

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, October 13, 2003*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Members for Naparima (Mr. S. Panday) and Tabaquite (Dr. A. Nanan) requesting leave of absence from today's sitting. The leave of absence which the hon. Members seek is granted.

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statement of the Tobago House of Assembly for the year ended September 30, 1999. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]

*To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*

2. Report of the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the years 2000/2001 and 2001/2002. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
3. Annual audited financial statements of First Citizens Mortgage and Trust Company Limited for the financial year ending September 20, 1998. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
4. Annual audited financial statements of the National Helicopter Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2002. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

*Papers 3 and 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.*

**APPROPRIATION BILL  
(BUDGET)**

[Third Day]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, when I listened to the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition and some other contributions

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from the other side, it was apparent to me that there is a deliberate effort on the part of hon. Members opposite to paint a picture of unreality and fiction in Trinidad and Tobago. In particular, when I heard the Leader of the Opposition make the astonishing statement that no hospitals or health centres have been constructed in the last fiscal year and none were programmed for construction in the coming fiscal year, I wondered how much time he had been spending in Trinidad and Tobago and if he had not been spending most of his time in another country. Therefore it is my responsibility to put the truth into the record.

In the last 12 months we have had some substantial achievements in terms of construction of physical plant and installation of equipment in a number of health facilities all over Trinidad and Tobago. I shall now put these into the record.

We completed the new Erin Health Centre at a cost of \$2.8 million. That is going to be officially opened in the very near future. We also completed the new Icacos Health Centre at a cost of \$2 million. That was completed in the last few months by the PNM administration. We also renovated and readapted the Chatham Health Centre; we completed the construction of a brand new health centre very close to the Mannie Ramjohn Stadium; the Marabella Health Centre—new construction—at a cost of \$2.5 million, completed by this PNM administration within the last few months.

The Gasparillo Health Centre is being renovated as we speak and we project to complete that work by June 2004. The Williamsville Health Centre is being renovated. Again, we expect to complete that work by July 2004. The La Brea Health Centre is being reconstructed. It is 75 per cent complete at this time. We expect to complete that by February 2004.

With respect to the Gran Couva Health Centre, designs have been completed and a contract would be awarded shortly. That is a renovation of \$1.5 million which would be completed in August 2004. Designs have been completed for the Las Lomas Health Centre and a construction contract would be awarded shortly. This is programmed to be completed in fiscal year 2004 at a cost of \$2.4 million. We are going to renovate the Talparo Health Centre at a cost of \$2 million. That is programmed for completion in August 2004.

With respect to the Debe Health Centre, a brand new construction at a cost of \$2.3 million is programmed for completion in November 2004. The La Romain Health Centre would be renovated at a cost of almost \$3 million. It is programmed for completion in November 2004. The Ste Madeleine Health Centre would be extended at a cost of \$1.5 million. That is programmed for completion in November 2004.

In the last fiscal year as well, contrary to the fantasy of the Member for Couva North, we completed the renovation of the Tunapuna Health Centre, at a cost of \$2.1 million. We completed the renovation of the Tacarigua Health Centre at a cost of \$2.6 million. We have completed the Maloney Health Centre at a cost of \$2 million, contrary to the fantasy of the Member for Couva North. We renovated and extended the Arouca Health Centre at a cost of \$2.2 million, completed in this fiscal year by this Ministry of Health; completed by the PNM administration. The Diego Martin Health Centre, designs are completed—

**Mr. Sharma:** None in UNC areas.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** None in UNC areas? What utter rubbish! Gran Couva, Las Lomas, Talparo, Debe, Williamsville, Gasparillo—rubbish! [*Desk thumping*]

Let us move on now: The Diego Martin Health Centre, construction would commence in 2004; in Petit Valley, renovation would commence in 2004. We have not discriminated. You see, the Members on the other side want to perpetuate the mythology—

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member for Fyzabad, I would ask you, please, the Member is on his feet and while he is addressing the Chair, all other Members ought to remain silent in accordance with the Standing Order. A little crosstalk is okay, but not constant crosstalk as you seem to be heading on to. You must remember that the Hansard reporter is right in front of you and you are disturbing her if you persist in this crosstalk.

Please continue.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You see, they want to poison the minds of some people in this country with a tissue of untruths and misinformation. [*Desk thumping*] They cannot deal with the truth. It is the truth that they cannot handle.

Let me move on now. We would be doing a renovation to the Upper Laventille Health Centre. We are starting that in the next fiscal year. The San Juan Health Centre is earmarked for renovation. The Barataria Health Centre is earmarked for renovation. We shall be building a brand new health centre at Carenage. [*Desk thumping*] Let me talk a little about Toco/Manzanilla. We completed the renovation and extension of the Toco Health Centre at a cost of \$1.8 million in this last fiscal year. We completed the renovation of the Valencia Health Centre at a cost of \$2 million in this last fiscal year; we completed the renovation of the Matura Health Centre at a cost of \$1.7 million in the last 12

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months; we have renovated the Coryal Health Centre at a cost of \$2 million in the last fiscal year; we have completed the renovation of the Cumuto Health Centre at a cost of \$2 million in the last fiscal year; we have completed the Manzanilla Health Centre renovation at a cost of \$1.9 million in the last fiscal year and we intend to commence—for my colleague from Ortoire/Mayaro—a \$2.5 million refurbishment of the Guayaguayare Health Centre in the next fiscal year, starting within the next month. [*Desk thumping*]

Yet they come here—I have to listen to the Member for Couva North, the Opposition Leader, a former Prime Minister. I have just listed more than 30 construction projects that have either been completed in the last 12 months—significant! These are real.

I remember when we were campaigning in the last local government election and I was doing some work in the Cocoyea/Tarouba area of which I am well proud, and when we reached the end of a particular street I gazed on the brand new Marabella Health Centre. It is there for you to see! These things are real! If you go up on the north coast you would see the Toco, Valencia, Matura, Coryal, Cumuto centres that have been reconstructed. If you go down to the constituency of my friend, the Member for Point Fortin, you would see the brand new health centres at Erin, Icacos, Chatham, and so on. These things are real. Yet they would come here with their untruths to try and poison the minds of the population and try to tell their supporters that nothing is going on.

Let me move to hospitals. For six years under the tenure of that administration they could not start the Tobago Hospital. It was sheer spite and malice; it was excuse after excuse: The Tobago House of Assembly is not cooperating; they cannot find a site; all sorts of reasons for the Tobago Regional Hospital not being started during the six years of the former UNC administration. It took a PNM government coming in to put an end to this nonsense. We selected a site; we completed the designs; we put the thing out for tender and the new Scarborough District Regional Hospital is now under construction. [*Desk thumping*]

The Princes Town District Health Facility was incomplete; no water connection, no equipment. There were all sorts of problems with that facility when we came in. It is an opposition area. Let me put it another way: It is an area that is now represented by the Opposition that would shortly be represented by the caring People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] We came in and solved the water connection problem; we spent \$3.2 million on state-of-the-art medical equipment for the Princes Town facility. We equipped it; we got doctors.

While I am on that, let me deal with another myth. You know, one of the things that is most distressing in this country is the ease with which certain persons would accept the foolishness and untruths fed to them by Members opposite. I looked at a newspaper over the weekend and saw a story about an Indian-born doctor, one Dr. Mahal, a mystery doctor who saved somebody's life and he has been applying to the Ministry of Health for years and there are no vacancies and he cannot get any work and he is going back to India because he is frustrated. I looked at this story. Do you know what the reality is? This is clearly designed to perpetuate the myth that has been put into the system by hon. Members opposite, that there are no vacancies and that we in the Ministry of Health are discriminating.

Do you know what the reality is? This is why I stopped on the Princes Town District Health Facility. We got the Princes Town District Health Facility going because we hired five Indian nationals; five medical doctors out of India to staff the Princes Town District Hospital. That is what we did. We did not discriminate. These persons presented themselves; they were all from India and we put all of them to work in the Princes Town District Hospital. Yet I have to read this foolishness in the newspapers that there are no vacancies, and there is the clear implication that we are discriminating along racial lines.

The hon. Members opposite would want to perpetuate the myth that we are discriminating. Do you know what the reality is? This particular individual is a student who has not even done his internship yet; has no licence to practise; not a mystery doctor, a "mischief" doctor. He is not registered to practise in Trinidad and Tobago, but would the people who have the responsibility to record the true facts put that into the system? No. But I have to read a story, as I read every day, coming straight from the Opposition, that we are discriminating against medical doctors out of India.

I would ask the press to be more responsible. They are being fed mischiefs and untruths by Members of the Opposition and they do not speak the truth.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** You are attacking the media?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I am attacking you because it is you who are feeding the untruths to the media.

Let us move on. For six years the Members opposite—one of them was representing a constituency in south Trinidad in San Fernando. They have circled San Fernando: Oropouche, Tabaquite, Princes Town, and so on. All of their constituents have to go to the San Fernando General Hospital for medical

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attention, but for six years they could not do one five-cent piece of renovation work on that hospital. I find that utterly incredible. What it demonstrates to me is that they do not care about anybody at all. They do not care about the people in north or south Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] It took a PNM administration to come into government and start phase one of the construction of the upgrade of the San Fernando General Hospital. We did it! [*Desk thumping*] For six years they could not do it! We came in, and after the 18/18 scenario, within a couple months we were able to get that project going. We are going to phases two and three within this fiscal year.

We started phase one of that upgrade. Phase one will be the renovation and reconstruction of hospital wards. Mr. Speaker, you are from San Fernando; you would know what I am talking about, and I know that you know persons in the medical fraternity; I am aware of that. You would know about the overcrowding problem in the San Fernando General Hospital. For six years they left an empty frame in the San Fernando Hospital compound. It is the PNM administration, at a cost of \$33 million—again, this is to debunk the myth that we are discriminating against certain areas of the country. We are spending \$33 million equipping and outfitting new hospital wards in the San Fernando General Hospital. [*Desk thumping*] You could have day surgery so that there would be additional bed space at the medical ward which is the most overcrowded ward at this point in time, so that the people of south Trinidad would get the health care that they deserve.

But you see, they do not want the people to know this. They do not want people in south Trinidad to know that it is the PNM administration that unplugged the bottleneck, the incompetent bureaucracy that was in that ministry before we came in and have got that San Fernando Hospital upgrade project going. It is 25 per cent completed at this point in time and we expect it to be completed within the upcoming fiscal year.

The next phase, at a cost of \$45 million—we are doing the necessary tendering at this point in time and we expect construction to commence within the coming fiscal year—is a new laboratory for San Fernando Hospital, a new pharmacy, a new day surgery unit, a new intensive care unit and a burns unit for San Fernando, because San Fernando is the industrial capital of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We would have the proper medical facilities in that area which the people of San Fernando and outlying areas deserve and are entitled to.

But we are not just doing work in Tobago and San Fernando. We are doing work all over the country. We intend to equip at least 26 health centres throughout

this country at a cost of \$22 million. We have started it already; we are 90 per cent complete and we expect by the end of December, 26 health centres in Trinidad and Tobago would have modern equipment.

We are installing computers in the Regional Health Authorities at a cost of \$3 million. In fact, we have already completed that project within the last fiscal year. We are in the process of getting surgical instruments for the San Fernando General Hospital. We expect to complete that within the next month. At the National Radiotherapy Centre in St. James, we would be installing new equipment at a cost of \$2 million for radiotherapy within the next month or so.

In addition, we intend to reopen the Central Sterilization Department (CSD) which was closed by the callous and uncaring UNC administration. Imagine your general hospital in your capital city, in comes a UNC administration, closes down the sterilization department and leaves it closed for two years, so when you have surgery taking place at Port of Spain you have to wait for supplies to come from the Mount Hope area. If the vehicle breaks down or there is a problem at Mount Hope, the surgeons in Port of Spain do not get their instruments; they do not get their gowns and they cannot do surgery.

In fact, when I look at what was going on under the tenure of the last Minister of Health, I see a deliberate effort to run the Port of Spain Hospital down into the ground. Because I visited the neo-natal unit at the Port of Spain Hospital within the last month and I saw a disgraceful situation that was left for the PNM administration to clean up. They closed the sterilization department; they closed the pediatric ward and relocated it so that people from the northwest peninsula—from the Diego Martin area, the Port of Spain area—could no longer get pediatric services in Port of Spain. They have to get into a taxi with their sick child and travel to Mount Hope, by which time the complications could get worse. It was a deliberate strike against the people of northwest Trinidad.

There was no money spent on that hospital during the six years of the United National Congress and it is not surprising. There was no money spent on the San Fernando Hospital either. So it was a deliberate strike against the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What was going on in that ministry was that essentially there was a quiet privatization of the health sector taking place. If one looks at the growth of private hospitals over the 1996 to 2002 period, one would see an explosion of private hospitals in that period. When you connect that to the deliberate neglect of the Port of Spain General Hospital and the San Fernando General Hospital, you could only come to one inevitable conclusion: It was a deliberate, surreptitious, underhand effort on the part of hon. Members opposite to

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downgrade the two main hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago and force people to go to the private hospitals. [*Desk thumping*]

That is what it was. How else can you explain the appalling conditions at the maternity unit in Port of Spain that was left untouched for six years under that former UNC administration? How else can one explain the closure of the sterilization department; the closure of the psychiatric ward at Port of Spain and no complementary facilities put in place? How else can one explain leaving an entire wing vacant and unoccupied for six years while there are people sleeping in corridors and on the stairs, while there is requirement for ward space in San Fernando? There is no other explanation. They ran everything into the ground.

I was appalled when I visited the St. James Radiotherapy centre in 2002 and saw the condition under which the hard working staff at St. James had to work. In fact, out of a hospital maintenance fund which we have created—because there was nothing in the system outside of the Health Sector Reform Programme for routine maintenance of hospital facilities and equipment—we are spending \$2 million out of this fund to do urgent repairs to the cancer centre at St. James so that the patients there can at least sit in air-conditioned comfort and get the kind of treatment to which they are entitled.

It was a deliberate neglect of the public health system. That is what characterized the tenure of the United National Congress. They even took good ideas and made nonsense out of them. You had the situation of the ambulance service; the Emergency Health Service (EHS), that was started as a pilot programme by the last administration. It was a good idea but, you see, it was supposed to be a nine-month pilot project, and during that period there was supposed to be a technology transfer; training of local staff; the creation of an ambulance authority and the localization—for want of a better word—of this modern emergency health service. Well, in typical fashion, the pilot programme was extended and extended; the technology transfer never took place; the training never took place; the consultant that was there just to show the locals how to do the work, eventually became the contractor operating the programme. The staff in the Ministry of Health became totally frustrated because there was never any closure to this issue. It would never end; it would just be continuous training that never happened, at great cost.

What they did as well, in an oil-rich economy, where an administration could make a conscious decision to spend \$2 billion on an airport; to spend \$100 million on a Miss Universe pageant that brought no benefits to this country; a conscious



decision to spend \$200 million a year on a desalination plant—those were deliberate conscious acts of the last administration—they could not buy new equipment for the emergency health services.

They brought in second-hand junk. When those vehicles came in 1999, or whenever, they were already four years old, left-hand drive vehicles that cannot fit on some of our roads. One of those ambulances cannot go into Belmont or into narrow country roads. So if there is a problem in an area where there is an access situation, the vehicles just cannot get to the constituencies represented by Members on this side and on that side.

**10.30 a.m.**

That was the vision of the last administration. They bought secondhand junk. Mr. Speaker, they made no arrangements for the transition; they made no arrangements to buy new vehicles and they put no proper maintenance systems in place. They started off with 50 ambulances in 1999 and by the December 2001, when the new administration came in, there were only 20 ambulances. They destroyed 30 ambulances in that two-or three-year period that they were running the Emergency Health Service (EHS). They mashed up all those ambulances that were featured on the television within the last couple months. Those thirty ambulances were destroyed under the tenure of the UNC administration. We came in and found just 20 ambulances hanging together with Scotch tape, glue and plasticine and so on. The cost of maintaining those old secondhand junk ambulances that they brought here was prohibitive and the fuel bill was prohibitive. We had difficulty to get parts and the ambulances were unsuitable.

Mr. Speaker, this PNM administration has done something that they decided not to do—because it was their decision. We have sourced and procured 40 brand new right-hand drive ambulances; Mercedes Benz, if you please; we are not bringing any junk. [*Desk thumping*] As part of the—[*Interruption*] It is being provided by the United Nations Development Programme. The United Nations Development Programme did a worldwide search; received applications from 33 suppliers and manufacturers of ambulances from all over the world, and has submitted a proposal to supply us with Mercedes Benz ambulances, and we will take them, thank you very much. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, are you hearing the rubbish they are talking. Mercedes Benz is owned by one of their supporters. They are saying it is a PNM company. Mercedes Benz is owned by one of their supporters. We are buying Mercedes Benz vehicles because we know that they are a high quality product, low maintenance and would provide service for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We do not care who owns the company. If it is

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UNC people who own the company; we do not care. We are all about the people's business and about nation building and whoever has a good product, we will acquire it. [*Desk thumping*] Not this poison that they want to put into the system where they are saying that we are discriminating against people. That is what is happening in the ambulance services, not the rubbish that I heard from the Member for Couva North that they did something so great.

Mr. Speaker, let me now move to the Health Sector Reform Programme. The health sector reform loan was signed in 1996 by the administration of the Members opposite. It was negotiated by the Members on this side and concluded by the Members on that side. It was signed in 1996 and had an approved budget of TT \$1.2 billion—US \$192 million—for a seven-year period ending July 2003. What happened during the period of the other administration, Mr. Speaker? They implemented barely 25 per cent of the programme but they spent 42 per cent of the money because they were totally inefficient. We came into a situation where the Health Sector Reform Programme ended in July 2003 and major components of the programme had not even been scratched.

In the information technology section of the Health Sector Reform Programme; absolutely nothing was done over that six-year period that they were in office to deal with something as fundamental as IT and computerization. In fact, the two ministers in the Ministry of Health, the Member for Caroni Central and the Member for Barataria/San Juan allowed—yes, I see you are nodding your head because you know it is true—all the computer systems in all the Regional Health Authorities to crash in the year 2000. So you had a situation in 2000 where every computer in the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex crashed. They lost all their records and they have spent the last two or three years reconstructing the medical records, using a manual system.

They just let all the systems crash in 2000 because they did not put anything in place. Mr. Speaker, we now have a system where it is up to the PNM administration to start—not to complete—the computerization and modernization of the IT and communications systems within the RHAs. This is something that should have been done in that six-year period but we now have to do it within the next three years. We expect to get a three-year extension to 2006. Mr. Speaker, it is totally unnecessary because the programme should have been 100 per cent complete if they had done their work but they are abysmal failures! We now have a challenge to do 75 per cent of the work in half the time. They had six years to do 25 per cent. We now have three years to do 75 per cent but we will do it, Mr. Speaker. We will do it!

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the human resource situation, there was supposed to be an orderly transfer of the employees from the Ministry of Health to the RHAs so by the end of the Health Sector Reform Programme—the seven-year period—all employees of the Ministry of Health would have been transferred to the RHAs under favourable terms and conditions. Do you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They came to this Parliament and made amendments to the RHA Act, which allowed daily-paid workers to transfer into the RHAs. The leader of the union was in the Senate and was a member of their party, so they facilitated a request that came from the National Union of Government and Federated Workers (NUGFW) to make the NUGFW the successor trade union for daily-paid workers from the central Ministry of Health into the Regional Health Authorities.

Now, there are only 900 daily-paid workers in the public health system but there are thousands of monthly-paid workers. At the same time the NUGFW made a request to be named as the successor union for workers transferring from the central ministry into the RHAs. The Public Service Association (PSA) did the same thing but because they perceived the PSA to be opposed to the UNC, they discriminated against the PSA. They amended the law to deal with the daily-paid workers' transition and refused to amend the law to deal with the transition of the monthly-paid workers. They penalized the monthly-paid workers all because of political spite! [*Desk thumping*] But we are going to change the law. You will see the pilot that the Minister of Works and Transport was talking about. It is something that has been worked out over the last nine months to allow orderly transfer of monthly-paid workers out of a central ministry. It is a prototype. We have all been working on this together in harmony with the Legislation Review Committee; the Minister of Works and Transport and his legal advisors, and the PSA. We have worked out a prototype to allow the orderly transfer of monthly-paid public servants into statutory authorities without any confusion, rancour and without any backbiting and victimization. That is surely going to come within the next two months for the regional health authorities. We would be able to achieve what the hon. Members opposite refused to do. You see, Mr. Speaker, it is not simply a failure to do, it is a refusal to do. They cannot explain why they did it for the daily-paid workers and why they refused to do it for the monthly-paid workers other than pure spite. Political victimization and favouritism, Mr. Speaker! [*Interruption*] But of course! Who else?

The other problems—Listen to them, Mr. Speaker; set up protest. We were faced with a problem when we came into the Ministry of Health where we found that for arbitrary reasons—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, could you quiet the babble on that side, please? [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order please!

*[Members continue to speak loudly]*

*[Mr. Speaker pounds the gavel]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. May I, again, appeal to Members opposite to allow the Member to make his contribution? Members opposite, you have a former Minister of Health; you have a medical doctor there and they are very capable of responding to the contribution of the Minister of Health. Please, let him have his say and Members on your side will have a say after.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** The truth is bruising, Mr. Speaker! They cannot handle it. I understand. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, the original health sector programme was geared towards creating a system of modern hospitals serving district health facilities which in turn served health centres; outreach centres and so on. There was a primary care network feeding into a secondary network and finally into a tertiary system. This was the original programme objective formulated by a former PNM Minister of Health in 1994/1995, when he met with the Inter-American Development Bank way back in 1994 to establish the original programme objectives and to negotiate the term of reference of the health sector reform. The purpose is to have a series of primary health care facilities: health centres and outreach centres, feeding into district health facilities: like the Princes Town District Health Facility; Couva District Health Facility and then feeding into hospitals like San Fernando General Hospital and Port of Spain General Hospital and so on but the whole thing just went upside down.

I was talking about human resources. Mr. Speaker, because they victimized the public servants and because they refused to allow the trade union to be named as a successor trade union because they had friends and families who were interested in undermining the lawful trade union for the monthly-paid public servants, they deliberately stalled the process. They also did not complete any employee policies. If you are a public servant and you want to transfer from a central ministry into a statutory authority you would have no idea of what your terms and conditions of your employment would be because there is no policy document. There is nothing telling you about job security, nothing giving you any information on disciplinary procedures, nothing telling you about your rights and responsibilities as a worker. For six years they deliberately deferred and delayed the completion of these policy documents. Again, that was another inhibitor

which they chose to do to make sure that public servants did not exercise their rights to transfer into the Regional Health Authorities.

A pension plan: again, you have public servants coming out of central government ministries where you have a non-contributory pension being asked to go into a statutory authority without any pension plan in place. What we have actually done within this last fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, is what they chose not to do. We have established the pension plan within the Regional Health Authorities and funded it to the tune in excess of over \$50 million out of our development programme and recurrent allocations. What this PNM administration has done is that we have systematically dealt with all the issues that they chose not to deal with.

We have come up with the correct wording of the amendment to the legislation to allow the PSA to be the successor trade union, subject, of course, to the Industrial Relations Act. We have completed our human resource and employment policy and practice documents. This is now in the system and workers can now understand what their rights and responsibilities will be. We have established the pension plan and within the last 12 months we have funded it to the tune of over \$50 million so that when workers transfer they would now have the benefit of a proper pension plan.

In this year's allocation—2004—we have made provision for the establishment of a motor vehicle loan plan. That was another thing that they chose not to do. Public servants travelling officers who are at this time in central government are entitled to car loans and when they transfer into the RHAs they are supposed to transfer under terms that are no less favourable than the situation they find themselves in at present. Again, that was another missing element. There is money in the budget under the travelling vote for the establishment of a motor vehicle loan fund for public servants as they transfer out from the central health ministry into the RHA. I am certain that before the end of fiscal 2004 this PNM administration would be able to achieve the orderly transfer of the majority of public servants from the central Ministry of Health into the RHA environment under terms and conditions which are favourable to them, with a proper pension plan; with proper employment policies; with car loans and all the things workers need in terms of security of tenure and so on. None of this was done in the six years, 1996 - 2001, while they ran the public health system into the ground.

What I have noted about hon. Members opposite is that they cannot deal with the truth. I have in my possession a document published by the World Health Organization (WHO) *Basic Health Indicators in the Americas*. It goes back a

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number of years and if one peruses this document and goes into the statistics and figures, one sees an ugly pattern appearing regarding the manner in which the hon. Members opposite dealt with critical health needs during the 1996 - 2001 period.

Mr. Speaker, let me deal with infant mortality. They do not like to deal with the truth. Under the administration of the PNM in the 1991—1995 period the infant mortality rate in Trinidad and Tobago was reduced from 19, which is what it was in 1991, to 16 deaths per thousand live births by the end of 1995. A new administration came in and then the figure began to creep upwards. It went up to 18 deaths per thousand live births and it stayed at 18 for a while; then it went to 19, then to 20, so by the year 2000 you had a situation where the infant mortality rate—under the tenure of the former Minister of Health, the Member for Caroni Central—rose from 16 deaths per thousand live births in the 1995 period to 25 in the 2000/2001 period. Mr. Speaker, if you plot a graph of the figures you will see that under the PNM administration from 1991—1995, there was a gradual decline from 19 to 16 and under the tenure of the UNC there was an increase of 16 deaths per thousand live births to 25.

What has caused these statistics, Mr. Speaker? These statistics are real. You can go on the Internet yourself, Mr. Speaker, if you do not believe the WHO figures. Check the World Fact book. Check any international repository of information to check the trends in infant mortality in Trinidad and Tobago over the 1991—2001 period and you would see the decline under the former PNM administration and the sharp increase under the UNC administration. What is responsible for this?

I have been looking into this matter since the recent very unfortunate situation at the Eric Williams Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex and a number of documents have come into my possession. Included among them are reports done by the Pan American Health Organization in 2000. What I have discovered is that in 1999 and 2000 there was a sharp increase in infant mortality in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, there were several months in that period where the number of deaths that occurred was in excess of 20 deaths per month. There was a sharp increase in the 1991—2000 period. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) did some research to determine what was happening in terms of morbidity and mortality in the institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly as it related to medical records. What was found—and I will read from the report. It is a report dated December 2000. Mr. Speaker, we know who was the Minister of Health at that time. It was not the Member for Diego Martin East. I read from the Pan

American Health Organization Travel Report. It talks about problems with medical records, data collection and early warning systems in our health institutions and priority problems.

“Obstetric cases are not coded at any of the hospitals. Morbidity conditions affecting sick neonates who are sent to the Eric Williams Hospital are not coded. Coding of surgical procedures is being done using the 8<sup>th</sup> revision of the ICD. However, this 8<sup>th</sup> revision has been in use since the 1970s.”

So we had a situation where we had a medical doctor in the Ministry of Health and his junior Minister, who was also a doctor, being aware—this report was delivered to him—that the coding of surgical procedures in our hospitals was being done using the 8<sup>th</sup> revision of the ICD which was in print since the 1970s. What is worse, the report says—

**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. Dr. K. Rowley*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. C. Imbert:** The report also states on page 7 that the Ministry of Health has the 9<sup>th</sup> revision in stock but the 8<sup>th</sup> revision was being used under the tenure of the former Minister of Health, the Member for Caroni Central. This was from a 1970s standards document. The 9<sup>th</sup> revision was in stock in the ministry but there was no political will. I will come to that in a while, Mr. Speaker.

“The form for hospital admissions and discharge summaries contributes to the tabulation and misrepresentation of the leading causes of hospitalization. No coding is done at the psychiatric institutions; private hospitals do not code their hospital discharges; physicians appear unfamiliar with the ICD principles.”

The recommendations are:

“The national health authorities must be made fully aware of the situation concerning collection, management and dissemination of morbidity data since they do not seem to understand the gravity of the situation.”

This is the most intriguing recommendation:

“We need to ascertain whether there is political will to address the situation.”

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This is an independent international public servant questioning in December 2000, whether there is political will to deal with the horrible—that is the best way I could describe it—systems for data collection and early warning within the public health system. A distinguished PAHO consultant questioning whether there was political will with two medical doctors in charge of the Ministry of Health at that time. There is, most certainly, political will now, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I am happy to announce that we have sourced three international consultants from the Pan American Health Organization to report to us, independently, on what transpired at the Neonatal Unit at the Mount Hope Hospital, and in addition to look at morbidity, mortality and data collection in all of our hospitals to see what needs to be done so that we can get accurate up-to-date information.

When we came into that ministry there was no Director of Research and Planning for more than a year. Can you imagine a fundamental government ministry operating without a planning and research department? No Director of Planning. They shipped the Director of Planning off to a foreign institution and did not replace him.

There is an Implementation Steering Committee which is comprised of all the stakeholders—I believe it was set up by one of the Members opposite, a minister of finance, where the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Finance, the Budget Division, the CPO's office and various other stakeholders who have an interest in health care in this country, together with the Ministry of Health, at the highest level, at Permanent Secretary level. The Implementation Steering Committee of the Health Sector Reform Programme, which is supposed to meet every month, had not met for 12 months. Before the PNM administration came in it was effectively disbanded and it is no wonder that during 2000 and 2001 with no Director of Research and Planning, with no meetings of the Implementation Steering Committee, that the entire health reform programme just went totally astray in the 2000 and 2001 period. It is no wonder that you have all sorts of unacceptable situations such as a 75 per cent increase in infant mortality under the tenure of the Member for Caroni Central, who has a habit of coming into this Parliament crying crocodile tears, pretending to be sympathetic. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Members were truly sympathetic, when they saw that sharp increase in infant mortality in 1999 and 2000 they would have done something about it. They did absolutely nothing.

Mr. Speaker, I will now read from the investigative report into one of the situations at the Eric Williams Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex. Let me



tell you the bed of thorns that was left for this administration by the former administration.

“General finding:

Untrained staff in infection control; lack of quality management systems; lack of awareness by the quality management staff; no functioning infection control committee; lack of communication between the quality department and the relevant personnel; no written guidelines on infection control throughout the North/West RHA; no attempts to enforce and implement policies and procedures of infection control.”

I can go on, Mr. Speaker. All of this flows from the tenure of the last Minister of Health. I have here a report dated August 2000—the country needs to know what is the truth because the hon. Members opposite do not speak the truth—Pan American Health Organization Report on medical records of Trinidad and Tobago, August 2000. It says:

“All of the medical records committees in the health system have fallen into abeyance.”

Let me repeat:

“All of the medical records committees in the health system have fallen into abeyance. The workload statistics provided are crude. There is no adherence to universally accepted performance measuring systems.”

This is a 100-page report dated December 2000 submitted to that Member of Parliament, the Member for Caroni Central, in August 2000. In addition to that I have the other PAHO report dated December 2000, so they had enough time to deal with the situation. But you see the intent was clear. There was a deliberate intent to run the general hospitals in San Fernando and Port of Spain into the ground; starve them of funds; give them no equipment; give them no funds; do no renovations; fill them with incompetent people.

There are situations in these RHAs where people, who were unsuccessful at the polls, who had no qualifications ended up in management positions. In fact, I remember observing in Woodbrook—In 1999/2000/2001 period, I witnessed the emergence of an obscene apparatus called the North/West Liaison Office, where nearly the entire administrative staff and members of the board of the North West RHA were housed in a building in Woodbrook. The purpose of that building was to penetrate the PNM constituencies of Diego Martin and Port of Spain. It is still there. There was the situation where persons who were unsuccessful in the 1995,

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1999 and 2000 elections—Imagine taking a farmer—this was one of the most ludicrous things that I saw—with no secondary school education who contested a seat in the general election; with not even one CXC pass and putting that person in a senior management position in the North West Regional Health Authority in charge of building and equipment maintenance.

**11.00 a.m.**

That is the characteristic of what they did, and there are so many situations like that; another unsuccessful candidate. Do you see the nonsense? This person was not of that ethnicity. And then they took another person, an unsuccessful local government candidate, plant him in the North West Regional Health Authority (NRHA) with not even one CXC pass and put him in a senior secretarial position handling records, data and so forth, and the Ministry getting information from the Pan American Health Organization, objecting to the incompetence and mismanagement and callous negligence that was pervasive of the health system in 1999 and 2000. All in these reports; getting warning signals from international agencies, from non-political people; just planting persons one by one into the system; taking persons from their fund-raising committee out of England. Do you know they had these little satellites in Canada, in England, in Miami, New York, Toronto, those satellite groups and ever so often the Member for Couva North would travel aboard on a fund-raising trip, collect some money and collect one or two incompetent and unsuitable persons and plant them into the government system. I do not know why they decided the health sector was the place for all these incompetent people. So, we have inherited a system of unqualified, incompetent people who are not committed.

There is a situation at the Mount Hope Hospital where they hand-picked, somebody who was brought from abroad and who was put in a job where the person was not qualified, in charge of serious areas of health management. There is a crisis at the Mount Hope Hospital and the person does not visit the place for seven days, while all kinds of bacchanal is raging in the country and understandable expressions of concerns; the people they put into the system; these incompetent, negligent and callous persons would not visit the hospital for a week after the event; and that is what we have inherited in the health system. It is pervasive throughout the system.

When I make the statement that the management in the health system is appalling and atrocious, I make no apologies for saying that. I have enough reports, I have enough indications that the vast majority of people they planted into the health sector from 1996—2001 are untrained, unqualified, uncommitted

and not sympathetic to the needs of the population; they are incompetent and are guilty of gross negligence, and I make no apologies for saying that, none whatsoever! We intend to reform the management structures and the management systems within the Regional Health Authorities within this coming fiscal year. We have given them enough time.

Mr. Speaker, this administration is not going to take the blame any longer for the incompetence of their party activists and the unqualified subversives that they have planted into the health system. [*Desk thumping*] There were situations over the last twelve months where doctors walked out of the hospital on the pretext—it is their friends and family we are talking about—that they are sick, and then they go to one of their colleagues who gave them a sick leave certificate. Mysteriously, all 300 of them are sick and then they visit their friends who would give them sick leave certificates. I am talking about executive members of organizations which are always in the news spreading misinformation, tendering sick leave certificates and then walking into private hospitals then performing surgeries and attending to patients while they are supposed to be sick and then sending the bill to the Government. That is the level of subversives that the hon. Member for Couva North and the hon. Member for Caroni Central have planted into this health system. People like that who would tender a false sick leave certificate, walk into a private hospital owned by a UNC candidate, do a surgery and then bill the Government, they have no shame that their names would appear as being sick in the public hospital and appear as being the person performing the surgery in the private hospital on the same day. We are not going to tolerate it any longer.

We are very well aware that we in this administration have taken on powerful interest groups in the health system; we are very aware of that. We are aware that every day there would be misinformation supplied to the newspapers and to the other media houses, every single day, like that rubbish I saw over the weekend about this alleged Dr. Mahal who has been applying to the Ministry of Health for so long and he cannot get a job. It turned out that he is a medical student. He does not even have a licence but the information is about “how wicked we are, we are not giving this person employment”—and this misinformation is going to continue because they come like little lambs and go to their sources in the newspapers and they say, “Oh, look at what that horrible Minister of Health is doing and this wicked PNM government, look at what they are doing.”

Regrettably, they do not understand the extent of their lack of integrity. They cannot believe that people could tell such horrible untruths but as time goes by, and more and more misinformation is exposed, we expect that there would be a

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more rational approach to these rumours and this misinformation. I know they call the media every day, all of them, calling some reporter and asking, if they heard what happened in the hospital yesterday; total untruths. I know that. Every day, sending out information but we know that as the situation begins to change we would see a more rational treatment of the situation.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to deal with another matter. There is a backlog of 5,000 surgeries in Trinidad and Tobago and there are situations where their friends and family would watch a poor person coming in for cataract surgery for bone surgery—the cataract problem was particularly prevalent in San Fernando, but not so much in Port of Spain where there are some dedicated eye doctors.

There was a situation where a 72 year old man, a diabetic, with an eye problem who went to one of their friends and asked for an early date for surgery and was told he would get that surgery in 2007. When the Ministry intervened and said, please assist this person, he is 72-years-old, he has diabetes, he is not well, he does not have many years of productive useful life left, please put him at the top of the list for surgery, the doctor would say no, no Minister could tell me what to do. But they would tell the patient if he comes to my private hospital tomorrow at a cost of \$8,000 I could do the same surgery, the same person. Wickedness! Thank God that person is no longer in the public health system. That is what is happening in this country, and we are very practical because poor people need health care. What we have done, recognizing that most of the qualified surgeons in this country work in the private hospitals anyway—that is where they want to work. Change is not easy. It would take years to rebuild the public health infrastructure, we have been in discussions with the private hospitals and it is going extremely well. We have invited them to submit proposals to us for clearing the backlog of surgeries, for clearing fibroid operations, prostate, cataract, lumpectomy, you name it, all of the common problems that people have; hernia and so forth that people have to wait years for in the public health sector.

