at the University of the West Indies, an increase of 23 per cent. When the hon. Member talked about the absorptive capacity he said we did not have it. We have demonstrated that it is there but we agree that there is need to expand the opportunity and to expand the Dollar for Dollar Plan to bring in the private sector into building the educational absorptive capacity in this country.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology (TTIT) is another enormous success, another idea of innovation and creativity of the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] I had the responsibility for TTIT and initially they had linked with the University of Houston so that when one got a degree from TTIT, one had one's accreditation linked to the University of Houston.

Mr. Manning: That is a second rate university. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. G. Singh: An excellent university at the technical level. In 2000/2001, 190 students, the Dollar for Dollar Plan: not available. In 2001/2000, 471 students, an increase of 147 per cent, Mr. Speaker, that was a direct impact of the Dollar for Dollar Plan. In 2002/2003, 583 students, an increase of 24 per cent from the previous year. In 2003/2004, so far 665 students, an increase of 14 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear in this context that the Dollar for Dollar Plan has impacted, positively, upon the growth and development of tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago. There is need, therefore, for clarity from the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. When he gets up to respond to us he needs to clarify exactly what is Government's position with respect to the funding of tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago. That is very important because there is a level of uncertainty that applies across the board.

The hon. Prime Minister also needs to clarify other tangential issues. Mr. Speaker, there is a perception that at the level of the university—having regard to the debate that is taking place outside—the question of higher education is very racially tainted and it is because of the perception and the role of a director on the Board of Governors of the Central Bank, Mr. Selwyn Cudjoe. Mr. Speaker, one should keep in mind that the Central Bank is the repository of the RSF and therefore the investment decisions that are going to be made on the RSF are going to be decided by the Board of Governors of the Central Bank. Therefore we must be able to ensure—[*Interruption*] All right, well clarify all of that because it is not stated. As far as we are concerned it is there and, therefore, you may set the broad policy but Cudjoe is in the mechanics of the shop carrying out the dictates: his own agenda.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to read into the record an editorial which we really ought to take into consideration. I will quote from an article in the *Probe* dated Sunday, September 14, 2003:

“Dead-end race to UWI

We are appalled that the racially-tinged matter of entry into the University of the West Indies (UWI) is being analysed in the media only in an emotive manner.

Ethnic protagonist Professor Selwyn Cudjoe is advocating an affirmative action scheme to redress what he perceives as a racial imbalance of students at the regional university.

Clearly, a non-issue is being ventilated here, because entry into any tertiary education institution should be founded exclusively on a clinical merit system.

Cudjoe’s alarum is wrongly directed.

But the fact that the university professor has influence along the corridors of power—he is, most interestingly, a director of the Central Bank and appears to be coddled by elements in the ruling party—raises fears that his outlandish views on UWI entry could evolve into a policy decision.

The Government has announced plans for a University of Trinidad and Tobago, and while details have not been spelt out, we wonder whether there would be a powerful lobby to dilute entry requirements.

Already, the Patrick Manning administration, in an astounding step, has watered down secondary grades pass levels.

A matter as critical and as basic as accessing the limited seats in our regional university should not easily be tampered with, and, especially, be discussed in the disturbing environment of ethnic discrimination.

Such a debate would surely arouse dark comments from adversaries that employment practices in the State sector and military services should also be closely reviewed.

And who knows where such a dead-end row could lead.

Instead, we submit that the country should be discussing critical and relevant matters,...

A senseless debate on student entry into university should not be permitted to dominate the local landscape at the expense of more vital and far-reaching issues.”

Mr. Speaker, clearly the hon. Prime Minister must tell us today whether Mr. Cudjoe is enunciating Government's policy on entry requirements into the University of the West Indies and other areas like TTIT. Here is a Central Bank governor, and keep in mind the RSF; the \$1.2 billion is currently located in the Central Bank for safekeeping with no investment yet.

If Mr. Cudjoe has his way—the point that the editorial is making is that he appears to be coddled by certain elements within the Government. It is therefore incumbent on the Prime Minister to say whether or not he speaks on behalf of the Government. If he does, and having regard to his utterances then it would really make a total sham of our National Anthem and our Constitution which guarantees equality.

We cannot have the National Anthem, which gives every creed and race an equal place, and the Constitution that provides as a fundamental right, the right to equality of treatment and opportunity in this society—If he speaks on behalf of the Government then, effectively, the Government is saying that we should burn the Constitution and we should not listen to the National Anthem. I do not believe he is speaking on behalf of the Government but I want the Prime Minister to say so. When I read in the newspaper that he is having a forum to discuss racial bias and creating all kinds of red herrings into society—Mr. Speaker, his role as a governor gives him a pedestal upon which to comment. [*Interruption*] His role on the Board of Governors of the Central Bank has provided him with a pedestal on which to pronounce on matters of Government policy and we must look at it.

If Prof. Cudjoe is there and he is looking after this Revenue Stabilization Fund and the RSF funds, those tertiary level institutions, then, indirectly, he is putting pressure to carry out his programme. What is his programme? His programme is one of tribal hegemony in this country and that is unacceptable. His programme is one of tribal domination and everybody else subordinate. The Prime Minister must make a clear statement. I have looked at the Prime Minister's appointment

of a committee to look at the question of race and it includes Cudjoe, so therefore there is self-interest articulation. But if you are putting Cudjoe in the Central Bank—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, may I interrupt you a minute? You are focusing a lot on Prof. Cudjoe but he is not the subject of the Bill before us. Could you link it back to the matter before us, please?

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I am dealing with the matter in his capacity as a holder of public funds in the Central Bank, as a member of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank and whether or not he is enunciating governmental policies. I am seeking clarification on that issue. I am dealing with the matter in the context that 20 per cent of the allocation of the RSF goes into the tertiary institutions and he has part control of that by virtue of being a member of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank.

Mr. Speaker, in this society, it is incumbent upon the Prime Minister to play a role above all parties and interests and to manage all the conflicting and competing interests so that everybody could guarantee a measure of equality, opportunity and treatment in this society so that is why I call upon the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, in the current context we have to ensure that there is equality of opportunity so people could access this Dollar for Dollar Plan; they could benefit from the investments that would no doubt take place on the basis of the significant savings in the Revenue Stabilization Fund and therefore I wish to call upon the Prime Minister to clarify the Government's relationship with Prof. Selwyn Cudjoe and whether or not his racist, hegemonic and tribal dominant statements are part of Government's policy.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I intend to speak on the Motion and the Bill before this House. The Bill before the House is a supplementary appropriation for the 2003 budget. Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister, must tell us in his winding up what has happened to the budgeted allocations for the various ministries. This afternoon we are dealing with a knowledge-based economy and I would link it in such a way that you would see the clarity with which I am going to debate this issue. [*Desk thumping*]

The Revenue Stabilization Fund that the Prime Minister is speaking about—of course we know it is a UNC initiative—when we look at the long-term gains it is for generations to come and we are speaking about a knowledge-based economy. The Revenue Stabilization Fund is supposed to assist in the development and

knowledge-based economy. To have a knowledge-based economy, one must have a functioning education system. One cannot build a knowledge-based economy with an inefficient education system. When we look at the situation in this country today we see that the education system is in crisis. The Dollar for Dollar Plan would be driving the tertiary education sector and the Dollar for Dollar Plan was mentioned in the report in terms of the contributions of the Government's programme. They said it was a one-off issue but we said no. One could see it is not a one-off issue.

The tertiary enrolment set by Caricom is 20 per cent in the year 2005. I am sure the hon. Prime Minister is aware.

As I speak of the Caricom initiative, I want to tell the Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, that no matter how many communication messages come from his Ministry to the Ministry of Education; all the kudos that are being sent, I want him to re-examine his position because this country's generations to come depend on an education system that is functioning. He cannot send messages from his office—I know he will deny that he sent it but I want the country to know that is why I am speaking in the debate this afternoon and not in the budget debate.

So the children in those particular areas like Orchard Gardens, what are we seeing there? The plan for Orchard Gardens was supposed to include a primary school. They built the primary school like they are saying there, Mr. Speaker. The children who were supposed to go to Orchard Gardens were sent elsewhere. In terms of the economics, the parents have to put more money forward for the child to go further in terms of passage—travelling expenses. That is putting more burdens on the parent. *[Interruption]* How is that related to this debate? The message that is being sent to the country is that there is a functioning education system. I am not attacking the Minister of Education, but the person at the top must take responsibility.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing a total breakdown in the education sector at all levels. I will tell the Member for Diego Martin Central, with respect to the school in his constituency, that they allocated for a roof—he knows that—and then they came at the very end and said they wanted a new school. What are we doing coming here for an appropriation when they in the Government are wasting the money? *[Interruption]* I will show the Member wastage here this evening.

The Minister of Education came to this Parliament, when I asked the question about the consultant in the Ministry of Education—*[Interruption]* I have it here. I

Finance Committee Report
[DR. NANAN]

Friday, September 12, 2003

have all the information and I will speak for 75 minutes and if you give me more, I will speak, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] This is relevant because it is dealing with the knowledge-based economy, the tertiary sector and the education sector from preschool because you cannot have a functioning education system if there is a breakdown in the preschool right up to the tertiary level.

The Prime Minister must take responsibility here this evening because all the children in this country are depending on the Government. We are seeing where they hired Global Competitive Strategies Limited, a company headed by Kenrick Burgess. I want to bring him in although you will tell me he is not part of the debate here this evening, but I will link him to this debate and show what is happening in the Ministry of Education.

We had a report coming from the Minister of Education in this House, when I asked the question. I want all Members to know that Global Competitive Strategies Limited, a firm hired by Nipdec—This is not fiction, this is in *Hansard*. [*Interruption*] The Member Diego Martin Central is a good friend of mine in the House Committee and I would not get into any debate with him this evening.

Mr. Speaker, Global Competitive Strategies Limited, of which Mr. Burgess is the Managing Director, was hired by Nipdec. I bring him into the debate because it is clear that the Ministry of Education spent \$90,000 a month, over \$600,000 of the budget, on Mr. Burgess. What did Mr. Burgess do? Let me tell you what Mr. Burgess was supposed to do. I want to go to the coordination of the repair of 146 schools under the 2003 School Repair Programme. That is the role of Burgess here. In the *Hansard* of May 21, 2003 the Minister said that:

“The critical action programme which covered plans for all the projects to be completed before school reopens in August 2003;”

That was the budget allocation to the Ministry, \$600,000, and after August the Minister came here, beat her chest and said, “Burgess doing all the work”. I want to remind the hon. Prime Minister that when I was Minister of Education he said, “He is a waste of a minister of education”, but when I was the minister of education every single thing that Burgess was supposed to do in that ministry was already done. [*Desk thumping*] I am telling you this as a fact.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister must understand—he must get information—that all these things that Mr. Burgess was paid to do were part of the loan programmes of the IADB and the World Bank. Everything that Mr. Burgess was doing here—all the programmes, all the logistics and everything. The number of workshops that ministry had is unbelievable. [*Interruption*] I do not want to get

into a debate with the Member for Laventille East/Morvant right now, because I see he is almost elbowed out too. So, he should not worry about people being elbowed out.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Burgess was paid over \$600,000 up to August. The School Repair Programme is a disaster. When I was Minister of Education, under the School Repair Programme, three schools did not open that year. Do you know what was the headline in the newspaper? “Thousands of Children Stayed Home”. You calculate, 10 schools, minimum, did not open and every day there are untruths: this school closed, this school cannot open. Imagine a school in my constituency, Brasso Venado, 50 students—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, link it to what we have before us, please.

