HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 10, 2003

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have referred communication from the Member for Tobago East requesting leave of absence from today's sitting.

LETTER OF CONDOLENCE

Mr. Speaker: May I also inform Members of the passing of the mother of the Member for Tobago East. On behalf of all Members of this House I would direct the Clerk to send the appropriate letter of condolence.

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October, 06, 2003]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Basdeo Panday (*Couva North*): Mr. Speaker, it is written in the good book: "where there is no vision, a people perish", Proverbs 29:18. After 22 months, two budgets, three junior Ministers of Finance, and $50 billion, it is painfully obvious that the PNM has no vision for Trinidad and Tobago and absolutely no idea of how to position this country to face the challenges of globalization and the inevitable economic tidal wave of liberalization that is taking over the world. What is there in this budget really to answer? It really says nothing.

Whatever else a budget may be, it is certainly not merely a statement of income and expenditure, of so much more money for this and so much less money for that and so much more money for the other. At this particular time, one would have expected the budget to address basic concerns in the society. The critical elements that have been missing in our quest to build the prosperous nation were the happy people.

I have been a Member of this honourable House for 27 years. In those 27 years I have witnessed many budget presentations and many a budget debate. Those 27 years of service in this Chamber have led me to two inescapable conclusions about the PNM and its approach no governance, life and economic development. As far as governance is concerned, their strategy is to divide and rule; and they do it blatantly, shamelessly and without apology. It is a strategy in total contradistinction to that of the UNC, which is one of national unity, inclusion and the removal of all forms of discrimination in the society. Theirs, Mr. Speaker, is a dangerous strategy. It is one that is ripping the nation apart. This population is polarized, as never before, with the inevitable consequence that national, social and economic life is moving backwards at an unprecedented rate.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to life and economic management, their philosophy is eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow may never come. We see it in their reckless spending, lack of accountability and this brazen sharing of largess among their friends, families, wives and top supporters. These are the common threads that run through all the PNM budgets. After listening to the Prime Minister's budget speech I cannot help but be reminded of the old adage: The more things change, the more they remain the same.

When the UNC was in government, we presented seven national budgets. Each budget was part of an overall plan for the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. Each budget built upon its predecessor and laid the foundation for its successor. There was a continuity from budget to budget. Each budget of the UNC was informed by and based on a clear vision that the UNC had for Trinidad and Tobago. That vision was to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a knowledge-based society with a globally competitive, technologically driven, diversified economy that will sustain full employment, growing prosperity, equal opportunity, a secure life, social cohesion and the highest standard of living for all our citizens. I emphasize all.

It is a vision of Trinidad and Tobago achieving its true potential and taking its place among the great nations of the world. It is a vision for the future, in a world where the philosophy of comparative advantage has given way to the imperative of competitive advantage. It is a vision of ensuring that our country is equipped with the requisite intellectual capital that will enable it to take part in the new knowledge-driven global economy. Most of all, it is a vision for ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago participates meaningfully in the mainstream of the new world economy. Where? Tell me where in this budget is such a vision. The term

2020 is a slang like Anaconda and Baghdad, collateral damage and traditional kidnappers.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that the concept of Vision 2020 was taken from the Belizian Government and that Anaconda, Baghdad and collateral damage from the Americans during the invasion of Iraq? I think this Prime Minister should stop looking at CNN.

The 2004 Budget could best be described as a glorified shopping list. One gets the impression that the Minister of Finance asked each of his Ministers to prepare a list of things they think people would buy into and he merely pruned that list to fit the amount of money he estimates he will have to spend. There is no coherent strategy that informs the budget and the priorities that have been identified are the most obvious, even to the uninitiated whilst he avoids the real issues. The budget is really a damp squib; costing some $22 billion.

If this population were to ask itself: Will I be safer tomorrow? Will my job be more secure or will I have a job at all? How will I be directly affected by this budget? Will the quality of my live improve? The only sure answer will be: I am sure that if I exercise my democratic right to march and protest, then the riot squad, which will be better armed, will be better able to brutalize me. The answer will be: I will have to pay more for gas and it might just be possible that the hon. Prime Minister has woken up, for he has finally admitted that under his watch, crime has become a problem bigger than any other that Trinidad and Tobago has ever had to face.

The challenges of the global economy to Trinidad and Tobago and indeed the entire Caricom region are the challenge of the knowledge-based economy which brings with it the challenge of equipping our citizens with the attitudes, values and skills to participate at the upper end of the economy. It includes the challenge of global competition on a scale never before witnessed in the history of the world—trade negotiating skills and dispute resolution skills have become national imperatives in the situation—the challenge of innovation and the convergence of new technologies; the challenge of bridging the digital divide and lastly, but by no means least, the challenge to create sustainable economic growth and alleviate poverty. It is not about more money for corruption in the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), the National Housing Authority (NHA) and the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP).

We will not win the new economic gain by merely being the low-cost labour supplier. We will win only if we are a country with the highest productivity. This

means that our human resources are the most important resources for competing in the future and therefore our major challenge is to position our people to be among the most productive in the world and you do not do that by handing them a whacker and by putting a man to stand at the side of the road in a blue uniform.

Mr. Speaker, to better understand how we can position and prepare our country to meet these challenges, we must first have an appreciation of the international, economic and geopolitical environment that characterize the world. The future of our country and indeed our region depends on our ability to interpret and forecast the international environment as it relates to the global economics. We must identify the major issues and deal with them.

The major global issues of the day are terrorism, trade liberalization, AIDS, growing poverty levels, deterioration of the environment, financial liberalization and the consequence of national regulations of the trade in financial services that will follow. The impact of SARS and the geopolitical uncertainties caused by America's presence in Iraq has led to a slowing down of industrial production and trade growth. In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, the United States has waged an incessant war on terrorism with the military invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq so far being the high points of that war. The war on terror, coupled with domestic problems in Nigeria and in neighbouring Venezuela, has made the international energy markets more volatile. The coming of Iraq on the oil market will not be without its consequences.

At home the challenge of crime on an unprecedented scale has us all living in jail. The assault on the business community will make every young person, especially those of Indian descent, think twice maybe 10 times before getting into business. It is as though there is a concerted strategy in motion for ensuring that the next generation refrains from business as a profession. For the young Indo-Trinidadian, what he or she can expect is kidnapping and rape and for the young Afro-Trinidadian youth, it is murder and mayhem. They are both victims of a Government without a vision. The worst part of it all is the lack of resolve on the part of the Government to deal with crime. Indeed, as we watch our country spiral into lawlessness, the Prime Minister continues to keep bad company. He dignifies these friends of his with the title of community leaders and his party hires them to terrorize the Opposition or corrupt the government-run projects. He and his Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation continue to assume that the population has no intelligence, so that they bury their heads in the sand and pretend that the average citizens are not affected by crime. They justify their

incompetence by telling us that we should be happy because other places of the world have more crime. I wonder if this Prime Minister knows that the majority of the population is of the view that the Government actively promotes crime against people who are not PNM supporters?

The most visible sign of maturity is people taking responsibility for themselves. On the matter of crime, the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation and his Prime Minister blame everything and everyone else but themselves for the crime situation. It does not seem to have dawned on them that they are now in the Government and they are responsible. They do not seem to know that the population has put them there to find solutions. It is all part of the PNM mindset that says that accountability is merely an abstract concept. It is also the explanation for their failure even to attempt to account for Government spending. They believe that they could hide their own corruption by accusing others of corruption. These are the challenges and issues that define our reality.

The UNC was well on its way to ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago prepared itself for these challenges, but as fate would have it, on December 24, 2001, the former President of the Republic, in flagrant violation of the Constitution, selected a PNM Government. I suppose some people feel that two tax-free cars and payment of medical bills justify this kind of thing. I call it morality and spirituality redefined. We must not despair. It is said that a democracy is not merely a system of government; it is also a learning process; and the people have chosen, they say, and by God the people are learning.

Today, sadly, the country is once more held hostage by the slash and burn economic policies of the PNM. The same slash and burn policies and ideas that they practised from the 1970s and the early 1980s when they presided over the oil boom of 1973—1983 that has resurfaced. The names have changed but the story remains the same. The PNM ideas of 2003 are the same old ideas of 1973. Instead of Special Works, we now have CEPEP and NHA. Instead of oil boom, we now have gas boom.

Again, just like they did in the 1970s with the disastrous social consequences, the PNM's focus is an aggressive and accelerated housing programme, geared not at providing relief for persons native to the communities where these projects are located, but geared at house padding for the next general election. Anyone who has any knowledge of the kind of conflict and violence such a policy has caused on the West Bank between Israel and Palestine would tread warily with such a plan. As George Bernard Shaw says: "A Government that robs Peter to pay Paul

can always depend on the support of Paul". I do not think he was referring to Rev. Paul. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, one has only to read the *IMF Article IV Consultation Staff Report* to see that the Opposition is not alone in its observation of the reckless and wild spending of the PNM since they returned to Government in 2001. In the IMF Report, they cautioned the PNM about increasing non-discretionary spending. Listen to what the report says. I quote:

> "The government needs to avoid the pitfalls from previous oil booms, (wasteful inefficient spending) and consider sustainable consumption in the context of the country's energy wealth."

That is the International Monetary Fund reminding the PNM of their sins during the oil boom, when others described us as having a carnival mentality with money passing through the society like a dose of salts.

The report goes further to say:

> "On current trends, proven reserves could be depleted within 10 years; a relatively short period. Furthermore, the future oil price trajectory may be less favourable than currently envisaged which would further deteriorate fiscal revenue prospects."

The IMF further warns, and again I refer to the report:

> "There is a risk that public spending may be inefficient and unproductive as occurred in earlier oil booms and crowd out the employment-generating non-energy sector. Public expenditures should be tempered to what can be effectively and efficiently spent, consistent with the country's absorptive capacity."

Mr. Speaker, in spite of all this advice, untrammelled and wild government spending has again been inflicted upon the country since the PNM assumed office some 22 months ago.

Apart from a few painted and neatly ordered stones, we have seen little or nothing to show for almost $35 billion that the Government has spent and for which there has been no accountability. In fact, the Prime Minister's philosophy is that instead of saving money to guarantee long-term economic stability, he intends to spend that money on infrastructure. However, one is confused as there is little or no evidence of infrastructural development taking place, even though hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent. If one were to look around the

country, one would note that there has been little or no improvement to the nation's infrastructure under the PNM and no significant capital investments. Where did all that money go?

In the last budget the largest allocation went to education and the second largest to health; both critical service delivery areas. However, it is noteworthy that there was no construction of a single new school to serve the ever-expanding demand for education. There was no construction of hospitals and health centres. One wonders if the PNM can build anything at all. We know they can pull down roofs. The Prime Minister, by his own admission has told us that the PSIP for 2002/2003 was a failure. In all areas of governance, this Government has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for incompetence, especially in the areas of economic management, health, education, national security and in the Office of the Attorney General. The Ministers of Health, Education and National Security and Rehabilitation, and the Attorney General in particular, have all bungled their respective portfolios from one crisis to another, demonstrating in each case an incompetence that is incomprehensible and that has left one with no other conclusion but that they are simply not up to the task at hand.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of education, we read in the *Guardian* newspaper of Sunday, September 21, 2003 that the Ministry of Education has failed to pay moneys to private secondary schools for children that were assigned to those schools. By failing to do so, this Minister of Education has put the UNC's vision for universal secondary education in Trinidad and Tobago in jeopardy and uncertainty. Even in the area of providing "breakfastes" for our school children, this Minister has bungled her portfolio, causing severe deterioration in the School Feeding Programme which the UNC had built up as one of the best in the Western Hemisphere.

Mr. Speaker, in health, the minister of confrontation and conflict has been such a dismal and unprecedented failure that the Prime Minister had to call in the Minister of Public Administration, a non-elected Senator, to handle the dispute with doctors. That was a clear indication of who is really running the country. Even so, the importation of doctors from Cuba to meet the increasing demand for medical professionals was another example of their myopia in solving problems of the country. This is another stopgap measure of the PNM: a short-term solution to a long-term problem. A solution would, of course, be to expand the intake of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of the West Indies and train more doctors locally to meet increasing demands, but the PNM does not see that far into

the future; just as they did not realize that to end the 11-plus fiasco, all one had to do was to build more schools.

Under the UNC, we established a highly successful Emergency Health Service (EHS). Today reports are that the service is rundown with many ambulances in a state of disrepair. The PNM has a habit of running things down, even if it is a prayer in Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] The proposal under the 2004 budget to buy new ambulances could only work if adequate mechanisms are put in place to keep them working. But this is not the PNM's way. Under the UNC administration we established VMCOTT for the purpose of maintaining government vehicles, especially police vehicles. The PNM has all but destroyed that too. Under the UNC there were always visible signs all over the country that the Government was at work, that activity was taking place. There was the construction of the Piarco International Airport of which we—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: Are proud.

Mr. B. Panday: Do not anticipate me Member. I will read that over for the benefit of the whole country. There is the construction of the Piarco International Airport of which we and thousands of other people in this country are exceedingly proud. [*Desk thumping*] There is the San Fernando Bypass, the construction of the National Library Complex, the upgrade of the road network and the construction of over 30 high schools and primary schools. Today, all those signs of progress have vanished, except for CEPEP which now stands for "Continuous Employment Painting Every Pebble".

The proposed overpass at the intersection of the Uriah Butler and Churchill-Roosevelt Highways has been shelved to the frustration of thousands of consumers and commuters. Mr. Speaker, on a morning the traffic jam starts as far east as Trincity Mall on the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway and as far south as the Munroe Road Flyover on the Uriah Butler Highway. People are suffering. Children cannot get to school on time; millions of man-hours are lost; productivity is reduced, but still the cries from the public for the overpass go unheeded. All we get are the moronic smiles of a minister who, in the short period of one year in office, is able to acquire multimillion-dollar homes.

On behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, I call upon the Government to act responsibly; either build the overpass or do something else to solve that traffic problem. Doing nothing is not on option. We cannot be a competitive nation if our people spend their time in traffic jams instead of being on the job or in schools.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I come now to a very important institution the UNC had set up and which the PNM seems bent on destroying. When we were in office, we were aware of the cyclical nature and the volatility of the international oil and gas markets. We were aware that Trinidad and Tobago as a small nation would be exposed and adversely affected by the shocks in the price of oil. That is why we established the Revenue Stabilization Fund, a move for which we were praised by the same International Monetary Fund (IMF). Interestingly, Norway, a country with one of the highest standards of living in the world has a well-developed Revenue Stabilization Fund with almost $100 billion saved in it.

Mr. Speaker, as I am sure you know that in the Government's 2002 election manifesto, they promised to bring legislation to this Parliament relating to the Revenue Stabilization Fund. Last year, in the Prime Minister's budget speech, he repeated that promise. To date, we are yet to see this legislation. This is another example of the absence of a properly thought-out legislative agenda. It should therefore come as no surprise that the IMF said that the Government seems to be non-committal about reactivating the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

In their advice to the Government, the IMF suggests that the current Revenue Stabilization Fund be strengthened to enhance its flexibility, transparency and accountability. The Opposition fully endorses the recommendation of the IMF in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, the budget is sadly lacking in vision and innovation. Whether we like it or not, we are in an increasingly globalized world. The competitiveness of our nation will be the key driver of economic activity. As I mentioned before, in this globalized environment, the philosophy of comparative advantage has given way to competitive advantage.

The World Economic Forum has reasoned that:

> "True competitiveness is measured by productivity. Productivity allows a nation to support high wages, a strong currency and attractive returns to capital accompanied by high standards of living."

And I hasten to add, on my own, that productivity does not necessarily mean working harder; it means working smarter.

In the 2002/2003 Global Competitiveness Report, the World Economic Forum notes that Trinidad and Tobago shows:

> "…notable competitive disadvantage in technology, public institutions and environmental indicators."

Mr. Speaker, it is common knowledge that the energy sector, in spite of the large volumes of capital that poured into the country over the last 10 years to construct the various Atlantic LNG Trains, the methanol and ammonia plants, provided a disproportionate number of permanent jobs once these plants were completed and operational.

In fact, what we now have in this country is a state of jobless growth. In spite of the fact that during the UNC's term of office we have been able to attract massive investments in the energy sector, few permanent jobs were created once the plants came into operation. The 80,000 jobs we created during our term of office were due mainly to our diversification efforts outside the energy sector. After 22 months of PNM corruption and maladministration, the news from the *Central Bank Economic Bulletin* of May 2003 tells us that unemployment is rising. The figures of the Central Bank do not even take into account the loss of 9,000 jobs, as a result of this Government's mindless, heartless, cruel, malicious and politically motivated closure of Caroni (1975) Limited. [*Desk thumping*] I will return to this later

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition believes that the current real rate of unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago lies in the region of 16 per cent. This means that we are back to the days of 1995 when the Member for San Fernando East was Prime Minister, and unemployment was 18 per cent.

Where in this budget is the PNM's plan for diversifying the economy, if indeed it has one? No one would have thought that with all the platitudes being bandied about the place such as Vision 2020, this budget would not have comprehensively and unequivocally addressed the issue of diversification of the economy away from oil and gas. In terms of imperatives, this is one of the most urgent tasks facing Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, while the winds of global change are blowing, we must recognize that oil and gas will not be here forever. In fact, there is a school of thought among petroleum economists and energy experts that oil is a curse. One only has to look at Nigeria, Venezuela, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq and Mexico to see how the oil wealth of those countries has never benefited the masses that continue to live in ever increasing poverty.

What is the solution? When we were in office, we proposed diversification through the development of the non-energy sector of the economy. Sector specific plans were developed for the following industries:

(a) Leisure;

(b) Marine;

(c) Chemicals, petrochemicals and plastics;

(d) Food and beverage;

(e) Printing and Packaging; and

(f) Information technology/electronics.

The basis for choosing these sectors was a study done by the consulting firm of Trade Development Institute (TDI) from Ireland. This study had been sponsored by the Commonwealth Development Council.

Mr. Speaker, for each of these sectors, Trinidad and Tobago has certain strengths and weaknesses. For example, our low energy cost was considered an advantage to these industries. In almost every sector however, there is a human resource deficiency that has to do with the absence of critical mass of trained and skilled personnel required to drive such industries.

Information services and information technology products have become essential to the development of economies. The convergence of data communications and telecommunications is leading the way in the manner we do business globally. In the area of information technology there is a significant skills shortage in software development, project management and people with a good mix of information technology and business skills. Studies also show that almost 23 per cent of the information technology professionals trained in Trinidad and Tobago are migrating abroad to find better paying jobs, and I imagine to escape kidnapping.

For Trinidad and Tobago to be a player in the global economy, it is imperative that we deal with the current human resource deficiency in the information technology sector. Instead of assisting the University of the West Indies to do just that, agents of the PNM, as part of their well-known hegemonic agenda, have aimed their guns at the university.

While the rest of the developed world rushes ahead, we cannot and must not be distracted by the agents of the PNM who preach race and hate. A computer terminal does not care if you are Indian, African, Chinese or Caucasian. It only cares that you have the skills and knowledge to operate it.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come for Trinidad and Tobago to implement a whole new generation of economic measures that will give a quantum boost to our economy. Going forward will not be business as usual. Indeed, it will be

business unusual. What the Minister of Finance has outlined as a second generation of economic measures is not only inadequate; it completely lacks an implementation strategy. Moreover, it contains nothing new, but merely repeats some of the ideas that the UNC had articulated during its tenure without addressing the problem of the capacity to implement. It is time for us to start asking ourselves what is beyond the knowledge era and to start preparing for that. I will return to this subject later. Let me for the moment touch upon another matter of critical concern for our economic survival.

Mr. Speaker, it is said that a leader must have the capacity to define reality. If this is indeed so, the Prime Minister must either have a warped view of reality or he refuses to face it altogether. The reality is that when the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is realized, the lives of 800 million people living in 34 countries of the Americas—including Trinidad and Tobago—would be changed forever. Protectionism will give way to liberalization, and the success or failure of developing nations like ours will be a function of our competitiveness as a whole.

The Opposition understands that there are over 100 pieces of legislation that must be amended or drafted anew, passed by Parliament and implemented if this country is to be readied for the FTAA. Laws relating to the importation of foreign goods such as the Food and Drugs Act need to be reviewed and updated, if we are to protect our citizens from substandard products. Sadly, this Government seems to have little idea or no concept of any planned legislative agenda, far less a programme of work which will look at the statute books as regards the FTAA; another example of their learned helplessness.

With the advent of the FTAA, it is expected that there would be an influx of foreign manufactured goods into the country. In this regard, we have heard nothing of the level of preparedness of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs and the Bureau of Standards, in the context of the FTAA. Is it that they are waiting on a crisis to develop and people to die, as happened last month with the death of 13 babies at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex? In this matter, the Minister of Health follows the example of his leader and his colleague, the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation. The Minister took no responsibility for this or any other health-related matter. The Minister blames everyone and everything else but his incompetent self. This is another manifestation of their incompetence, immaturity and inability to govern, to which has been added this Minister's arrogance and tactlessness. Some people say that he is very short—sighted. [*Desk thumping*]

Where in this budget speech is there any indication that any thought has been given or preparation made by the Government for the accommodation of the concerns of the labour movement, environmental groups and other civic organizations into trade negotiations between Trinidad and Tobago and the World Trade Organization (WTO)? Civil society has been completely ignored in the Government's strategy or lack of it for trade liberalization. The Government is literally telling civil society that it has no value to add on this matter. This is horribly disrespectful and ought not to continue.

Globalization must be given a human face. So far it has been merely serving commercial interests. That is why poverty is one of its major consequences. It follows that participation of civil society in trade liberalization is urgent and essential. Trinidad and Tobago must do everything possible to ensure that civil society participates aggressively and meaningfully in trade negotiations, whether it be the WTO or the FTAA or the Association of Caribbean States (ACS).

Local manufacturers are already bracing for the onslaught of the FTAA and the flood of foreign goods and services that would bombard this country. To date, the Government has done little or nothing to prepare or to assess the state of readiness of the local manufacturing and services sector to produce and export competitively on world markets in time for the implementation of the FTAA, which is expected to come on stream in 2005.

There is also the need to educate members of the public and the business community about the FTAA. In a recent survey conducted by Ernst & Young, it was discovered that 62 per cent of the local business sector remain in the dark about the real impact of FTAA and WTO rules.

One would have thought that in this budget, the Government would have devised a comprehensive plan to assist local manufacturers in upgrading their facilities to retrain their staff in preparation for the FTAA. Again, as with the legislative agenda, there is an absence of planning, an absence of a vision. This budget really lacks depth. It is a $22 billion squib when it should have been an intercontinental ballistic missile.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is the economic powerhouse of the Caribbean. The development of Caricom equals the development of Trinidad and Tobago. It is in our interest to make sure that all the Caricom protocols are implemented. But this Government seems blissfully unaware of the importance of trade liberalization.

It is time for Trinidad and Tobago to put trade negotiations on the front burner of our foreign commercial policy. The economic future of Trinidad and Tobago is likely to be impacted upon by trade negotiations more than any other economic phenomenon that we now face; yet, not a word, not a thought in the budget.

Trade negotiations are a complex matter. Do we have the technical capability to participate meaningfully as we need to in negotiations? Do we have enough trained and qualified people? Are we mobilizing our human resource in this regard, or are we excluding those whom we believe do not share our political affiliation? Are we discriminating against our qualified citizens on the basis of race or political affiliation? If they are excluded, they will migrate to other countries and you will soon find them negotiating against us. Is the budget for trade negotiations adequate? Are we making any impact on the policy level of the international institutions? Are we in a position to deal effectively with dispute resolution?

Mr. Speaker, the answer to all these questions is a resounding, no. Trade negotiations were a matter that the UNC had started to deal with in earnest. Members opposite, without vision as they are, have relegated it to the dustbin. I urge them to put it back at the front of their economic strategy. I wish to warn the PNM that they neglect trade negotiations at the long term economic peril of Trinidad and Tobago. Posterity will not forgive them for it.

Trinidad and Tobago is now the largest exporter of natural gas to the United States of America. Indeed, we are the largest producer in the Western Hemisphere. Revenues from natural gas have now surpassed those earned from oil. In the March 2003 edition of *Latin Finance*, Prof. Anthony Bryan of the University of Miami wrote, and I quote:

> "The government and society together need to find a mechanism to spread the growing energy wealth and determine how these resources can be best invested to create a sustainable economic base for current and future generations."

To date, we have seen no credible plan presented by this Government to use the revenues from natural gas to create a sustainable economic base. The Opposition is in total agreement with economist Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir. He recommends that the greatest benefit of this revenue would be derived if it is saved and invested so that economic stability can be preserved in an environment of certainty and not one of uncertainty and volatility. The philosophy of saving and investment for the future seems to be anathema to the PNM. I remind them

again of the example of Norway, which I mentioned earlier, and strongly recommend that we do the same.

What savings ratio is the Minister proposing in this budget? Is the projection of the oil price realistic or optimistic? What will be the effect on the budget balance if the price of oil is less than the Minister predicts? This is another case of a lack of strategy. No target has been set for savings.

The Opposition is equally concerned about the current natural gas reserve/production ratio, which is constantly decreasing, given that production rates have increased with the coming on stream of Atlantic LNG Trains 2 and 3. Given the current rate of depletion of existing reserves, it is expected that proven reserves would be exhausted by 2020. That is the real vision. Some experts have even calculated that we only have 15 years of natural gas left.

At the present rates of production of LNG, 60 per cent of proven natural gas reserves have been committed to Trains 1, 2 and 3. When Train 4 comes on streams, it is estimated that 80 per cent of proven reserves would be committed exclusively to the LNG industry.

Mr. Speaker, there is also the issue of gas prices on the international market. Since we are no longer solely reliant on oil, and we now have natural gas to widen the revenue base, gas revenues and gas pricing have become an essential part of budgeting. For the last 12 months gas prices averaged at or about US $5 per mmbtu. Energy analysts predict that this price will fall to US $4 per mmbtu for the next 12 months. Again, this is an example of just how volatile international energy prices can be.

In early August of this year the Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez—who according to this Prime Minister is responsible for crime in Trinidad and Tobago—paid a visit to this country. Coming out of this visit was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between this country's Government and the government of Venezuela. The Prime Minister as a trained geologist fancies himself a person with some knowledge of the energy sector. The Opposition understands that the proposed eastern Caribbean gas pipeline may now be expanded to carry gas to Cuba and Puerto Rico. Apart from the obvious engineering, technical and economic challenges posed by the construction of such a pipeline, a new dimension has now been added that represents a geo-political quagmire of sorts given that Puerto Rico is an American territory and Cuba is persona non grata in the eyes of the American government. Is this another case of putting foot in mouth?

Be that as it may, the more immediate issue for us lies in the following questions:

1. What is the Government doing about the current take or pay arrangements between the National Gas Company and BP Amoco as the new LNG trains are being negotiated?
2. Is the virtual monopoly status of BP Amoco as a gas supplier being addressed in the negotiations?
3. Can the Government give the nation the assurance that the issue of taxes is being addressed in a manner that Trinidad and Tobago will be reasonably assured of a steady and predictable revenue stream from gas in the future?
4. What assurances are being given by the investors about the development of downstream industries if Trinidad and Tobago allows new trains?
5. What will be the status of our reserves if the new trains of LNG are allowed?

Mr. Speaker, the budget does not seriously address the problems of the local onshore dimension of the industry. The Opposition is very concerned about what is being seen as the death of the local onshore oil industry in Trinidad and Tobago. The onshore oil industry in Trinidad has virtually ground to a halt under the watch of the PNM over the past 22 months.

Current land production is approximately 60,000 barrels per day. It is estimated that some 300 million barrels of oil remain buried in mature fields in south Trinidad. At present there is little or no drilling activity on land in south Trinidad. This has virtually paralyzed the onshore oil industry; a development that one would have thought would have caught the attention of the geologist Prime Minister and his energy czars. The neglect of this historically and important component of the energy sector has seen countless opportunities for economic development and job creation lost. The Government continues to turn a blind eye to the calls being made by the South Chamber, for the tax regime as it relates to the exploitation of mature onshore fields to be revisited. All they have got so far are promises, promises and more promises. This must be the most promising Government that there has ever been.

In the *Guardian* newspaper of September 18, 2003, the South Chamber accused the Prime Minister of reneging on promises to revise the fiscal regime for onshore production. The Chamber added that the onshore oil industry now faces terminal decline and the loss of thousands of jobs.

What more warning does this regime need? How long must the onshore sector wait? The fact of the matter is that taxation and government facilitation are important components of the competitiveness equation of the industries. The UNC therefore demands that the Government deals with the onshore oil sector as a matter of urgency.

Mr. Speaker, while the Government of the day seems to be revelling in the fact that we are poised for increased revenues from oil and gas, the hard truth is that the PNM has a history of mismanaging periods of economic booms. The IMF has warned the PNM against counting their chickens before they are hatched. The PNM, however, seems not just content with counting the chickens, but on killing, cooking and serving it to its party supporters and financiers. For them, the word "boom" means time to party and have a good time. In this regard, the party has already started the feeding frenzy at the national trough with an obscenity that defies imagination.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that Government's spending is based on expected future revenue streams from oil and gas. This spending is therefore anticipatory and demonstrates the guesswork that passes for long term fiscal planning under the PNM. The Prime Minister boasts that politicians are for the first time directly involved in planning the budget. He must be talking about the PNM and the PNM alone. In any event it is a confession that when he was Prime Minister between 1991 and 1995 his Ministers did not have an opportunity to do so.

Mr. Speaker, under the UNC, every Minister was fully involved in the budget exercise. The budget was not only a tool for financial planning; it was the basis for ministerial accountability. It may well be that this is the first time that the PNM Ministers are involved in the budget exercise, but with the UNC, full ministerial involvement was a way of life.

