

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Tuesday, October 14, 2003*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[Fourth 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 in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my esteemed privilege to address this honourable House in support of Government's budget for 2004 the theme of which is: Charting the Course to 2020, Empowering People. The theme of this year's budget reflects this administration's vision of taking Trinidad and Tobago to developed country status by 2020.

Mr. Speaker, it was the hon. Member for Couva North who reminded this honourable House that without a vision the people perish. This administration has a vision for Trinidad and Tobago. We have a vision of transforming Trinidad and Tobago into a prosperous and progressive society catering to the needs of its citizens; a society where all citizens—particularly women, youth, the poor, the elderly and persons with disabilities—will be given equal opportunities for personal growth to actively participate in their own development; and a society in which poverty will be progressively reduced. In order to achieve this vision, we must empower all our citizens.

It cannot be disputed that since we took the reigns of government in 2001, this administration has placed tremendous attention on improving the circumstances of the less fortunate in society. Our focus has been on strengthening the social sector, since we recognize that economic development must be accompanied by human development. The improvement in the performance of the social sector is a critical part of Government's vision for Trinidad and Tobago.

The improving gross domestic product (GDP) and domestic per capita income figures over the last 22 months of this administration's governance, as was

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

revealed by the hon. Minister of Finance during his budget presentation are, indeed, achievements of which this Government is justifiably proud. We are also aware that despite these gains, the gap between the haves and the have-nots in this country continues to widen. Trinidad and Tobago cannot hope to achieve developed country status by the year 2020 unless this gap is closed quickly.

This administration recognizes the social and economic marginalization as the bane of successful development. As a responsible and caring Government, we are therefore committed to ensuring that the mass base of society experiences a high quality of life. It is against this backdrop that the Ministry of Social Services Delivery in the Office of the Prime Minister has sought over the last fiscal year, and will continue in the fiscal year 2003/2004 to deliver a network of integrated effective and accessible social services, through programmes and projects which seek to empower our citizens, and to foster their dignity and independence. Our goal is the creation of a socially healthy nation. We are committed to pursuing this goal through the provision of services that recognize and complement the initiatives of other government agencies in developing the human potential of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, the kinds of improvement in the social sector that the present budget envisages will not come easily. We are aware that in closing the gap between affluence and indigence, we will be upsetting established economic arrangements, and challenging narrow interests at certain groups—including Opposition parliamentarians—which will be slow to surrender. There will be those in this honourable House who would be quick to decry as handouts and fostering a dependency syndrome, the improvements that we have earmarked in this budget for the delivery of social services in this country. As the population is becoming increasingly aware, in the vast majority of cases, those who criticize Government's social sector initiatives are really seeking to protect their own narrow interest, but the responsibility of this Government—the social contract into which we have entered with the population—requires us to forge ahead, not only in spite of, but because of such narrow interest. Just as how our opponents have their axes to grind, so too, we have our jobs to do. And as it must be now clear to all who observe this Government in action over the last 22 months, we are a Government that will discharge our duty to the disadvantaged in this country, fearlessly and without apology.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to outline some of the initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Social Services Delivery in the fiscal year 2002/2003, as well as this administration's plans for the fiscal year 2003/2004. In pursuit of Government's

mandate for the effective delivery of social services, and in recognition of the need to empower our citizens to take effective control of their lives, the ministry has been pursuing, and will continue to pursue a two-pronged approach of first providing direct and immediate relief to the improvised and vulnerable groups in the society, and ensuring that all programmes and projects have a developmental component.

More specifically, the initiatives of the ministry have included over the last fiscal year, and will include in the fiscal year 2003/2004, provision of assistance to the needy, destitute and new poor; provision of assistance to needy persons in times of emergency; implementation of programmes to improve the quality of life of various sub-populations of disadvantaged persons, and to ensure that all our people are brought into the mainstream of national development. Some sub-populations of concern include: children in difficult circumstances; socially displaced persons; persons with disabilities; juveniles and others before the courts; persons in need of advice, counselling and emotional support; substance abusers and potential drug users; implementation of transformational programmes aimed at enabling citizens to become emotionally stable, self-sufficient and productive citizens; implementation of preventative strategies to prevent citizens from descending into poverty and need; to treat with experiences of family dysfunctionality; the neglect or marginalization of sub-populations; the elderly; persons with disabilities; socially-displaced; abuse of licit or illicit substances and other forms of social dysfunctions. An ongoing monitoring and evaluation of services are provided to ensure programmes relevance and efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, poverty reduction is a key development priority. Since resuming governance, I am pleased to be able to report to this honourable House that this Government has made notable strides in introducing measures to improve the quality of life of our citizens in this area. Among these strides are those that have been made in relation to our senior citizens. Our senior citizens are part of our nation's heritage and must be treasured. We are therefore committed to fostering their continued independence and dignity and facilitating their continued participation in nation building.

To this end, we increased the grant of old age pension to \$1,000 a month for persons whose monthly income was \$100 or less, and to \$900 for eligible senior citizens, whose incomes exceeded \$100, up to a maximum of \$1,000, thus enabling a larger number of older persons to access this provision. In 2003 a total of 63,746 old age pensioners benefited from the Old Age Pension Programme. What is most remarkable about these increases in old age pension is the fact that

in 2001, those who now sit on the Opposition Benches, promised these increases, but by the year 2005, after what they were hoping would be the next general election. We on this side of this honourable House effected these increases in a short space of time to resurrect a long-buried taunt of theirs. That is performance.

It is not only about increases in old age pension that this administration took care of the elderly. In the fiscal year 2002/2003 the Chronic Diseases Assistance Programme (CDAP) was implemented by the Ministry of Health to ease the burden of the cost of pharmaceuticals for certain types of illnesses. In the fiscal year 2003/2004, we will continue our thrust to improve the quality of life of our senior citizens. Accordingly, and as was stated by the hon. Minister of Finance, the Government will increase personal allowances for senior citizens, and will further extend the personal allowance to include non-residents over the age of 60 years in receipt of Trinidad and Tobago pension. Mr. Speaker, this is all part of this Government's commitment to reducing the hardships experienced by our senior citizens.

It is not simply in relation to senior citizens that this administration has acted in the fiscal year 2002/2003. This administration has moved swiftly and effectively to address the needs of all the vulnerable in our society. As tangible evidence of this administration's concern for the needy, the entire public assistance grant Programme was radically revised to provide a greater level of support to needy individuals. Overall, individual public assistance grants benefited, on average, from a 32 per cent increase during the last fiscal year. Grants were increased as follows: from \$222 to \$320 for a single individual; from \$428 to \$560 for two individuals; from \$625 to \$770 for three individuals; and from \$720 to \$940 for a family of four and more. Approximately 24,941 households were recipients of public assistance.

Mr. Speaker, not only were public assistance grants increased, but in other to ensure that needy persons and their families enjoy a higher standard of living, we also made significant increases in the entire range of emergency cases grants during the last fiscal year. These grants, which target situations of dire need or natural disasters such as fires and floods, had remained stagnant for the last eight years; six of which were spent under those who now occupy the Opposition Benches.