Dr. A. Nanan: Of course, Mr. Speaker, it is 75 minutes I am speaking for. I will link it.

Money, that is the issue! The issue is the appropriation in the budget! [*Laughter*] Money, that is what I am trying to tell the Prime Minister; wastage, and he tells me that is not true. Wastage! Money is the link. That is the linkage. It is money we are talking about. Whether it be \$1,000 or \$1 million, it is money. So, whether it is \$497 million you are coming to put here or \$500 million, you should have come last year and put it.

I also did some research. Let me tell you something, the International Monetary Fund does not hide anything. I went on the website to see their report of June 23, the Executive Board of the IMF Concludes 2003 Article IV Consultation with Trinidad and Tobago. I would not have gone into that, but I will take another five minutes to deal with that. I am going back to Mr. Burgess because I do not want to get sidetracked.

Mr. Speaker, they are paying the man \$600,000, for what? For a School Repair Programme. Do you know what really hurt me? When I asked the question in this House on how many preschools—The Member, in his budget statement, if I remember correctly, said that the preschool was the pillar for the education system. He cannot deny that here. Do you know what reply came back? The reply was that not a single preschool was built in his time and he wants to take credit for that? What was the reason? They said the UNC set a benchmark of \$180,000 and that they came in at \$400,000. I want to tell the Prime Minister that it is my information that they wanted to build those preschools for \$1 million and take \$500,000 on the side. He can have a commission of enquiry into that if he wants, but I am telling him the facts. When the UNC was in government we built

preschools in every single constituency with no discrimination and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant can tell me that I lie. [*Desk thumping*] We opened the preschool at Rose Hill.

Mr. Imbert: You never built one by me.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to be sidetracked, I am dealing with the issue of preschools. The Prime Minister said it was a pillar. How can there be a foundation for the education system without preschools? That really hurt me and I want to tell the Member for Diego Martin West—but he is not here—that on June 30, 2003 the World Bank loan came to an end and in the document for that loan there was a possibility to extend the period, but the World Bank came and said, “No, the cut off date is June 30, 2003”. Why? Was that the only loan that there was an exact cut off date like a guillotine? Non performance!

Mr. Hinds: You were not sent to a preschool.

Dr. A. Nanan: What does that have to do with this debate? The Member for Laventille East/Morvant will get his 75 minutes to speak. [*Interruption*] The Prime Minister should not try to belittle the debate. There is an amortization schedule for that World Bank loan. On August 01, 2003, you were paying \$1.83 million for that loan and you will continue up to February 01, 2011 to finish pay off this loan. Non-performance by the Ministry of Education.

I really did not want to get into this debate, Mr. Speaker, but when I see what is happening in this country I have to speak out. [*Desk thumping*] I was the minister of education in a system that had a lot of problems but we ensured that we tried to remedy all. Now, they are coming with public relations and spending money like rain. Every time I open the papers to the sports page I see a full page coloured ad with the Minister of Education. Take the money and spend it where necessary. [*Interruption*] I want to stay on the money issue, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to be sidetracked because I have to deal—if it takes 15 minutes I want to be given a little leeway.

Mr. Speaker, the matter with the consultant has to be revisited.

Mr. Manning: Which consultant?

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Burgess. That has to be revisited because he is a failure. Through your performance management system you will realize he is a failure. I do not care how much you have with respect to the Biche report, you must understand that in this country when you are dealing with the people, we are looking to go forward.

Right now the World Trade Organization is meeting in Cancun, Mexico. The global situation is beyond Trinidad and Tobago. One must understand that when we are dealing with the World Trade Organization's issues they are not about a school closing here and no security there. All these things add up, but look at the global situation and how we are positioning this country in terms of the situation with trade. That is why I hope that Mr. Valley is briefed properly when he goes to Cancun because when they go to Cancun they are doing a follow-up on what was discussed in Doha and it is very important that Trinidad and Tobago has a firm position with respect to trade and the World Trade Organization, but that is another debate. I will leave that for the budget.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at that allocation of money, the Ministry of Education is paying the consultant, they should stop paying him. I think they should revisit that and stop paying him because there are contracts with respect to non-performance. Review that contract and at least get something credible for that kind of money that is being paid. No early childhood care and education centres were built and the School Repair Programme is a disaster in every sector.

Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with the Student Support Card—this plastic card—that they are giving out. [*Interruption*] The Prime Minister should not distract me as he knows that I am dealing with the issues. The issue here is not the possession of the card. The issue here is the \$8 million, not the card. [*Desk thumping*] This \$8 million, without tender, is the issue. How many books could you buy with this \$8 million that was spent on this card? We had put forward a voucher system. They say they are giving \$1,000 with this card that comes after school has opened and the people now have to go and access money. They should do a survey. How many people are using that card to buy books? That is the issue. I do not know if the Minister holds any brief for Republic Bank. I did not say that, but that is what I am seeing here in an article on page 4 in the *Probe* headlined "Now Hazel lands in banks' bad books".

Mr. Speaker, you know what really got me vexed? Up and down the country there are schools receiving books, but the schools in my constituency received one book today—they received another book. One total haphazard distribution of books across the system and the man responsible? Mr. Burgess, the consultant. He is the one doing all the work for the ministry and he is the one to have the programmes on stream. How can you have a vision 2020? You cannot even have a vision 2005 if you cannot get the systems right.

I want to deal with the money because it is a money issue in the Ministry of Education, failure at all levels. In the *Trinidad Guardian* of September 02, 2003 there is an editorial, “Are we ready for the new school year?”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are stretching my indulgence. Please try and link it to the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I will link it.

The Revenue Stabilization Fund, whether it is for the Dollar for Dollar component of the Revenue Stabilization Fund—because 60 per cent of the surplus revenue from the petroleum taxes go into the Revenue Stabilization Fund and 20 per cent of that goes to the Dollar for Dollar Plan—the link is the money aspect. It is a supplementary appropriation on the Bill. They are coming for \$497 million more.

We had another appropriation earlier this year for more money. What is actually happening with the allocation for the Ministry of Education? I am dealing with the Ministry of Education because we are dealing with a knowledge-based economy and the Revenue Stabilization Fund would be driving the tertiary enrolment and because the Prime Minister said that they will continue with the policy of the UNC. So at the tertiary level we see enrolment increasing because of the Dollar for Dollar Plan, but we still see the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, up to now, cannot come up with an accreditation mechanism to facilitate the private sector, a simple exercise. The Minister should be removed!

Mr. Manning: Which minister?

Dr. A. Nanan: Minister Montano. It is all linked. It is networking. Apparently that does not happen in the ministries.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so we are seeing that the Revenue Stabilization Fund would be a contributor. The IMF report, I feel, was the driving force for the Government to surreptitiously come now and put the money into the Revenue Stabilization Fund. I would just read a bit of the IMF report because it is interesting.

“Executive Board Assessment

Directors viewed the effective use of prospective higher energy revenues as key to Trinidad and Tobago’s future development and growth. They noted that the authorities’ plan to achieve developed country status by 2020 through establishing a highly educated work force,...

This is the crux of the debate, “a highly educated work force”.

“and strengthening infrastructure, is a commendable objective, but cautioned that the government needs to tailor its spending in line with the country’s absorptive capacity. Specifically, they recommended that the authorities take advantage of the higher-than-budgeted oil prices to raise the primary surplus, and transfer part of it to a strengthened revenue stabilization fund (RSF), whose assets could be invested abroad to generate income for future generations.”

This was Article IV Consultation with Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we are seeing here with this appropriation is that part of the revenue of the Revenue Stabilization Fund will be used for the Dollar for Dollar Plan to expand the tertiary enrolment sector. We look forward to the accreditation system being put in place to enhance and broaden the area of tertiary enrollment and to involve the private sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a situation in that Helping You Prepare for Employment (HYPE) Programme recently when somebody in the audience got up and asked why was there a bias towards one particular race in that particular programme? The Prime Minister talks about race relations and a committee on race relations, but I do not know if the Prime Minister ever read the report of the committee on race relations of 1995. If he read the report he would have seen that our history and the various countries that took control of Trinidad and Tobago, were stepping stones for us to have any racial divide. In every single report and recommendation they were talking about unification, national unity. Every single report, whether it be in the early 1800s or as we come forward, with that background, we are seeing now why the United National Congress policy on national unity is a foundation to prevent discrimination in this country.

If you trace the history you would see that the “whites” were dominant for so many centuries that when the East Indians and the Africans came the population grew and they put one against the other to maintain their dominance. When one sees that kind of racial discrimination in the 21st Century and in every single area of governance one has to wonder what this 2020 vision is all about. Is it a 2020 vision for dictatorship? Why must we have discrimination at all levels? Why use a smoke screen of a committee—another committee? There was a committee before. The issue was raised about an equal opportunity bill and the Prime Minister ran and got a committee. The Prime Minister should take stock of his ministries and his government. He should ask for a report on the Ministry of

Finance Committee Report
[DR. NANAN]

Friday, September 12, 2003

Education. He should ask how many committees there are functioning and he would see that the more committees there are, there would be more bureaucracy. [Interruption] The Prime Minister can say what he wants. [Interruption]

[MR. SPEAKER, *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, I am the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite and when I speak here I speak on behalf of the constituents and the country because somebody has to speak out. [Desk thumping] All the propaganda, all the newspaper clippings, all the money that is being spent on the newspaper—when we were in government we were very thrifty. The Prime Minister opened his eyes wide, but he should take a survey of the ads in the newspapers. Top joke of the year? I would tell you what is the joke of the year just now.

Getting back to the debate in terms of what is happening with bureaucracy and non-performance, when one looks at the allocations, over \$2 billion have been allocated for the Ministry of Education under recurrent expenditure, over \$175 million in development programme and a supplementary allocation again is coming.