Mr. Speaker, the IMF has warned that a 50 per cent decline in oil price would mean a 4 per cent fiscal deficit by 2005 and an 8 per cent fiscal deficit by 2008. Experts in oil pricing point to the seven-year cycles of spikes and valleys in the oil industry. If this is accurate, and the last oil price trauma was in 1998 when the price fell to $10 a barrel, then we may be looking at another major pricing event in 2005.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the budget falsely speaks of a stable currency. The fact is that under the PNM there has been a devaluation of the Trinidad and Tobago dollar. In June of 2002 the dollar stood at TT 6.1787 to the US dollar. Twelve months later

in June 2003 the dollar was devalued to 6.2861 to the US dollar. That is a devaluation of 10 cents or 1.74 per cent. Analysts predict that further pressure will be placed on the TT dollar in 2004. The Prime Minister has grudgingly admitted that the public debt has increased by $2.3 billion during the fiscal year. What he did not say is that the total public debt is expected to be 68 per cent of GDP by the end of 2003. This represents an increase of 1½-percentage points on the public debt as it stood at the end of 2002.

In 2001 when the UNC was in government, we had placed a moratorium on borrowing. That moratorium has since been ignored by the money-guzzling PNM whose appetite for money is whetted by their desire to use and abuse state resources and moneys for the purposes of buying elections, as was marked by the obscene spending in the run-up to the October 2002 general election and again for the 2003 local government election. Once more, therefore, I urge the PNM to follow the advice I have given for the Revenue Stabilization Fund. Any decline in the price of oil can spell disaster for Trinidad and Tobago. The fund must be treated as a device for stabilizing the economy in periods of difficulty. I emphasize once more that cycles are a proven feature of the world economy. If we ignore this lesson the PNM shall repeat its mistakes.

Mr. Speaker, experience has taught me that the only thing the PNM has learned from experience is that the PNM has learned nothing from experience. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*] It is said that it is better to keep your mouth shut and let people think you are a fool rather than open it and remove all possible doubt. We are confronted with that injudicious comment from the Prime Minister about the proposed merger of the First Citizens Bank with the Unit Trust Corporation. It seems that this Prime Minister cannot leave well alone. Under the UNC the First Citizens Bank became one of this country's great success stories [*Desk thumping*] following on the PNM's fiasco with the Workers Bank.

Does the Prime Minister know that any attempt by the PNM to merge the First Citizens Bank with the Unit Trust will require legislative changes that can only be approved by this Parliament? This is not the prerogative of the Cabinet or any so-called citizen or pseudo citizen. [*Desk thumping*] That statement by the Prime Minister regarding the proposed merging of the two financial institutions coming on the verge of this budget has dealt a severe blow to the confidence that people have in these organizations. This Prime Minister has a penchant for putting his foot in his mouth.

I want the population to understand what the issues in this proposal really are and they are as follows. Will the financial sector benefit from more or less

competition? What are the synergies that are possible from a merger of these institutions? Who will benefit from such a merger? Should the growth of the FCB and the UTC come from expansion within Trinidad and Tobago or should they grow outside Trinidad and Tobago? Would the relevant strategy for the FCB be a merger with another pseudo government institution or should it be divested? In a related question it should be asked if the business of commercial banking and financial services is the business of the State. If these issues are examined, the UNC has no doubt that a merger of the two institutions could only be to the advantage of fattening the pockets of the PNM and its cohorts.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the issue of crime and its impact on the economy as I promised. No "patch patch", "now fuh now", hare-brained scheme of this Government to reduce crime, no public relations, hyped-up crime plan and no amount of money that they throw at crime will save the people from the criminal beast that the PNM has unleashed on the society. The Frankenstein that they created when they embraced the criminal elements in the 2002 general election campaign cannot and will not be tamed by those who created it, fed it, clothed it and cuddled it [*Desk thumping*] from its infancy to its adulthood. The PNM cannot deal with crime because they are part of the problem [*Desk thumping*] and, if you are part of the problem, you cannot be part of the solution. They are the problem. They cannot be the solution.

I have said on numerous occasions that there is a symbiotic and interlocking relationship between the PNM and crime. The Government cannot with one hand say it is fighting criminals and with the other hand embrace hard-core criminal elements as part of its political strategy of dealing with the Opposition. That relationship explains the fact that the crime wave of today marked by kidnapping and murder has followed the PNM into office. Last year we had a record number of 172 murders. By the first week in October this year the figure was 176. What these statistics mean is that a murder is committed in this country every 36 hours. It seems that the only area where the PNM has the capacity to outdo itself is in the area of crime. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you would recall that when the Member for San Fernando East was Prime Minister in the 1991—1995 period, there was a similar wave of criminal activity, so much so that in 1994 he had to fire his Minister of National Security and make himself Minister, the only effect of which was to increase crime. [*Laughter*] It seems that crime follows this Prime Minister. He is the Pied Piper of crime and criminals whom he shamelessly dubs community leaders. When the UNC came into office we dealt with crime and drugs decisively. We did

not put them in charge of projects or give them huge NHA contracts for creating ghost gangs so that they could earn hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars with which they buy guns and drugs and fast cars.

There are serious consequences for economic development if this crime wave continues. There is a nexus between rising criminal activity and economic decline. These and similar sentiments have been expressed time and again by the various chambers of commerce whose members have been kidnapped, murdered and brutalized. It is only some dotish PNM members of DOMA who think that the PNM is doing a good job and it is the UNC responsible for everything that is happening. Mr. Speaker, because of the Government's total incapacity to manage the crime situation in this country, businessmen are leaving. The business people of Chaguanas, Princes Town, Couva and Barrackpore have demonstrated how they feel. Many have already sent their children abroad to live. As a result, families are split up with children living abroad and parents living at home in fear.

That is the reality of Trinidad and Tobago today. It is a reality that the Prime Minister would deny as he buries his head in the sands of his own incompetence. Crime is already having an adverse effect on business. Current reports indicate that consumer spending has decreased. People are afraid to spend money on new cars and for renovation to their homes. Businessmen are not borrowing to expand their operations out of fear that this may be interpreted as a signal of their prosperity and make them and their children kidnapping targets. There has been a flight of capital as people lose confidence in the ability of our banks to keep private their financial status.

Mr. Speaker, the old adage that nothing succeeds like success has been turned upside down on its head by this incompetent PNM regime. Whereas the spending boom in revenues should have the effect of increasing business activity, the PNM has succeeded in achieving just the opposite. Instead of venturing into new enterprises, businessmen are planning to close their business and leave Trinidad and Tobago in frustration to escape crime and kidnapping, leaving behind an entrepreneurial vacuum and precipitating capital flight. This situation is not conjecture, it is not hearsay; this is hard reality. It is a reality that has descended on this country ever since the PNM returned to office in 2001.

Crime has also had serious consequences for the tourist industry, which could impact on revenues collected from tourism, job security in the tourism sector and further expansion of the industry. In December last year, the Foreign and

Commonwealth office of the United Kingdom issued a travel advisory which stated, and I quote:

> "We believe Trinidad and Tobago to be among a number of countries where there may be an increased terrorist threat. British nationals should exercise vigilance, particularly in public places frequented by foreigners such as hotels, restaurants and shopping malls."

That travel advisory caused the cancellation of visits of two cruise lines, P&O and Princess. In true form, the Prime Minister sought to blame the entire affair on the Opposition. Mr. Speaker, in the final analysis, the fundamental question that citizens must ask is, are you safer today than you were 22 months ago? The obvious answer is a profound no. [*Desk thumping*] It is an answer that resonates through the country as a reminder of the incompetence of the Prime Minister, his Attorney General and the Minister of National Security.

Mr. Speaker, the Government's gross incompetence when it comes to dealing with crime is demonstrated by statements made by the Prime Minister over the last four months. A careful study of these statements would indicate that the Prime Minister does not have a clue of how to deal with this problem and that is demonstrated by his proposals for dealing with serious crime in this budget.

On June 05, 2003 at a post-Cabinet press conference, the Prime Minister, being forced to admit that crime was getting out of hand, promptly blamed the high crime rate in Trinidad on Venezuela. By September 11, 2003 in another post-Cabinet conference, the Prime Minister had come to the conclusion that Trinidad was a very secure place and that the average man in the street had nothing to fear and if, per chance, he should get killed, that was mere collateral damage. Just one week later, September 19, 2003, the Prime Minister had come the full circle and at a consultation on social development admitted again that levels of crime in the country are unacceptable.

Recently, I imagine after séance-like meditation, he came to the conclusion that the latest kidnappings are not the work of traditional kidnappers. I can only guess that the traditional kidnappers, being his friends, must have told him so. The shifting and inconsistent opinions of the Prime Minister as regards the country's crime situation is a matter of concern given that he chairs the National Security Council. The Prime Minister seems to change his mind on the state of the nation's security on an almost daily basis but I pray that he continues these post-Cabinet conferences. Some of us need that comic relief. When the Prime Minister runs out of people to blame, he instinctively turns to the Opposition. His

latest salvo has been to blame the Opposition UNC because we refused to support the PNM legislation that would make kidnapping a non-bailable offence and he has some dumber PNM stooges in DOMA mouthing his allegations like an uncontrollable echo.

Let me for the umpteenth time state our position. In our entire legal history, for some 300 years, there have been only three offences for which there is automatically no bail pending trial. These are murder, treason and piracy. That means that if you are accused and merely charged with one of these offences, you must stay in prison pending trial no matter how long it takes to bring you before the courts. In fact, right now there are several persons in our prisons awaiting trial for several years charged with murder on the mere say-so of another person, sometimes the killer himself. You can kill a man and, when you are charged by the police, all you have to do is to tell the police that if they grant you immunity from prosecution you are prepared to say that Mr. X hired you to do the crime and Mr. X will be charged and be in prison without bail, which may take several years.

There are some people in this country who expect us to give that kind of power to this criminal Government so that they could lock up without bail any opponent at all. All they have to do is get their criminal friends to kidnap somebody, get an amnesty against prosecution and say that Panday hired them to do it, [*Desk thumping*] and the hapless Opposition Member is in jail without bail until thy kingdom come. They expect me to give that kind of power to a Government that planted drugs and ammunition in the home of a Member of the Opposition just before the 2002 election? [*Desk thumping*] DOMA, if you think that I am going to do that, you could not be dumber. Our position has been and continues to be that until such time as there is constitutional reform that prevents the Government from abusing such power, let the judge decide if a person accused of kidnapping should get bail or not. [*Desk thumping*]

Now that we have got that out of the way, let us see what the Prime Minister has proposed for dealing with the most pressing problem in the country, crime. After 22 months in office we hear that the Government has now declared war on the criminals. What was it before, a declaration of peace and love and hugging—an embrace? It is obvious that their criminal friends have not heard the Prime Minister or they probably are still laughing at his joke because the kidnappings and murders continue as if he had not spoken. What are the initiatives of this so-called war? The budget says former Colonel Peter Joseph, now Brigadier, who was commanding officer of the regiment, is mandated to establish a special crime-

fighting unit. The functions of the unit are not clear but as to its composition the Prime Minister says, and I quote:

> "…we shall draw on persons from any of the Services in the country, the Police, the Regiment, Coast Guard, Prison, Fire Services, Volunteer Defence Force…"

To whom is the Prime Minister referring when he says "we"? We shall do it. The Prime Minister? The Cabinet? The Chief of Defence Staff? The Commissioner of Police? It is important to know that because his proposal may very well be illegal and unconstitutional. Since the Prime Minister does not specify the functions of the unit, I can only presume that the purpose of a crime-fighting unit is to fight crime; but fighting crime is the function of the police. They are trained to do just that, fight crime, and the function of the army is to fight war against external enemies and they are trained to do just that. The army may assist the police in particular instances but they cannot take over the function of crime fighting. That is the function of the police. What is more, the regiment does not and cannot have control over the police.

The Police Service Act has specifically given operational control of the police to the Commissioner of Police [*Desk thumping*] not to an officer of the regiment. Whence, therefore, shall Brigadier Joseph derive his power to control the police? I do not think that the Prime Minister—I almost said "Crime Minister" [*Laughter*]—has given proper thought to this proposal? If there is a crime-fighting unit outside the police service, what will the rest of the members of the police service do? Also fight crime? From whom will they take instructions and orders? What is the role of the Commissioner of Police now? Who will be in charge of the Prime Minister's new, heavily armed riot squad? No wonder the criminals are laughing.

There is another proposal of the Prime Minister, which I find puzzling if not laughable, and that is the establishment of a Special Security Commission to act as a think tank on crime prevention and detection. Whom do you think this think tank will include? Messrs. Overand Padmore, John Donaldson and Herbert Atwell. Are these not the same gentlemen who were employed as special advisors to the Ministry of National Security for the past two years at exorbitant salaries? What were they doing if not thinking and advising the Minister of National Security? Maybe they will get some new ideas if we put them in a tank [*Laughter*] therefore we have a think tank.

What is even worse, where does all of this leave us? If there is going to be a new crime-fighting unit, a new think tank of advisors on crime, what is left for the Minister of National Security to do? [*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: As usual, nothing! As usual, nothing!

Hon. Members: Nothing.

Hon. Member: He has been fired.

Mr. B. Panday: Is this a novel way of firing him from his job without firing him? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Prime Minister, all the indications are that you cannot solve the oppressive crime rate in this country without constitutional reform. I warn you that the next generation of entrepreneurs is migrating. You and your Government are responsible for destroying the capacity of this country to grow from internal resources. Some people think that it is a deliberate strategy. My duty is to warn and I warn that the consequences will be terrible. It is you and your colleagues who have unleashed this tiger on the populace. You are giving the impression that you are trying to grab the tiger by the tail. It may have started to turn around and bite you. Next it will devour you. You need help, Mr. Prime Minister, the help of a new Constitution.

I emphasize that the Government is responsible for dealing with crime. For too long the PNM has been blaming forces outside itself for the crime situation. Mr. Prime Minister, you and your Minister of National Security must take responsibility. You have the power, the resources and the authority to fight crime. Use it. Right now you are behaving like immature adolescents. You are running this country, not the Opposition. It is your job to find the solutions. If you need help, you will get it but you must end the rank discrimination and oppression that is taking place in this society. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us make it quite clear, the UNC will support any move to deal with crime but we demand constitutional reform as a precondition of our support. [*Desk thumping*] Without control we cannot give you that kind of unlimited power. Mr. Speaker, the Constitution is the foundation of our society but events have overtaken it. Whatever structure we seek to build on this foundation, be it an economic programme, a social programme or a crime-fighting programme, it will collapse because the foundation is weak. We want meaningful crime-fighting programmes that are built on a rock but the friends of the Prime Minister keep preventing him from addressing the issue of the quality of the foundation. I say

again for the nation to hear, the UNC is ready to address the issue of constitutional reform at a moment's notice. That is now. If the PNM is serious about fighting crime then I invite you to open the discussions on constitutional reform now. [*Desk thumping*]

It is ironic that this Government is unable to deal with kidnappers, robbers and rapists but it is able to find hundreds of policemen to prevent decent citizens from expressing their displeasure with crime in Chaguanas. [*Desk thumping*] Decent people cannot march and speak freely any more except they are PNM supporters but the criminals can and, to add insult to injury, you propose yet another crime-fighting plan as the main plank of your budget! This is hypocrisy. Why should anyone believe you? The UNC certainly does not. The only war you are fighting is against the decent, law-abiding people of Central and South Trinidad. Look at the brutal manner in which you have treated the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Speaker, there is a strong link between discrimination and national development. If one group of people feels that there is a planned system of discrimination against them, they become demotivated and disillusioned, they withdraw their enthusiasm and they subconsciously work against anything you propose because they view it with suspicion. Those members of that group who are better qualified or have the resources to do so will contemplate migration to other countries. There is a brain drain. If you drive away your intellectual manpower, who will implement those proposals which you have advanced, haphazard though they may be? Do you think the square pegs you are forcing into round holes will ever achieve anything?

The statistics as regards brain drain and loss of intellectual capital are frightening to say the least. The statistics tell us that 47 per cent of all citizens who migrate are persons with a tertiary education. There is a cost to this and a cost that the nation must bear. It costs the nation hundreds of thousands of dollars to educate a citizen from primary school to the tertiary level. When that person leaves this country that investment in human development is lost. The big winner in all of this of course is the country to which that citizen migrates.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, all evidence points to the fact that since the Government came into office 22 months ago, that process of brain drain as well as entrepreneurial flight has been greatly accelerated. The brain drain has been aggravated by the crime situation and the insidious practice of the developing world to offer

scholarships to our brightest and best. Parents who can afford it, and many who cannot afford it, are sending their children away for education. Many of these scholars never return.

Your budget is not worth the paper it is written on if there is not a sufficiency of manpower to implement your proposals!

Now I turn to the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited and the retrenchment of its workers. Mr. Speaker, ever since this PNM regime stole the election and returned itself to Government, they seemed to have had an obsession with Caroni (1975) Limited. That obsession is a common thread that runs through their incompetence laden 22 months in office.

Last year they threatened the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited that they would shut down the company if the UNC did not come to Parliament to help them elect a Speaker. The obsession culminated with the retrenchment of 9,000 of Caroni's workers. That singular act by the PNM would forever be recorded as the greatest act of fascism, racism, discrimination and political victimization ever carried out in the history of Caribbean politics.

Mr. Speaker, that obsession stems from their desire to destroy the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers Trade Union, an organization that they see as the cradle of organized political opposition to the PNM. It is no secret that the majority of workers of Caroni (1975) Limited have traditionally never supported the PNM. This would therefore explain the ease with which this vicious PNM Government has socially and economically displaced an entire community.

To date, there has been no national consultation on the future of Caroni and the PNM has failed to tell us what it is, was, or will be their plan for the industry post-July 31, 2003. That a government can shut down a company and displace an entire community without so much as the inkling of an idea of what to do next demonstrates either the highest degree of incompetence or the highest degree of malice towards the people and the communities of the sugar belt. I am, in fact, tempted to believe that it is a combination of both. What is worse, they then proceeded to hire my former Attorney General in the capacity of a real estate agent [*Laughter*] to sell the lands of Caroni. So I see in the papers. Was that part of the done deal? Oh, it is too humiliating to bear!

Mr. Speaker, let me at this point make it unequivocally clear that it was never the UNC's intention nor was it ever a decision of the UNC government to close down Caroni (1975) Limited and infringe its progress. [*Desk thumping*] That is part of the vicious propaganda being spread by the PNM and its newfound allies.

In fact, our plan for Caroni included the expansion of the company's activities by the invitation of private sector participation in the company's operations. That plan would have seen not a single worker being fired and would, instead, have seen the retention and the extension of the existing workforce through its subsequent expansion as new technologies and new investments were introduced.

In fact, this process was started by us with the invitation for private sector participation in the rum division of Caroni (1975) Limited. In that regard, CL Financial showed an interest in the rum distillery and its operations. However, before anything could be done, the PNM and its agents in the press began to spread the propaganda that the distillery's rum stocks was worth $1 billion and we were selling it to our friends in CL Financial. The result of this vicious lie was that in disgust, CL Financial subsequently withdrew its offer of participation, and they closed down the company still. Today, we hear nothing of the famous $1 billion rum stock. What we are hearing is of a planned land grab that will see Caroni's lands given to the PNM financiers and supporters.

Mr. Speaker, a paper prepared by the University of the West Indies also warns of the potential of a land grab by political investors. That paper also reminds the Government that there is a national physical development plan which was passed by the Parliament in 1984. That plan governs land use in Trinidad and Tobago and any deviation from this plan would therefore be illegal.

What is the Government's plan for the future of the 75,000 acres of land that belong to Caroni (1975) Limited? What, Mr. Speaker, is the role of the mysterious management and business development company in distributing those lands? What mechanisms will be put in place to guarantee that the process is transparent? Would the displaced workers of Caroni be given priority in accessing those lands? We expected the budget to provide some answers to these questions. Instead, one hears of the secret and cabalistic meetings of the junta in Whitehall on Saturdays to discuss with so-called investors the sale of Caroni's lands and the company's assets.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition calls on the Government to publish and make public as part of a national consultation on Caroni a comprehensive plan on how it intends to restructure the company and what it intends to do with the thousands who have been rendered jobless. We are convinced that the PNM Government has no plan for Caroni except to grab its lands.

This action of closing down Caroni (1975) Limited was forced down the throats of workers. The workers were threatened that if they did not accept VSEP

they would be dismissed anyway. History will recall that this vicious regime chose to mete out brutality to sugar workers for racist and political reasons. It is only a matter of time before massive poverty, unemployment and vagrancy set upon the land that is Central Trinidad. This PNM Government must carry the burden for the pain and suffering that it has set in motion. May God have no mercy on them and may they not inherit even six feet of this land!

I warning the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources that from this closure there will be a fall-out that he and his Government have not even begun to imagine. He is the most callous of them all. He has reigned down depression and death on the sugar workers. He has not listened to their pleas. He has laughed at their tears. He has ridiculed their leaders and rubbed their faces in the ground. He has forced retrenchment on them while he gladly spreads the nation's resources on unproductive work for his party supporters. Mr. Minister of Agriculture, you have scorched the earth in Central Trinidad and the earth will remember you for this. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to education. It is a pity that the PNM has extended their discriminatory vision to the University of the West Indies. One well-known PNM ideologue and close confidant of the Prime Minister has even called for a quota system at the University of the West Indies and at the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology. That gentleman sits on the board of management of the Central Bank. When he speaks, he speaks as a member of the Government and as an officer of the Central Bank. It is also understood that he has the strong backing for his ideas and programmes from the Prime Minister and other members of the Cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, if the PNM were allowed to manipulate the admission process of the University of the West Indies to serve their hegemonic causes, it would mean an expansion of the discrimination that was so ruthlessly effected at Caroni (1975) Limited. It would lead to a contamination of the integrity of the university and would undermine its independence. This issue is a serious one and one that demands serious attention and scrutiny by all stakeholders since it involves not only our tertiary education system, but also the lives of thousands of our young people.

In keeping with the imperatives of a knowledge-based society, the UNC sought in 2001 to increase enrolment in tertiary institutions from 7 per cent of the student population to 20 per cent. To accompany this, we introduced the dollar-for-dollar plan where the Government would pay 50 per cent of the students' tuition fees.

I recall that the Member for San Fernando East, when he was Leader of the Opposition, said that the plan was a failure and called on us to abandon it, but let me tell him that the latest enrolment figures at the University of the West Indies for students registering for the academic year 2003/2004 proved that the Member for San Fernando East was wrong. That figure now stands at 11,500, an increase of 23 per cent over last year's figure and 100 per cent when compared to the figure for 1999/2000. That the dollar-for-dollar plan is a success is to the credit of the UNC.

Mr. Speaker, the dollar-for-dollar plan is not for any one race or any one group. It discriminates against no one. It is our philosophy on this side that a rising tide raises all ships. The University of the West Indies is central to the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean. In this regard, it should be noted that the economic success of Ireland and South Korea have been credited to the creation of companies owned by nationals based on university spawned innovation and inventiveness. In this regard, the University of the West Indies at St. Augustine must be empowered and given all the resources required to develop a strong graduate school.

A compromise of admission standards at our institution of highest learning will be a backward step. The solution is not to be found in lowering standards. It is to be found in creating new opportunities and implementing strategies that make tertiary education more affordable to more people. The PNM must learn that prosperity does not come from taking from one group to give to another. It only comes from creating more for everyone, but I say, if you rob Peter to feed Paul, you may get the support of Paul, but he will always be a slave.

Mr. Speaker, success in the future will come from leveraging human resources for competitive advantage. In that context, the quality of our human resource will be our most important resource of competitive advantage in the future. Any thought of reducing standards at the University of the West Indies, whether admission standards or the quality of the programmes, must therefore be seen for what it is. The thoughts, not of yesterday's people, but of the day before yesterday's people.

Mr. Speaker, I said that it is time for us to implement a whole new generation of economic and social measures for the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I mentioned also that the future would not be business as usual but business unusual. I now turn to this topic.

Our goal for the future must be to make Trinidad and Tobago one of the most competitive nations in the world. This means that our people's productivity must

be second to none. The quality of our governance must be unsurpassed and our physical infrastructure must be first class. It also means that our financial system must be world class and our bureaucracy must be efficient and transparent. Our education system must produce graduates that can be employed by the industries of the future and our health system must be capable of dealing effectively with our people's problems. Competitiveness also means that our justice system must be fair, independent and efficient.

In this context, we must realize that incentives and legislation for development of industry cannot be a one-size-fits-all model. Trinidad and Tobago must implement legislative and incentive framework that is sector specific. In addition, we must move to a system where incentives are performance based.

Sector development strategies must also address the human resource requirements of sectors, the requirements for physical infrastructure, international marketing support, the utilization of cutting edge technology and competition policy. In developing sectors, Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that there is intense competition between firms. Government must provide an enabling environment. Customers must be demanding and the industry cluster must be strong and competitive.

Mr. Speaker, a cluster development strategy is critical for success for going forward. Industries do not become internationally competitive without a strong support system. It is necessary, therefore, to have exporters supported with supplies of services, parts, assemblies, subassemblies, that are intensely competitive and very strong.

Government should also support strong industry associations, manufacturers associations, chambers of commerce, and so forth. These bodies assist their membership to compete in the external environment, represent the views of the business community to the Government and make industry information available.

Trade unions and workers' organizations must be treated with respect. Where workers are not organized, they must be protected by law. That is why we in the UNC insisted on putting union representatives on the boards of state enterprises. It is a pity that the PNM has removed them all. Without people, economics have no meaning.

Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that development cannot take place without investment, and few countries in the world have all the required financial resources for their development. It must therefore attract foreign investment. Everyone also knows that Trinidad and Tobago has received no foreign direct

investments (FDI) in the last two years. This is the same country that under the UNC became the country with the highest per capita of foreign direct investment in the world.

What has happened? Why has all the foreign capital dried up? I will tell you what has happened. The PNM happened. Do you really expect people to come here to invest huge sums of money when they can never be sure they will not be the victims of crime? In Trinidad and Tobago, crime, especially kidnapping and murder, follow the PNM while the Leader of Government Business persisted in keeping the company of perpetrators of coups and leaders of organized crime.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM plus crime equals political instability, and investors always shy away from political instability. But the FDI is essential for growth, job creation and the competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago. So what do we do? In this context, I wish to recommend that the Investment Promotion Act on which the UNC had begun work must be completed and enacted, and you will have our support if it comes with constitutional reform. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, while we are on the subject of investments, there are two initiatives that are sorely required at this time. They are, one, the venture capital regime must be comprehensively overhauled. There is an excellent task force on this subject and Government will do this nation a big favour by implementing the recommendations of that report.

Two, the company laws need to be reviewed to give troubled business a safety net. At present, the only real option a business has if it is in financial difficulty is bankruptcy. Trinidad and Tobago needs something resembling a Chapter 11 in the United States to give business a chance to recover from financial difficulty.

In addition, both for the sake of our citizens' safety and in order to attract foreign direct investments, the Prime Minister must reform the Constitution, stop keeping bad company, appoint a competent Minister of National Security and deal comprehensively with crime. Since that is not possible for him, he should consider the option of resignation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that certain sectors had been identified in which Trinidad and Tobago had the potential to become internationally competitive. It is essential that Government pursue a strategy so as to make these sectors viable and competitive, but to launch ourselves meaningfully into the mainstream of the new global economy, we must target other sectors as well. In this context we must look at the biotechnology, microelectronics, high technology and high technology manufacturing.

The commitment to develop the Wallerfield Science and Technology Park was contained in the UNC manifesto long before the PNM copied it. But still, it is a move in the right direction. This is a project that was conceived and developed under the UNC but, Mr. Speaker, the enabling environment for Wallerfield to succeed has not been touched. Unless this environment is created, in other words, unless the requirements of a high-technology cluster are put in place, Wallerfield will turn out to be nothing more than a glorified industrial estate.

Wallerfield is our chance to be a creator of knowledge rather than merely a purchaser and consumer of knowledge from the developed world, but the legislation, incentives, infrastructure and human resource development regime and an international marketing regime must be put in place. This project is not simply about land preparation, roads, utilities and a few speculative buildings. It is much more, and the PNM would do well to read the reports that have been done on this project.

I will now turn, finally, to the tourism industry. First, I wish to say that Tobago needs a new modern airport. This should not be a subject for debate. It is an overdue infrastructural need for our sister island and the sooner we build it, the better. Enough said on that.

It is also time to review comprehensively the tourism master plan. Much has changed since the plan was done. It is now approximately eight years old. September 11, 2001 was a significant event in the life of the tourism industry. The adverse international advisories that were issued against Trinidad and Tobago and the rise of exciting new destinations are also significant, but there have also been significant developments within the industry. These include the passage of the Tourism Development Act which repealed a piece of legislation that was over 30 years old.

In addition, many of the recommendations of the plan, including several studies have been done. Crime has impacted very negatively on the industry, while the level of government's support to market destinations is less than most of our Caribbean colleagues. Does the Government have a position on cruise ships? Is anything going to be done about the cruise ship terminals? The job creation potential of the tourism industry is tremendous. Tourism jobs will be a meaningful substitute for CEPEP jobs. It is also an industry that can bring a lot of investment and foreign exchange. I strongly recommend that Trinidad and Tobago pursue this industry vigorously.

As we move forward to create jobs and to improve the quality of life of our people, let us not forget that there has been an increasing level of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago since the PNM came to power 22 months ago. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report downgraded Trinidad from 49 to 54 with respect to our rank in dealing with poverty. In other words, under the PNM, the poor have become poorer and absolute poverty has increased.

Mr. Speaker, during the period that the UNC was in power, we steadily increased old age pension, kept the level of taxes down, removed VAT on many items, passed the Maternity Benefits Act, created the Women's Second Chance Programme, created universal free secondary education and did many other things to alleviate poverty. The ineptness of the PNM in this regard is compounded—[*Interruption by the Member for Diego Martin Central*] Mr. Speaker, is he always that stupid or is this a special occasion? [*Laughter*]

The ineptness of the PNM in this regard is compounded by the effects of trade liberalization that have aggravated poverty worldwide. The PNM seems to think that the solution to the problem is to fritter away the nation's patrimony in things like CEPEP, but nothing can be further from the truth. The solution lies in implementing measures that can ensure that the next generation will break out of the dependency syndrome and that everyone will be employable.