The increases effected to these grants by this administration were as follows: house repair: from \$3000 to \$5000; household articles: from \$1,500 to \$3,500; medical equipment: from \$1,500 to \$5,000; funeral grant: from \$1,272.88 to \$3,450; pharmaceuticals: from \$300 to \$500; emergency assistance: from \$80 to

\$130 per person; book grant: from \$500 per family to \$500 per child; uniform grant: from \$200 per family to \$200 per child; clothing grant: from \$200 per family to \$200 per person; house rent: from \$900 to \$2,500 for three months; education grant: from \$80 to \$140 per month; dietary grant: from \$80 to \$115 per month; and special child grant: from \$80 to \$300 per month. Mr. Speaker, so far, we have only touched on old age pension, public assistance and disability and related grants, but these grants cover a surprisingly wide range of the population.

Many persons—including those who now occupy the Opposition Benches—are unaware that under the old age pension, public assistance and disability grants alone, the Ministry of Social Services Delivery services approximately 95,000 clients monthly. This places a serious challenge on the ministry to ensure that services are efficiently and effectively delivered. While we have done considerably well to date in meeting our commitments, we recognize—and we do not hide from the population—the fact that there have been fallouts in the system. One such major fallout has arisen in the form of stolen cheques. Another potential challenge relates to the possibility of increased cost in the preparation of cheques.

Under the former administration, there were various reports of ghost cheques being issued to non-existent persons, and of probes by the fraud squad into the issue of fraudulent cheques to persons who did not qualify for assistance. There is, therefore, the need for the ministry to introduce sustainable measures in-house for the processing and preparation of cheques, as well as for the efficient and timely monitoring and retrieval of data. Given the prevalence of problems in this area, it is a mystery to us, on this side of the House, as to why action was not taken by those who now sit on that side to address these matters when they had both the chance and the duty to do so.

I am pleased to be able to announce that this administration is at last taking the bull by the horns. To this end, we intend in the fiscal year 2003/2004 to fully computerize the Social Welfare Division, and in so doing, improve the overall efficiency in the administration of these grants. It is anticipated that the computerization of the welfare system will bring long-ranging benefits to citizens, including: eliminating the long wait for records to be checked manually, reducing the time taken to commence receipt of the various welfare grants, easing the process of transfers of payments from one local administration district to another, easing the plight of grieving clients who make burial assistance claims and require information verification from the National Insurance Board, and reducing and/or eliminating the incidence of fraud in the dispensation of welfare grants.

Mr. Speaker, another area of great concern to this Government is the plight of those persons, who for one reason or another, continue to require nutritional support in order to survive. To address this critical and basic need, the Social Help and Rehabilitative Efforts (SHARE) food hamper distribution programme was expanded in 2003 to provide monthly food hampers for an additional 7,000 needy families, bringing the total number of households serviced under the programme to 15,000 per month. Further, the value of these hampers was increased from \$150 to \$200 each, and they are now provided for a period of six months, instead of the previous three months. This new initiative has effectively widened the social safety net to embrace persons who previously would not have been able to benefit from the SHARE programme. These include persons on social welfare or in receipt of other sources of income, where such welfare or income falls below \$1000 per month, and others who, although their income is above the poverty line, are still unable to afford basic food items.

Mr. Speaker, fundamental to the SHARE strategy is the developmental and empowerment component whereby clients are referred to, or provided with skills training and rehabilitation to enhance their self-reliance. I am pleased to inform this honourable House that during the period October 2002 to September 2003, approximately 12,399 persons benefited from various forms of empowerment programmes implemented by participating non-governmental organizations. These included 84 skills training programmes, in areas such as grow box; motivational lectures, enterprise projects, other agricultural projects, job placement and counselling.

In addition to the SHARE programme, the ministry in the fiscal year 2002/2003 continues to implement and expand other poverty reduction strategies intended to empower and rescue those in need from the trap of poverty. Two notable programmes in this regard were the Micro Enterprise Training and Development Grant Programme and the Micro Enterprise Loan Facility or MEL as it is more commonly called. These two initiatives are in keeping with global developments, recognizing the promotion of micro entrepreneurship as a key poverty eradication strategy. The grant programme targets those who, for one reason or another, cannot access a micro loan, but who with some assistance could become self-sufficient and move off welfare programmes. I am pleased to be able to say that over the years, the grant programme has seen several success cases of persons moving from the position of dependency to even becoming employers in their own right, or becoming employable, as a result of acquiring training through the grant.

On the other hand, the MEL programme targets those persons who, while they may not meet the stringent criteria of most loan agencies could, with some more amendable conditions, begin successful micro enterprises and lift themselves out of a state of dependency either on the State or on families and friends. MEL utilizes community-based organizations and equips them to become the community-based owners and managers of the loan facility. These community-based organizations in turn promote the programme in their communities, and encourage needy residents to enter into, or expand micro-business with a maximum loan of \$10,000. MEL is currently on-stream in Mayaro and Four Roads Tamana.

In April of this year, this administration also launched MEL in the communities of La Sieva, St. Joseph, Gonzales, Belmont and Roxborough, Tobago. To date, MEL has already performed successfully with a 79 per cent loan repayment rate, and extremely beneficial qualitative successes, in terms of empowerment of borrowers and capacity building of community-based organizations. By focusing on the community organizations, this programme seeks to strengthen communities and promote sustainable development, which is critical to balance growth of the nation.

I have the honour of informing the honourable House that just this month, the United Nations Development Programme advised that the MEL facility was selected as the second most successful initiative in Latin America and the Caribbean in the realm of poverty reduction. [*Desk thumping*]

There will be no doubt that those on the other side will be anxious to remind this honourable House that it was the former administration that introduced the MEL programme. We have no problem with that. Introducing a valuable concept is one thing; managing funding and implementing it as effectively as this administration has done, is entirely another.

We are happy to report that we have been able to take the MEL programme from the state of infancy in which we met it to the state of international recognition, which it now enjoys. Like so many other things in the economic life of this country, what has made the most difference, is the touch of the master's hand. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, while the many initiatives that I have cited demonstrate this administration's concerns with empowering our people, we recognize that if this country is to achieve developed country status by 2020, or indeed at all, there is need for a structured approach to discourage the incidence of welfare dependence on the State. True development must foster independence.

Following a recent review of the ministry's social welfare programmes, it was initially recommended that an empowerment unit should be established to identify, screen, refer and monitor those persons who were benefiting from the ministry's social welfare services, in order that further rehabilitation and developmental initiatives might be sourced for these recipients.

We are pleased to be able to announce today that Government has decided to extend this approach to all citizens who receive assistance in one form or another from the ministry. Accordingly, the ministry will establish what is to be called the Development Support Unit. This unit will facilitate access to relevant rehabilitated agencies of recipients of public assistance, and other forms of assistance from the ministry. Additionally, the unit will focus on designing developmental programmes for these citizens, as well as facilitating linkages with relevant service providers. In simple terms, this would be this administration's major anti-dependency unit. For all of their talk of handouts and dependency syndromes, it is remarkable when those on the other side were in power, such a unit was never implemented, far less conceived.