Imagine a man, a welder or doing some other task that required lifting of heavy objects having a hernia and he cannot work. I know persons in my constituency who had been waiting under the tenure of the UNC administration for four years. I remember writing a letter.

I need to tell a little story here. There was a particular constituent of mine, a young man, 30 years old, welder, had a hernia, and visited the hospital in 2000, and they told him to return in 2005. So, as a Member of Parliament, I wrote a letter to a doctor saying this is a young man and he cannot work; he cannot

provide for his family, could you please assist him? The doctor tore up the letter and said no MP could write to him. Rip up the letter, threw it on the ground and said go back and tell your MP he tore up the letter. That is happening even now, and we are going to put an end to that. We are going into a partnership with the private hospitals. We expect to reach agreement within the next month; they would charge us an agreed fee for these routine operations and we would start to use the private hospitals to clear the backlog of surgeries in the public hospitals. [*Desk thumping*]

We are pragmatic. People need help and once the help is available and once we can get a reasonable price as part of a matrix, a rubric, an agreement between the Government, a public sector/private sector partnership, we are going to do so. We do not care who the doctors are in those hospitals even though it is the same one who tore up the letter. We are going into partnership with them. We would pay them and the poor people would get the relief that they need. As we move toward 2020, we have to reach a situation where anybody, regardless of status, regardless of class, regardless of position, regardless of who they are, can walk into any health institution in this country, whether it is a private institution or a public institution and get treatment free of charge, and in a short time. That has to be our 2020 vision. [*Desk thumping*] This is how it is in the developed countries and we have to get there.

So once there is a financing system in place that would pay for all of this, we have to get to the point where anybody, whoever they are, can get treatment at a private or public hospital free of charge at the Government's expense. That is what we intend to do and that is why in the short term, in addition to going into partnership—and they are going to get left behind, all of them, because most of the owners of the private hospitals could be characterized as supporters of their party. But they are meeting with us. Some of them were candidates for their party. Do not try to fool me. “You think they stupid.” They do not want to deal with the truth. They have been engaged in campaigns for the UNC party but now they are working with us. They are meeting with us. They are not interested in the petty politics and obstructionism and the racism on their side. They are working with us. All of these people are now meeting with the Ministry of Health, getting involved in a partnership to provide health care to the poor and needy for the benefit of the people of this country. That is 2020. [*Desk thumping*] That is national unity. They have cast aside all their political preferences and they are working in partnership with this PNM administration. And that is what running a country is all about.

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So they can spread all the misinformation they want. They could lie; they could come up with a mystery virus every day. Every day I open the newspapers and read about a mystery virus which has been planted in the system by unscrupulous supporters and Members opposite. But we are dealing with it. We in the Ministry of Health are moving on. We have no time for them and their nonsense. That is why we started a Chronic Diseases Assistance Programme. For six years they could not do it. For six years they could not provide free medication for the elderly and the poor. For six years they could spend \$2,000 million on an airport, \$100 million on a wasteful Miss Universe fashion show, \$200 million a year on desalinated water, they could do that, but they could not spend a few crumbs providing poor people with free medication that they deserve. It is this PNM administration that is going to do it and it is going to expand its free medication programme to get to the point where medication, as we move toward 2020—that is another part of our 2020 vision, that poor people who need medication whatever it is, whether it is diabetes medication costing ten cents as the hon. Member for Caroni Central would like to say; or a cancer medication costing \$10,000 for one dose, whatever it is, the Members on this side are committed to providing this kind of service for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why we are moving towards the construction of a new cancer centre. We are not wasting time. We have completed the legal agreements; we have completed the financing agreements and we expect to break ground on that cancer centre within the next few months and we expect to be able to complete that cancer centre within the next two years or so.

Mr. Speaker, when the cancer centre is completed and the people are trained and the onconology programme is up and running there is going to be a situation in Trinidad and Tobago, where, for the first time there would be a world-class onconology centre with state-of-art technology. Not antiquated technology from the Cold War like cobalt machines, which is what they brought in. We are going to have linear accelerators. We are spending the money where it is required. We are not wasting it on all these grandiose projects or sending it into people's pockets like \$25 million for a second-hand mill from Dhanpur. That is where it came from. We are not doing that.

We are spending \$25 million on a linear accelerator so that people would get the kind of cancer radiotherapy treatment that they require. We are going to have specialty units for breast cancer, prostate cancer, gynaecological treatment, head and neck, colon, lung and neural cancers. That is what we are going to do. When we are completed with the cancer programme and the cancer centre within the

next two years, one would be able to treat in excess of 2,000 cancer patients in Trinidad and Tobago, instead of the 200 persons who now suffer from the conditions that exist. We know the conditions are not acceptable.

In fact, Trinidad and Tobago would become a leading centre of tertiary care for the region. That is where we are going. [*Desk thumping*] We are going to operationalize the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, something you could not do in six years. Already we are establishing the national cancer centre programme at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. Already we are in discussions with other ministers of health within the Caribbean so there would be complementary activities. The country would concentrate on one aspect of specializing health care—and Trinidad and Tobago has already begun to discuss the sharing of the resources from that new oncology centre with member states in the southern Caribbean. So instead of Caribbean people having to go to Miami, London and Canada for treatment, they can come to Trinidad and Tobago.

It is going to be a new growth centre, a new business activity for Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to continue to operationalize and put into the system the facilities at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. There are theatres that have been closed and were never used during the six years of the last administration. That is why foreign doctors were brought in. That is why specialists were brought in, ophthalmologists, therefore, we would be starting an eye surgery unit at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. That is why we are operationalizing a new eye surgery theatre, beds if necessary. All of the complementary facilities and equipment that are required to do specialized eye surgery at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex for the whole country, so that within a six-month period once that unit is established—we have the doctors already. There is an Ethiopian eye surgeon with a record of doing 20 cataract surgeries in one day. That is the caliber and quality of people that were brought into this country. There are Cuban ophthalmologists; there are committed Trinidadian ophthalmologists, all working together in a surgical team so that hundreds of cataract surgeries can be performed per month at our dedicated eye surgery unit at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, serving the entire country.

So that no longer would persons who are 65 years old and 72 years old have to suffer the indignity of going by one of their friends and being told, “I do not care if you are 72 years old, I do not care who you are,” and “I am not doing your surgery, come to my private hospital.”

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Mr. Speaker, you have heard our vision for the health service. We are going to move on. You have heard of the fantastic record of construction. I began my contribution listing over 25 major construction projects in the health sector, achieved and completed in fiscal 2003, and there are another 25 to be completed in fiscal 2004. The health sector in Trinidad and Tobago is moving towards vision 2020 despite the obstruction and sabotage of hon. Members opposite, and when they are completed Trinidad and Tobago would be well proud of its health system.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Dr. Hamza Rafeeq** (*Caroni Central*): Mr. Speaker, a few days ago there was an article in one of the newspapers that said Mr. Imbert was the class clown. During the time that is allotted to me in this debate, I will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that statement is true. But before I get down to responding to most of the untruths that the hon. Minister has said in this debate, there is one point I would like to address and I will take a few minutes in doing so.

Last year when this side spoke on the budget debate, many of us made reference to the discrimination taking place in our society. At that time we had just come out from a general election—the PNM had been in office for about nine months. However, the trends that we saw emerging then, indicated to us that there was widespread discrimination in the society. We used the opportunity in the budget debate of last year to alert the Government on the realities of the day and to give them the opportunity to correct this situation and reverse the trends as quickly as possible. We did this against the background of the experiences of other countries in the world and against the experiences of our own Caribbean neighbours. We know, for instance, of the experience in Jamaica which, although that society is almost a homogenous society as far as ethnicity is concerned, that country is severely divided and fractured along political lines.

Many of us were in Jamaica and experienced that whenever a political party won an election those opposed to that party felt that they had no place in the mainstream of society. They felt discriminated against, they felt they were not benefiting from the resources of the state and they felt that generally the party in power was only governing for the benefit of those who supported them.

Mr. Speaker, this may not be the only reason, but this is one of the reasons there is such a high rate of violence in Jamaica and one of the main reasons elections are fought so viciously, that there are so many murders and so much violence during an election campaign. The experience in Guyana is similar.



We, therefore, seeing the trends throughout the preceding nine months took the opportunity in the budget debate of last year to highlight this in our contributions and to alert the Government as to what was taking place and gave them an opportunity to correct it.

Mr. Speaker, at least one person took note of what we were saying and that was no less a person than the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. In his winding up of the debate he made reference to our comments and in at least one instance offered some hope that there would be a reversal of that trend and there would be some kind of equity in the distribution of the resources of Trinidad and Tobago. I would like to quote from his winding up on Friday, 25 October, 2002, and I quote:

“Yet, the question of equity arises and quite properly so. Hon. Members opposite have raised the question of the equitable availability of these programmes to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and the point is well taken. What hon. Members may not be aware of is that earlier this year the Cabinet took six decisions, the first one was to employ, on contract, 39 persons as cultural development assistants; 39 persons as youth assistants; 39 persons as sport assistants—I may not be using the correct terms, but outside the public service it is youth, sport, culture, community development, environmental assistance and there is one more, social services.”

He went on, and at the end of it he said:

“It is a good start and a tangible demonstration to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that when we say we care we do not just care about some, we care about all. Our policy is that if we say we are a family, when we sit to eat at the table, there must be something for everybody; that is our policy.”

Mr. Speaker, these comments offered us some hope that at least somebody was listening and somebody was taking note of what we were saying. Today is one year later, we do not know who these officers are; we do not know who these 39 persons are, but we know—and sad to say that was the signal at that time to unleash discrimination in this society at an unprecedented level aimed at anyone who was suspected of being opposed to the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, there are many instances that we can quote. Employment in the public sector and the state enterprises, in the award of contracts, CEPEP or otherwise, in infrastructural development, in dealing with certain areas and certain industries and so forth. I just want to mention two of them.

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On a regular basis, as Members of Parliament, constituents come to our offices asking for recommendations whenever they see an advertisement and they would like to apply for a job. They come to our offices asking for recommendations. But they are wise enough because they tell us that they would like a recommendation, but they do not want a recommendation from the Member of Parliament. They want us to get a recommendation from someone else because they know, they say it, that when that application reaches the state sector with a recommendation from a UNC Member of Parliament, the application would be thrown in the waste-paper basket and would not be considered. They are aware of that. That is one area of discrimination.

The second area, and I do not want to cross the boundary here because I know that this matter is before the court, but there are certain things I want to say that are in the public domain.

Mr. Speaker, as you know the people of central Trinidad, not being able to get the attention of the authorities in dealing with the escalation of crime in that area, took to the street last Monday. During that time several persons were arrested including two Members of Parliament. As I said, that matter is before the court and I do not want to discuss the details of it, but the point is—[*Crosstalk*]

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

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Mr. Speaker, I do not know why they become so jittery when we speak about discrimination. We were charged and we would deal with the matter in court. I am only giving information that is in the public domain. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** I am the hon. Speaker, and when a Member is on his feet, I would like to hear him. So please hon. Members, let us hear the hon. Member.

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Mr. Speaker, I am talking about discrimination. Nine people were arrested and charged and they are before the courts.

Mr. Speaker, there was another march that was organized some time ago, in July 2001. It was organized by Dr. Selwyn Cudjoe. I want to read from an article in the *Express* of Wednesday, July 25, 2001, and I quote:

“The ‘Red Day of Resistance’ organized by NAEAP and Communities United to Fight Under-Development (Cufu), went on despite a deluge of rain and a written notice from the acting Commissioner of Police, John Grant, that they had ‘no permission to hold a public march or public meeting yesterday near the Red House during the sitting of the Senate.

At the end of it all Cudjoe declared their success: ‘This is the beginning of civil disobedience. They said we couldn’t use a microphone, we used a microphone. They said we couldn’t walk but we walked. We stood in front (the Hall of Justice) in protest and we bowed our heads in prayer and defied them to arrest us. It is the beginning of civil disobedience in this country because we must tell them we not afraid.

Around 12.30 p.m. almost 100 people, including PNM PRO Rose Janierre and former NAR Minister Jennifer Johnson, crowded into the gazebo in Woodford Square and listened to the speakers. Camille Robinson-Regis, PNM MP for Arouca South, later joined them for the silent march.”

### **11.30 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, this took place after a group had applied for permission, was denied permission and nobody was arrested. On Monday last, people were walking and nine persons were arrested. I would not say any more on that at this point in time. The point I want to make is that if people are not made to feel that they belong and have an equal opportunity in accessing the resources of the State, as anyone else in this country—whether it is jobs, contracts or infrastructural development—then the society will continue to be divided, it would continue to be fractured and the Government’s 2020 vision will forever remain an elusive dream.

This Government will continue to provide for half of this country and will be pushing the other half further and further until something happens, the consequences of which may be too horrendous to contemplate at this point in time. [*Interruption*] They do not like to hear about discrimination and this is why things will only continue, under their administration, to get worse and worse in Trinidad and Tobago.

I have made these observations since we are sitting here in the national Parliament with representatives from all over Trinidad and Tobago. Collectively we represent everybody in this country and if we sit here discussing a budget from which the resources would only benefit half the country, then we are wasting our time and no amount of preaching or moral platitudes is going to change that. I just wanted to make that point before I respond to the Minister of Health, the Member for Diego Martin East.

Mr. Speaker, if you believe the things the Minister of Health has said this morning, then you will think that he inherited a health sector which was in

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shambles and you would think that everything now is hunky-dory and perfect. The people of Trinidad and Tobago know differently.

The Prime Minister, in his budget presentation, indicated that the health sector received the fourth highest allocation in the budget, \$1.6 billion. So, now the hospitals can be fixed, the health centres would be rebuilt, there will be more drugs in the system—

**Mr. Manning:** Who said that?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** I am saying that. There would be more drugs in the system, doctors would get more money and everyone would be happy. I would deal with these increases in a moment, what they are intended to do and where they are intended to go. Let me just make the point that in last year's budget there was an increase of over \$200 million, over the previous year's allocation, for the health sector and yet it has deteriorated to the extent that now it is worst than it has ever been for a long time. [*Desk thumping*] If the PNM or the Prime Minister feels that flinging more money is going to solve the problem, then that is not only an ill-informed and misguided view, but it can also be counter-productive.

Mr. Speaker, I quote from page 4 of the review of the budget by PricewaterhouseCoopers. It states:

“It is fair to say that the average citizen will consider it their right and government's obligation to provide an environment that offers:

- safety
- healthcare
- educational opportunities
- prosperity”

Then it goes on to say:

“the answers, whatever they are, do not lie in simply spending more money in these areas.”

The health sector, certainly, needs more money, but with no vision, no direction, no planning and an incompetent leadership at the top nothing substantial will be achieved. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when I spoke in last year's budget debate I warned the population that despite the grandiose plans and elaborate promises that were being made, the population should not hold its breath because things were likely to get

worse. Today, I warn the population again, that despite the extra dollars for the health sector do not be conned into believing the sector would be significantly better when you take into account the history of performance of this Government and this minister, in particular, over the last two years.

When the performance of the health sector is reviewed over the last two years, particularly within the last year, what do we see? We see constant squabbling and fighting between the minister and the doctors in the public service. That has done severe damage to the health sector in this country—severe and maybe irreparable damage to the health sector in this country. We see strikes in the sector that not only caused untold suffering to the population, especially the poor, but may have also contributed to deaths in the public sector. We saw significant deterioration in the infrastructure for which money was allocated but not spent. I would deal with this a little later in my contribution.

We saw a lack of basic drugs to the extent that on many occasions surgical operations, including life-saving operations, could not be carried out. We saw newborn babies dying—I would deal with that in a while—for lack of basic sanitation. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker, for lack of basic sanitation, newborn babies were dying at our hospitals. We saw the ambulance service—I will deal with that a little later as well—deteriorate to the point where it no longer exists.

Mr. Speaker, in the midst of all of this, we have a minister who, in order to cover up his own incompetence, seeks to exonerate himself from everything and instead lays blame on everyone else. First, it was blame the United National Congress, forgetting that he has been the minister for the last two years. Then it was blame the doctors, blame the RHAs, blame the management, blame the system, now it is blame the media to the extent that one newspaper, in an editorial, labelled him as the master of the blame game.

**Mr. Imbert:** You wrote that?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Yes, I wrote it. He absolutely refuses to accept responsibility for anything that goes wrong in the health sector, but as you have seen today, he lavishes praises on himself with the few achievements that the sector has had even though he has had little or nothing to do with it. He abdicates all his responsibility when things go wrong, but has no problem in taking out full-paged advertisements in the newspapers when there is an achievement for which he has had little or nothing to do with. A case in point is, just before the last local government election he took out a two-page coloured advertisement in the newspapers with himself opening the Princes Town District Hospital, something

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he had absolutely nothing to do with. The hospital was built under the administration of the United National Congress. [*Desk thumping*] He took almost two years to open it and then before the local government election that is the one achievement he could have boasted of, taking full-paged advertisements in the newspapers.

Mr. Speaker, specifically I want to deal with the budgetary allocations in this year's budget. I first want to deal with the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). In the health sector there is an increase—Mr. Speaker, this is a horror story—in the development programme of over \$120 million over last year's allocation. The allocation for 2003 was \$78 million. I said, in the budget debate at that time, that \$78 was too little for the amount of work that had to be done and the number of projects that had to be implemented. I stood here and made a case for that to be increased from \$78 million. The allocation remained at \$78 million however, and the allocation for this year is \$200 million—that is what is in the PSIP.

Mr. Speaker, I now understand that the Prime Minister knew something that we did not know. The Prime Minister knew that \$78 million was too much for the Ministry of Health because they could not spend it and I will tell you why. [*Desk thumping*] The scandalous reality is that out of the \$78 million allocated to the Ministry of Health and considering that so much needed to be done, this competent minister was only able to spend \$58 million; \$78 million was allocated, the health sector collapsing all around and all he could spend was \$58 million.

He was minister from January 2002, even if he did nothing from January to October 2002, he had enough time to review projects, he had enough time to bring his own projects on stream, bearing in mind that there was an existing programme of health sector reform. He had the opportunity to put things in place so that at the start of the new financial year he would have brought his projects on stream and not only spend the \$78 million that was allocated to him, but in addition to that make a case for supplemental funding during the variation of appropriation.

You have a case of ceiling falling down at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital, babies dying because of a lack of basic equipment, ambulances almost non-existent, constant overcrowding at the San Fernando General Hospital—all the horrors that he has described and a list of other woes in the health sector—and the Minister, because of his incompetence, could not spend the \$78 million that had been allocated to him, he could only spend \$58 million.

Mr. Speaker, let us get down to the specifics of these allocations and what this \$78 million was supposed to have done. The Minister mentioned a while ago that he did construct a few health centres. However, many of those were projects that had been started before him and were completed during his time. [*Desk thumping*] I have no problem with that, that is how government works, but this is what he was supposed to have achieved during that time. That is what was stated in the budget document, I am referring to the budget document: The upgrading of the Port of Spain General Hospital and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; procuring of equipment for central sterilization service department other departments; construction and refurbishment of 11 health and outreach centres and such as Diego Martin, Petit Valley, Morvant, Upper Laventille, San Juan—all of these he said he would do next year—Barataria, Maloney, La Horquetta, Arouca, Tunapuna, Tacarigua, St. James enhanced district facility, St. Joseph's enhanced health facility, continuation of the upgrade of the new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital, commencement of the construction of the Point Fortin District Hospital, completion of the Siparia District Health Facility and 11 health and outreach centres at La Brea, Erin, Ste. Madeleine, La Romain, Debe, Marabella, Williamsville, Gasparillo, Gran Couva, Talparo and Las Lomas and a lot more.

That is what he was supposed to have done with the money last year. He has done absolutely nothing and I will go into a little more details in a while, but that was the physical infrastructural development that was supposed to have taken place with the money that was allocated, of which none was done.

Mr. Speaker, he spoke about the overcrowding at the San Fernando General Hospital. In the 2001—2002 budget, the UNC administration had presented the budget at that time, and allocated \$35 million towards the construction of that surgical suite he spoke about. The designs were completed and the contract was about to be awarded when we demitted office in December 2001. The PNM took office in December 2001 and during that fiscal year nothing was done, no contract was signed and absolutely no work was done to advance the process.

A new fiscal year began in October 2002 and is now completed and absolutely nothing has been done as far as that new wing was concerned, except that with great fanfare and the entire media in tow, he signed the contract a couple weeks ago. That is all that has been done. Two years ago \$35 million was allocated and he could not spend one cent to ease the plight of the half a million people in San Fernando who access healthcare at the San Fernando General Hospital. The overcrowding continues where two patients share a bed, where patients are placed

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on the corridors of the hospital, where there are no proper laboratory facilities in an institution that serves over half a million people and the minister could not spend the \$78 million allocated to him, he could only spend \$58 million and give the rest back to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, the obvious question, therefore, is: If after one year of reviewing and planning and doing basically nothing, the Minister could not spend \$78 million then how come he would spend \$200 million in this budget? The Minister of Finance can go ahead and boast that he gave a triple allocation to the Ministry of Health, the fact is that he could not spend \$78 million just who is he really trying to fool? *[Interruption]* That is not all.

Everyone knows that in Trinidad and Tobago there is a high incidence of heart disease. In fact, heart disease is the number one cause of death in this country. When we were in government, in addition to instituting programmes in health promotion, disease prevention and control, we established a fund to assist needy persons who were required to have surgical procedures such as angiogram, angioplasty, cardiac by-pass surgery and so on. The fund was established in the budget of 2001—2002 with an allocation of \$2.5 million. The intention was that we would begin the programme some time early in 2002 and once the system—

**Dr. Rowley:** What is the relevance of that?

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** I will tell the Member what is the relevance of that and his incompetence. Once the systems were established and the programme got going, to increase the allocations annually as resources would permit. It costs about \$10,000 to have an angiogram, about \$50,000 to have angioplasty, and over \$125,000 to have cardiac by-pass surgery. Most people faced with this situation cannot afford to have these procedures done and must either go home and die or be treated with medication for as long as possible before they die. The programme, therefore, was intended to subsidize the cost of these procedures for needy persons but in a transparent manner.

Mr. Speaker, in 2000—2003 I had expected that the allocation of \$2.5 million would have been doubled because in the same way that the Government said that it allocated \$500 million for the management of Aids, \$5 million definitely was not too much for the treatment of heart disease considering that heart disease was the number one killer in this country. *[Desk thumping]* However, the Government had other priorities like CEPEP, NHA and so on, and they allocated \$2.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, do you know the biggest scandal of all in a country where every single day people are dying of heart disease, some of them very young and in their



prime? That competent Minister, out of the \$2.5 million was only able to spend \$118,000. [*Interruption*] If that is a lie then these documents lie because I have taken these figures directly from these documents. To me that is one of the biggest shames and disgraces in this country. First the Minister did not consider it important to increase the allocation and when he was given the allocation of \$2.5 million, this Minister made available to the population only \$118,000. Even as we speak there are people who are walking the streets with bar-b-que tickets and so on trying to raise funds for surgery for their loved ones so that they would not die and here you have a minister with Government's allocation of \$2.5 million saying to the Minister of Finance, "I don't want it, keep it; I cannot spend it."

In all of this, last week the Minister must have looked at this document, the development programme, and when he saw the scandalous figures it is only yesterday there was an advertisement in the *Express* newspaper, I think it was, advising people who needed free surgeries—free angiograms and so on—to apply to the ministry now. Who is he trying to fool? That is not the only horror story.

The next item of expenditure in the development programme for 2004 is renal dialysis with an allocation of \$2.5 million. Chronic renal failure or kidney failure, again, is very prevalent in this society. Because of our high incidence of diabetes and high blood pressure, there is a high incidence of kidney failure. I am sure that everyone here would either have relatives or friends who are suffering from kidney failure and who are in need of regular dialysis.

For those who may not know, Mr. Speaker, for those who cannot afford dialysis on a regular basis—that is like three times a week in most cases—kidney failure is a virtual death sentence. The cost of dialysis on a regular basis is prohibitive and the average citizen cannot afford dialysis unless he has financial assistance from someone else.

While in office we got together with the different stakeholders and developed a programme, the first phase of which was to purchase a number of dialysis machines. The other phases would have followed until citizens, especially those in need, would have been able to access dialysis at a reasonable cost or in some instances even free. In 2001—2002 we allocated \$25 million towards this programme. As I said, in the first phase this was supposed to have bought dialysis machines. The dialysis machines, I understand, have been bought but in the last year's allocation \$2.5 million was allocated.

Do you know what happened, Mr. Speaker, and you would not believe it because I myself had difficulty in believing this. Out of the \$2.5 million allocated

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for renal dialysis, not one cent was spent. Let me repeat that. Out of the \$2.5 million allocated for renal dialysis, not one cent was spent. *[Interruption]* The machines were bought with the previous year's allocation. Not one cent was spent. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, in a country where there is such a high incidence of renal failure, where persons who suffer from kidney failure, and their families, are reduced to virtual poverty and become beggars and where families just have to watch their loved ones die, this Minister, having been allocated \$2.5 million to assist poor people told the Government, "I do not want it because I cannot use it." Do you know what that means? What that means is that he is saying to people who are suffering from kidney failure, "You are not important, you do not deserve Government's funding, you deserve to die". So, when you have a minister of government taking it upon himself to pass death sentence on people—smiling while saying it—then you understand the incompetence of the person we are dealing with. *[Desk thumping]*

How could a minister arrogate unto himself that kind of power? Even a sadist will not do that. I do not know if it is incompetence, I do not know if it is insensitivity, but what I do know is that the Minister is sitting on his throne at the ministry with the wherewithal to help poor suffering people and refusing to do it. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I can conclude my contribution here, because I think I have said enough to convince the population that this budget is only mamaguy and to expose the incompetence of the Minister, but there is a lot more which I intend to reveal.

I want to deal with the subject of HIV/AIDS. Last year in the budget presentation the Prime Minister announced that starting this fiscal year and continuing for the next five years the Government will spend \$500 million on all aspects of the campaign against HIV/AIDS. While saying this, that over the five years \$500 million will be spent, he allocated \$10 million in the development programme. This meant that the rest of the money would have to be spent in four years. Even though there was a strategic plan in place this Minister of Health, from that \$10 million—and he was supposed to spend \$500 million in four years—he was able to spend \$8 million.

Mr. Speaker, in addition the Prime Minister mentioned in his budget statement of last year that in the fiscal year 2003 construction would begin on a world class AIDS testing facility in Tobago—a walk-in service—that will provide the results

of an AIDS test in a very short time. To date we have heard nothing more of that, and, of course, there has been no allocation made for it in the 2004 budget. He spoke about that beginning in fiscal 2003, fiscal 2003 has gone and he has made no allocation for it in fiscal 2004.

Mr. Speaker, in all of this “grand charge”, the major achievement of the Government as far as AIDS is concerned—it is in the budget statement—is that later this month the Government will launch a national AIDS coordinating committee. After two years in office they are going to launch a national AIDS coordinating committee. That is all they were able to achieve in two years in dealing with a serious problem, a severe problem, of HIV/AIDS.

Mr. Speaker, after two years there is not one single new idea in dealing with this major problem while the rest of the world is moving ahead. In this year’s budget statement the Prime Minister mentioned the national strategic plan, and I will tell you how they have no ideas. In this year’s budget statement the Prime Minister mentioned the national strategic plan, that was done by the UNC government. He mentioned the US \$20 million loan from the World Bank for the fight against HIV/AIDS. While we were in office we were at the forefront of setting up that facility and we did so not only on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago but we did that on behalf of the people of the entire Caribbean.

He talked about access to antiretroviral therapy, as a government we negotiated the reduction in price of these drugs to the extent that we were able to get a 90 per cent reduction in the price of these retroviral drugs so that the programme can begin. He spoke about expanding the coverage of the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of AIDS, that was a programme that was successfully implemented under the United National Congress government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I am saying to the national community that we are not optimistic about all these promises that the Minister has made given his party’s history. Let us move on because the minister also made reference to this. Let us move on. The horror story continues.

The Prime Minister also mentioned in his budget statement that construction is expected to begin this year on the National Radiotherapy Centre at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. While we were in office we completed a techno economic feasibility study for this centre and based on this study this Government went ahead and entered into a government-to-government arrangement with the government of Canada to construct the centre. We did not

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think that was the best arrangement because the same firm that did the study was engaged to construct the centre. Anyway, that is their way and we have no problem with that if that is what they want to do.

Mr. Speaker, two years have passed and they did absolutely nothing. There are thousands of patients in Trinidad and Tobago who are dying on an annual basis because of cancer, to the extent that cancer is now considered in this country an epidemic and the Government is twiddling its thumbs while patients continue to suffer and die.

In the budget of 2002/2003, that is last year's budget, \$5 million was allocated towards the construction of that centre. Do you know what happened? Not one cent was spent of that \$5 million. Not one cent was spent while people are suffering and dying from cancer. Again, although the Minister had \$5 million to start the process nothing was done. In other words, he said to the Minister of Finance—he has been good to the Minister of Finance—“While people are suffering and dying on a daily basis, I will help your budget to look good. Take back this money I can't spend it.” Because of that the Minister of Finance, seeing that he was not able to spend one cent last year allocated not one cent this year for the construction of the cancer centre. Why must they continue to fool the population on sensitive matters like this? Why continue to give false hope to people who are in distress? Why do you not level with the population and tell them that nothing has been done for the last two years and there is no allocation so nothing would be done for this year? How could you be so insensitive to people who are suffering?

While we are dealing with the development programme, it is not all bad news. There is one area in which the Minister exceeded his budgetary allocation. He did not do badly on every count, there is one area in which he outperformed. In the budget allocation of 2002—2003 he got \$500,000 for communications and at the end of the year he spent \$1.5 million. So, he outperformed himself. [*Desk thumping*] One point five million dollars to communicate what? He had \$2.5 million dollars for cardiac surgery and he could have only spent \$100,000. He had \$2.5 million for renal dialysis, he spent not one cent. He had \$10 million for AIDS, he spent \$8 million. He had \$5 million for the oncology centre, he spent not one cent, yet he had \$500,000 for communications and he spent \$1.5 million. [*Desk thumping*] That is what he should have used the allocation to do, to communicate to the population that, “Look, I had money for all these things and I could not do it.” That is the track record of this Minister, an extremely proud and impressive record as far as the development programme is concerned, yet the minister has

been allocated \$200 million for this year. He could not spend \$60 million last year but he has been allocated \$200 million this year.

I said a while ago that when we asked for an increased allocation last year the Prime Minister knew something which we did not know. He knew that the Minister could not spend it so he left the allocation at \$78 million. He gave \$200 million this year, he probably knows something we do not know like, “Cuba, here I come.” So, some other Minister may have to spend the \$200 million.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the ambulance service which he mentioned. This is the classic case of this Government taking a good world class service and running it down to the ground. Just for those who continue to speak this foolishness, including the minister, that the UNC bought second hand ambulances, let me for the umpteenth time put this on the record. When we went into office in 1995—[*Interruption*] Do not get hot, listen. When we went into office in 1995, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*] Not only short-sighted.

When we went into office in 1995 there were no ambulances in the public health service even to transport—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, you are not permitted to sit in your seats and shout out “lie” across the floor, please.

### **12.00 noon**

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Mr. Speaker, I will repeat. When we went into office in 1995, there were no ambulances in the public health sector to transfer ill patients from institution to institution. I met, on the desk of the minister, when I went into office, a letter from the staff of the San Fernando General Hospital addressed to the then Minister of Health, the present President of the Senate, stating that there was one ambulance at the San Fernando Hospital, which was not working. The situation was similar in the Port of Spain General Hospital, Mount Hope, Sangre Grande and Point Fortin.

When we came to office, in the first two years, we bought 15 new ambulances and five used ambulances for the hospital, but they were to transport patients from hospital to hospital and from institution to institution. However, we knew that in our Health Centre Reform Programme we could not build a health centre in every village nor could we build a hospital in every town. We knew that in order for people to have access to medical care on a timely basis from any part of this country, especially in cases of emergency, a separate, dedicated ambulance service was necessary.

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We took the decision to establish that service as quickly and as efficiently as possible. We entered, with the Government of Canada, a government-to-government arrangement for the establishment of that ambulance service. That involved a lot of things; not only the purchase of ambulances, but also the setting up of training facilities—training the emergency medical technicians and dispatchers, establishing dispatch centres, procurement of communications systems, establishing protocols for responding to calls, establishing centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago, establishing a system of procurement of supplies and consumables and maintenance of the ambulances.

The entire service was bought through an arrangement with the government of Nova Scotia, including used ambulances. Having established the service and bought the ambulances for \$150,000 each, we knew that these vehicles would have to be replaced in time. That was what was available at that time. We also knew that in the entire process of establishing this service, the easiest part of it was the procurement of ambulances.

We wanted to establish the service, so we set up an arrangement for proper maintenance of these vehicles so that they would give us a few years and then would be replaced, on a phased basis, so that in a few years time we would have a fleet of new ambulances. We thought, at the time, that it was a better approach than putting brand new ambulances into the system in the hands of inexperienced young people, especially given the history of maintenance of government vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, let me mention that the same service they are decrying was responding to 150 calls a day on a timely basis and saving thousands of lives. When the UNC government came into office, the first thing we did was to dismiss the management company that was running the service and run it ourselves. The last warning I left at the ministry when I demitted office was, “Do not bring the Emergency Health Service under the management of the ministry or the. It would not work. That would be the demise of the service.” That is exactly what they did.

Shortly after the minister dismissed the management company, the systems and the service started to collapse and we are now at a point where, as I said, the service is almost non-existent. I said to the minister at that time that if he was not happy with the arrangement with the management company, he should renegotiate it. If he found that the contract cost was too much, he should renegotiate it, but he ought not to run it by himself. He cannot run it. To date

they have not only run down the service, but they have not purchased one single new ambulance. Two years have gone—2002, 2003—and not one single ambulance has been purchased.

I would like to quote what I said to the Minister in my contribution to last year's budget debate. I knew that if he did not take steps the service would collapse. I said then that when we established this service, we bought these used ambulances at the cost of \$150,000, each fully equipped. A lot of them have now outlived their usefulness and the fleet needs to be replaced gradually. It would indeed be a tragedy if such an important and efficient service were allowed to collapse. However, with the kind of allocation made in the budget, I fear that this is where we are heading. On behalf of all the citizens in this country, particularly the poor, I implore you and I beg you to do whatever is required to at least maintain the level of service that our population has become accustomed to.

I urged the Minister of Health to go down on his knees and beg in Cabinet, if necessary, but not to preside over the collapse of the Emergency Health Service. The population would not be kind to him if he did.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. H. Rafeeq:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I thank hon. Members for extending my time.

The hon. Prime Minister mentioned in his budget presentation that 40 new ambulances would be purchased for 2004. I have perused all the budget documents and I have not seen one cent allocated for the purchase of ambulances. Is this another case of mamaguying the population?

Let us now deal with the recurrent expenditure. This year's recurrent budget from the Ministry carries with it an increase of \$80 million over the revised estimates for 2003. The greater part of this allocation will be used towards funding two items—salaries and an increase in the drug allocation. There is an increase of \$32 million for the purchase of drugs and most of the rest of the increase will go towards salaries.

While I am on the subject of drugs, let me mention that the Minister has made heavy weather of his Chronic Diseases Assistance Programme (CDAP). That is a programme in which old people above the age of 60 can access drugs at private

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pharmacies. I have made the point already, and I want to say again, that that is a good programme, but the Minister should make the drugs that are expensive available to poor people. He is making drugs that cost 5 cents and 10 cents available at the private pharmacies and drugs that cost hundreds and thousands of dollars are not available.

These drugs are available at the health centres where people get them or they can access them at the private pharmacies, but the expensive drugs that people need and cannot afford are not on the programme. So, they are giving people drugs worth 5 cents and 10 cents and the ones worth \$5 and \$10 are not available. They are no better off because these same 5 cents and 10 cents drugs are available in the public health sector and the expensive ones are not.