In other words, we have to make the population productive and we have to create sustainable jobs. This we can do only by implementing the new economic measures I have just outlined. Our problems will not be solved by reducing the budget to a shopping list, as has been the case with this budget that can only be described as pathetic. Our problems will only be solved when we find the formula for living together as one people, free from discrimination, free from fear of group domination, advancing on the basis of merit in a society that provides equal opportunities for all.

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

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Eric Williams): Mr. Speaker, allow me to begin my contribution to the 2003—2004 budget debate by commending the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for eloquently presenting what is clearly a budget fundamentally rooted in sound sustainable development philosophy and principles, a budget which speaks to ameliorating the plight of our currently economically disadvantaged citizens through the provision of job opportunities and creating an appropriate economic and social

environment to foster and sustain growth, development and provide generally for the welfare of our citizens.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, in realizing these laudable objectives, the energy sector will no doubt have a critical role to play. In this regard, I wish to address this honourable House today on matters relating to the energy sector and outline some of the policies and plans we propose to implement and to continue implementing to take this country on a path to sustainable development. Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, the energy sector is international in scope and is therefore subject to the vagaries of international geopolitics and economics. Clearly, this places certain events out of our control as a small oil and gas producer of some 0.4 per cent of world production. Our exposure in this regard is therefore great, but one that we cannot avoid. As energy planners, if we fail to consider this, we do so at our own peril.

Having said this, Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, geopolitical events in the last fiscal year have led to firm energy prices and great demand for oil and gas. Given the current trends in the industry, the likelihood is that a similar pattern will occur during the next fiscal year.

12.00 Noon

Mr. Speaker, a cold winter, political unrest next door in Venezuela, and the war in Iraq kept the energy product markets extremely tight, and the later fallout from these events did little to reverse the market trends. Further, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) seems determined in its effort to restrict supplies in order to keep oil prices firm over the next winter. As tension continues to rise in the Middle East, there is also an air of uncertainty that looms on the international horizon and, as such, there is nothing to indicate that any dramatic changes are likely to occur in the energy markets; at least, not in the short term.

Having said this, Mr. Speaker, we must note that those who are familiar with the energy industry know that there are no guarantees in the energy markets. In the longer term, it is wise to look at energy developments in, among other places, the former Soviet Union, as direct foreign investment in that region has the potential, in the mid to longer term, to see that region rivalling the Middle East as the world's leading energy supplier.

In my address to this honourable House today, I will elaborate on the dynamic growth that is taking place in the energy sector; I will look at some of the key highlights, and make some announcements; I will give an overview of the natural

gas-based industry; look at some of the imperatives which we face for growth in our petroleum sector, then, specifically, look at the growth areas in the energy sector, and then bring us to a conclusion.

Mr. Speaker, many people who look at the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago often ask the question: How is it that such a small twin-island country as ours has achieved some of the objectives that we have achieved? When they look at Point Lisas, and some of our achievements in the petrochemical and now the LNG sector, they ask that question. I am asked that question repeatedly.

Mr. Speaker, let me take you back to 1977; to the time of the ground breaking of the first iron and steel plant in the country, then called the Iron and Steel Company of Trinidad and Tobago (ISCOTT). The Prime Minister of the day, Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, said these words, which were poignant, which pointed us on the way forward; indeed, it set the vision for where we are today:

> "Blessed as we are with hydrocarbon resources, we have a choice to make. There have been attempts to persuade us that the simplest and easiest thing to do would be to sit back, export our oil, export our gas, do nothing else and just receive revenues derived from such exports and, as it were, lead a life of luxury; at least, for some limited period. This the Government has completely rejected, for it amounts to putting the entire nation on the dole. Instead, we have taken what may be the more difficult role, and that is, accepting the challenge of entering the world of steel, aluminium, methanol, fertilizer and petrochemicals, in spite of our smallness and in spite of our existing level of technology." [*Desk thumping*]

That is the PNM vision.

As a political party in government, we seek to do our best for all. It is not an exact science, and we are human beings, but we do the best we can; we chart a vision and set out on it, and we are willing to pay the price. Many of our members are also willing, in support of us, to ray the price of success. Today, we are charting the course to 2020. In doing so, we seek to empower our people as we move to developed-country status.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into a review of the sector, I would point out a few things, which seem to have caused some concern among various pundits and scribes, and also bring some new information to the attention of the national community. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance indicated in his budget presentation that the price of oil which he used to budget on is US $25 for Galeota mix. This seems to have created a lot of concern, and the suggestion that this

Government is somewhat reckless and is taking a less than conservative position, in terms of its budgeting process and, hence, the expenditure that goes with that.

Mr. Speaker, let me educate the wider community: the Galeota mix of crude, such as it is, trades plus or minus 50 cents around the price of a crude known as West Texas Intermediate. This is an internationally traded crude. Because of that plus or minus 50 cents variability, one could approximately say that Galeota is almost the same as West Texas Intermediate. If one were to accept that, then one should know that West Texas Intermediate trades at US $2 above the OPEC basket price. What is that price? It is the price range that OPEC has set for the price of oil. They have lumped a number of crudes together, and with their formulae have come up with a price. They have set a lower range of $22 and a higher range of $28, and have allowed their price to fluctuate within that band. They have also instituted a number of measures to seek to defend their price range.

As I pointed out, our production is miniscule in the scheme of things. Indeed, the world expects that OPEC, if no one else, would have a good chance at managing the band that they have set for themselves. It is not a perfect science, but, at least, they have a better chance than any other group of persons in the world. So when we say $25 for Galeota mix, essentially, we are equating that to West Texas Intermediate. Since West Texas Intermediate trades at $2 above the OPEC basket, we are, in effect, saying that we are setting our price at $23. As a result, we have taken a conservative position on the OPEC band. We are not at the rock bottom, but we are $1.00 above the base that they use for their band to fluctuate.

I have the honour to inform this House that when I checked the numbers over the past few days, the price that West Texas Intermediate is trading at internationally is of the order of $30 to $29. The OPEC price today went above its $28 marker. Therefore, when OPEC looks at their basket, they can seek to manage it; they have the mechanisms in place. We have to ask ourselves whether Trinidad and Tobago would like to send the signal to the international community that we do not believe that OPEC can manage its basket; I think not. In any event, the price we have used is well in line with the prices suggested by many international agencies and other countries.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, one should also recognize that the energy sector has contributed almost TT $6 billion directly to Government revenue over the past year; it is a significant contributor. Indeed, as we would point out later, our energy sector accounts for 25 per cent, or so, of our gross domestic product.

Another perception that seems to have taken root—and I heard it repeated in the contribution by the hon. Member opposite a short while ago; in fact, I saw it written in the press—is that we are not attempting to assist the small oil producers onshore Trinidad and Tobago. While I would lay out a rather long programme that we are developing, I would like to point out that we have, in fact, reduced the liability of these companies. What was the mechanism used?

We have exempted small oil producers from the petroleum production levy. What is this levy? Many of us do not know. Currently, this is a levy that is payable by oil-producing companies to offset fuel prices. It fluctuates up to 3 per cent maximum of the gross revenue of an oil operating company. The liability is prorated across all the operating companies, based on their production. You take the total, get what that percentage is, and that would be the liability of each company, except that can only go up to 3 per cent of their gross revenue.

The cap was put in place at a time when oil prices were, indeed, lower. In the current high oil price scenario, the Government is liable for any excess above that 3 per cent cap of the oil companies. In any event, what have we done? We have indicated that companies which produce less that 3,500 barrels of oil are now exempt from the petroleum production levy. At the same time, we have also raised the variable cap to 4 per cent for other companies, that is to say, companies that produce in excess of 3,500 barrels. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the effect of that measure would be reflected directly to the bottom line of all the small oil producers onshore Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, it is one of the measures of relief that they have been requesting for some time now. It is the PNM Government that has found a mechanism to assist in this regard; and there are other mechanisms to come. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we have under way a review of the policy for transportation fuels. As the country is now well aware, we are putting in place a programme to phase out lead in our transportation fuels by the end of March 2004, or sooner if possible. Indeed, it is possible that it could be done much sooner; we are working on it. [*Desk thumping*]

The oft maligned Environmental Management Authority has taken the lead in bringing to the attention of the national community the benefits of the removal of lead, so I do not have to educate this honourable Chamber anymore about it. Beyond that, two or three weeks ago, Cabinet agreed to the empanelling of a multi-sectoral committee to review the use of compressed natural gas for mass transit vehicles. I have seen a number of comments in the press that the Prime

Minister and Minister of Finance did not mention compressed natural gas in his budget presentation, but he did point out that his ministers would come along after and expand, in great detail, on the many programmes we are putting in place.

At the World Gas Congress in Tokyo, which I had the honour to attend recently, along with other technocrats, I went specifically to listen to papers being presented by different countries and companies on the use of compressed natural gas as a transportation fuel. It turns out that the current thinking is that the base load required to cause compressed natural gas as a transportation fuel to be effective, is when one goes after the mass transit system in the country. What do we mean by this? We mean the buses and maxi-taxis. In putting programmes such as this in place, there are a number of innovative supply side and demand side initiatives that countries around the world have put in place.

So what have we done, Mr. Speaker? Without going into great detail—because I have a lot to say today—we have empanelled a multi-sectoral committee of technocrats from the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC), the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Vehicle Maintenance Company of Trinidad and Tobago (VMCOTT), and the National Gas Company (NGC), to think the matter through, to consult and cooperate, as necessary, and to develop a policy for the use of compressed natural gas as a mass transit fuel in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We have given them a two-month time frame to report on their findings, so we could chart a way forward. So, hopefully, throughout this fiscal year, we might be in a better position to actualize this.

Of course, this will further assist us in protecting our environment, because if we can then get the mass transit system to migrate from diesel and the additional mixtures and the pollution that goes with diesel, the environment and the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be that much better off; their quality of life would have been improved. In addition, we are developing policies on other alternatives for transportation fuel. We are well aware that the international community is looking at fuel cells and other technologies, and we are, indeed, moving fast to look at those carefully.

Finally, in terms of key highlights, I wish to announce to this honourable Chamber, the national community at large and, indeed, specifically, to the petroleum industry, that BHP and its partners have made a new gas discovery in the Block 2 retained portion of the East Coast of Trinidad in a well called the Howler No. 1. They have made a gas discovery which is likely to be considered a commercial discovery in the Cretaceous Naparima Hill formation, which has

eluded us, in terms of its commerciality, for quite a number of years. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] No, it is just offshore, but the Cretaceous formations, aged formations, and, in particular, the Naparima Hill, have long been considered to be the source rock for most, if not all, the oil and gas that exist in our very rich petroleum province. The significance of a commercial discovery in the Cretaceous formation blows the game wide open. So for those who say that we are running out of oil and gas, I say, "Think again!" [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

On top of this, we have been blessed with a lovely geo-political location. In all these developments, we continue to remain strategically close to the largest market in the Western Hemisphere, the United States of America, where we can get our products to market ahead of many others from around the world.

Beyond this, as of today, I also wish to announce to the national public and this honourable Chamber, that the proved reserves of natural gas are 20.8 trillion cubit feet; probable reserves, 8.3 trillion cubit feet, and possible reserves 6.1 trillion cubit feet, giving a total of what is called the "three Ps", proved, probable and possible, 35.2 trillion cubit feet. On the oil side, we now have the largest amount of reserves that we have ever had in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The proved oil reserves now stand at 990 million barrels of recoverable oil; [*Desk thumping*] our probable reserves are 324 million barrels of oil, and the possible reserves, based on the audits and estimates of the companies that exist in Trinidad and Tobago, are now of the order of 2 billion barrels of oil. When you add them all together, they come up to 3,314 billion barrels of oil. That is the three Ps resource base that we have to work with here in Trinidad and Tobago. If you convert the gas to its equivalent volume in oil, that number stands in the order of 9.18 billion barrels of oil equivalent here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, these increases in oil reserves are due to the discovery of a large amount of condensate in, at least, 24 new gas and condensate fields and the BHP/Angostura field. Note also that there are 500 billion cubit feet of natural gas in the onshore central block, which is currently operated by Vermillion in partnership with Petrotrin. All this starts to become important later on as I talk about the exploration programmes which we either have in place or we are contemplating.

Just to say to those who seem to forget: when I was a boy I recall my father, who then also worked in the energy sector, telling me that the pundits were saying that we had about 25 years of oil reserves. I was less than 10 years at that time; today, in my mid-forties, the oil continues to flow like a river, well into the future; God bless Trinidad and Tobago! [*Desk thumping*]

Indeed, the so-called "oil boom" of the late 1970s was a time in which we produced in the order of 300,000 barrels of oil equivalent, with about two-thirds of that being oil, and the other one-third being natural gas. The price then was not predicted. In fact, it was short lived, and, indeed, it was a windfall, which is why we called it a boom. Today, our production is well above these so-called "boom days". The production for fiscal 2001/2002 of crude oil and condensate was on average 124,877 barrels of oil per day. In 2002/2003, it rose to 136,180 barrels of oil per day. It is to be noted that the forecast for last year, which is the number under review, was actually 127,940 barrels, so we increased the production and the prices were a lot firmer than they were predicted to be.

Mr. Speaker, given all of this and what we now know of the geology and the reservoirs, the oil production forecast for 2003/2004 is conservatively estimated to be 132,340 barrels of oil per day, but we already know that there is the potential for swing production of an additional 5,000 barrels per day from fields we have already discovered, which we may or may not decide to bring on this year, depending on how the strategy develops.

Natural gas production for fiscal 2002/2003 was of the order of 2.47 billion cubit feet per day or about 412,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day. The projection for fiscal 2003/2004 is just under three billion cubit feet of natural gas, 2,930 million, or the equivalent or 488,000 or so barrels of oil equivalent per day. Indeed, the projection for production in Trinidad and Tobago for this coming fiscal year is expected to be of the order of 620,670 barrels of oil equivalent per day. We expect that by 2008 we would be producing in excess of one million barrels of oil equivalent per day, comprised mainly of natural gas.

The production looks, essentially, like a tidal wave. What is different this time, as I have demonstrated, is that this production is predictable, and is tied to large gas-based projects that have long-term contracts. Unlike what the other side wishes to fantasize, we can now plan ahead, taking the more difficult road that was suggested to us by Dr. Williams. Indeed, I would suggest that we are also taking the high road as we move forward. [*Desk thumping*] Our challenge is to convert this production into revenues and value for our nation in a way that is win/win with our people and our trading partners.

Today, I would point out that while the real gross domestic product (GDP) of Trinidad and Tobago grew by 6.7 per cent, the petroleum industry grew by an even more impressive 9.3 per cent in real GDP terms. [*Desk thumping*] The majority of our oil and gas resource is found off the East Coast with some gas off

our North Coast. We have a well-developed pipeline infrastructure to monetize the gas, both onshore and offshore.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to an overview of the natural gas-based industry. During the period 1995 to 2000, over US $6 billion in foreign direct investment has been invested in the sector. It is, reportedly, the highest level of foreign direct investment in the Americas on a per capita basis. As I pointed out before, we have the vision from the 1970s, and it has continued today, so we have a relatively diversified gas market.

I would remind Members present, that when the Point Lisas estate was being built, those who now make claims about house padding because of the housing developments which benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago throughout the country, are some of the very people who said the construction of that estate was, at the very best, madness, another crazy idea of the "Doctor politics" of the day. Today, the Point Lisas estate has caused us to have some of the high value that I have pointed out. We have what is internationally classified as the "Trinidad model of natural gas development". [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Trade and Industry, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the Prime Minister and others are being asked increasingly to go around the world to explain to other countries how to develop in the way that Trinidad and Tobago has developed. [*Desk thumping*]

12.30 p.m.

We have in terms of our existing natural gas usage, a natural gas liquids processing facility at Phoenix Park; we now have three LNG plants otherwise known as trains; we have nine ammonia plants; one urea plant; five methanol plants; four iron and steel mills; and four generation plants—of course we got one under dubious circumstances. [*Laughter*]

Other areas for the use of natural gas are in our refinery, cement manufacture, light industrial and commercial customers now number 96, two gas-fired air-cooling projects and, as of now, 4000 CNG powered vehicles. I have pointed out that we are about to cause a revolution in the real sense by moving our mass transit fleet over to compressed natural gas. [*Desk thumping*]

In terms of ammonia exports, Trinidad and Tobago continues to be the largest single site for the export of ammonia and our largest customer continues to be the United States.

Mr. Speaker, the total ammonia production was 3,765.3 metric tonnes, up by 23 per cent the previous year, and exports increased by 26 per cent to 3,356

metric tonnes, and this went primarily to the lucrative US market. Points to note—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch and will resume at 1.45 p.m.

12.32 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.45 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. E. Williams: Mr. Speaker, before we took the lunch break, we were in the process of detailing the diversified natural gas sector that we have in Trinidad and Tobago. As of today, 57 per cent of our natural gas now goes into LNG; 9 per cent goes into power generation; 3 per cent into the metal industries; 28 per cent into petrochemicals and about 1 per cent each goes into gas processing, refining and other miscellaneous usage.

As we were pointing out, Trinidad and Tobago is still the number one location site for export of ammonia and indeed, if you look at our largest trading partner, the United States of America, up to July this year, the year to date figures indicate that 46 per cent of the ammonia imported into the United States came from plants in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It is also important to know a bit about the US market because in 2002, US imports of ammonia were 5.6 million metric tons and almost three million of those metric tons or 52 per cent were imported from Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We also export urea to the United States but it is also important to know that almost all the plants in the United States are greater than 20 years old and there are no known plans for new plants. So plant capacity in the US is actually expected to fall and increasingly we are receiving visitors from abroad, potential investors who are seeking to propose ammonia plants in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at methanol, the picture is almost the same. Our exports were 2.14 million tons and last year prices peaked at US $306 per tonne, the highest ever in 10 years, and the United States is the world's largest methanol consuming and producing country with a current market size of 8.9 million metric tons and market growth there is expected to average just under 3 per cent through 2005.

Again Mr. Speaker, when one looks at LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) and takes it in the broadest context—as I mentioned before—we have our geopolitical and

geographic position relative to the market in the United States which give us a transportational advantage, plus the formulae that we continue to work with the LNG partners in terms of the net back arrangements and so on, allow us to be competitive going into the US market, so much so that today Atlantic LNG in Trinidad and Tobago supplies about two-thirds of the LNG imports into what is now acknowledged to be the lucrative United States market.

Mr. Speaker, all of these statistics are known in some degree or the other. We have come this far, where do we go, and how do we move forward? We have had to look and we continue to look at the potential factors that influence our growth and, indeed, increasingly we are coming to understand what some of the imperatives for growth in our energy sector are going to be.

As I mentioned before, our constant 1985 prices, that is our real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by sector, the energy contributes just about a quarter of our GDP. But when one looks at today's prices, the GDP works out to just about TT $67.7 billion or if you put it in US dollars, $8,378 per capita. Why is it important to understand some of those concepts, the Gross Domestic Product and, as we move on, the Gross National Product?

Mr. Speaker, if you were to plot on a graph the purchasing power parity or (ppp), expressed as GDP in thousands of US dollars against our exports in natural resources, and you plot several other countries around the world that are in similar situations to Trinidad and Tobago, you would find that we plot with our GDP, now roughly in the $7,000—$8,000 range. In a situation where our exports of natural resources are in the 70 per cent and greater, or thereabouts, we are quite nicely lumped together with a group of countries that are emerging economies just like ours. We have in a similar group, countries like Costa Rica, Argentina, Nigeria, Venezuela and others. We are developing countries, but we have set a vision as a government. We have articulated that we wish to become a developed nation by the year 2020. If one looks at the profile of developed countries using a similar source of metrics, one would find that their purchasing power parity expressed as GDP per capita is in the 20,000 and greater per capita US dollars, but their percentage of exports in natural resources are usually under 25 per cent of their exports.

If we wish to move from being a developing nation to a developed nation, then one of the potential metrics at which we can look is that profile of countries, but even as we do that, we observe some lessons. The first of them is that natural

resources are a means and not an end in and of themselves. Like many other countries that have a lot of natural resources we have low purchasing parity per capita.

Secondly, to move to become a developed nation, we need to have economic diversification, and it is obvious. If we have to reduce the percentage of natural resource exports in a phase as we pointed out, of almost exponential growth in production of our natural resources, we indeed have to increase the other sectors of the society at an even faster rate. One other lesson we can learn from this sort of profile is that a broader base of wealth in the society is indeed required.

I heard from the other side an attempt to explain this sort of arrangement. Mr. Speaker, we have been studying the matter very carefully. If you also go beyond just looking at the Gross Domestic Product, and look at one of the metrics that the World Bank uses in its statistics and analyses to describe a developed and a developing country, you would find that they use the metric of the Gross National Product and lumped countries that have a Gross National Product, that is to say, essentially in layman's terms, the value that remains within the economy. They have looked at countries that have Gross National Products in excess of US $9,200 or so per capita and greater, as countries that are developed countries. If you were to hear detractors from all around, you would believe that Trinidad and Tobago is nowhere nearly in sight of becoming a developed nation.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that we are not perfect, but the fact is that our Gross National Product per capita is just over US $7,000 per capita and in fact, that puts us into a group of countries that are in the middle income range and we are considered to be in the upper middle income range of developing countries in the world. We are just below the threshold of becoming, by this particular metric, a developed country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: We are on course.

Hon. E. Williams: That is the point: we are on course. What is even more telling Mr. Speaker, is when you compare our Gross Domestic Product over the past several years and our Gross National Product. Why is it important to compare those two? The Gross Domestic Product in layman's terms would be the total economic activity that takes place in the country whether it is from a foreign source or not. The Gross National Product, is of course the value that remains in the country in broad layman's terms.

If one tracks both of them over the past few years, one would discover, as some of us have had to discover, that there is a gap between the two of the order of TT $2 billion per year and we are finding that since the energy sector is a

significant contributor to all this, we have to find ways to leverage our energy sector to close the gap between our GDP and GNP.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Port of Spain South has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. E. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank all Members present. As I was saying, we have to find ways to close the gap, in other words, part of another of our imperatives for growth, especially as it relates to the energy sector, is increasingly we must find ways to capture the value that is created in that sector locally if we are to go as a nation.

At the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, we have been taking a look at this and trying to figure out how do we as one arm of the Government work in tandem with others to try to leverage our energy sector to do this. One of the first things we ran into was something that hon. Members opposite sought to describe. It is a phenomenon that is indeed known as the resource curse. It is a situation where countries like ours that are rich in a particular natural resource that is depleting, tend to attract foreign direct investment only in that area to the detriment of other areas of the economy. As I mentioned before, we have to find ways to diversify and such. So in seeking to avoid the resource curse and to understand it, we have recognized that there are certain things about countries like ours. For instance, production and/or revenues of the dominant sector are cyclical, resources are in the depleting category, the industry is capital intensive versus labour intensive, the dominant sector has few links with other economic sectors, and products are highly competitive and rely on non-sustainable advantages, for example, low labour and transportation costs.

Members opposite like to boast that they have doctors on that side. Well, we have been seeking to diagnose the problem on this end, and as we do so we seek to move forward. In doing so we determine that there are certain mitigating factors that we can seek to pursue to grow. We need to leverage the energy sector to lead to sustainable development of the non-energy sectors. We have to intensify the links between the energy sector and the non-energy sector; for example, to build manufacturing, processing and other industries that may be allied to it, but which we can leverage into other areas of endeavour. We are seeking to do so, and I will describe one area shortly.

We have to address the imbalance in growth between the sectors. We also have to balance our investment portfolio to include value added products and services, and increasingly, we have to shift the focus away from these capital-intensive industries to knowledge-intensive industries as we increase our productivity. So we are recognizing that for value added trade and investment, we need to encourage the strong export orientation of goods and services that are globally competitive—export value added goods and services to developed countries and lesser value added goods to developing countries.

We have to have more domestic and regional competition, more national investment in Trinidad and Tobago; investment that is future wealth-generating such as the new industrial estate which we propose to develop at the Union Estate in La Brea, the Offshore Platform Fabrication Yard that is being developed at LABIDCO which has the potential once it is fully on stream to become an export industry. We are actually expending in the order of $75million—$80 million to build the fabrication yard which would start to do some work.

I must mention to this honourable Chamber, that already a local company, the Damus Group, has been awarded a contract with the technology partner in the United States to build parts of a platform for the BHP development off the East Coast. [*Desk thumping*] And it did not happen by accident.

Mr. Speaker, we must also have a shift in joint venture investments from foreign to local companies and have greater national equity in foreign direct investment projects. I believe it was in the budget statement in one of the documents that the Minister of Finance has put out where he points out that there is already a team that is looking at amending some of the laws that govern the pension funds, credit unions and so on because at the moment they are unable to invest their savings in any of these projects and particularly so in the downstream where it is not as challenging or as risky as in the upstream.

If we are able to find the correct formula—and I understand the technocrats are looking at it—then that is yet another means of taking the wealth that is being generated in the energy sector and spreading it in a transparent manner to the broadest base of the society. As we looked at it a little more closely, some tools for development on the road to vision 2020 for the energy sector. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries as an arm of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is going to pursue policies with operators to ensure a proper mix of share of in country spending, and review our local content policy. We have already announced that the Ministry of Finance has consultants who are looking at a

review of the petroleum taxation system and we are certainly going to have a closer look at the employment of nationals in the energy sector.

I announce to this House that Cabinet has agreed to the formation of a special unit within the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries that has as its mandate and its focus to follow up on the understudies and persons who applied for work permits particularly in the energy sector so that they can inform the Ministers involved and, in particular, my colleague, the Minister of National Security, who grants work permits.

Also they need to follow-up on the understudies because I do not know if Members know that when an expatriate comes to the country and applies for a work permit, the company is supposed to designate a national as an understudy to that individual. We have discovered that we had not been following up on those understudies and tracking their progress in the various organizations.

When we speak about local content policy, I would bring to the attention of this honourable Chamber, the experience of a plant that was built a few years ago—we were not in office, but Members opposite were. There was a certain percentage of local content designated for that plant and in these petrochemical type plants, a key component would be the pipes—which are called vessels—to carry all the products throughout the project. It turns out that the technology in Trinidad and Tobago is that we could build these vessels or pipes between two inches and I think six to eight inches, but the really new technology is in the vessels or the pipes that are greater than the eight inches up to 20 inches or whatever.

It seemed that under the watch of the previous administration, somebody calculated that the percentage, or pipes from two to eight inches were exactly the percentage that fit the local content that company was required to provide and, therefore, the local industry did not benefit. It built what it was already capable of, there was no input into increasing the technology, and all the high-technology products were shipped in from elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker, as we now move forward with new petrochemical plants, or even expansions of existing plants, we have learnt from these errors of the past and we are working a lot more closely with the construction people in those plants to ensure there is true and real technology transfer.

We have also recognized, and we have quantified it, that we do have a human capacity problem. It is all well and good to say so in a qualitative sense, and we now understand that over the next five years, 2004—2009, if we stay with the

existing educational structure that we have, we would have a shortage of professionals in the order of 416 or so per year. In terms of engineering technicians, a shortage of just under 1,200 per year, and skilled craftsmen and machine operators about 530 or so.

Mr. Speaker, we are already addressing these shortages. My colleague, the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education is working very hard at this, but we continue to find innovative ways of leveraging the energy sector to relieve us of some of these shortages. You would have heard the hon. Prime Minister announce the new University of Trinidad and Tobago.

2.10 p.m.

We have, indeed, expanded the number of national scholarships that are available to citizens in Trinidad and Tobago and we are expanding the National Energy Skills Centre (NESC) and the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology (TTIT) and especially and significantly so, into the East-West Corridor. It would appear that this was something that was not thought of before; TTIT and NESC centres were built in other parts of the country and it turns out that there is a significant need in all parts of the country, so the PNM has moved expeditiously to make this change.

We are also looking at ways of creating our activities in business to create entrepreneurism. Indeed, we are seeking to go towards the trading of stocks and bonds on the local market. Everybody knows we do not have a mature market at the moment. In fact, most people do not know where the stock exchange is. However, this is something that is desirable.

Yet, more so, one other imperative of growth as we look to the future is what is known as the triple bottom line for sustainable growth. The triple bottom line suggests that we must keep in balance the economic objectives of the nation: the social objectives as well as the environmental objectives. If any one of those is out of whack, then we are out of compliance. So we are seeking to balance these as we move forward. Those are some of the imperatives that we see as we move forward.

So given that diagnosis of the problem and the understanding that we now have, what are some of the projects we are seeking to get into? We have already announced an offshore bid round for 12 blocks in and around Trinidad and Tobago. That bid round will now close on November 21, and we expect that the results would be available and awards would be made around January 21 next year. The blocks are both shallow water and deep, with a mix of geological styles

and oil and gas potential. So that we are bringing into the fore, not necessarily new areas, but areas for exploration. They have been looked at and we are bringing new ideas to explore there again.

As has been mentioned, we have signed a memorandum of understanding with our neighbours, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The next step after the MOU is to set up a steering committee with the appropriate technical teams reporting to it that would be inclusive of the private sector to work at understanding and unitizing the reservoirs across our borders.

Yet another initiative which is just now coming over the horizon and which we are going to propose over the next year, given the exciting results that I have reported in the Howler 1 Well, is to have an all-inclusive bid round of all of the southern basin of Trinidad and Tobago—onshore Trinidad and Tobago. As a result of this, we already have expressions of interest from super major companies. Indeed, they are starting to understand something that we have been advocating for some time, that a 3D seismic survey across the entire basin is what is required to properly understand the geology of Trinidad and Tobago.