On another level, and in keeping with the focus of the ministry's efficient and effective delivery of services to clients, the fiscal year 2002/2003 saw to full operationalization of the Couva Social Services Centre, and the engagement of staff to coordinate activities at the centre. The objective of the centre is to ensure that persons have easy access to the social services available at the ministry by providing a one-stop shop facility. The centre, therefore, provides services of the various divisions of the ministry, including the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme (NADAPP); the National Family Services Division, SHARE Secretariat; Probation Services Unit, Social Welfare Division. The concept of the centre is to facilitate a team approach to the delivery of services, thereby eliminating service duplication and reducing cost for both Government and citizens. This is the first of such centres, and its evaluation will inform the feasibility of establishing other similar facilities throughout the country.

An important facility provided at the Couva Social Services Centre is the establishment of the first of 15 community-based multipurpose telecentres, which resulted from a call by communities throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, for information on the various initiatives of, and services provided by the Government, community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations. Mr. Speaker, this is a Government that listens to the cries of its people.

The telecentre affords disadvantaged persons, especially in rural areas, as well as public officers, access to information via computers and the Internet on

government programmes and services. At the touch of a button, persons can obtain information on how to access government's myriad of social services. The telecentre will also provide website facilities to micro entrepreneurs. A significant amount of information is currently available on the website.

In the fiscal year 2003/2004 this information will be updated and expanded. The telecentre also seeks to provide Internet access and computer literacy, software and hardware training to persons at the community level. In the fiscal year 2002—2003, 7,148 users benefited from this facility. These persons visited the centre for e-mail access, research and work-related projects and for access to the use of a computer. A training course in computer literacy was also conducted during this period.

Infrastructural works, furnishing and equipping were also completed for two telecentres in two other areas, namely Princes Town and Belle Garden, Tobago. These two centres and an additional three centres will become operational in the fiscal year 2003/2004 in Siparia, San Juan/Laventille and the Chaguanas areas. The key to poverty reduction and citizen empowerment is the accessibility of services to those who most need them.

Another issue is the involvement in the planning and design of programmes of key stakeholders and/or the communities, in order to ensure greater programme relevance and acceptance by stakeholders. It is with these fundamental issues in mind that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in 2001 signed an agreement with the European Commission for the implementation of the European Union's sponsored Poverty Reduction Programme.

10.30 a.m.

This programme is designed to support and enhance Government's poverty reduction strategies and to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups in society. The programme's objectives include:

- Improving the delivery of poverty reduction services through the implementation of a micro-project grant initiative for community-based projects and micro-credit programme;
- Strengthening the information system on poverty through the conduct of poverty studies;
- And strengthening the institutional framework for poverty reduction programmes through a decentralized framework for service delivery in the establishment of regional, social and human development councils.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that shortly action would commence under the Ministry of Social Services Delivery, to establish at least eight regional, social and human development councils throughout Trinidad and Tobago in fiscal 2003/2004. These councils would comprise senior public officers, representatives of civil society as well as private-sector organizations in the particular regions. The establishment of these councils would be a major step towards the decentralization of the delivery of social services in this country. Altogether 15 councils would be established; 14 in Trinidad and one in Tobago over the course of the next two to three years.

Among other things the councils are expected to influence national policy on social services delivery by giving feedback directly from the communities to the various social sector ministries. They will facilitate the establishment of networking and collaboration mechanisms among civil-society organizations and between civil society and Government in the fight against poverty. A major function of the councils would be the overseeing of a micro-project fund that would be available to communities. Each council would be serviced by a secretariat or a project implementation unit.

Mr. Speaker, Members of this honourable House would be interested to know that workshops have already been conducted in the municipal regions of Diego Martin and Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo in preparation for the establishment of the regional councils. That the micro-project fund design has been submitted for finalization, and that propriety steps towards the conduct of a living standards measurement survey have been taken. That survey would provide up-to-date information on the poverty situation in the country, to enable the development of appropriate policies, plans and programmes to improve the quality of life of the poor. It is anticipated that the councils would be the forerunner to the full-fledged decentralization of social services that would be implemented through collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development.

Mr. Speaker, too many of this country's problems today arise from non-functional or dysfunctional families. Fully cognizant of the pivotal role of the family in arresting the social decay facing the nation, the Ministry of Social Services Delivery would continue to direct special attention to the institution of the family. Already, in the last fiscal period, the national family services division successfully implemented a number of media-based initiatives designed to promote healthy family functioning and to improve the quality of family life in Trinidad and Tobago.

The radio series, "It is family time, let's talk," which is aired on Mondays and Fridays on FM 95.5, seeks to sensitize and inform the national community on issues impacting family life. This approach complemented the National Family Services Division's ongoing activities through workshops and seminars at the community level. In schools, religious and other organizations aim at promoting healthy family functioning, effective parenting, early childhood care, as well as providing strategies to address various forms of family dysfunctions including incest, violence and relationship conflict.

In short, the ministry would pursue a co-ordinated assault against family dysfunction led by the National Family Services Division and supported through interventions by each of its constituent divisions. This is being vigorously pursued both in preparation for the end of the international decade of the family in 2004, and with a view to reducing social dysfunction such as low self-esteem, under-achievement, delinquency, domestic violence, crime and teenage pregnancy. The strategy would capitalize on the role of the media in information dissemination. It would also involve co-ordinated approaches through NGOs, communities, the education system, religious bodies and other relevant stakeholders.

Apart from these initiatives, a comprehensive array of programmes would be initiated by this administration in support of families. These include the family life management programme, which would address, among other things, the lack of parenting and family-life skills; interpersonal relationship problems; financial difficulties; training of caregivers at children's institutions; community-based family life meetings; training of parents and family media programmes. These initiatives would utilize various media to provide interventions targeted at communities, the school-based population, civil society organizations, caregivers at institutions and others. They would provide training in the areas of parenting; violence in the family; life-skills development; knowledge of child development; self-awareness; rights of the child and effective management and operations of children's institutions.

The Ministry of Social Services Delivery would also actively provide support to the family court pilot initiative now being led by the hon. Attorney General. Social workers from the ministry, drawn both from the Probation Services Unit and the National Family Services Division, would provide social work services required by the family court. Mr. Speaker, the introduction of this much-needed family court is certain to promote harmony in troubled families. More specifically, it would facilitate the hearing of family matters in non-adversarial

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

matters; reduce delay and inconvenience to the public in the resolution of family disputes; and provide for the more efficient and economical use of social service resources in the resolution of family disputes. The ministry is committed to ensuring that every support is available to the institution of the family as we, as a nation, grapple with the destructive effects of dysfunctional families.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to address my attention now to persons with disabilities. For 116 days of this year, the population of this country was made to endure the uncomfortable spectacle of several of our disabled citizens protesting for their right to equal treatment, predominantly in the sphere of employment. The record would show that the protest highlighted, in dramatic terms, the plight of the disabled in this country. But the record would equally show that long before the protest began Government had been addressing the plight of the disabled in real and tangible terms. Since resuming office this administration has demonstrated its understanding of, and unwavering commitment to the needs of this sector of the population primarily through significant improvements in financial support provided. Government spared no effort in ensuring that through several different initiatives the disabled community had a variety of financial assistance measures to turn to for support. Let me share a few that were initiated long before the protest began.