I say to the Minister that while he boasts about making drugs available in the private sector, I want him to know that there are many health centres and hospitals that do not have basic drugs. When the pharmacists at the San Fernando General Hospital made that statement, he chastised them in his usual fashion. I do not know if he said that they were giving away the drugs or selling the drugs to private hospitals. However, the point is that they made a case: all 25 pharmacists said they do not have the drugs to do basic operations. They do not have life-saving drugs in the hospital, yet he is boasting that drugs are available from the private sector. Those are not life-saving drugs. I want the Minister to know that while he is boasting, he must understand what he is doing to the population.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is a \$32 million allocation for drugs and an extra allocation for personnel emoluments. Much of this money will go towards paying the foreign doctors. We have made our position very clear as far as foreign doctors are concerned. We have no difficulty in filling the vacancies in the country with foreign doctors once they fulfil the criteria for entry and for working here. From day one, this Minister has adopted a confrontational approach with the local doctors. He has held the position that the local doctors are recalcitrant and he has to “manners” them.

I am sure that in the history of government in this country, there has never been a worse relationship between a minister and the doctors as there exists between this Minister and the doctors in this country. What is sad in all this is that when this happens the people in this country who suffer are the poor people who seek care in the public health sector.

The Minister feels that he can run the health sector without local doctors and because of this he has made life as uncomfortable as possible for the local doctors



so that they can either leave the country or leave the public health service. This is indeed sad when we consider that our local doctors are some of the best trained in the world.

Why would anyone want to sacrifice the standard of care that our doctors are capable of giving and replace it with questionable alternatives? Why would one want to do that? In the haste to get rid of local doctors, this Minister wants to flood this country with Cuban doctors. He came to Parliament, ignored the protests of the professionals, ignored the advice of the Opposition and amended the law to give himself one more responsibility, and that is that of registering doctors. But that is how this Government works. When something does not work for them, instead of trying to make it work, they disregard it and set up a parallel organization as they are doing with the police service. They thought that the medical board was not working in their interest, so they set up a separate organization to register doctors. They felt that the police service was not working; they set up a separate police force.

Anyway, the Minister amended the law and brought Cuban doctors here. So far the Cuban doctors are in the clinics and in the hospitals. Most of them cannot speak or understand English. The consultants at the hospitals, who have ultimate responsibility for the patients, are even reluctant to allow them to examine their patients.

If doctors cannot speak to patients; and if doctors cannot examine patients, how can they diagnose and treat them. The two most important things in diagnosing the illness of a patient are that the doctor must be able to speak to them properly; more than 80 or 90 per cent of diagnoses are made only on the history of the patient and another 8 or 10 per cent by examining the patient. That is only from speaking to the patient. The doctor must speak to the patient and elicit information from him. If he cannot speak to the patient and cannot examine the patient, how will he diagnose and treat him? What we have in the health sector are glorified observers that are collecting a salary of \$15,000 and \$20,000 per month. That is what we have in the public sector.

We have been told that when local doctors speak to the nurses they have brought down here, they only smile. There was an incident reported to us. They removed the five local nurses from the Intensive Care Unit and put five Cuban nurses there. When the doctor came in that morning, he said, "Good morning!" They said, "Good morning!" He said, "How is my patient?" They smiled. He said, "How is my patient?" They smiled. The third time he asked, one of the nurses said, "I am married and I have four children." [*Laughter*] That is where the health sector has reached, Mr. Speaker.

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That is why I think the article was written a couple days ago about this Minister being the class clown. The experience with the Cuban doctors failed in Jamaica; it failed in Grenada; it failed in Guyana; yet we, in Trinidad and Tobago, with some of the best doctors in the world, want to bring in Cuban doctors to treat our population. I say to the Minister that his experiment has failed and the sooner he cuts his losses the better for everyone. He has already cost this country millions of dollars by his hard-headedness and arrogance and one of these days this is going to blow up in his face. He cannot play with people's lives like that.

There is a second group of doctors in this country at this time—the United Nations volunteer doctors. Let me debunk the myth about them being volunteers. They probably volunteered from wherever they came, but each one is costing the Government \$21,000 per month. The contract signed between this Government and the United Nations is for US \$12 million over a three-year period for 100 doctors and that translates into \$21,000 a month for a volunteer doctor. Do you know what is the audacity of this Minister? Most of them are junior doctors. We are paying the United Nations for these doctors who have come through that programme to mentor and train our doctors.

Recently a young female doctor was saying—a Trinidadian—that one of the volunteer doctors, who was almost at the stage of a final-year medical student, would not take advice or instruction from her because she was female. That is what we are paying \$21,000 a month for. I have a feeling that the Minister is well aware of all of this but he is not telling his Cabinet colleagues. He is telling them everything is working fine.

Let me move to another area. Whether the Minister admits it or not, there is an epidemic of dengue in this country and there is a conscious effort on his part to engage in a massive cover-up. When the situation was brought to the attention of the Minister some time ago, his response was that the doctors were incompetent and did not know what they were talking about and, as usual, he blamed the UNC. He said that they were UNC mosquitoes spreading dengue. All this denial was taking place while patients were flocking to the San Fernando General Hospital, sleeping on the corridors, sleeping two patients on a bed. It got to the point that the hospital was saying they could not accommodate any more patients. Yet the Minister is saying that we do not have a problem as far as dengue is concerned.

No problem can be lulled into complacency because the samples that are being tested are few and far between and are not truly representative, then he must listen to doctors on the ground and he must listen to the population. Patients have

died from dengue and thousands have contracted this disease, yet the Minister denies these facts.

Right now, there is an epidemic of red eye and an outbreak of another viral illness affecting thousands of citizens. I am not blaming the Minister for these, but I am saying that he must first admit there is the problem and together with his technical staff and the experts, put things in place to manage the epidemic. His immediate response of denying first and blaming others after will not do the population any good. There is so much to say concerning the incompetence of this Minister I do not know which to leave out.

Let me say a few words on tobacco. I do not only want to deal with the development programmes and recurrent expenditure. I want also to advise the Minister on what he should do for the benefit of the people of this country. When we were in office, we had taken a strong position against smoking and had developed a draft policy document to address the problem of the use of tobacco in the country. This was done after several rounds of consultation and with advice from our best technical minds and world trends at the time.

Since then the World Health Organization has adopted a convention on tobacco and many countries in the world have gone ahead and passed legislation in order to deal more aggressively with the problem of smoking. In order to deal with that problem, the process was way advanced for bringing legislation to Parliament to deal with smoking. To date, nothing has been done and this document has not seen the light of day.

I will mention four of the major recommendations in that document. First, there was the banning of all advertisements on tobacco and tobacco products; secondly, disallowing cigarette companies from sponsoring sporting and cultural events; thirdly, banning smoking in all public places; and, finally, making it mandatory for all cigarette packet to carry health warnings covering at least half of the surface area of the packet. These were the major recommendations. To date, nothing has been done with that document, while young people continue to get hooked on smoking and others continue to suffer and die.

Today we see new cigarette companies entering the market because the market is friendly. While other countries are strengthening their fight against tobacco and tobacco products, we are very lax and therefore an easy market to penetrate.

Today, we see the cancer society leading the fight against tobacco and we commend them for this. Because this Minister will not listen to us, I hope that

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someone who has the authority will sit him down and explain to him exactly what his responsibility is. Until then, we will continue to be in serious trouble as far as the health sector is concerned.

Let me touch on one other point and that has to do with the tissue transplant legislation. The doctors have been clamouring for this piece of legislation for decades. Successive governments have failed to bring this legislation to Parliament. We started the process of consultation and after several drafts brought the bill to Parliament. It was sent before a joint select committee and again public consultations were held and at the end of all of this, the bill was passed.

What was required then to operationalize the Act was for the regulations to be developed and the necessary infrastructure to be put in place to implement the Act. When we left office, the regulations were almost completed. Today, after two years, nothing has been done and although the law remains on the statute books, it cannot be implemented.

There are many young people in our society who are dying for various reasons—we will not go there—and they have healthy organs, which can give life to others. There are thousands of persons suffering from kidney failure and other organ failure, who can be given a second chance at life by organ transplant, yet the Minister absolutely refuses to publish the regulations in order to give effect to the Act to save lives. I do not know why this Minister likes to punish people so. Is it that he does not care? Or does he derive secret pleasure from seeing people suffer? I do not know.

I do not know what the Minister has been doing for the past two years, but when we were in Cabinet, we took the Health Services Quality Bill to Cabinet. It was approved and sent for final drafting before being brought to Parliament. Every speech the Minister has made so far inside and outside Parliament, makes reference to it; yet he stubbornly refuses to bring that bill to Parliament.

Early in his term he said, in his usual boasting manner, that he would bring that bill to Parliament during his first year in office. One year has gone, two years have gone and that bill has yet to see the light of day. Is he afraid to bring that bill to Parliament because when it becomes operational his incompetence will be exposed? One wonders how one person can be so inefficient when dealing with a sensitive sector like the health sector. Is it really incompetence? I really do not know, but I do know that the boards of the Regional Health Authorities do not think much of him. They do not believe he should be there, but they tolerate him because he carries the handle of Minister.

While there is so much work to be done in the health sector, and while he neglects them all, he is involved, at this time, in a bitter and bruising battle with the North West Regional Health Authority over the appointment of a chief executive officer. Mr. Speaker, you may remember that some time ago, the North West Regional Health Authority placed an advertisement in the newspaper for a human resource manager. Before the closing date for applications, and certainly before interviews were held, the Minister instructed the North West Regional Health Authority to hire Mr. Keith Toby as human resource manager. The Regional Health Authority, not wanting to disobey their line Minister and face his wrath, hired Mr. Toby, but changed his title to human resource consultant to avoid public outcry.

Then came an advertisement for the chief executive officer for the authority. Several applications were received, interviews conducted and several rankings given. One Mr. Stewart Smith, who had a long association with the health sector both at home and abroad, was ranked number one. Another person from Canada was ranked number two and the Minister's blue-eyed boy, Mr. Keith Toby, was ranked number three. The Minister insisted that Mr. Toby should be appointed and is engaged in a bitter war with the RHA to have him appointed.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, you will see that tomorrow the RHA denies all this because today they will be threatened by the Minister. That is how he operates. Instead of fighting the board over the appointment of his friend and partner, he should concentrate his efforts in dealing with the problems in the health sector and spending the money that has been allocated so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago could benefit.

I have pointed out some of the projects the Minister should engage in during this year. Last year, I outlined to him a 10-point plan to assist him in his management of the ministry. He disregarded all advice. Now, he has a tremendous amount of resources at his disposal in order to respond to the problems in the health sector. He now has \$1.6 billion, two permanent secretaries and a host of technical officers at the Ministry. He now has the resources of the RHA, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Pan American Health Organization and the United Nations available to him. He has the University of the West Indies, where resources are available to him. He has the professional organizations with a wealth of experience and knowledge and he has another resource, which has not yet been tapped, the private sector. There is absolutely no reason why he should not be able to deliver and ease the plight of the sick and suffering people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** The sitting of the House is suspended and will resume at 1.45 p.m.

**12.28 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.45 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**The Minister of Education (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Government's budget proposal for fiscal year 2004 which has as its theme: Charting the Course to 2020—Empowering People. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the hon. Patrick Manning, in presenting the Budget Statement 2004 reaffirmed that all of our experiences have been honed into Vision 2020. He re-emphasized that the focus is to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a First World nation.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance has espoused a bold new vision to improve the quality of life of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In his budget presentation on page 46, he has committed that education continues to be our major instrument for social transformation and development in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It is this Government's intention to create a comprehensive, modern education system that is able to provide training and knowledge as well as foster skills and aptitudes, relevant to the development needs of Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, preschool, primary and secondary level institutions will be strengthened to accommodate a stronger foundation for the development of scientific and technical skills and to create an environment to prepare students for continuous learning.

Government is confronting the challenge to deliver quality education to all citizens. We are proceeding in a very deliberate way, with focus and determination. We aim to create a culture of lifelong learning that is aligned with the national objectives. This Government remains resolute that the human resources of Trinidad and Tobago will be the pride and envy of the world. Indeed, the Ministry of Education has aligned itself to this national vision and therefore, the mission of the Ministry is to lead the modernization and renewal of education in this country.

In my contribution to the 2003 budget debate, in my capacity as Minister of Education, I affirmed that we on this side of the House have a clear vision for the development of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This vision for social and economic transformation, for moral and cultural development, is a vision in which citizens of every creed and ethnic group, the aged and the young and the

differently-abled will be afforded an opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the development of this beloved country.

The Ministry's vision for education comes from the policy document 1993—2003. This policy was formulated by this PNM Government 10 years ago after two years of stakeholder meetings. The policy was appropriate, having taken into account all the relevant issues of the education system of the day. It made recommendations to broaden access and to improve the quality of the education system. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, six years later in 1999, the UNC government interpreted this policy of broadening access and improving the quality of education as the hurried construction of 10 schools out of 19. These 10 schools were built within a period of two years with no reference to quality issues such as curriculum update, teacher professional development and institutional strengthening of the Ministry of Education. Even the physical infrastructure has left a lot to be desired because of the 10 schools built, structural defects have been discovered in eight. One school, the Biche High School, has been the subject of a commission of enquiry which has recommended that the school be closed and that we go to the Central Tenders Board to ensure that a consultant be hired to ascertain whether the school is fit for student utilization.

Mr. Speaker, chaos reigned in the education system: chaos which this PNM Government had to address. With full cognizance of our mandate from the Education White Paper 1993—2003 and the vision statement 2020, the Ministry of Education in 2002 moved swiftly to complete a strategic plan for the period 2002—2006. Accordingly, the Ministry identified four major strategic objectives to be pursued over the four years. These are accessibility to educational opportunity for all, delivery of quality education to citizens at all levels of the education system, sustainable policy development for the education sector, continuous alignment of the strategic direction in the education system with objectives for the national development.

Mr. Speaker, as a nation we have already attained universal access to education at the primary and secondary levels. In this regard the Government has continued apace to expand the school plant in areas where needs have been identified. Mr. Speaker, during the fiscal year 2003, nine secondary schools were constructed: at Preysal, La Romain, Vessigny, Rio Claro, Guaico and Cunupia in Trinidad, and at Mason Hall, Goodwood and Speyside in Tobago. The tenth secondary school at Guayaguayare is expected to be handed over before the end of this month. Eight primary schools were constructed in Chaguanas North, Princes Town, Cunupia, Caratal, Waterloo, Iere, Castara and Buccoo. The

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Scarborough Methodist Primary School is to be handed over shortly. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I would like the Member for Couva North to take special note. Even though he is not here I am sure they would tell him. I was taken aback when, in his response to the budget statement, he stated that no schools have been built by this Government. I also want to highlight the geographical areas which have benefited from these new schools. Not only did we build schools, but this year the Ministry of Education outdid its previous record of the year 2002, as over 320 schools were repaired during the vacation period. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, on account of the lack of planning and lack of foresight of the UNC government, this PNM Government has had to face several challenges. In 2000, the UNC government implemented its policy of universal secondary education. Unfortunately, that government failed to think through the process carefully; in other words, the UNC government did not formulate a comprehensive plan. In its haste to score political points, that government created a host of problems relating to physical amenities and technical issues. These problems impacted negatively on the provision of quality education. This Government has had to deal expeditiously and resolutely to redress these deficiencies.

Earlier this year, I had cause to address this honourable House on the need for Government to provide for September 2003, additional places in certain new secondary schools. This arose out of the overly large intake of students in Forms I in 2000, to satisfy the UNC government's goal of universal secondary education. The Ministry of Education realized that when students were to be promoted to Form IV in September 2003, there would have been a shortage of space. As such, the Ministry had to devise a plan to address the situation. I am pleased to announce that in September 2003, arrangements were put in place which ensured that all students had access to school places.

During the last academic year the Ministry of Education continued to fund places at private secondary schools to accommodate students who wrote the Secondary Entrance Assessment and 14-Plus examinations. For the first time, the A'level Examinations were included. This was due to the improvement in the CXC results. Consequently, in a pilot project in 2002, we had expanded access for A'level students and 544 students were placed in private secondary schools. [*Desk thumping*] Contract agreements have been signed with all private secondary schools and to date they have been paid their fees. This approach has been successful in that we at the Ministry are still registering additional students



who have been assigned to private secondary schools for the academic year starting September 2003.

We are also expanding access at the adult education level. In this regard there are 46 lifelong learning centres with especially trained tutors catering for 9,000 participants who are provided with training in courses such as computer literacy, computer repairs, homecare for the elderly, childcare and East Indian dance.

The aim of this Government is to provide the highest quality education to all students. Therefore, another major initiative of the Government has been the deshifting of secondary schools. The shift system was established at a point in time in the nation's development when it had become necessary to provide access to secondary schooling to a wide cross-section of the public. There has been some measure of success in this regard. At the same time, however, it is acknowledged that there have been negative issues. For example, the classroom contact hours are fewer in the schools which operate on a shift basis and the supervision of students, outside of the shift system, poses a challenge. Therefore, this year we saw a pilot project with the deshifting of the Marabella Junior Secondary School which has been converted to a five-year school. This is to say it is operating under a single shift; and in tandem with that move, the Marabella Senior Comprehensive School has been converted to a seven-year secondary school. Having evaluated the lessons learnt by carrying out this project, the Ministry of Education has produced a deshifting plan which would guide the deshifting of the remaining 19 junior secondary schools to 2006.

To continue to sustain and improve the quality in the education system, we are placing greater focus in the Ministry on developments in the technical areas. In 2002 we embarked on a comprehensive modernization of the curriculum, placing it at the centre of the qualitative reform process. Our goal is to have a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of society today. We recognize that the global, competitive environment today requires the labour force to have a broader set of skills: hard skills as well as soft skills. The traditional basic skills of reading, writing and computation remain. In addition, new areas have been added such as managing information and resources, managing relationships with people, as well as self-management. Global workers need flexibility, problem solving and decision-making ability, adaptability, creativity, thinking, self-motivation and the capacity for reflection.

We recognize the imperatives of a changing world environment and its impact on our student population. That is why we are having such problems today in the school system. No preparation was done by the other side to situate our children

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in this changing world. Modernized curriculum for Forms I and II of the secondary schools were introduced in September 2003, just last month. A draft of the Form III curriculum has been distributed to all secondary schools. These curricula have as their goal the achievement of the essential learning outcomes, aesthetic expression, citizenship, communication, personal development, problem solving and technological competence. The modernized curriculum was introduced in the following subject areas: Mathematics, Language Arts, Integrated Science, Spanish, Physical Education, Visual and Performing Arts, Technology Education, Social Studies, History and Geography.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight for the benefit of this honourable House the diversified nature of this new curriculum, including as it does, the new areas of the Visual and Performing Arts, Physical Education and Technology Education. Technology Education will ensure that our students become innovators and entrepreneurs and still be skilled to navigate the global business environment of the 21st Century. The visual and performing arts curriculum aims to lay the foundation for our people to excel in the rich, cultural forms which now brighten our national landscape.

Through Physical Education and sport, we expect to institute a deep behavioural change in our children towards healthy lifestyles and wellness in addition to opening the door to a new world of careers for them. The Ministry of Education is on the move. This new approach to the curriculum moves away from the prevailing teacher-entered, rote memorization world of instruction to a dynamic, interactive, student-centred, constructivist learning model.

Side by side with the modernized curriculum, we have introduced other innovations to enrich school life. Pan in the classroom initiative was introduced in 2003 and a director, regional coordinators and instructors have been hired and trained. In order to cater for other musical interests, we have started to provide a wider array of instruments other than pan, such as the tabla, harmonium, sitar, guitar, trumpets, keyboards and drums. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, the curriculum is a rich one; affording the opportunity to each child to explore his or her career options and to develop his or her talents, interests and skills fully. At the primary school level revised curricula have been implemented in Integrated Science, Agricultural Science and Social Studies and a Moral and Values curriculum will be introduced shortly.

At the pinnacle of our modernized curriculum system is a National Curriculum Council which has been established to guide and support curriculum development within the primary and secondary education sectors. The council

comprises members from a wide cross section of the society and includes parents and student representation. No child will be left behind and no effort will be spared at ensuring our children receive an education of quality.

Mr. Speaker, to implement a modernized curriculum, we need teachers. Quality education demands quality teachers. To this end, the Ministry has recently created a teacher professional development unit, headed by a project director and four teacher development specialists in the areas of early childhood education, primary education, secondary education and special education.

For fiscal year 2004, we will be moving apace to establish a comprehensive, integrated approach to teacher preparation and continuous, professional development of teachers. This unit will establish a new policy framework for pre-service teacher training, in-service training, continuous professional development, as well as address the issues of teacher recruitment, certification of teachers, re-certification and quality assurance. The result will be a complete professionalization of the teaching service with teachers who are now on the cutting edge of their subject expertise as well as in the art of pedagogy, modern teaching, learning strategies, classroom management and student development.

Mr. Speaker, there is more. In support of this revolution in teaching and learning strategies, the Ministry has stepped up on our training of teachers. Several beginning teachers workshops have been held in 2003 to prepare teachers to implement the new curriculum, using a variety of teaching and assessment strategies.

The first cohort of teachers has been trained in the development of Technology Education, where over 44 teachers attended workshops. In Visual and Performing Arts workshops, 39 teachers were trained up to the postgraduate diploma level.

Then there was the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), which was introduced in 2003. CAPE was developed by the Caribbean Examinations Council, to meet the changing demands of the regional and international environment. CAPE is available to students in sixth form schools, colleges that offer courses that are equivalent to sixth form programmes and at teachers' colleges. Thus far, CAPE workshops have been held for 355 teachers in 50 schools, in eight subject areas. In other areas, beginning teachers workshops were held to prepare teachers to implement the new curriculum. There were 27 workshops in 14 subjects for over 500 teachers, to support the successful implementation of the school-based assessment component of the CXC

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Examinations. A two-week workshop for 195 new teachers in all subject areas was also held. Site-based workshops in general teaching and classroom management strategies for over 300 teachers were conducted in five schools. Content focus workshops were held for a further 180 new technical vocational teachers. Forty primary school teachers have been trained to use instructional technology in the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, training does not stop there. The Ministry has been re-engineered. The Schools Broadcasting Division, expanded the media unit and the television production unit. For 2003, seven new staff members were brought on board including a director, a producer, a graphic artist and photographers. The unit is now poised to produce state of the art instructional materials for our schools.

In our drive to improve quality education, a Quality Assurance Committee has been established in the Ministry, headed by Chief Education Officer and includes a wide cross-section of the Ministry's staff. This committee is now considering the revitalization of the continuous assessment process; not only at the primary school level, but throughout the secondary school. Through this mechanism, the students' performance is monitored in a structured way and on a continuous basis. This facilitates early detection of problems so that the appropriate, corrective action is instituted in good time. The Ministry is confident that deepening and expanding this initiative will improve the quality of education tremendously.

The National Curriculum Council will operate at the heart of the curriculum engineering process, ensuring that there is capability in the system for continuous review, continuous renewal, monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum system.

Now, I turn to the matter of student support services and indicate to this honourable House that in the Ministry of Education we have made major strides in this area in 2003 and we are prioritizing several activities in this area for 2004. Student support services is essentially about providing psycho-social, emotional and material support for all students to maximize their learning potential. It is intended to ensure that all students do well at school and take full advantage of the curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, we are transforming the school intervention strategies from merely an intervention programme to a well structured, integrated system for student support, with the goal of addressing the full range of student needs in the classroom with appropriate linkage to the home and the community. Students and schools will be able to obtain dedicated services from guidance officers, school

social workers, guidance counsellors and special education teachers. This service will be decentralized school by school.

**2.15 p.m.**

In the Student Support Services (SSS) Programme, students are being trained in peer-mediation for cultivating attitudes and skills, in using a non-violent approach to resolving disputes. Research in this programme will extend beyond the 10 pilot schools. Other projects aimed at student behaviour modification and the development of positive character traits include: Together we like the way; the student time-out; out of school suspension, and the peace, love and understanding programmes. Teachers have been trained in the techniques of schools, school room management and conflict resolution, so that they are better able to understand and manage anger and stress. The reduction of violence and indiscipline requires greater attention of parents and homes from which the students come.

Working in partnership with JB Fernandez Trust, a parent-training workshop has been developed. We will increase the number of school social workers, which will help parents of bring up their children better and cooperate with the school in their education. In participating with this thrust, the Government will continue to expand homework centres to provide for children from disadvantaged families.

The Government is committed to providing a safe and secure school environment. As such, we are continuing aggressively to implement the school security programme. We increased the number of primary schools receiving security from 155 to 242 primary schools, and enhanced the period of coverage from 16 hours to 24 hours in the 242 schools. [*Desk thumping*] The Government has increased the total number of security officers at 87 secondary schools, in response to a request from principals. We completed phases four and five of the Security Enhancement Programme in 129 primary schools. This entails the provision of security lights, guard booths, perimeter fencing and burglar proofing of water tanks. Through this initiative, the Government demonstrates its commitment to the alleviation of poverty, and to the provision of a social safety net for the low-income groups of our population.

Mr. Speaker, this Government was the initiator of the School Nutrition Programme in 1979. This Government established the objectives and all the processes of the programme that are in use up to this time. The School Nutrition Programme is now in the process of re-establishing a modern approach to target its recipients effectively. To this end, a company was established in 2002: the

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National Schools Dietary Services Limited. A board of directors is in place and this company is poised for expansion. The Government is proud of the achievements of this company. The services have been expanded from a total of 6,000 meals—and that was during the time that the other side was administering them. The National Schools Dietary Services Limited Company provides 145,000 meals daily throughout the country. This is an increase of over 130,000 meals. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, discussions are ongoing with the Caribbean Root and Tuber Crops Network to provide a sustained supply of ground provision. Soup was served for the first time in November 2002 with great success. The soup included cassava, corn and other ground provisions that are produced locally. [*Desk thumping*] The company has developed and distributed a standardized recipe book for caterers, in order to achieve a greater level of consistency in the end product. All field officers have been trained in hazard analysis critical control point concepts, and they are now equipped with thermometers for fieldwork.

Mr. Speaker, the area of textbooks reflects the assurance of the Government millennium development goals, adopted at the Millennium Summit of 2000. One of the goals is the eradication of extreme poverty. Our children need the support of the provision of textbooks to facilitate their participation in the school curriculum. In the last fiscal year, 660,000 textbooks were provided for over 152,000 primary school pupils. A textbook loan programme was completed for students of Forms I and II in public, assisted and private secondary schools. Forty-seven thousand students benefited from this programme, and 230,538 textbooks were delivered.

To date, a book grant of \$1,000 per student has been provided to parents of 40,263 students in Forms IV and V in public, assisted and private secondary schools and students in Lower VI. These grants are presently being processed as we speak. A total of 53,000 students benefited from this programme. The total sum expended on the textbook initiatives is \$117.3 million. A special feature of this year's initiative was the involvement of booksellers in the distribution process in order to preserve the viability of the textbook industry.

Transportation: Transport for school children using the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) buses and maxi-taxis has been expanded. A fleet of 200 maxi-taxis transports approximately 21,500 students per day, in addition to 15,000 students transported by the PTSC buses at an annual cost of \$30 million. In the fiscal year 2004, we are targeting those students whose needs are not currently

being met, as well as the physically-challenged children by the provision of articulated buses, appropriately equipped to meet their special needs.

**School Libraries:** The Government upgraded and improved its library collection at schools by providing increased information resources for students. Library resources of up to \$1.9 million were provided in schools. Our aim is to ensure that every school has a functioning library to eradicate the scourge of illiteracy.

In the computerization programme, hardware has been provided to 81 primary schools and 110 secondary schools. Forty-six laboratory teachers have been trained in the primary school system. Two hundred and fifty primary school teachers have been trained to use special curriculum software to enhance the delivery in areas of Mathematics and English Language in primary schools. A curriculum guide for information technology was developed and piloted in five primary schools. Forty primary school teachers have been trained to use instructional technology in the classroom. An additional 20 teachers have been trained in the development of curriculum software. Recently, we established a presence on the worldwide web making access to information on the ministry easier.

Work will continue apace on the computerization of the examination section of the ministry to facilitate on-line registration for the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), Secondary Examination Assessment (SEA) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE). The system will replace the traditional paper-based system, and will guarantee reduced cost of stationery and mailing, greater accuracy and faster completion of the registration process.

**Building quality stakeholder relationships:** Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding our vigorous effort at reform of the education system, we maintain a human face to this exercise, and we pride ourselves on maintaining a principle of open dialogue, consultation, collaboration and consensus with all our stakeholders. Regular termly meetings are held with the principal associations: The Association of Denominational Boards; the National Parent Teachers Association of Trinidad and Tobago; the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association; a range of non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders in education. We meet, dialogue, share information and we encourage feedback. In all our policy review and development exercises, stakeholder consultations are a major part of our approach. Such was the case with the decentralization and restructuring programme, the rationalization of specialized craft in secondary schools and a policy framework for early childhood care and education.

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We have begun implementation of a comprehensive training plan geared towards the filling of skills and competency gaps to support high levels of performance, effective succession and career planning programmes. What we observed on assuming office was that the UNC paid little attention over the years to the human resource issue in the ministry particularly, in the area of staff development and succession planning. Towards resolving this problem, we have been seeking to pursue strategies to ensure that we have the right mix of skills and competencies at the right time, and in the right quantities.

Mr. Speaker, to give some details on the extent of the ministry's commitment to develop its employees, I am pleased to report to this honourable House that 50 senior administrators of the ministry are currently undergoing a Modular Leadership Training Course, which is jointly facilitated by the Universities of McGill and Montreal in Canada. Eighteen officers of the Education Planning Division have undergone training in the rudiments of school mapping and micro-planning and, utilizing geographic information systems which is funded by the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation. One member of staff of the Planning Division is pursuing studies at a foreign university in educational planning at the masters level, and this is funded by the Ministry of Education.

Forty primary school teachers have been trained to use instructional technology in the classroom. One cohort of 40 persons under the age of 50 is currently in the Executive Diploma Programme for principals and deans. Forty other persons over the age of 50 have been trained in the Executive Certificate in School Administration.

In 2003 the Ministry of Education received an original allocation of \$145 million to support its Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) initiatives. Given the aggressive construction and rehabilitation programme embarked upon by the ministry, supplementary funding was provided, resulting in a revised allocation of \$343 million. At the end of the last fiscal year, 95 per cent of the allocation of \$343 million was spent. For fiscal year 2004 the ministry has been allocated \$364 million under the PSIP.

Mr. Speaker, in 2004 we will be deepening the process of modernization and reform of the education system. Comprehensive reform takes time. We are focused, and we are planning strategically. We are sure of what we are doing. Our priorities for 2004 are:

- (1) Expanding access through early childhood care and education; and
- (2) Construction.



Under the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme, this Government is committed to the empowerment of its people. Given the commitment of this Government to invest in human capital, and our quest for the reduction in poverty, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance announced our goal for the provision of universal early childhood and education by the end of the decade. [*Desk thumping*] We intent to build on the work which has been done in the area of pre-school education. The formative years of a child are critical to the development of a good citizen.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Minister of Education has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Sen. The Hon. H. Manning:** In furtherance of this goal of universal pre-primary education, we are building on the foundation which has been laid. This year, the Government plans to build 30 early childhood care and education centres, utilizing the revised modern designs, which takes into account the new curriculum and facilitates the construction of a sound building. Our approach would be community driven to eradicate poverty, and to strengthen our thrust for the holistic development of the child.

The construction of schools: For the current fiscal year, the Ministry of Education has commenced phase I of its 2003—2006 construction programme, which is geared to radically overhaul the entire school plant by undertaking the construction of 29 schools, which would consist of 15 primary schools, 10 secondary schools and four Sixth Form centres, accelerating the technical upgrade programme which targets 144 secondary schools. This programme makes provision for multi-media centres, computer laboratories, science laboratories, technology laboratories and the commencing and refurbishment of two teachers colleges. The de-shifting programme is being accelerated in 19 junior secondary schools. All designs will be conforming to the requirements of the new curricula.

The security programme continues apace with the provision of security fences and security lighting in 28 secondary schools which have been designated as high risk schools. A demographic study will be undertaken to determine needs and guide the planning and construction process. An allocation of \$364 million under the PSIP has been allocated to the Ministry of Education for this fiscal year.

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For the fiscal year 2004, the following initiatives would be undertaken to continue to improve on the quality of the education system: To be able to continue the process of curricula reform with the writing of the curricula for Forms IV and V. We will be able to operationalize our plan for the rationalization of specialized craft in the secondary school; we will be able to develop and implement a revised programme for the National Certificate of Secondary Education; we will be able to expand the continuous assessment process at the primary and secondary school levels; to finalize the health and family-life educational curriculum for primary and secondary schools and to continue the programme for restructuring, decentralization and deconcentration of the Ministry of Education. The agreed model for decentralization would strengthen operations at the level of the schools to ensure timely and adequate resourcing and a robust system of school-based management.

The Government will be able to outfit 120 additional primary schools with computer-aided instructional management software; we will be able to roll out school-based management, whereby principals, with the help of the community, teachers and students will have greater autonomy in managing their schools. We will be able to accelerate the establishment of local school boards: both at the primary and secondary levels. Mr. Speaker, following the analysis of the pilot project, the establishment of 20 booths is projected for the year 2004. A project unit has been established in the ministry to manage this service.

Mr. Speaker, the Government will continue the appointment of heads of departments and deans at the secondary level, and senior teachers at primary schools. Some 150 heads of departments and deans were appointed in 2003. We will also establish a holistic system for student support services and decentralize school by school.

The proposal for the creation of a new Student Support Services Division will be submitted to Cabinet by the end of October 2003. We will institute a substitute teacher system to stem the problems associated with teacher-absenteeism. The consultants for this work have already been hired.

The Government will finalize the new performance management and appraisal system for teachers and school administrators. We will finalize an Employee Assistance Programme as part of our strategy to improve individual work performance and promote wellness. The director of this unit has already been hired.

For institutional strengthening, the Government will implement a comprehensive training plan geared towards the filling of skills and competency

gaps to support high levels of performance, effective succession and career planning.

Mr. Speaker, on assuming office, we observed that the UNC government paid little attention to the human resource management issues in the ministry, particularly in the area of staff development and succession planning. We will therefore be intensifying our strategies in 2004, to obtain the right mix of skills and competencies at the right time, and in the right quantities.

The Government will develop and strengthen the operations of our Testing and Assessment Unit. We will develop a dynamic research and evaluation system to assure satisfactory levels of literacy in all schools, through participation in the Centre for Excellence, in the teacher-training programme. A team of curriculum experts is already working on this project.

The model for the restructuring and decentralization of the Ministry of Education will be one of deconcentration in the short term, with a gradual devolution of some authority to the school district levels, and eventually outsourcing of certain educational functions to companies or educational authorities. This model is expected to be phased in over a four-year period. It points to the decentralization of the ministry's operations as an important strategic tool for achieving better organizational performance; better management of schools; a higher level of effectiveness throughout the sector.

Over this period, it is expected that the efficiency of the Ministry of Education operating systems will be increased through the continued development of an Educational Management Information System (EMIS). The development of EMIS will include: Evaluation of results of needs assessment survey; design of information technology architecture; development of technical specifications for EMIS goods and services; implementation of EMIS hardware and software at schools and development of training programmes of central and regional offices in the use of EMIS.

Integral to the issue of quality education is the matter of testing, assessment and measurement. In 2004 the Government will be taking steps to include in our schools, sound research base-testing and assessment methods based less on paper and pencil tests, and more on performance standards, for example, portfolios and project performance and real-life authentic tasks.

At the primary and secondary school levels, we will be accelerating the continuous assessment process in 2004. Through this mechanism, the student's performance is monitored in a structured way and on a continuous basis. With

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these facilities, early detection of problems will occur, so that appropriate correction action is instituted in a good time. The ministry is confident that this imitative will improve the quality of education tremendously. The Ministry of Education will continue to focus on the creation of a culture of peace and understanding that effective teaching and learning requires an environment that is safe ordered and well disciplined.

In 2004 the focus will be on stakeholder groups, teachers, parents and the community. Students will be trained in peer-mediation for cultivating attitudes and skills in using a non-violent approach to resolving disputes. This programme will extend beyond the 10 pilot schools, and include over 30 support programmes that could be sourced from non-governmental organizations and other highly qualified consultants.

In conjunction with the Schools Intervention Strategy Programme (SISP), the Ministry will move away from intervention strategies to placing a well-structured Student Support Services Unit in place to guide our children for holistic development from early childhood care to the secondary level. In keeping with our objective of healthy lifestyles and wellness, during the course of the current academic year, the Ministry of Education will implement the Stern John Football Development Programme for primary schools. This will support the introduction of physical education as an examinable subject in the secondary curriculum.

The ministry will also institute a festival season to work jointly with the stakeholders involved in visual and performing arts. The Government will implement a community development programme by next year, to create through the school feeding operations in remote communities, agro-development and micro enterprise activities, aimed at promoting social economic development in those communities. Steps have been taken to establish a test kitchen for the school nutrition programme.