Indeed, there have been cries for more lease operator and farm-out type arrangements, but essentially those would be wells that would be built purely on geologic understanding; there is no new technology in terms of 3D seismic imaging which would allow one to see better where one is going. We are now working out the commercial details before we come forward with a firm proposal of how we proceed with this. But we also see that such a proposal would cure a number of potential ills that exist at the moment in the basin, as well as assist us in going after cleaning up—first of all, assessing, doing a true baseline study of the environment and attempting to ameliorate several of the environmental issues that exist in our society.

I move on to another part of the sector, the retail fuel sector. We have already discussed the removal of lead. It is common knowledge there have been some increases in the price of retail fuels, but I will point out that we have, in fact caused liquified petroleum gas (LPG) to remain at $1 per pound. We are also looking much more closely now at site remediation in gas stations. We have just about quantified it. We have of the order of 650 steel-walled underground storage tanks throughout this country. There are a little over 200 gas station sites. Some are in operation and some have been shut down, but they all appear to need to have remedial work done on them to remove the lead contamination that is in the soil.

We are seeking to link projects together in the energy sector so that as we receive revenues from some of those projects—because some of these projects carry large signature and other types of bonuses—we can find a way to utilize some of those funds directly into the cleaning up of the environment; the remediation of environmental issues. We are seeking to have new and expanded petrochemical projects. As we mentioned before, there are two methanol plants that are currently under construction; we have the 10th ammonia plant in the country that is under construction; we have given approval for the expansion of the Atlantic LNG Project so that a fourth train would be put in place.

Why is all this important? It is important so that we can get to a project that has eluded us for some time now, that is to say to get into the business of the plastics via ethylene. It seems that a number of people have been saying that with all the natural gas we have, we should get into the plastics because that is one of the ways that we can create plastics, through a part of the natural gas known as ethane. But what may not be well known is that the percentage composition of our natural gas in Trinidad and Tobago is such that it is fairly lean in ethane. What do I mean? If we look at the first four of what is known as the carbon chains, the first four types of gases that exist in natural gas: methane, which is what we call C1, because it has one carbon atom in it; ethane, which would be what we are desiring which has two carbons; propane, which many of us know as cooking gas, and then butane—for those who still smoke and who ignore the Minister of Health's warning, like some colleagues on both sides—which is C4; of those four gases in natural gas, our natural gas is composed of 94 per cent methane. It is composed of about 3.3 per cent ethane, 1.1 per cent propane and 0.3 per cent butane. This is what I am advised by the technical people.

The upshot of that is that to get enough ethane to go for an ethylene project, we have to increase the volume of natural gas that we produce so that we get enough ethane to make it worthwhile, as well as some of the other economic metrics that have to do with markets and so on. It is turning out that now that we are going to Atlantic LNG 4, we are now getting to the stage where we have enough of a volume of natural gas that we can contemplate a world scale ethylene cracker. In fact, we should be producing with Atlantic LNG 4 and all the LNG production, of the order of 50,000 barrels per day of ethane which would allow us to contemplate a world scale cracker of the order of 850,000 metric tons per year. This project is receiving a considerable amount of attention and a number of potential investors have been coming to talk to us about this.

Of course, there is also the Caribbean gas pipeline. As recently as last week a group of Senators from France came to visit me as Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. Why is that important? Because as far as we understand the market in the Caribbean, we need as a first phase for such a project, to go as far as Guadeloupe, one of the French islands. We need to have Guadeloupe and Martinique as a part of the mix, because in the other islands the need and the requirement for natural gas is not great enough to cause it to be economically viable. But if we can get Martinique and Guadeloupe in the mix, then we potentially have a project.

In fact, I heard a speculation. The engineering technology is not the issue so much anymore. In any event we are moving ahead with the concept of a pipeline to Guadeloupe. Again, why is it important? Is it that we just want to do something for doing it sake? No. In Trinidad and Tobago, if we were to generate the same amount of electricity that we now do with diesel, liquid fuels, we would have to use of the order of 40,000 barrels of diesel per day to generate the electricity we do now, at world prices today for diesel upwards of $30. As it is, with the natural gas that we use, the barrel of oil equivalent in terms of volume, if converted into volume and similar BTU content or heating content, we expend less than $10 per barrel of oil equivalent.

What does that translate into? That translates into the low electricity prices that we have, which provide, among other things, a manufacturing advantage to our manufacturers. This, we would like to share with our Caribbean neighbours. We believe that it would encourage economic growth in the Caribbean region. We believe that we have a responsibility to work with our Caribbean neighbours to ensure their development as well as ours, for all sorts of reasons.

We have already put into the public domain what are the returns from the Atlantic LNG 4 project, but there are a couple of other projects that I would like to put on the table so that at least Members could have an idea. We already understand now that, as I have mentioned, we have signed the memorandum of understanding with regard to aluminium. We are looking into aluminium.

Even if we took that out of the mix and we look at the normal increase in terms of housing and manufacturing and other enterprises, we know that we are going to need new electricity generation capacity. Of course, power generation falls under the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. If we put all of these projects into the mix, we would recognize now that we are going to need new capacity onshore Trinidad of the order of 450 to 500 megawatts of new capacity.

So we are looking at ways of causing this to happen. There would probably have to be private sector, but at the moment we are not quite sure, but it is work in progress. I thought I should let Members know.

An interesting project that we have just gone beyond the pre-feasibility stage also in the area of electricity generation, is the setting up of a new electricity generating facility in the sister island of Tobago. It is time that Tobago comes directly into the energy mix in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] A team led by staff from my ministry have conducted a pre-feasibility study which suggests that there are now two potential sources of supply that we can pipe to Tobago and build a power generation plant of the order of 40 to 45 megawatts capacity in Tobago. Currently Tobago is supplied with electricity by undersea cable from Toco, but Tobago also has back-up electricity generation—diesel-fired generation, and those plants are aging and they are almost at the end of their life cycle.

So it is turning out that one of the options that is appearing now to be quite feasible would be to build a new plant there and actually back-feed the northeastern peninsula of Trinidad and Tobago which is about to grow significantly. I heard somebody pooh-poohing the idea of what we are going to put into the mix to cause the Wallerfield area to happen. One of those things is electricity generation. If we can bring electricity from a source that is actually closer and more economical—because the cables are already there—if we put in a new plant there, then we can back-feed the northwestern peninsula of Trinidad. It means that we would have less infrastructure to put in to improve the electricity supply in that area and the two sources of natural gas appear now to make it possible. So some more work is being done and we hope in the near future to say one way or the other if we are going to go that way.

There is a lot going on. There is so much more that we can say and I know I am running out of time. But let me wind up by saying that if we summarize the key success factors for development in Trinidad and Tobago, whether we use any of our indigenous economic enterprises or activities, but specifically so in this case, the energy sector, we think that there are three success factors that we have identified. One is that we must have a high level of economic diversification; we need to have a high level of value-added trade and investment and we need to encourage small and micro enterprises and development of our private sector.

In essence, when Dr. Williams enunciated his vision back in 1977, he asked, and we ourselves asked the question: What are we doing as a nation to enhance our productive capacity? We have achieved almost everything that he had set out

in that vision in the industrial sector, save and except for aluminium and we are now working on it.

As we move forward towards 2020 to become a developed nation, while we foster production growth even more than we have in the past—and I have demonstrated that we are doing so—even as we encourage more sustainable investments and sustainable development, using all of the metrics that I have described to this honourable House, and even as we deepen and broaden our presence in the market place, the question that it appears that we must now ask ourselves is: How is our production and our productive capacity going to enhance our nation? I submit that the key driver behind this is investment in our human capital. This People's National Movement Government is committed to leveraging all of the resources of Trinidad and Tobago by 2020 to become a developed nation. The energy sector is a key tool that we can use. It is the means to an end, a brighter future for Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Mr. Gerald Yetming *(St. Joseph)*: [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, this budget that we are debating here is the second budget of this administration, both of which were built on Vision 2020. But I want to refer to the beginnings of both budget statements so we can get a sense on how we may have progressed year over year.

In the budget delivered on October 21, 2002, at the start of the budget the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister made a couple of statements. In fact, the beginning of that budget statement was rather upbeat and promising. He spoke about upholding and advancing the human dignity of every individual irrespective of race, colour, religion, culture, ethnicity, gender or social orientation. He spoke of how Trinidad and Tobago would be a prosperous and progressive society catering to the needs of our citizens, a preferred place to live, raise children, do business, work and go to school. This was on October 21, 2002. He spoke about the citizens, of how Trinidad and Tobago would be enjoying a high quality of life and he said, “crime and violence will not be tolerated”—very early in that budget statement.

You compare that to the start of this year's budget statement that we are now debating and this budget statement starts off with an admission that:

> “The level of security enjoyed by citizens is the most critical problem facing Trinidad and Tobago today. The population is being terrorised as the criminals have declared virtual war on this society.”

He went on in the beginning of this budget statement to outline an 11-point crime plan. How have we progressed year over year?

I want to start with this Vision 2020, because we keep hearing about Vision 2020. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries just spoke a lot about it, and all that they could say about Vision 2020 is becoming a developed nation by the year 2020. I would venture to say that if we ask each one of the 30 Ministers of Government, "what precisely do you mean by Vision 2020?", I venture to say that you would get 30 different answers. Just to say you want to become a developed country by the year 2020 does not mean a thing to the man in the street. Ask any citizen: Where are you likely to be in 2020? How are you likely to be affected? Where are your children going to be in 2020? How would you be? Nobody could know. The only thing you are hearing now is, "Well, you know, we are at US $7,000 per capita and if you want to become a developed country we would need to get to US $20,000 per capita." Now the economists are telling us, "Well, to move from $7,000 to $20,000 by 2020 you have got to grow by 10 per cent per year and we are not doing that." The Member for Diego Martin Central was careful to say in a public place that people must not expect to wake up in 2020—let us say, on January 01, 2020—and see a whole new beginning. They must understand that there would be progression.

In the *Social & Economic Policy Framework 2004*, which is a document circulated with the budget statement, on page 10 there is a whole section on Vision 2020 and I would like to read certain sections of it. It says at page 10:

> "Government, through its Vision 2020 objective is seeking to systematically put in place a long-term planning framework that would inform development and implementation of various initiatives throughout all sectors of the society with the ultimate goal of achieving developed country status for Trinidad and Tobago by the year 2020."

It goes on to say:

> "The intention is to fashion a comprehensive and integrated Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (MDP) which will provide the roadmap to 2020. This Plan, will guide the budgetary and planning process…"

The plan has not yet been developed. This is the second budget. This budget is not based on any 2020 plan, because the plan has not been developed. It continues:

> "This Plan, will guide the budgetary and planning process to ensure that investment is directed towards those specific areas necessary for building on the Vision 2020…"

It goes on to say:

> "The establishment of a matrix of activities as well as a definite timetable of interventions and allocations is to be a main feature of the overall exercise. Other features will include goals to be established, strategies to be pursued, yardsticks by which to measure our progress and milestones to celebrate along the way."

Perfect! Absolutely perfect and absolutely correct, except it is not done yet. Therefore, the point I am making is that the last budget and this budget are based on talk, Vision 2020, but no substance, and when you get this plan, then we would be able to measure year after year—the man in the street, the poor citizen, having seen and understood this, will understand how we are making progress.

I want to identify with the committee established under Arthur Lok Jack. I think once that committee operates independently and objectively, using the best minds available, regardless of political persuasion, we would find and get a 2020 plan and a roadmap that every citizen, regardless of political persuasion, would buy into, which is why you have the public consultation now. Because unless we buy into it, you do not want to have a situation where you have a change in government with plans now to change division.

Having said that this budget was based on no plan, I would say that this budget would therefore take us nowhere. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: You see the logic?

Mr. Manning: Donkey logic.

Mr. G. Yetming: I am coming to donkey logic in a while.

Instead, this budget and the words, deeds, actions or lack of action of this Prime Minister, this Minister of Finance and this Government, are leading us to instability in this country. [*Desk thumping*] The only reason in a budget of plenty, a budget that is supposed to be upbeat and promising, you would have embedded in that budget about a riot squad and enhancing it and giving it the best technology, is because you are anticipating riots. Why in a budget of plenty and of promise are you introducing riot squads? So that in fact my statement that this Government is leading us to instability is supported by the Government's intention and announcement in a budget statement that the riot squad is going to be improved and given the best technology.

I picked up the *Guardian* this morning and the editorial starts off—in fact the headline says: "Is Govt keeping T&T 'governable'?". This is not UNC talking. It says:

> "The Government could, ironically, be doing more to make the country 'ungovernable' than anything Opposition Leader Basdeo Panday is likely to achieve in that direction."

2.40 p.m.

I repeat.

> "The Government could, ironically, be doing more to make the country 'ungovernable' than anything Opposition Leader Basdeo Panday is likely to achieve in that direction."

By saying that this budget and the actions of the Government are leading us to instability, I am not preaching doom and gloom. I am issuing a warning to the Government and the Prime Minister, that unless he sits back, looks, listens, and addresses his actions and policies accordingly, we in this country are going to get into trouble. It is simply a warning.

Mr. Manning: Thank you.

Mr. G. Yetming: I know that you would appreciate it.

The editorial ends by saying:

> "The Government must show it has a more sensitive response to all this than simply beefing up the Riot Squad for the UNC, and reading the riot act for the rest."

I am submitting that the Government is taking us down at least five roads to instability. I am sure that my colleagues would find more. The first road is their total incompetence and inability to deal with crime by their actions or inactions, notwithstanding the announcement at the beginning of the budget. I would elaborate on each one so that the Prime Minister could get the five of them together.

The second road is rising unemployment and jobless growth. The third road is unsustainable, unproductive and wasteful spending. The fourth road is perceived or outright discrimination. The fifth road is the incompetent and insensitive handling of the financial sector. Each road has the potential to create instability in this country. There are five and each one, or any combination, or all, could set up

this place to a point that we would not like or that we would be difficult to recover from.

Crime is the first road. Crime is out of control by the admission of the Prime Minister. If I could use the term "uprising", the people's uprising in Chaguanas had nothing to do with politicians firing or encouraging anybody. The people of Chaguanas, out of pure frustration, came out to show their disgust at crime. The fact that UNC MPs joined in that march is not material. With the level of crime, the point would soon reach—it is not just a question of crime. It is a question that the criminals are in such control of the country. You cannot tell me that if the criminals are in control of the country and the State is unable to do anything about, we cannot have instability.

The brain drain which the Leader of the Opposition spoke about and capital flight—let Central Bank tell us how much foreign exchange they have had to put in the system, this year as compared with last year. Let the Minister of Finance tell us that. [*Interruption*] If I am wrong I am wrong. In spite of the additional foreign exchange coming into the system in the normal fashion, let the Minister tell us whether there has not been an increase in the level of interventions by the Central Bank in the foreign exchange market. Whether there is that hard evidence or not, they cannot deny that there is the flight of entrepreneurs, brain drain and some capital from this country. We are not talking about the reduced foreign investments and the considerable loss of jobs as a result.

At one time we spoke about Trinidad and Tobago being the financial capital of the region. They are talking about Trinidad and Tobago being the manufacturing capital of the region. All that is fine. Those things are laudable objectives to which we totally subscribe. You cannot achieve it if you cannot curb crime. Others will speak about the Brigadier, and the legality or illegality of this special unit. Crime and the inability of this Government to deal with it would take us down the road to instability.

The second road is rising unemployment. In his budget statement, the Prime Minister had to admit to the fact that unemployment had risen. He seems to think it is temporary. I remember that in his last budget statement he spoke about Wallerfield and 35,000 jobs for the next 10 years. There is no mention whether by accident or design of the number of jobs to be created in this budget statement. There is an admission. We understand that the job losses are in manufacturing and the services sector. Those are high-valued jobs. The percentage rate increase given in unemployment did not include Caroni (1975) Limited. We have had

unemployment in this country before. I am aware of it being up to 18.1 per cent. It might have been higher than that before and there was no instability. The difference between then and now is that, if there is high unemployment in a country of plenty, you are sowing the seeds of instability. Therefore, when you send 9,000 people home from Caroni (1975) Limited and do nothing and are still doing absolutely nothing to help them get jobs, create businesses or industries to take up those positions in this time of plenty, you are looking for instability.

We all agreed that something had to be done about Caroni (1975) Limited. If you want to think about downsizing, could that not have been done over a period of time? You could have carried Caroni (1975) Limited to 2006. Everybody in the industry would know today, in 2003, that in 2006, Caroni (1975) Limited would be gone. In that four-year period you could have done the land allocation for farming, industry creation in Caroni (1975) Limited to create jobs, so people would make the transition and not have 10,000 persons go home, spend out the money from Voluntary Separation Enhancement Programme (VSEP) and then wonder from where the next dollar would come. You are sowing the seeds of instability.

In a period of plenty, you are talking about $400 million for the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) and the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) per annum and you are not showing that sensitivity to the 9,000 persons from Caroni (1975) Limited and treat them the same way by carrying the industry over a period of time with annual reductions. I will treat with that under discrimination.

The third road to instability that this Government is taking us is the unsustainable, unproductive and wasteful spending. This is not the UNC talking. The IMF warned them about it. They said, "You did it before, don't do it again." When you increase some of these expenditures, what we consider to be wasteful and unproductive and they are expected to continue year after year, the question that would arise is: What would happen the year you cannot afford it?

The taxation in the oil sector moved from $1.8 billion in 2002, to $4.9 billion in 2004 projected. Over a period of two years, the Government's revenue from oil taxation more than doubled. When you are unable to collect those revenues because of a depression in the price of energy, the first thing to be cut would be some of these unsustainable expenses, where human beings are involved.

The fourth road has to do with discrimination in this country. I sat in Parliament for the past year and I heard my colleagues talk about discrimination.

I was very careful not to run into that because they spoke from a different perspective. I am prepared now to say that there is discrimination by the PNM Government against half of the population in this country. The first time I spoke about this is a couple months ago when a newspaper report disclosed the particulars about the women's URP programme. It was disclosed that in every PNM constituency there were six gangs and in every UNC constituency there were three, with the exception of St. Joseph and Barataria/San Juan. That matter was raised and never defended. How could they explain six women's programmes in PNM constituencies and three in UNC constituencies?

How could they explain their treatment of Caroni (1975) Limited? I am dealing with it now in a discrimination context. I suggest very strongly to the Prime Minister that the Government has a responsibility to ensure that it does not take us down this road. You need to do more than have your Ministers talk about what happened between 1995 and 2000. You need to come out with facts to convince the population and the people who believe or perceive themselves to be discriminated against, who feel it in their hearts and pockets, that this is not so. You have a responsibility so you do not take us down the road to instability. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, since this morning we have been going very well. Let the Member for St. Joseph continue.

Mr. G. Yetming: I would read from an article written by Tony Fraser. This is Tony Fraser speaking and not the UNC. He said:

There are however more than a few questions to be raised about the nature of CEPEP and URP and the other direct social welfare projects. Do they engage people in sufficiently productive activity? Are the projects being equitably distributed throughout the country and not to the political constituencies of the ruling party? Do the programmes really have a training allotment to inculcate the value of self-reliance into the future?

Even more frightening for the law abiding tax-paying citizen is the possibility that funds gained from social welfare are being used to finance brutal acts of violence. The Ministers involved must convince the nation in the budget debate that the transfers are not directed to political patronage, temporary appeasement and/or the nurturing of a criminal element.

I beg them to do so. On this note about law abiding tax-paying citizens and funds gained from social welfare being used to finance the criminal element, the budget allocation for the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation

increased by $151 million from last year to this year. The allocation to CEPEP increased by $255 million. On one hand, you are giving the crime fighters $155 million more for the year, and the criminals, a major part of the $255 million. For every gun that the police buy, the criminal could buy two. [*Desk thumping*) They cannot deny it. They know it and they are trying to stop it by saying that the Defence Force would hand out the cheques to the National Housing Authority (NHA). Why are they doing that? They know that the money is going in the wrong place. The only question is: How much? Is it 25 or 50 per cent? Work that back to the $255 million that you just increased the programme by. If it is 25 per cent, they are talking about $60 million. I am still on the point of discrimination.

The Government announced that the 3 per cent levy on the oil producing companies would go to 4 per cent. The additional revenues generated would be $249 million. This is where the money would go and it is in the budget statement.

Programmes	Million
Reafforestation Programme	50
URP	200
CEPEP	225

They are distributing it. I do not have a problem with that, but the distribution is URP and CEPEP, both of which we know go in a particular direction. Drainage and other community projects go to La Horquetta, Maloney, San Juan and Laventille to the tune of $250 million. If you are going to raise $250 million by virtue of an increase in taxation, why are the drainage and community projects limited to those areas? You would tell me that there is no discrimination in this country by this administration. That is a dangerous road to instability in this place. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members and Member for Laventille, as I said earlier on, we have been going very good since the start of today's proceedings. Let us continue to go good. The Member is on his feet. I am appealing to all Members on both sides of the House not to engage in cross talk. Let the Member make his contribution.

Mr. G. Yetming: The fifth road to instability is the incompetent and insensitive handling of the financial sector by this administration. In the budget statement, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance said that the importance of a strong and well-regulated financial sector must not be underestimated. That

says that the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance understands the importance of a strong and well-regulated financial sector. Maybe, he does not understand that a very fundamental requirement of that strong financial sector is confidence. Unfortunately, this administration does not have a history of dealing with this financial sector or understanding the confidence that is required in this sector.

I would quote from an article appearing in *The Trinidad Guardian* dated Thursday, October 02, 2003. The headline is "Loose talk from the PM". He makes reference to the statement that the Prime Minister made at the post Cabinet briefing of the press. He made reference to the Unit Trust/First Citizens Bank merger. It said:

> "Inherent in that statement is the belief that ultimately the Cabinet has the power to decide whether the monies of unitholders in the UTC's mutual funds should be diverted into a merger with the FCB."

I am quoting this article because it provides in capsule form a number of issues, though in very mild language what I wished to have said. It continues:

> "The feedback Prime Minister Manning would have received from his off-the-cuff statement on the proposal should have informed him that he and his executive do not have the legal, political or moral authority to utilize unitholder funds in a manner deemed fit by the Cabinet.
>
> Manning would have understood, too, that as Minister of Finance his words on an issue impacting on the savings of people have the potential to generate fears among those savers investing in the UTC.
>
> It follows, therefore, that the Minister of Finance should in future be extra careful about his pronouncement on financial issues."

The *Daily Express* in its editorial on September 29 had this to say:

> "…this whole episode seems to point to an emerging Government style that Mr. Manning has introduced, one that has to do with testing the waters or, to put it more crudely, flying a kite, before a formal announcement is made."

The *Daily Express* is talking about this growing practice of Mr. Manning to fly kites. The reason I want to spend some time on this is, if this financial sector collapses, you could forget 2020. With all the oil, gas and plans that they may have, if this financial sector collapses, forget it. They may dismiss collapse and feel it is exaggeration, but it is not.

There is a story about a businessman driving down the road in a country in the Far East and he saw an unusual thing. He saw a line outside the bank. He did not understand what it was for. He knew that it was different because he had never seen a line before. It was around the time of the collapse of a bank. He picked up his cell phone and called his friends. As a result of this man passing and seeing a line outside this bank, he panicked and there was a run on the bank. I do not want them to feel that this collapse is an exaggerated view.

So, Mr. Manning, according to this newspaper editorial, flew a kite.

3.10 p.m.

The Member for Diego Martin Central said to a group—I caught a glimpse of it on television—these commentators who are passing comment on this UTC/FCB merger are not informed, or they are not analyzing the thing. I want the Member for Diego Martin Central to tell me: How does one analyze a kite? He cannot. When you get a kite and you are the subject of it you would get angry and they would get scared. When the Prime Minister or somebody at Balisier House flew a kite and was threatening the Member for Diego Martin Central, his partner Joe Laquis immediately went to the media to send a message back to Balisier House, "Do not come here in Diego Martin Central." When the Prime Minister or somebody flew a kite about the Member for Diego Martin East being sent to Cuba, he panicked. He did just like the depositors of FCB and Unit Trust, he wrote a letter to the Editor to say 9,000 people voted for him and all these people were going to be upset. What he was, in fact, telling his Prime Minister is, "I ain't going to resign."

So do not be upset when UTC depositors—a unit holder called in during a radio programme and said. "I am PNM"—I can not remember the terminology that was used—in fact, the caller was saying, "I am a PNM, that if they went ahead and did that, I am removing my money." That was not a singular case. If they could only listen to all the people who called in and wrote to the newspapers, they would have realized that people got scared. People got scared and once confidence is broken you are looking for trouble, you are looking for instability in this country.

The chairman of the Unit Trust came out openly and said, nobody talked to him and this is a hostile takeover. Why is it that the chairman of FCB will get a position paper, outline proposal, whatever it is; if it is a merger of equals, why did the chairman of FCB not pick up the phone and call the chairman of Unit Trust and say; "Partner look, I have this outline proposal, we are talking about a merger,

could we meet and talk about it so we can put up a joint position to Cabinet?" He did not do that. Why it is when the Minister of Finance got the outline proposal he did not say, before this thing goes to Cabinet I want to hear what the chairman of the Unit Trust has to say about it? He did not do that either. So you cannot blame the chairman of the Unit Trust for saying this was a hostile takeover plan, particularly when you have to get the support of the Government for legislation to make it happen. And do you know what is the consequence of all that? The consequence of all that is they are now planning to remove the chairman of the Unit Trust.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. G. Yetming: Mr. Speaker, thank you. So there was one Minister in the Ministry of Finance who came out and said lack of analysis. Cannot analyze a kite. Then you have the other innocent Minister in the Ministry of Finance—I have to say innocent. Minister Sahadeo gave an interview. It is an article written by Andy Johnson.

'To be honest, you know, there really is nothing on paper.'

Referring to this merger. Andy Johnson had to ask in a paragraph in the article. He says:

> "One question arising immediately from her admission on the phone was then, by what means does a matter come to the Cabinet if it is not in the form of a note, or a proposal in writing, and how does the discussion take place in such circumstances."

So they are upset with us and they are upset with the unitholders and they are upset with the population because we do not know and we cannot analyze this thing, but you are dealing with an outline proposal, and you are dealing with a Minister of Government who says she does not have anything in writing. How could you be treating with a matter of this importance and discussing it in Cabinet without a piece of paper? [*Crosstalk*] Let them get up and defend it. Mr. Speaker, she never denied it.

But Mr. Speaker, she goes on to say:

> "For the 21 years of its existence, she says, the UTC has been 'very heavily supported by the Government.'"

She is now trying to justify the fact that this action ought to be taken. She said:

> "For the 21 years of its existence, she says, the UTC has been "very heavily supported by the Government. People got tax breaks for putting their money into the UTC.'"

She goes on to say:

> "'It's nice to run a public company, especially when there is such strong support from the Government, but there comes a time…'"

I want to let the Minister know that the question of tax incentives to investors in the Unit Trust ceased since 1996, and I want to let her know that any financial support provided by the Government, through the Central Bank through the UTC, ceased since 1992, so do not try to justify doing something about the UTC because the time has come. And she went on to say that the UTC needs to go on to another plane. It is not for the Government to decide whether the UTC should move on to another plane. It is not for the Government to decide!

Mr. Valley: If the Member would give way, I just want to ask one question. There was a guarantee on principle that the Central Bank provided to the Unit Trust. In what year was the guarantee provided by the Central Bank moved?

Mr. G. Yetming: Mr. Speaker, I am the Member of Parliament for St Joseph. The Minister of Finance should be able to answer that. The point is that the Unit Trust does not belong to the Government. The initial investment was put in not by the Government, partly by the Central Bank. The expenses that were taken up by the Central Bank ceased a long time ago, and it is time that the navel strings to the Government be cut. The Government, in its last budget spoke about bringing Unit Trust legislation to the honourable House. Let them do it. The Government should have absolutely no say in the future direction of the Unit Trust. [*Desk thumping*] And, therefore, their move to move the chairman, Mr. Alleyne, is a wrong one and is not advisable. It is untimely! Because if you do that you will fuel the speculation that the Government is interfering in the management of the Unit Trust and you are likely to get the run that you are looking for. Do not do it now even if you want to do it.

In fact, I think that the Government should focus on a policy position for the FCB. The FCB has been performing well. It came out of three failed banks and the population knows that, particularly where the predecessor bank NCB was concerned there was perceived to be Government interference in the running of the bank. In fact, one of the biggest disservices that we performed on these state enterprises is having to change with every change in administration or change in Minister, change in Government having to change these boards. I totally subscribe to the view that, in fact, the non-performance of many state enterprises has to do not with poor staff, but the frequency of change of boards. Could you imagine an executive having to report on one board today, another board next year and not have a sense of where to take this company? There could be no strategic planning which is why I come back to 2020. Let it be properly done and let all of us buy into it so that every time there is change, we would not be changing the future.

Whether it is the First Citizens Board, Water and Sewerage Authority Board or the Regional Health Authority, the respective governments contribute considerably to their non-performance. In fact, I go further to say—I had discussions with the Prime Minister when we were in Government. To me, it is absolute nonsense to talk about privatization and about divesting 49 per cent of a company, absolutely nonsense! Which private sector firm is going to invest either money or technology or whatever it is to buy 49 per cent of a company to have government in control and having the majority on the board and appointing the chairman? Could you imagine buying 49 per cent of Trinidad Distillers and put four board members and five controlled by the members and they are deciding year after year?

To come back to the First Citizens Bank, I think that the Government—I am strongly of the view—

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for St. Joseph for giving way. The Government's policy is clear, and that is, if an enterprise were of strategic importance, the state would retain a participating interest in it. If it were not of strategic importance then the State would divest its interest in an orderly fashion. Rum Distillers is not a company that is of strategic importance and, therefore, in due course the State would divest it completely.