You would recall that in last year's budget, this Government, already quite sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities, increased by 375 per cent, the special child grant which targets children with disabilities from \$80 a month to \$300 a month. In the last budget as well, Government increased by 333 per cent, the medical aids and equipment grant, which caters to persons in need of wheel chairs; special lenses, walking sticks and other aids required by persons with disabilities. This grant was increased from \$1,500 to \$5,000. Further, the physically challenged long before the protest started stood to benefit from other grants administered by the Government such as the education grant, the pharmaceutical grant and by other arrangements administered by the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry of Social Services Delivery.

In 2003, and even before the protest began, Government continued to provide financial support to the Diagnostic Research Educational and Therapeutic Centre for the Hearing Impaired (DRETCHI), to expand the provision of hearing aids to the hearing impaired. An additional 82 persons benefited in 2003 from this programme over and above the 603 persons with hearing impairments who had benefited under this administration in the previous financial period.

Also in fiscal 2002/2003, and months before the protest began, persons with disabilities have been targeted as a specific category of beneficiaries under the Ministry of Health's Chronic Diseases Assistance Programme (CDAP). This programme was officially launched in February of this year. Additionally, and before the protest began, persons with disabilities who receive the disability assistance grant were and remain entitled to bus passes for the purposes of public transportation. None of this was as a result of some accident. Rather, they were and are the product of a carefully designed programme of support put in place by an administration, seized with an understanding of and compassion for the needs of this sector and, indeed, all categories of needy citizens in Trinidad and Tobago.

Further to this, in his 2003/2004 Budget presentation, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance announced an increase in the disability assistance grant from \$600 to \$650 per month, as well as the reduction of the qualifying age of access to this grant, from 18 years to 14 years. Mr. Speaker, the effect of these measures would be to increase exponentially both the access to and the measure of financial support available to the disabled community under this facility.

In 2003, approximately 8,294 persons benefited from the disability assistance grant at an expenditure of \$65 million. It is anticipated that the reduction in the age of access to this grant to age 18 years would result in a further expenditure in the amount of approximately \$72 million, and that the cost of the entire programme would now be in the order of some \$117 million a year. In stark contrast to the efforts of this administration in this regard, Mr. Speaker, it is to be noted that in their last budget those who now sit in the Opposition Benches had increased this grant from \$520 to \$600, at a cost of \$7 million.

Notwithstanding the substantial expansions in the disability assistance grant, there have been those who have complained that these expansions are still not enough. Such persons would do well to remember that in addition to all the aforementioned sources of direct state assistance available to members of the disabled community, the spouse and children of persons with disabilities could also qualify for a grant of public assistance. Mr. Speaker, what is significant is that by lowering the age to 18 years, this administration now ensures that persons with disabilities who fall within any age category, can access financial assistance. Those who are between the ages of zero to 18 years could access the monthly special child grant. Those who are adults from 18 years to age 65 can access the disability assistance grant and those 65 years and over, the old-aged pension grant.

All in all, Mr. Speaker, these advances in financial assistance to the disabled are nothing to scoff at, particularly when one compares the position that obtains now with that as obtained under the former administration. Apart from these specialized grants available to the disabled community, there are a number of other grants and facilities available to help reduce the cost of living to needy citizens, which would include disabled citizens. For example, the disabled are as entitled as anyone else to the range of support available to help reduce the cost of school books through the Ministry of Education's school textbook programme.

Additionally, two-thirds of the daily nutritional needs of disabled children can be met on weekdays through the school feeding programme. In addition to these individual grants of financial assistance, Government, through a number of ministries has, over the years, been providing annual subventions to organizations representing persons with disabilities. Altogether, a total of approximately \$26 million is expended annually on non-governmental organizations representing persons with disabilities as follows:

- \$5.5 million from the Ministry of Education on salaries of teachers at special education schools;
- \$9.5 million from the Ministry of Health; and approximately \$11 million from the Ministry of Social Services Delivery, which is the largest portion of subvention provided by this ministry to non-governmental organizations.

Mr. Speaker, permit me also to share with this honourable House the other areas of support provided to the disabled community by this administration. At present, the Disability Affairs Unit acts as a co-ordinating agency creating linkages and lobbying relevant agencies, as well as the private sector towards the implementation of measures that facilitate the understanding of the needs and inclusion of persons with disabilities. This unit has already played a major role in sensitizing the national community and stakeholders about issues concerning persons with disabilities. Among its achievements have been;

- The conduct of a survey in secondary schools to identify the population of children with disabilities and their needs;
- The sensitization of the corporate sector as to the needs and abilities of persons with disabilities;
- The running of a public awareness programme via the television and radio, to sensitize the public regarding the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities;

- The continuous lobbying of public sector agencies, to create a society that is more aware of the needs of persons with disabilities;
- The implementation of the sign language component of the news highlights on TTT;
- The conduct of the first-ever workshop with all non-governmental organizations representing persons with disabilities, to obtain the views of persons with disabilities, to foster dialogue with Government and to engage in policy formulation.

Through the work of the unit, the Government strives to co-ordinate the views of the disabled community on matters that affect them the most.

The Members of the disabled community would also have the opportunity to participate in formulating a policy. The first policy was introduced by this administration in 1994, where it was approved by Cabinet, in principle. This policy is now in need of updating, given their dynamic environment in which we live nationally and internationally. This would be done in 2003/2004, under the guidance of the recently reconstituted national—[*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. C. Kangaloo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, the policy is in need of updating, and this would be done in 2003/2004 under the guidance of the recently reconstituted national co-ordinating committee on disability, via national consultations and with the full involvement of the disabled community, government and private sector. This policy would be in keeping with government's vision for the year 2020, which is currently being crafted with the involvement of members of the disabled community, through their participation on several of the Vision 2020 subcommittees. The policy, when revised, would inform the development of a comprehensive action plan for implementation by all sectors of the society on behalf of persons with disabilities. Mr. Speaker, I must stress that to effectively address the issues of persons with disabilities requires the full support and involvement of all stakeholders and the wider community.

Arising from the recently concluded protest action, the articulated concerns of the disabled community have been in the areas of employment, transportation,

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

housing and education. Over the past few weeks the national community has witnessed the considerable strides made in the area of employment. As several of the former protesters have now began to obtain gainful employment in Government agencies and state enterprises throughout the country. This has been largely as a result of moral suasion on the part of the Government, and all state agencies have been mandated to consider their employment policies, with a view to adding to the disabled population already in their employ.