Over the coming year, the Ministry of Education will continue to pursue opportunities for financial and technical co-assistance and intellectual cooperation afforded by local, regional and international agencies. The Ministry of Education will seek to take advantage of any technical cooperation opportunities, which would provide support for the objectives outlined in its Strategic Plan 2002—2006.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I am very grateful for this opportunity to share the information of the performance of the Ministry of Education. I am sure that you would appreciate why we say that the Ministry of Education is on the move.

Education and investment in our human capital is our major vehicle for social transformation and for the empowerment of our people. Government is allocating a large amount of resources to education in order that we could achieve our vision of transforming Trinidad and Tobago into developed country status by the year 2020. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Education have taken up the mantle, and we are confident—as a result of all our initiatives—that over the next few years, the nation will undergo positive transformation through a system that is well planned; a system that is focused; and a system that is driven by scientific research and stakeholder collaboration. The Government believes that education is everyone’s business. [*Desk thumping*] The Government also believes that human resource development will lead the way to a bright new tomorrow. We are on the move.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

**2.45 p.m.**

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar** (*Siparia*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy, and I am sure all hon. Members in this honourable Chamber are happy, to have had the hon. Minister of Education share with us her thoughts, ideas and plans for the Ministry of Education and for the education of our children. There is not a single person in this country—from the youngest to the oldest—who does not recognize the value of education. Last year, we did not have the opportunity to have the presence of the hon. Minister and so I welcome her taking the time to come to this honourable Chamber and share her thoughts with us.

I see that the hon. Minister has, in fact, kept her entire speech that she delivered in last year’s budget presentation and read it so beautifully for us here today. [*Desk thumping*] The *Hansard* records would show that the ideas, the plans and the programmes are all the same. Mr. Speaker, through it all, this is the first time I have seen the Member for San Fernando East smiling for 60 minutes straight, because most times he falls asleep. He was blushing. He seemed to be saying that this is his beloved wife in whom he is well pleased. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members on the other side, may I take this opportunity to get a copy of that speech and you may want to emulate it. So just like the only Minister in your Government who received a letter of praise from the Prime Minister you can follow the pattern of that speech and get a letter of praise as well. Regrettably, I know the Member for Diego Martin West would have a serious problem getting any letter of praise. You see, as reported here in the *Trinidad Guardian* of

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September 29, 2003, headlined; “Education system ineffective—Rowley”. This is the report taken from the words of the Member for Diego Martin West and I would read it. Mr. Speaker, if the Member for Diego Martin West had in effect said that the two years of management, under their administration, rendered the system ineffective, then there is very little we need to say, because it is an admission.

The report says:

“Planning and Development Minister Dr. Keith Rowley has said the education system is ineffective.

He made the comment while delivering the feature address at the Diego Martin West constituency’s 37th annual conference at the Point Cumana Community Centre, La Horquette, yesterday.

In a wide-ranging speech, which dealt with several current issues, Rowley said the education system was key to achieving Government’s Vision 2020 plan, but was plagued by ‘many, many impediments’

He stressed: ‘We do not have the most effective teaching service. It is antiquated, as it relates to the hiring and advancing of teachers.

‘We are just going through the motions and our children are just slipping through the system,’ he said.

Rowley, MP for the constituency, also referred to the high failure rate in Mathematics and English in this year’s CXC examinations.

He predicted that by 2005 the failure rate will be ‘horrendous’...”

Mr. Speaker, who will be in office until 2005? Is it not his administration and his Minister of Education? He says:

“He predicted that by 2005 the failure rate will be ‘horrendous...’”

This is what he said. And I totally agree with the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Desk thumping*] I continue to quote.

“Rowley noted that the problems in education were just part of the crisis within the public sector.”

So he is saying that there are more crises in the public sector, and the whole country is agreeing, because for the two years under the PNM every sector in this country is in crisis. [*Desk thumping*] And from the mouth of one of their own, of

that Cabinet, of that Government, admitting that this is only one of the other crises in the public sector. Mr. Speaker, you can see why.

When I listened to the speech read by the hon. Minister of Education there is not one single new planned project or idea within it. It is the same as what was done last year. If you pick up all the documents we got with the budget speech it is the same. So when the hon. Minister of Education, and the Prime Minister, tell me that they want to achieve something by 2020, the hon. Minister again made reference to it at page 10 of the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2004*. This is a document which was laid in this honourable House in this debate. It says:

“Government, through its Vision 2020 objective is seeking to systematically put in place a long-term planning framework...”

Mr. Speaker, that means they have not put it in as yet. They are seeking to put it in place. That is their Vision 2020! It continues:

“The intention is to fashion a comprehensive and integrated Multi-Sectoral Development Plan (MDP) which will provide the roadmap to 2020.”

The intention is to provide via the road map. 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 framework.”

So there is the intention to do it; you are seeking to put the framework into place and yet you bring a budget in which the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance mentioned that it should be informed by that roadmap and there is no roadmap. So what is this budget about? Where are we going? What are the benchmarks? It continues:

“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.”

The establishment of: not that this is the matrix; these are the objectives; these are the goals; these are the strategies and these are the benchmarks. Nothing!

In his contribution, the Member for St. Joseph made the point that if you ask every one of the Ministers what is Vision 2020, each one of them would have a different detail as to what is Vision 2020. Mr. Speaker, do you know what is worse? If you go out into the public and ask “John Public” what is Vision 2020, not one of them could give you an answer. Nobody knows. They have no clue.

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If we continue with this PNM down the road Vision 2020 would be a total wreck of this country. [*Desk thumping*] Here is Vision 2020; the Minister of Education in her contribution says “in keeping with the Vision 2020 posited by the Minister of Finance in his budget statement,” and so on, “this is what it is for education.” As I have said before I have not seen a single change of any plan and of any policy. Instead, we have at every area in the Ministry of Education a level of stasis that has taken place. Things have stopped happening. That is the information that we have.

So that it seems to be the mentality of the PNM Government—as it has always been—to pelt money at it; pelt money at it; more money; more money. More moneys mean better, better, better. That is far from the case. Last year, there was a very huge budget allocated to education, but the problem was in the implementation and it still remains in the implementation. So when the hon. Minister of Finance promised in the budget statement and the hon. Minister of Education has repeated that they want to bring universal early childhood care and education in this country, two years ago, before we left office, we had begun that process. Two years later the Government has not built a single early childhood care pre-school. Not one! [*Desk thumping*] On your own admission to this Parliament I have the hon. Minister of Education’s reply to the question asked: Did you build any? In the period we were there, using the Vote Basic Education Programme Loan, we built 41 pre-schools; whereas in the two years the Government has been there—[*Desk thumping*] You want to talk about construction, let us talk about construction

Mr. Speaker, we must remember that education is not about a building with computers, desks and chairs and so on; education is the output and the input is all the money that is being put into it. What is the output? When the Member for Diego Martin West could tell us that the failure rate is horrendous now and would be horrendous in 2005, then it means that for all the input that is being put into education there would be no output, because the failure rate would continue and that is the real problem in education. Education must deal with the hardware, which is the construction of the schools; the placing of the computers in the schools; giving of the textbooks and so on, but there is a subsidy to education which has always been the problem under the PNM administration.

You want to boast to me about curriculum development. That is what we started under the Secondary Education and Modernization Programme (SEMP). And every week and every month I see a new headline of so many curricula that have been done and drafted. You know, Mr. Speaker, my information is after all



these years, and the two years the hon. Minister of Education has been there, she keeps boasting about the curriculum for each core subject, you know they are still in draft? Why have they not been tested, piloted and ready in final form to be used in the schools? Why two years later? And the hon. Minister of Education is still coming to tell me that she is bringing draft core curriculum. Oh, God! Please come out of the draft and let us get into the warmth. [*Desk thumping*] Get the thing done! It is still in draft form.

The hon. Minister of Education spoke to me about curriculum; she spoke to me about school construction, which I must mention. She said she has been to so many secondary schools. Please do not mislead us. She knows that everything was done with respect to those schools. Mr. Speaker, she mentioned Cunupia High School. Can the hon. Minister of Education tell me which Cunupia High School she is speaking about? Cunupia High School was built, opened and dubbed the University of Central by the UNC government. [*Desk thumping*] How can the Minister of Education come here to mislead us and say that she constructed so many primary and secondary schools?

The truth is, in the last PNM administration of 1991, under the Member for San Fernando East not a single school was built. And in this administration every school that the Minister of Education has been opening and turning keys for are UNC schools. [*Desk thumping*] Be honest! Do not mislead the country! That is why I said nothing has been changed. Even if the hon. Minister of Education wanted to mislead people she could have at least changed the name of the schools. But when you pick up the draft estimates for the *Public Sector Investment Programme* (PSIP) for last year and this year, every one is the same; when you look under the SEMP, every one is the same.

I want to ask the hon. Minister of Education, that while she mentioned the additional SEMP schools that she is doing, what has happened to the two SEMP schools in Debe? Is it because those schools are Maha Sabha schools that would educate the Hindu children in the Penal community? What has happened to the two schools? Two years later into your term you tell me of Vessigny, you tell me of Guayaguayare, but the two Maha Sabha schools in Penal—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rowley:** Two in Westmoorings.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** You would speak of Westmoorings because that is your constituency; I am speaking of my constituency. I am entitled to do that. Not even a single post has been put down. Why? The hon. Minister of Education cannot answer that. The hon. Minister has the reasons why.

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I am calling upon the hon. Minister of Education, on behalf of my constituents, when she talked about we crammed children into schools. Again, she is misleading people. When those children were being put into the school we had an entire building and the school was empty. What fool I would have been if we had said to put only Form I and let 10,000 children stay out on the streets. We would have been foolish. So there were ten new schools with an intake for Form I and the rest of the school remained empty. That is what she is saying. We put the students in because there was a school plant, but in the meantime the second batch of ten schools was supposed to be under construction. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Education would have to tell us why it is those were not ready on time?

The hon. Minister of Education mentioned that we did not have the development of the human resources. Could the hon. Minister answer me today and this nation, how is it, under the SEMP just within the last couple of months every report the hon. Minister has received from the bank has been unsatisfactory, and about the human resource development. The institution was strengthening. All the things the hon. Minister has been saying that we did not do. Answer! Under the Secondary Education and Modernization Programme (SEMP), the bank was here two weeks ago. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member for Diego Martin West, you would get your chance to speak. Mr. Speaker, he is the one who agreed that the system is ineffective. My information is that under the SEMP—this is a very important thing to note—billions of dollars were given for education. And I made the point that money, money and more money is not the answer. Under the SEMP there was US \$107 million—which is over TT \$600 million—for doing all this work in the education sector. My information is that you cannot meet the benchmarks in the last few years, you have not met the benchmarks and so the bank is very annoyed about it. What does that mean? You are not drawing down the money. The information is that only 10 per cent of that money. It is the same point that was made this morning by the Member for Caroni Central when he mentioned that every year there is a big sum of money and at the end of the year the policies and programmes have not been implemented and you have not been able to do what the money was put there for.

Under the SEMP of US \$107 million, my information is that 10 per cent has been spent. Mr. Speaker, do you know what that means? It does not mean that you are saving money you know; it means that the taxpayers in this country have to continue to pay the interest because it is loan funding out of the bank. We are

not using the money to implement, but we have to pay for that money. Mr. Speaker, that is under the SEMP. I have further information coming out of that ministry of something very frightening that is happening.

Where we had agreed with the World Bank for the technical upgrade of installing laboratories in our secondary schools, and whilst it was that that technical upgrade should have been in the region of \$200 million for about a certain number of schools, I understand that it has been established in the Ministry of Education of something called the fiefdom of a gentleman by the name of Mr. Kenrick Burgess. This is a man who was hired at \$90,000 a month for doing a host of things. A host of thing means that he is the *de facto* Minister of Education. Our information is that nothing could happen in the Ministry of Education without passing through the king, Mr. Burgess.

I understand there are officials who are horrified at what is happening with the technical upgrade of the secondary schools, which has not yet started. Then two years later not even one has started. Initially, the sum of \$200 million was proposed to be spent. We then heard that that sum went up to \$400 million as proposed to be spent. Right now I am being told that it is somewhere nearer the region of \$600 to \$700 million being proposed that they spend for the technical upgrade. *[Interruption]* No, I am not throwing out numbers.

Mr. Speaker, if this is so, I do not know. This is my information. I understand why that is so is where initially they were talking about doing certain blocks with the technical upgrade—that through Mr. Burgess and some other advisers in the ministry—they were saying well, if they are going to put in one block here they should probably do more and it is getting grander and grander like all PNM models and styles. Mr. Speaker, do you remember the great white elephant which is the Hall of Justice? Do you remember the other white elephant, which is the Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex? Now they want to make these schools into white elephants.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about education it is not just about the school, but the quality of the education. We must understand what we mean by quality of education. You cannot have a school with 1,000 children, 1,500 children and 2,000 children. That is what they want to do. Those are the factories that they built as the junior secondaries, and when we dealt with education we decided that the schools would have optimum sizes: the 450, the 325 and the 800. You cannot go above that, but you are adding these blocks now. That is the plan. We were told here in the Parliament earlier in the year where more moneys were voted for to be able to add blocks to expand the sizes of the existing schools. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Manning:** No one said that!

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, that was mentioned here. It was recorded. [*Interruption*] It is a science block. It is in the *Hansard*. Mr. Speaker, if the hon. Member for San Fernando East does not know, please let him find out. Because I am telling you that where it was to be just that we are now being told that they want to raise it from the proposed \$200 million to \$400 because they want to put other things. And then they want to raise it to \$700 million because they want to put other things. Please find out. That is the information we have. If that is what is happening the Minister of Education cannot run a school. She is running a factory that would turn out more dropouts and more criminals on our streets. That is what would be happening. Mr. Speaker, in order to keep the sizes of the schools down the Government needs to build the other schools. There is no point in telling me about model school and whatever else. The hon. Minister of Education is in charge, it is her job and it is her duty. So she must do her duty for the children in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

It is very, very disturbing as to what is happening in the SEMP. I wonder if it would go the way of the World Bank projects that were in education. The World Bank project was the one utilized to build over 24 primary schools by the UNC in this country. It was also the programme that brought the funding in for pre-schools. Again, our information is that the World Bank project, which is now officially closed as of June 30, that the Ministry of Education requested an extension but were not given the extension because they could not meet the benchmarks and satisfy the conditions of that World Bank loan.

In the same way the Minister of Health sought and obtained an extension for the Health Sector Reform Programme—because the time had come where he applied for that extension—we are advised that the Ministry of Education asked for the extension but they did not satisfy the benchmarks and therefore the loan was not extended.

Talking about the universal pre-school education now, when you had the funding for two years even before the project closed they were not built. Now the project has been closed down, the loan funding is gone and they were paid for all of those years the hon. Minister of Education now wants to tell us that they are going to build universal pre-school education in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I went on the website of the bank—and this is there for everyone to see—this is not to tell me I lied or somebody in the ministry leaked out the information. There are very good officers in the Ministry of Education. [*Desk*

*thumping*] Not one of them has compromised their position. There is an excellent set of officers in that ministry. [*Interruption*] I have not spoken to any of them. I would not ask them. [*Interruption*] I went on the website—do not distract me, let us get on with the information—and two contracts were granted by this Government with respect to the famous textbooks that were given out to the primary schools. The project was also for giving out the free textbooks. That is why I said that is not new. When the hon. Minister comes boasting saying that she is happy that the children could get textbooks, because that was part of the loan that we negotiated and had in place for the textbooks. We did that in the year 2000. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Education should go and check her records because we distributed free textbooks. This was the problem.

The bank and the conditions in the benchmarks had to be satisfied in order for you to go forward with the funding. Instead, the Ministry of Education used the words “bank funding” and issued two direct contracts in the sum of millions of dollars for two sets of textbooks. When I checked the website—what do you mean by direct contract? It says, “direct contract means one and one, sole contractor.” So there was no tendering. If you check all the other contracts under the World Bank; the World Bank is very strict about its benchmarks and its conditionalities. If you go on the website you would see it. We do not have to get it from them it is on the website. Granted under that fourth basic education programme here in Trinidad and Tobago they were done by competitive bidding.

Mr. Speaker, the question has to be asked: Is that why the extension was not granted for the funding to continue? Because the manner in which the hon. Minister of Education went about procuring the textbooks, the procuring method of direct contract, was inappropriate and the bank was not satisfied with the way in which the contracts were being given out.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That is serious corruption.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Mr. Speaker, do you remember when the UNC government dealt with the \$300 million textbook racket when we standardized the textbooks. My information is that the textbook racket, under the PNM, has started all over again. The racket is now spreading into the School Feeding Programme. This was the Government who did away completely with a school nutrition company in their time, in 1994, and today we are being told that from last year another company has been started. Let us understand what they mean.

Under the committee that was set up in our school feeding programme, the caterers who have to supply the school feeding programme would have to tender.

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The tenders were actually given out by the Central Tenders Board. When there is a company now set up, as you have done, those people who would now be the caterers in the programme, it is opening the doors for CEPEP corruption, NEDCO corruption and now the school feeding corruption all over again. [*Desk thumping*] The company now does not have to come to the Central Tenders Board. They do their own thing and they give their own contract jobs to the boys and girls, the wives, husbands and friends. Just like the Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL) does with the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), and the other one with NEDCO. Mr. Speaker, the door has now been opened back to a racket in the school feeding programme.

Even more important—and I welcomed the additional meals—the breakfasts and the lunches that you say you would be providing, I welcome the meals. [*Desk thumping*] Again, as I did last year hon. Prime Minister and hon. Minister of Education—it seems that I am appealing to Mannings Incorporated. My apologies to both of them, Mr. Speaker. They are happy that the company is running the country. I am making an appeal again that this is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious plural society. [*Desk thumping*] In the School Feeding Programme there is no point giving more meals if the children cannot eat the meals. There are people in this country who do not eat beef or pork. My friend from Morvant/Laventille is a “rasta” and he would tell you that he does not eat those things. There is a Hindu community and a Muslim community, but the meals that are being provided are not catering for the dietary religious preferences of the members of the country. What is the point? [*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** That is not true.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** That is totally true! If you are interested I can tell you where it is happening. This is now the Divali season. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, the truth offends. Go to your schools and find out. Check it! Especially in the Divali season again, it is imperative. It is happening in the schools. So do not tell me about more meals. I am glad. Tell me about the quality of the meals that are being provided for our children. So when we talk about more money, more money and more money that is not the answer. More and more does not mean better and better. It must be in the implementation and ensuring that every citizen in this country is benefiting from the programme.

Mr. Speaker, when the hon. Minister tells me about libraries and a library in every school, again, it is a great concept and idea. But when you pick up the draft estimates a very small sum of money is being allocated for libraries.

[*Interruption*] This is another vision. Mr. Speaker, there was always an allocation for libraries. So it is a regular allocation. So to say that you are going to increase the number of libraries in schools, I do not see it. Maybe it is there but it is not in these estimates.

More important is that in the libraries right now in the system there are many schools without librarians. We also have to pay attention to that. What is the point putting a library in every school and there is no librarian to run the school library? So far, as with everything else—that is why the hon. Member for San Fernando East is so pleased with the Minister of Education—the only new library that has been put up is in the constituency of the Member for San Fernando East, which is similar to the de-shifting process. This is the Government that put our children through that shift system. This is the Government that has our children suffering.

### 3.15 p.m.

The 10 new schools that we built, the 25 new secondary schools that we established, we could have put them on the shift system, and then you would have been able to accommodate double numbers. We said “No way”, because the shift system has proven to be the breeding ground for the criminals who terrorize our land when they come out of school, [*Desk thumping*]*—the breeding ground, the factory. They are factories and they recognize it too. They are now saying that was their choice at that time but they kept that right up to 36 years, “eh”, and they would have continued it. That is the pathway, the road, to take us to instability in this country.*

The shift system is an evil that must go and so we started that deshifting process but, you know, in the two years again that they have been in office, the only schools deshifted are the two—Marabella Junior Secondary and Senior Comprehensive—in the constituency of the Member for San Fernando East. Only those two! The schools in the—[*Interruption*] Yes. Why should only two schools in this county be deshifted, Marabella Junior and Marabella Senior?

**Mr. Manning:** Would you give way?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No, no, no. You had two hours, Sir. You had two hours on a day when I was not here. Hon. Speaker—[*Interruption*]*—hon. Speaker—[Interruption] They are not in San Fernando East, okay; point taken; but two schools, Mr. Speaker—[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, out of all the juniors and seniors that are on the shift system, in two years only two have been deshifted. Again, when you tell us you want to

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deshift, I agree with you, but you have gone nowhere further, only two schools in two years. At the rate that you are going, I will be dead and all of us here will be gone before these schools are deshifted, the number of years that will take. So that whole deshifting process you need to put on priority. We need to put a priority on shifting away from the shift. We have to do it. If we are to prevent the kind of dropout rates and the kind of values that we are seeing in the schools we have to get rid of that shift system.

Last night I am told that a 14-year-old boy was shot in a nightclub by another teenager. These are schoolchildren. When we look at—[*Interruption*] You know, they cannot think. They cannot think at all, you know. I have finished that point, I am on a new point but they cannot follow, they are so slow. I am talking to you about the violence and the crime in our schools—[*Interruption*] violence and crime in our schools, Mr. Speaker, and when you look at all the headlines Mr. Partap passed here to me, “Children exposed”, “National Library fracas”, “Gang rule at Cedros school”, “Gang War in School”, “Money woes”, “School’s out for Gov’t kids”.

**Dr. Khan:** What year is this?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** This is in the last week or two. These are headlines from the last couple of weeks, the last couple of months for the most. “Murder in school”. This is what is happening to the school system. These are the people who will be the dropouts. If children “beating up children” in a school, children “cuffing dong teacher”, there is murder in the school, what do you expect in the society? These are the ones who are dropping through the cracks, who will come out of the system and these are the ones who will be our criminals, again leading to that instability in our country and so we have to deal with them.

There is nothing in what the Minister has said, and that is what I talked about, the hardware versus the software of education and perhaps we can talk a little about that software in education. We have to be able to look at what is output. I started about input and output. So great, there is the input; you are going to get all this money and a lot of things can be done. What is the output? What are the benchmarks?

Again, you have not identified your 2020 vision so you cannot tell me what are your benchmarks. In the same way with 2020 vision we are being told that if you have to achieve the kind of economic levels expected, you must have a growth rate of 10 per cent per annum, and we are nowhere near that, well the same way in the education sector you must have the benchmarks. What are the



benchmarks? What is the reality now? This is why the Member for Diego Martin East was horrified and said it was horrendous.

The truth is that the literacy rate, as exhibited by the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) and the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), shows that over 50 per cent of our children are illiterate, that is to say, they get less than 50 per cent in English in the SEA and in maths. At the secondary level 50 per cent fail maths and English and so—[*Interruption*] We will come to that and I will give you a point. In Tobago—you forgot that Tobago has the highest level of children outside of school, “eh”. [*Interruption*] What is the benchmark in education as in economics?

The benchmark has to be that, “I want to raise the literacy and numeracy rates”. I want to say by year one, year two and year three this is what should be happening in terms of the CXC and SEA passes, but if there are no benchmarks—and that is why when you say you will establish and you will get the road map and you will do it, you do not have any of those. We will never get there. Our children will continue to fail and fall through the cracks. First of all we need to establish the benchmarks and, if education is to be of any use and any meaning to anyone in this country, you must first raise the levels of literacy and numeracy.

I was horrified, and the Minister could tell us if this is true, to learn that the Adult Literacy Tutors Association (ATLA), offered to come into the schools and help and they were refused so to do by the Minister. Even if that can be used until you can increase the literacy level and you tell me I put them into secondary schools, I say, okay, the levels of numeracy and literacy were that bad and I put them into schools. You see, Mr. Speaker, that is another scandal that is going on in the Ministry of Education.

The first year that you put all the children into secondary schools you had to bite the bullet and you had to send them through. Whether they were ready or not you would have sent them but you would have placed in the secondary school programme to allow them to recover, the remedial programme, and we started that. I understand none of that is happening now. The remedial programme throughout the schools has collapsed. Even more important—that is that cohort—what about the cohorts that are coming from the primary schools now?

This is where I am, the scandal that is taking place with respect to something called the Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP). That programme which was supposed to go hand in hand—[*Interruption*] Read your 1993 White Paper. You talked about it so much. You will know that it carries the CAP within it

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which says that at the primary level you continuously assess the child and where the child is deficient you keep them and do the remedial work at that level before they drop out at the secondary level, but the CAP has not been implemented. I heard nothing about it and my information is it is just getting absolutely nowhere. So the CAP is in danger and as long as we do not deal with CAP we will still be turning out low levels of literacy and numeracy straight into the secondary school out of the primary school. We have to deal with it. It has to be done.

I come back again, what are your benchmarks? So, levels of literacy—what is your benchmark with respect to this technologically driven world? We are living in the age of the Net. Here we are talking about putting a library in every school. What has happened to Internet connection for every school? That is the way to go. With a library, yes, we can do it. I do not want a library in every school, you know, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker. What I would like is the Internet in every school so they would have access to the wide world of knowledge. [*Desk thumping*] The books that we want them to read, what we do is, you do not focus on libraries because you are going to deal with “the whole set ah buying book and textbook racket and book racket and so on”.

In every school you can tell every class, each child should bring one book. If there are 20 or 30 children in a class and each child brings one book—not textbooks we are talking about now but each brings a book that they can read, those who could afford it, they bring a book that they like to read, within that classroom of 20 or 30 children that class will have 30 books to read for the term. [*Desk thumping*] So when you are dealing with your resources and you tell me there will be a library in every school, I know that is not going to happen in the near future. In the meantime, put the Net in every school and let the children—and even before that—[*Interruption*] We started the programme. That is what I am telling you and I ask, where has it gone? [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Valley:** Where?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Internet in every school. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Valley:** Where?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** We placed Internet connections in the secondary schools.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Where? Where?

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I am not going to answer them. [*Interruption*] They are just trying to distract me and throw me off. Yes. You should have that

information. Ask your Minister of Education. So Internet in every school but in addition—[*Interruption*] in addition—[*Interruption*] in addition—[*Interruption*] the class textbook, have the class book library so that the children can share it; but you see these people how dishonest and misleading they are?

My information is they are shutting down every distance-learning centre that we set up throughout the country. Is that true? Distance learning centres, they are going to shut them down, Mr. Speaker, the centres that were set up. That is another method and form of education. You see, they want to confine me into talking on one issue. I do not intend—with their questions and their stopping—I will continue because in every area of education there are problems. Every area is in crisis.

Mr. Speaker, we talked about the proposal for a library in every school, we talked about the curriculum, but there is another scandal that is brewing coming out of the Minister of Education and the Ministry. My information is that an advisor to the Minister of Education has advised the Minister who has agreed that with the next SEA examination—now I want you to remember how the SEA works. After you write the SEA, based on level or performance children are given the schools of their first or second choice and so on, okay? So the SEA has now become, instead of being a selection process, instead of being one to decide whether children stay in primary school, move on to secondary school or drop out, it has now become a tool, an instrument to help decide where to place the students.

My information is now that the advice given to the Minister by, I think by an advisor who has come from abroad—I do not know if it is the Organization of American States (OAS) or something, and with which the Minister has agreed, is that the first 1,000 children, the children who, when they write the SEA, the 1,000 who come first, one to one thousand, they will be given their first choice of school but the rest of the children writing the SEA are to be distributed like rain and flour and rice and so on all over the system willy-nilly by lottery. Now, what you are doing here is very dangerous because you are saying to our children and to the parents, “You no longer have a school of your choice”. Under the Constitution, the parent has the right to choose a school for his child [*Interruption*] and so this is another way of dealing with the whole issue of zoning. This is what this is about and, again, if it is not so [*Interruption*] I will be very happy to hear them tell me it is not true but this is, I understand, what is being circulated from this advisor, a Trinidadian who was at the OAS. [*Interruption*] So that is something we need to find out, whether that is really happening.

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Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk a bit on the Dollar for Dollar Programme. As you know, this was a programme that has affected so many thousands of our children—of our adults, not children any more, the Dollar for Dollar Programme. I would ask if the hon. Member for San Fernando East would probably wake up. I would like to ask him something, Sir, with due respect. *[Interruption]* I do not think he has woken up yet. Maybe—I would like to ask the Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Member:** “Ask he wife.”

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** No, he is fast asleep.

**Mr. Speaker:** Perhaps you can do it through me.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Through you? Well then he would not be able to answer us, but perhaps he may wake up in time to answer the question.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Mr. Speaker, he is not in the General Council, you know.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** *[Interruption]* The hon. Member for San Fernando East, the Minister of Finance, I would like to know why is it—well I do not want to say that he lied. Somebody might say he lied but I would not say that he lied. I would say that he misled this Chamber. Why he misled this Chamber—

**Mr. Speaker:** But you know you cannot use that at all. You know that. You cannot say that. Please.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you, Sir. He misled us. When we met here at the finance committee and there was money being moved for the Interim Stabilization Fund and questions arose about the dollar for dollar fund, we asked the hon. Minister how much money the Government had put into that Dollar for Dollar Programme. He told us that they had put \$25 million in 2002 and \$50 million in 2003. Mr. Speaker, the revenue records give the lie to any such moneys being put in the dollar for dollar fund. *[Interruption]* Let me finish please, Sir? I will finish it and then you can deal with it.

In the first place, in 2001 the records show us that for the Dollar for Dollar Programme there was \$240 million. In 2002 we see in the books again it went to \$229.9 million and in 2003 we see it at \$185.5 million. Now, we know from page 20 of the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2004*, the book that was given out, the numbers of students who drew down on the fund and we know also, therefore, that in 2001 about \$19 million was taken out, in 2002 it was \$36 million, and for the 2003/2004 period maybe another \$36 million. However, when we do the arithmetic, it is very clear that if \$25 and \$50—that is a \$75 million—had been

put into the fund as the Minister told us, it would be \$185—not \$185 alone, it would be plus the \$75. So I say—[*Interruption*]

I am not confused. I know very well what I am saying. No moneys were put into the fund by the PNM. We were told, the drawdowns are \$19 million and \$36 million. The drawdowns are not \$25 and \$50. We can see the drawdowns. You have first of all in 2001—\$240,000. It goes in 2002 to \$221. So what is the drawdown? It is \$240 million minus \$221 which leaves 19. It is 19. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please. Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Siparia has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I say that this House was misled—240 minus 221 leaves 19 which went out—[*Interruption*]; 221 minus 185—36. It is 36. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, may I tell you, I am now doing an executive MBA and one of the courses is financial accounting. [*Desk thumping*] No, you have to speak to somebody else if they failed the MBA course, “eh”. We have just started it, Mr. Speaker. My first point on dollar for dollar is that what we were told in this Chamber, the records in the estimates do not reflect that any \$25 plus \$50 million was put into that fund by the PNM administration.

In the second place, last year in the budget statement by the hon. Minister of Finance on Monday, October 21, 2002 the Minister stated:

“Tertiary Education

Mr. Speaker, we are committed to providing affordable education at the tertiary level...While the Government will honour existing obligations under the Dollar for Dollar Plan...”

I repeat that:

“While the Government will honour existing obligations under the Dollar for Dollar Plan, a more suitable and sustainable alternative will be announced during the year.”

Well the year has come and gone and no alternative whatsoever, whether suitable, sustainable or otherwise, has been put forward. So again, you know,

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these budget statements that we see are just statements of intent. They are not implemented. You cannot believe them. They are not carried through. It is just a grand design and a grand document, good PR, “it sounding nice, everything sounding nice and by the end ah de next year when we come back to the Parliament, you have ah next nice sounding one you stand up and yuh read.” However, what did you do in between? So for dollar for dollar nothing has been done.

What happens when the hon. Minister comes now, this year, to make his Budget Speech? Again I read from the same *Social Sector Investment Programme* and this is page 20 of the documents put here. [Interruption]

Ah ha! Very good; very good. My colleague has drawn to my attention an article, Monday, October 13, 2003 page 5, that is today, on another matter, a controversial matter:

“...the UNC-initiated Dollar for Dollar Higher Education Plan  
Manning maintained...”

This is where Mr. Manning, Member for San Fernando East, is speaking to the PNM Youth League, yesterday, and says:

“Manning maintained that such a plan was discriminatory against those who did not have the matching dollar in order to qualify for assistance.”

He said it was discriminatory against those who did not have the matching dollar in order to qualify for assistance.

“He said only last week he received a letter...”

From a student who could not qualify because they did not have the matching dollar for dollar.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Give them a scholarship.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** That is fine.

**Mr. Ramnath:** That is donkey logic.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I want to read—I will come back to that, Mr. Speaker, because I want to read what the Minister of Finance said in this year’s budget statement—

**Mr. Ramnath:** “Yuh doh take away from those who yuh give because one cyar get. Yuh help those who doh have.”

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:**—with respect to the dollar for dollar education plan—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** But I watch your hidden agenda.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** On page—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Ramnath:** Cudjoe agenda—I'm sorry.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** On page 20—I am getting a lot of help here from my friends. On page 20:

“A total of 7,604 students benefited from the programme as at January 2003, an increase of 3,376 students when compared to August 2002. The enrolment has also increased at the tertiary institutions. For the academic year 2002/2003 the enrolment was 13,061 for the institutions under the plan compared to 9,482 for the year 2001/2002. Estimated expenditure for 2003 is \$35,734,715.”

That is why when I spoke earlier—this is the \$6 million we are talking about as the drawdown, so there was nothing about 25 and 50 being drawdowns. So within this we have seen the success of this programme, that there has been an increase by over 3,000 students by January of 2003 as compared to last year. What will be interesting, then, is the enrolment was at 13,000. So what we do is we come back to this Vision 2020 and one of the benchmarks—we must set the benchmark again. What is the percentage of our people who should be in tertiary level education? That is why we had initiated the dollar for dollar plan in the first place.

We had said that where there were about 6 to 8 per cent of people going tertiary, if we want to achieve developed status we had to raise that to 20 per cent. So you set your benchmarks again. By year one we would have so many, by year two the percentage will go up and will keep increasing until by 2020 you would have achieved a benchmark. Everybody would know this is what we have to achieve in order to reach where we want to be. So we are clear from this in your own document that the Dollar for Dollar Programme has been successful, tertiary level education has increased, more people are enrolled.

The *Social Sector Investment Programme 2004* continues—your document—and I read:

“A review of the programme will be conducted in 2004 in order to find a more cost effective means of offering financial assistance to tertiary level students.”

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So last year you told us that you would announce a suitable sustainable alternative in that year. Nothing happened. This year you are now telling us that you will review the programme to find a more cost effective means. What does “cost effective” mean? What do the words, “We will find a more cost effective way” mean? What is not cost effective when you see that student enrolment has increased and you see more than 3,000 students in one year have been able to access tertiary level education? That was the largest intake. What do the words, “cost effective”, mean?

Is that what it means when we read the article from the *Express* that I just drew to your attention? Is this what it is about, that you are now saying there was discrimination against those who did not have the matching dollar in order to qualify? Let us get something clear, “eh”. Those who deserve to be in university, you can deal with them on the basis of scholarships. [*Desk thumping*] What you can do is take the best in the system and keep increasing your level of scholarships. To say that, “Because you are poor down there, you cannot match the dollar for dollar, okay, I will give you the full thing”, what criteria would you use? It must be based on merit at the top of the system. Why? It is because you want to be sure that when you spend—how much does it cost to educate a university student—those millions, at the end of the three years, that person will graduate and be qualified, that you would—again, not the money but the output.

You do not want to place a student there who will not be able to utilize the funding you have provided, and this is scarce resources, if that student cannot graduate or cannot complete the course. So what you do is take your best scholarship level. So if those who are poor cannot afford it, you have the scholarship system to deal with that and I suggest that if we want to help more poor students but they are bright—because one criteria must be brightness. It cannot be, “Just because I decide I want to go to university, I am going, Government will spend \$3 million, \$4 million, \$5 million to send me through university and I fail all the courses”. You must have merit and so scholarships, that is the way to go. Then for the other batch of students, you go with the dollar for dollar until such time as we reach utopia and every single person will be able to go to university, which will not happen.

We are talking about distributing scarce resources and therefore how we deal with the priorities. We ask the question, then, what do we mean by “cost effective”? Is this the way you are going to carry out Cudjoe’s plan to deal with ethnic criteria in order—[*Interruption*—his plan that ethnicity will now become the criteria on which to send people to university? Is that what this is about? So,



hon. Speaker, I say it is a dangerous thing when you move merit as being the criteria and you want to now introduce other cost effective measures which you have not defined or explained. I suggest what is cost effective is the fact that you have been putting more and more children into the system at the tertiary level. That is it with respect to dollar for dollar.