Mr. G. Yetming: I was not making the point to attack Government's policy. I was just making the point to say that a big impediment to the performance of many state enterprises and regional corporations, Regional Health Authorities and

so forth, is the fact that the frequent changes—When the NAR came into office I thought that the decision to change every single man and every single board was the wrong one. It is not a PNM thing. I am only making the point that all of us contribute to the inefficiencies by virtue of the right we have and exercise to change the boards.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the Government ought to be in the business of banking, and I think that the Government ought to take urgent steps to get out of the First Citizens Bank, particularly in light of the fears and concerns being expressed by people now as a result of that merger announcement. I say this also because what the population does not know is that this country, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have supported the First Citizens Bank in excess of $2.5 billion to date. Half a million dollars of our money, the people's money went and continues to go into the First Citizens Bank because of the bad loans that were granted by the Workers' Bank and National Commercial Bank that had to be taken over by Taurus to make FCB good, and when FCB came into being, $700 million of bad debt, were taken over by Taurus in exchange for paper guarantee by the Government. The point is, by virtue of these government banks, NCB in particular, the mismanagement and the Government's interference, today, we are paying for that to the tune of about $2.5 billion.

In fact, I want to remind the Ministers of Finance that they must understand why unitholders are fearful with this talk. It is not to say that these people do not know about loss. We have to remember that when NCB and Workers' Bank and the Cooperative Bank went under, the shareholders in those banks lost, I believe, in excess of $300 million. When NCB was folded up, men got 10 cents on a share.

Mr. Valley: What year was that?

Mr. G. Yetming: It does not matter what year. Mr. Speaker, shareholders lost in excess, I believe it was $300 million. The very lady, who called about her units in the Unit Trust and was fearful, said: "That is my retirement income, I am depending on that to live on." She went on to say when NCB went under she lost money, so let us be very careful.

I want to wrap up the point on FCB. The net asset value of FCB today is about $1.3 billion and if they were to sell FCB at twice time net asset value, they could collect $2.5 billion. The time is right for the Government, rather than thinking about promoting this idea of a merger, to take a policy position to remove its dominant holding in FCB.

While I am on the financial system, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, in speaking about the legislation that had to come to the honourable House—and he talked about changes to the Financial Institutions Act, the Securities Act and so forth, I just want to ask—and he spoke about legislation to cover mutual funds—what is his intention with respect to the credit unions in this country?

The new Governor of the Central Bank, and I am sure the former Governor would agree that the credit unions ought to be brought under the supervisory control of the Central Bank so that all financial institutions including the insurance industry and pension plans, which is what would come, that the Government needs to go a step further and bring the credit unions under that same regulatory body. I make the point only because it was not stated in the Budget Statement.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the price of oil used in the budget.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spoke about OPEC and the basket being between 22 and 28. I want to read from an IMF document, the *World Economic Outlook* published in September 2003:

> "Commodity markets have continued to be heavily influenced by geopolitical developments, the cyclical situation, and supply shocks. After peaking at over $34 a barrel before the war, oil prices fell back sharply in April, but by end-August had returned to $30 a barrel, reflecting a slower-than-expected recovery in Iraq's oil production, persisting tight industrial country inventories, and concerns about the sustainability of current production levels in Nigeria and Venezuela."

It goes on to say that:

> "In early September, oil prices fell back, and—while they are expected to remain elevated during the remainder of 2003—they are projected to drop to an average $25.50 a barrel in 2004 in the face of rising supply, including from Iraq; indeed, many oil market analysts see a possibility of a significantly larger price decline."

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for St. Joseph in being so gracious as to give way. I wonder if the hon. Member is aware that subsequent to that article, OPEC took a decision to cut oil prices by $900,000 a day and oil prices have soared above $30 a barrel again. Is the hon. Member aware that article does not take that into account?

Mr. G. Yetming: Mr. Speaker, the point is none of us have a crystal ball. We do not know whether there would be another war next week in Saudi Arabia; we do not know these things. And, therefore, we have to be guided by what the Organization of Petroleum and Exporting Countries (OPEC) says and what OPEC does at a particular time; what the International Monetary Fund and what the other industrial analysts would have to say. I am only advancing that I consider a $25 dollar price of oil to be very optimistic.

I am suggesting and I might be wrong; by the end of the year I may be proven wrong. The reason I am raising this is to deal—I do not want it to be said that it is my pet topic but it is to deal with the Revenue Stabilization Fund. There was a debate about a month ago when we were dealing with another matter in this Parliament, and notwithstanding the fact that in the previous budget statement it was said that the legislation for the Revenue Stabilization Fund was going to come, when we had that debate I got the impression from the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance that the debate on whether there should be a fund or not was still taking place in the Ministry of Finance. That is fine. I find it difficult to accept that after two years and more, because we have now reached the Revenue Stabilization Fund and it was since the year 2000, it is now 2003, so certainly the Government and the party that was then in Opposition, would have had at least three to four years to have taken a studied position on this Revenue Stabilization Fund. I noticed that the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance said absolutely nothing about it in his Budget Statement. But in going through the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004*, on page 19 of that document it says:

> "Effective constraint on expenditure and enhanced revenue collections from a more diversified and broad-based Non-oil Sector will continue."

This is Government's policy. Like I said, the book is entitled, the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004.*

> "This relatively conservative fiscal position is deemed necessary in order to avoid excessive budgetary reliance on revenues from the exploitation of non-renewable natural resources and for building a reasonable 'rainy day' fund to weather temporary shocks. Government will therefore place 60 percent of excess petroleum revenues into the Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSF). The remaining windfall revenue not earmarked for the RSF, will be used to retire outstanding debt."

So that we have not embodied this in the Budget Statement but inside this *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004* the policy position of the

Government, which is, they have now according to this, accepted the Revenue Stabilization Fund. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, on this page there is a box, Box: 5.1, headed Revenue Stabilization Fund. I would like to quote from it. It says:

> "Government views the Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSF) as an important management tool for not only improving domestic savings and making provision for revenue shortfalls, but also as a measure of fiscal discipline. To this end, Government has re-evaluated the provisions of the RSF and is of the view that, consistent with transfers to the Fund, withdrawals should be the lesser of 60 percent of the deficit of petroleum taxation revenues and 25 percent of the opening balance of the Fund."

I thought—I might be wrong—why introduce in this little box the withdrawal feature? You say that you view the RSF as an important management tool, improving domestic savings and making provisions and so forth and then you talk about withdrawals to the lesser of 60 per cent of the deficit and 25 per cent of the opening balance?

What this means—and that by and large, I think, is the withdrawal position that was built into the draft legislation so it is not that I am agreeing with the withdrawal position. I only find it interesting in now announcing their policy position on the RSF that within the first paragraph of the box they talked about withdrawing. They open the door with a fund of $1.5 billion and a maximum of 25 per cent to be taken out next year, in the tune of $400 million. So I ask myself; Why budget at $25 a barrel, so high a price if you really intend to use the RSF? It is not the Government's intention to put any money into any stabilization fund and, therefore, by budgeting with your price of oil high, you guarantee that no money would be going in. Not only that, but if the price should come in below $25 a barrel, they would have the ability to dip their hands into the existing fund of $1.6 million. I want the population to understand that. You talk about sleight of hand!

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would use the last five minutes of my time to just make a quick point on a critical issue affecting the country and which is absent from this budget. I know the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries took some time to try to articulate a position—I am referring to the question of the diversification of the economy. I do not think that this Government is sufficiently committed to an aggressive diversification of the economy. After 20 years of talking about moving

away from the dependency on oil, and now on oil and gas, instead of moving more towards diversification, we are moving further away from it.

The Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister, at another time in Parliament, related a story and I am going to read the story from the *Hansard* of September 12, 2003, to illustrate the point. The Minister of Finance said:

> "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…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 this 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."

Funnily, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries got up and talked about when he was 10 years old and what his father had to say about running out and now he is a big man and it is not running out yet. Clearly, these two leaders in the Cabinet, in the energy sector, are convinced by and determining policy on the basis of a letter dated 1905. Imagine that! [*Desk thumping and laughter*] Imagine a prime minister, imagine a minister of energy determining a policy for this Government and this country on the basis of a letter written in 1905 and on the basis of what he heard when he was 10 years old. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries referred to the reserves he said, "Oh we have the equivalent of 9.5 billion barrels of oil" and there was a lot of pounding on the desks as if the PNM put it there. [*Laughter*] The PNM put that there. The point is that there appears to be the position that we will forever have oil and gas in this country so forget about developing the intellectual capital, dollar for dollar, and forget about aggressively diversifying the economy. Forget about all that.

Mr. Speaker, I know my time has run out. One of the last statements of the Prime Minister during his budget statement was that this budget shall serve as a further unifying force in our society. I submit that if he continues along the past, if he ignores the advice that we have tried to give today, and we will give over the next couple of days, this Government would serve as a destabilizing force in this country.

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

[*Crosstalk*]

The Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation (Sen. The Hon. Howard Chin Lee): Mr. Speaker, I am being disturbed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is the first time the hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation is addressing this House and I would ask you, all Members, to pay him the due courtesy that he deserves. He is the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation and I know he may provoke a little crosstalk, but, please, keep it under wraps.

Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee: Mr. Speaker, first of all I take this opportunity to thank you for allowing me to speak as this is the first time I am addressing the Lower House.

Mr. Speaker, as I stand before this honourable House today our country and its law-abiding citizens face some of its most daunting challenges in the history of our country. I make this declaration because when I accepted this responsibility, as the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation almost two years ago, I did so knowing that there would be no quick-fix solution for the problem of crime and with the deep conviction that the only way to succeed would be to try and to remain committed.

I am here today, Mr. Speaker, to let the good people of this nation know that they are not alone and that my commitment, the commitment of my ministry, and the commitment of the Government is stronger and more determined than ever before. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I have heard the other side talk about crime as though there was no crime during their reign. When the Leader of the Opposition was then the Minister of National Security, he had the highest murder rate in the history of this country—152, an average of one murder every 48 hours.

The measure of this commitment, Mr. Speaker, if only expressed in words, would have had little or no impact on the crime situation, but as the saying goes, action speaks louder than words. It is our commitment to action that is taking the assault on crime to the cities, to the towns and villages, into the neighbourhoods and unto our roadways.

Mr. Speaker, over the last two years this ministry, the protective services and other divisions under the jurisdiction, has been strengthened, trained and modernized and re-equipped to function at levels of professionalism and effectiveness that are well beyond the previous capabilities. Please allow me to outline the initiatives in the 2003/2004 budget, but first, a quick review of the

2003/2004 budget shows clear support to the stated theme "Charting the course to 2020, Empowering People".

The theme is maintained through the budget giving a clear signal of Government's intention to promote national development by focusing on a number of key areas. The allocation this year to the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation reflects the Government's conviction of the importance of crime reduction and eradication in achieving its goals. The Ministry of National Security, therefore, has a strategic role to play in establishing and maintaining systems and strategies to effectively reduce crime and promote an enabling environment that will contribute to the country's sustained development.

The 2003/2004 budget allocation constitutes a firm commitment by the Government to deliberately and consciously chart and follow the course to confront this challenge to take Trinidad and Tobago to the achievement of developed status by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, you would note that the budget allocation has been increased; $1.9 billion has been allocated to the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation. This represents approximately 10 per cent of our national budget. Our Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), which is the development programme, has been increased 150 per cent from $31.4 million to $83 million, whilst under the recurrent expenditure there has been an increase from $1.6 billion to $1.8 billion.

I shall now outline the major activities undertaken by the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation in the fiscal year 2002/2003 and the plans for continuation of all of our projects for the following year 2003/2004 using the above allocations. First, let me outline all that we have done in the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service which comes under the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation.

My ministry has been consistent in its effort to bring the protective services and other divisions of the ministry up to the established standard, technologically. During the fiscal year 2002/2003 we were able to progress along the path with the completion of Phase III of the information technology network for the Fire Service Division. The phase provided for the acquisition and distribution of computer equipment throughout the four divisions of the fire service. Emphasis is also placed on improving the communication equipment through the acquisition of three new PABX telephone systems for use at fire service headquarters in the north, south and in Tobago. In effect, it is to reduce the response time of the fire service.

In terms of its facilities and the improvement for the fire service, the construction of the Piarco Fire Station and the Sangre Grande Fire Station is now 71 per cent and 31 per cent completed. The expansion of the stores facility is 99 per cent completed and the design for the Couva Fire Station—which we are not discriminating against—which will cater for industries at the Point Lisas industrial estate is completed. Tenders would now be invited for construction of the latter during the current fiscal year.

I want to now specifically focus on the Piarco Fire Station which should become operational within the current fiscal year. Upon completion of this station, Trinidad and Tobago would become fully compliant with the regulations of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) which dictates that the airport fire and rescue service be able to adhere to the response time, save lives and minimize the effect of any accidents.

Mr. Speaker, that fire station at Piarco will be the best in the region. This station will be outfitted with new state-of-the-art equipment at $15.9 million and amongst the items to be purchased for this station at Piarco are as follows: two major airport firefighting vehicles; one medium range crash tender; one first strike water tender; a foam refill system; a bridge crane air compressor and a standby generator. Once operational, it will adequately provide the airport and environs with the level of fire coverage that is required for such critical areas.

Mr. Speaker, mobility of the fire service was also advanced during the last fiscal year with the acquisition of five utility vehicles, one ambulance, a 25-seater bus, command vehicles, dump trucks and panel vans. A water tender tanker, and a hose laying and recovery fire rescue vehicle have also been acquired. These vehicles and equipment are to be delivered to the fire service toward the end of this month.

For this year so far our records indicate that the fire service has responded to over 1,304 fire related calls, 5,300 calls for ambulance services and 1,923 non-fire related calls. There is no doubt that these acquisitions allow the officers to better respond to the needs of the citizens of this country. In the 2003/2004 budget $13.5 million is allocated for the construction of new fire stations in San Fernando, Couva and Sangre Grande.

I would like now to move to the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service. The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service is now positioning itself to make the shift from retributive to restorative and rehabilitative mode. We are now focusing on reducing the rate of recidivism from 65 per cent to 40 per cent and to do so would require a rehabilitative mode within the ministry.

Integral to this process would be the introduction of a parole system and best constructive regimes methods which will ensure that prison inmates are in a position to contribute meaningfully to society upon release from the prison system. We are also allocating $4 million to the maximum security prison because when we took office only 800 inmates were allowed to occupy the maximum security prison.

The maximum security prison can effectively cater for 2,200 inmates. By the end of 2004 plans are also in train for upgrading the Golden Grove facility to align it with the ministry's rehabilitation objective. I will not delve too much into this area as the Parliamentary Secretary who is responsible for rehabilitation will elaborate to you in the near future.

I now move to the area of immigration which falls under my ministry. To eliminate the aspect of passport fraud, which the Member is well aware of, the Ministry is injecting $4 million to the automation of passport preparation and another $1.8 million to install mechanisms for the electronic scanning of passports and other travel documents. By next year we would be introducing a machine-readable passport which effectively will minimize fraud and will be able to computerize a system where we would know who is in our country and who is leaving. So that all of those illegal immigrants cannot enter without a valid passport. This honourable House will be kept abreast of the developments in the area as we finally progress on the machine-readable passports which the UNC was incapable of doing.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to review the operation of two of the most important divisions that fall under the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation: the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. During the last fiscal year the ministry channelled considerable energy and resources into developing and strengthening those two divisions that stand in the forefront in the fight against crime, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force.

Mr. Speaker, when we took office in 2002 in the Defence Force there were four vehicles operating, do you know how many they have operating today? Seventy. [*Desk thumping*] Seventy brand new vehicles in the Defence Force. When we looked at the air wing of the Defence Force, do you know how many planes were operating? One. Do you know how many are operating now? All five. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, in the Coast Guard, do you know how many boats were operating when we took office? Five. Do you know how many are operating now? Fifteen. [*Desk thumping*]

I shall now share with you the progress made in these two divisions. During the past year the ministry concentrated on building the relevance and the effectiveness of the police service by focusing on increasing its visibility, responsiveness, mobility, accessibility and its infrastructure. We purchased 140 new vehicles for the E-999 and we improved the Global Positioning System (GPS) for the E-999. Basically, it reduces the time in which a response is made.

As part of visibility, by year 2004, the project SRP-1000 is a key component in the ministry's strategy to heighten police and the law enforcement visibility in the city centres and the surrounding communities. The deployment of the additional 1,000 Special Reserve Police officers would be implemented by the end of the year 2003 and this will impact positively on crime detection and, as well, the level of criminal activities in high crime zone areas.

In keeping with the drive, the ministry has also taken a decision to purchase 24 mobile police stations for use in city centres, public events and at scenes of serious crimes. [*Desk thumping*] This would allow not only for a police presence in high crime areas that may be located at long distances from an established station, but also a more rapid response to distress and closer to people's neighbourhoods.

In addition to increasing the ground patrols, there would also be an intensification of surveillance by the Police Service through increased aerial surveillance and the installation of cameras and the installation of close circuit televisions.

Mr. Speaker, during a recent visit to the United Kingdom we were able to explore a range of surveillance technologies that are now actively looking into the introduction of closed-circuit television as a crime fighting tool to monitor the activities on the nation's roads. Similarly, surveillance cameras, when installed, would provide the police service with valuable data including an image of the driver and the identification of the number plates on vehicles. These acquisitions would limit the mobility of stolen vehicles and the use of such vehicles in the commission of crimes such as robberies and kidnappings.

Mr. Speaker, in striving to make the Police Service more effective, we recognize the importance of furnishing the officers with the appropriate tools so as to allow them to perform their duties effectively and efficiently. Hence, we continue in our drive to acquire state-of-the-art equipment and technology over the past year. Over the past year you will also recall the Automatic Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) which was introduced to assist the police in

identifying criminals through a computerized database. Since it became operational this system has considerably reduced the time taken to verify and to identify the suspects and criminals. In the interest of proper maintenance of the software and to ensure that the work of the Police Service continues to benefit from the use of this system, this ministry has invested $470,000 in procuring a service level agreement for the Automatic Fingerprint Identification System.

Mr. Speaker, further to the development of a more technologically advanced service, the ministry utilized $542,000 to upgrade the Remote Database Management System (RDMS) which belongs to the Police Service. This was done so as to expedite information exchanged amongst all its units.

Thirty additional computers in the last year and other network equipment were also acquired and installed at a number of police stations, divisional headquarters and that was to widen the existing network of its wireless communications.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the introduction of anti-crime initiatives and acquisitions of upgraded technology of critical importance is the enactment of legislation to support the activities of the law enforcement agencies. In July of this year a decisive statement was made by passing Act No. 21 of 2003, commonly referred to as the Kidnapping Act, 2003. This reflected Government's zero tolerance stance on the issue of kidnapping and it provided the police officers with the specific legislation framework for action in cases of kidnapping. Essentially, the Bill provides for the punishment of kidnapping for ransom and other related offences and for matters incidental thereto.

The legislation declared the following offences as criminal acts: kidnapping for ransom, reward or any similar consideration; knowingly receiving ransoms; possession or disposing of money or property which has previously been delivered as ransom; and knowingly negotiating to obtain a ransom. It also legislates against disclosure of information that could be used by the potential kidnapper where such information is not restricted to financial data, but includes general information that can contribute to the commission of the crime. Had we known we would have brought legislation to increase penalties against fake kidnappers. [*Desk thumping*]

The Firearms (Amdt.) Bill, 2003 would provide additional powers to the police as well as facilitate the imposition of stiffer penalties for firearms offences such as the illegal possession of firearms and the illegal trading in weapons. This Bill also imposes the suspension of a firearms user's licence for persons convicted of domestic violence offences. Further, this Bill mandates the maintenance of a

firearms registry by the Commissioner of Police and the creation of a database of all firearms and ammunition in Trinidad and Tobago.

We also anticipate that crime detection would be greatly enhanced with the commencement of DNA testing at the Forensic Science Centre. As a result of the introduction of DNA legislation in this country, at present, my ministry, in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General and the Director of the Forensic Science Centre, is formulating regulations to operationalize the provision of the DNA Act, 2000. This Act would provide for DNA forensic analysis to include a DNA report as evidence as well as to determine any other related matters and should begin at the centre within the next five months.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I now move to the work that has been done to the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, over the years, has become an integral part of the Ministry's effort to eradicate crime both at sea and on land. In pursuing the development of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, this Ministry continues in its effort to provide the division with an acceptable work environment, up-to-date technology, equipment and the necessary manpower.

Let me review the last fiscal year. During the last fiscal year, therefore, refurbishment work was conducted on a number of facilities utilized by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard. Included in the facilities that were upgraded were the Staubles Bay facility, the Teteron Barracks, Camp Omega and the Defence Force Headquarters.

When this Government came into power in 2001, the fleet of the Defence Force was severely depleted. In fact, there was one serviceable aircraft for use by the division. Having recognized the crippling effect that this situation imposed on the surveillance capabilities of the Defence Force, this Government took immediate steps to refurbish and return the service to the unit’s aircraft. At present, there are five serviceable aircraft.

In addition to revitalizing the division’s fleet, its mobility was also enhanced during the 2002/2003 fiscal year with the acquisition of the following vehicles:

32 troop carriers

30 land rover jeeps

16 twin-cab pick-ups

8 Prados

1 Ford transit ambulance

4 patrol vehicles

Added to that, the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System, better known as the GMDSS, which is a new system utilizing sophisticated communication and alerting technology, was also operationalized during fiscal 2002/2003. This system has enhanced the search and rescue capabilities of the Coast Guard and it provides for increased surveillance and safety at sea. At present, the Ministry is pursuing the acquisition of additional equipment for its enhancement and, in keeping with training for this GMDSS, in the last fiscal year, 32 members of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard have received training and plans are afoot to train 39 more.

The operational readiness of the Defence Force was also further enhanced approximately three weeks ago when Cabinet approved the acquisition of two offshore patrol vessels better referred to as OPVs for use by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Princes Town, you will have your full 75 minutes. Let the Member continue!

Sen. The Hon. H. Chin Lee: OPV—offshore patrol vessels. Have you got that? These vessels will be used to patrol the EEZ, the waters in and around Trinidad and Tobago. These vessels will have the capacity to carry a rotary wing aircraft, a helicopter, two fast inceptor crafts and a company of regiment comprising approximately 150 soldiers and their operational equipment.

This translates into more sustained surveillance of our territorial waters and increased maritime law enforcement capabilities. The fight against the illicit drug trade, the preservation of the marine environment and search and rescue are among the areas that would immediately benefit from the acquisition of these vessels.

The Coast Guard, for the next fiscal year, will also acquire six new interceptor vessels at a cost of $2 million. In the interest of providing appropriate facilities to house and maintain these vessels, an allocation of $3 million was made for the 2004 fiscal year for the construction of a jetty at Staubles Bay. This will allow the berthing of TTS Nelson as well as the new vessels. [*Interruption*]

When they bought the Nelson, they had no facility for it, so we are now putting in facilities. This facility is earmarked to accommodate the new OPVs. The facility that is earmarked for Staubles will be there to accommodate the new OPVs as well as the CG6, which has been out of service for a considerable length of time. The CG6 is due to be returned to service by the end of this year.

To further enhance the maritime safety, a coastal radar surveillance system will also become operational within the next six months. This will allow total coverage of our coastal waters. Before this we had about 3 per cent coverage. We will have total coverage in the next six months.

Prior to this acquisition, surveillance of our territorial coastlines was at a minimum. These measures will coincide with the first strike increase of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, which began in 2002. This programme of expansion will continue to the years 2005. For this fiscal year alone, the strength of the Defence Force was increased by 734 recruits—232 in the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard and a total of 502 in the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment. Additionally, there are 21 officer cadets in training, 15 regiments of the Coast Guard. Upon successful completion of this course of training in April of next year, these officers will join the rank as Second Lieutenant and Midshipman.

In September of this year, the Defence Force also recruited a batch of soldiers: the first tranche of a 560-man battalion to form a second infantry battalion. We are now expanding from one battalion to two and an engineering battalion. So, in the history of the Defence force, the southern section of our country and particularly the energy-based industries have remained vulnerable in the absence of such a battalion to safeguard their interests. This Government gave its commitment to rectify that situation and is now on the path to realizing this objective by setting a second battalion in the south of Trinidad.

Of equal importance to the increase in established strength of the Defence Force is the continued training and development of all of our officers. Training is key. Apart from the normal recruit training, members of the Defence Force benefited from training in defence management. They benefited in engineering, survival at sea, the GMDSS, the radio operations, intelligence and tactics, paramedics, certified quality management and building construction technology.

The Defence Force has also made its mark in the area of youth development through its involvement in the Civilian Conservation Corps programme. The officers continue to play a key role in instilling discipline and lending guidance to the youth so that they can adopt positive attitudes and live more rewarding and

productive lives. For this year, two groups of young people have been inducted into this programme under the Defence Force. The first group was in May with an intake of 1,200 trainees from the north-west, the north, the central and south-central regions; and the second group in August from the north-east, south-east, south-west and Tobago regions.

Mr. Speaker, given the level of commitment that the Defence Force has shown to this programme and the obvious benefits to the youth population, we look forward to the further strengthening of the Civilian Conservation Corps during the current fiscal year.

In addition to the Civilian Conservation Corps, we will also introduce three new programmes for the benefit of the young people of our country. These three programmes are as follows:

- The National Youth Service Programme, carded to begin on January 01, 2004;
- The MILAP programme, which is Military-Led Academic Training Programme, to come on stream by July 2004; and
- the Military-Led Youth Programme for Apprenticeship and Reorientation Training.

The first of these programmes will target students who did not complete their secondary school programme and who will be trained in technical skills at the army's Cumuto Ccamp. The second will target the secondary school students who did not graduate with a full certificate. These students will be housed in dormitory facilities, utilizing existing schools after regular school hours. The third will involve a system of voluntary national service.

Mr. Speaker, I now move to the combined services of the police and the Defence Force. I have just chronicled the upgrading of the police service and the Defence Force to a level where it is now possible for these parallel arms of the Ministry to integrate their combined skills and capabilities to form another dedicated core of specialist resources in the Government's fight against crime.

We already have evidence of the operational capabilities of these two divisions, based on the success, to date, of the Inter-Agency Task Force (ITF), which was established in May of this year. This amalgamation was established primarily to reduce crime and the fear of crime in the Laventille, Morvant and Belmont areas through a heightened presence, through the introduction of programmes and activities for the development of members of those

communities, particularly the youth, and generally assisting in the establishment of a positive community spirit and its image.

Since its establishment this year, the ITF has successfully conducted 2,962 mobile patrols. It has also conducted 428 foot patrols, 593 snap road blocks and searched for 3,330 persons and 1,118 vehicles. These activities have resulted in the detention of 395 persons, detection of 14 murders, seizure of 23 weapons and 174 rounds of ammunition. I want to assure the population that the work of the ITF will continue as it strives to provide safer communities for all of its citizens.

In his budget presentation, the hon. Prime Minister recognized the value of the inter-agency collaboration by initiating the establishment of a special crime-fighting unit under the command of Brigadier Peter Joseph. This unit will have the ability to utilize manpower and resources from other protective services, including the intelligence units, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, both arms of the Defence Force, as well as the Voluntary Defence Force, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, prison service and members of the civilian population.

Brigadier Peter Joseph is no newcomer to the business of fighting lawlessness. Having enlisted in the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment in 1975, he completed his officer's cadet training at the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst in the United Kingdom. He graduated as a top student in his intake. At the time of his promotion, Brigadier Joseph was acting as Chief of Defence Staff. Many, however, will remember him for his key role in foiling the Muslimeen's attempted coup in 1990. Under his expert guidance, this unit will become operational within two months and is expected to have a decisive impact on the incidence of violent crimes such as kidnapping, extortion, illegal narcotics and activities of any group intent on terrorizing the population.

In conclusion, the measures outlined here today remain consistent with my own determination and my Ministry's commitment to uplift the quality, the effectiveness and the operational capabilities of all of the divisions under my Ministry. These measures will ensure that they are adequately equipped, not only to deliver effective tactical responses, but also to effect long-term deterrent strategies. Above all, these measures and resources are aimed at re-energizing all of the units with a fierce determination to roll back this wave of crime and return peace of mind and security to the peace-loving citizens of our nation.

I thank you.

Miss Gillian Lucky (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I was so thrilled when I saw the hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation and

Rehabilitation joining us here in the Lower House even though he never thought it fit, even though many bills fell within his purview, to join us in the First Session of the Eighth Parliament. However, having heard him, I must say that I am now convinced that he is living in another world. The world in which he lives is Disney World.

How embarrassing it must be—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Princes Town, I am appealing to you for the second time. Perhaps, you will do well to emulate the example set by your colleagues in the Front Bench—the Member for St. Augustine and the Member for St. Joseph. Please take an example from them

Miss G. Lucky: How embarrassing it must be, after hearing pages upon pages of the alleged work done by this hon. Minister, to realize that in Trinidad and Tobago today, we have a murder rate, in 2003, that has exceeded the murder rate for 2002. Perhaps it would do the hon. Minister well to ensure he does not run away during the tea break. I hope he comes back. He seems to be so pre-occupied with fires and fire stations that I think, subliminally, he has recognized that he is under fire and has been constructively fired. That is the reality of it.

When the hon. Minister began and there were some welcoming asides, it took me back to when he said to us this afternoon, "Quiet!" It reminded me of a time he was in deep south and was told of the escalation in kidnappings. He told the nation to stay calm. Well, the nation has stayed calm and I can only say that the hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, like the rest of the nation, is trembling because even in his contribution, maiden though it was, we saw his hands shake many times when he must have recognized that he has talked a lot of airy-fairy stuff that has not been implemented. When he tells this nation to stay calm and he lets the nation know that he is sleeping well, the message that the hon. Minister is sending to the public is that while he sleeps well, this nation continues to be traumatized.

We are now in the "Crime War II". There was World War I and World War II. In the 2002/3 Budget, we had already declared war on the criminals, so we were in "Crime War I". When, therefore, in this budget, 2004, we hear, as an opening salvo, that the Government is now declaring war on criminals, we are now in "Crime War II". Obviously, we have lost "Crime War I" and what has happened now is that the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation and Rehabilitation is in a situation, especially in light of the recent budgetary promotion of now Brigadier Peter Joseph, because the Minister of National

Security and Rehabilitation is in a state in which he knows not and he knows not that he knows not that he is no longer the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation.