In addition, several state agencies have committed to rendering their facilities more accessible to the disabled and to further supporting the disabled communities, through the award of bursaries, through training of the disabled and through financial support to organizations that provide services to disabled children. The State has, therefore, been playing its part, but the State cannot be expected to do it alone. There is a collective responsibility that society has towards our citizens with disabilities, and Government calls upon all sectors of the national community, particularly the private sector, to follow our lead and join in creating new and expanded job opportunities for the disabled.

In relation to housing; I am to report to this honourable House that the National Housing Authority has advised that there has been a long-standing practice of housing the physically challenged and the visually impaired by assigning ground floor units which are easily accessible to them. During the next fiscal year and continuing thereafter, a percentage of the units to be constructed by the NHA would be designed to accommodate persons with disabilities. According to the nature and the degree of disability, it may be necessary to further customize the units and the NHA is prepared to do so as is required. [*Desk thumping*] The percentage of relevant units would be determined by Cabinet once a workable database is established.

Mr. Speaker, in relation to the issue of transportation, the Ministry of Works and Transport has indicated that in the new fiscal year, PTSC would be purchasing three new purpose-built buses, catering to wheelchair users. These buses would be utilized along the East/West Corridor, inclusive of the North Western peninsula and the North South route. Additionally, one of these buses would be used in the transport of differently-abled children as requested by the Ministry of Education. The Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) is also in the process of identifying certain areas along these routes to pick up people with disabilities. Sidewalks in these pick up areas are to be adjusted to facilitate the differently-abled individuals.

Another initiative of the PTSC, in the next fiscal year, would be the dial-a-ride system. This measure would facilitate differently-abled citizens who are unable to leave their homes to telephone PTSC, who would send transport to pick up these individuals at their homes. The Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) has also announced that seats would be reserved for persons with disabilities in all PTSC buses.

As well, the Ministry of Social Services Delivery has entered into a partnering arrangement with the International Institute of Health Care and Human Development, which had imported a bus for wheelchair users. The purchase of this bus was financed with the assistance of the Community Development Fund administered by the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs in the sum of \$150,000.

Mr. Speaker, you would be pleased to know that Government waived all import duties with respect to this bus. In the partnering arrangement with the institute, Government would share the operating cost of this bus. The bus would also operate on the dial-a-ride system and would operate within Port of Spain and its environments. Government hopes to enter into similar ventures with any interested NGOs to service other parts of country. In addition, in fiscal 2004, all road works undertaken by the highways division of the Ministry of Works and Transport would be user-friendly for the differently-abled population. The sidewalk on Wrightson Road would be redesigned to be made user-friendlier for persons with disabilities. All new walkovers would be designed to accommodate the disabled.

As well, the placing of zebra crossings and relevant signage at institutions specifically associated with the disabled, and the placing of audible devices at traffic lights at major intersections for persons with disabilities would be undertaken. The Ministry of Social Services Delivery has also been successful in lobbying to the transport division, to obtain three-year driving permits on behalf of hearing impaired persons. When all these initiatives are taken together, a clear picture of a concerted and concentrated effort would be emerged by Government, to move comprehensively and appropriately, in response to the various factors that impel the opening up of access of transport to the disabled.

In terms of education, I am pleased to be able to report that the Ministry of Education has acted on its commitment to build-disabled friendly schools, and that there are now 31 accessible primary schools and seven accessible secondary schools, with an additional 12 schools expected to be completed soon. The Minister of Education has indicated as well, that the ministry is addressing the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

matter of having some of the country's older schools remodeled to render them accessible as well.

Insofar as tertiary education is concerned, and bearing in mind the known economic hardships experienced by some members of the disabled community and the disadvantages many have faced with regard to access at the earlier educational levels, the Ministry of Social Services Delivery initiated a scholarship scheme for students with disabilities at the University of the West Indies. That scholarship scheme is run in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Administration and Information. Currently, the Disability Affairs Unit is engaged in discussions with the University of the West Indies, to make the campus more user-friendly to persons with disabilities.

The Ministry of Health would also be expanding its screening programme to detect visual impairments in all our nation's primary schools in an attempt to unearth possible challenges to effective education at that early level.

As I indicated earlier, a survey has already been taken of a large sample of secondary schools. The results of that survey would be applied to inform the curriculum and make the education system friendlier for persons with disabilities.

Access to information is critical in empowering our citizens. In this regard, it must be noted that the National Library is accessible to persons with disabilities. Also noteworthy, is the fact that the library's information, especially in the children's library, is accessible and available in alternative formats for persons with disabilities. The library also offers a variety of software for visually and hearing impaired persons. In addition, all activities in the children's library are designed to include visually impaired children. The National Library Services (NALIS) further proposes to develop a collection of Braille and audio books for the benefit of the disabled community. In addition to these direct responses to the concerns raised by the protesters, Government is also committed to addressing the following areas in the new fiscal year.

The Ministry of Local Government has indicated that it would be working with all the municipal corporations to ensure that all new buildings constructed would be accessible to persons with disabilities. In discussions held with the Mayor of Port of Spain, it was indicated that all pavements being remodeled in Port of Spain would be user-friendly to persons with disabilities.

The Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs has indicated that at present, it is arranging to have all its existing community centres and other community facilities refurbished, to include ramps, washrooms and other facilities

for persons with disabilities. In addition, all new buildings to be erected by the ministry would include such facilities.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has indicated that all new arenas are being designed with facilities for persons with disabilities.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has advised that all renovations and refurbishments of the National Museum at Naparima Bowl would be designed to accommodate and provide unrestricted access to persons with disabilities. In addition to everything else, the Office of the Attorney General is at present considering the necessary legislation to require that all new public buildings be constructed with full facilities and accessibility to persons with disabilities. Other wider long-term legislation, such as the Citizens With Disabilities Act is being actively considered by that office, together with the possible involvement of the National Co-ordinating Committee on disability, in informing the drafting of and related legislation.

Mr. Speaker, other activities of the Ministry of Social Services Delivery proposed for the current fiscal year include the training of personal assistants or facilitators to aid persons with disabilities. The establishment of a disability assistance fund, to provide support to persons with disabilities to purchase aids and equipment or stipends for personal assistants. The fund would be managed by a multi-sectoral committee. Other activities include the strengthening of the income generating capacity of organizations involved in vocational and rehabilitative activities, as well as improving the equipment and technologies available to organizations of and for persons with disabilities that are engaged in providing skill training and production activities.

Attention would also be placed to implement the provisions of ILO Convention No. 159 concerning vocational, rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons.

To this end the Ministry proposes to collaborate with members of the disabled community and relevant state agencies to introduce a vocational and rehabilitation system for Trinidad and Tobago to enhance the skills training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, children are the future of this nation. Within recent years there has been an alarming increase in the abuse and neglect of children. As the Government of Trinidad and Tobago charts a road map to developed country status by the year 2020, these issues affecting children must be urgently

addressed. In 2003/2004 the Ministry of Social Services Delivery will establish the Children's Authority to act as the guardian of children in Trinidad and Tobago. The establishment of the authority has thus far been delayed due to certain administrative requirements.