I would strongly urge that nothing be done to interfere with the system of meritocracy on which a democracy like ours is based. We will end up pelting millions of dollars away and at the end of it you will not have reached the benchmarks in terms of raising the level of tertiary educated people in the country. Pelt the money away but you will not reach the benchmark and at the rate we are going, we cannot reach any of those benchmarks because in the first place you have not even set benchmarks. How will you know what you must achieve by when if you had not set the road map or the output? So we are only about input—spend money, spend money, spend money. We are spending money but we are not getting value for the money, we are not getting that level of output that we need to get. We are not getting that at all, no output.

So I want to—[*Interruption*] Well that is it. Then what do you do? You come and raise the price of gas. What do you do then? You are pelting money away with no output and then you raise the price of gas for what reason? You know, I cannot understand. That is a point I really do not understand, the manner in which the gas hike has come. Now, raising the gas price touches every person in this country. It affects the cost of living of every one of us whether we are driving a car, taking a taxi, a maxi or a bus; whether we are buying our goods, anything, in a shop, a parlour or a supermarket.

Every person in the country is affected by that increase in the price of gas but the reasoning for it is so fallacious, the reasoning—it is foolish reasoning with due respect, it is nonsense reasoning because we are being told that they did it because the environmentalists say we must use unleaded gas and therefore “We are raising the price of the super gas because we want to be able to get you to use unleaded”. This is what we were told. [*Interruption*] “We want you to use unleaded gas because it is environment friendly.” Yes? However, when we look at what has happened, unleaded gas has increased by the highest amount. You also increased the cost of super.

Do you know what was the UNC proposal, Mr. Speaker? The UNC proposal was to raise the price of the super because we wanted to discourage people from using the super as that was the leaded gas. We would have raised that price and with the income and the revenue that we were deriving from that increase in the

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price of the super, we would drop the price of the unleaded to encourage people to go into the lower price. [*Desk thumping*] What I have seen—what I— [*Interruption*] Talk to our people at NP. This was the plan of the UNC, [*Interruption*] that you would raise the price of super, [*Interruption*] because I do not want you to buy it, [*Interruption*] so I put a high price, yes, [*Interruption*] and I drop the price of the unleaded.

**Dr. Khan:** Good economics.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Good economics—and I use that money now to make up for the loss in revenue. [*Interruption*] In all wonders of the world, [*Interruption*] at the time when you are reporting these huge gas finds and all this great money coming from the oil and gas sector, why is it in that year you want to raise the price of kerosene and diesel—pitch-oil, they call it pitch-oil? Why are you raising the price of things when you say you have plenty? There is absolutely no reason and so I have gone into gas hikes but I really want to get back into— [*Interruption*] but you see politics, Mr. Speaker, as I said somewhere else, politics is in your gas tank because that is what has happened. Through the politics they have raised it to a very, very unreasonable kind of thing.

There are so many areas in education but there is one area about which I am very concerned and which I want to raise with respect to pre-service teacher training. There was in place in the Ministry of Education a unit dealing with pre-service teacher training. People who wanted to teach at both the primary and secondary levels would come in and get pre-service training, that is before they actually went out there to teach they would get this level of pre-service training. This is very important because, as you know, Mr. Speaker, the way the system is at present, to become a primary schoolteacher all you need are O levels. You might never have stepped in a school in your life as a teacher, you may have never had any training, that is your minimum qualification, some of the secondary or A level qualifications.

So what was in place was this pre-service training unit and people who wanted to become teachers would go in there and get their training while the young people would get a stipend whilst they are there being trained. Part of that training was they would have an orientation programme between July and August, and then they would actually go into a school for nine months while still receiving their stipend. That did two things. They got on-the-spot training but with a master teacher who was there, the senior teacher, and that person provided assistance to the senior teacher whilst at the same time being trained.

**3.45 p.m.**

What I understand has now happened is that they completely abandoned the pre-service training for teachers, so there is no pre-training for people wishing to teach, and they have abandoned it because they said they were going to set up something called a teacher education unit, but for the life of me, I do not understand why they shut down the pre-service unit when they have not yet, for seven months still, put in place what was supposed to replace it. What kind of planning is that? What should have been done, they should have kept the existing unit in place until such time that they got the new unit going. That has not happened. So, shut down that whole pre-service training unit for seven months, and at the rate they are going, it will be quite some time before people start to be trained in this new unit they are establishing.

Mr. Speaker, there are two issues I want to raise on another portfolio which has to do with the family court. With respect to the family court, we were all very pleased when legislation was brought here to increase the number of judges, and so on, to take part in a pilot project for a family court.

Let us understand what the family court is about. The family court, because we did the Bill, the Bill was laid in the Parliament by the UNC Government in 2001. Of course, it lapsed when Parliament was dissolved. The whole concept of the family court is to take family dispute and family matters out of the adversarial arena in which the rest of the court system operates.

What are family matters? Family matters are divorce, applications for access and for custody and maintenance and application, most importantly, for protection orders in the arena of domestic violence. That is what the family court is about, and this one would have a separate court with judges specially trained in family disputes and resolution of disputes with other personnel for counselling, and so forth. That was the concept of the family court, and so, even though when the hon. Attorney General came we were not happy that she was just going to do a pilot in two courts in Port of Spain, we said, okay, go with it, because we really wanted to get this family court off the ground. I think every person in the country, where family matters could be resolved in a way away from the criminal processes of the courts. So, the pilot project is to start.

I have been advised that contrary to every other jurisdiction in the world where family courts operate, the family court being set up here at Nipdec House will not deal with domestic violence matters. That, to me, is the crux of breakdown in family life. I saw last night on the news that this lady was

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murdered. The murder that took place yesterday, that appears to be a domestic violence matter.

We saw in the *Guardian* newspaper on Sunday an entire page about families in (legal) action. A whole page giving examples of people going to the court and what happens to them, and they were welcoming this family court. They were dealing specifically with domestic violence matters. My information is, I do not have the statistics, but just from a run on how the courts operate and speaking to people who operate in the courts themselves, that the majority of family matters coming up in the Magistrates' Court tend to be basically for maintenance and for protection orders.

Let us face it. When the family life breaks down it is because of this domestic violence taking place; wife may leave, husband may leave, father may leave! In fact, one of the examples given was of an old father who was being terrorized by his children in the house. They wanted a protection order too. So, domestic violence matters, an application for protection, one goes for a protection order and at the same time one can now apply for access to one's children or custody or maintenance of one's children. They go hand in hand.

So, imagine a litigant who will now go to Nipdec House and there is a whole family court going on but he can only get X, Y and Z—access, custody and maintenance—in this family court and he will have to come back a next day in another court somewhere else, at St. Vincent Street, to deal with domestic violence matters. What reasoning is there in that?

I understand that a Canadian judge has already come down and done some training and he was very happy and was saying that this will deal with all the domestic violence matters. In Canada and other jurisdictions, they deal with domestic violence matters. They were told at that workshop, no.

Mr. Speaker, you are an attorney-at-law and know of the practise of the law. How can we put the domestic violence matters related to families outside of the family court? Therefore, I ask the powers that be and make a stirring plea for domestic violence matters—Member for Arima and the other lawyers on the other side, that it must be included in the pilot project for the family court. I urge you to please take it up with your colleague. I cannot believe, as I say, here I am, the client is a battered wife, goes for a protection order, goes to St. Vincent Street and so on, but at the same time the protection order is being sought, you are seeking to get maintenance. If it is the wife, she wants maintenance for her children. If it is a husband, he will also want access to the children. So he will also have an

interest. There they are, in the family court, which I understand is to be at Nipdec House, but those courts are not going to deal with domestic violence matters. I make a plea and I think every lawyer out there, and every family member out there will strongly support the call that domestic violence matters be placed within the purview and be included in the family court.

The second issue with respect to the Ministry of the Attorney General, I mean there are so many we could speak about. I will just select one that came to my attention today because time is against us. One will recall that for many, many moons we kept calling for the Attorney General to lay in Parliament the Integrity in Public Life Act Regulations, because what was happening, as we all know, is that persons in public life, including some persons who had now acquired multi-billion dollar houses in Maraval, and so on—persons in public life, because the regulations were not here, could not, did not have a duty, were not able to file their accounts with the Integrity Commission.

This has been the case for the past two years, and every time we called upon the Attorney General—in fact, I brought a Motion, if you will recall, Mr. Speaker, for this matter to be debated. Leave was not granted on that occasion. I know my colleague has filed a matter in the High Court also about the lack of these regulations being brought here for Parliamentary approval. In the first year we had no Parliament, so it could not be laid. Another entire year has gone by, and it is only within the last week or so they were laid.

The reasons the hon. Attorney General kept giving us was that they had to redo them, they did not do them properly. The UNC had tabled in Parliament the relevant regulations in 2001 before the Parliament lapsed. So they were there, they were drafted, but the hon. Attorney General told us we have to look at it again, see what should be done, and see if we have to change it, update it, whatever.

This morning I sent to the Parliament library and asked them to please give me a copy of the 2001 integrity legislation. I had with me the one that has now been laid in 2002. Would you believe there is nothing that has changed? Nothing has changed except—the Member for St. Joseph and myself were doing it this morning—on one form they asked me to put my date of birth and they put XXX. I think that is the only new thing now.

I do not see any changes that it took two years for this to come to the Parliament. Two years! This was laid in 2001. Hon. Speaker, you could look at it. This was laid in 2001. It took two years to bring back the same thing and all

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kinds of rigmarole stories. That is the highest level of incompetence I have ever seen on the part of any Attorney General. [*Desk thumping*]

Instead, every time, it seems to be a disease that they are all acquiring on the other side starting from the Prime Minister that every time they open their mouths, they have foot in mouth disease. Put their feet in it. The hon. Attorney General is picking up, now has a penchant for coming forward and making totally inappropriate statements for her

We have talked here in this Parliament day after day about the lack of a legislative agenda. We come back after weeks and weeks and pick up the Order Paper and there is nothing on this Order Paper of substance. The only thing is the Occupational Safety and Health Bill which is a UNC drafted Bill that is back in the Parliament, went to committee stage and which we will fully support expeditiously. All the others were there, little bits and pieces, changing a word here, a clause there.

What has the Attorney General been doing for two years? Instead, attacking the integrity, impugning the integrity of the judicial system of the administration of justice in this country. In the matter of Dhanraj Singh, I was horrified to read, the Attorney General held a press conference and is attempting to go behind the ruling of the court, behind the verdict of a jury of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So much so that the DPP had to come out and reprimand her for doing it.

Members of the law fraternity had to come out and reprimand the Attorney General for commenting on a case in that way and said, if she wants to be a politician, let another politician do it. She holds the office of Attorney General, and the latest thing she has now come to tell us is Transparency International is now saying Trinidad and Tobago is now more corrupt under the PNM than it was under the UNC. She comes to say, no no; that is the UNC's fault. [*Laughter*] Here we are in 2003, and any time the hon. Attorney General says something, I am saying she displays that level of incompetence in terms of her functions as an Attorney General.

We saw very early in our tenure, the horror with which people reacted when the hon. Attorney General attempted to give a gift to one of their Ministers. Let us not forget that, and from then on that has been the pattern of behaviour, and on each level, each time we come to the Parliament, cover up and incompetence. The WaterFarms issue and the whole Lindquist scenario. Total cover up of what was taking place there and showing interference in the administration of justice, the same way her comments on the Dhanraj Singh trial show interference with respect to the administration of justice.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken at length on various issues in the education sector. I want to repeat, I am very happy that the budget for the Ministry of Education has been increased. It is a trend that we have been witnessing over the years and I am very happy to see it. As they say, they put the money where their mouth is, but putting more and more money will not be the answer to bringing our citizens and our children up to the level of education that they need. What is needed is the competence, management, the implementation of the plans and programmes and, furthermore, they must have that quality level of education in the schools.

Mr. Speaker, the Schools Intervention Strategy Programme, the famous SISP, I remember launching that in the Ministry of Education. It was done publicly, so there was nothing to hide when I launched the SISP in February 2001; set up all the committees in place, which the Minister now boasts about touch and light the way and the mock trials, and so forth. Wonderful programmes, I am very happy, because that is the only way to deal with the problem of violence in the schools.

Regrettably, instead of taking the SISP, I remember the Minister telling us, “This is not Kamla SISP. Kamla’s was \$3 million and ours was \$24 million.” It is the same kind of attitude about more money, more money, means it is better, but it is not, because my information again is that apart from touch and light the way and all those other PR programmes, not a single one of the other school intervention strategy committees is functioning.

The Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA) has complained that the committees have been abandoned. It was a holistic approach that they need to take all the programmes with respect to SISP, that every part of the SISP must be implemented. Remember it was to dealing with the whole issue of the violence. The whole issue of crime in the schools, and I am suggesting that yes, they have taken it on board, I am very happy to see that they have taken it and walked with it and going with it, but only a part of it. What is happening with the rest of the SISP?

Finally, in the one minute that I have left, I want to point out and to ask, why is it that the contracts that are being given out for repairs, and so on, to schools—perimetre fencing and security lighting and so on—are not being given to the lowest bidder but, in fact, in several cases those contracts have been awarded to the highest bidder? Why is that happening? Is it a case of jobs and money for the boys and girls? I want the Minister to investigate that. A question answered in this Parliament with the contracts and the names of the contractors, time does not

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permit it, but the question itself here gave us the answer. It is being given to persons who did not make the lowest bid, but to those who made the higher bids.

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

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Franklin Khan):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to join this budget debate and to give my support to Government's fiscal measures for 2004 as articulated by the hon. Prime Minister last week Monday.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to, before I begin, congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, the three Ministers in the Ministry of Finance and, the Minister of Planning and Development who has responsibility for the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), all of whom have worked very hard and have presented an excellent budget for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, from the budget statement, irrespective of what the Opposition has been saying, you would realize that the economic fundamentals remain intact. The budget has indicated that despite a global slow down, global growth, economic growth was 3.2 per cent, Trinidad and Tobago experienced in that context almost phenomenal growth rate of almost 6.7 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] Even better, the energy sector continued to be the livewire and frontrunner in this regard with economic growth in the energy sector at 9.5 per cent. Our foreign reserves, as one would see in the budget, which is equivalent to 8.5 months imports. Even the best of times, most countries in the developing world are not even close to that.

Irrespective again of what the Member for St. Joseph said of wild and indiscriminate spending, our inflation stands at an extremely low 3.6 per cent. If there is indiscriminate spending, there is absolutely no way that the inflation will stay at 3.6 per cent.

**Mr. Yetming:** Stay on that course.

**Hon. F. Khan:** We will stay on that course. We continue to have a low interest rate, so people can borrow to invest. We know there are a couple challenges remaining in the economy. There is job creation which the budget has focused on and we in the PNM will continue to focus on wealth creation and, for want of a better word, a redistribution of the wealth of Trinidad and Tobago so that we can continue to build the social stability of this country, which is a big middle class that includes professionals, well-educated people and strong micro enterprises.



Mr. Speaker, my contribution today, after one year in office and one year as the Minister of Works and Transport, is to account for the stewardship of the Ministry of Works and Transport over the last year and to outline a very exciting year of activities and programmes for the Ministry of Works and Transport.

As it is one year, let me take this opportunity to reminisce. One year ago, just a few days extra from that, on the 7th of October, 2002, after a hiatus of seven years, the people of Ortoire/Mayaro voted resoundingly to put the PNM back into power in Ortoire/Mayaro [*Desk thumping*] and together with my colleagues from Tunapuna and San Fernando West, we brought in a decisive victory for the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. S. Panday:** The PNM had the Jamaat al Muslimeen!

**Mr. Speaker:** Contain yourself, hon. Member for Princes Town.

**Hon. F. Khan:** After a deadlock of 18/18, we brought a decisive victory to the PNM. If the Member for Couva North wants to know why I smile so continuously, it is because we feel proud that we are now governing this country and the country is in the safe hands of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] I will continue to smile, because based on their behaviour and our performance we will stay as Government of this country for the next 15 years. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** In the first instance!

**Hon. F. Khan:** I have deliberately started, very unlike my grain, my budget contribution on a political note. I did not intend to do it, but I have decided to do it. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! The Member is on the floor.

**Hon. F. Khan:** As I was saying, I deliberately decided to start my budget contribution on a political note, because as a newcomer to this Parliament, I sat here for one year, and for one year listened to the other side, a lethal and potent cocktail of racism, discrimination, civil disobedience and a general theme of lack of cooperation for the development of our country, Trinidad and Tobago. The Member for St. Joseph, whom I hold in high esteem—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Not anymore.

**Hon. F. Khan:** When we were bombarded on this side with a year of that potent cocktail—I do not want to call many names but largely from the Members for Chaguanas, Fyzabad, Nariva, and a sprinkling of others—I used to say to

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myself, forget them, those are the boys in pit, but there were two Members on the Opposition side that I considered to be in balcony: The Member for St. Augustine and the Member for St. Joseph.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Where Roodal?

**Hon. F. Khan:** Roodal in house! [*Laughter*] Only two Members in balcony. Mr. Speaker, I was so disappointed, when the Member for St. Joseph, after much deliberation, I guess, went down into the gutter too and said that one of the roads to instability is discrimination by the People's National Movement.

I will deal with that during the course of my contribution, because, Mr. Speaker, I just want to share the view that while that loose talk will be tolerated by certain people who represent certain constituencies on the other side, I for one very humbly, representing the constituency of Ortoire/Mayaro, I do not have that liberty, because my colleagues again, from Tunapuna and San Fernando West could tell you, we depend on every vote to succeed. I cannot afford to isolate any section of Ortoire/Mayaro and survive.

I will give some statistics to prove that. In the 2000 election, I got 34 votes in Barrackpore. In the 2002 election, I got 26 votes in Barrackpore. [*Desk thumping*] Because we come out with a particular image to the community, because we in the PNM, especially in Ortoire/Mayaro and the other so-called marginal constituencies, cannot talk that loose talk, that foolish talk.

Mr. Speaker, at Penal Rock Road, there is a village called Platanite. It borders the Siparia constituency. Penal Rock Road joins the village of Penal to the village of Moruga. The village of Moruga is largely inhabited by people of African descent, Penal is largely of East Indian descent, and a strange piece of sociology exists in this little village of Platanite which is located in the middle of the Penal Rock Road on the 13-mile mark. This village is probably the most cosmopolitan village in Trinidad. It is probably 25 per cent African, 25 per cent East Indian, 25 per cent “dougla” and 25 per cent Spanish. In 2000 again, the village has just under 200 votes. They got one hundred and twenty-something, we got eighty-something. In 2002 we got 137 votes. [*Desk thumping*] I am saying the loose talk would not benefit anybody.

**Dr. Khan:** How much the UNC got? Is that where the party was?

**Hon. F. Khan:** In the local government election of 2003—there is a village called Kernaham. We call it “Kanaham” in Mayaro, just before the Ortoire bridge. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources gives out flood cheques there occasionally. [*Laughter*]

The people of Kernaham are largely descendants of East Indians who came from Penal and Debe to plant watermelon, just in the swamp there. The village of Kernaham is 100 per cent East Indian. In the local government election of 1999, the PNM got one vote in Kernaham. And that guy died since then. *[Laughter]* When we were facing the local government election in 2001, the village of Kernaham falls in the electoral village of Cocal/Mafeking, which is actually the Nariva constituency, but it is sociologically and commercially part of Mayaro. Mr. Speaker, there are 75 people on the electoral list in Kernaham and our candidate there said he thought he could get about 20. The day before election, a young girl came to me and said, "Mr. Khan, we are getting 34 votes inside Kernaham," and for the record, we got 34 votes in Kernaham. *[Desk thumping]* I say no more. I will leave the Opposition to their foolish talk

**Mr. Ramnath:** You went and intimidate the people! What are you talking about?

**Hon. F. Khan:** Just to say, the people of this country continue to look below the surface. Mr. Speaker, through you, to this honourable House, there are people in this country who fundamentally want change, who fundamentally want the society to progress, and the detractors of that will pay a dear political price if they continue on that trend. *[Desk thumping]* As I said, I did not intend to give a 10-minute political introduction, but having said so, let us proceed now to the Ministry of Works and Transport.

**Mr. Ramnath:** You hired the Mafia in Ortoire/Mayaro! I will talk about all the bribe!

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! Please, Member!

**Mr. Ramnath:** My apologies, Sir.

**Hon. F. Khan:** The Ministry of Works and Transport is one of the larger ministries in Government, both in terms of size of allocation on the recurrent and on the development side, but more importantly, it is a very complex ministry which has a wide ambit or wide scope, a wider spectrum of activities that are undertaken in the Ministry of Works and Transport.

The Ministry of Works and Transport is responsible, inter alia, for bridges, coastal erosion, drainage and irrigation, government buildings, roads and highways, air services agreement, civil aviation, harbours, vehicle registration, public transport, shipping, traffic management and national transportation.

With regard to statutory authorities, the Ministry is responsible for the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, the Air Transport Licensing

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Authority, the Pilotage Authority, the Port Authority, Public Transport Service Corporation, the Transport Board, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Maritime and Fisheries Institute of Trinidad and Tobago. We are also responsible for VMCOTT, MTS, for national helicopters and LIAT. Quite a heavy portfolio, Mr. Speaker.

On the recurrent side, the Ministry has been allocated \$1.087 billion and on the PSIP we have been allocated \$133 million. I want to guarantee this House and the national community that every effort will be made by the Ministry to extract maximum value from the resources that have been allocated to us.

Mr. Speaker, it would be appropriate to start with drainage, because last year, I would not say I got a baptism of fire, but a baptism of water, because just after the 2002/2003 Budget, in November of last year, we saw one of the worst episodes of flooding in Trinidad and Tobago. The Cabinet, in its wisdom, took a decision at the time to allocate \$50 million to a flood mitigation programme. That money, I will outline how that money was spent and how, in our opinion, it was well spent.

Before I proceed, just for the edification of the House, what is a flood? A flood occurs when the carrying capacity of a river is insufficient to take the volume of runoff at any specific point in time. [*Desk thumping*]

#### **4.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I will give you a lecture in geomorphology now: three major factors contribute to or impact on flooding. One is the duration and intensity of rainfall, which is an act of God. If it rains continuously for an extended period of time, you will always be restricted as to what you can do. The second factor is what we call the geometry or cross-sectional area of the river, which means that if there is greater volume in the cross-section, the river can carry more water. That is where dredging, and embankments and widening of the river course assists in the alleviation of flooding. The third point is management of your catchment area.

If the slopes are forested, it absorbs water, percolation takes place and you have staggered run-off into the watercourses. If we develop our slopes, or you have slash and burn or housing development, you have accelerated run-off, sheet erosion, siltation of your watercourses and major floods in the area. In that context, I will attempt to explain what we did and how we have worked assiduously to alleviate the flooding problems in Trinidad and Tobago.

In Trinidad, we have four major river basins that are really prone to flooding. The largest by far is the Caroni basin, which has been an area of perennial flooding for centuries, and decades in the recent past. There is the catchment of the Oropouche Lagoon and the related rivers, especially the tributaries of the Godineau River. There is also the Ortoire River, which rarely floods, because even though it is the second largest river system on the island, its catchment is still part of the Guayaguayare/Rio Claro/Moruga forest reserve. Because there is not much settlement there, nature continues to do its work well. It is only when man interferes that things start to go haywire. There is also the North Oropouche system, which really operates in the Manzanilla/Toco and northeastern Trinidad area.

Mr. Speaker, during the fiscal year that has just closed, the following major projects have been commenced or are in various stages of construction: First and foremost, we have the Marabella River improvement works, which is a contract for the construction of drainage channels and reinforced concrete sides east and west of the Southern Main Road Bridge, construction of an access bridge, construction of the Southern Main Road Bridge and installation of sluice gates. That contract was awarded at a cost of \$10.1 million.

The Cipro River improvement works was a contract for rubble masonry walling and paving of the Cipro River at a cost of \$13.7 million. The areas that will benefit from this project include Green Acres and the Gulf View/Gulf City area of San Fernando. In the first project, the Marabella, Union Road and Gopaul Lands areas are targeted to benefit.

A key project that was implemented last year was the Caroni River improvement works, which is the construction of an embankment two metres high by two metres top wide from St. Helena to the Kelly weir. That contract was awarded to Lutchmiesingh Transport Contractors at a cost of \$10 million; work is in progress. The areas to benefit are Kelly Village, St. Helena, Piarco and the area around the Piarco Airport—Member for St. Joseph.

Another major contract was for the Richplain River, awarded to Bhagwan Construction Limited at a cost of \$4.9 million. The areas to benefit are Diego Martin, Richplain and environs. Contracts have been awarded for improvement works to the North Oropouche River in the Sangre Grande area, for the supply and installation of control structures along the Guayamare, Guayabal and St. Joseph Rivers.

Mr. Speaker, contracts have already been awarded for the supply of pumps on the Caroni north bank; improvement works in the Diego Martin and Maraval

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areas for reconstruction of culverts, and ancillary works in the Moruga area and reconstruction of culverts in the Princes Town area. We have dredged, for the first time after many, many years, the Guayamare River west of the Uriah Butler Highway. For those of you who drive south—and I know most of the Members on the other side drive south every day—we are building an embankment from the Guayamare intersection almost to Chaguanas. [*Crosstalk*]

We have also done significant work in St. Helena, EL Carmen, Chinee Man Ravine in Kelly Village, Madoosingh Ravine, Bamboo No. 1 drain, Deosaran main drain, Guayamare south bank, Bovell Canal and Kelly diversion. I made this point because a significant component of the \$50 million allocated for flood mitigation, after the floods of November 2002, was spent in the Caroni area, not because we wanted to pamper the Opposition or because we wanted to show that it was not reversed discrimination, but because we were dealing with flood mitigation in the Caroni basin, based on scientific decision-making. [*Desk thumping*] When we get the toxic and potent cocktails that come from the Opposition all the time, it really grieves my heart to hear that type of talk day in, day out, as somebody who has offered himself for public office. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, with the permission of the Member for St. Augustine, I can say that we have been working so well in alleviating the floods of the Caroni basin. We continue to build embankments for the St. Joseph River, where we had major flooding at Cipriani Labour College. We continue to build embankments at the Trincity Industrial Estate, which falls in the constituency of St. Augustine.

I want to read into the record a letter I received from the Office of the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, for which I complimented him. It is dated Wednesday, October 01, 2003, and addressed to Hon. Franklin Khan MP, Minister of Works and Transport. I wish to refer to the above caption subject “Flood Concerns, Businesses in the Trincity Industrial Estate”, and my correspondence to you ending with that of May 19<sup>th</sup> last year, the copy of which is enclosed for reference, and advise that the businessmen of the Trincity Industrial Estate have indicated their satisfaction with the work carried out on the Tacarigua River, particularly with regard to dredging and providing proper embankments to alleviate any risk of flooding in the area. They have asked me to please convey their sentiments to you and the staff of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Member for St. Augustine, I know you make yourself well heard at retreats, when your comrades speak this kind of language, let them know that this side continues to act in the national interest. [*Desk thumping*] There is very little discrimination, if any at all, when we allocate projects. [*Crosstalk*]

It is in that context, Mr. Speaker, when we deal with drainage, we deal with two types of problems: one, flooding in the flood plains of the river, which would relate to the Caroni basin in one regard, and then the issue of drainage in what we call the “upper reaches” of the river, which is largely the upper courses of the river as it comes through the valleys of the northern ranges. The problem there is siltation, erosion of the sides and walls of the river with the resultant slope stability issues that relate to people who are living on the banks of the river and on the steep slopes of the northern ranges; that is the other component of the drainage programme. In 2002, we spent, virtually, \$50 million in the Caroni basin.

In the 2004 budget, because the Prime Minister announced that there will now be drainage projects in the upper reaches of the river, on the slopes of the northern ranges, and mentioned Maloney, La Horquetta, San Juan and Laventille, the hon. Member for St. Joseph took that as the reason he would jump into the discrimination ring, because the Prime Minister said that he would fix La Horquetta.

What the Prime Minister meant was that all the streams coming out of the northern ranges that need walling and paving to protect the slopes, start from Arima and end in Diego Martin. The Arima River and tributaries will be included; the Tacarigua River and tributaries; the Tunapuna River and tributaries; the Curepe main drain; the San Juan main drain; the Carib main drain in Laventille; the Malick River and tributaries; the Coconut Growers Association drain in the Beetham; the St. Ann’s River and its tributaries; the Cascade River and its tributaries; the Maraval River and its tributaries; the La Horquette River, which is in Diego Martin West; the Diego Martin River and its tributaries, and the Petit Valley River and its tributaries. The whole project is a plan.

Please understand that when we choose projects, we do not do so *vaille-que-vaille*. The Opposition sees everything through the goggles of racism and ethnicity. I do not know how much we have to preach to this country again, for the people to understand, to quote Sprangalang, “We is not of that”. [*Desk thumping*] The PNM is here to give stable and sensible governance. [*Crosstalk*]

For this fiscal year, most of the projects I outlined are worth over \$60 million; some of them are between 20 to 60 per cent completed. Most of them will be completed during fiscal 2004. The other major project that will start in 2004 under “Drainage” will be the construction of the Mamoral Dam and reservoir project. Money has been allocated in the budget to start this project. Again, this project will deal with the Caparo River and its catchments. There has been serious flooding in the Caparo and Brasso Caparo areas from time immemorial.

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Mr. Speaker, the Mamoral Dam and reservoir project is a \$110 million project over a four-year period, which is going to start in this fiscal year. It involves the construction of a retention dam, and on completion of this major phase, the Caparo River flood basin and water reservoir project, it is expected that benefits from flood alleviation will come to the people of Mamoral, Brasso Caparo, Palmiste, Longdenville, Chaguanas and surrounding areas. [*Crosstalk*]

What more can I say? I have outlined the facts. I have not said those things to please the other side or anybody else. We are just showing that scientific management and decision-making are taking place, not only in the Ministry of Works and Transport, but also throughout the PNM Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I now move to the second big area in the Ministry of Works and Transport, which is what we call the “National Highways Programme” (NHP). As I have indicated, this an Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) funded programme of US \$304 million. It is virtually TT \$2 billion of works to be spent on this National Highways Programme. This is a six-year time slice programme of investment and routine expenditure into the highways network of Trinidad and Tobago.

The programme is about three years behind, and I will explain the reason for that after the tea break. It was badly handled by the last administration. I will go to great lengths to show that the UNC did not like IADB projects. The hon. Minister of Health will tell you that they skylarked with them. I have very lucid evidence that they skylarked with the National Highways Programme.

Mr. Speaker, do you know why the UNC did not like IADB projects? During that same period they built the airport terminal, the desalination plant, InnCogen and what have you. They did not like the IADB because it has very specific, transparent and stringent procurement processes that you must go through. I will show that every single IADB project handled by the UNC was way behind, because they showed no interest in billions of multilateral funding, but instead sought private funding from all the commercial banks of Trinidad and Tobago; \$150 million borrowed at the commercial rate of 12 per cent, because they refused and mismanaged IADB funds, which were at a very low percentage. They did not like how the IADB programmes were administered. [*Crosstalk*] I will talk about the overpass later in my contribution.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for the tea break, and will be resumed at 5.00 p.m.

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



**5.03 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Hon. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, before we broke for tea I was introducing the National Highways Programme. I did mention that it was an IADB-funded TT \$2 billion programme over a six-year time slice. It is structured under three elements, one of which is roads and bridges rehabilitation. Over the period of this programme, we are supposed to rehabilitate 586 kilometres of roads and reconstruct 65 bridges, do the Trunk Road expansion, and construction of new roads and highways to the tune of 50 kilometres. The programme also has an institutional strengthening component in which the Ministry of Works and Transport will be restructured and reorganized, and the Highways Division will be made into an autonomous authority called the “Roads Authority”.

During the last fiscal year, probably the single biggest accomplishment of the Ministry of Works and Transport had been the completion of the extension of the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway from St. Joseph’s Village to Golconda. [*Desk thumping*] The residents of Oropouche, Siparia and those areas further south now have an easy drive coming from Central and North, pass the San Fernando Technical Institute bypass and straight down to Golconda. In a jiffy you can reach to Debe and Penal through the M1 and M2 Ring Roads.

Mr. Speaker, that project was completed in just over 24 months at a cost of \$164 million. It was accomplished within the budgetary allocation of \$165 million. [*Desk thumping*] We, at the Ministry of Works and Transport, feel very proud, because over the last several years there has been a tendency to have cost overruns on major projects in Trinidad and Tobago.

We are using the NHP to prove that once there is proper project management expertise in the ministry, projects can be completed on time.

Today, the tools of project management are very sophisticated. While a lot has been said about cost overruns in the past, like the Hall of Justice and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, those were projects of the 1970s and early 1980s. Today, the system is more robust; project management is now a specialized field of study. There is good software to assist you in managing complex projects. At the Ministry of Works and Transport, we are saying that once you get the required expertise on board, you have a focused, monitoring exercise, the project management skills are there, and the project management tools are available to the people who are so qualified, we do not see any major risk of significant cost overruns, in the future, for very large government projects. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker, save and except the construction of additional lanes or the dualling of existing roads, apart from the Mucurapo Foreshore, no new road has been constructed in this country since the construction of the Solomon Hochoy Highway. [*Desk thumping*] Both the Solomon Hochoy Highway and the Mucurapo Foreshore were constructed by the PNM. I do not want to get into the politics of that too much, but I wanted to explain how significant the first phase of the Highways Expansion Programme would be.

During the course of this year, five significant contracts have been awarded, construction has started and we are at various stages of completion. This is called “Year II” of the NHP, and contracts to the tune of TT \$192 million have been awarded in four packages. Contract 17 includes Cedar Hill Road from the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Mayo Road, 4.5 kilometres, is one contract. Couva Main Road from the Solomon Hochoy Highway to the 14-mile mark, which is the Gran Couva Police Station, at a length of 8.2 kilometres, and the Diego Martin Main Road from Axion Court to the intersection of St. Lucien Road, a total of 18.7 kilometres, was awarded as Contract 17 to Seereeram Brothers Limited.

Contract 18: 13.75 kilometres along the Guaracara/Tabaquite Road, from the 2.5 kilometre mark to the Morichal Junction. This is not road paving, it is total rehabilitation and reconstruction. Every single drain will be repaired, and every single landslip along the course of the road will be reconstructed. Contract No. 19: the Moruga Road from the Naparima/Mayaro Road Junction at Petit Café to St. Mary’s Village, a total distance of 10 kilometres was awarded to General Earth Movers. Contract No. 20, the Mayaro/Guayaguayare Road from the Mayaro Junction to Guayaguayare Village, 15.9 kilometres, was awarded to Haniff Mohammed and Sons.

Contract No. 21 includes the Naparima/Mayaro Road from Albamy Street to St. Croix Junction, nine kilometres. Another component of that contract is the Southern Main Road from Bridge 161 to Bowen Trace, which is in the Chatham area past Point Fortin. These five contracts are at a total cost of \$192 million, spanning the length and breadth of Trinidad. Again, these projects were selected on a scientific basis, and not because they were in Ortoire/Mayaro. They are in Moruga, Mayaro, Guayaguayare, Cedar Hill, Guaracara, Diego Martin and Point Fortin, based on scientific studies because of the need to reconstruct the road network of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, year three contracts, which will be awarded, hopefully, by the end of this year or, at least, by January or February of next year, will be 120 kilometres of roads and 40 bridges at a cost of TT \$300 million. I want to outline

where the year three contracts will be: 40 bridges throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. It would be difficult for me to read out the names of the 40 bridges, I think that would bore you, but the roads will be offered in two packages.

Package one will be the Caura Royal Road, Caura, 8.2 kilometres of rehabilitation in the constituency of Tunapuna; the Morne Coco Road, 5.2 kilometres; that is in the Diego Martin East constituency; the North Coast Road from Las Cuevas onward to Blanchisseuse, 12.6 kilometres; the Naparima/Mayaro Road from Poole to Rio Claro, 11.9 kilometres, and the St. Croix Road in Princes Town, from Princes Town to Barrackpore, where the villagers protested. Mr. Speaker, I met with those villagers, and I outlined the programme to them, which is in the year three contracts. It should cost approximately \$20 million. Nine landslips will be repaired along that road, 41.58 kilometres of road. In Tobago, we will be doing the Mason Hall/Les Coteaux Road and the Spring Garden Road, 6.1 kilometres.