After the tea break, I hope that I will see the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation and that he would not do what he normally does—run away when under fire. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea. It will be resumed at 5.00 p.m. sharp.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Miss G. Lucky: Mr. Speaker, you would remember that just before we broke for tea I had made the prediction that when we returned to this honourable Chamber, we would see the glaring absence of the hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation. I am so sorry to say that I was accurate, but I must say that that was typical of the operation of this hon. Minister who, when he is under fire, after making some very questionable and unjustifiable statements just fled the scene. This is what we on this side are saying about ministers who refuse to accept ministerial responsibility.

Ministerial responsibility does not have the conventional meaning of the word "responsibility". The word responsibility means, in that context, that a minister is answerable or he is accountable. It is not good enough for a minister to come into this honourable House, spend about 45 minutes, patting himself on the shoulder, perhaps trying to justify why he ought not to be fired or removed, and then when a response is being given, having been warned and cajoled that he should return to the House, he just is not there. Perhaps that is why he can say so openly in a newspaper report that despite all the crime in the country, he is sleeping well.

I waited with baied breath for the Government's anti-crime plan. After reading the Government's anti-crime plan in this 2004 Budget, I must admit that I am confident that at least one sector of this population is very happy with this anti-crime plan. That sector is the criminal sector. When the criminals recognize that there is no formidable measure that is going to be implemented to deal with their criminal activity, I can understand why all of them right now are eating, drinking and being merry while we try to explain to the Government that its anti-crime initiatives will not work. It is just a case of pie-in-the-sky and false promises that cannot be honoured.

Best of all for the criminals in this anti-crime plan in Budget 2004 is the fact that the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation will remain with his portfolio, although unknown to him he has been constructively fired, sidelined and replaced with someone who will be running a unit that has questionable operation and certainly questionable jurisdiction. How the criminals must be laughing at us when they heard about this think tank! This think tank" has been created and filled with little or no brains. The Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, on the one hand, sought to chastise and undermine every initiative of the former government, the United National Congress, and on the other hand, one of the "thinkers" or "brains" is a former Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, Joseph Theodore, who was a Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation under the very UNC regime.

What baffles me is that on the one hand the Minister is able to say that this anti-crime plan will work, suggesting that it is filled with all these "brains" and when we look at the "heads" holding these brains we realize that nothing will be done that is different to what was done by the UNC government and there will be no measures to deal with crime that will send a message to the criminals, "Criminals beware!" In fact, the message that the criminals have heard is: "Criminals, have no fear because Minister Howard Chin Lee is still here!"

What is even worse, Mr. Speaker, is that in this anti-crime plan, citizens who are very frustrated with what is taking place with respect to criminal activity, innocent citizens who just want to walk and talk about what is happening, are being told to be quiet because disobedience will not be tolerated. Once again, the criminals are laughing. They are not targeting the criminals. They are targeting citizens who want to express their frustration. Mr. Speaker, very fundamental to the rights and freedoms we enjoy here in Trinidad and Tobago, is the right of freedom of expression.

Let me send a message to the other side that nothing they say or do will prevent the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago from speaking out about what is happening and the injustice that is taking place under this PNM Government. What is perhaps even worse is that, with the establishment of this anti-crime unit, there are now many committed and competent police officers who are feeling undermined and demoralized because they understand that they are there to protect and serve us and they feel that despite all their effort, the Government is prepared to ignore them, is prepared not to give them the resources they need and instead establishes some questionable anti-crime unit which will, perhaps, be able to facilitate some of the officers.

This anti-crime plan will not work and once again citizens of this country are being given false expectations. The good news for the criminals, however, is that everything will be okay with respect to their criminal activity and as a sign of the approval of the budget, criminals continue to run riot throughout the country and they have sent a powerful message of thanks to the Government between Monday, when they were warned to beware, and today when we are responding to the anti-crime initiatives which the Government intends to implement. The criminals have sent a clear message of thanks that everything is A-Okay and well in the underworld. Unless the Government recognizes that it has to distance itself from the criminal elements, it must come to terms with the fact that an incompetent Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation will be unable, even by his conduct or things he says, to send that fear of God that needs to be sent to those criminals that we will not be tolerating their activity.

I am sorry the hon. Minister is absent but he came here in his capacity as a tourist. A tourist is a person who visits for a short period and leaves. When I thought about it during the tea break, I recognized that the message being sent to this hon. Minister is that he must get accustomed to the tourist capacity because when he is formally removed as the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, the ministry that will be given to him is the Ministry of Tourism. He is getting accustomed to his new role.

5.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I was actually at one point feeling very sorry for the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation. I felt, perhaps, he was not being properly advised. When I thought that the persons who were advising him out of the think tank and now they would be going into the think tank to advise him. I realize that maybe he was just being badly advised. After his contribution here this afternoon, I realize that this is a minister who, with the greatest of respect to him, is not prepared to learn and listen. He is prepared to come here and tell this honourable House about grandiose plans of building fire stations, when what we want to do is fight crime. This hon. Minister prefers to tell us and boast about how many boats he has in operation, even though cocaine is being washed ashore on the east coast. This Minster wants to tell us about all the helicopters that he now has working when he was busy flying in a helicopter going to criminal sites. What is the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation doing in a helicopter going to visit so-called Anaconda roadblocks? Does he not recognize that when these roadblocks are being put into operation it is a situation in which the police are doing searches and in some cases seizures in the course of their duty? This

Minister is busy riding in helicopters throughout the country. What is happening is that in the fight against crime, the Government is prepared to use public relations and propaganda and boast about the number of arrests.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you from personal experience that in one magistrate's jurisdiction in Trinidad that magisterial officer realized that with respect to these boasts about how many persons are arrested, or tickets issued in the Anaconda roadblocks, when the matters actually reach the courtrooms—which is when you want to know what the final determination is in order to see the success rate and true story—so many of them are dismissed. Many of the police officers recognize it is more important to go on the streets and fight crime than to have to go in courtrooms and wait for hours to deal with what is really considered to be very petty offences. That must be because there are insufficient police to deal with the crime situation. Yet the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation is boasting about all the equipment that he has. What it shows me clearly is that despite the best equipment, despite the best advice, despite this Minister being the best, he certainly cannot deal with the portfolio of national security. He does not even understand that with this very unit—the new anti-crime unit, of which he boasts and seems so happy that it has been created—what his new role as Minister is going to be. If this new anti-crime unit is going to literally be administering, implementing or creating policy, that is the role of the hon. Minster. The hon. Minister himself is not recognizing that he will soon be performing a non role and maybe that is deliberate, because it is an attempt by the Government to have a minister holding a ministerial portfolio, being a member of the Cabinet, getting all the goods, terms, conditions, benefits and emoluments, but literally doing nothing.

Mr. Speaker, I am the last person to go into the realm of speculation, but I am afraid that in this particular instance in which an anti-crime unit has been created—already there is talk and concern about its jurisdiction and legality—I now find myself asking the question: Is it that Brigadier Peter Joseph is really a Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation in training? Maybe the plan is that after about six months or maybe one year, Minster Howard Chin Lee will be put aside and then we will have this new minister in the name of Minister Brigadier Peter Joseph. That made me go into another realm of speculation: perhaps Brigadier Peter Joseph was really the first choice candidate for the portfolio of Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation. Maybe what really happened is that for some reason, he said no or it was pointed out that if it were given to somebody who was not of the highest rank in the Defence Force, it would certainly have sent a wrong message to citizens.

Now I can understand when Minister Howard Chin Lee does not perform, it is really his fault, but at the end of the day he has been given a portfolio for which he was not the first choice. That was the difference between the UNC and the PNM. When the UNC was in power, first choice positions were given to persons who had the competence. They looked for the best and they gave them to the best. If the best did not pass the test, then they were removed. All this old talk and pages upon pages telling us about which fire stations are being built and how many cars have been brought in. Again, how does the Minister feel by boasting about all these alleged achievements in light of the fact that crime is escalating at an uncontrollable rate in Trinidad and Tobago?

Even the Minister's sense of logic, you cannot understand it. On the one hand he says that the Member for Couva North held the portfolio of Minister of National Security and in his tenure there was the highest murder rate of 152. Those were the words of the hon. Minister. The present murder rate for 2003 is 178. Unless my Math is wrong 178 is more than 152. The Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation is so intent on relying on propaganda and public relations that he is even prepared to fool the population with figures. He says 152 is the highest murder rate we have ever had in Trinidad and Tobago, but for 2003 it has already reached 178. Does the hon. Minister think that as time progresses and we reach December 31, 2003, persons can resurrect and therefore the murder rate has a chance of getting lower? Is it like some Member on the other side who can resurrect people and make dead men start walking, that this hon. Minister really believes that he can perform some kind of magic and make people who have died and are now statistics, come to life again? Is that where we have reach in the fight against crime; that people will seek to fool the citizenry with figures; figures that cannot justify the positions and statements that are taken?

Mr. Speaker, much has been said about the Defence Force, the role of the Defence Force and the fact that this Defence Force is going to be—I am so happy to see the hon. Minister has been able to come back here. He certainly must have heard the comments I have made in his absence and he has come to face the music. I know that he knows a lot about music.

Much has been said about the Defence Force, but there is something that continues to worry me today. The hon. Minister again boasts about how many vehicles are now attached to the Defence Force. Should the Minister not be very worried that some of these vehicles, or at least three of them, were reported as being involved in criminal activity in terms of beating up residents in the Barataria/San Juan constituency? What was amazing is the fact that the hon.

Minister called for an immediate investigation into the alleged involvement of the army; not recognizing that even though that can be done—of course I checked the legislation because I am not going to get carried away with propaganda and 65-second statements from the Minister telling the population he has everything under control. He has nothing under control when it comes to national security. What was amazing is that the police were not even given the necessary resources to go on the scene with immediate effect to make sure that the crime scene was preserved.

I remember, in a contribution that was made by one of the Members on this side, there was the suggestion that when we are dealing with crime detection we have to operate on a very scientific basis that demands that from the time an offence is committed and reported there is a sanitization of the scene. We hear a lot about the sanitization of reports, but sanitization is not for reports; it is for crime scenes to make sure that evidence is preserved. When the hon. Minister is boasting about vehicles, let him beware that it is alleged that vehicles and their registration numbers were actually printed in a newspaper; those vehicles were without the necessary authority in a place that they ought not to have been and persons in those vehicles committed acts of assault and battery on innocent citizens. That should be worrying the hon. Minister.

Before I go into the impotent anti-crime plan of 2004, I think it is very important to look all what was promised to this nation in the budget of 2003, when it came to national security.

There are many persons on the other side who believe that on this side we just make irresponsible statements, that we are unable to substantiate our position with facts. What I did, in order to dispel those views—that the Opposition only talks without substantiating its positions—I looked at the 2003 budget proposals and incentives to deal with crime. I often say it in this honourable House that I approach things in a very scientific manner. I think when one is scientific it removes emotion and ensures fairness. There was a seven-point crime plan that was suggested, offered and promised last year. There was the assurance that there was going to be crime war. As we said, we lost that war. We are now in "Crime War II. We have fewer persons to fight with less equipment.

Last year what was said, amongst other things in this crime plan, is that the following measures are going to be aimed at strengthening the protective services. I am now quoting from the 2003 Budget. Let us therefore, go through each of these seven points and promises and let us determine how many were really delivered. At the end of the seven points, let us grade it and let us give it a

percentage and really determine whether there was a success story or a story of failure. We must not go to 2004. Before someone is promoted from Standard 1 to Standard 2 or Form III to Form IV you do an assessment. I am clear in my mind that the crime approach that is being taken by this Government is an approach that is not fit to go into kindergarten or nursery school; it just does not even meet that standard. The first point for last year. I quote:

"We have committed increased resources to the Protective Services;"

Only this morning—I would be going to that particular article. In the *Trinidad Guardian* we have Acting Inspector Christopher Holder pointing out that police officers do not have bulletproof vests and he is also calling on such officers not to go to Laventille if they are not going to be given the vests. We will come to that later. The first point was:

"We have committed increased resources to the Protective Services;"

Those resources are still sorely lacking. We still have police officers complaining that police stations are ill-equipped and understaffed. With respect to the first point, there is non-delivery.

"We will expand the police presence in several high crime areas;"

Unless we are going to talk about Chaguanas on Monday and Caroni last Friday, there is no increased police presence in the high crime areas. On point number two, there is non-delivery. This one was meant to slip through the cracks, but we on this side read every word and ensure that the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed.

> "We will construct five (5) new police stations in Manzanilla, Mayaro, Matura, Cumuto and Brasso;"

Because I was not aware this was done, I decided to get direct evidence; it is called the best evidence. I called the police stations and they said to me without even knowing who was on the other side: "Listen, whoever this is, we have no new station. We do not know what you are speaking about." I said maybe I just encountered somebody on the other side who was not prepared to be helpful.

I look now at the 2004 Budget to see which police stations are going to be built or are going to be dealt with. What is amazing is that in the budget, amongst the new police stations that are going to be built, there seems to be some uncanny repetition. In the 2004 Budget there is mention that new police stations shall be constructed over the medium term at, amongst other stations, Brasso, Matura and Manzanilla. Of these five that were going to be built, these are now starring

again. The justification is going to be: "We are going to be giving you two, three more." The reality is, let us stop the public relations and the propaganda. Let us get down to the facts.

In every bad situation there is always a cloud with a silver lining. What happened on Monday to the two Members of Parliament was an indication of what really happens in police stations: the level of bureaucracy; the fact that for simple offences to be written up, it takes hours upon hours. Nine boys were charged with littering and it took six hours before they could be brought to the magistrates' courts. Let the public start understanding that when we in the Opposition object to the maladministration of the PNM we know what we are talking about. Sometimes you have to do more than talk; people have to feel to be able to understand. [*Interruption*] I mean that when people go through the process and they hear people saying it takes five hours for a simple charge to be written on a piece of paper, that cannot be true. When they actually experience it, because they are waiting to show their support on the roadways, they are able to nod and say: "I see now what you are talking about." This must not happen. That is what I mean.

Let us just say—when I say who cannot hear will feel, I do not put it into that violent context that is being suggested. I put it into the context of those who do not hear will have to feel; meaning they will to go through the process and experience. Already there is the mentality on the other side of licks, fire, and no tolerance to civil disobedience. Mr. Speaker, it just goes to show where the minds of the other side are set. That is a very worrying situation. [*Desk thumping*] That is also what you call "best evidence rule" because by their utterances they have shown where their minds are. With respect to the building and construction of the police stations, there has also been non-delivery. Just as a reminder, three points raised so far, three non-deliveries.

> "We will utilize Mobile Police and Army Patrol Stations in the more remote areas;"

I can understand the obvious point that will be made on the other side is: "Well we have joint patrols. It was done in Laventille." Hear what was said:

"…in the more remote areas;"

The assurance that was given is that in those areas that often feel neglected—there is no police presence—that is where those patrols would have been going to reassure the public. That too was not done. The Government should not talk

about joint patrols in crime hot spots. This is not what this is saying here. We are sticking to the script. There was non-delivery on point number four.

> "We have started a programme of repair and refurbishment of police stations that have fallen into disrepair;"

Case in point, Gasparillo Police Station. When I made the point in the wee hours of the morning, in my last presentation on the budget, I remembered that I was being encouraged by the other side to wind up—it was early in the morning—and they would see about Gasparillo. Stupidly and naively I believed them, but not this time around, they are going to take the jamming for the 75 minutes. Gasparillo Police Station was not attended to until the roof caved in. It is so good to know I have the attention of those on the other side. The Gasparillo Police Station caved in before any attention was paid to it. The immediate question was: imagine the liability of the state if anyone was inside that police station when the roof caved in.

Everything for the Members on the other side is a grinning, skinning and joking, but the criminals are getting away with murder in this country. When we say getting away with murder they are singing a different name. I am talking about persons who have actually confessed to pulling triggers, getting away with murder in this country. I know of what I speak. We have failure on point number five.

"We are upgrading the Coast Guard facilities and we are establishing a multi-purpose facility in Tobago;"

By this time I feel I have no choice but to just give them a tick and say they did that. We have reached point number six and there is no tick for delivery. So let us give them a tick. They got one point out of seven so far. In point number seven it was stated:

"In addition to the thirty (30) vehicles which were recently acquired, we are securing seventy-four (74) special vehicles for the Police Service."

I am giving them a tick for that too. Of the seven major points to deal with crime, there has been delivery of two. Two out of seven is 28 per cent and 29 per cent for those who still want to adhere to the high standards of the University of the West Indies. It amounts to a failure.

At the end of the budget presentation of 2003 what was said? When you make a promise you must not boast about delivery until you have actually

fulfilled the promise. At the end of the 2003 Budget presentation, the Prime Minister said:

> "We promise to commit more resources to provide a first class, professional, highly trained protective service. Delivered."

Everybody on the other side went into their automatic clapping.

Mr. Speaker, speaking about automatic clapping; in criminal law there is a defence called automatism, that is when a person does an act involuntarily; meaning that they just do something but they do not have any intention. Therefore, on Monday when I heard the budget was presented and those on the other side were just knocking the tables in loud applause at opportune times, I realized that it was not really because they believed in what was being presented or that they were happy with what was being presented. They were literally just knocking the table because that is what they felt ought to have been done.

In my budget contribution last year I made this point and at once there was grinning, skinning, laughing and scorning from the other side. I said: "Do not tell the nation that you have delivered until you have honoured your promises. Do not boast that your crime plan is going to work until you have ensured its implementation." When you tell a nation that is traumatized—as it was traumatized last year and is even more traumatized this year—that you are going to war with criminals and what happens instead is that the criminals win the war and every innocent citizen is battered and killed, it means that you have demoralized the nation.

When, therefore, the Member for St. Joseph talks about the five roads that lead to instability, understand that the major road to instability—I want to call it the highway to instability—is uncontrollable crime. Under this PNM regime there is uncontrollable crime. The logic says uncontrollable crime means that we are on the highway to instability and then the next step is total destruction and irreparable harm.

It is not too late for the Government of the day to wake up and realize that there are persons who do not want to go into its think tank. That think tank is already overcrowded with incompetence. There are many people who do not want to go into that think tank, but they are prepared to help. It was the hon. Member for San Fernando East who, in one of his utterances, said that the Opposition is irrelevant. This irrelevant Opposition is the very Opposition that he has now mentioned in the budget that he would be coming to support many of the legislative initiatives that would be used. I have made this point over and over *ad*

nauseam: Do not insult the Members to the extent to say that they are irrelevant and then come and say: even though you are irrelevant, we still want your support.

Mr. Speaker, I think that perhaps the most disappointing, unfulfilled promise was that made in the 2003 Budget in which the Prime Minister indicated that there would be a Kidnapping Prevention Act with stiff penalties which would be placed before the Parliament within 90 days. In the first instance, the legislation was never laid within 90 days. That in itself was not disappointing. As you would know, in the legal profession sometimes time is of the essence and sometimes it is necessary to give extensions of time so that there can be a more comprehensive and holistic material or there is more of a comprehensive approach to dealing with crime with more comprehensive legislation. Mr. Speaker, once again, we on this side waited with eager anticipation. What was presented—we have made this point over and over again—was a piece of flawed legislation, containing sections that could not be supported and only an irresponsible and irrelevant opposition would have its given blind support to the legislation that has been brought.

By his own admission, the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation indicated that the legislation in the Kidnapping Bill that was brought, now the Act, dealt with kidnapping for ransom. I have made the point over and over that there is a difficulty in arresting persons for that hybrid that is contained in the legislation; that is kidnapping for ransom, because most persons involved in a kidnapping are either the kidnappers or they perform the role of falsely imprisoning the victim or the mastermind who normally arranges the method to ask for the ransom and subsequently collect it. The point the Opposition kept making was that by creating this hybrid unnecessary offence, you were convoluting the offence and it was that offence for which no bail would have been granted. Put in simple terms so the hon. Minister and his colleagues could understand, since the passage of that legislation—and even if that legislation was the law years ago—the reality is that hardly anybody would be charged under that particular section.

As I mentioned before most persons do not commit all three components of that criminal act. When that suggestion was made—it was explained to the Attorney General that she was misleading herself—again, the response was one of arrogance, ignorance and incompetence. That is why it is no surprise that even the portfolio of Attorney General seems to be up for grabs. The persons who hold the office of Attorney General and Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation refuse to listen to wisdom. As far as some of these Ministers are

concerned, they know everything. Even if they do not know everything they are prepared to support and defend their colleagues and say: "You know, when we took office we did not realize that this particular ministry was so difficult." You have to feel sorry for Ministers. If these Ministers cannot handle the job and if the job is so difficult and they did not realize it was so difficult give persons who can do the job—to see persons look across from where you sit—these are the persons on this side who can get the job done. The UNC was getting the job done.

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as I get ready to leave the 2003 budget promise, what was also said in that budget statement was that the Government would provide specialized training and resources to the Police Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to fight crime and bring offenders to justice. Was it my imagination, or was it a few weeks ago when members of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and other state counsel—realizing that their terms and conditions were not being increased—decided to send a message to the Attorney General and the Government of the day?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Miss G. Lucky: Mr. Speaker, I make no apology for fighting for the plight of state counsel, because the lawyers who work with the State have always been treated in a substandard fashion. A few weeks ago, when state counsel could not take it anymore they decided to send a message, after numerous attempts were made to have the relevant authorities listen to their concerns.

I worked at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for eight years, and I understand, very well, what a state counsel has to endure. [*Desk thumping*] I was president of the Association of Legal Officers (ALO), and it was my duty to go and fight for better terms and conditions and remuneration packages for legal officers. I made presentations to Mr. Keith Sobion who was the then Attorney General. Under the UNC, I also had to deal with—the very formidable—Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj. I was not even involved in any politics then, but when I made representation it did not fall on deaf ears. Under the UNC regime, we were given substantial interim increased emolument packages.

Mr. Speaker, why did this situation have to reach a point where state counsel had to contract a virus or just withdraw their enthusiasm? Does this Government understand that a critical component in the fight against crime is criminal prosecution? Does this Government recognize that many persons who are arrested are set free for one reason or the other when they go into the courtrooms? Does this Government recognize that what state counsel have done—by the Government's definition—is an act of civil disobedience? Is this Government sending a message to state counsels that if they try to stay away from the courtrooms, or refuse to do their work—in a fight to get better terms and conditions—they will be guilty of civil disobedience and they will be dealt with? Is this the message the Government is sending to officers who are committed and competent?

Unless this Government really understands that people in this country are frustrated—people are frustrated because their concerns are being dismissed—we are going to continue along the road that leads to instability. The criminals will continue to laugh at us, and they will get away in the courts. The Government is not sending the criminals a powerful message that they are going to deal with the criminals.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to hear of many incidents of kidnappings and other serious crimes. What amazes me—even the victims of those atrocious acts—is the fact that the criminals are operating at times which would normally be considered to be slow in criminal activity. In other words, criminal activity usually takes place between 10.00 p.m. and 4.00 a.m. During those hours criminals feel that they would not be detected easily. In other words, the visibility issue is something that works in their favour. Now, criminals do not care what time they perform their criminal acts. They are performing criminal activities in front of police stations, behind courtrooms, inside police stations and in broad daylight.

In the same manner the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation was able to access a helicopter to go and manage the operations of Anaconda, he should be able to access helicopters easily when a kidnapping is reported. It should be like in the movies where one would actually see these helicopters on the crime scene with bright lights—if it takes place in the night—and tracker-dogs going through the bushes with their handlers. But, you see, the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation prefers the entire nation to look at him in a helicopter as he goes down and tells police officers that they are doing a good job. A good job doing what!

I was hoping that someone could call the Minister as a witness in a courtroom, so that he could see the kind of frustration that people have to go through when they are witnesses in cases. The Government of the day does not care. So, when the Government of the day does not care, then there is no need for criminals to beware. With respect to crime, that was the very sad story of the promises made in the 2003 Budget Statement. That will explain why we lost the 2003 "Crime War I".

Mr. Speaker, now we are in "Crime War II" 2 for 2004. What are the initiatives that the Government intends to implement? First of all, I have already spoken about the first plan, which is to have this crime unit. Today, I looked at an article in the *Guardian* newspaper headlined: "Police body slams PM's anti-crime unit 'More jobs for the boys'". This is a story written by Corey Connelly and it says:

> "The Police Service Social and Welfare Association has dismissed Government's new crime-fighting unit as a 'political creature,' designed to create 'more jobs for the boys.'
>
> 'The Commissioner is the only person that has that control. Officers must be assigned by the Commissioner,"

These are the words of the President of the Police Service Social and Welfare Association, acting Inspector Christopher Holder. He went on further to say in the article and I quote:

> "Describing the move as 'a thief in the night,' Holder said Government had 'further deflated' the morale in the Police Service.
>
> 'Government has pushed us too far. The PM has downgraded and shown scant courtesy to the Service. He has shown the depth of his political interest,'…
>
> Holder said the resources being used for the unit could have been pumped into the existing intelligence agencies in the Service.
>
> He said police officers were functioning with inadequate resources."

Now, this is the part that acting Inspector Christopher Holder has to be very careful with. He ends by saying:

> "As a mark of protest, the association is calling on members to desist from participating in joint army/police patrols in Laventille, unless they are provided with bulletproof vests and other necessary equipment.

The association has also called on them to stop working in all dilapidated police stations and buildings."

This is the President of the Police Service Social and Welfare Association who represents police officers, pointing out that with the establishment of this anti-crime unit, police officers—the very police officers who are meant to protect and serve—are being sidelined, undermined, scorned and held in contempt by the Government of the day.

Mr. Speaker, if this mark of protest is taken, we may reach a stage in this country where police officers would be arresting police officers, and army officers would be arresting police officers. The Government will have to make sure that army officers have the powers to arrest. Is this what we want for Trinidad and Tobago? Why does this Government not recognize that it has to nip the problem in the bud? The Government must not allow this problem to escalate. The Government should not think of establishing a new crime unit. The Government should first make sure that what is in existence is good enough or competent enough or capable enough to deal with the crime situation.

Mr. Speaker, the reason I highlighted the role of the army is that the role of the army is very limited and restricted. Army officers—by the very nature of the positions that they hold—do not have the same powers as police officers. Imagine how the criminals will continue to laugh at us when they realize what was said in the report that I have just read. There may be a situation where police officers would be arresting police officers; police officers may be going after army officers and army officers may be going after police officers. The criminals would then say, let everyone get in trouble. This would clear the way for criminals to do what they want to do. When is good sense going to prevail?

The second point made—although recognizing that demonstrations in our society are expressions that are allowable—according to this budget, the Government made it absolutely clear that it will not tolerate acts of civil disobedience. The Government said it would impose the laws of the country rigidly and fearlessly. So, law-abiding citizens are being told not to come out and join any legitimate or constitutional act of civil disobedience. Civil disobedience, by its very nature, is not automatically illegitimate. What citizens are being told is that they have no right to participate in anything that the Government deems to be an act of civil disobedience. The Government is trying to intimidate this population.

Mr. Speaker, it is said that people could take so much and no more. The PNM's very motto sometime ago was: Enough is enough. Today, we are

reminding the PNM that enough is enough, and citizens in this country would not be intimidated. Citizens would have to take the necessary action. [*Desk thumping*] I am not preaching violence. I am just saying that the Government is focusing its attention on taking innocent citizens—who are fighting for a justifiable cause—to courtrooms and subjecting them to arrest and letting the real criminals get away.

We heard about a Riot Squad. Before we could even think about a Riot Squad, we have not yet reached a situation where we should be focusing on a Riot Squad. Is this Government's intention? At one point, I really felt that the Government was encouraging riots in this country. When the Government does not deal with the concerns of citizens, obviously, they are going to riot. Mention was also made about increased police patrols. The Government also said that the Coast Guard and the Defence Force will get better facilities, and the Government is going to implement strict laws.

Mr. Speaker, when the debate for the Kidnapping Bill was taking place, I made the point—and the Member for Princes Town also made the point—that the legislation did not stiffen the penalties for kidnapping, false imprisonment and demanding money with menaces at the common law. We made the suggestion to the Government that it ought to bring legislation to deal with the common law offences of kidnapping, false imprisonment and demanding money with menaces. The Government of the day decided to ignore what the Opposition said. The Government told the Opposition that it was speaking nonsense, and the Opposition did not know what it was speaking about. The Government does not sit and analyse if there is any merit in the contributions being made by Members on this side.

When the Prime Minister made the suggestion in his budget presentation on Monday and appealed to the Opposition—on behalf of the national community—to support the Government in this exercise which is clearly in the interest of all of us it makes people wonder: How true is the intent of the Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East? Is the Member being genuine and sincere when he asks the Opposition to support the Government? In these debates, it is not for the Opposition to give blind support. It is for the Government to bring legislation; it is for the Government to listen to what the Opposition has to say, and if there is merit, the Government should make the necessary amendments.

It was pointed out to the Attorney General that there was a wrong section quoted in the Kidnapping Bill—it should have read section 32 and instead there was section 31—no attempts were made by the Government to correct it. When it

was pointed out to the Attorney General that the number of judges should be increased from 20 to 28, since that is the number of judges that is needed—it was the first time that I had really seen the Member for San Fernando East nodding in consent to my contribution. I really thought that one day the Opposition was going to get what it wanted, but somehow the Attorney General got her way. I decided there and then that the Attorney General needed to get a little shake-up. Again, when I say shake-up, I am talking about the proposed Cabinet reshuffle. It is clear, in my mind that this Government is not dealing adequately with crime.

Last week Friday, I held a press conference and I proposed a nine-point plan. Of course, my nine-point plan is going to be bashed by Members on the other side. An utterance was made that my nine-point plan is nonsense, and I do not know what I am speaking about. You see, like the Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, I put my nine-point plan out for public comment. It must be put in the public domain.