Upon proclamation of the Children's Authority Act, however, the authority will immediately assume guardianship and responsibility for the estimated 1,500 children currently in care in the plethora of children's homes throughout the country. The authority will establish standards of care to be observed by such homes and thereby ensure that our children are adequately cared for at these institutions. The authority also will have jurisdiction over children who are mistreated or abused in their own homes and, as such, reduce the level of ambiguity that now attends intervention in cases of abuse, abandonment or neglect. In 2003/2004 the Ministry also proposes to establish a facility to cater to the special behavioural needs for particularly disturbed children and adolescents.

Initially, intervention will be made on behalf of girls with severe behavioural problems. This intervention will complement the existing facilities available to care for children in difficult circumstances. The Ministry will partner with the Petherton Trust to establish a special home for such girls and provide them with specialized care in a more controlled environment having regard to the smaller numbers to be accommodated. This concept of a facility which would specialize in individual care and attention to clients will seek to ensure that restorative treatment is provided to persons who will be this nation's adults of tomorrow and to whom society holds a collective responsibility for their care.

The Ministry will also partner with the International Labour Organization (ILO) in a project that aims at rescuing children involved in the worst forms of child labour, in this case, scavenging. In the first instance, and as a follow-up to a rapid assessments survey conducted by the ILO, this Ministry will collaborate with the ILO to conduct an in-depth study of those unfortunate children who are engaged in scavenging at the landfill sites of Beetham and Forres Park. Based on data emanating out of the study, the Ministry will work with the ILO to rehabilitate the youngsters and their families to deter them from this type of activity and to foster their educational developmental and needs.

Mr. Speaker, during fiscal 2003/004 Trinidad and Tobago will also benefit from planned interventions to assist socially displaced persons as part of the Ministry's continuing efforts to facilitate their movement off the streets. In the past year, the social displacement unit continued to provide casework, counselling and psychiatric care to residents at the assessment centres for socially displaced

persons, both at Port of Spain and San Fernando, as well as referrals to substance abuse rehabilitation centres. Three interrelated new strategies will be employed in this fiscal period.

The first involves the sensitization of the national community to social displacement issues and the existing programmes and services available to this subpopulation with a view to enlisting the support of the relevant sectors of this national community in a collaborative assault on the problem. Additionally, the Ministry would seek to attract socially displaced persons off the streets by ensuring that assessment centres do not deter residents and that the highest standards and most relevant forms of care are available in the centres. Rehabilitation of socially displaced persons must be provided on a continuum from detoxification and assessment through to independence and reintegration. The Ministry of Social Services Delivery directly delivers programmes or facilitates or refers clients along this continuum.

Mr. Speaker, experience has shown that there is a pre-independence stage where specific intervention in terms of communal, short-term living accommodation is needed to the benefit of employed, socially displaced, strictly homeless persons. This releases spaces at assessment centres as well as enhances the employment prospects of rehabilitees who can use a non-institution-based home address. In fiscal 2003/2004 a short-term halfway house will be established for the strictly homeless socially displaced persons. This will be the first of its kind to be established.

Mr. Speaker, this administration has demonstrated by all of the measures announced in the course of this debate that it is a Government that is committed to the care of all its citizens. While the cries of political patronage and hysterical resorts to race and bigotry do nothing to dampen this administration's commitment to the disadvantaged in the society, in fact, Mr. Speaker, such behaviour only strengthens this Government's dedication to this country. Those who occupy Opposition Benches may snarl as loudly and as fearsomely as they like, they will not prevent this country from moving towards developed position status by 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

Those opposed to us have one of two choices, Mr. Speaker. They can join us in constructive nation building or they can condemn themselves to political irrelevance by holding on to outdated approaches and selfish agendas. That, Mr. Speaker, is their business. Ours is to take Trinidad and Tobago forward. It is a sacred responsibility and one from which we do not intend to resile. We have taken the first steps in the required direction. I call upon the Opposition to

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[SEN. THE HON. C. KANGALOO]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

support what is good and right for Trinidad and Tobago and to join me in supporting this administration's 2003/2004 budget presentation.

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

Mr. Winston Dookeran (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Speaker, the nation for the last week has been engaged in looking at the budget presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance in which he took the opportunity to paint a picture of plenty. I believe it is the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries reinforced that statement when he said that oil is flowing like a river. The Minister appears to be oblivious to the fact that what goes up—[*Interruption*] Should I complete the sentence?—the caption of a recent article dealing with oil-producing countries in which this commentator warned oil-producing countries that they face a special challenge in managing their economies, not because oil prices and revenues are highly volatile and hard to predict, but also because they must plan when the time comes that oil may run out.

Mr. Speaker, we are conscious of the fact that the Minister has said that since he was a young geologist he has been hearing that story and that he no longer believes that that is the situation, but it is in the interest of the nation that we must not formulate public policy on the basis of persons' private interpretation of events that are contrary to what the expert opinions are saying. I believe the Leader of the Opposition in his address to this honourable House last Friday noted that several of the world's large oil producers were, in fact, countries where the standard of living of the population was not commensurate with the oil wealth, so we should be cautious.

The Minister of Finance in his budget statement could not hide his euphoria as he gleefully took credit for the 9.5 per cent growth rate of the energy sector, a trade surplus of TT \$2.9 billion and external reserves of US \$2.4 billion. His entire presentation painted a picture that money is no problem. Mr. Speaker, the last time we heard that phrase, money turned out to be the problem and the government that was elected in 1986 had an enormous task to take this country out of a recession and restore a platform of growth. It was a monumental task and, if we had not succeeded, Mr. Speaker, they would not have been reaping the rewards of that success today. [*Desk thumping*] In his girlish ecstasy, he could not help treating the nation to a dose of expenditure, millions here, millions there, millions everywhere, with little understanding as to how and what are the financial, economic and social issues of our country today. No wonder the nation has lost interest in his dissertation and, added to the stress and strain of a crime-filled society, we could hardly have taken any more.

There is now in the general population a new awakening, that, after 22 months in office, this Government has lost its way. [*Desk thumping*] I intend in my presentation today to put forward the alternative interpretation to the economic situation in this land so that we can devise a strategy that would navigate us through the rough and uncertain waters presented both by the local and external situations into an era of sustained growth. The picture that oil and gas will not run out, the picture of plenty that oil is flowing like a river, has indeed masked some very important trouble spots in an analysis of our economic situation. It appears to me that the Government prescribes its policies for us and then looks for the analysis after. [*Desk thumping*] What we would like to do is to assess what the reality is and then identify some of the solutions that would attempt to change that reality.

Let me start, Mr. Speaker, with the point that is of critical importance to anyone involved in economic planning and management and that is the issue of the fiscal deficit in the non-energy sector. This paper to which I have referred made the point that the non-oil fiscal balance should feature prominently in the formulation of fiscal policy. The first error that the Minister of Finance made is that he looked at the overall fiscal surplus without regard to understanding the dynamics of the non-oil fiscal deficit that is emerging in this country.