The second package of roads, all of which will be awarded by the end of this year as year three contracts will be the Lothians/Inverness Road, five kilometres, which is in the constituency of Princes Town; the Naparima/Mayaro Road, continuing the second section, between Poole and Rio Claro; the North Coast Road from La Fillette to Blanchisseuse, 9.8 kilometres; the San Francique Road from the Siparia/Erin Road to the Siparia Road through Timital—Member for Oropouche, all that is my territory as well—is the area that will be repaired; and the Toco Main Road from the Valencia junction for 10 kilometres going towards the Matura area. The sixth road will be the Moruga Road from St. Mary's Village, where we have finished the first contract, onward into Moruga.

Mr. Speaker, year three contracts will be for 40 bridges, 120 kilometres of roads, at a cost of TT \$300 million. As we move on, we will deal with highways expansion programme. As I mentioned before, we have completed the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from St. Joseph Village to Golconda. Tenders have been invited for consultants to design a series of major highways in Trinidad and Tobago. The consultants have already been pre-qualified, and submissions have been made, so we expect by the end of November, for the latest, to award major design consultancy contracts for the following highways: one, contract for the design of the continuation of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from Golconda to Point Fortin. This is a distance of 32 kilometres, and is expected to cost in the vicinity of TT \$600 million for construction.

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The second major consultancy contract for design will be for the continuation of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from Wallerfield onward into Sangre Grande, a distance of 9 kilometres. It is estimated to cost \$323 million. There will be a design contract for the third highway, a major highway from San Fernando to Mayaro, with phase one being to Princes Town. The phase to Princes Town is expected to cost just under \$300 million. These are three significant major highway construction programmes to open up the infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago, and to cater for the development of its various geographic segments.

Highway to Point Fortin, highway to Mayaro, highway to Sangre Grande—if I had my choice, you know which one I would choose first, but this is not how we govern; it is not how we operate. The highway to Point Fortin has been given No. 1 priority; the highway to Sangre Grande has been given No. 2 priority, and the highway to Mayaro has been given No. 3 priority. [*Desk thumping*]

### **5.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, concurrent with that, designs should be completed by the end of this year and construction starts in January or February for the dualling of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway from O'Meara to Wallerfield and that is the final piece of the dualling of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway. There has been a bottleneck of traffic there for many years and construction should start very shortly, hopefully by February of next year.

Mr. Speaker, the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin will cost \$600 million, and from Antigua Road in Sangre Grande, \$400 million or thereabouts, that is \$1 billion and Princes Town will cost \$300 million, that is \$1.3 billion, and a little again, if I put \$300 million with that I could almost carry it to Rio Claro, but I want it to stop at \$1.6 billion.

It is mind-boggling that for \$1.6 billion this country got an airport terminal building at Piarco, the atrium of which is now leaking with the heavy rains. What this Government is going to give you for \$1.6 billion—chalk and cheese—three major highways of over 100 kilometres in length in a country that has had no new roads and highway construction since the Mucurapo Foreshore and the Solomon Hochoy Highway. Both were built by the PNM over 20 years ago, critical infrastructure as the Member for Diego Martin Central is advising me, critical to Point Fortin because of the LNG expansion.

The development of the La Brea Industrial Estate is finally going to take place. I do not want to get into energy because the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries amply covered that area, but we are going to build the top deck

for the BhP platform right in La Brea. Nobody talks about the dilapidated conditions of La Brea, everybody is concerned about what is happening in Caroni. I am not saying it is wrong, but the man who has been suffering for many years with poverty in his constituency is finally going to see the light as the People's National Movement continues to develop. [*Desk thumping*]

The Wallerfield Industrial Estate, the highway is going on to Wallerfield straight into Sangre Grande as we continue to build the infrastructure. I will talk about traffic shortly but we have to pull employment eastwards because it is our intention for persons on the East/West Corridor to come on to the artery of transportation, and depending on where you are coming from, half should be turning left into Port of Spain and the other half should be turning east as we open up Trinidad and Tobago for all. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the National Highways Programme as we said, is a significant programme to the tune of almost \$2 billion. The third component of the programme would be slope stability or landslip repairs and four contracts would be awarded this year to fix a series of landslips throughout Trinidad and Tobago at a cost close to \$100 million.

There are two types of landslips in Trinidad which show the geography, and geology, which is interpreted as the demographics. There are the landslips that occur in the mountainous areas along the North Coast Road and Toco Road which are what we call unstable slopes, and those that are 60 and over which occur as rock falls from the mountains. Those are very simple to repair, you just build a wall to hold them.

The more difficult ones to repair are those that we see in central and south Trinidad, those are caused from unstable slopes based on the volume of clay in the soil. So there would be slope failure at a very low angle and these are the landslips that we see along the Naparima/Mayaro Road, the Tabaquite Road, Moruga Road, St. Croix Road into Barrackpore and all these areas there are a proliferation of landslips. Those landslips call for more significant engineering designs and cost significantly more money to be repaired. Much focus will be placed on those and we have been working in unison and in conjunction with the major reconstruction programme that is going to take place on the Naparima/Mayaro Road, Moruga Road, St. Croix Road and Tabaquite Road.

The final component of the National Highways Programme is the institutional strengthening. During the course of this year it is expected that we would be bringing legislation to Parliament for the establishment of the Roads Authority of

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Trinidad and Tobago which would be an autonomous authority with full responsibility for the construction and maintenance of the road network of Trinidad and Tobago. We think if we unlock that system from the mainstream government, there will be greater levels of efficiency and cost effectiveness with regard to road maintenance and construction. Expect that legislation to come as we continue to transform the public service of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, many exciting things will be happening in Trinidad and Tobago this year and the next five years. As I told somebody recently, if he leaves Trinidad now and returns in five years, take a taxi to go home because he would be lost. [*Desk thumping*] He would not understand the infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Dr. Moonilal:** That is why everybody leaving.

**Hon. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, I now move to another component of the roads programme. I want to get back to the discrimination and I am sorry I have to do that today because I really want to use this opportunity to deal with an issue that stuck in my stomach for a whole year so I have to talk about it now.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport has been paving roads for the last two years since the PNM came into office, it is a programme called the Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency (PURE) and to date has spent close to \$300 million. The first \$250 million was spent under the auspices of my predecessor, Sen. Piggott, at the time and during the last year, we spent close to \$50 million on paving roads.

Prior to that, the UNC had a road-paving programme in 2000 administered by Carlos John and \$1 billion was spent on that in this country in 2000. I want to share some statistics with this honourable House today.

Mr. Speaker, under the PURE Programme for which I am responsible, we have a fixed-cost contract through Nipdec for paving roads at a cost of TT \$250 per tonne of hot mix. At the fixed-cost contract—and I want you to listen to this carefully and I hope you do not mind my saying so. At \$250 per tonne for hot mix laid, TT \$1 million will pave four kilometres of road. If my mathematics is correct, \$1 billion is supposed to pave 4,000 kilometres of road and they spent \$1 billion. Do you know how many kilometres of road are under the Ministry of Works and Transport? It is 2,200 kilometres of road and they were getting hot mix at \$275.

**Mr. Rahael:** Dollar for you, dollar for me.

**Hon. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, save and except consultancy fees and what have you, every road under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Works and Transport, 2,000 kilometres, could have been paved twice, and they did in fact pave some twice. [*Desk thumping*] Where did the money go?

The Ministry of Local Government, which deals with minor roads and higher densities in certain areas, have just about 4,000 kilometres of road.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro has expired.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the House for this extension. Understand what \$1 billion could do. That is a lot of money and properly managed, that should have resurfaced every road that needed surfacing in Trinidad and Tobago. There should have been no basis for persons to burn tyres and protest for road-paving exercise.

The matter is with Mr. Lindquist right now so it is not finished. I asked: Where did the \$1 billion go? At best we would have gotten \$500 million worth of roads and I will make one more point and I will say no more on this.

We checked the amount of bitumen Petrotrin sold over the period and we know the formula for the hot mix, and nobody imported bitumen into the country during the road-paving programme. So all the bitumen must have come from the Petrotrin refinery.

**Mr. Rahael:** Talk about corruption.

**Hon. F. Khan:** When we took the amount of bitumen that was sold, even if the contractor shortchanged the mix by 20 per cent in the plant, Petrotrin and Lake Asphalt did not sell half of the bitumen. If there was ever evidence that this country's money was squandered, wasted, and stolen the—[*Inaudible*] [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance at the time, the Member for St. Joseph—I like to call names, Member for St. Augustine, because I still place some confidence and hope for the future in you all because we put you all in balcony. [*Crosstalk*] I will probably give him one more chance to stay in balcony.

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Mr. Speaker, I now move to what is considered a contentious point with which I would deal quite succinctly this afternoon. I now deal with national transportation. Currently, before the Central Tenders Board is the award of a contract for a new comprehensive national transportation study for Trinidad and Tobago, which should be awarded during the course of this month. I cannot prejudge the Central Tenders Board, but a reputable international firm that has expertise in transportation systems and most of the companies which did in fact bid, had linked up with a local counterpart in a joint venture.

I would like to draw the attention of this House to the fact that the last comprehensive national transportation study in Trinidad and Tobago was done in 1967 and much has happened in this country in terms of traffic and road construction from then to now. The PNM Government is going to put this whole thing together and come up with long-term solutions to all the issues that face this country in terms of its national physical development as it relates to traffic management.

It is in that context I have to respond to what has become the contentious Uriah Butler/Churchill-Roosevelt Intersection, which the Leader of the Opposition made a big fuss to have the overpass built.

Mr. Speaker, several things are pertinent to a decision on the Uriah Butler/Churchill-Roosevelt Intersection. First and foremost, the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway is not a freeway. From Arima to Port of Spain there are 15 traffic lights along the way. What would happen if there is not a holistic management plan for the process? If freeway status is given to the major intersection, which is the Uriah Butler/Churchill-Roosevelt Highway Intersection, you would simultaneously carry that traffic into the weaker intersection both upstream and downstream.

On a morning, that traffic would be simultaneously taken into El Socorro and Aranguez and the traffic will be backed up unto the overpass. On an evening between the Uriah Butler Intersection and Curepe there are about four traffic lights through the Valsayn area, and I am not saying it will not bring some level of relief, but defining a solution to the traffic along the East-West Corridor calls for a holistic approach to solving the traffic management issue. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to read a report from the Ministry of Works and Transport and I quote from an internal Ministry of Works and Transport document. It is from a study team we had put together earlier this year, dated October, 2003. I quote.



Over the past four years, debates on the challenges have been reduced—

These challenges mean the intersection challenges.

quite incorrectly through a combination of propaganda and high-tech computer simulations to the singular question of what should be done at the Uriah Butler/Churchill-Roosevelt Intersection.

When given such limited considerations, the semi-popular but incomplete response was ‘build an interchange’ and this seems the only logical conclusion.

However, building an interchange at the Churchill-Roosevelt/Uriah Intersection in isolation of other improvements upstream and downstream of the intersection would serve only to transfer traffic congestion to other less efficient intersections at a faster rate.

I continue.

This would render the huge financial investment of the interchange inconsequential and bring ridicule to the technical competence of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

This was the engineer speaking.

Mr. Speaker, we met with the Joint Consultative Council (JCC), this is where all the engineering expertise lies in Trinidad and Tobago, these are the people who first made the population aware of what was happening at the airport. One of its members cried at the Commission of Enquiry into the Airport, he felt so hurt as to how the money of this country was wasted.

I would read some excerpts from this report which was sent to me. It is dated April 2003. It says:

In the early days there were 23 persons per vehicle, now over the last 33 years from 1967 there are now four persons per vehicle.

The report goes on to say:

The issue of the long-term capacity of the East/West Corridor needs to be addressed before making major decisions on capital works. This approach is of particular significance when decisions on great separations have been made.

Great separation is the overpass.

The paper prepared by Mr. Ronald Nurse, see Appendix 1, demonstrates that in the long term, serious capacity constraints will occur west of the proposed Churchill-Roosevelt Highway/Uriah Butler Intersection.

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And this is the key part here.

Using road improvement methodology, the most effective way to increase the capacity in this region is to provide a relief road from north to west and west to south traffic from a location south of Grand Bazaar to Aranguéz.

And I will deal with that shortly. It continues:

This fact mitigates against the construction of a three-level interchange at the Uriah Butler intersection.

The report continues:

The JCC thus advises that the three-level interchange should not be constructed at the Churchill-Roosevelt/Uriah Butler intersection. Great separation allowing for free flow from east to west and west to east traffic should take place at this intersection.

I will put this in layman's terms for you now. What this is saying—and which is the decision this Government is going to take and the formal decision will be taken in Cabinet within a couple weeks—is what the UNC started to construct at the ridiculous price of almost \$250 million is what you call a tri-level multidirectional overpass.

The recommendations of the technocrats at the Ministry of Works and Transport and the JCC are saying what we need is great separation east/west and west/east, which means there will be a ramp moving east/west and west/east and the west to south traffic will pass under to go to south.

However, that would not solve all the problems because there is no storage capacity along the route. The ultimate solution would be a new bye-pass and this would also be approved in the proposal. It would be constructed from the Barataria Interchange south of the Grand Bazaar to touch down on the Uriah Butler Highway and that traffic would now move south. Apart from making it a freeway west to south, it will bring storage capacity to the roads so that all south-bound traffic would be leaving the highway at Barataria so there will be easier flow along the East-West Corridor. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, that would be the first phase of the other significant revolution that the PNM will be undertaking in the next five years, that would be the precursor to the construction of the Southern Link Road which would be a new freeway from Macoya to connect to this road into Barataria. So the Southern Link Road will now be the new freeway of what the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway was

intended to be. There will be a freeway status from Sealots because the last traffic light is at Barataria.

From Sealots, take the bye-pass road, go across the Uriah Butler Highway and taking freeway status to Macoya to the last traffic light, into Wallerfield. There will be a new highway to Sangre Grande, and an upgraded Manzanilla Road to Mayaro. That is why I said if one leaves the country and returns in five years he has to take a taxi to go home. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I would not delve too much on the intersection, I think we have articulated our point quite clearly as to why the intersection as presently perceived by the UNC cannot proceed. Firstly, it is technically flawed. The project was approved without structural design work being done. Pieces of heavy tons of concrete could not be held with an arch and cable suspension when it is supposed to be suspended from the bottom. They would have killed somebody you know. Somebody would have died on that overpass. It is conceptually and structurally flawed.

I dealt with the financial arrangements on many occasions and I have letters where Mr. Humphrey says: "I instruct you." I will read one of them. In my term in office, there is nothing I like more than this letter. It is the Minister writing to the Chairman of UDeCOTT saying that it is taking too long to construct the overpass. It is a letter dated February 2001 to Mr. Robert Tang Yuk, Chairman of UDeCOTT saying that they are moving too slow. I will quote the last paragraph.

I hereby instruct UDeCOTT to award a design build contract to PRES-T-CON on conditions that items of the project be negotiated using the engineer's estimate as a starting point in the negotiation without any further delay.

He goes on to say.

A similar award should be made to Ifill for its component of the project without delay.

Do you know who is Ifill? The people who were supposed to build the arch.

Mr. Speaker, I say it as a joke, a Government Minister bravado enough to write the Chairman of a state corporation for a \$125 million contract saying: I instruct you to give an award to company "X" or company "Y" without being tendered for.

We at the Ministry of Works and Transport had been looking at the holistic traffic management issues. We know that a simplistic solution of just building

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roads will not solve our problem. The country needs a mass transit system into the city; it also needs to pull some employment opportunities eastward so the whole system is being planned in unison.

The Wallerfield Industrial Park, the upgrade of the highway system, the construction of a new freeway from Macoya, the southern link road into Port of Spain and even then by any city in the world there will be commuters en masse into the city during the peak hours of commuting which is in the morning and afternoon. Port of Spain and along the East/West Corridor in particular needs a mass transit system.

We recently had discussions with the Indian Government, the State Rail Company of India has offered through a government-to-government agreement to do a concept paper on the feasibility of a light rail system, or a monorail along the East/West Corridor. It is still early to say what will happen, but hopefully by the end of this year.

Mr. Speaker, when that concept paper is presented to the Minister of Works and Transport, its contents would be reviewed and if we feel the idea is worth taking forward, then we would have international tenders for a full feasibility study. I am only making this point very briefly because I just want to show that we are looking at the short-term, medium-term and the long-term as we continue to plan for the development of Trinidad and Tobago to 2020 and beyond.

In wrapping up, there are several issues; new legislation will be coming during the course of this year from the Ministry of Works and Transport. As I mentioned, it would deal with the Roads Authority. Another interesting one is that we are bringing Breathalyzer legislation to Parliament during this term and I was confidentially advised that the best action one could take to destroy the United National Congress is to bring this legislation to Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] I do not know if it is true, but I was confidentially advised.

Mr. Speaker, there will be several pieces of legislation coming, there will be the transformation of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago into a private organization that we hope to be the transshipment hub for the southern Caribbean and Latin America. There are many changes at the airport with a new strategic plan and we have finalized the transformation of the Department of Civil Aviation to the Civil Aviation Authority.

In closing I will elaborate some more on the Port Authority. It is being redesigned into several autonomous businesses. There will be the Port of Port of Spain (PPOS), a holding company, which would be a land by infrastructure based

company that will be vesting all the port assets and lands. There will be a separate company to deal with the Government's shipping service and another company to handle cruise shipping.

The Port of Port of Spain would be seeking a joint venture partner and already proposals have been made and we are in the process of choosing the preferred partner for the port's reorganization.

Currently we would be spending over \$100 million on the port this year. We would be constructing Berth 7, which would allow the port the capacity to have two large container vessels to dock alongside each other for the significant increase in the amount of shipping and tonnage coming along the Port of Port of Spain.

**5.45 p.m.**

During the course of this year there would be a major transformation of the port which would be handled smoothly. All this talk about retrenchment, that transformation process, just as it happened with the Civil Aviation Authority, without any ranting and raving with anybody, would be a smooth transition and we continue to look at the human element as we make these structural transformations towards the economy.

I want to say a quick word on the Civil Aviation Authority. We feel proud to announce today that on October 01, 2003 the Civil Aviation Authority has become fully operational. [*Desk thumping*] It was a major exercise on public sector reform and it was a major precondition by the FAA to give Trinidad and Tobago aviation over-sight responsibilities and to reinstate the Piarco airport to its category one status.

I was just told to give a slight update of the Tobago ferry. That, again, is an area in which over the years, for whatever reason, the country has not done it right and this time we intend to do it right. We are going to modernize the transportation system from Trinidad to Tobago. We are going to acquire a new ferry to serve between Port of Spain and Scarborough. Through the Central Tenders Board we procured a shipping broker to source the vessel for us. We have given him specifications and the company is presently preparing a short list of vessels. We have two options available to us: One, which is called the modern fast ferry, which is an aluminum hull catamaran-type design and then there is what you call the mono hull conventional fast ferry. We are weighing the pros and cons; the operating costs; the capital cost; the type of lease arrangements/purchase that we can get into; the marine conditions and what have you, bearing in mind

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that most people conceive the service as a passenger service. But by and large, for probably 46 or 60 per cent, it is more a cargo service than a passenger service.

So we want to make the right decision. That investment would be to the tune of plus or minus TT \$200 million. We have a technical team that includes representatives from the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Port Authority and the Tobago House of Assembly, who are looking at the matter in the greatest detail and hopefully by the end of this year we would be in a position to tell this country the type, the name and the nature of the vessel we are buying.

In closing, I have outlined, I hope, the activities of the Ministry of Works and Transport over the last year. I think we have worked well in drainage; highways; national transportation; in planning the future. We have outlined what we have planned to do for 2004. As you see, we are going to transform the physical landscape of this country.

No PNM Minister can make a contribution without talking about 2020. As we move towards 2020 and as we transform the physical landscape of this country, I have told people that there are many parameters to define a developed country, because the Member for St. Joseph said we do not know. What I have to say, as the Minister with responsibility for infrastructure, is that when you enter a developed country and look at the physical infrastructure, you would know. So at the Ministry of Works and Transport we would continue to upgrade the physical infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago; we would continue to expand the highway system; we would continue to work on a national transportation policy and solutions for the transportation problems we have in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I feel proud to have led the ministry and I want to thank my technical staff and with the plans that we have outlined for fiscal 2004 and beyond, rest assured that I would continue to smile because I am very proud of being part of this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Chandresh Sharma** (*Fyzabad*): Mr. Speaker, one cannot help but reflect on what has happened in Trinidad and Tobago in the last year. As we all agree, the purpose of budgets is to uplift and add value to the lives of people. More than that, it is to make sure those who are poor are given a bit more and those who are under-privileged can access more. What we have seen in Trinidad and Tobago is quite the opposite.

Of course, when my good friend, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro spoke, I guess his conscience was bothering him and he spoke about race and discrimination. He is very correct because this is what obtains in Trinidad and

Tobago at this point in time. It is instructive that we look at that as well simply because it is affecting the lives of every citizen in this country. In fact, it could not have been put better by the hon. Prime Minister, and I would come to that in a few minutes. Before I go there, I want to look at the July IMF Report which was made available on the Internet and I want to read the last line:

“The political stalemate ended with the general elections held in October 2002.

The October 2002 election resulted in a clear victory for the PNM. Nonetheless, political divisions largely along ethnic lines continue to complicate the policy making context.”

This simply means it affects all our lives on a daily basis. In fact, when you look at a travel advisory from the United States at this current time, it says in part:

“Visitors should exercise normal caution and good judgment.

Violent crimes, including assault, kidnapping and murder, have involved foreign residents and tourists, including U.S. citizens. Since the beginning of 2002...”

PNM rule, of course:

“... there has been an increase in kidnappings for ransom.”

Of course, one American citizen has fallen victim to crime.

**Mr. Hinds:** Indian?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** The Member for Laventille East/Morvant is asking whether it was an Indian. You see, the whole PNM fight is with Indians. Indians are affected in this country and they can say what they want, that is the way it is. The PNM is doing everything. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The Member for Fyzabad is on his feet so please, let us not provoke the Member. Let him make his contribution.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps this can best be treated with by quoting what the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago said in the *Express* of June 29, 2003 while campaigning during the local government election. It states:

“PNM must welcome Indo-Trinis, pleads Manning.

Prime Minister Patrick Manning admitted on Friday night that the People's National Movement (PNM) has primarily been a one-race party.

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In an address lasting almost an hour, Manning repeatedly pleaded with Afro-Trinidadian members of the PNM to welcome Indo-Trinidadians into the party and urged them to stop the ‘loose talk about race’.”

So it is from the PNM and it is historical. It was not yesterday. I have made the point that for 30 years there were no secondary schools in the Caroni districts because Indians live there. The article continues:

“Speaking at a PNM public meeting at Centre Pointe Mall in Chaguanas, Manning said as a politician he always tried to live by two of the PNM’s founding principles—morality in public office and inter-racial solidarity.”

The fact that the Prime Minister talks about it is enough for this budget debate to focus on it because the Indo-Trinidadian community makes up nearly half of the population and the PNM cannot continue discriminating.

Let us look at what obtained since PNM came into government in the last year: Crime has increased—victims, largely Indians; Kidnappings have increased—largely Indians; murders—mixed; corruption from PNM. When the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro was speaking and he tried to talk about Carlos John, I want to ask the Member when he said how he won that seat—it has been said by many people and I have heard it from quite a few sources, that the Mayaro campaign received \$5 million from a particular contractor who today was given a large contract in this country—pay-back time.

In fact, that project was estimated to cost \$88 million-odd. It is very interesting that in 1997 when the 36-inch line was run, it cost \$88 million. We are now going to be running a 56-inch line and it is rumoured that that contract would be awarded for \$66 million. The question is, if in fact it is happening, is the PNM involved? The short answer has to be, yes. If in 1997 a 36-inch main was run and it cost \$88 million, how is it today, a 56-inch main running parallel along the 36-inch line—not yet awarded, but it is rumoured that it is happening and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Prime Minister must talk about it.

For the last year we have seen the highest levels of discrimination and when one of the PNM spokespersons, Dr. Cudjoe, spoke about admissions at the University of the West Indies and about introducing a particular approach, it did not stop there, you know. He was speaking on behalf of the PNM. Let me tell you what now obtains. At this time the Medical Science Department of the University of the West Indies is considering lowering its standards to treat with the PNM, largely in keeping with Cudjoe’s appeal. Listen to what they are planning to do.



The board is now recommending that the admission be changed to give students points for things like music, dance, drama, painting, ceramics. Imagine that! In the future under the PNM when you visit a doctor, he would ask you: "Can you do ceramics? That is your cure. Can you dance? That is your cure." That is PNM medicine.

This is what they are negotiating. It is very interesting. Twenty scholarships have been negotiated for the St. Georges University in Grenada. Ten of these scholarships are to be awarded on merit and ten others "on criteria". What is this criteria? It is PNM contact again. In fact, it is going to cost much more to send that student to Grenada to study medicine. It is because these 20 students would have to pass through the admissions filter that obtains at the University of the West Indies. Under the PNM they have already lowered the standards for CXC admissions and now they are saying: "You do not need to beat books." In fact, the Minister of Health earlier indicated that we have some of the best doctors in this part of the world, in Trinidad and Tobago, and now you are going to lower those admissions.

The PNM is destroying the country. We have seen the highest levels of racism. Of course, we are seeing the business community every day migrating. They are sending their children abroad. We have seen an increase in unemployment. Of course, the national debt has increased. The banks are reporting capital flight on a daily basis. We have seen an increase in Ministers' salaries—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Member for Fyzabad is on the floor. He is the only one who is entitled to speak and I am appealing to all Members on both sides, let the Member speak and let him have his full say. Any Member who has not spoken on the Government side can answer him. Members on his own side, please, he does not need prompting—please.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning two of our Members appeared in a place in Chaguanas and you should have seen the large number of police officers there. You have heard earlier when a march was led by someone who has been appointed by the PNM to a high position, that person was treated at the highest level, and you saw the difference last week in another place. By any view, that is racism and discrimination. Call it what you want, but that is what it is.

Why does that occur so much under the PNM? I am sure the Prime Minister did not intend it to be this way. But now the Government is paying for discrimination. We have seen an increase in the Community-based Environmental

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Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) and on previous occasions we identified the number of contractors who are members of the PNM. Someone asked, “So what? PNM members cannot get contracts?” Of course, they could, but it must be fair and square. How is it that the majority of contractors in CEPEP who have received \$200 million do not reflect the pot-pourri of Trinidad and Tobago? Is it by design or by accident? How is it that the \$125 million spent on the Unemployment Relief Programme has a similar kind of reflection?

So again you are seeing the discrimination, day in and day out. For the first time we saw criminal leaders meeting with a Prime Minister and negotiating kidnappings and murder. Public spending keeps increasing and we are not seeing value for our money. The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro spoke about the NREP. It is very unfortunate when a Member comes to this House and chooses not to speak the facts. What obtained under the National Road Enhancement Programme (NREP) was bridges; the same landslides he spoke about. He did not talk about that in his programme. The \$300 million that they are spending under the Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency (PURE), which again is an in-house matter, you are not seeing the spread of it. Under the NREP you saw roads throughout Trinidad and Tobago. There were landslide repairs, drainage, bridges, throughout the country. So to come and make the comparison with PURE, which is only paving—under NREP you had road reconstruction. In some areas you had the road being dug up to 20 and 40 inches.

Another thing is, who administers these programmes? Does a Minister do it? What is the role of the public servants? Who are signing off on these things? Does the Minister know how payments are made? Does the Minister sign off on a cheque? Is that what obtains under the PNM?

When you talk about fixed cost, Mr. Speaker, if you paint this building and you use paint at \$30 a gallon and \$50 a gallon, there is a difference. So when you talk about what was purchased from Lake Asphalt—in fact, under the PNM, they are not buying anything from Lake Asphalt and the products from Lake Asphalt are world renowned. The John F. Kennedy Airport is paved with the product of Lake Asphalt; also Germany. In fact, the yard of Buckingham Palace is paved with the product of Lake Asphalt, which was developed under the PNM and the UNC, of course. The Minister chooses to come here—now I suspect the reason he has chosen to tell us about that is because he wants to hide something. I hope it is not that contract to be awarded soon.

The Prime Minister, in presenting the budget, spoke about this leading us to Vision 2020. One of our senior thinkers in this country, Dr. Terrence Farrell, “has

advised that if Trinidad and Tobago aims to attain developed nation status by the year 2020, it has to achieve a rate of growth of 10 per cent per annum.” He was speaking at a particular place. Now we know what obtains at this particular point in time. So based on Dr. Farrell’s thinking, which is agreed by many others, it just cannot be. He states:

“When compared to other developed countries, he maintained, we were far behind those of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which had a per capita income of between US \$25,000 and US \$33,000.”

Right now 35 percent of this population lives under the poverty line and those countries that were obtaining \$25,000 and \$33,000 include Singapore which had a per capita income of US \$17,000 and US \$22,000. He continues:

“‘If we have to get to developed country status by 2020’, he said, ‘we need to establish some kind of benchmark outside which this can be done. Maybe we will not get to US \$20,000, but the question is what does TT need to be able to do to get within striking distance of those countries?’ he asked.

He said, ‘We need to understand that no country is going to jump from where we are now, growing at about 4.5 percent GDP to seven percent in 2004. This can’t happen, economies don’t behave that way.’ TT, he continued, therefore needs to accelerate gradually from where we are now at 4.5 percent up to and in excess of seven percent. ‘At some point in time between now and 2020, TT will have to grow at rates of 10 percent per annum, US dollars,’ he asserted. ‘This has never happened in TT before.’...

‘If you spend too much Government and society expenditure on consumption and not enough on capital formation then there will be no growth.’”

So again, we are seeing all the thinkers expressing their views and the Government, for some reason, not wanting to treat with it.

I want to respond to the other matter raised by the Minister and treat with some local government issues. What we have seen in the last year and for some time before that, under the National Social Development Programme known as the NSDP, which was a programme that did not come to this Parliament but received close to \$70 million of taxpayers’ money, the Government used it for political campaigning. So when the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro spoke about how he won Ortoire/Mayaro, that is what they did.

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Close to 385 self-help projects that were done in the last year, 83 per cent was done in PNM constituencies. In fact, in Laventille West or East, or perhaps both, there were 54 projects. That is how the PNM discriminates and that is why we are where we are in this country today. Under the National Social Development Programme \$70 million, of which \$50 million was spent on WASA to do water projects in the majority of PNM areas.

In fact, when you look at the way Government spends money, it chooses PNM constituencies and a large section of the society feels discriminated against. You heard from the Minister of Health and the number of health centers were in PNM areas. When the Minister was talking about moneys received from the World Bank, what he did not realize when he was attempting to say that we are not interested in World Bank money, it was under the UNC that most of those moneys were raised in the first instance—close to \$400 million.

So again the Minister chooses to come here and say anything to look good, singing for his supper. Of the US \$449 million, the majority of it was obtained from UNC negotiations. In 1996 the IDB approved US \$134 million for the Health Sector Reform Programme. That is close to TT \$1 billion. In 1996 the UNC administration obtained \$120 million for the National Highways Programme, close to TT \$1 billion again. Of course, the PNM got \$5 million for the trade sector support programme. It was negotiated by the Minister of Trade and Industry.

So to say that the UNC did not treat with the international funding agencies is largely inaccurate, as we have demonstrated. Most of the programmes—the highways programme that the Minister spoke about and the National Health Sector Programme—again was obtained from UNC funding. In fact I want to refer the other side to an IMF working paper. It is by Sanjeev Gupta and Erwin and it talks about: “Does higher Government spending buy better results in education and health care?”

Based on studies done—and they have looked at Trinidad and Tobago—it has shown that under the PNM that does not obtain. When you look at the health sector today, it is the worst it has ever been. Trinidad and Tobago was also part of a study by the World Development Bank when they spoke about the oil windfalls in a small parliamentary democracy and they looked at what obtained in Trinidad and Tobago under the PNM when we had the oil boom. What they found again was failure.

The other matter I want to touch on is community centres which, of course, is under the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs but built by the Ministry of Works and Transport.

**Mr. Speaker:** If the hon. Minister of Health and the Member for Oropouche wish to carry on a discussion may I recommend to you that you use the facilities of the tea room?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Again, we have seen that moneys are being removed from the construction of community centres across Trinidad and Tobago and placed in PNM constituencies. We saw it in the constituency of the hon. Prime Minister. Where centres are being built for \$1 million average, that particular centre is being built for \$4 million-odd and there is a cost overrun on it already. So you are denying other communities. The same thing obtains in the Diego Martin West constituency.

So this country, governed by the PNM, is largely for PNM constituencies. The constituency of Fyzabad gets very little under the PNM. They cannot show a single project that was done in that area. The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are not prepared to treat with this level of discrimination. They cannot take it. How many of them are going to leave this country? If the PNM feels that when they come here and say we are going to spend \$22 billion, as if it is their money, the money belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and every one of us must feel comfortable to live in this country and know, whichever government is in office, it is treating with all its citizens.

When you look at what obtains in many ministries, in particular the Ministry of Works and Transport, while the minister has identified a number of projects and talks about one particular design is not good, it is the same technical people who gives advice on them. The consultants largely remain the same. So they cannot tell the UNC it is good one day and when the PNM is in office they tell them it is not good. It is like paying Ken Burgess. Any opinion you want for the right price you can obtain it. That is how Ken Burgess earns \$90,000 per month. You tell him what to say and he would say it to you.

The Minister spoke about the Airports Authority. I want to direct your mind to the personnel expenditure at the Airports Authority which was increased by \$11 million. The Airports Authority for the PNM has become the employment bank. That is where the Minister sends letters every day, telling them to employ people—political pay back. Contracts are \$11 million. In addition to that, goods and services have gone to \$94 million, an increase of \$9 million. Goods and services at the airport are largely maintenance. The established list of contractors is changed by the PNM as they see fit—*[Interruption]* The Member for Diego Martin East confirms it.

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So you see the levels of discrimination every day. The PNM seems to be looking to see “what can we take tomorrow; who can we get rid of?” It is a concerted effort.

**6.15 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, it is similar at the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, expenses keep increasing every day and revenues are dropping. More than that, however, when you look at the employment—when you look at state agencies employment keeps increasing. Again, why is it increasing? Is it producing more? No. The reason for increasing employment is jobs for the boys and girls. Again, Mr. Speaker, a high level of discrimination.

I saw an advertisement for Special Reserve Police (SRP) and you cannot tell me why in Trinidad and Tobago, where we have a pot-pourri society, the advisements does not reflect Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, it is very interesting when I look at the photographs on this budget document—you may not see it from where you are, Mr. Speaker—they do not reflect Trinidad; and Tobago and this is so all over.

**Dr. Rowley:** What is wrong with you?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** How you mean what is wrong with me? Why do you not look at it? Why? When you present a national budget document, it must reflect Trinidad and Tobago; the discrimination obtains in everything! I have demonstrated in all the advertisements placed by the Government that they do not reflect Trinidad and Tobago. The only time they found an Indian person to put in an advertisement was for Caroni (1975) Limited, when they were licking up 9,000 jobs. [*Interruption*]

Why is this happening? Why are we scared to talk about it? Why must we not talk about it? Are they prepared to treat with it? They are going to wake up one morning and half of this country would be gone. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** You are talking race now. Why are you talking race! [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order please!

[*Members continue to speak loudly*]

[*Mr. Speaker pounds the gavel*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Order, Please! Hon. Members, I think it has come to a point in the proceedings where I have to indicate to Members that they

consult—Look at your Standing Orders. There is a provision in Standing Order No. 43(3). I will have no hesitation in invoking this provision. This is the last warning I am giving to Members. Standing Order No. 43(3) talks about disorderly behaviour and I can ask for a Member to withdraw from the House. I am appealing to Members. I do not want to do it but if I have to do it I will.

Member for Fyzabad, please continue.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government closed down Caroni (1975) Limited because they claimed it was losing money and 9,000 employees lost their jobs. When you look at the multiplier effect where those persons who treated with goods and services were supplying indirect employment, it would have resulted in about 100,000 jobs for \$300 million. The Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago obtains \$134 million from the Government. Now, the question is: Why is Caroni (1975) Limited treated differently from the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago? Is it because the composition is different? Is it because it is a party group? Is it because the workers support the PNM more than they support other parties? It must be something. There could be no justification for getting rid of 9,000 workers from Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Speaker, every so often the history of the PNM is to attack that sector of the community. When you look at donations from state organizations—I feel sorry for the Member for Tunapuna. He means well, the roots man. He came here and said: Ramleela, 27 groups, each gets \$10,000 each. Mr. Speaker, who is he fooling? With respect to the 27 groups, Ramleela is played for 10 days; that is 270 days of Ramleela at \$270,000; that is \$1,000 for 27 groups; that is \$30-something dollars per day for four hours of Ramleela playing. Carnival, for two days, receives \$40 million. Divali, Eid-ul-Fitr—who are we in this country? Are we nobody? Is this what the Government is doing?