What did the public have to say about my nine-point plan? Well, I was reading the *Guardian* newspaper this morning, and I was very surprised when I saw an article by Clevon Raphael.

Mr. Imbert: The *Guardian* newspaper again.

Miss G. Lucky: Mr. Speaker, you see, what is good is that when you are speaking the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, you will never get caught up in lies, and you will not find yourself in a situation where you say something and then realize that you have put your foot in your mouth. I did not speak to Mr. Clevon Raphael. I did not tell him what to write or what not to write. In Mr. Clevon Raphael's article it says:

> "Opposition MP Gillian Lucky has presented her nine-point crime plan but do you think the powers that be would take her on? 'Nah, she playing politics,' they would cynically say.
>
> I particularly like the one calling for the equipping of police stations with a senior officer with specific knowledge in kidnapping and related crime detection."

Mr. Speaker, whether the nine-point plan was chastised or commended, the fact is that the Opposition took the initiative to present something far superior to what was presented over the last two years since this Government has been in power. [*Desk thumping*]

What has been the reaction? A certain person on the other side would know, because he indicated that this plan was nonsense. Let me now tell this honourable House what Members on the other side are calling nonsense. According to the other side, nonsense and rubbish is the fact that I have asked for better terms and conditions and remuneration packages for police officers and state counsel who are attached to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. That is rubbish as far as the other side is concerned. The Government continues to fall into every trap that is being laid for it this afternoon.

The fact that I have said that the Government should indicate—without going into specific details—whether there is a high-tech system in its possession that could be used to trace and detect the whereabouts of criminals, and the Government finds that is rubbish. Whenever a kidnapping is reported there should be an immediate—

Mr. S. Panday: Take your time.

Miss G. Lucky: Mr. Speaker, now that Members have deemed what I have said to be rubbish is actually in tandem with what has already been proposed by the Government, they are now seeking to retract it. What is rubbish? Rubbish is the fact that I have said whenever a kidnapping is reported there should be an immediate search and track from the site of the criminal's activity to send a message to the criminals that the police are hot on their heels. The use of helicopters, tracker dogs and E999 vehicles are critical. That is rubbish according to the Government.

I have asked for an immediate assessment of each police station in Trinidad and Tobago so that an efficient upgrade of all police stations—based on a priority need basis—should be implemented. That is nonsense! What is also nonsense is the fact that I have said that each police station should be equipped with a senior police officer who is knowledgeable in kidnapping, negotiations and counselling.

Amazingly, the Government's crime plan talks about offering counselling services. The Government cannot even arrest kidnappers, but it wants to go out and counsel families of kidnapped victims. But, you see, once anything comes from the Opposition side it is considered nonsense. Yet, it is recorded in the budget that the Government is hoping—in the national interest—that the Opposition would join in the fight against crime.

Mr. Speaker, rubbish is when the business community ought to be encouraged to make funds available to the State so that the State could equip police officers with some of the equipment that they need. That is rubbish! Hear what is greater

rubbish! Rubbish is point number seven—this is something that keeps evading the minds of the think-tankers on the other side—a witness protection programme. I notice I have the attention of the Member for San Fernando East on that point. I am grateful because there must be a witness protection programme. It is sorely lacking. There is an ad hoc system in place and that is not the fault of any particular government. I am not looking back to say that the programme was not there in the 1996 Dole Chadee trial. Let us stop looking backwards. If the Government wants Vision 2020, why are we looking backwards?

If we have a comprehensive witness protection programme, it would mean that before witnesses could be given immunity to become state witnesses, they would have to go through proper polygraph testing, and they would have to be assessed properly. So, immunity would not be given to persons who, for some reason or the other, have not told the truth, and literally get away with murder. The Government should make sure that there is a witness protection programme. But, you see, that too is rubbish.

When I ask for the Arima and San Fernando Magistrates' Courts to be upgraded; that is rubbish. When I ask for legislation that would stiffen penalties for the offences of kidnapping and false imprisonment—those pieces of legislation do not require a special majority—that is rubbish. Anything that is worthwhile coming from the Opposition to deal with crime is rubbish.

Mr. Speaker, when will this Government understand that in the fight against crime there is need for cooperation? When will this Government understand that the Opposition is willing to play a role? The Opposition cannot be asked to play a role in building the nation when the Government is guilty of acts of intimidation and discrimination. That is why the call continues to be that there must be constitutional reform. If plans and points are being offered and they are deemed "rubbish", then the Opposition is not going to convince this Government that there may be merit in what it is suggesting, and we are not going to get anywhere.

A few Saturdays ago, I was sitting in a restaurant with other diners and a text message came across on my cellular phone—apparently, there were other persons in the restaurant who got a similar message—with a suggestion that if you really care for your daughter you will do something. The point is that this message intimidated people. Everyone in the restaurant got up—especially those with daughters—and left the restaurant and called their children and told them to go home.

The Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation never thought it fit to go on the television either Sunday, Monday or Tuesday at least, to give citizens some

kind of comfort to put their minds at rest, but the Minister wants to come into this Lower House and to talk about all the great things that have been done. If so many great things have been done, and so many achievements have been accomplished by this hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, why is the crime rate escalating? Why has the murder rate exceeded the number for last year? Why is it that the nation continues to be very traumatized? Why are people saying that they have to go to the streets, because they do not believe that anyone is really concerned about what is happening? This Government boasts that it is a caring Government, and it is not providing security for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the building of police stations and the equipment that would be given, unless the public has confidence in the police service; unless the public could be assured that when they call a police station, within minutes, they would get some kind of assistance—like the response that was given in Chaguanas on Monday where there were many police officers—unless the public could get that kind of assurance, we are not going to get anywhere in the fight against crime.

As I conclude, let me just take this opportunity to tell the nation that the crime plan—number infinite—which is in the 2004 Budget Statement is not going to have the desired effect in bringing the crime situation under some kind of control. Unless Ministers understand that ministerial responsibility means being answerable and accountable, we are not going to get anywhere.

When I heard about this new trend where Government Ministers are defending themselves for their inaction, errors and incompetence, and providing defence for their colleagues, I decided to research what is really ministerial responsibility. *The Constitutional and Administrative Law* by O. Hood Phillips and Paul Jackson, Seventh Edition gives that definition and it says:

> "The individual responsibility of a Minister for the performance of his official duties is both legal and conventional: it is owed legally to the Sovereign, and also by convention to Parliament. 'Responsible' here does not mean morally responsible or culpable, but accountable or answerable."

Mr. Speaker, the article went on to say that the reason for individual responsibility is constantly undermined. Ministers who have erred either resign or they are usually given another post. A timely reshuffle is sometimes done when Ministers are not doing what they are supposed to be doing.

6.10 p.m.

It goes on to say:

> "…a Minister who is unpopular with the Opposition is protected by the solidarity of his colleagues."

Well, you see, Mr. Speaker, I can now understand clearly why the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation perhaps will not be removed and will not resign but he really has been sidelined, constructively fired. That is because he will always get the protection of his colleagues because the political agenda for this Government comes first and not the national interest.

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

The Minister in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Hon. Edward Hart): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to address this House as we debate the measures outlined and provisions made by the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister in his budget presentation for fiscal year 2004. Permit me to take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance, the hon. Prime Minister, on his budget presentation for fiscal year 2004. It was not only the largest budget delivered in the history of the Parliament, $22 billion, but it was a budget which contained provisions for all sectors of the national economy and the society, from business entrepreneurship, security of property and education, to the delivery of basic needs for the deprived sectors of the national population—food, health, utilities and housing. It was a budget with not only a human face but one with a conscience. In this regard, I want to address the issues of culture.

Mr. Speaker, when we speak of culture in Trinidad and Tobago, we tend to restrict the definition of culture to the creative and performing arts, for example, music and dance. I would use the more all-embracing definition of culture. In this regard I use the Unesco definition of culture as, and I quote:

> "…the sum total of ways of life, thought, and action, behaviour, belief, customs and values underlying them."

Our culture, therefore, represents all our artistic expressions, our experiences, our values, behaviours, heritage and way of life which has been influencing us and which will continue to guide us. Our culture determines how we behave and how we think, our attitude to our family, to our fellow men, to our environment and to our economics of savings, investment and expenditure patterns. In other words, our culture gives us our unique identity as a people and as a nation. This,

Mr. Speaker, influences the mandate that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism embraces.

Based on the above, the Ministry is in the process of finalizing its strategic plan in accordance with a mandate of reaching developed country status by year 2020 or before. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism comprises the following agencies involved in pursuits and projects of a cultural nature—the National Museum and Art Gallery, the National Carnival Commission (NCC), Queen's Hall, Naparima Bowl, the National Steel Orchestra (NSO), the Archeological Society and the Tourism and Industrial Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (Tidco). I propose to highlight some of the major achievements of these organizations and the Ministry for the year 2003 and to articulate the way forward for fiscal year 2004.

The National Museum and Art Gallery has been very proactive in showcasing our artistic skills and archiving our art treasures and history. The major areas of achievements in this area in 2003 were as follows. Two permanent exhibits were installed. A new exhibit on the history of art in Trinidad and Tobago was installed in the art gallery at the museum. The exhibit traced the development of local art from the pre-independence era to present-day. The Museum of the City of Port of Spain located at South Quay was finally opened on a permanent basis with an exhibition on the history of the capital city.

Mr. Speaker, there were no fewer than a dozen exhibitions mounted at the museum for this year alone. Some of the major showings included an exhibition on the story of the Witco Desperadoes Steel Orchestra entitled "Desperadoes The Evolution"; a display of stamps from China spanning several decades; an exhibition of sculpture by Tobago-based German artist, Louise Kimme entitled "Resurrection to Dance"; a photography display on the life of Mahatma Gandhi in association with the Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Cultural Cooperation; paintings on Tobago Heritage by James Armstrong entitled "Tobago to Africa and Back"; an exhibition tracing the development of fine craft in Trinidad and Tobago. This exhibition marked the independence anniversary of Trinidad and Tobago.

The museum also experienced an upsurge in educational and other special activities in 2002—2003. The major achievements included quarterly lecture series in collaboration with the John Clifford Sealy Memorial Foundation; workshops throughout the year in photography, acting and improvisation with the Trinidad Theatre Workshop; Sunday evening poetry recitals on the first Sunday each month with The Circle of Poets; a museum concert series, a quarterly one-

hour concert that featured Witco Desperadoes in June and Neal & Massy Trinidad All Stars in September; launch of a major publications programme with the launch in September of a 180-page full-colour, hardcover book on the work of master artist LeRoy Clarke.

Mr. Speaker, one of the critical requirements for a museum and art gallery to be responsive to the needs of the people that it serves is that it should be a living museum. It must encourage and support ongoing activities, including the regular flow of human traffic, inclusive of the support of philanthropic organizations. In this regard, the museum has become the regular meeting place for the Writers Union and the Arts Support Alliance, bringing back much life to this institution. In 2004, the museum would continue the mounting of worthwhile and relevant exhibitions and music concerts providing the forum to our artistes to showcase their creativity, skills, talents and training. In order to meet the anticipated increased flow of traffic and demands of the national community from a learning and tourist perspective, arrangements are being made to increase the physical capacity of the museum. In this regard, the 2004 budget has included a provision for the preparation of designs for the physical upgrading of the National Museum.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn my attention to the National Carnival Commission, the vehicle through which carnival provides opportunities for full artistic expressions, the generation of social and economic capital, the development of small business entrepreneurship and moments where social inequalities become diluted in carnival euphoria. It is therefore considered to be a major social investment that allows positive avenues for youthful energies which may be most prone to antisocial behaviour.

In fiscal year 2003 the NCC began its marathon course towards making a more direct contribution to the social needs of communities by taking sure and deliberate strides in assistance to special interest groups. In the area of the promotion of the steel pan, the NCC, through Pan Trinbago, has sought to broaden its contact and the promotion and expansion of indigenous culture. In addition to the traditional competition, which was successfully held, the following new projects were achieved in 2003. The Republic Pan Fiesta was celebrated in regions around the country. It was a resounding success and the Witco Desperadoes emerged clear-cut winners with their rendition of a Clive Bradley arrangement, "This Melody Sweet". It was really a wonderful display. Then we have the steel pan workshop preparing for quality worldwide exposure; then we had a steel pan workshop for primary schoolchildren catching them early, Mr. Speaker.

Then we had the Panyard Sensations series of concerts which provided pan lovers with entertainment in the panyards. It all started at the All Stars panyard at 46 Duke Street where there was a tremendous crowd—very nice show. Later on in my constituency at the Exodus panyard, they had to lock the gates. There were thousands of people crammed inside and many were left stranded outside on the streets. What an outstanding display! After that they left on a tour to Japan where they toured some 16 cities—a very excellent steel orchestra, Mr. Speaker. Then we had the pan technology one-month course for 25 persons training in the manufacture of steel pan.

Mr. Speaker, the steel pan is all over the world now and at times it is like we have to play catch up because there are many factories abroad manufacturing the instrument. We have Ellie Mannette who is doing a tremendous job in America and all over. In Sweden alone there are about 250 steelbands, you know. There are tuners like Bertie Marshall, Leo Coker and Lincoln Noel, et cetera, and when they move off the scene we want to ensure that we have young persons who can continue with this art form.

In the field of mas', we had a very successful carnival. The Commission took responsibility for all major competitions. Carnival 2003 was considered by many to be one of the better-run carnivals in terms of the smooth and efficient flow of pans. [*Desk thumping*] Remember long ago, Mr. Speaker, it took hours to get into the savannah—the timing and hospitality of its patrons. Moreover, the NCC, led by Mr. Kenny De Silva, in recognition of the need to increase participation in carnival by all segments of our population, both urban and rural, and mindful of the intense forms of creative activity in communities outside of the main urban centres, increased its level of subvention to 42 regional carnival committees from $1.6 million in 2002 to over $2 million in 2003. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we had carnivals all over—Rio Claro, California, Couva, you name it, Palo Seco, Fyzabad—all over we had mas'.

The NCC continues to support and promote directly national events and celebrations which have elements of carnival. In 2003 the Commission gave its support to Arimafest, Point Fortin Borough Day, Toco Season, Guayafest and many community-based independence and Republic Day celebrations. The NCC is also committed to the preservation and exposure of the traditional art forms of carnival. In this regard, the Commission sponsored and funded a number of workshops on traditional mas' characters for over 1,600 primary schoolchildren as far as Guayaguayare in the south to Toco in the east, Princess Town in south central and Plymouth in Tobago. This serves as a training ground for young

people under 16 years of age to gain a greater knowledge of the traditions of carnival.

You see, we had some of the traditional characters like the bats and the clown and "Pierrot Grenade" and so. It was a dying art so we are rekindling that, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] A vacation camp in traditional mas' and sports was held in August where over 85 children from neighbouring institutions were exposed to elements of sports, dance, costuming and music and I was pleasantly surprised that there were inmates from the St. Mary's Children's Home and the Belmont orphanage taking part in these workshops. [*Desk thumping*]

In order to share the traditions of carnival with the wider national and international communities, the Commission collaborated with the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and Tidco in displaying live traditional characters in the arrival and departure lounges of the Piarco Airport. Traditional characters welcomed visitors with a taste of carnival as it used to be. The occasion was also used to exhibit carnival arts and artefacts. The NCC continues to support the development of carnival in other regions. In 2003, the NCC assisted carnival committees in other Caribbean countries by sending tutors to lecture and conduct workshops in the adjudication and management of carnival.

The Commission supported the development of closer linkages with international carnivals, in particular, new initiatives in other places where Trini carnival is not yet celebrated. In May, the Commission was represented at San Francisco carnival and in June in London, a world conference on carnival. Yes, Mr. Speaker a world conference on carnival was held in London. You would appreciate the fact that we have about 79 Trini-style carnivals all over the world—Notting Hill, Brooklyn's Labour Day, Washington, Toronto and so on. Carnival has become a cultural industry and the NCC has moved expeditiously not only to improve its administrative capability but also to refurbish its infrastructure at the Queen's Park Savannah.

The following projects were undertaken and completed in 2003:

- building of 120 new vendor booths. It was nice to go to these booths, Mr. Speaker. It was pleasing to go and purchase things—a wonderful sight to behold around the savannah;
- completion of installation of new seating in the grand stand—patrons were comfortably seated;
- successful completion and overhaul of its financial management systems and procedures;

- installation of a web site and preparation for the computerization of the adjudication process, keeping in line with the outside world.

For fiscal year 2004, the National Carnival Commission will place emphasis on the following objectives:

- expansion of its regional carnival base to afford more of our citizens to stay in their communities and play mas'—we have allocated $3 million for this;
- supporting viable initiatives of the special interest groups in their particular art forms—$13 million was put aside for this; and
- more efficient management of the carnival product to ensure value for the moneys invested. A revised organizational structure and strategic plan will be completed within the fiscal year;
- to foster research on the traditions of carnival and to preserve its products. This will be achieved through the re-establishment of the carnival institute. Nine hundred thousand dollars has been put aside for this, Mr. Speaker.
- to improve its revenue base through aggressive marketing of its facilities;
- to deepen our awareness of other aspects of the carnival arts through the exhibition of carnival art to be held in November 2003;
- the painting of the perimeter walls of the savannah by young artists; and
- a symposium.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn my attention to Queen's Hall. You will no doubt be aware that this premium performance hall in Trinidad and Tobago has been under rehabilitation and refurbishment for the past three years. In 2003 approximately 80,000 of the approved scope of works was completed allowing for the hall to be opened and used for commercial purposes during the soft testing period. It is my pleasure to announce that during this period Queen's Hall has been tested to its maximum with a number of international performances, which included the production of the widely acclaimed "Carnival Messiah" with a cast of approximately 180 performers.

During the past year, the 41-year-old Naparima Bowl continued to be used by a wide range of customers, local, regional and international. The facilities were always in great demand and there was always maximum occupancy of all

available spaces. Notwithstanding the age of the physical structure and progressive deterioration of some vital parts of the plant, rigorous attempts have been made to keep this meeting place for the arts open and alive. Upgrading of the staff competencies in key areas to meet the changes and challenges is continuing. Repairs to the stage and upgrading of its technical facilities were accomplished. A new lighting board has since been installed and other communication systems were improved through new technology. In 2002—2003 a total of 940 persons rented the facilities and a total of approximately 96,000 persons attended events hosted at the Naparima Bowl during the period.

The National Steel Orchestra continued to go from strength to strength. The band has continued with several projects which included performances, both locally and abroad, performing in over 10 concerts, including the gala opening of the 30th anniversary of Caricom. Institutional strengthening of the band: members are involved in a two-year associate degree in the performing arts, steel pan, at COSTAATT. Members will graduate in May 2004. For the year 2004 we propose to expand the NSO outreach programme. In this regard, concerts are planned for six communities across Trinidad and Tobago and schools in the following areas will benefit from the band's outreach initiative—Arima, Tunapuna, San Juan/Barataria, Chaguanas, Morvant/Laventille and Port of Spain.

Open School for the Arts: one of the new initiatives of the culture division of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has been the Open School for the Arts. Mr. Speaker, this is a new concept in arts education which provided training for interested persons in such areas as drama, songwriting, folk, modern and social dance, music literacy, pan sinking, Indian music, Indian dance, welding for pannists, events management and calypso extempo. The objectives of this project were:

- to develop practitioners in the performing and visual arts;
- to promote the concept of culture in its holistic form through the exposing of the communities to attitudes, beliefs, values and practices which positively impact on the way of life of the nation;
- to foster a greater appreciation for the varied and diverse art forms in our society;
- to sublimate negative traits and behaviour through the medium of the arts;
- to allow for greater collaborative effort between governments and civil society; and

- to provide institutional strengthening for community groups.

Mr. Speaker, this project was a major success. A couple of weeks ago there were over 700 persons graduating. These classes ran for a period of 12 weeks with 36 contact hours. Forty-nine persons were employed during the life of the project. Introductory training was provided in a number of skills, which allowed for sustainable development among members in the community. Two digital videodisks showing the work of the Open School for the Arts were produced. Partnership was fostered with communities through the provision of institutional strengthening support for community groups and the active fostering of better relationships. There was a low attrition rate among the participants in the courses which augers well for our planning and delivery, including the continuation of the programme.

For the fiscal year 2004 the Division of Culture proposes, Mr. Speaker, to introduce a number of new courses to be added to the programme, vis-à-vis Ramleela, "Chowtal" singing, "Biraha"—[*Interruption*] Yes, people might want to know what it is, but I grew up in an area where I am familiar with these things. Beraha is more or less like an extempo, you know. We will have wire bending, traditional Indian wedding songs, storytelling, rapso, drumming, inclusive of tassa and African drumming, dance for the differently abled and signing for the hearing impaired. [*Interruption*] You see, Mr. Speaker, I am fortunate to be the only "dougla" in the House, so I have the experience on both sides. [*Desk thumping*] We also propose to increase the number of venues from 22 to 40. This would include six communities in the sister isle of Tobago in collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly; to provide additional employment opportunities for approximately 100 persons; to increase training to approximately 1,200 participants at introductory and intermediate levels in one of the disciplines offered.

Mr. Speaker, the Cultural Immersion Project is a joint project of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Education but initiated and run by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The aim of this project is to totally immerse a number of the nation's schools in the culture of the nation. These will include drama, roti-making, storytelling, steelband playing, drumming, stick fighting, dance and tassa drumming among others.

This project is divided into three deliverables—Immersion of Schools into Culture, Children at Risk and Creative Arts Vacation Camps. The Immersion of Schools into Culture introduces students to the great diversity which constitutes the national culture. Mr. Speaker, it affords opportunity for exposing the genres

which appear to be ethnically and geographically specific to students across Trinidad and Tobago. This project runs for the duration of 12 weeks during the first term of the academic school year. The Children at Risk project is aimed at children who are having trouble in the school system. For the 12-week duration of the project, the students will be exposed to nine hours of immersion in the creative forms and nine hours of exploration of feelings evoked through the creative expressions towards identifying coping mechanisms for dealing with feelings. The hours will be divided into one-and-a-half-hour sessions once per week.

Mr. Speaker, this is in keeping with the aim to facilitate and nurture the creativity and development of all citizens through the provision of a supportive environment. This deliverable will assist in reducing negative behaviours among students. It will also assist in treating with emotional problems of these children through creative arts and group therapy. The objectives of this project are as follows:

- to identify coping mechanisms for dealing with feelings of anger, joy, love, sadness and frustration;
- to transfer coping mechanisms learned to other areas of their lives;
- to develop some basic skills in some form of cultural expression; and
- to develop a keen sense of appreciation for our creative expressions.

The following benefits are envisaged:

- improved mental awareness resulting in better grades at school;
- better team spirit thereby creating better relationships;
- preoccupation with the arts instead of negative habits;
- improvements in moral values and higher levels of patriotism.

For the fiscal year 2004, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism proposes to increase the number of schools participating in this project and to increase the number of camps from two to six. The Ministry also proposes to pilot this project in Tobago in collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, this Government, through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for fiscal 2003, not only celebrated the major festivals of Baptist Liberation Day, Indian Arrival Day and Emancipation but also provided the support for the various national bodies to organize commemorative events at the community and

national levels. Financial assistance was provided for Eid-ul-Fitr, Baptist Liberation Day, Indian Arrival Day, Emancipation Day and Ramleela.

Let me talk "a lil' bit" about Ramleela. Permit me to dwell for a while on the celebration of Ramleela, an event which is observed in over 30 communities in Trinidad. Ramleela is basically a story of the triumph of good over evil, of knowledge and justice over ignorance and injustice. Mr. Speaker, hear this. For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, our icons of Ramleela, who have kept the festival alive for over 120 years, were honoured and celebrated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on September 14, 2003.

This Ministry, in conjunction with the National Ramleela Council of Trinidad and Tobago, comprising 27 functioning Ramleela groups, organized the Ramleela Bhushan Awards Ceremony to pay homage to the pioneers of our village theatre in the celebration of Ramleela. Moreover, in order to demonstrate Government's commitment to support Ramleela in a tangible way, grants were provided to the active Ramleela organizations even before the start of the celebrations. Of great surprise to them was their increase in grants for Ramleela 2003. The Ministry provided funding in the sum of $300,000 for the celebration of this festival, an increase of more than 100 per cent over last year's contribution. [*Desk thumping*] In addition, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism paid out the sum of $66,000 owing to Ramleela groups for the fiscal year 2001—2002.

Divali—for the Divali celebrations, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism also proposes to increase the general allocation for organizations and will allocate $250,000 in grants. In addition, the Ministry, in collaboration with a number of Divali organizations, proposes a major celebration of the Divali festival at the Brian Lara Promenade on October 22, 2003. Everyone is invited, Mr. Speaker. The event will be marked by displays, lectures and lecture demonstrations and cultural performances throughout the day.

6.40 p.m.

Two other arts projects by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism that are of particular importance to the development of the indigenous arts are the Mobile Institute for Pan and a complimentary pan ensemble project.

The Mobile Institute for Pan forms a part of the cultural outreach programme of the Division of Culture. It introduces the public to a number of introductory courses in the discipline of steel pan and increases the levels of cultural literacy with respect to pan technology and pan artistry throughout the national community.

Mr. Speaker, the mobile institute will deliver a number of courses including pan sinking, pan tuning, pan grooving, welding for pannists, pan craft, pan design, metallurgy and pan, physics and pan, playing of pan and arranging for pan to name a few. This project will be spread across several communities in Trinidad and Tobago during which some 600 persons will be introduced to some aspect of the pan. Each course runs for a period of 12 consecutive weeks and consists of 36 contact hours. Courses will be conducted by qualified, experienced and certified tutors.

The Mobile Institute for Pan has two major goals: the promotion of the steel pan as the national musical instrument in every community in Trinidad and Tobago and the further exposure of young persons to the beauty and versatility of the steel pan through quality interaction with icons of the steel pan movement.

Mr. Speaker, we anticipate that the national community will benefit tremendously from this project. Among the benefits to be derived are over 100 experienced pannists to be employed during the life of the project. There are many steelbandsmen who are not employed now, Mr. Speaker, and this is welcome news. Roughly 600 persons will explore and develop their skills with the steel pan as technologists and/or as player.

More than 40 steelbands and other community groups will benefit from training and institutional strengthening from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and, finally, increased involvement by the national community and greater awareness among citizens in general about the value and importance of the national musical instrument to the overall development of the country.

Mr. Speaker, we have the pan ensemble project. Complementing the work of the proposed Mobile Institute for Pan will be a futuristic initiative of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism appropriately dubbed the Pan Ensemble Project. This project is geared toward the promotion and exposure of pan ensembles of four to seven players with a view to encouraging the management of ensembles as viable business concerns within the context of a national cultural industries programme. Mr. Speaker, the Jit Samaroo family group is a shining example of what we are speaking about.

The objective of the project is create a database of existing—Jit Samaroo, a real hero—pan sides of four to seven players throughout Trinidad and Tobago as a first step in facilitating the promotion of the work of these small sided orchestras so that their capabilities can be identified thereby making it possible for them to be hired for various kinds of functions. When we go abroad, in all the hotels and different places we see these small-sided orchestras.

The project will comprise four components. The documentation of bands comprising four to seven players throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Location, membership, profile of the groups and their experiences, telephone contact, manager and other related data. The production of promotional material such as brochures and call cards for each group. The promotion of the work of the group through midday concerts throughout the country. Imagine on a Friday lunchtime, workers in Arima leaving to go to the Dial and hear our pan music, a nice repertoire, and then back to work. Same thing happening simultaneously down at San Fernando, they go to the library and so on.

The training of the groups in protocol, personal grooming, instrument maintenance, image building and management. The provision of training for group members in business management. Mr. Speaker, the national community will benefit from this initiative in several ways inclusive of the provision of ongoing work of pannists; the hiring of small mobile pan ensembles for community functions; upgrading of the skills level of individual pannists, since a higher skill level is required when working in small ensembles; encouragement of professionalism and a spirit of entrepreneurship among a group of persons who normally do not see themselves as entrepreneurs; an ongoing demonstration of the ways in which talent can be harnessed for individual, community and national betterment.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just speak a little about a project that there is, because we are speaking about crime a lot, and in the US Virgin Islands, Judge Verne Hodge, the chief judge of the US Virgin Islands, 20 years ago, recognized the importance of the steel pan and, in an arrangement with the Territorial Court, young offenders are sent to play the instrument. There is a big centre for that. The Marshal of the court brought vehicles and they transport them to and from the venues.

There are 12 tutors employed and each tutor sees about a particular section. There will be a tutor for the tenors, one for double seconds, for the cellos, the bass, and so forth. Just last month they had advertisements for the quadraphonic which is a new instrument included in the steel orchestra. They are doing extremely well and these tutors have sick leave benefits, vacation leave, and so forth. Very professionally done, and this has been working wonders.

They also monitor the pannists at school and if they are not doing well academically, they pull them out of the orchestra. So, they monitor them from elementary to tertiary. It is a very successful programme and they have formed themselves into an orchestra, one hundred strong. Rising Stars. They come to

Trinidad every carnival for panorama, but they play in different orchestras. Some go to BP Renegades, some to All Stars, some to Phase II, so they get all round experience when they get back to the US Virgin Islands, and this is helping considerably because it helps them with their self-esteem and their self-worth by playing the instrument. Very good programme. [*Desk thumping*] As my colleague from San Fernando West is saying, music is really good therapy.

Other programmes and projects that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism proposes to undertake during the 2003/2004 fiscal year include completion of the refurbishment of Queen's Hall, inclusive of construction of an administrative building, ancillary structures and landscaping. It is plenty work going on there.

Renovations to Naparima Bowl; preservation, development and management of Naipaul House; upgrade of the Little Carib Theatre as a lasting tribute to the contribution made by the late Beryl McBurnie and the founder of the Little Carib; restoration and rehabilitation of buildings on Nelson Island as part of a major project to develop the island as a national heritage site. Finally, preparation of the relevant studies and designs for the construction of an academy for the performing arts. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, permit me just to touch a little on the beautiful constituency of Tunapuna, which I am so proud to represent. We had our conference last Saturday and I reported extensively on the work being done up there. A lot of work has been done in Tunapuna and there is much more to be done. We had a church service on Tuesday, a thanksgiving service because the Bible says we should give thanks and we did just that—a very successful service.