Mr. Speaker, the Equal Opportunities Act. I would just go back to that issue on racial discrimination since I was interrupted by the Member for San Fernando East who thought he threw me off track, but I got back the point. The point I was dealing with was the two committees he has on race relations and discrimination at all levels. I saw in today's newspaper where a writer—a Member of the Government—was defending CEPEP. We have no problems with jobs, but we have a problem with mediocrity. Since the PNM got into Government what have they done? They have reduced the grading system. They have watered down the education system and they continue to do so. They are watering down the education system. They are going to introduce Caribbean Advance Proficiency Examination (CAPE) completely and remove the A'level system.

The Member for Diego Martin East—I do not want to bring him into the debate, but I would pass him a note—knows that the grading system must be the foundation for a country. When you lower the grades to get into the university and the public service, what are you doing? The Singapore government and the Hong Kong government are staying with the A'level system. Why are you going to introduce a system that will parallel the A'level system and remove the A'level system? Why? Is it because our students cannot make the grade?

Mr. Speaker, do you know what really hurt me? I asked another question: How many Mathematics and English teachers are missing from schools for 2003? Then I saw the report, 50 per cent failure in Mathematics and English at CXC.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, perhaps you are anticipating the budget, but link the Dollar for Dollar Plan with the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

Dr. A. Nanan: Sure, Mr. Speaker, I was just trying to get into that area. I am not wasting time though. [*Interruption*] I am dealing with the issues because they are burning issues and somebody has to speak out. It is not anticipating the budget debate. I am dealing with the allocation, the Revenue Stabilization Fund and a component of the Revenue Stabilization Fund which is the Dollar for Dollar Plan. The Dollar for Dollar Plan will improve the enrollment into the university, improve tertiary education and so we will build a knowledge-based economy. [*Interruption*] I said from preschool to tertiary level, that will be the driver for this knowledge-based society.

For the Dollar for Dollar Plan, as a component, there is a format whereby every year a certain allocation was supposed to be made to support the Plan. It was no fly-by-night programme, it was a programme properly thought out and it was supposed to be enhancing the tertiary level enrolment, as we already heard. The education system is not only built at the tertiary level, we have to start from the preschool right up. If you have failures at every single level and every year we come to Parliament and we allocate a certain amount, \$2 million or \$3 million for a particular purpose—The Member for San Fernando East, the Prime Minister, always holds up his policy documents and says, “Vision and policy framework document”, that is his Bible. If you read that you would see that preschool and the education system is one of the pillars whether it be the UNC, the PNM or whichever government. It is building a society. When we look at the allocation and money we see waste at all levels. If that money that is being wasted right now under the PNM administration could have been saved, it could be used to improve the deliverables to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have situations in terms of allocation and transportation problems and the Minister is beating her chest while talking about breakfast and school lunches for children. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I am a seasoned politician in the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, allocations to that Ministry and failures at that level—I will get into this area because it is important in terms of the money allocated to the school child and in terms of the parental support in a particular area and revenue base from the Government. This is a piece of economics, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that I get it right. If the particular parent has to send a child—and that is the reason the UNC education policy was that we build these schools in particular rural areas.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, well, if that particular child cannot go to the school, let us say for some reason the parent cannot afford to send that child, the child drops out of the system—you are building a knowledge-based economy—and if that happens sporadically throughout the country, then you have a group of dropouts with whom the State has to deal through its social policy framework. That is the economics. If the children are close to the school and they can afford to go to school and they have the comforts—yes, you are providing books, but if they are not in school, what will they do with the books? You are not even sure if they are getting the books because the parent—you are sending the cart after the fact, Mr. Speaker.

So if you do not have access to the school, if you are sending the children way out of their district and they have to travel these long distances, the parent cannot afford it. In my particular area, they have sent a lot of children out of the area and the parents are coming to me because they cannot afford it. The State will have to find money in the social policy framework, that network now in that budget, to come back to compensate for these children, and that is the economics of the situation here; and we are not talking about dollar for dollar at this particular point in time. We are talking about millions of dollars.

The budget for the Ministry of Education is over \$3 million, Mr. Speaker. The transportation requirement for those children is close to \$21 million, probably about \$30 million. School security—\$30 million to \$46 million. We are not talking about \$10,000 and \$20,000. We are dealing with millions. So a \$497 million transfer this afternoon when you are talking about the large population of schoolchildren—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I must insist that you link this thing to the dollar for dollar out of the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

Dr. A. Nanan: Okay.

Mr. Speaker: Please; otherwise I will have to invoke the Standing Orders on you.

Dr. A. Nanan: Okay, Mr. Speaker. I will leave the pre-school and get to the enrolment with respect to the university.

Mr. Speaker, the Dollar for Dollar Plan is a 20 per cent component of what you are putting—this \$497 million. That 20 per cent component we are seeing here would improve the enrolment numbers. We had a plan for the dollar for dollar programme that is not in place right now. The accreditation system is not there for the private sector to get involved and we will continue to say that

because in every single area in terms of accountability, there are parents who cannot afford to send their children. The university only has a certain number of spaces. So in terms of the actual numbers that can be accommodated at the university, we need to broaden the network.

If you are looking for a knowledge-based economy, you must look at every single institution, whether it is private or public, to see how you could encourage these players to get involved and so you will be able to have more people at the tertiary level and have greater progress towards this knowledge-based economy. We are not against your knowledge-based economy. That is your only driving force, human resource development.

So, Mr. Speaker, this \$497 million allocation will be a part of that driving force but the main—besides the \$497 million coming in as a supplementary appropriation, we should have seen the legislative framework set up and I blame not so much the Prime Minister this afternoon, I blame the Attorney General for the lack of a legislative agenda. That should have been on the forefront of the Government's agenda, if they are dealing with a knowledge-based economy and they are looking forward in terms of a 2020 vision. What we are seeing, however, is a haphazard legislative agenda and I do not want to go there, Mr. Speaker, in terms of what they should have brought and what they have not brought. I will leave that for the debate.

Mr. Speaker, the private sector must get involved and they must have that mechanism, that is why I said that Minister Montano must stop playing the fool and making statements that he cannot support. Sorry. I take that back. The Minister must get to work. Stop hoodwinking the population, Mr. Speaker. I leave that for the Prime Minister to do. I am not going to fire the minister; but, Mr. Speaker, that is the importance here in this debate. You have that allocation coming in, \$497 million, but you are not telling us this afternoon about any accreditation system to bring in the private sector to have more people getting into the tertiary level system and so expand the tertiary level enrolment and meet the goals of your projected 2020 or 2005 as the case may be.

Mr. Speaker, when we deal with the enrolment system at the university—I am sorry the Member for Diego Martin West is not here—there must be a road map from the Ministry of Planning and Development in terms of where this country has to go and what are the requirements. You cannot have programmes like CEPEP, you must get out. I saw the Member for Laventille East/Morvant writing that in about four years' time you will have a phasing out of the system. "Ah hope

Finance Committee Report
[DR. NANAN]

Friday, September 12, 2003

dey doh kill you, you know? I honestly hope dey doh come and surround your house this evening, you know.”

Mr. Hinds: I never said that.

Dr. A. Nanan: Okay, but you have to be careful.

Mr. Hinds: You must learn to read.

Dr. A. Nanan: You have to be careful.

Mr. Hinds: Pre-school for you.

Dr. A. Nanan: He said that they were phasing it out on a percentage basis. “I doh know if he doh read what he writes buh dah is what he said.”

Mr. B. Panday: “He doh write wha’ he read.”

Dr. A. Nanan: Probably. He probably does not know what he wrote.

Anyway, you have to have a system, not a CEPEP university. You must have a solid academic base and that is why the University of the West Indies is a pillar in the Caribbean. When I hear talk about a university of Trinidad and Tobago, you must tell us what you mean. What are you going to do? Are you going to get rid of our system? Are you going to reduce or water down the system to facilitate a minority group? What are you going to do? This \$497 million that you are putting as a supplementary appropriation, is it that, as you are lowering the standard, you are going to bring more people through the back door? We want to know. We are not going to stand idly by as an Opposition and let you demolish the systems that we have in place in this country.

No person could stand in any forum and talk about a quota system for the university. A quota system? In Maryland they went to court. The Supreme Court ruled on a system of race admittance and now you are coming after the fact? It is a red herring and I must tell the country that. It is a red herring that they are putting forward to the nation. People are afraid now. You know how much people come to me and ask me now, “What am I going to do? Should I send my children abroad because the standards are dropping in Trinidad and Tobago?”

Mr. S. Panday: Discrimination. Discrimination. [*Interruption*]

Dr. A. Nanan: I would not give you anything that you will be able to write properly. You will get no information from me to make any credible statement. Mr. Speaker, sorry about that.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, so what are you doing? Trinidad and Tobago has a reputation in terms of the world scenario. Our students for years have been competing at the highest level, and when you put this money into this particular Revenue Stabilization Fund and a component is going to that Dollar for Dollar Plan, you are generating a surplus of tertiary level students that will make a difference in this country, but in terms of accountability you must have a proper planning mechanism to facilitate them when they come out of university, Mr. Speaker, and it all comes down to money. The appropriation, the money allocation, is what is important.

So, Mr. Speaker, my intervention in this debate was really to get the Prime Minister to understand that the country wants to go forward. The country must go forward in this globalization of the world. You must go forward with a strong academic system. You cannot try and water down the system at all levels. You must ensure that your standards are proper and you must use your standards to access other areas.

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

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Mr. Speaker, I would begin by thanking my colleagues opposite, the hon. Member for St. Joseph, the hon. Member for Caroni East and the hon. Member for Tabaquite for the contributions that they made in this debate.

Mr. Speaker, the Westminster system of democracy, which is the system by which Trinidad and Tobago conducts its democracy, calls for a government that, by way of executive authority, carries out its policy positions and accounts to the Parliament. The Opposition's responsibility is not to oppose, as some of us are wont to say, but to show the other side. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is expected that, as the Opposition discharges that responsibility properly, in seeking to show the other side, they will, in the normal course, come up with alternative proposals for the consideration of the government.

Mr. Ramnath: Really?

Hon. P. Manning: Yes. Considerations of national interest—[*Interruption*] Well, clearly, we went to different schools. Considerations of national interest, Mr. Speaker, dictate that if the Opposition adopts positions or articulates points of view that can be demonstrated to be in the national interest, then a responsible government will seek to incorporate those points of view into its public policy positions—most important.

So when we—well, there is a point that has to be made on this matter, and that is that when the PNM comes into government, it does not wholesale remove whatever policies it finds in place. We have seen what that has led to by the NAR's attempt to do it in 1986—1987 and we have seen the attempts of the UNC to do that again in 1995 and 1996. What the PNM does, Mr. Speaker, is it accepts the status quo as it is and considers that a point of departure. To the extent that we have new policies, we introduce those new policies immediately to the extent that we consider it prudent to do so, and, in the case of other policies, what we do is continue those other policies that we meet, even if they are inconsistent with our own positions, until such time as we can prudently determine our own policy position and implement it in the national interest. That is how the PNM sees it.