Under the Sports and Culture Fund there was a group that was trying to promote long time Indian singing called Biraha; they gave them \$10,000. If it is something else, however, it is \$30,000 or \$40,000. I want to call some of those figures. Mr. Speaker, the National Lotteries Control Board, like many other state organizations gives donations. Tell me if you want to identify with this, Mr. Speaker? The steel orchestra was given \$25,000; Spektakula Promotions, \$10,000; Fonclaire Steel Orchestra, \$125,000; uniforms for band \$5,000; Fonclaire Steel Orchestra, another \$125,000. The Member for Arima said tassa drums would be the next national instrument. Not in your time! Not in my time.

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[*Interruption*] So what is this? Is this the Government that the people elected? Is this where my hard-earned tax dollars are going?

Mr. Speaker, the same gentleman who led the march at another place and who was not interfered with, obtained \$50,000 donation to write a book.

**Hon. Member:** Serious? Call his name.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** This is a very frightening place! This is now PNM country! If you do not support the PNM, you might be murdered; you might be kidnapped; you might have to pack up and go. It is the highest level of racism.

I cannot imagine how Members on both sides have a difficulty treating with this sometimes. The country is collapsing! It is in crisis! It is not for the want of not having money or intelligence; it is because it is racially divided. The international agencies are observing it; I just read from the report. We need, as the House of Representatives, to treat with it. Every radio programme talks about it. Every newspaper carries articles about it. The Government has an obligation to treat with it.

I am speaking as the representative for Fyzabad. I represent one of the most mixed constituencies in this country—more mixed than any Member on that side. [*Interruption*] What did you say? The people are not happy. The Indians are not happy. The Africans are not happy. The “Douglas” are not happy. The Chinese and others are not happy. That is very important. Mr. Speaker, over the last five elections 50,000 plus people have voted for me. The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro said he got some votes in some Indian area in Barrackpore. He made a big thing out of it today. But, Mr. Speaker, did he scare those people? Did he take the terrorists down there? That is what he did, Mr. Speaker. The same thing happened in San Fernando West. We saw a gentleman who was liming with the Prime Minister with a machine gun on election day. Of course, unfortunately, he is no longer with us because I would have invited him to answer some questions. The levels of discrimination by the Government are extremely high. The levels of discrimination by agencies of the Government are just as high.

Mr. Speaker, a question was asked some time ago about use of the Road Improvement Fund (RIF) and when one looks at what obtains under the PNM—I have an answer here, St. George East occupies one and a half pages; St. Andrew/St. David and Victoria, the same, but when one looks at Caroni there are very few areas under the RIF. This is documentary evidence. This is not something that I have made up.



A question was asked in this Parliament about the Rural Electrification Programme by the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) for the period January 2002 to April 2003. The question was asked for the Minister to list the projects and addresses of the works undertaken and the number of dwelling homes obtaining electricity connection under this programme. Mr. Speaker, again, when one looks at the spread of projects—Members on both sides of the House obtained those answers—again the majority of the projects are in PNM areas: Mayaro, Maraval, Palo Seco, Moruga, Point Fortin, Rio Claro, San Fernando, Santa Cruz, Santa Flora, Siparia, La Brea, Toco, Tunapuna, Valencia and Wallerfield. How is it that every time a question is asked and one looks to see where projects are being done, the majority of the projects are in PNM-controlled constituencies? So the level of discrimination is very frightening.

More than that, Mr. Speaker, I have demonstrated on previous occasions—and I do not want to be misunderstood to indicate that no projects take place in UNC-controlled constituencies; certainly they do, but a lot less. There is no fair play and no equality. In fact, when one looks at a UNC-controlled constituency one would observe that wherever there are PNM pockets of support a project is sure to take place there.

Mr. Speaker, under the National Commission for Self-help the earlier arrangements that the communities would come together and assist themselves in funding those projects. In most UNC-controlled constituencies that still obtains—the constituents still have to come up with some of the money. In the PNM-controlled constituencies, however, they come up with nothing, in the majority of cases. So at every level of government expenditure where there are opportunities—the Member for Siparia made the point earlier with respect to the School Feeding Programme—it is changing to treat with PNM supporters.

I want to give notice to this House and to the Prime Minister in particular, the mover of this Bill, that it is much too much. I represent many people and I cannot contain them. Wake up and smell the coffee, Mr. Prime Minister. I am sure you mean well. This cannot be by your design. [*Interruption*] Yes, they will be careful but they are prepared to lose their lives. You threaten them to be careful; you threaten them with riot squads but they are not scared of that, Mr. Prime Minister! The Prime Minister must understand that there comes a time in the lives of people when they must stand up and they are going to stand up. [*Desk thumping*] They are standing up in every part of the country. They are standing up in New York, Toronto and England because Trinidad and Tobago is still their country. They ate the “cascadoora”. You must not poison the “cascadoora” they have to eat.

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Consider this as parliamentary brotherhood advice. You have been here longer than all of us. You are the longest serving Member in the Commonwealth—*[Interruption]*—wherever it is. Make sure you do not end up being the Prime Minister under whose chairmanship the highest level of discrimination or racism obtains. I know that is not your intention.

One cannot talk about this budget without making reference to the problem that affects us the most. I have talked a bit about crime and based on what we on this side are seeing, we are not satisfied that the Government is approaching the reduction of crime in an intelligent way. I suggest that more communication has to take place. There must be a fairer distribution of the resources. There must be more consultation. Like Members on that side, we were also elected to represent people and to add value to their lives. The PNM cannot choose the projects for us. Members on that side can talk about how much work they have obtained in their constituencies: how many health centres; how many Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) contractors; how many URP gangs but Members on this side cannot lay claim to the same. That must not be allowed to continue.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen children of nationals of this country being forced to migrate and the Government must do something about it. They must not be made to leave this country every day. We have heard business groups asking for foreign intervention to get them out of this country, maybe, to grant visas and so on. Of late, when citizens of this country decided to communicate their disgust, we heard the Prime Minister talk about a riot squad. I suggest to the Prime Minister that that is frightening. When one looks at what obtained in Guyana, Grenada, Jamaica and Uganda they started off in a very similar manner and one has to be very careful. Mr. Prime Minister, the national community feels that we are going the way of Grenada with the Mongoose Gang; Jamaica and Idi Amin. I am sure you do not want to communicate that to them, so revisit that, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, the hot item for many people is what obtained with Caroni (1975) Limited and there are many schools of thought. One of the things outstanding, however, is the way Caroni (1975) Limited workers were treated. They were fooled and they were taken advantage of, but that is not the end of it. This budget has made no provisions for them, none whatsoever. They have put \$225 million into CEPEP; \$125 into URP and you have not thought about the 9,000 workers in Caroni (1975) Limited. I am asking—the purpose of this debate is to make sure that we could revisit some of the proposals and we need to revisit and

to make sure the 9,000 workers are treated with. The entire lifestyle of the people of Caroni (1975) Limited community has been affected. There is still time to treat with it. You should not make them feel the way you are making them feel. Think about it! Are you happy with what you have done to the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited? *[Interruption]* That is not the way to treat workers of Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Speaker, something arrested my attention earlier today. Over the last couple of years that I have been here—normally when a Member of Parliament dies, we pay some respect. It is perhaps a slip-up that we did not observe the passing of Dr. Winston Mahabir. *[Interruption]* Hold on! Hold on! You would remember that when Dr. Winston Mahabir left this country he was a member of the PNM, and you would remember the reasons he left. It is recorded in the history. That is still with us today. Here was a Member of Parliament elected by the people to serve and he could not serve out his term; he had to leave. We must not fear talking about it. In fact, if you read this book *In and out of Politics* you would cry, being a former Member of this House. We have to be extremely careful how we treat with the national community. The idea of this budget is not just to give figures and to talk about approaches.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch a bit on the regional corporations. The regional corporations in this budget are receiving a lot less money but more than that, in many areas, it is not really obtaining funding. Why is that so? If one looks at the Siparia Regional Corporation, for instance, it covers from Cedros to Penal with 71,000 people. When one looks at the moneys put aside for goods and services, per person, for the next year, it is about \$10. I hope the Member for Arouca North noted that. With CEPEP you have \$225 million for 5,000 workers. So 5,000 workers are going to receive \$225 million and 71,000 people living in the Siparia Regional Corporation are going to receive \$10. Mr. Speaker, that is a high level of discrimination. The reason the Government is doing is to avoid treating with the people. Dengue outbreaks, no moneys in the regional corporations, and so it is in many corporations. In fact, when one looks at the increases it is the least in the UNC-controlled corporations. Am I correct, Member for Arouca North? You can expand on it. We cannot continue this way. Everybody would see this.

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the services that obtain and the Minister's intervention in the regional corporations—we have seen roads being paved. In fact, in the constituency of Siparia I saw a cheque for \$500,000 to pave Mulchan Trace. Mulchan Trace is in the area where the PNM candidate won the election so they were prepared to spend large sums of money and they do this every election.

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The Penal/Debe Corporation sent recommendations for roads to be paved. Mulchan Trace is one of the least populated areas, but \$500,000 directly—

**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. [*Mr. G. Singh*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, I want to make the largest appeal of my life that I could possibly make for more than half of this population: that the Government revisit how it does business; how it treats with the nationals of Trinidad and Tobago and to make sure, more and more, that it demonstrates that all of us, regardless of who we are, in which constituency we live, have a place here. It must be in keeping with the National Anthem of Trinidad and Tobago. Unfortunately, from all the evidence that I have demonstrated thus far to which I would add a bit more, it shows high levels of discrimination. I want to make the point as often as I can that discrimination and racism obtains and we have to deal with it.

In a question asked in this Parliament about the employment for monthly-paid staff in the URP, the majority of workers employed on a monthly basis for which the answer was presented in this House, again, showed levels of discrimination. This cannot be by accident! If one could argue that in certain geographical areas one may find different people living, that is okay, but even where that does not obtain one sees discrimination, when one looks at the Couva office, for instance, and when you look further south. So the Government has to become conversant and aware.

With respect to the purchase of equipment—materials and so on—let me tell you about discrimination. In the last two years a number of The constituency offices for Members of Parliament—they are Government buildings—the only buildings that were repaired were those that were occupied by the PNM. Not a single office occupied by a UNC member has been repaired or renovated. The Member for Diego Martin Central office has been repaired. [*Interruption*] Do you not go in your office again? The office of the Member for Diego Martin Central; the office of the Member for Diego Martin West—

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, let me just put on record that since I took up office in 1990, my office has not been repaired.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, you being a lawyer—[*Interruption*] Hold on a second. You being a lawyer, sometimes they would take the jury to the scene of the crime. Let us go and visit his office and see. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, you are welcome to come tomorrow.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** I will file a question in this House to list all the offices occupied by Members of Parliament which have been repaired, renovated, painted, windows installed and air condition units installed and you will see that only offices of Members of Parliament on that side—no all. The Member for Diego Martin East office has obtained some repairs—

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I want to caution the hon. Member. He should really get his information correct before he lays charges, lest I be tempted to ask that he be referred to the Privileges Committee. [*Desk thumping*] The Clerk of the House can guide the Member with respect to that. There has been no work done on my office.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, if these matters are not raised then we would not be doing our duty and the oath of our office says: "...without fear or favour". Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of information here and because of the time I am selecting. This one has just come to my attention. Would the Minister list the names of all the individuals who are recipients of funds for the hosting of Phagwa III, including addresses and the amount of moneys granted? One group got \$4,000, another group got \$5,000, one group got \$17,000, and one group got \$4,000. The largest organization in the country got \$42,000. Now, when one looks at moneys that the Government makes available—You want to bring this country 2020 but what are you going to show them? Will you show them only one part of the culture? Are you going to show them everything? Are you going to show them Divali, Hosay, Eid-ul-Fitr, stick fighting? All those things must be promoted. But, Mr. Speaker, you notice the focus and concentration has always been to keep one area down.

In URP high levels of theft and corruption continue. The Member for Diego Martin suggested that I should know. Yes, I know because I keep tags. In fact, in Point Fortin when there was no construction work—I hope the Member for Arouca North would treat with it—\$4 million for the purchase of material had to be paid. Now a large amount of it was used for campaign purposes.

A particular hardware obtained from the early PNM days to today the largest purchases. Point Fortin is directed to go to this hardware in Arima. I think it is J. Chai. That is the Minister's favourite hardware. Under the , they sent a truck that,

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I think, cost them \$600 to rent with driver/loader for 12 clips to put up something for water. Imagine that! Mr. Speaker, that is management of this economy, only to make sure they get the business. So you see the kinds of things that are happening here? The moneys of this country are being wasted.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot talk about Phagwa and Ramleela and not talk about Carnival. This question was asked: "Could the Minister inform the House of the following: the groups and organizations funded by the Government for Carnival 2003; the quantum of moneys allocated to each group or organization and their addresses, etc." Caribbean Prestige Foundation \$100,000, principal, William Munroe; Soca Chutney Organization, \$90,000, principal, George Singh, nephew of a Member of this House; National Action Cultural Committee, \$100,000; Trinbago Unified Calypsonian Organization, \$3,819,369.25; National Carnival Bands Association, \$2.6 million; Pan Trinbago Association, \$6,592,000; Regional Carnival Committees, \$1.4 million.

You know what they did, Mr. Speaker, I have been the Member for Fyzabad since November 1991 and every year we observe all the national festivals; we celebrate Carnival. Under the they give the money to a group led by the candidate for the PNM, so the group that I am part of gets no funding. They do that in most of our constituencies. Steelbands, \$301,000. So when you see this kind of distribution of funds it is questionable. It makes one wonder what is going on in this country.

Under Refurbishment of Community Centres: We have made representation for refurbishment of community centres and we have seen very little happening in our areas. With respect to sports, the grounds which have been lighted are not the grounds for which we made representation. Now, I do not know how you would treat with that; to me that is discrimination. I represent young girls and boys who want to play sports as well but I cannot get a playground in my area lighted. The PNM chooses the ones they want to do. Another PNM project.

#### **6.45 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, the Adopt a Community Programme is one where state agencies or bodies are encouraged to adopt a programme. Do you know how that is done? The Minister decides that. A Member of Parliament sitting on this side would write, asking to have this community group adopted but once it comes from the UNC it is not treated. Recommendations from the UNC for employment cannot obtain. I think the Member for Caroni Central made the point that if that recommendation comes from the MP's office they are in serious trouble.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to miss speaking about employment practices of state bodies. These bodies such as Petrotrin, WASA, T&TEC, TSTT, BWIA, Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and all similar bodies do not represent equality of opportunity. It does not matter whether one has O'levels or A'levels any more. One has seen the levels of discrimination. That is why I really felt what the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is feeling when he talked about racism and discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, in WASA one is moved and the reason he is moved has nothing to do with his qualification, experience or ability to do the work, it is because he looks like you and me and he is paid twice the sum of money today; and that obtains all over MTS and the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. If the PNM feels I would stop talking about it they lie! I will never stop talking about it. Never! [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, when you made reference to somebody looking like you and me, if I may dare say so, I do not think we look alike. [*Laughter*] Some people tell me I am good looking. [*Laughter and Desk thumping*]

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, I hope you are not denying your roots. I hope you are not forgetting who you are.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, I am commenting on my looks not my roots.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, I will arrange a meeting with the CEO who was fired from WASA and you would say if you look like him. [*Interruption*] Yes, I am like Dr. Rowley. The Member for Diego Martin West must remember that because of an ugly action he committed he cannot go back to Tobago. It was a very ugly act.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, hon. Member, continue.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, on the question of local government I suggest to the Member-- [*Interruption*] Do you have pockets? Mr. Speaker, I hope the Member for Arouca North would explore the possibility of making sure the local government bodies become more responsive to treating with issues. For instance, the chairman's fund needs to be increased because oftentimes people go to the local government bodies asking for assistance in emergencies or for all kinds of different things. I hope she can treat with that.

In addition to that, there is a difficulty with many state bodies and I appeal to all Ministers in particular. The public servants in your ministries seem to have a difficulty treating with Opposition Members because they feel that they would get

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into trouble if they treat with them. I suggest that some approach be extended because we are legally the representatives of people and from time to time when they come to us—whether it is for a pension requirement, assistance for rebuilding a home—those requests for assistance or investigations should be treated in a fair manner. I do not think we want any favours granted, but we want to make sure that if the Member for Diego Martin West can get assistance in the form of \$10,000 for a constituent whose house was burnt or get the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, URP gangs or CEPEP to lend assistance, we should be able to make sure the needs of the constituent are met in the same manner.

Mr. Speaker, I appeal to the Minister with responsibility for the National Commission for Self-help, to look at the distribution of projects. All of us on this side, and I suspect all Members on the other side, have requests for projects, but what you see is not a fair distribution.

The other matter I want to touch on is with respect to the MPs office and I think the Member for Diego Martin Central may be able to treat with this. Over the last year, the need for services from the Members of Parliament offices on both sides has increased and I want to make a few suggestions. I do not want to make suggestions that would go to the House Committee because I think they require moneys to be utilized from the budget. I suggest that every Member of Parliament on both sides should immediately have a toll free phone number and that would cost the State very little.

When constituents come to our offices with emergencies or they are in serious trouble, we always have to give them assistance from our own moneys, but we are elected Members of Parliament and we are representing people. There is a death in a family and they need some assistance, how often can we find moneys from our own personal resources? I suggest that a fund be established—this obtains in many parliaments as in our neighbouring Barbados and Jamaica.

Again the offices of Members of Parliament in many cases also double as community centres where members of the community use them for classes, training, hosting of functions and so on and there must be more assistance for the maintenance and provision of these services. I think this will benefit all of us. I am hoping that you can make every effort to treat with those areas.

Mr. Speaker, I have noticed in the provision of moneys for local government that there is very little money made available for water distribution. I suggest that we find a way for two things: encouraging the local government bodies to do more water self-help projects. It does not make sense that at the end of the day so



much money is spent on trucking when you could run pipelines. However, make sure there is fairness and equality in it, do not choose only PNM areas.

I have noticed that people want to access different kinds of things, for instance, forms to apply for pension or the SHARE programme or whatever have you, but those forms are never made available to Members on this side. I suggest that the offices of local government and the offices of Members of Parliament on both sides be made a place where constituents could obtain those forms. It does not make sense for somebody to come to the constituency office in Fyzabad to be told they must now go to Port of Spain or San Fernando to collect a form, but for some reason the PNM thinks it is better for them to keep them there.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of community development the local government bodies have to be empowered to treat with more requests. For instance, earlier today I asked the Minister of Local Government: How many gangs have you sent to clean the mandirs for Divali? He treated my observation with contempt but at Carnival time they are available so it is that level of discrimination, that fear to treat with something that his colleagues may not agree with. Divali is a national festival and is observed in the temples. Under the UNC administration every temple was cleaned during Divali, every masjid was cleaned during Eid, every church was cleaned during Christmas because you want to promote that community participation. The gangs are already there, oftentimes, with very little to do and even if there was work to do you must make sure—The same thing with CEPEP gangs, they are available to maintain the MP's offices on that side but you cannot get them to clean on this side. [*Interruption*] But you have the URP gangs by you night and day. I have made the point about the National Commission for Self Help and I really hope that we will see a fairer distribution in treating with the local government bodies.

The other area I would touch on is youth development as it relates to the local government bodies. I suggest to the Minister that there must be a concerted effort to treat with whatever youth development is taking place. For instance, in the area of cricket, oftentimes they start the preparation of the grounds very late so the youths are denied that opportunity. In some areas they play competitive cricket and if the grounds are not of a particular standard they do not qualify or they lose points for it. I know there is the Sports Commission and I am hoping that could take place. In the area of culture I suggest that local government, again, make a concerted effort to treat with the request of local government.

Mr. Speaker, having said everything what I have said, I want to recap, very quickly. Based on the last budget presented in this House for which we had to

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give our blessings, we have found a high level of discrimination in the expenses available to everyone. We have seen many communities not being treated with and I want to make sure that does not obtain anymore.

In a question in this Parliament the Government was asked to identify where it had given its support for agencies to borrow money. We saw large sums of money being borrowed. That answer was circulated and in some instances there was \$400 million and in some instances US \$30 million or US \$40 million. Those were not presented in the House, but more than that the state agencies are to do work throughout Trinidad and Tobago and I have demonstrated here today without any doubt that there is a high level of choosing PNM areas over UNC areas. I want to make sure that when moneys are borrowed by these agencies that they treat with all the areas in Trinidad and Tobago, on both sides of the House.

Mr. Speaker, on the question of consultants employed by the Government, oftentimes the Government does not report to this House unless Members ask who are these consultants and what are they employed to do, for instance, UDeCOTT. We have seen it reported in the print media that UDeCOTT is buying large areas of land at very high prices for housing. Again, only in PNM areas: San Fernando West, Roy Joseph and Tunapuna. The point is that all of this has to be done fairly. You cannot be spending large sums of taxpayers' money to buy these lands, put up houses and very few people benefit from it.

In fact, when you look at the infrastructure cost of a lot of land under the NHA's housing project it is costing close to \$100,000 just to service that lot which is extremely costly. The sugar welfare group does the same thing for \$20,000 and NHA is doing it for \$100,000. That is another area in which we have to make sure that we limit the wastage and reduce it as much as possible.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Caroni Central spoke about AIDS, but I just want to remind Members opposite that it is felt that by the year 2005 GDP would be affected by 4 per cent or 5 per cent because of Aids and we have to make sure that we treat with it. Again, local government and offices of Members of Parliament must be empowered and provided with resources to lend assistance in this fight. It is extremely important because the death rate from Aids is about the highest in this part of the Caribbean in the age group 25—35 years. I am hoping that through local government, in particular, which is already treating with communities far and wide we would find some way of providing resources available for that programme.

Mr. Speaker, I have looked at what obtains in countries like Brazil, England and so on and I have found that local government plays a very important role in

the wellness and well-being of people in the communities. I encourage the Minister to look for resources to focus on youth, mothers, HIV/AIDS prevention, youth projects and getting the NGOs more involved. Even in the United Kingdom, there is involvement of NGOs, youth groups and CBOs in community programmes at the highest. They have found that it reduces teenage pregnancy and alcoholism.

I think the comment by the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro was very unfortunate when he spoke about the Breathalyzer and people here. If you drink you drink, that is one's personal business and he must not make things personal. It shows him to be very childish and I am sure he did not mean it. As I am on the point that we need to treat with that, it has shown to be very a good agent for the reduction in domestic violence, and again we can lend to that. Of late more and more communities are employing the local government's approach to improve safety in the community and to add value to the community.

Mr. Speaker, we have a number of suggestions. We are not only criticizing the budget—it needs a high level of criticism—but we have to make sure, at the end of the day, that all our people are treated fair and square. If it is one appeal that is coming collectively from this side and the national community of Trinidad and Tobago, who now live close to 75 countries, is for the PNM government to reduce—they know they cannot stop it—the levels of racism and discrimination and treat with all of us fair and square.

I pray God's blessings on all of us. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister in the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs (Hon. Eulalie James):** Mr. Speaker and hon. Members of Parliament, I embrace this opportunity to contribute to this important debate which was initiated by the presentation of the Appropriation Bill by the hon. Minister of Finance and Prime Minister of this country, on Monday, and which has attracted the attention of citizens both within and outside this august Chamber.

The budget presentation 2004 by the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister is the best I have heard to date. [*Desk thumping*] I say so without fear of contradiction because the budget has catered for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am particularly pleased that the Minister of Finance dealt with the burning issues facing the country, specifically the social programmes such as education, housing, health, sports and national security. What I wish to do publicly though, through you, Mr. Speaker, is to give credit to the Minister of Finance for identifying the constituency of Laventille West to benefit from the drainage

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programme [*Desk thumping*]*—*in particular the Beetham drain. I know that many of the residents in Beetham would be happy to know that at last they would get some relief.

Mr. Speaker, in spite of all the negatives I have faith in the PNM Government and my Prime Minister that little by little, during this term, Laventille will be brought to the place of which we all would be proud along with rest of the country. We are seeking to make this beloved nation a developed one by the year 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

This debate is about people and their development. It is not merely about dollars and cents or income or expenditure. It is more about the astute management of our nation's human and financial resources and could bring about improvement in the quality of life irrespective of their social and cultural origins. The Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs, a ministry which I am proud to represent, also has people as its central plank in the process of development.

My ministry is at the forefront of confronting the social problems in our society and engaging people in communities to contribute to the alleviation of these problems. More specifically, the quality of life approach guides my representation and work with my constituents of Laventille West.

As I reflect on the performance of the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs over the last fiscal year, I am more and more convinced that we are on target and many people are benefiting from our intervention. I do not pretend that there is a magical solution to all social ills or that there are no difficulties in satisfying the needs of the people. The experience of Laventille West has shown that the problem of crime and unemployment has defiled the best efforts of governments in the past. Incrementally though, this Government is gnawing at the roots of these problems and we are optimistic that improvement is on the horizon given the support which is forthcoming from community groups and members of the public.

There is a growing appreciation in Laventille that Government alone cannot solve all the problems. Community groups are now appreciating that they must be part of the solution. There were a number of initiatives over the last fiscal year which have demonstrated the partnering of the community with Government in the drive to improve the condition of life of the people of Laventille. These include a consultation and solution-oriented seminar for groups in Laventille which I initiated as parliamentary representative. The facilitators included people

like Fr. Clyde Harvey, Mr. Frank Dolly, Mr. Anthony Watkins and so on. Out of this seminar came useful suggestions and ideas for alleviating social problems and physical deficiencies in the constituency. We have ongoing community because we recognize that there are no quick-fix solutions to the problems and we are working with the younger generation in particular so that they are the ones who would change Laventille.

I also thank the Minister of National Security and members of the protective service for the assistance they have given us in the constituency to abate crime in the area.

The non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) also organized their own consultation and submitted their findings for consideration by the ministry. At the level of the ministry officers of the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs embarked on a preliminary survey to develop a database on the profile, needs and group structure in the communities between Port of Spain and San Juan including Laventille. The ministry is therefore developing an increased capacity for drawing on reliable people, people-driven information, to inform social policy and programmes.

The evidence is clear that this Government does not intend to address the problems of Laventille or any other community in an ad hoc or superficial manner. We prefer a studied, people-centred approach which would result in incremental benefits.

The ministry will continue to interact with the representatives of community groups to incorporate their views and identify needs in our policies and programmes. Already communities' concerns have contributed to the reshaping and the successful implementation of some activities during the past year and include the designing and increasing of the scope for new programmes at community centres; a redesigned centre which has been constructed at Soogrim Trace while the St. Babbs centre has been refurbished with a specific room for training in computer literacy. This is part of the ministry's plan to ensure community centres are upgraded and equipped with computers in order to ensure that disadvantaged communities are not left behind in the world of computer technology.

As part of the upgrade programme, community centres will be refurbished at Red Hill, North Malick, Laventille Extension, Straker Village. Eastern Quarry, Leasehold, Beetham Gardens and Pelican Extension will receive new centres. These are not done in isolation to other centres in the country for approximately

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25 centres are to be built in the new term. I heard the Member for Fyzabad say that no centre was looked after in his area. I give him the assurance that at least one centre would be built in Thick Village in the year 2004.

A major concern is the east Port of Spain Cultural Complex. This building was constructed before the PNM demitted office in 1995, since then the building has been vandalized, neglected and underutilized.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the past government took no interest in this centre. My ministry has already accessed professional advice as the first step in restoring the building and making it available for use by communities. The refurbishing work includes the complete overhauling of the electrical system, painting and correcting structure damage resulting from termite infestation. In addition a security fence would be constructed and aesthetic-enhancing sales outlets would be provided for use by concessionaires as a means of impacting on the employment situation.

Mr. Speaker, my ministry promotes education and training as the gateway to employment and income generation. In this connection we have been implementing a number of programmes to equip the unemployed with skills for job creation. Among our facilitating programmes are: Skills Training Programmes at community centres; the Expert Centre Programme; the Women in Harmony Programme and the Non Traditional Skills for Women Training Programme.

The Women in Harmony Programme has started the process of breaking the cycle of poverty and dependency in the lives of many women who are fixed with inadequate education, low level skills and no skills and lack of opportunity. It is designed, as well, to transform the lives of persons without any hope for gainful employment and persons with an enhanced self-esteem and a chance at economic independence.

Mr. Speaker, in the year 2003, my ministry has trained 25 women in office procedures and management skills at Lenore's Business School. They are in the process of forming themselves into a company and I can assure they will become very successful businesswomen;and some of these women are from Laventille. [*Desk thumping*] The ministry is certainly proud to have made an impact on the lives of these women.

**7.15 p.m.**

In the constituency of Laventille, there are many households headed by females with very little or no recourse to reliable financial and social support

systems. As a means of providing support for these women and other disadvantaged persons, the ministry in conjunction with the Families in Action Organization, would be conducting programmes in parenting which would take place in the month of October.

The programme would attempt to help parents; re-orient their perspectives and approaches to parenting; build self-confidence in their roles as caregivers and aid in the functional development of healthy families; the programme would also address the issue of parenting from a gender perspective whereby the roles and responsibilities of both men and women would be examined in the social context of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, there was another programme that took place during the month of September and just last Tuesday, those participants graduated. It was a course undertaken by the Ministry of Social Development, a course in leadership with one of its components as anger management which is needed in the area of Laventille.

While I was at that graduation function, I felt heartened to see that many of the participants were young people, and how they have learnt so much with just 15 contact hours. One should have heard the reports from those young people concerning the programme.

The ministry would also be supplying the Morris Marshall Foundation with books for its library. This would be useful in literacy and in the Learning to Read programmes. We also hope that this would increase the passes that we have in Laventille, although there have been many successes, for there are many lawyers and doctors and so forth, but many of the students need that assistance to enable them to pass for the “better” schools.

Crime Prevention and Community Security. My ministry has adopted a proactive approach to the problem of crime and delinquency. This approach complements the law enforcement focus of the police service. This partnership is quite evident in the anaculture concerts which seek to engage vulnerable members of communities in cultural performances. The concerts encourage our youth in particular to make productive use of their free time rather than drift towards breaches of the law. Our concerts have been very successful in igniting community participation and support.

Mr. Speaker, just last week I visited the area of Four Roads Tamana, an area that I did not know before. I was happy to hear how they appreciated that programme so much that the chairman in her speech told those who were there

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that they would miss the programme, they would miss the practice in the centres, for it used to bring them together in camaraderie, and it kept them from doing other things. It also helped them to learn more of the culture of Trinidad and Tobago.

Another crime prevention and control mechanism in the community is the Community Safety and Enhancement Programme which was launched in July. The participation was tremendous. The main objectives of the programme are:

To establish and sustain community safety and enhancement groups.

To provide guidelines for prevention strategies adaptable to the needs of specific communities; and

To encourage the development of proactive programmes and projects, aimed at crime prevention.

The programme promotes a coordinated approach to crime that involves the active participation of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Commerce, the police service and the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Village Councils.

Since the launch, officials of the ministry have been encouraging the registration and mobilizing support for the programme at the community level. At least 70 groups have been identified and 32 have already applied for registration with the ministry. Community meetings and sensitization seminars have also been held to inform the public of the structure and objective of the programme. The ministry plans to intensify activities in the programme in the new financial year, beginning with the implementation of a national programme of training before the end of 2003.

Mr. Speaker, I always remind hon. Members of this honourable House that Laventille has no scope for agriculture, fishing or big business. Therefore, some avenue must be found for people to survive financially, and that is why we welcome programmes like the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and other programmes which could assist the people. These programmes are national in scope, for only the PNM understands that you must provide for the less fortunate because it is a caring government.

Mr. Speaker, I must always applaud the Government for the foresight in creating a skills centre out of the Rum Bond on the Eastern Main Road, Laventille which would provide a number of skills training, not only for the young people of



Laventille but throughout the East-West Corridor. I know that they can only benefit from this for many of them do not have any skills at present.

I also thank the Government and the Minister of Culture and Tourism for putting the Fort Picton refurbishment in the budget. I have been asking for that over the years, ever since we were on the Opposition Benches and I thank this Government for looking at that because it is the only true tourist attraction in Laventille. Not the two tanks which they made priority.

Mr. Speaker, if you were to see the state of the two tanks you would realize that money was wasted on that project. We also thank the Government for looking at the National Housing Authority flats at Beverly Hills, one that needed looking after for a number of years.

I can remember walking into the office of the Minister of the UNC government. And when I walked in and I asked for some assistance for Beverly Hills, I even said if you cannot fix them, at least give them some board or something so that they can repair the buildings. They told me they had no money for that programme, not even a board to help them with. And today, the PNM Government, has shown the caring, because those buildings were like wafer, you could actually pull somebody out of those buildings in the night. I am happy that they are looking at that and not only that, but all other buildings throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

The previous government had said they had no money to upkeep the NHA buildings and today, if one looks throughout the country, one would see all NHA buildings being painted and upgraded, and one has to thank the PNM Government for their caring.

I also thank the Minister who sits next to me, for he assisted me in the repairing of some roads and I am thankful for that for the people of Laventille. The water situation has improved immensely and there are lights throughout Laventille at this point. So much has been done in the year 2003, and Laventille benefited that is why I am speaking so much about Laventille.

There is always this saying that the PNM is not doing anything for Laventille. I also noticed that as soon as the PNM said they were going to turn the Rum Bond into a skills training center, there was a hue and cry about why Laventille, why you cannot put it here and there. You cannot please all the people all of the time, and you have to do what you have to do in the interest of the people one seeks to serve. [*Desk thumping*]

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The Member for Fyzabad spoke about forms to get things done like the self-help and so forth. Nobody has to walk into his office to put the forms in his hand. The ministry is located in El Socorro, and it is there for any Minister to walk in and get his forms for his people. We do not discriminate. One can get the forms and give them to anybody one wants to give them to. In fact, that brings me back to community centres.

I was proud to do the re-dedication of a number of centres this year, and do you know where they were? Mostly in the Opposition areas. One was opened in Sangre Grande. We went to Chaguanas, all over, and refurbished those centres. They are there for them to see.

In this budget there are allocations for 25 centres and they are all over and from which some of them would benefit. Mr. Speaker, it is not a case of discrimination. We are here to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are going to do it without fear or favour, and we are doing it. If you noticed, in 2003 we worked not for the benefit of the PNM as they want to make people believe, but for the benefit of everyone whom we seek to serve. We are not choosing places, because the Minister of Works and Transport outlined how much work he did in those areas.

Mr. Speaker, it hurts one when they have to come down on us and say we did not do anything for them. Why do they want to sit in their offices and expect you to come to them? If they ask us to do anything for them we surely do it, because we are not here to serve PNM constituencies alone. I sit in the Ministry of Community Development daily, and you would not like to see the number of persons who come to the ministry, not from PNM areas only, but from the Opposition areas and, they could leave my office and tell people how I treat them.

We do not treat them as if they were outsiders. We treat them with dignity because they are people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to tell them on the other side that I love my East Indian brothers and sisters. I love all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but what I do not like, is what they are doing to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I have nothing personal against anyone but what they are trying to do. If they could throw their minds back, when we were there and they were here, when they brought Bills to the honourable House, if we thought that the country would benefit from those Bills we supported them. We never withdrew our support. Why are you behaving in this manner? You have absolutely nothing to gain by this.

Mr. Speaker [*Interruption*] There were a number of things to be done to that building. The Bill was totally flawed and this side had to point out that and it was

sent to a committee. Any other Bill that was brought here and we thought it was good we supported it. And they cannot deny that fact. Today they are coming to tell you if you do not do this they would not support it. It is not the Members on this side they are supporting, it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because whatever we are doing it is in their interest. I hope they would rethink what they are trying to do. If one can remember we used to get up in this Parliament on that side and we used to say anything we wanted, even if the Bill was good. We would argue with you down to the last but—

**Mr. Speaker:** Honourable Member, please, the next Member to speak is, in fact, the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan. And hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant, you will also have your 75 minutes. So, please! Continue Minister.

**Hon. E. James:** As I was saying, even though we argued down to the last and said anything to them that we felt like saying, when we were on that side, and I stress again, when it came to the crunch and we recognized that the Bill was good, we supported it. So you could do the same. Tell us what you want, do what you want, but when something is good, support it. Do it in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago who expect you to take some interest in their affairs.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking them to rethink their position. As I said before, they have absolutely nothing to gain by their present behaviour. Today, I stand here in support of a budget that would satisfy all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I wish my Government the best because it is going to take this country into development status by the year 2020.