In conclusion, what I want to say is, we are going to press on with the work here and I want to say how proud I am and feel very pleased to take part in the budget and I support the budget fully. I want to remind all my colleagues, because I am still in the mood from the church service, we must all remember that God is real, God is sovereign and he is all powerful.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Harry Partap (*Nariva*): Mr. Speaker, God moves in mysterious ways, [*Laughter*] His wonders to behold. As you are aware, last Monday we were not able to be present in the House because of circumstances which have been well publicized, but God spared us from listening to a budget that was uninspiring, unimaginative, dull and desperately boring. [*Desk thumping*]

It was a budget presentation that was delivered in this House on which the hon. Minister of Finance spent two hours and he said precious little for the benefit of the people of this country. It was 78 pages packed with material for public relations, and that is what this Government has been doing for the past 21 months. It was only a matter of public relations.

If one looks at the newspapers, one would see there are spreads in of various Ministers cutting ribbons and viewing this and that, but nothing substantial for the people of this country. Mr. Speaker, the workers of this country and the poor will hardly benefit, and their burdens will not be eased by this budget. The budget really is a betrayal of the hardworking people of this country.

It gives with one hand and it takes back twice as much with the other hand, particularly with the increase in the price of gas. You may think, Minister of Finance, that that is nothing. It is, because it means that the price of every single thing in this country will increase. Already in the groceries we hear them talking about transporting the goods, so the prices will go up. Not because of any legislation here, but because of the price of gas. Taxi fares will go up and a number of things, the prices will increase because of this budget. So it gives with one hand and it takes back with the other, twice as much.

Mr. Speaker, this budget leaves the workingman, the poor, the retrenched and the underemployed in a worse position. This budget reinforces the "gimme gimme" syndrome. It is a new dimension of state handouts. It entangles the poor in a web of control ready to be manipulated. This is what this budget does. But that is not new. That is the ethos of the PNM. Handouts to manipulate, and that is what the PNM has been doing.

The PNM's concept of empowerment is making the poor subservient to the PNM party. Making the poor and unemployed dependent on the PNM. Mr. Speaker, we on this side have no problem with programmes aimed at assisting the underprivileged and the vulnerable in the society. We have no problem with that. In fact, we welcome that, but those programmes must eventually help the recipients out of their disadvantaged state.

With the social assistance programme under the government of the UNC and under the Member for Chaguanas, there was a learning component. We had a component of skills training and at some stage in the life of these people, they would be able to lift themselves out of their disadvantaged state, but when the PNM came in December, 2001, they removed the component of skills training, and they inherited that from the UNC but they chose not to continue. The PNM made these programmes straight handouts.

Mr. Speaker, this budget will not help to improve the life of the most vulnerable in the society, and if the Minister of Finance wants to fool himself by thinking this budget is going to help the most vulnerable, I want to say that that is not true. It is not going to help them. I do not know if the Minister of Finance, perhaps he did not heed the prayer offered by the Reverend Cyril Paul. Apparently not, because in this budget, the Minister said a lot of things which he did not mean. Reverend Paul prayed so that would not happen, and a lot of things in this budget he does not mean would happen.

It reminds me of an advertisement on the television or radio where the advertisement goes this way: it is a local company with its headquarters in perhaps London, I believe, and the local man calls up the fellow at the headquarters and he says, "We have a problem. One of our competitors, they are selling at a lower price. But that is not all. They are also offering the best quality." And the fella says, "True? Are you serious? But we do the same. The only thing is, will they offer the best? We say things but we do not mean it. We say that we are offering better quality and lower prices but we do not mean it. Does the competitor mean it?"

This is the budget. They say a lot of things in this budget, but they really do not mean it. You know why I say that? Because if we go back and I think one of my colleagues on this side had done it, we would see a lot of things remained undone and they are rolled over into this budget. That is sad.

I submit that the Minister of Finance said things in this budget which he really does not intend to do. This has been the way of the PNM. They use everything for political purposes. I want to read from *Crisis*. It is a series of articles edited by Mr. Owen Baptiste, and this is in the aftermath of the 1975 Bloody Tuesday. He wrote an article in this Book called *Crisis*. It is more or less just us today. It is a repeat of what is happening again today. I am at page 226, and hear what he says:

"The fact is, the government…"

And it is the PNM in government.

> "is today the biggest employer in Trinidad and Tobago. But this unprecedented rapidity of government participation in industrial and commercial enterprises (planes, telephones, print, packaging, flour, sausages, banking, oil and sugar) is regarded more as a form of political patronage and state terrorism than, as Williams suggests, the promotion of a national and nationally-oriented private sector."

It goes on:

"In his address to his own convention in September, Tapia secretary, Lloyd Best pointed out that 'half of the jobs in the country are directly under the party's control'."

Meaning the PNM's control.

"People are intimidated…by the tentacles of state which are reaching out into all corners of business and snuffling out their freedom. The truth is, in spite of the propaganda and the promise of moving the population towards economic independence, it is the opinion of Williams-watchers that what the government has in mind is not a greater nation, but a greater party—"

The PNM, a greater party "that it hopes to reap from its involvement in all these enterprises, as in Best Village competition and the Special Works project, not higher production, but wider support'."

Mr. Speaker, that is what the PNM is doing.

When the Member for Tunapuna stood up there and rattled off what the Ministry was doing and talked about Carifesta, I thought he would have said that the Carifesta troupes, the people who represented this country, did not represent a cross-section of the people of this country. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!

They are practising racism. It did not reflect the composition of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are talking about. We are talking about the discrimination that the PNM has inflicted on this country in the past 21 months.

Mr. Speaker, let us listen to what the Minister of Finance said, and I am just using a little piece on the last page of his budget presentation. He says:

> "We govern for all, the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong, the Young and the Old.
>
> All children shall be better educated, all sick better cared for, all elderly made more secure, all disabled more respected. There shall be greater advancement of the young, more business development for the entrepreneurial and more employment opportunities for all.
>
> There shall be greater security in Trinidad and Tobago."

Mr. Speaker, maybe these are laudable goals, but are you serious, Minister of Finance, Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East? Are you serious? The Holy Book says: "By your deeds, ye shall be known." We govern for all?

Mr. Manning: By their deeds we shall know them.

Mr. H. Partap: I had the opportunity of précising the Holy Bible, but we govern for all! Really? You govern for all? I just spoke about the Carifesta. They governed for all? What has been the record, Mr. Speaker, of the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister since December 24, 2001? What has been the record? I will tell you.

Government for the PNM! Governing for the PNM. Not governing for all. That is not a perception. That is the reality in Trinidad and Tobago today. Different strokes for different folks. Look what they did with the sugar industry. They closed down the sugar industry. They sent 10,000 people on the breadline, but they took action for Carlisle Tyre Company for 400 workers. They took action to save their jobs, did they not? They could say what they want, but I am telling them what they did.

He could not spend $350 million to keep Caroni until it was restructured in a proper way, but he put $225,000,000 in CEPEP and it goes only to one section of the population. I warned him about this last year and told him about it. I tried to tell him it is a wrong thing he is doing, but he did not listen. He keeps on not listening because he is ruling this country only for the PNM, and that is what Williams was doing.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East has to change, and that is what we are calling for. We are calling for a change in the way he does things so discrimination would not be as rampant as it is in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, I am ashamed to be living here, to know that one section of the population is discriminated against. We cannot sit and allow that to happen. We cannot do that.

If he feels comfortable at home and in his office by doing that—the Minister of Finance, you are the Prime Minister of this country—he must take stock. He said $225 million gone to CEPEP for this dubious thing, the intention of strengthening the training and development component. What training and developmental component in CEPEP? Perhaps he does not know! That is laughable. There is no training and developmental component in CEPEP.

I know! He drives only from St. Ann's to the office. That is as far as he reaches. I am on the street every day. I walk the streets and I know. Do not worry with the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. He might be misleading him, because he is doing the same thing in Ortoire/Mayaro. Mr. Speaker, in some cases there are no job sites for CEPEP workers. I know that. How are they going

to have developmental training? They have no job site to go to. It is the same old thing! On a Friday they will gather to collect their money. [*Interruption*]

You do not talk because Laventille is in a serious state. If you want to put your head in the sand that is your business, because they are killing, and I will show you just now how the killing is going. Mr. Speaker, sorry. He is provoking me.

Mr. Speaker, you know what that CEPEP is for? It is a vote bank for the elections—the general and local government. It is also a vote bank for the Member for San Fernando East.

Mr. Manning: Me?

Mr. H. Partap: Yes, for the PNM leadership election. That is what it is for. [*Laughter*] So you do not know? That is serious business!

Mr. Manning: Which election?

Mr. H. Partap: Perhaps the other Members did not know. He set up the CEPEP so that he would have a cadre of people who would vote in that election. I hope the Member for Diego Martin West is hearing, if he is challenging him. Also, the rest of the team.

Mr. Speaker, CEPEP is not open to all citizens. It is only for the PNM supporters and the CEPEP contracts are only open to PNM General Council members and the higher people. The small people do not benefit, but be that as it may.

So do not come here and give us the impression that the PNM is governing for all. That is not true. That is a myth. It is not true at all. Do not think you will fool us with that kind of thing. Let us see what it says here. It says, "All children shall be better educated". Mr. Minister, are you really serious? Let me tell you what one of your Ministers, the Minister of Planning and Development said. Dr. Keith Rowley, and I am quoting from the *Guardian*, page 3 of September 29, 2003. This is what it says:

> "Planning and Development Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, has said the education system is ineffective."

7.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West is attacking the Minister of Education by his statement; he is attacking his own Minister of Education; I would not go further than that. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Do you really believe

that you will be offering education to all? Let me just read a few of the clippings I have here: "Gang rule at Cedros School" Is that how they will be better educated? "Gang war in school"; "Children exposed to porn"; "National Library fracas" Better educated? [*Crosstalk*] We have more clippings, but I will not bother to read them. They are not even paying the money for the private secondary schools. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that when my colleague, the Member for Siparia, speaks on Monday she will deal with the incompetence of the hon. Minister of Education and all the failures in the past 21 months. I have already told you what the Member for Diego Martin West said about the education system.

Mr. Speaker, children in the education system are still being placed far away from their homes, and they have to get up at 4 o'clock and 5 o'clock in the morning. I want to read a letter that I sent to the hon. Minister of Education. She has not acknowledged it, so I am reading it in the Parliament today. It is addressed to the hon. Minister of Education:

"September 09, 2003…

> I wish to bring to your attention the special plight of 12-year old Rajendra George of Hay Trace, Coalmine, Sangre Grande who cannot take up a place offered to him at the Five Rivers Junior Secondary School based on the Secondary Entrance Assessment Examination. He is forced to remain at home because he cannot afford transportation costs."

I am sure that the Member for Arouca North knows what it means to be travelling from Coalmine to Fiver Rivers. [*Crosstalk*]

> "Rajendra's father, Mr. Augustine George, 42 is the sole breadwinner, but is now unable to work due to two mishaps, which damaged his backbone (September 2002) and his hip (February 2003).
>
> Mr. George made an application for the transfer of his son from Five Rivers Junior Secondary School to any of the six secondary schools in the Sangre Grande area. This application was made on August 15, 2003, on the prescribed form and the appropriate attachments, without success. "
>
> My letter is dated September 09.
>
> "He is undergoing medical treatment at present."
>
> They have not moved him.
>
> "Madam Minister, the Swaha College is about three (3) miles from Rajendra's residence while the Five Rivers Junior Secondary School is thirty-

five (35) miles away. In order for Rajendra to get to Five Rivers, he would have to change transport at three (3) points—Coalmine to Sangre Grande; Sangre Grande to Arima and Arima to Five Rivers. The total cost of transportation is about $30 per day for the thirty-five (35) miles journey. Rajendra will have to leave home before 5:00 a.m. on mornings to reach to school on time and may return about 5:00 p.m. on evenings (depending on the shift…).

I am making an appeal to you, Madam Minister, for your intervention to have Rajendra assigned to any of the secondary schools in the Sangre Grande area. Those in Sangre Grande are as follows: North Eastern Secondary; Sangre Grande Junior Secondary; Guaico Secondary…"

Which was started by the UNC.

"Swaha College;…"

Built under the UNC.

"the Sangre Grande Business College…"

Contracted by the UNC.

"and the Bates Memorial High School."

Also under the UNC.

"The Manzanilla Secondary School and the Coryal High School…"

Built under the UNC.

"are in the Sangre Grande region but may be just as difficult for Rajendra to access without high transportation costs.

The fact that Rajendra is being assigned a school so far away from his home makes it impossible for him to access the offer and really defeats the concept of universal secondary schooling for all children of secondary school age. I am aware, Madam Minister that your Government has embraced the programme of universal secondary school education initiated by the UNC Administration and it is my prayer that you will do all in your power to ensure that no child is left behind."

And I know they do not like prayer. [*Crosstalk*] I hope that the Minister responds to this.

Mr. Speaker, so much for the issue of education, sending children 35 miles away from their homes.

Mr. Ramnath: That is another Indian under attack!

Mr. H. Partap: Yet, Mr. Speaker, the Government continues to refuse to open the Biche High School. The Biche High School has not collapsed. It has not blown up as yet. No one from the village surrounding the school has died from gas emissions. [*Crosstalk*] There are no gas emissions in the area. Children still have to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning looking at that good school on the hill, one of the most modern schools, and then have to travel to Manzanilla for education. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ramnath: Pure spite!

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, each day that school remains closed, it would be living proof of the PNM's victimization of the school children of Biche. That is done merely to satisfy their political vendetta with the UNC. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] What is wrong with this man? He drives in front of that school everyday and nothing is wrong with the building; we know that. You still have people living around there who are 85 years old. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, I am calling on the Government to send back Dr. Rohit Dhoon who had written a report on that school; let him revisit the site. Let him conduct his tests and report to you. You could send in Cariri as well, let them do what they have to, but stop punishing the people and the children of Biche!

I know it would be a hard pill to swallow, after you have said so many things about the building, and spread so much misinformation and hysteria throughout the country about the school. The media was assisting you, because they were showing one little part on the hill where the contractor built a step on loose earth, and it washed away. Obviously it would wash away; [*Crosstalk*] you know about that, Member for Diego Martin East. They built a wall without weep holes, with half-inch iron. Tell me if that would stand up? It cannot. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, the Members for Diego Martin West and Diego Martin East and a gentleman called Mr. Burgess, who is now getting $90,000 a month at the Ministry of Education, they went around spreading—I cannot say lies, because that is not permissible—but they were spreading misinformation about the school. [*Crosstalk*] I am asking them through you, Mr. Speaker, to do what they have to do, but open the school.

It is interesting that there was a commission of enquiry into the school, but up to today that report cannot see the light of day. Do you know why? If that report had said the kind of nonsense they spoke about, that the UNC was responsible and

so on, it would have been broadcast all over the country; but I believe that the report pointed to a particular consultant who did not do his job. [*Crosstalk*] The man who is financing the PNM, a Senator, was a member of that company. I believe that the commission of enquiry put blame on the consultant, and because they wanted to protect him, they decided to send the report to three or four lawyers to look at.

The report has been out about a year now. [*Crosstalk*] I want you to correct the nonsense that you did. The PNM must stop trying to protect the culprit. It is not the UNC. They know who it is! [*Crosstalk*] The Member for San Fernando East is aware of who the person is. [*Interruption*] If the UNC was found culpable, you would have exposed that 1,000 times, but now you hide the report; bring the report out. Do not wait until Biche gets heated, [*Desk thumping*] because it will come; as night follows day, it will come, but we are giving you the opportunity to act. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Go back and read the *Hansard*; I will stand by every word I said. [*Crosstalk*]

You have no reason to prevent the opening of the Biche High School, except that you are victimizing the people of Biche. [*Crosstalk*] You could do what you want; you cannot win in Biche/Tarouba; you know that. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] You are trying to come to Nariva, but we are waiting for you. Let me get back to the budget.

It says in the budget that all sick will be better cared for. Again they are making me laugh. Mr. Speaker, one headline reads: "Baby Boy Dies; Heads to roll at Mt Hope" This morning I only grabbed up a few clippings. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*].

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please! Member for Nariva, please! I am appealing on behalf of the *Hansard* reporter; she is having great difficulty hearing the contribution of the Member for Nariva. Let us hear the Member for Nariva in silence. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

Mr. H. Partap: This, of course, is a hollow promise, as long as you have the Member for Diego Martin East in that ministry. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] He is a waste of time! [*Desk thumping*] He is incompetent and is making the Government incompetent as well! Every one of you on that side will become incompetent because of him. I notice that the hon. Prime Minister wants to ship him away to Cuba; [*Desk thumping*] give him a nice title, "Your Excellency"; he will go to Cuba. He is a waste of time in that ministry; he is presiding over the nonfunctioning of a very important institution, people's health; so leave!

[*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Do not wait until the Prime Minister moves you; tell him you want to go, that you are tired; make an excuse "nuh" man; just leave! [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this one is really interesting. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. H. Partap: I am getting back to the budget. It says that there shall be greater security in Trinidad and Tobago; hold your breath. Who will trust those words? Some of you do not know; you do not leave the back seat of your air-conditioned cars. The windows are rolled up, so you do not see what is happening outside; you do not hear what people are saying; but people are laughing at you. You are guaranteeing the security of people?

First of all, you have to move that incompetent Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation. You appointed a committee against crime, and put Ken Gordon as Chairman. All they have come up with is, "If you want to fix crime, fix me." It is not "me"; they have to fix "you" first, Mr. Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] It is you who are encouraging crime through your friends who you call "community leaders". That advertisement is a waste of time. You do not solve crime by a full-page ad; you are just giving the newspaper owners money. Is that what you are doing? "Fix me?" I am not responsible.

My leader said in the election campaign that if you vote for the PNM, you are voting for Abu Bakr as your Minister of National Security. He said that if you vote for the PNM, you are voting for more kidnapping and crime. Therefore, do not tell me that I am responsible for crime; I am not. I disagree with Mr. Gordon. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Headlines read:

"Murders At An All Time High"; "Murder rate goes past 2002 figure"; "3 murders reported in 12 hours"; "Kidnappers strike again"; "Cocaine ashore"; "Minister's Car In Murder Drama" [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

You are driving your car on the Priority Bus Route and you do not have your glass up and your car locked? Strange. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*]

The headlines continue:

"Please help me raise $2 million to release my son"

They go on and on:

"Royal Castle Owner Kidnapped"

I have a bundle of them. You are guaranteeing us that we will have greater security? We do not trust you; that is the first thing. Once you aligned yourself with the community leaders, who are known criminals, we cannot trust you.

Mr. Ramnath: Burgess is a community leader in San Fernando East.

Mr. H. Partap: At the close of the budget speech it promises more employment opportunities for all. You are really making us laugh. You are making the budget an issue for the circus. More employment opportunities? Do you know that in the 21 months that the PNM has been in office, 13,831 persons lost their jobs? [*Desk thumping*] If you multiply that by five, which is the number of persons in a normal family, check how many people will be suffering.

In our time, the UNC created 70,000 jobs. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] It is not true, because you cannot believe they are throwing out 13,000 people. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Less than 14,000; I will give you a little extra; 14,000 people unemployed in 21 months. God help this country if you last for the five years. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Caroni, 10,000; BWIA, 200; Sagicor, 30; Carib Glassworks Limited, 140; McDonald's, 145; Home Construction Limited, 400; and so it goes on. Another 2,700 will be going after this budget. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Port Authority, some going; Petrotrin, some going; PTSC, some going. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Do not yawn, because people out there yawning, and they do not have food to eat. Let them yawn.

I do not see the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprises Development here this evening, but let me deal with some aspects of the performance of the Ministry of Labour over this part of the year. I refer to the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004* at page 77/93. What it talks about is a rehash of what was there last year, in the last budget. Why are you fooling us? I cannot understand this!

"NHRMIS data base expanded to include additional data sets for analysis"

When we were there, we completed the National Human Resource Management Information System (NHRMIS); yes, we did that. [*Desk thumping*] It was a matter of continuing it; you do not have to put that on your Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP):

"Establishment of a Labour Market Council"

It appears again.

"Regular publication and dissemination of labour market information"

That has to go in your PSIP? [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Whatever it is, this is your Social and Economic Policy Framework. [*Laughter*] Do you know what you

are doing? You are fooling us. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] You are telling us that you are doing something, but you are doing nothing. [*Crosstalk*] [*Interruption*] Well, okay, you say what you are going to do for 2004, but you had it last year. The point I am making is that you are repeating this. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: May I ask you a question? Just one minute. Mr. Speaker, I simply want to ask the Member whether he is aware that it is a medium-term plan, and it covers a three-year period?

Mr. H. Partap: I do not know what your point is. [*Laughter*] Let me tell you what my point is. [*Desk thumping*] You are repeating this, and you do not have any indication here of what percentage was accomplished. If you had that, then I would say that you did 5 per cent, and you have 25 per cent remaining. I would read this to mean that you did nothing, and you have come again to fool me. Mr. Speaker, there are a number of things here; you must read it.

Mr. Speaker, page 78/93:

"Increase in the number of Users (Job Seekers and Employers) of the NES"

We restructured the National Employment Service (NES) under the UNC with the help of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United States Department of Labour, because we wanted to bring it in line with what the Americans were doing. It was like a one-stop shop: you came in, registered, did your applications, and within two or three days, they would match you to a job; that is what it was.

Let me tell you what happened to the NES system. In 2002, while you were there through your godfather, [*Laughter*] 1,666 persons registered. Do you know how many people got jobs? One hundred and thirty-five in the private sector, and 332 in the public sector. Up to September 2003, 2,874 had registered. Do not ask me who give me the figure, because you would fire the person, and I do not want you to do that. It means that people want to use the system. When we were there we made it user friendly. Obviously, it is continuing. Look at what happened, Mr. Speaker. Out of that 2,874 only 104 got jobs in the private sector, and 195 in the public sector. Your people are not working hard enough. [*Interruption*] [*Crosstalk*] My business is not to add it. [*Laughter*] If you want to add it, you add it. [*Laughter*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. H. Partap: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank the Member for Diego Martin Central; I guess he wants me to correct the figure. The figure was 2,874 registered; 104 got jobs in the private sector, and 195 in the public sector:

I was looking at the Social and Economic Policy Framework, but I have only half an hour so I have to go quickly as I have many things to say. I referred to 79/93, 78/93, to tell the Member to look at it. Your Minister is fooling you; do not let the man fool you! He has put everything in here that he had put last year, that means he is trying to bamboozle you. [*Laughter*] I have warned you, so you know what to do. I expect to see this appearing in 2005 again. [*Interruption*]

[MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

In the Consolidation Division there is still a shortage of staff. People are leaving for greener pastures, and the Minister is unconcerned. You have one Chief Labour Relations Officer (CLRO); you have three senior LROs; three LROs II, and five LROs I; no wonder we have so many industrial disputes in the country, and people marching up and down the road. I hope those of you on that side know that when we were there, we had no industrial disputes. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for San Fernando West was Chairman of the South Trinidad Chamber of Commerce.

Hon. Member: That was when she was UNC. [*Laughter*]

Mr. H. Partap: Now there are a number of them, because you do not have people who can do crisis management in the ministry. You need people who would go beforehand and try to sort the problem out. As the then Minister of Labour, I, and my colleague from Oropouche intervened before, quietly. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: So how come you are now in Opposition?

Mr. H. Partap: "Because All yuh tief the election!" [*Laughter*] Let me be a little more parliamentary: You stole the election. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, you know how you stole the election; I do not have to tell you.

Hon. Members: How did we do it?

Mr. H. Partap: Ask Philbert, he is trying to implicate all of us. We are going again.

What I notice is that the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is now contracting 10 positions as six senior and four junior LROs; they do not want to fill it through the establishment. Everything has been settled now; you are only waiting for the budget, then you are going to appoint them. Jobs for the boys! When you contract people, you can pay them whatever they ask for. Jobs for the boys; we know that!

The Member for San Fernando East would have known that. The Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is being used as a party group, that is serious business, and they employ friends and relatives. Somebody's sister is there.

7.40 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is what the Member for Point Fortin is presiding over, a party group. I just spoke about the National Employment Service (NES) and I gave the figures. The figures and placements are dropping because there is a lack of leadership in the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development; it is moribund and ineffective. The ministry is not aggressive enough to win the imagination of the employers so they could open up their place and employ more persons.

The ministry, through the NES is not meeting the objectives set by the UNC government, and those set may not be as stringent as the ones we set. In short, the reflection at the ministry now is one of complete incompetence, and I feel that Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development should get off his big chair and do some work, and must even stop the smoking in there. When we were there, the Minister of Health had advised us and we had made it a no smoking building. Now I understand it is like if you are in London and it is cold.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they promised to open an NES office in Sangre Grande and Rio Claro in last year’s programme. Up to today there is none. I think one was opened in Tunapuna but they have their reasons for that.

If one goes to the labour inspectorate, again, there is lack of staff and not enough persons to monitor the minimum wage which they want to raise. It is time for the Minister to get busy and come to Cabinet.

In the farm programme, numbers are being reduced since we left office. We moved the farm programme for Canada from 750 and we increased it up to 1,597. They took a PNM hack and made him a consul in Canada doing nothing. If I were in the street I would tell you he did not know something from his something.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Mr. H. Partap: I do not know his name but he was a failed candidate. He fought an election against the Member for Couva South and lost and you shipped him away to Canada to enjoy himself just like you are doing with Ashton Ford now. You sent him to relax in London like what you are going to do with the Member for Diego Martin East; send him to Cuba.

Hon. Imbert: To do what?

Mr. H. Partap: When we left office, 1,597 men in Trinidad would have gone to Canada to work on the farms. The number was reduced to 1,481 in 2002 and up to this present time it is 1,484. You are reducing and if you continue you will go back to 753. So recall the fella from Canada because he is a waste. I know the man who is there now had been a personal choice of the Prime Minister.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Mr. H. Partap: At the next sitting of Parliament I will give you his name.
Mr. Manning: Poor me!

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government has no interest in workers. If we give them a chance they will take that Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) and put it in a committee. I hope that would not be done, but they have no interest in workers.

We introduced the minimum wage when we were there and amended the Minimum Wage Act to allow aggrieved workers to access the Industrial Court with or without a lawyer. I hope it is still there. We introduced and passed the Maternity Protection and Benefits Bill. We established the multipartite committee that hammered out a social and economic compact. I do not know if it is still there. We want action, we do not want the "ole" talk again. We engineered the National Employment Service and brought it to a respectable standard and people felt comfortable going there, now I do not know what is happening. [*Crosstalk*] How many bills you all refused to support, that is what has to be asked.

For the past 21 months now, the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development has been at a standstill and I want to tell the Prime Minister that one day he should put on an old hat and jacket and go quietly to see for himself. He could wear dark shades too if he wants. That ministry is being used as a party group and because of that, the workers are demoralized, laid back and do not care to work. They have a right to be so, because everything is based on a decision made by one man; the fella who stands for one of your relatives, the

godfather— [*Interruption*] I am saying there is a lack of leadership, and the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development needs pulling up.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the UNC left office it left the Occupational Safety and Health Bill which I see has been brought back. Good. We left basic conditions of work and minimum wage and that would have taken care of the Minimum Wage Act. We would have repealed that and put it under basic conditions and minimum wage. We left the Industrial Injury and Benefits Bill, which would have replaced the Workmen's Compensation Bill which as you know, is archaic and does not reflect what is happening in the society today. [*Interruption*] That is why I am saying the Minister is not doing his work. If he were, you would have known.

I think the Legislative Review Committee (LRC) moved the Attorney General as Chairman. I always knew the Attorney General as Chairman of the LRC. You moved her and put Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams who is not a lawyer, but that is your business, you know what you are doing.

We had reviewed the Industrial Relations Act, the legislation governing the Registration Recognition and Certification Board, has to change, we also did a draft to amend the Cooperative Societies Act. Why are you all not doing that? It is because your Minister does not have a handle, he just has a hold on the ministry and is too busy operating as a party group. He must stop that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my colleague the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, in her contribution referred to the Cumuto Police Station. It was on the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) last year and it is back again. Nothing has been done. The station is now in a temporary building and the situation is terrible. I find it strange that the Minister of National Security is the PNM shadow Member for Nariva.

Hon. Member: "Doh make joke!"

Mr. H. Partap: Yes. He is the PNM's shadow Member of Parliament for Nariva and the Cumuto Police Station and temporary station are so bad that sometimes they feel they just cannot operate. There is no vehicle there. Tell the Minister of National Security if he is shadowing there, we want the Manzanilla Station too. Try to do the Cumuto Police Station quickly and the Manzanilla Police Station as well because the Biche Police Station does not have a vehicle. The weekend villagers had planned to light fire on the road, three vehicles were there but they still could not prevent the groundswell. I am telling you, you cannot

win Nariva you know, you could do what you want. You could come with many more cheques.

The Minister of Works and Transport did a little piece of the Cunapo Southern Main Road and promised to finish it. Do not put the people of Nariva through the trauma of having to do the things they have to do in order to get your attention. I am raising it here again, that road must be fixed, please fix it. I am not begging you. These are citizens of this country and they deserve to have their road fixed; and do not wait until election time because you cannot win. So do it now. You must pave the road and do it as quickly as you can.

There are more things I would like to say, but I know my time is drawing to a close so before the Deputy Speaker has to warn me to end, I will say that the budget is a serious disappointment. There are lots of things in that budget which we know you are not going to deliver and we are saying that the people of this country deserve to be able to access all the facilities offered through government without being discriminated against. We will continue to say this until you make some changes in the way you operate, so you treat people equally as you said in the closing of your statement.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday, October 13, 2003 at 10.00 a.m. for the continuation of the debate on the budget.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.55 p.m.