So when we came into government and we met the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund in place, it was not for us merely a question of removing the fund because we had expressed points of view to suggest that the fund was inconsistent with our own policy positions but that if we met it in place we would continue it, until such time as we are able to replace it by something that we consider superior. That was the position of the PNM. The mere fact, therefore, that the Revenue Stabilization Fund continues to be in place today does not by any means suggest that the PNM has changed its position and that it has adopted the fund. What it means is that the PNM is still in the process of clarifying its own policy position on this matter. That is what it means; and the reality is, in the Ministry of Finance there has been a very sharp divergence of view on this question of the fund. That is the reality.

Some say, as the Government has been saying, that if you set aside moneys that were, well, unanticipated revenues, a percentage of unanticipated revenues from any one source in any particular year, then what in fact you are doing is setting aside moneys for a rainy day. However, there is a different school of thought, Mr. Speaker, which my friend, the Member for St. Joseph, either did not appreciate or conveniently chose to leave out, that says that if you have a borrowing programme at all, then to be saying that you are setting aside moneys that were unanticipated when your budget was predicated, in a fund of any kind, is, in fact, to create a financial illusion. That is the other point of view.

So that, if in any one year you are going to be borrowing \$3 billion, or whatever it is, but through an Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund you are sterilizing financial revenues to the extent of \$500 million, in effect your net borrowing is \$2.5 billion. That is what the position is, and that to take this position, the point of view also goes so far as to say that what in fact you are doing is that you are borrowing to save. That is what it is.

Mr. Speaker, I take it one step further. When you borrow, you do so at a higher interest rate than the rate associated with a deposit in any bank and, therefore, if you are borrowing to save, it is an exercise that some people describe as an exercise in donkey logic because the net position in that is that you are going to be paying a service charge on your borrowings which would not have been applicable if you were not borrowing to save. Mr. Speaker, two legitimate points of view.

We have been debating the matter in the Ministry of Finance and the mere fact that we have not articulated yet a clear policy position on the matter means that the debate is not yet through and that we are not anxious to run into a position merely because we condemn something that happened before. We are trying—it is the way we conduct our business. We are looking to see where the truth lies, Mr. Speaker, and, as we identify that truth, we adopt it as policy in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is how we operate and therefore there is no inconsistency by any means.

Mr. Speaker, the legislative framework. The reason there is no legislation yet is because our minds are not made up as to whether we will keep it or not. Our minds are not made up. There is another argument that I need to put into the record of this Parliament and that is the idea of putting aside revenues for future generations, which is the main purpose of the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund as has been described by the Member for St. Joseph.

Mr. Speaker, there is an alternate point of view to that, of which I think this Parliament ought to take note and that is this: that, as you save these moneys for future generations, when in fact today you have an absorptive capacity that can accommodate higher levels of public expenditure and you have infrastructural requirements, Mr. Speaker, that can satisfy future and present generations, there is the point of view that the better course of action in those circumstances is to spend today so that you improve the infrastructure not for future generations alone but for future and present generations.

Mr. Speaker, these are legitimate arguments. [*Desk thumping*] These are legitimate arguments and these are the arguments with which the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is grappling. We are not running—[*Interruption*] Of course. We are not running into a position merely because we oppose or did not oppose something and we are quite right in our opposition to it.

Mr. Speaker, the current thought, I do not know if the Member for St. Joseph is as up-to-date as I on this matter, or my colleague from Diego Martin West who

in May of this year attended a meeting of the Caribbean Development Bank in St. Kitts and listened to the experts on this matter arguing the case, pointing out that there are two countries in the Western Hemisphere that adopted that route. They went the route of sterilizing excess revenues. The countries are Argentina and Colombia and that it had the effect of improving the perception of the banking sector on their borrowing capability which led to excess borrowings on the part of both countries and a collapse of the financial system in the case of one of them; another point of view; and therefore the debate continues.

I would have thought that my friend, the Member for St. Joseph, Mr. Speaker, in articulating a position before the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago would have been forthright with us and the national community in pointing out the various points of view on the matter and then coming to a conclusion. If you are here merely to advance your cause, then so be it. We are here for a different reason. We are here to try to find out what is in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is why, Mr. Speaker, even if we say that our position is this, and in a debate in this Parliament the Opposition gets up and they can, on the basis of cogent and reasoned arguments, demonstrate to the Government that they are expressing a point of view that is superior to ours, that Opposition has the assurance that we will adopt that point of view. That is how we are operating.

So, Mr. Speaker, far from what the Member for St. Joseph has said, we have by no means adopted the policy of the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. We have not done it. We are looking at all the histories associated with it and we will come to a conclusion. When we come to a conclusion on the matter, Mr. Speaker, if we confirm the fund or the need for a fund such as that, we will enact it into law. We will bring the legislative framework to which reference has been made by my friend, the Member for St. Joseph. If not, Mr. Speaker, we will replace it by something else.

We also said that the one argument that the minister had advanced at an appropriate time on this matter is the improvement in our credit rating. Mr. Speaker, some of the credit rating agencies in fact view the existence of a fund such as that as an insurance policy that improves your credit rating. Therefore, when I had made the point, as the minister had pointed out, that that was the only argument that you had put forward with which I was in sympathy, I repeat it. It is the only argument that you had put forward with which I was in sympathy because we have found that to be so. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, however, it is not just the existence of an Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund, it is also the way the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is conducting its business.

Ever since we got into office, we have been in constant touch, Mr. Speaker, with the international financial agencies, the rating agencies and major banks. Just recently the Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Mr. Ken Valley, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the other Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Mr. Conrad Enill, three of them together with relevant technocrats were in New York. They were on a road show discussing with potential investors in your country what is the state of play, what is government policy; how does government seek different positions; what is it necessary for us to do to improve our credit rating and so on—constant discussion between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the relevant agencies that pronounce on these things and determine, to a very large extent, what the credit rating of Trinidad and Tobago is.

If, therefore, within recent times there has been an improvement in the credit rating of our country, it is not because the previous government had put a stabilization fund in place—and that did contribute to it. Mr. Speaker, that did contribute to it. That was not the total story. It was that plus the other actions that had been taken by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the current Government, which is now altering the perception in the international community of what Trinidad and Tobago is all about. No longer is this country viewed as one with a government of profligate spenders and persons who pay scant courtesy to integrity in the conduct of public affairs but Trinidad and Tobago today is now being viewed as a progressive country in the Western Hemisphere, stable and democratic, with a vision, Mr. Speaker, that is ambitious but achievable in a reasonable time frame, the Vision 2020, and run by a government of people who are dedicated and committed not just to achieving the vision but to doing it in the context of integrity in the interest of improving the quality of life of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: All you did when you were Leader of the Opposition was to bad-mouth the country and bad-mouth government. That is all you did.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, they had their chance to talk. [*Interruption*] We sat here patiently—[*Interruption*—we listened to all that they had to say—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: You were bad-mouthing the country—

Mr. Speaker: Order, order please!

Mr. Ramnath:—and the UNC. Everybody t'iefin'. Did you meet Bechtel when you went to New York? The deal you are making with Bechtel down—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, please. Hon. Member for Couva South—

Mr. Ramnath: Oh, sorry Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Continue, Prime Minister.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, since we have come into Government I have not been to New York nor have I left the Caribbean.

Mr. Ramnath: The men you sent to New York.

Hon. P. Manning: You see, so you changed the tune. Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph was doing quite well until he began to engage on a foray into petroleum and projections for the future of production. He was talking, for example, of our petroleum resources lasting for another 20 to 40 years. He started off by saying 20. Upon realizing the corner into which he would have put himself by saying 20, he just added on 20 more—20 to 40, he added that on as an insurance policy. Mr. Speaker, the addition represented neither policy nor insurance.

I would draw to the attention of my good friend and hon. Members opposite a file that I came across when I began to work at Texaco Trinidad Incorporated in the geological department in 1969. In going through the files, I saw a letter. The letter was written by the then chief geologist to the then general manager of the company and that is what the letter had to say. It said that the chief geologist was expressing concern that the oil in Trinidad and Tobago could be running out and that the time had come for the company to begin to examine alternative methods of revenue if the company was to survive. The date of that letter, Mr. Speaker, is 1905. In other words, such a position did not recognize or take into account the complex nature of the geology of Trinidad and Tobago, a country that has been described as the graveyard of geologists.

Many a geological reputation has floundered on the stratigraphy and geology of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, Texaco Trinidad Incorporated in the 1940s had an opportunity to buy acreage on the East Coast and they turned it down on the ground that the East Coast was not prospective enough. Today, we know that all the gas going into LNG is coming from the East Coast with a little from the North Coast now. We know that. In other words, the nature of geology, it is not an exact science, and the geology of Trinidad and Tobago is so complex that nobody can make the kind of statement—nobody who is educated enough on the matter will be prepared to make the kind of statement that the Member for St. Joseph made this afternoon. The reality is that you do not know, you “doh” know—*[Interruption]* You “doh” know. *[Interruption]* You “doh” know. *[Interruption]* “Doh say dat.” You do not know.

Mr. Ramnath: But if you do not know you must be conservative. [*Interruption*]

Hon. P. Manning: Sir, you did not say that. [*Interruption*] No, you said 20 to 40 years and therefore if your premise is wrong then your conclusion is going to be wrong. That is what you said. Mr. Speaker, you see, when they talk, we sit here quietly and we listen to them. Whether we agree with what you say, whether we do not agree, it is our responsibility to pick sense out of nonsense and we do that. We do it. We listen to what they have to say. So that when we reply to you, we are dealing with the issues that you have raised. Mr. Speaker, just let me tell something to my hon. friend opposite.

Mr. Ramnath: Would you give way to a question?

Hon. P. Manning: Oh sure.

Mr. Ramnath: Is it not the practice of governments to hire consultants to do reserve calculations so that you can, based on those calculations at the present time, do the necessary planning? Otherwise, why do you hire Ryder Scott and all of these other people to do your calculations? So you must base—I say to you, you must have a reference point. Based on the reserves calculated by Ryder Scott of your present and probable reserves, you make an estimation of what the life of your production would be like. I do not think it is fair for you to be saying the Member does not know, because it is based on that he is speaking.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I would advise my hon. friend, the Member for Couva South, that there are four geologists in this Government and you have to be careful what you are saying because what he is saying is that we hire consultants, which in fact we have done, and we have asked the consultants to make an estimate of our petroleum reserves. Do you know what they have done? They have taken proven reserves, probable reserves, which we have not discounted, and possible reserves, all on the basis of current thinking and what has been discovered. On that basis the reserves position of Trinidad and Tobago today is 35.2 trillion cubic feet of gas—[*Interruption*—of gas. [*Interruption*] Hold on.