Thank you, very much.

**Dr. Fuad Khan (Barataria/San Juan):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to join this debate after such a contribution by my colleague from Laventille West. Our parliamentary system is not such a good system because after a contribution like that of the Member for Laventille West, where she enumerated a number of helpful projects to the whole country, I have to stand in this honourable House and because of this system of adversarial politics; decide what part of her presentation I need to tear apart. And you must understand that, because for six years when I was a young representative, I remember the UNC Government sitting on that side, coming to this honourable House with good Bills and good ideas, but this had to be taken apart by the Members who were on the Opposition side at that time. Our system of governance, of politics and parliamentary movement was derived not from the Westminster system, as they think it is, part of it, but also

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from a system the colonial people decided was similar to a model I understand called the White Hall model, and that fosters this type of behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, because of his position which is close to the door, he has to show—and probably he is being disallowed to speak—that he is speaking and attacks the Opposition which is his right, we have to respond and then you have to keep order. When a lie is repeated constantly people tend to believe it. No one could convince me in this honourable House that there is equality for all. That is a fallacy. I want to read something from a document:

“The paramount concern must be the people’s business. That is the purpose of this august body and place that we call Parliament. This is where, through reason and discussion, we must strive to foster and to uphold the dignity of the human being by way of legislative programmes, for example, that take accounts of matters of critical importance to the well-being of our citizens.”

It goes on:

“We must lead our people above the cut and thrust of commonplace politics to a level of understanding of nation building that will continue the work that was begun even before we claimed and were given ownership of this Parliament.”

It goes on:

“We must work together in our Parliament to ensure that decisions are taken and laws enacted that reflect clear provision for the welfare of all our people.

If our laws do not insist upon fair opportunity for all, including the differently abled and the poor, we can hardly count upon the ability or the willingness of the people to help us achieve the targets for development that we have set ourselves.

The distribution of the national income is a matter to which careful consideration should also be given. This is an area in which there are no easy answers as there are legitimate demands all around. Moreover, we cannot legislate wealth nor industriousness, but systems may be put in place through laws that provide for ways of encouraging productive pursuits.”

Do you know who said that? You see, Mr. Speaker, disrespectful. This is the President of Trinidad and Tobago in his speech at the opening of Parliament. And

they do not understand that. Maybe that is why whenever he is out of the country somebody gets kicked out of office, like Mr. Alleyne, or put in place like Colonel Peter Joseph. Because he is asking for equality for all and that type of system.

The budget presentation by the Hon. Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, in its pages:

“Housing; the availability of which provides the opportunity for nurturing family life.

Unity in diversity; underpins the emergence of a strong, confident national psyche.”

Mr. Speaker, does this mean equal opportunity for all? It goes on and it talks about the professionals and they would not tolerate acts of civil disobedience and we will have a riot squad in place.

Mr. Speaker, how can we achieve equality for all if our parliamentary system determines otherwise? When a party is in governance, the people belonging to that party, not just necessarily the representatives, take it upon themselves as we see that is occurring with the guy for affirmative action, to decide a set pattern and course either as a party policy, or a method of racism. And that is wrong. Any aspect of it is wrong. I am going to give some examples of what occurred; that my dear friend from Laventille West, has indicated that there is equality for all in all aspects. But, I am going to show in no uncertain manner that this is not so, Mr. Speaker.

When on the December 24th 2001 a decision was supposed to be made based upon the Constitution—in the Constitution there was no provision for the decision, 18/18—the next step was to go to the Parliament which is the supreme movement in this country and who was the incumbent Prime Minister then? The UNC government. Who got the most number of votes, Mr. Speaker? The UNC government. Because of previous personal attacks and personal movements that took precedence to good reason or process and procedure, the PNM Government was installed with less votes but same number of seats and they were not even the incumbents.

This is important because it came to pass that a Member who continued with affirmative action was able to go to the “somewhat” President’s House at that time—and I would read a certain document here stating certain transactions and we found out later that there were two free cars and after that there was free medical and escort and many things bargained. There may be more things coming into play in the near future and we may find out. Basically, a country was

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sold for two cars and medical bills. That is where the inequality in this country started. Why did we not go back to election and deal with that? Rather than just saying—[*Cross talk*] Maybe the tag line for this should not be discipline, tolerance and production. From the year 2003, it should have been Robinson four cars. I am going to read something. This article from *The Probe*. *The Probe* is a weekly newspaper which is usually laughed at by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It says:

“One law for Cudjoe, another for Manohar?”

THIS newspaper would never support law-breaking of any kind.

We simply cannot build a modern society without strict adherence and respect for law. At the same time, law enforcement agencies must display even-handedness and detachment in the performance of their vital public duty.

In light of that, we are dumbfounded about what appears to be an obvious and blatant inconsistency in police response to public protest marches.

This week, several people including two elected parliamentarians, were arrested and charged with allegedly taking part in a public street protest without police permission.

The police action is being viewed by many as high-handed and designed to threaten, harass, intimidate and brutalise those who were peacefully exercising their...

Not only that, but leaders of the protest, including Afro-centrist champion Professor Selwyn Cudjoe, secured an audience at President’s House with the then-Head of State Arthur Robinson.

Although that protest was expressly forbidden by the Police Service, more than 100 demonstrators triumphantly took to the streets of the capital city. Later,...

I do not know if I should call him Professor Cudjoe because he must have gotten that by affirmative action, and one gets things by affirmative action, based on what was written on the paper.

“...Professor Cudjoe thumbed his nose at the police, declaring ‘This is the beginning of civil disobedience.

‘They said we couldn’t use a microphone, (but) we used a microphone.

‘They said we couldn’t walk, but we walked.

‘We stood in front (the Hall of Justice) in protest and we bowed our heads in prayer and defied them to arrest us.’”

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I think you are repeating an argument that was made earlier on by another hon. Member on the Opposition side. Please move on.

**Dr. F. Khan:** It is an argument but did he read this, Sir?

**Mr. Speaker:** I think he quoted the same thing. He quoted exactly the same thing.

**Dr. F. Khan:** It was a different article. Mr. Speaker, he quoted an article from the *Express*.

**Mr. Speaker:** But the content is the same. I know you might be reading from a different paper but the content is the same.

**Dr. Khan:** Okay, Mr. Speaker, I bow to your ruling but could I just read this part. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. Khan:** All I am asking for is equal opportunity and so forth. Is something wrong with that? You are promoting it. Walk the talk! You want us to support the legislation.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, please take your seat. Perhaps it would do the honourable House well, and you also if you address me. Really, the rules do provide for an hon. Member speaking to address the Speaker. Please.

**Dr. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, sometimes when we speak about equality I get a little emotional. I am very sorry.

Mr. Speaker, I came into politics because I realized that there was a need for equal opportunity for people. When this does not occur and when I see after five years of the movement in this country for equal opportunity and national unity, and because of one man who got two cars it was crushed underground. It does hurt. It hurts because our country was climbing and flying, and now what is it? A level of rape, kidnapping, murders; people running out of the country; foreign investment is gone. I am only asking that the other side listen instead of behaving like school children; that there must be equal opportunity in order for this country to go forward.

**7.45 p.m.**

Fifty per cent of the people who voted for the other party must not be disenfranchised. This parliamentary system promotes unequal opportunity. They

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say it all the time: you are there and we are here. At the end of day when the Member for Diego Martin East tells me that the next time they are coming for my seat, he is saying that voter padding is taking effect; the house padding is taking effect. He is confirming it. We are asking for two things: equal opportunity and proportional representation; and let us have them together. *[Interruption]*

Why is the Member for Diego Martin West provoking me? He always does that. This budget statement says “unity in diversity...equal opportunity, etc.” It makes a number of superficial statements—housing plans, et cetera. It is not worth the paper it is written on, not only because it is superficial, but also, from what we have heard from other Members so far, it has shown that it is repeating the budget speech from last year. I have not heard anything new.

I heard we are going to get free Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and CT scans. No offence to the Member for Diego Martin East, but he should look at the process and at the people he has put in charge of the committee for the X-rays. He will find that, under the ground, many things are going on—where the machines are coming from and the service contracts. Investigate it!

Mr. Speaker, I want to go along the line of equal opportunity for all because of the budget statement, which indicates that there will be equal opportunity for all. There is a letter to the editor, dated Monday, March 24, 2003. They are saying to the hon. Prime Minister that he should address, not only the historical imbalance—he said CEPEP is addressing a historical imbalance—but also the other historical imbalances.

“The Prime Minister said that he has introduced CEPEP to address a historical imbalance and to provide an opportunity to make entrepreneurs of the descendants of slavery and indentured labourers. He slipped in indentured labourers to give the impression that he cares about Indo-Trinidadians as well.

I look forward to see Manning and the PNM address the other historic imbalances that exist in the police service, prison service, fire service, army, coast guard, positions of senior public servants, WASA, TSTT, UTC, government OJT programmes and the allocation of government housing in a country that is supposed to belong to all of the people...

Not only does Caroni lands belong to all of the people, but the assets and employment opportunities in all the state agencies as well. A country where every creed and race is supposed to find an equal place.

On the second point, an entrepreneur is one who undertakes investments at some measure of financial risk.



What are these CEPEP people risking?

These so-called CEPEP entrepreneurs are risking nothing but their own future...

I would like to remind the Prime Minister and the PNM that no matter how much money and state resources are placed in the hands of people who are held captive by any Government, their lifestyles would never improve...

The PNM knows that they are sure to remain in power as long as the Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians are divided.”

The article goes on. When we look at this type of article and you marry it with various other articles—

**Mr. Speaker:** Did you give the source?

**Dr. F. Khan:** I said the source. I said *Newsday*, Monday, March 24, 2003. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, we are looking at the headline, not the other thing.

“\$44m PNM payback”.

This was *Sunday Guardian* dated February 23, 2003. It says that the PNM administration has spent over \$44 million in just three months on contracts and that this information is from documents laid in Parliament.

“They show 110 contractors recruited for CEPEP have been paid, in some instances, as much as \$600,000 each for the three months’ work. Several include former PNM councillors like:

- Roopchand Balliram...
- Jennifer Marryshow...
- Marva Bostic, who also appeared at the EBC Commission of Inquiry...received \$542,173.37...
- Jameel Mustapha, uncle of PNM deputy political leader Nafeesa Mohammed, owner of Sarah Maintenance Co, which received \$423,010.44...”

Mr. Jameel Mustapha, I will say now, Mr. Speaker, one has to find out where he got the money and who signed the guarantor to open this company. When they find that out, Mr. Speaker, you have to ask the simple question: Is anybody else sharing in the spoils of CEPEP?

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I will come again with this one:

“PNMites query awards to Sando West”

Look at it here. It is *Sunday Guardian*, March 02, 2003. This involves a guy called David Fraser, who is in charge of recruiting people for CEPEP. This does not go to the Central Tenders Board, so they can do their own thing; something like the National Insurance Property Development Company (NIPDEC).

“PNM insiders are questioning the award of...controversial 110 Community Environment Protection and Enhancement Programme contracts to PNM party members of the San Fernando West Constituency...”

CEPEP’s communications manager David Fraser confirmed most of the companies were formed over the last year, specifically for CEPEP.

Several callers also claimed there were ‘ghost gang operations,’ similar to those discovered in the Unemployment Relief Programme and National Housing Authority...

Questions are also being raised as to why one Kenny Grant received two contracts. He was listed as the principal in two similarly named companies—K&S Environmental Services Company Ltd., which received a CEPEP contract of \$419,562.24, and KGV Environmental Services Ltd., which received...\$420,731.40.”

In those two contracts, he got \$800,000.

“Among the contract recipients were:

- Marva Bostic, PNM San Fernando West Constituency executive, who is listed as the principal of AE Rasolli Maintenance Services, which got \$542,173.37...

The EBC enquiry—I think I can speak about it here although it has not been sanitized. She was a person who used to work for the Singer Company. She got a contract for \$542,000.

- “Ainsley Matthews, PNM San Fernando West executive member, was listed as the principal of Answer Maintenance Ltd. which received \$404,606.29.”

This is only up to March 02, 2003. We are in October and CEPEP has been running since then and they are now getting \$250 million to squander. Everything that they have cleaned—the grass has now grown back and the drains are now

clogged—is still the same way. We have achieved absolutely nothing and, as the President has said, we need to have it for productive means.

- “Suresh Seecharan, a former Victoria county councillor who campaigned for and spoke on San Fernando West MP Diane Seukaran’s platform. He is listed as principal of the Beautification and Sanitation Co. which received \$390,104.69.
- Kathy Ann Cardinal Austin, a PNM San Fernando West executive member who is listed as the principal of Cut-Clean and Clear Maintenance Services, which received \$410,633.64.
- Alvin Reeves...PNM San Fernando West executive member, listed as the principal of Danavin Company Ltd. which received \$427,149.17
- Jennifer Marryshow, former PNM councillor of Marabella, PNM San Fernando West executive member whose Marryshow Maintenance Ltd. received \$393,342.09.
- Sharon Thomas-Loney, secretary of the PNM San Fernando West constituency executive, whose Thomas Loney Maintenance Services received \$336,340.15.

Party insiders also noted Reyard Khan, who is listed as principal of High Road Maintenance Company, is the brother of PNM’s defeated candidate for Gasparillo in the 2000 and 2001 general elections, Farad Khan. The company received \$329,538.41.”

It goes to my place:

“...San Juan/Barataria too

PNM activists of the San Juan/Barataria constituency were also allegedly recipients of contracts:

- Aslam Ghany...the principal of...”

[*Interruption*] I am not saying anything about African/Indian. I am just reading corruption. Mr. Speaker, this is corruption and unequal opportunity because 400 persons applied, they short-listed the people, gave it to 110 persons for the sole reason of giving out the money. I am not against the CEPEP programme; I am against the scamps who are the contractors. CEPEP, if done well, is an excellent programme, but they have corrupted the programme in the same way they have corrupted the Special Works Programme, LIDP, NHA and everything. Why? For personal party movement.

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We go back to Jameel Mustapha. The reason I am hitting him is that I know him. I know the character that he is and I know what he is capable of doing. *[Interruption]* That is why I fired him. I know what he is capable of doing. He went to the EBC and they caught him lying. They talked about names.

- “Horace Gordon, husband of former PNM culture Minister, Marilyn Gordon...received \$332,890.21...
- Darian Marcelle...
- Lionel Beckles...”

If this country is to progress, two things have to change. *[Interruption]* No, no. PNM has to be there. If this country is to go forward, we cannot do it in the manner that they have done, with the movement of the programmes that they have instituted. Mr. Speaker, I know that after the PNM general election, now that they have gotten rid of Hugh Francis from Diego Martin West, and a CEPEP contractor has won that chairmanship, you will find that the CEPEP, hopefully—after we have made enough noise—will be given some form of equality.

When asked about CEPEP, the Prime Minister said—I do not know if I can believe anything the Member for San Fernando West says again; I always thought he was a born-again Christian who went to all these religious functions. He said that the CEPEP contracts were no PNM payback.

**Hon. Member:** I do not believe that.

**Dr. F. Khan:** “Manning said that there was absolutely no political bias in the selection process for CEPEP”. He described CEPEP as one of the best programmes. The opinion page, however, says something different. This opinion is *Sunday Guardian* Editorial, February 24, 2003.

**Mr. Speaker:** If I may just quote a sentence from May’s *Parliamentary Practice*. It reads as follows:

“A Member may read extracts from documents but such extracts and quotations should be reasonably short. The purpose of this rule is to maintain the cut and thrust of debate which depends upon successive speakers meeting in their speeches to some extent the arguments of earlier speeches.”

The reason I quote this is that so far the bulk of your contribution has been concentrated on extracts from newspaper articles. They should be reasonably short.

**Mr. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, with great respect, we have had ministers of government come here and read their contribution.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I am talking about extracts and quotations from documents. That is different from a Member reading his or her speech. So far, the major part of your contribution is centred around quotations from newspaper articles. Perhaps you need to move on.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Mr. Speaker, I take your guidance.

When I was researching the budget, I tried to find things to talk about in this document. A lot of things came out clearly that the Member for San Fernando East said he was going to do. When I cross-referred it to last year's budget, I realized it was the same thing with a different cover. I asked myself what I could speak about because the job of parliamentarians is to represent their constituents. I decided to go to them and ask what I could speak about. Do you know what they said? They said that when I come to this Parliament, I must make sure that the PNM does not victimize them with people like Jameel Mustapha and Nafeesa Mohammed, Aslam Ghany, McDonald Padmore in the area because all of them are getting CEPEP contracts; one of them has a shop and is making them buy from the shop—a whole lot of corruption.

I did some research in the library so that I could back the facts. I take your guidance. I am not arguing your guidance. Like in any scientific paper, when you take your bibliography, you tend to quote at length to reinforce a point. When I am finished here, I hope that the Member Diego Martin Central and the Member for San Fernando East take the message back to the Minister in charge of the environment and SWMCOL and read the riot act to him and say to him that he is not going to do what he did the last two years and disenfranchise taxpayers' money and give it to party hacks, who are building houses with the money and instead give it to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in an equitable manner.

Not because somebody belongs to another party, should someone attack them, make sure they get nothing unless they join theirs. Members of my constituency have been told that if they want CEPEP work with these people that I called—I do not know the others—they are not to attend any UNC function and they are not to wear any UNC jerseys. If they do that, fine, but they are not to tell them they are supposed to wear PNM jerseys, take out PNM party cards, if they want CEPEP contracts. Also, for the local government election in Barataria/San Juan, there was nobody in the blue uniforms working in the CEPEP arena. However, the people had on blue T-shirts working to pull people out to vote for the PNM so that they can get jobs. You see the discrimination, Mr. Speaker?

If the Members for Diego Martin Central and San Fernando East were here, maybe they would have said that they were going to take the message back to the

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caucus of the PNM and that the unequal opportunity which exists in this country would be addressed and that they would really and truly implement the equal opportunity legislation and start talking parliamentary and constitutional reform so that the people would not be afraid of house padding or this type of negative behaviour as a result of what is occurring.

So, when a Member like my friend for Laventille East, for whom I have a lot of respect, stands and says that she is doing her best for equality; if the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is doing it, the Member for Arouca North, et cetera, you ask yourself why are the people they put in positions not doing the same thing. Is it because of our parliamentary system that allows a member of a local government body to attack a sitting Member of Parliament? Is that the parliamentary system?

I read in the newspapers about Mr. Orville London and the Chief Secretary attacking the Member for Tobago East. That should never happen. He should be disciplined. I have not heard one person on that side, who is an elected Member, support the Member of Tobago East in the negative articles, which are personal in nature. It is easy for a man to take because the Member for Laventille East/Morvant always attacks me on the operation. I can take that. Our parliamentary system should never allow someone to attack a Member of Parliament. Maybe the high incidence of AIDS in Tobago has gotten to him and he has a problem, but I believe that that should not occur.

I just want to read this editorial.

“CEPEP: Making economic winners of political victors” [*Interruption*]

Do you want to go for a coffee break and come back? When the Minister of Education was here, Mr. Speaker, I fell asleep three times, I was not asking for a coffee break. Even the Member for San Fernando East fell asleep. He got a nudge and he had to get up. If they are tired, they should go for a coffee break.

“CEPEP: Making economic winners of political victors” [*Interruption*]

I said earlier, *Sunday Guardian*, February 02, 2003. Mr. Speaker, they are my friends. I am asking them to give us equal opportunity and constitutional reform. Let us carry the country forward. I will keep drumming it in for the next four years. Last time I spoke about that.

“Some idea of what was involved in the making and operating of CEPEP came to public notice on January 18 at the Queen’s Park Savannah. That was when the CEPEP principals organized an event to showcase the programme’s achievements, and it turned out to be a festival of PNM triumphalism.

Prime Minister Patrick Manning showed up wearing a PNM shirt. Though he apologized for being so attired, he was welcomed as the conquering hero by his party's foot soldiers then being rewarded with the CEPEP benefices.

Three months after the party's victory in the general election, it was timely and convenient to put the spotlight on a programme that had contributed to that victory.

Prime Minister Patrick Manning hailed CEPEP as brilliantly successful. He claimed that 110 new businesses had been created...

About \$75 million had been invested in making a reality of CEPEP. This was not, however, really a small business development scheme...

CEPEP took the easy route. It focused on a single sector—the environment or, more specifically, cleaning it up and it managed to funnel tens of millions of taxpayer funds into the hands of chosen operatives.

These in turn hired gangs, dressed them in blue overalls, and assigned them to weed, cut bush, clear drains, and brighten neighbourhoods with paint...

What is clear is that an impressive number of PNM figures, such as former councillors, appeared to have the inside track to the CEPEP millions.

More and more, the nature of CEPEP is clarified as a slush fund to ensure that the winners of the last general election also become economic winners, with public funds being used to reward political support."

Mr. Speaker, on both sides of the divide, we are saddled by people who do that. Unfortunately, in certain things that we do—because there is no equality, transparency and accountability—it is fostered. I do not think that anybody does it with malice, but because the system determines how one achieves power or continues to achieve power, the system determines that type of movement.

Transparency International, which attacked UNC to such a great extent, was mum on CEPEP.

"We can't say anything on CEPEP," said current chairman, Boyd Reid.

'In fact, we have nothing to say on CEPEP at the moment,' Boyd added, in the face of allegations of corruption...

'It's not that we don't want to communicate with the public.'"

It had nothing to say about CEPEP. Mr. Speaker, do you see the balance of inequality? If you are going to jam me for accountability, jam the other side too.

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That is all we ask. It is like a teacher in a classroom with a favourite. Thank God, Mr. Speaker, you have no favourites. It is like the Member for Diego Martin East getting on the way he does in a classroom and the teacher doing nothing. However, a person like me, who is a little aggressive, the teacher always flogs me for the same thing the other person does. That is what it looks like.

All we on this side are asking is for the start of the equal opportunity movement. That is the way this country will go forward. The Members on the other side ask why all this racism, discrimination and nepotism talk. I agree with them. Why do we have to have it in this country? We have to make it known rather than sweep it under the carpet because it is happening. If it were not happening, it would not be spoken about. Let us talk about which contractor is doing a rotten job or which person did not put down this or that or which building collapsed or who did not put down a proper building, rather than say who is UNC and who is PNM and who gets the spoils.

I just want to go to one more thing—NEDCO. This is the *Probe* of Sunday, March 23, 2003.

“Now \$300 million Loan Scandal

NEDCO is another CEPEP, say critics

The Government is running into strong criticism of dishing out some \$30 million in a little-known scheme to political friends.

The National Entrepreneurship Development Co. (NEDCO), set up in October 2002 has been quietly handing out loans for the purpose of setting up micro businesses...

A criticism is that NEDCO has been designed as a social handout.

Reports are that some loans were hastily granted before the general election to recipients in the marginal constituencies...

Six members of the NEDCO board of directors were recently relieved of their duties by the office of the Prime Minister.

It is understood that the directors had earlier questioned the lack of transparency in the processing of loans.

There are reports that Labour Minister, Lawrence Achong, who has responsibility for NEDCO, is unhappy with its running...”



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Mr. Speaker, does this not reek of the same thing as Hubert Alleyne? When you are unhappy with somebody, what do you? You fire them. [Interruption] Malcolm Jones I will tell you about him just now.

“NEDCO is based at Port of Spain...

Centre managers can award loans of between \$15,000 and \$50,000 each.

Sterling Belgrove, considered a spiritual Guru of Prime Minister Patrick Manning and who is attached to the Rose Foundation, a Baptist organisation, is said to be a consultant to NEDCO.”

**8.15 p.m.**

Is that true? Deal with it now you know.

"But there is no evidence that Belgrove has any influence with respect to the granting of loans.

CEO Ricardo St. Cyr could not be reached at Press time to respond...

Critics of NEDCO are alleging that the programme is being run in a similar...manner to Community Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), which is also under considerable public criticism.

There are claims that partisans of the ruling People’s National Movement (PNM) have been able to easily access loans, some without presentation of proper feasibility studies for their projects.

Invoices are also reported not tendered.”

False invoices have been tendered in NEDCO to receive loans. Some of the people in NEDCO are able to tell the recipients what area to go to for false invoices, for a small sum of the NEDCO loan.

"There are also allegations of inadequate monitoring to ensure that loans are used for the purposes intended.

In a statement to Parliament, response to a question from former Labour Minister, Harry Partap, Government had sought to justify criteria..."

My dear friend from Point Fortin did not answer the question.

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

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Dr. F. Khan:** My dear colleagues, I am asking for something very simple. I am asking that you put country before party and put development—*[Interruption]* You have enough already. Let me not start on you. You are going through enough problems. Mr. Ancil Morris is dealing with you.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is being hit by a serious crime wave of kidnappings which, along with the kidnappings believe it or not, are not reported. There are rapes of kidnapped victims, terror and torment. Not only are selected people in the business community being kidnapped, but also there is a high level of extortion of people who are not kidnapped. What is happening is, it is like protection money. I received a phone call—this is with respect to the Ryan Singh kidnapping case. Ryan Singh was kidnapped in Tunapuna. A lot of his friends, young people, went to his home the same night. They, apparently, were trying to find ways and means to retrieve him. Unfortunately, somebody close by was watching the house. I make this point so that someone could let the policemen know that when a person is kidnapped, there is somebody close by watching that house. This person was able to take the car numbers of youths who went there, find out where they live and the school they attend, accost them for money, or else. It has been happening for the last couple of weeks. It has recently been reported to the police, because they have been extorted of \$2,000 and \$5,000 as protection money for their not being kidnapped.

That is not all; what is frightening is that recently, in the International School they saw somebody, a man outside, taking pictures of the students that passed after school. Apparently he ran when he was questioned. When enquired, he was not from the press or anywhere else. I know it is in the newspapers, but it is something for us to think about. *[Interruption]* Maple Leaf. The Member for Diego Martin East is taking it as a joke. This is not a joke. You must be serious with this one. It has reached Goodwood Park, the Stollmeyers, and they are moving around the country. The story is similar: three armed masked men in a white B14 Sentra.

Mr. Speaker, we heard a lot from the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation where he is going to fix fire stations and helicopters. What we did not hear from the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation is what steps are being put in place to catch these people. It is not just with respect to kidnapping, but a lot of other things, but this is the main scourge right now. It is spreading like wildfire, causing us to lose foreign investment. People are leaving in droves. I am not saying so because I am an Opposition Member; I am seeing it.

People do not sleep well at nights. People do not go out because of what is happening. It is being targeted.

We were told that there was a system which was brought into the country—I do not know how true it is but I was hoping that the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation would have addressed it. It is called the carnivore system and it can detect at an instant, where calls are coming from. When someone is kidnapped, all these phone calls go back and forth with drops off and drops on. We should have a system in place that is not reported to the media, which would be able to apprehend these people.

Mr. Jeelal, from my constituency, was kidnapped first and then shot in his leg. His son was kidnapped thereafter. They have since left the country. If this thing continues as it is going, no one in this place would be safe, not even you, Mr. Speaker.

I feel this because this is my country, like everybody else. I may be a UNC Member of Parliament, but it is my country as well as the Members of Parliament for the PNM and the supporters of both sides. When I call for equal opportunity, it is not to make them look bad, or that they are not doing their function. I do not believe anybody does anything with malice to hurt anybody at this level. What I believe is that it is a power play and a party play. We need to change the system, where both sides could get together to solve that kind of problem. I am not saying that this is the way we are going and if we go this way we will not support it, or you will not support it. We are asking for something that will bring equality in Trinidad and Tobago.

In Barataria/San Juan there are houses being put up at a rapid rate, so too in St. Joseph. That is why the Member for Diego Martin East could boast that I would not be here next year, but I would make the four years count. The Member for St. Joseph said they are attacking that area. The Member for San Fernando West has a major housing area. From what I heard, that is being earmarked for the Minister of Education. I do not know how true that is. What is happening is what they call legal voter padding. If we have such legal voter padding, it puts the other 50 per cent of the population at a disadvantage come any election.

When you could transfer people in houses, as they did in the early PNM days in the Barataria Housing Complex, the Maloney Housing Complex and Mc Bean which they call Point Lisas, they were able to change the demographics of the country. When you have an accelerated housing programme with so much money, if there is not equal opportunity for all, you will find that systems are

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going to be put in place that the demographics of voting will change. If you change the demographics of voting, you will stay in power indefinitely. The concept is not a matter of development; it is a concept of party power first. What will happen is, if you remember the United States, the President cannot stay more than two terms in office. As a result of that, in those two terms, that President has to do everything he could do to lift the United States of America to a certain level. When you have a system that is finite and not infinite, a lot of things could happen. When someone has gerrymandered the boundaries and voting demographics, you end up with a situation where they are certain that they will win the election in the first past the post system and as a result of that—they could boast like the Member for Diego Martin East that we would not be here, fine—we would have a one party state, militarization of the police. We will have the model that is being practised by Chavez of Venezuela.

Venezuela is an oil rich country, but look at it today. You can get the Bolivar on the streets. It costs \$1,600—\$2,500 Bolivar for US \$1, but they are a rich country; they have everything. The policies that are being put in place in Venezuela are similar to the policies put in place with the Cuban model. We may scoff and laugh, but it is a serious business.

When we look at the Zimbabwe model and the way they are attacking the freedom of the press, the opposition and its leader and saying that it is treason, they are shutting down the freedom of the press. Also in Zimbabwe, President Mugabe is deducting the salaries of the opposition members for six months if they do not go to the Parliament and listen to his speeches. That is the level he has reached to: freedom of the press, kicking out journalists. Remember in Zimbabwe they kicked out the white farmers? Now they are asking for aid. You do not mash up a system, because you feel it is unequal.

When the Government brings these policies into place and the history of the country, you will not benefit with one group of people leaving. For now you will experience not much dip in the barrel of money. But at the end of the day in about three to four years' time when these people start moving in droves, there will come an exponential curve; you start slow and then you see it just moving. As a result of the exponential curve, you will find that the country will start dipping. The country has started dipping already. People are saying that nobody is spending, borrowing or doing anything, because they are afraid of crime and kidnapping and they are saving their money. [*Interruption*] The economy is not growing, you stay and believe that. Mr. Speaker, when figures are done like that it is six to eight months before they are calculated, not right away.

When this budget proposes to do certain mechanisms and actions, but it does not assist 50 per cent of the population—because you have 50/50 or 40/40/20—you are committing a serious and grave error to the people which is the 40 per cent here and the 20 per cent which are the floating voters. Mr. Speaker, if you are only giving your supporters everything, you are then creating a situation that only the 40 per cent whom you know will get whatever it is.

We go back to crime. This is going to provoke some laughter. When you are attacking—somebody has created a criminal activity—initially you have to investigate it. When you investigate it, it gives you the history, examinations and the tools so you could try for capture. When you capture then you could get a penalty. Legislation, basically, is for penalties. There are some pieces of legislation such as DNA and forensic for capture. When we are falling short in the investigative mode of our police service and our systems outside, then we cannot go to capture. Capture is at a disadvantage. The police service needs more investigative tools and investigative persons. Bringing in people will increase the bulk, but at the end of the day—it is like a medical examination: when someone comes into the casualty department, if a junior officer sees them you find that the diagnosis is not like when a senior officer sees them. When you have junior officers taking the history in the investigation, no wonder, as it is said, the forensic has become bastardized and contaminated; as happened in the case of Akiel Chambers. They lost the samples. At the end of the day you will find that nothing can occur.

When I started, maybe I named it wrongly, the Guardian Angels, it was a system of community surveillance. Having the community surveillance, it was attacked by the Member for San Fernando East as a vigilante group, only because it was UNC. Have you ever tried to call Crime Stoppers? Has anyone here tried to call Crime Stoppers to report any crime? I doubt you have. You will find a most unprofessional movement with their unprofessional phone calls. At the end of the day you achieve nothing. All those fancy advertisements and fancy money being thrown inside, we are achieving nothing.

It would be better if the Government takes that money and gives it to the 36 Members of Parliament to form surveillance groups. They do not have to call them Guardian Angels. The Government should pay young people to form surveillance groups. What they do is that they have their eyes, ears and cell phones in the system and they look out as in a roster system and find out if there is any unusual activity. All they do is that they understand where the exit points are, put their cars in the roads and block the roads. They do not stand by their

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cars. Those people would not be able to exit, and you call the police. You must have a cell phone network, because the criminals would hear the phones ringing in the night. That is what the Guardian Angels was: a community, nationwide, surveillance unit. Right now we would have caught all the kidnappers. But no, the Government prefers to put partisan politics into it and then decide that it is a UNC thing. The Government should take the concept and let the police use it.

Mr. Speaker, when the criminals reach Hillsborough, by the Member for Diego Martin East, he will listen to me then. At the end of the day, all of us are affected, not just us on this side and the supporters of the UNC; everybody is affected in this country. If people are so coarse and unfeeling to say that type of trash I feel sorry for them. This is not about a UNC achievement where I would read everything. I decided to stay on crime and equal opportunity and proportional representation. I wanted to bring something different to the budget debate.

There will come a time in this country that people—it is happening already—are going to get angry with the criminals. They are going to have— unless the Government does not move fast—to put programmes into place that are of an equal nature. It is going on record that the time is now. We cannot wait for the next five years. We have to do it now, or else we will lose our people. The same way people ran out of Guyana and Jamaica and went to Miami and made the developed countries more developed. The Germans left Germany and went to the United States. The Americans went to New York. The Guyanese went to New York and Canada. At the end of the day, when you look at certain things, the brilliant people in Guyana—[*Interruption*] I just know two names: Shridath Ramphal and Fenton Ramsahoy where are they, do they live in Guyana? They do not. Do you know why? The system in the early days under Burnham ran them.

Do we want this to happen here because it is a PNM/UNC thing that we decide that we are going to ignore it and crush the other side? Go ahead and crush us, kick us out of office, I have no problem with that. Kick us out of the Parliament, that is okay, no love lost. At least what I am saying here would be on record today. Once it is on record today whoever looks at the record would say that the fallacious attitude of the Member for Diego Martin East will decide on the foolishness that they are doing. They are joking with crime, because it has not touched them.

I am calling on the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation to put a witness protection programme as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre did. If he puts a

witness protection programme, he will be able to catch half of them. Randolph Burroughs did it. I have an article here but I am not going to read it. The article states that the late Randolph Burroughs was able to do that quite well. He walked at the level of the criminals and was able to get information from informants and dealt with the criminals in no uncertain manner. The time has come in this country—as Mr. Manning has said, he is removing the gloves. If he is removing the gloves deal with them in an appropriate manner. He is putting a select force together, under Brigadier Joseph, creating a system parallel—as the Member for Diego Martin East created a parallel medical system, hoping that it will work; now they cannot speak English and they are doing all sorts of thing; I know so—as a short term cure for a major illness. You put a parallel police system alongside the police system. The policemen are not quiet and co-dependents like doctors. The policemen are attack personnel. They are not going to take that foolishness.

The same way the port authority workers said: "Come here and play the fool with us, you think we are Caroni (1975) Limited." They did not go by the port again. The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro has stayed quiet on that one. At the end of the day, I am urging and asking the Government to put the systems and investigative measures into place and try to speak to the policemen; let them absorb—you do not put a new Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation in a parallel system as the Minister of Health has done with the Cubans and the UNDP. Right now we have 70-year-old people with the retirement age of 60 in the country. The Minister of Health spoke about a great surgery. He should go and take a look at it. It is a brain abscess, anybody could do that. He has to listen sometimes. If he listens he will learn. The Minister of Health has one mouth and two ears. He should listen more.

Mr. Speaker, I have decided to make this contribution, I know I irritated you a little with the reading of the newspapers, but this is what the people are saying. These are articles that are in the national papers and it shows, in no uncertain terms, that there is no equal opportunity for people of a different party in this country, and we have to address that. The only way we could address that is through legislation and give the people a voice to address it.

Secondly, because of the parliamentary system of first past the post, it has evolved now into a house padding fiasco. As a result of the house padding fiasco, we have to call for equality in representation and proportional representation for all.

Finally, the criminals have taken over, not only in Laventille—Laventille has a hard time—but throughout the country. We need systems in place to catch,

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apprehend and deal with them. I am asking that the surveillance movement be changed and the investigative apparatus be beefed up, not only in forensic but more personnel.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, thank you.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Tuesday, October 14, 2003 at 10.00 a.m. I simply want to inform my colleagues that tomorrow evening we would have to go a bit later than this time, as a matter of fact, perhaps, much later. As you know, you have pointed out the fact that the debate must be finished by 8 o'clock on Wednesday evening; 7.30 p.m. to be exact. Therefore, we may have to go very late tomorrow evening. I just want to inform my colleagues. I beg to move.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 8.43 p.m.*