In fiscal years 2001 and 2002, despite the fact that we had higher than budgeted oil prices, the Government recorded a deficit of 1½ per cent of GDP, reflecting a steady decline in the buoyancy of the non-energy revenues. The non-energy fiscal deficit of central government widened to about 10 per cent of the non-energy GDP from 4 per cent in 1998. The International Monetary Fund Report, which was published in August of 2003, based on the article for consultation, argued that if Government expenditure as a percentage of the gross domestic product remains at the projected level of 25 per cent for the next six years, this will result in a non-energy deficit of between 11 and 13 per cent for the medium term.

It is in these times that we must understand what would happen as the years progress and the cycles keep changing. In other words, if we do not take appropriate actions now and save some of our new-found wealth, and, at the same time, invest to generate income from this revenue, then in the medium term we will pay the high price for this strategy. The pleasures of today, of which we hear a gleeful effervescence, will soon give way to the troubles of tomorrow. It may not be next year, it may not be the year after, but it will certainly come in due course if we do not take the preemptive actions today.

The second issue, Mr. Speaker, deals with the issue in which the Minister of Finance glibly says that he is targeting a debt ratio of 50 per cent of GDP by 2006 but does not take the necessary steps in order to make that happen. In order to be able to pay our debt comfortably, I will give you the figures and, to make sure it does not get out of control, it is necessary to generate an annual primary surplus of 4 to 5 per cent of the GDP. This figure is also based on the analysis of the technical people who produce the IMF report and this will require about 1 to 3 per cent increase in the GDP up to 2008.

Are we planning for these things? Or, are we sitting back, Mr. Speaker, and saying, "Well here we come with good times. Let us spend millions here, millions there, millions everywhere without regard to what the next government will have to do in Trinidad and Tobago to rescue this situation."? [*Desk thumping*] Notice I said the next government, Mr. Speaker, because in the laws of economics and political cycle, the behaviour of this Government is leading us to a new government in a not too distant future. [*Desk thumping*] We note the absence of the review of fiscal measures which has been one of the documents that is usually produced in budget time and nowhere in the budget itself do we see any explanation for this point that I have raised.

We talked about the unemployment rate and the budget document concedes that the rate has, in fact, increased but attributes that to the developments in the sugar industry, when the evidence before us suggests that it is in the manufacturing and service sectors that this unemployment has taken place. For the second consecutive quarter, according to the Central Bank Report, the Economic Bulletin of the Central Bank, unemployment has risen and what is significant is that the job losses are in the crucial areas of manufacturing and services, the sectors that would generally provide resilience and sustainability in our economy.

We continue to develop and articulate a policy of an external propulsion of this economy, relying totally on the fortunes of the external sector, particularly as it affects our energy sector, but I want to warn the Minister that no country has developed on that basis. Development cannot be imported. [*Desk thumping*] Development, Mr. Speaker, cannot be imported. It has to be built on the resilience of the economy and, when we ignore that, we ignore it at our own peril.

The fourth issue is the persistent excess liquidity in the banking sector. The Central Bank has been conducting monetary policy in the midst of persistent excess liquidity and periodic pressures in the domestic foreign exchange market.

According to the May issue of the economic bulletin, between January and April of 2003 the foreign exchange market came under excess demand pressures prompting the Central Bank to provide support to the tune of US \$193 million compared with US \$80 million in the same period the year before. The Member for St. Joseph made that point but this is the report of the Central Bank.

We must take note of these warning signals—the warning signals with respect to the domestic deficit, the warning signals with respect to our debt sustainability, the warning signals with respect to the quality and nature of our unemployment situation, the warning signals with respect to the fact that the banking sector has so much liquidity and so little opportunities today. The Economic Bulletin, Mr. Speaker, reported that the declines in the supply of money were driven by declining trends in domestic deposits—these were underlying themes—while commercial banks' credit contracted by 1.1 per cent over that period. Although this Parliament had given the Central Bank the approval to conduct open market operations by raising its ceiling from TT \$3 billion to TT \$8 billion, the Central Bank in its economic report warned that the preferred policy course should be the direction of fiscal prudence and consolidation.

Mr. Speaker, are we vulnerable to the external shocks and what are we doing to reduce that vulnerability? What is there in our economic strategy that will reduce that vulnerability to external shocks? We talk about Train 1, Train 2, Train 3, Train 4 and others and the Prime Minister gleefully talks of these. I have no problem with that, but let us use this period of plenty to plan for the periods of the future. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we wonder very much about the process of planning that has been taking place in this country.

With the growing importance of the energy sector, the economy's vulnerability to external shocks has increased. In the unlikely or likely event, we do not know, that the price of oil was to fall by 50 per cent, according to the IMF report, the fiscal deficit would be over 4 per cent of GDP in 2005 and 8 per cent in 2008. The external surplus on the current account will swing into a deficit of ½ per cent of GDP in 2005 and a deficit of 3.2 per cent in 2008.

These figures, Mr. Speaker, have been outlined on the basis of the analysis done by independent persons who were engaged in assessing the Trinidad and Tobago economy, but these are the things we hear nothing about in the budget statement and I would have thought that the budget statement would have looked at the pros and the cons, the difficulties and the promises and out of that evolve a plan that will satisfy us for the future. Rather, the Minister of Finance seems to himself to be so happy with the oil and the energy that he has forgotten the rest of

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

the country. [*Desk thumping*] So we are living on the edge with the hope that oil will never run out. Perhaps he is right and the price of oil will always be in our favour, not to mention the price of gas, which is now just as important.

In this regard, given the fact that the revenues from natural gas are now very substantial, the Minister of Finance should do us the courtesy to disclose the gas prices on which his projections have been based as well. Then we can make a proper assessment. We do not need to have overnight consultants, Mr. Speaker, to come to justify prescriptions of the policy. Government prescribes and then it looks for the analysis.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the way public policy is formulated is that you do the analysis first and then you decide on the prescription. I read in the newspaper today that some independent consultants are now saying that the Unit Trust Corporation merger with the First Citizens' Bank (FCB) might be a good thing; the analysis is being done after. The damage has been done to the credibility and confidence of that issue.

What about the competitiveness of the economy? We have talked a lot about the new world ahead of us: the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The crucial issue here is whether this economy will be competitive to undertake that challenge. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is a conservative organization, it rarely speaks in superlatives. This is what it said:

“The planned use of projected energy revenues would lead to excessive growth in the Government sector and crowd out the non-energy economy...the Government needs to avoid the pitfalls from previous oil booms and consider sustainable consumption in the context of the country's energy wealth...The competitiveness of the economy could deteriorate in such circumstances as demand pressures build, which would aggravate prospects in the non-energy economy.”

So the single most important economic strategy of competitiveness has not been dealt with in the budget statement. All we hear about is the period of plenty; the expenditure of millions here, there and everywhere. The job of the Opposition is to bring the Government in line when it gets out of line; then the people's job is to get a new government in place, when they cannot do anything better.

The existence of structural unemployment: the Global Economic Research report, an organization based in Toronto, talked about our international credit

rating. They said that the international credit rating agencies have highlighted the existence of structural unemployment as one of the factors constraining an improvement in the country's sovereign rating.