What it does not say, Mr. Speaker, is the potential of the basin, and that is the point. If you are looking therefore at a reserves to production ratio on the basis of your current estimates of the reserve, you come to one conclusion. What you also know is that on the East Coast of Trinidad and Tobago in particular, any development, any expiration programme that is entered into, will have the effect of proving up more gas.

Mr. Ramnath: That is speculative, all speculative.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, let me also tell my friend, the Member for Couva South, that on Saturday morning I am going to the hive. Do you know what the hive is? The hive is a piece of technology that BPTT has in this country. It is a three-dimensional modeling of the geology of Trinidad and Tobago, the province on the East Coast in which they operate. It is a piece of modern technology. In fact, it is ultramodern, Mr. Speaker, and I am going on Saturday morning so I can appraise myself of what the current thoughts are in these issues, what the latest models say, so that when I come to this Parliament I can speak on the basis of fact and not on the basis of surmise, as my good friend, the Member for St. Joseph, did.

Mr. Yetming: I appreciate the Member giving way. The point I was trying to make has nothing to do with whether it is 20 years or 40 years. The point I was trying to make—I was leading into the argument that the Revenue Stabilization Fund was created for a purpose and the purpose of that fund was to increase the intellectual capital of Trinidad and Tobago for the day—so that the country does not depend on energy resources. Whether the energy resources last 20 or 40 years, in any event we have a responsibility to develop the intellectual capital and that is why we created the dollar for dollar.

Hon. P. Manning: Yes, but, Mr. Speaker, he was making a second point. The second point he was making is that if our reserves give us a life of 20 to 40 years, then there is urgency in taking action now. That is the point he was also making and I say he could not say that. That if there is urgency, it is for a different reason, not the one that he has adduced—[*Interruption*—a different reason. Mr. Speaker, I am only debating what the hon. Member said. I am not ascribing to him anything that he did not say. I am only saying what he said. If that is what he said, then it is to that I address my attention.

In other words, Mr. Speaker—and I would tell my friend, the Member for St. Joseph, and hon. Members opposite, when you talk in this Parliament, one of the things you have to be sure of is that you are accurate in what you say—accuracy. Do you know why? Because the population of Trinidad and Tobago is listening to us and they come to their conclusions based on what they hear from us. They listen to the Government, they listen to the Opposition and they come to a conclusion as to where the truth lies in between there. That is the point. It is because of that that I could not understand why the—and my good friend, the Member for Tabaquite, will make a statement to the effect that, “When we were in government we were very thrifty”. Quotation. Exact quotation “When we were in government we were very thrifty.” What you really mean is, “We were very spendthrift”.

Mr. Speaker, no schoolchild in this country will believe that because they know otherwise. We have just taken possession of a report from a commission of enquiry where \$1.6 billion was spent on an airport that was designed initially at a cost of \$400 million. In other words, the cost—you could have built four airports for that. Where are the other three? We see one. Where are the other airports you could have built for the \$1,600 million instead of the \$400 million, the cost at which it was designed? Then the Member for Tabaquite says that they were very thrifty?

Hon. Member: What about the Hall of Justice?

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the Hall of Justice? You had your chance to talk. “Why you did not talk about the Hall of Justice?” [*Interruption*] But you are free to do it. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: We could raise it now, you know.

Hon. P. Manning: No, well, we have another Bill coming up. Talk on it.

Mr. Ramnath: Talk about cost overruns. [*Interruption*]

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, Whitehall.

Mr. Ramnath: Bernard could say what he wants.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, Whitehall. In Whitehall today I have to be moving my desk any time rain falls. If you see what has happened on the Prime Minister’s desk recently; important documents being subject to leaks from the roof and documents being impaired as a consequence of that. You are calling people every minute to move the desk here and when you put it here another leak opens. You move it there, leaks all over the place, but they spent \$34 million to refurbish Whitehall when the initial projection was \$5 million, and then the Member for Tabaquite comes and talks about, “When we were in government we were very thrifty”. Mr. Speaker, what is that?

I wonder if the Member for Tabaquite heard about the Miss Universe contest. I do not know if he heard about it. I do not know, Mr. Speaker, whether he is aware that they spent over \$100 million to run a beauty contest in Chaguaramas; and not only that. [*Interruption*] “Is ah fashion show; yuh right.” Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but the minute the contest was over and “de fashion show dun, dey wind-up de company midnight the same night”, and the reason for that is that you have no entity to sue, it does not exist, and then you are talking about, “When we were in government we were thrifty”?

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my friend, the Member for Tabaquite, has heard about the National Road Enhancement Programme (NREP)—\$1 billion to resurface roads in Trinidad and Tobago—and in the event that he does not know it, there is an enquiry on right now and I would tell you one thing. I do not want to go into all the details of it, but I will tell you this much. Based on the amount of bitumen that was used—well, which was paid for on the NREP programme at a cost of \$1 billion, if all that bitumen had been used “we would ah ha no Pitch Lake in Trinidad and Tobago today”. It would have disappeared. *[Interruption]* It is a combination of both, brother. It is asphalt cement—what is wrong with you? Mr. Speaker, he will get his chance to talk. *[Interruption]* That is the point I am making. It is an insignificant amount but they used so much—in fact, they charged for so much of it that all would have been gone. That is the point I am making. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Ramnath: You are misleading the House, man.

Hon. P. Manning: On what?

Mr. Ramnath: All the bitumen came from Pointe-a-Pierre.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, he is right, all the bitumen came from Pointe-a-Pierre because what they used is not just bitumen, it is a mixture of bitumen and asphalt. It is called asphalt cement. *[Interruption]* Well, all right. Well, when you get your chance to talk, talk. I am merely using my time. *[Desk thumping]* When you get your chance to talk, talk.

Mr. Speaker, you see because they come to the Parliament—it was not my intention to take this position this afternoon, but I really was incensed by the contribution of the Member for Tabaquite. I really felt—*[Laughter]* Yes, I really felt—*[Interruption]* *[Laughter]* “Yes, I would ah let it pass.” I would have allowed it to pass had it not been for the contribution of the Member for Tabaquite. *[Interruption]* “Eh?” No, it has nothing to do with that. Mr. Speaker, just let the record show, it has nothing to do with his great generosity towards the Minister of Education. *[Laughter]* It has nothing to do with that. It has to do with making statements to this Parliament that bear little relation to the truth because, you see—and “I ain’ talk about InnCogen yet, yuh know”. I have not spoken about InnCogen yet. *[Interruption]* Should I or should I not?

Mr. Singh: Talk about it.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, you see the Member for Caroni East is inviting me to speak about InnCogen but, as he invites me to do so, I notice his

colour changing. [*Laughter*] [*Interruption*] You want me to deal with your opposition in the party but I am not prepared to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I have not talked about the stadia. “What de stadia cost?” Initial price \$100 million; we paid \$400 for it.

Mr. Imbert: Four fifty.

Hon. P. Manning: Four fifty—and the Member for Tabaquite comes to this Parliament today and says, “When we were in government we were very thrifty”.

Dr. Rowley: “You say dat?”

Hon. P. Manning: Yes.

Dr. Rowley: You mean shifty?

Mr. Imbert: Shifty? [*Laughter*] You mean you were shifty?

Hon. P. Manning: I have not yet mentioned the desalination plant.

Mr. Singh: Talk about it.

Hon. P. Manning: The desalination plant—we are paying through our noses to this day—is \$200 million a year.

Mr. Imbert: We just had to get a loan for WASA.

Hon. P. Manning: We are paying through our noses, Mr. Speaker, because of the “thrift”, to which the hon. Member for Tabaquite referred in relation to the government of Trinidad and Tobago of which he was a part. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: That was a futuristic project. Futuristic.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I have said to the parliamentarians on our side, and especially the younger parliamentarians, that politics is an honourable and noble profession and if the people of Trinidad and Tobago do not share that view, if the people of Trinidad and Tobago today view politicians and politics as anything but noble, then politicians have nobody but themselves to blame for that position. When the Member for Tabaquite got up this afternoon and made the statement that he made, in fact it was grist for the mill. What in fact he was doing was contributing to a public perception of politicians that we on this side of the House are trying to change. I want to invite you, when you speak in the Parliament, please, accuracy is the name of the game.

Mr. Speaker, because he took it one step further. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: He made a deal with Ramesh Maharaj and Trevor and Ralph Maraj to overthrow a democratically elected government, you know.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, while the Member for Couva South talks about his erstwhile colleague, I am about to talk about \$25 million for a Tobago boat that never came.

Mr. Ramnath: Done deal.

Hon. P. Manning: We are told it is a done deal. He was a part of that government. [*Interruption*] You were not? Well get up and disclaim paternity.

Mr. Ramnath: No, I did not say that.

Hon. P. Manning: Well, get up and say you were not a part.

Mr. Ramnath: But I am answering you.

Hon. P. Manning: Get up and say you were not a part. The Member for St. Augustine was a part of that government. He was in the Central Bank. The Member for Caroni East? Well, we will deal with him in due course. The less said the better. In fact, I will “buy special pyjama” for you. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

The Member for Tabaquite tried to give the impression, Mr. Speaker, that something was improper in the way the Ministry of Education dealt with the whole issue of these cards that are used to access the books that are being given in the education system. I just want to reiterate what was said yesterday in a press conference and that is that the Government invited proposals, one bank responded, the proposal was examined, taken to the Central Tenders Board and the Central Tenders Board awarded a contract to that bank in accordance with the laws of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Desk thumping*]—a lot of questions to answer.

Mr. Speaker, and they are talking about—what else they had to say? The Member for St. Joseph was talking about if you sterilize the money in the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund you have less money to spend on hare-brained schemes. “You know any scheme more hare-brained than the airport?” Which one? Perhaps I should give you a new one. The schools of which the Member for Tabaquite spoke so eloquently—300 per cent increase—\$80 million; it cost about \$300 million at the end of the day and you are talking about profligate spending.

Mr. Imbert: “Yetming order investigation.”

Hon. P. Manning: You are right. The Member was moved. In fact, to the credit of the Member for St. Joseph, when he saw it he could not take it either. He decided, “I going to investigate that”. He decided to investigate it. How he finds

himself in the company of his friends not even God knows; but, as you make your bed so you lie on it. Mr. Speaker, my mother used to tell me, show me your friends and I will tell you who you are. If the Member for St. Joseph finds that he ends up with a reputation that is less than honourable, then, let me assure you, we on this side accept no liability for it. We gave you an opportunity, you chose to walk away from it. So be it.

Then, Mr. Speaker, completely extraneous to the matter before the House, they talk about this Dollar for Dollar Plan; and the Member for Tabaquite talking about, on education, the Government is lowering the standards—the PNM is lowering the standards. Do you know to what he is referring? He is referring to the recognition by the Government of grade 3 at CXC, forgetting, Mr. Speaker, that grades 1, 2 and 3 at CXC are equivalent to grades 1 and 2 at Cambridge. “He just doh know dat”, or chooses conveniently to ignore it and that all the countries in the region have done it, but when Trinidad and Tobago does it, it has a sinister motive and he did not say it directly but it is implicit, he put it in the context of race relations in the country. That is what he did. That is what he did.

I do not want to get involved in that but I want him to explain one thing. I want him to tell me what policy it was that the UNC pursued that led to a situation where, in the year 1998 there were 2,400 to 2,500 students at the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and in the year 2003 there are 350. I would like you to tell us the policy position that was pursued by the UNC that led to that. What was government policy at the time? We would like to know. I “doh” want to get involved—Mr. Speaker, I “doh” want to get involved in all of that.

The Dollar for Dollar Plan is fundamentally flawed in its concept and I will tell you why. You see, for you to benefit from a government’s dollar you must have a dollar yourself. That is fine. What about the man with no dollar?

Mr. Ramnath: He is halfway better off.

Hon. P. Manning: To those who have, more will be given and to those without, even the little that you have will be taken away from you and the PNM’s position is social equity. We are here to level that playing field—equality of opportunity for all, upward mobility for everybody. That is the PNM’s position [*Desk thumping*] and that is why we are against dollar for dollar; and if we have not replaced it yet, Mr. Speaker, it is because a comprehensive review of the tertiary education is underway at this time for those who did not know. I mean, we not “vupping”. The thing is fundamentally flawed and what beats me is that my colleagues opposite are unable to see it. It is fundamentally flawed. The poor

man has no chance with the Dollar for Dollar Plan. The man who—I “doh” want to get involved in it.

These are social issues, Mr. Speaker, but we set up a standing committee of the Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister with all the relevant ministries on it as stakeholders. The objective is to bring about a shift in the social policy and for Government to understand that especially in this age of globalization, Mr. Speaker, and this age where liberalization has taken place right across the board, that without an element of social policy, the rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer and one of the effects of the so-called trickle-down theory to which they clearly seem to subscribe is that it does not trickle down and that countries are reporting substantial rates of economic growth with substantial increases in the level of poverty. That is what is happening, and the government of Trinidad and Tobago, this Government understands that. We had—I thank God for six years in Opposition, you know, Mr. Speaker. If I could thank you all for nothing else, it is that. Thank you very much, gentlemen. It gave me a chance—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Ramnath: Go and thank Robinson, man.

Hon. P. Manning: It gave us a chance to sit without having to take you on and to think and rethink our policy positions in a number of areas and come up with new positions. We are by no means infallible and even now, Mr. Speaker, the positions that we are adopting are not perfect, and if as we go along our colleagues opposite articulate points of view that we feel are in the national interest, we will adopt them. That is the way this Government sees it.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that I have dealt with all the relevant issues that have been raised in this matter. There is one I did not deal with and that is Prof. Cudjoe. Mr. Speaker, I am not going to deal with the individual. Let me deal with the concept. The question is, should a dialogue on race relations in this country take place in the full glare of public scrutiny or should it be swept under the carpet? Some years ago, I was one of those who would have said that race relations is not a matter to be put squarely on top of the table. I would have said that. Today, Mr. Speaker, I am an older and wiser man.

I now am of the view that the way to salvation in this matter is public dialogue. However, I think that the protagonists in this matter must understand that they must have a sense of responsibility to the country when you do that and that in expressing their points of view they must not do it in such a way that they antagonize and create unnecessary discord in this society. As long as that is adhered to, Mr. Speaker, let the debate proceed. Let it proceed because, as the

debate proceeds the population is going to see this point of view, it is going to see that point of view and any other point of view that falls in between this and that and, at the end of the day, you have a more educated population and a population that is in a better position to decide where the truth lies.

That is why we set up the Centre for Ethnic Studies. One of the big flaws in this whole national debate on race relations is that it has proceeded on the basis of emotion and surmise and we set up the Centre for Ethnic Studies which my good friend, the Member for Couva North, in short order destroyed when he came into government in 1995. “I ain’ think it las’ long into 1996. It make ‘96? It ain’ make it for long”—almost instantaneous. Mr. Speaker, we set up the Centre for Ethnic Studies at the university, “eh”, so that in a dispassionate way the issues involved can be studied and we put two people to head at the time. One was Prof. La Guerre and the other was Prof. Ryan for obvious reasons and, as long as they agree on something, then that is the position. They have studied the issues and when that position becomes available we make the position public so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will know the basis on which their Government takes decisions on issues of this sort. That was the Centre for Ethnic Studies.

I will tell you, there is a proposal today to incorporate the Centre for Ethnic Studies under the administration of the University of the West Indies. Mr. Speaker, we have had to consider the wisdom of doing that. I am now in a position to say that it is a point of view that we do not share because one of the first issues that has now broken out is the University of the West Indies and I am sure that when the Centre for Ethnic Studies is established, all the talk that takes place, the centre will have a role in examining the issue. That is the role of the centre. The centre will examine the issue, and dispassionately incidentally, and the centre will decide what is correct and what is not correct and it will be for the benefit of the national community. On this occasion it is Prof. Fitz Baptiste and Prof. Brinsley Samaroo. Those are the two people who are going to head the institute.

Mr. Ramnath: That is to study the problem.

Hon. P. Manning: Yes, to study.

Mr. Ramnath: While you practise your discrimination?

Hon. P. Manning: No, no when they—no, they study and publish, and when they publish, you take your policy decisions based on that. Mr. Speaker, I understand why my friend, the Member for Couva South, is becoming so anxious because, you see, there was a basis on which they survived for a long time. It was by saying this and saying that and saying that without a shred of evidence,

tarnishing the PNM and everybody who comes within their path and surviving in their own community on that basis—on the basis of misinformation. To them, Mr. Speaker, the Government has taken a key and important step in ensuring that that foolishness comes to an end. We are going to study the issues, we are going to do so dispassionately, we are going to publish the results and we are going to let the population understand.

Mr. Speaker, in seeking this afternoon to appropriate \$497.4 million to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund, what the Government is doing is continuing for the time being the policy that we met in place when we came to office, initiated by our colleagues opposite. As I had said before, in due course we are going to review—in fact, we are reviewing these policies right now, and, as soon as an appropriate alternative is found—because, as I said, there are different points of view on the matter—then the Government will enunciate its policy for the benefit of the national community.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Third Report 2002/2003 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the proposal for the supplementation of the 2003 Appropriation.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning):

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to provide for the supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2003, be read a second time.

Question proposed.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, when we debated a few minutes ago the report of the Finance Committee, we did so on the basis of an agreement on both sides that we will deal with that resolution and the Bill that is before us at the same time and, therefore, in those circumstances, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

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

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this may be an appropriate time to take the tea break. We will resume the sitting of the House at 5.00 p.m., which will give you a little more than 30 minutes. When we resume, we will be taking the Motion by the hon. Member for Caroni Central.

4.27 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.02 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

**MOUNT HOPE MATERNITY HOSPITAL
(HIGH INCIDENCE OF INFANT DEATHS)**

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I take no pleasure in raising this matter at this stage of our Parliament, because it has to do with the high incidence of deaths of infants at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital. This is only a symptom of what has been happening in the Ministry of Health over the last two years.

Over the last two years, the ministry has been floundering and the tenure of this Minister so far has been characterized by crisis after crisis in the health sector. First, we had doctors going on strike. We had the collapse of the Emergency Health Service. The Health Sector Reform Programme was abandoned. Basic drugs were in very short supply or no supply at some of our major medical institutions. Just two days ago, it was reported that there was a shortage of drugs at the San Fernando General Hospital, something which has been corroborated by a member of the board and the management. We have a situation where the dialysis service at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex hardly exists. We have had a situation where there has been crisis after crisis in the health sector.

This present one, in which babies have died at the neonatal unit at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital, is one that certainly requires urgent attention. What is sad about all of this is that this situation did not come on us overnight. This situation has been developing from the beginning of this year. From the beginning of January, we have had a problem at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital which has escalated in the last two or three months and yet nothing has been done, allowing a death toll of 13 babies in the month of August alone. This situation calls for urgent action, but it does not only exist at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital. The difficulties that have caused this situation may also be present at the Port of Spain General Hospital and the San Fernando General Hospital as well.

Mount Hope Maternity Hospital
[DR. RAFEEQ]

Friday, September 12, 2003

There seems to be—which I will deal with in a minute—a massive cover-up of this situation. In the midst of all of this 13 babies died in August and eight in July. What has been the Minister’s response? It has really been typical of him, in that first of all he has been less than honest with the facts to the population; and secondly, he has sought to, in his typical fashion, blame everyone else except himself.

I will quote from the *Daily Express* of September 12, an article written by Richard Lord.

“Imbert said blame must be laid at the level of the managers. ‘It’s a management issue. Throughout the health sector...when you track the source of every problem it’s a management problem,’ he said.”

The Minister is blaming everyone else except accepting responsibility for the situation himself. What is the present situation? I would like to quote from two articles written in the *Trinidad Guardian* of September 12, 2003. This article is written by Jada Loutoo.

“Thirteen babies have died within the last month at the neonatal ward of the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital,...

Poor sanitary conditions are being blamed for the deaths, although Health Minister Colm Imbert yesterday assured the situation was being dealt with.

He denied that there was a ‘mystery illness’ which was claiming the lives of infants.

‘I am not aware of any mystery illness...we have found that there was an unacceptable number of children who were exhibiting some form of virus,’ he said

He denied that there were fatalities. But a well-placed source at the hospital confirmed that there were deaths caused by sepsis—an infection which overwhelms tiny bodies.

The source said the number was unusually high.

‘This is usually the mortality figure for the year, and here we have 13 babies dying in one month,’”

Mr. Speaker, I would now quote from the article written by Aleesha Khan in today's *Daily Express*.

“Killer bacteria at Mount Hope

The neonatal intensive care unit of the Mount Hope Women’s Hospital has been evacuated because of the outbreak of killer bacteria that have caused ‘tremendous morbidity and mortality’ among babies on the ward.”

Mount Hope Maternity Hospital

Friday, September 12, 2003

Here we have the Minister saying that there were no fatalities and here we have tremendous mortality and morbidity.

“The Enterobacter sp. is a potentially fatal virus responsible for a variety of infections,...

The exact number of deaths so far is unknown but a letter from the Mount Hope Women’s Hospital to medical chief of staff Dr. Esau Joseph recommending the closure of the ward confirmed that the outbreak of the virus has caused ‘tremendous morbidity and mortality’.

The letter, dated September 8, stated that every single in-patient was at some stage of Enterobacter infection.

‘As of September 5th, 2003, 100 per cent of the in-patients were at varying stages of treatment for this Enterobacter infection.

The letter also stated that all the patients have developed thrombocytopenia...”

Here we have the medical chief of staff of the Mount Hope Women’s Hospital saying that we have had tremendous morbidity and mortality at the hospital and we have the Minister saying that they have had no cases of mortality. What is more frightening is that the Minister is quoted in an article by Richard Lord, as saying:

“Imbert added that the development ‘is a regular situation; this is not something that is completely abnormal.’

Imbert said children died every single day of the year. He however admitted that ‘a greater number of children than normal had been affected by the conditions.’”

I hope that this is a wrong quotation.

“Imbert said about 30 babies died in the country every day...”

Mr. Speaker, that is not true. Our total mortality in this country for the year is approximately 8,000—9,000. Thirty deaths per day bring us up to 11,000, so that is not true. The Minister has been misleading the population. We are not really surprised about this.

We should recall that between the 1991—1995 period, there was the eggnog incidence in which the same government was involved where 14 defenceless, innocent people died under the hands of the PNM. They attempted a cover-up at that time, but because of pressures that were mounted by the people, they set up a

Mount Hope Maternity Hospital
[DR. RAFEEQ]

Friday, September 12, 2003

commission of enquiry under the late Sir Isaac Hyatali. Nothing was done about that report.

We must understand that it is true in a neonatal unit newborn babies will die. In the best institutions all over the world, neonates will die. When you have an unusually high incidence of persons dying, then it does send a signal. That signal was sent to this Government and the Minister, as early as January of this year. Nothing was done until it was exposed by the Opposition. When this matter was exposed by the Opposition, the Government then began to take action. There was a massive cover-up of this issue. I want to alert the population there is another issue which is brewing. There is an unusually high incidence of dengue deaths. We will deal with that on another occasion.

The response of the Minister has been flippant and he is joking with the health of the population of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly with these little babies. I think everyone understands the kind of traumatic experience a mother goes through when having a baby and shortly after, to have that baby die does put, not only the mother, but the entire family under severe pressure.

Today I want to recommend three things as we deal with this situation. Firstly, the Minister is ultimately responsible. In the interest of accountability, he must take full responsibility for this. [*Desk thumping*] Thirteen newborn babies have died in August, eight in July and several others before that. The Minister of Health should take full responsibility for this. It is not enough to blame doctors, managers or anybody else. He must take full responsibility for this. Mr. Speaker, the Minister should resign as Minister of Health. [*Desk thumping*]

Secondly, we on the side call for a full commission of enquiry to be established into the deaths of these little babies. Commissions of enquiry have been established for less than that; namely: Biche High School and the Elections and Boundaries Commission. Here we have over 25 little babies who have died and the population needs answers. We want a full commission of enquiry established so that the matter can be properly ventilated.

Thirdly—since the Government and this Minister has in some way admitted to some kind of liability of the Government—we are calling on the Government to pay full compensation to the relatives of those babies who have died. [*Desk thumping*] Those are the three recommendations that we are making this afternoon. We hope that the Prime Minister and the Government would take these recommendations seriously. They have the blood of these little babies on their hands. They must take their responsibility very seriously and deal with these three issues.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central, over the last several years, has carefully cultivated an image of being a responsible and mature individual, but that is merely a façade. The Member for Caroni Central has to get accustomed to speaking the truth. He must not come into this Parliament and tell untruths. The Member for Caroni Central has this habit of scandalizing very serious matters and putting untruths on the record. I shall now put the truth on the record.

In 2001, when the Member was the minister of health for Trinidad and Tobago, in the month January there were 10 neonatal deaths, in February there were four neonatal deaths and in March there were 10, all under the stewardship of the Member for Caroni Central. In fact, I am reading from the records of the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital. In 2001, when the Member for Caroni Central was the minister of health, there were 62 neonatal deaths at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital. He did not come to this Parliament and was not honest when he presided over the deaths of 62 little babies, as he likes to call it. He did not call for a commission of enquiry, an investigation and he did not resign. In fact, there were also in excess of 70 perinatal deaths. In fact, over 150 little infants died in 2001, under the stewardship of the Member for Caroni Central. He must come to the Parliament and speak the truth.

For the year 2003 so far, up to the end of August, we have had 17 neonatal deaths for the whole year, but in 2001 there were 62, under the stewardship of the Member for Caroni Central. We have had three neonatal deaths in the birth department and 30 perinatal deaths. For the year, so far we have only had 50 infant deaths. In 2001, there were over 150 deaths. These are the official records of the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital. In virtually every month in the year 2001, there were at least 10 deaths of little babies, as the Member calls it, at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital. What are the records for August 2003? There were 11. The Member was averaging 10 for every single month in 2001, whereas in 2003 we have had nine in February, seven in March, three in April, six in June and, for the record, we have had five in July; not eight, nine or 10 or all these ridiculous figures.

What is happening in this country today is that a Member of Parliament who should know better: a member of the medical profession, who has no information, he and his cronies have gone to the media and given false and bogus information resulting in newspaper articles. He then comes back to this Parliament, after giving the newspapers all his false, ridiculous and untruthful information, and reads the newspaper articles. The Member for Caroni Central could not produce one source document, one piece of statistical information or one record to

Mount Hope Maternity Hospital
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, September 12, 2003

substantiate his wild allegations. I have the actual figures. From the information I have, we have reduced the number of deaths from 150 in 2001 to 125 in 2002. For the first eight months of 2003, we have had 50 deaths. We are well on target to reduce the total number of infant deaths at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital to below 100. That would be a 35 per cent reduction in infant deaths in this country.

Mr. Speaker, it is time that Members are honest. The Member for Caroni Central comes into this Parliament and says 11 little babies—full of drama and propaganda—died in August and that there must be a commission of enquiry. Why was there no commission of enquiry in January, March, August, September or October 2001, when the Member for Caroni Central was the minister of health? The Opposition scandalizes these things. They make belief and pretend it is an abnormal situation. They tell untruths and feed the media with all sorts of propaganda and rubbish and this finds its way into the public domain. Then the Member would come back here—after he has fed the media with his garbage—and read his own text in the newspapers. It is irresponsible, reprehensible and immature. I am satisfied that when you look at the numbers, there has been a systematic reduction in the number of infant deaths at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital. The figures do not lie, they show you 150 in 2001, 125 in 2002 and only 50 so far, for 2003. If 50 is too much in 2003, then 150 was three times too much in 2001, when the UNC was in government. It is the kind of nonsense that we have to put up with in the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Speaker, I must get emotional, the Members opposite are not speaking the truth. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva South, please, the Member is in possession of the House, let him speak.

Hon. C. Imbert: I believe that if one child dies that is one too many, but the Member does not have to come here and lie about it! There were 150 deaths in 2001.

Mr. Speaker: You cannot. You need to rephrase that. You are capable of doing that. Withdraw it, please.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw that. As I said, if one infant dies, that is one infant death too many. But the 150 infant deaths for 2001 are on the hands of the Member for Caroni Central. When you trace what is going on, all of the people who are in the system and managing the health sector at this point in time, with few exceptions, were all installed by the Member for Caroni Central. The manager for quality and the chief executive officer were all installed into that

system by the Member for Caroni Central. But you know something? We in the Ministry of Health, under the PNM, are not making any joke.

We discovered that there was an unacceptably high level of infection—I want to be absolutely clear because the Member for Caroni Central was very careful to distort, modify, add, take away and completely change what I have said—at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital neonatal unit. We sent in the principal medical officer and the chief medical officer and we sanitized and sterilized the neonatal unit. In fact, the babies are being returned to the neonatal unit at this time. Within hours of being informed that there was an unacceptably high level of infection, we took immediate action. We moved in, sanitized and sterilized the neonatal unit. We are now putting in place the systems which the Member for Caroni Central failed to put in place.

He spoke about the shortage of drugs in San Fernando, but he was the minister for six years and presided over a system where the millennium year came and all the computers in the San Fernando General Hospital crashed because of the incompetence of the Member for Caroni Central. All the computers at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex crashed in 2000, because of the incompetence of the Member for Caroni Central. They were not year 2000-compliant. The Member for Caroni Central had done nothing to modernize the computer systems at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and San Fernando General Hospital. Because the computers crashed in 2000 and they did nothing in 2001 to upgrade the computer systems, the San Fernando General Hospital reverted to a manual system of inventory control for medication—all because of the incompetence of the Member for Caroni Central. We in the PNM are going to be spending, in the next fiscal year, in excess of \$15 million to completely computerize the inventory control system for pharmaceuticals in all our public hospitals. [*Desk thumping*]

If we had left those hospitals in the scandalous condition we had found them, through the bungling incompetence of the Member for Caroni Central and the interference of the Member for Barataria/San Juan—Mr. Speaker, there were always fighting, that is why they could not get anything done. The Member for Barataria/San Juan wanted to get rid of the Member for Caroni Central. It was a war in the Ministry of Health. That is what I found when I went there. It was a case of this one not talking to that one or this one undermining that one. That is what I found. While they were fighting, the board of the North West Regional Health Authority (RHA) was on a frolic of its own, resulting in persons appearing before the courts, destroying all the systems in the North West RHA. This is the

Mount Hope Maternity Hospital
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, September 12, 2003

legacy that the PNM has been handed over and we will rise to the occasion and fix that horrible mess that we found when we got in there in 2001.

I wish to report that we have sanitized and sterilized the neonatal unit. The children are now responding to antibiotics to deal with the Enterobacter infection that the Member spoke about. It is routine. That is a very common infection. That is another thing they do—routine bacterial infection that is standard throughout the world, Enterobacter bacteria—the Member for Caroni Central comes into this Parliament and pretends that it is a mystery virus. Enterobacter bacteria has been in existence in this country for more than 50 years. While the Member for Caroni Central was minister there was Enterobacter bacteria throughout the hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago but he will call his friends in the media and mislead them and fool them into believing that there is a mystery virus. I am happy to report that the children are responding well to antibiotics. We have sterilized and sanitized the neonatal unit. Once again, the PNM has come to the rescue of the population of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] You are a disgrace!

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Health (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the Motion before the House, there is a Motion on the Adjournment to be moved by the Member for Chaguanas.

CHAGUANAS SCHOOLS (UNACCEPTABLE CONDITION)

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (Chaguanas): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On September 01, when school reopened I visited my constituency and some of the schools adjoining my constituency. To my horror, I would like to describe what I saw on that day. The first school I visited was the Caroni Hindu Boys College also known as the Vishnu Boys College. After three years, since this school has been opened we have the Forms I in a community centre, Forms II in an old ministry of works building and the Forms III in an annex to the primary school.

5.30 p.m.

On July 02, 2003, I asked a question in this honourable House with respect to the Caroni Hindu Boys' College, also known as the Vishnu Boys' College, and the Minister of Education made a very long speech. With respect to this particular school it was promised that the school would have been started and would have been delivered during this financial year. When I visited the site of this school I

saw a steel structure which indicated that construction of the building had just started and, in my view, construction could be over a year from now. I would like to hear the Minister say something on that matter.

Mr. Speaker, I then visited Charlieville ASJA Boys' and ASJA Girls' Colleges—I must admit that the works there were near completion. I quote from the Minister's reply when she said that the starting date of this project was November 07, 2002 and the project completion date was May, 2003—and that date has since passed—and what I saw there was an utter disrespect for the people of Chaguanas. The schools were opened, of course without fanfare, and the roads were not paved and the entire place looked like a dump.

As a matter of fact, when I investigated further, the sewer system was uncovered. This sewer system is as big as this Chamber. When I enquired about the sewer system I was told that they were experimenting. There was an open sewer system for 1,500 students of both the Charlieville ASJA Boys' and ASJA Girls' Colleges. Although the schools were four or five months late in re-opening, the sewer system is something that I frowned upon. I want to repeat today for the Minister's attention that this is something that should not be treated with lightly, especially after hearing the Member for Diego Martin Central this afternoon talking about the caring of children. There are 1,500 students on one compound—I did not add the primary school students, which is another 800 students, and there is also a pre-school on that compound—and these children could be affected negatively by that open sewer system.

Mr. Speaker, I now move to the Saraswatie Girls' College. No work has started at that college. As was promised in an answer by the Minister, this school should have started at the same time and been completed in a few months' time. I wonder why the hon. Minister and the Government of the day targeted these schools for non-completion.

I also visited the Chaguanas North Government Primary School, which is another new school initiated, of course, by the United National Congress (UNC). When I visited this school, to my horror and surprise—this school was built for the surrounding area—all the students from the Chaguanas Primary School were sent to this school with teachers and principal en bloc. This school was built for 750 students and 800 students were taken in. Students for the primary section of this school were not yet interviewed, and we are talking here about an additional 150 students. I think that this is carelessness but, more than that, not taking care of the children in Chaguanas. I want the Minister to tell us what is going to happen to the surplus of children at the Chaguanas North Government Primary School.

Chaguanas Schools
[MR. RAMSARAN]

Friday, September 12, 2003

Mr. Speaker, I went to the Cunupia Primary School, which is in the constituency of Caroni, and this school was supposed to have been opened since March 2003. The children of this school were sent two miles away to the Enterprise Primary School for two years. I am sure you would have heard on the news or read in the newspaper where parents were protesting against the non-opening of this school which was promised to be opened in March 2003. To date, the school is yet to be opened. There are 1,000 students there since this is a big primary school, and these children are also affected negatively, and in today's world these children have to operate on a shift-system in a primary school. I think this is quite unacceptable.

When I visited the Monroe Road Primary School—again, as promised in this answer, construction was due to start in this fiscal year, but nothing has happened.

Mr. Speaker: I know you have mentioned Chaguanas and Monroe Road Primary Schools, but those schools are not related to your Motion.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I will not go into that. When I wrote the letter there were many matters that were mentioned and I asked if I could raise them. I am very dissatisfied with the way the children in the constituency of Chaguanas are being treated. I am also disappointed with the manner in which the Government has carried out its school building exercise. I think the Government must understand that governance is not only about sitting in offices, but they must also understand that there are children who are suffering for school places.

Mr. Speaker, what I saw in Caroni was very distasteful. There are teachers who have to travel or walk to classes through this village. The community centre is, at least, half a mile away from the Ministry of Works and Transport building. This is an old building which was condemned by the Ministry of Works and Transport, and this building is being used as a school. This move was supposed to be temporary and a school was to be built on that site, but I see no signs of anything happening in that area.

I want to put it to the Government that I know that they do not care. I expect a long-winded speech from the Minister, but the fact is how are we going to deal with these children since the dates for the re-opening of these schools have passed and the Minister made no statement on this matter? If the Minister really cares about the school children she would have come here at the start of the new school term and made a statement on the non-opening of schools across Trinidad and Tobago—of course, this is outside this Motion.

Mr. Speaker, what is happening is that these schools are being built with no support systems such as traffic control, et cetera, and nothing is being done to take

care of these children. This morning there was a traffic jam at the Caroni intersection where there are schools in four buildings, and students were crossing at that intersection. This was causing a massive pile-up of traffic. Again, this is because of the insensitivity of this Government. The Government is supposed to treat children better, whether they are neo-natal or whether they have long into this world. The Government must not only talk about caring, it must also show the country that it cares.

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

The Minister of Education (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a statement on the Motion before this House. The main focus of the strategic thrust of the Ministry of Education is to adapt secondary and primary education to the challenges of our post-industrial global village. The school building component will contribute to equity and a strengthened human resource base and the provision of universal access to five-and seven-year secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker, before I continue on this Motion before the House this afternoon, I would like to state that the schools—though they are not at present occupying what will be their permanent headquarters or campuses—are all operating, and I will provide all the necessary evidence of this in my reply.

In the following projects and programmes that are now being carried out by the Ministry, the Ministry of Education has repaired 327 primary and secondary schools during the vacation period; there is a continuation of the building of primary and secondary schools; and over 14 primary schools and five secondary schools are to be rebuilt during this academic year.

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

Mr. Speaker: What is your point of order?

Mr. Imbert: Sit down!

Mr. Ramsaran: Irrelevant!

Mr. Speaker: Please continue, hon. Minister.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: The technical upgrade of over 100 secondary schools is to be continued; re-structuring of the Ministry of Education and strengthening of capabilities within the ministry to support the transformation thrust has begun and the following divisions have been restructured:

- (a) The Education Facilities Management Division (EFMD);
- (b) The Human Resources Division;

Chaguanas Schools
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Friday, September 12, 2003

- (c) Educational planning; and
- (d) Expansion and upgrading of existing primary and secondary schools to ensure universal primary and secondary education as well as to accommodate plans for the de-shifting of junior secondary schools, and the conversion of senior comprehensive schools.

Mr. Ramsaran: I am leaving this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Chaguanas, just hear me, please.

Mr. S. Panday: You are too biased.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Princes Town, please. I do not think it is right—having brought a Motion and the hon. Minister is replying—for you to get up and walk out. Let me just state for the record that the House does not appreciate that action. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] Order please, Member for Princes Town. Hon. Minister, please continue.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Speaker, these initiatives would provide specifically increased access at the primary and secondary levels; minimization of overcrowding in the school system; and provision of a safer and more conducive environment for teaching and learning.

Four of the five schools questioned in the Motion are denominational secondary schools that are under construction under the agreement of the Concordat of 1960. This is an agreement that was signed between the State and the denominational boards of education. This Concordat agreement defined specific rights and responsibilities of the State and denominational boards.

Mr. Speaker, a cost-sharing arrangement exists for the construction activities as follows:

- (1) Primary schools: The Government provides 75 per cent of the cost of construction and 5 per cent of the cost of construction for payment of design and supervision fees.
- (2) Secondary schools: The Government provides 66 $\frac{2}{3}$ per cent of the cost of construction and 5 per cent of the cost of construction towards the cost of designs and supervision fees.

The denominational boards are responsible for the following:

- (a) Provision of the site;
- (b) Pre-design activities: Statutory approvals and environmental clearance, et cetera;

- (c) Designs;
- (d) Tender documents;
- (e) Procurement of consultants and contractors; and
- (f) Award of contract.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize that all the schools named in the Motion before this House are functioning at the present time. The Vishnu Boys' College, also known as Caroni Village SDMS, ASJA Boys' and ASJA Girls' Secondary Schools, Saraswatie Girls' Hindu College and Cunupia Government Primary School. In fact, the Cunupia Government Primary School will be formally opened on Monday, September 15, 2003. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Vishnu Boys' College has been functioning, with the concurrence of the SDMS Denominational Board of Management since September 04, 2000 at three locations namely:

- (a) at an annex in the SDMS Primary School building;
- (b) at a new block which was constructed on the SDMS Primary School compound; and
- (c) at the Caroni Community Centre.

Construction is under way, and in our agreement with the boards, we have agreed that we would phase the construction of these schools. Phase I, which consists of the multi-purpose hall, classroom and toilet blocks as well as substructure works are in progress at the new location.

With respect to ASJA Boys' and ASJA Girls' Secondary Schools in Charlieville, again, with the agreement of the ASJA Board, these schools began functioning on September 04, 2000 and are continuing to function in partially completed facilities. Construction works started in November, 2002 and are continuing. In Phase I, the multi-purpose halls have been completed and work on Phase II, which is classroom and administration blocks, toilet facilities and other areas are continuing. These works are 95 per cent completed.

With respect to the Saraswatie Girls' Hindu College, from the start-up date of operations on September 03, 2000, the Saraswatie Girls' Hindu College has been functioning in a temporary structure on the grounds of the SDMS Hindu Temple at Caroni Savannah Road, Charlieville, adjacent to the proposed school site for its permanent location.

Chaguanas Schools
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Friday, September 12, 2003

Final designs and bills of quantities are due for completion and evaluation at the end of September, and start-up of construction is scheduled for mid-November, 2003. I want to repeat that we have not yet received the designs and bills of quantities from the denominational board.

The Cunupia Government Primary School is on a shift system with Enterprise Government Primary School and this school is due to be officially handed over to the Ministry of Education on Monday, September 15, 2003. A walk-through of the facility took place on Monday, September 08, 2003 with officials from the Ministry of Education. The school was readied for occupation by the Ministry of Education as furniture and equipment were in place. Another walk-through of the facility took place today, Friday, September 12, 2003 and the keys were handed over to the school's principal. Parents and teachers were consulted and are eager to assist in setting up the school for opening on Monday, September 15, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, the two main issues that delayed the opening of the school were:

- (1) electrical works—and that is the planting of poles and transformers; and
- (2) Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA)—approval of the sewerage treatment system was outstanding.

While four of the five schools have not been completed, I would like to point out to this honourable House that the Ministry of Education was able to source additional funding for construction when the review of the Public Sector Investment Programme was undertaken, and by far the most substantial portion of this money was apportioned to these projects.

I wish to point out that in some cases the relevant denominational boards have not been able to furnish some of the necessary requirements early enough to allow the Ministry of Education to proceed with these projects. However, at present, these challenges have been sorted out and all of the projects are proceeding on course.

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

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.47 p.m.