This is a recent report. They also talked about the risk of fiscal policy mismanagement, and concluded that there is general consensus that the risk of political temptation to overspend is a valid one. This is the other side. [*Crosstalk*]

So what do we have, Mr. Speaker? The 2004 budget public sector expenditure is between 25 and 30 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), a figure that is not sustainable without transferring the risk of fiscal shock to the next generation. This risk can become even greater, depending on how the Caricom economies perform, for regional recession poses a risk to domestic growth.

These considerations I have outlined today have not come out in the budget document, but they point to quite a different economic strategy. The budget's economic strategy is wrongly placed, and it will not be able to sustain stability and internal growth in this economy. We may not see that next year or the year after, but we will see it the year after that, because the projections have suggested that you are likely to have good years, even next year and the year after that, because of the externally propelled economy, but the world is in cycles; everything goes in cycles. What goes up, will come down.

Last Friday, the Member for St. Joseph carefully identified the sources of instability of which we must be concerned. He clearly identified the areas of instability which this country should be concerned about, and he outlined the five different areas to which we should pay heed. Let us not bury our heads in the sand; let us in this country stand up and be counted today.

The economic focus of the budget should be on the manufacturing sector and micro enterprise sector, but what has been the Government's response to the manufacturing and processing sectors? The Minister of Finance said that he will be discussing the elements of the trade assistance programme with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association and that Government would continue its quest to position Trinidad and Tobago as the manufacturing sector of the Caribbean and the gateway to the Americas. He said that the Wallerfield Business Park would commence physical infrastructure during the fiscal year. Informed commentators on this issue have other views.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

The publication of the *Taxation Bulletin*, done by PricewaterhouseCoopers on Monday, October 06, 2003, had this to say on the issues of the Government's response to manufacturing:

“Like so many budgets of the past, the 2004 budget presentation brought little in the way of good news for the manufacturing sector.”

The Review of the Economy 2003 reported a slow down in performance in this sector to 3.6 per cent in real terms, compared to 7.8 per cent growth in 2002. On average, the sector has grown by just over 8 per cent in the last three years. The hon. Prime Minister has earmarked Trinidad and Tobago to become the manufacturing centre of the Caribbean and the gateway to the Americas. The question is: What measures and incentives currently exist or are proposed to achieve this objective?

These are the views of independent commentators on the issue of the budget's response to an area of the manufacturing sector. The service sector and the micro enterprise sector are the two sectors that could provide the resilience in this economy.

This point was further reinforced by another report by Ernst & Young, “Focus on Trinidad and Tobago Budget 2004”:

“Business seeking to operate in the post-2005 environment, with the CSME and FTAA are faced with the challenges of technology, competition, and shifting demographics and psychographics: factors which combine to form an environment of uncertainty and opportunity...”

The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) will mean trade creation and substitution as new trade opportunities are created and old ones are replaced to take advantage of new trade rules. It went on to talk about the challenges that the business sector will have to undertake:

“businesses will have to demonstrate an ability to adapt quickly to change, accept shorter product lifecycles and recognize that doing business the same old way will probably result in failure.”

What has been the response of the budget to these challenges in terms of specific incentives and programmes to engineer resilience in the economy? Does the budget of 2004 respond to these challenges? Perhaps, you may argue, that by promising antidumping legislation, more regulatory oversight of the Bureau of Standards and the Food and Drug Division, and the computerization of the Customs and Excise Division, we are, in fact, doing so. That has been the

response of the budget on the most important issue for sustainability of the economy and economic terms.

We know that the Prime Minister is a geologist, and he must get quite thrilled when he sees the issues surrounding energy and gas doing so well, but I want to warn him that he must leave aside that professional exuberance of his and deal with the public policy of Trinidad and Tobago in a general total way. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Rocks in the head!

Mr. W. Dookeran: This is the time for a dynamic thrust in these sectors; a quantum leap into a new world; a giant step forward. Not the meek and old-fashioned response that the Minister of Finance has given us here. I am afraid that for the second time in his distinguished career he has lost opportunity. He would no doubt remain the Minister of Finance, if he so wrongly chooses, but the nation—and I say this in all sincerity—has begun to lose faith in his financial stewardship.

It would not have mattered if his actions did not affect the lives of all of us and generations to come, but it is a tremendous pain for us to see another golden opportunity arising in Trinidad and Tobago, and we are not taking the appropriate steps this time to make sure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. These were points raised, not only by me. I have taken the trouble to look at other professional opinions on this matter. I have looked at the report of the Global Economic Research, in which they talked about the political temptation to overspend, the risk in fiscal policy.

On the last occasion in the budget debate, we on this side were very careful to advise the Government to stay on course:

“We are suggesting that an emerging risk that is coming through the global and the United States adjustments, the overall balance of payment deficit and the emerging fiscal imbalance all put together are, perhaps, at this stage, putting our fundamentals at risk.”

Are we setting the stage to put the fundamentals of the economy at risk? It may not happen next year; it may not happen the year after that, but in a three-year time frame we will see the results. The seeds are being sowed now for the decay of the economy in that time frame. Are we setting that stage? We have come through that stage.

We know that in 1988 the economy’s fundamentals had gone wrong and we knew, at that time, that the fiscal account had gone off track. We knew that the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

balance of payments had gone off track, and we knew what we had to do between 1988 until now to rebuild those fundamentals. One of the important things about fundamentals is that once they get off track it is very costly to bring them back on track. We concluded last year when we said that we had spent the last 15 years in this country building those fundamentals, are we going to put them at risk? We should take note that this period of plenty is a period and an opportunity to plan for the future.

Let me look at the issue of social policy. It is painfully clear what the Government is doing: accumulating tax revenues from the energy, household and corporate sectors, and dispersing these revenues through a programme of political engineering.

Mr. Ramnath: Language boy!

Mr. W. Dookeran: They have re-enacted the old model of the welfare State. Many of the measures I heard the hon. Senator speak about earlier, fit into that bracket, some of which are new, but some of which fit into that bracket, creating in the process a nation where all of us are now clients of the State. The clients of the State today are not only the welfare recipients or those who are involved in many of the schemes that have been suggested for social mobility, but are in every sphere of society: the business class, the professional class, the homeownership class, and the small contractors class.

A large public purse in a small country is bound to generate all sorts of dependent clients; people in all walks of life who will now become beholden to the State. The issue is: Would an enlightened government encourage people to become beholden to the State and remain clients of the State, or would such a government now give them the opportunity to become independent and free citizens, where they can make their own choices? That is the key issue.

When I heard the hon. Minister of Social Development today, I realized her contribution was done in the context of the old models of welfare. Is this the kind of society we want our children to inherit? These are the big issues. Are we shirking our responsibility to build a modern and independent society? Even if we were to have a programme of social benefits, such a programme should be accessible throughout the nation. The Minister spoke about having some information placed on a website, and so forth. I ask the question: Would the people who will have to access such programmes generally have access to websites?

Political engineering and poplar economics is the order of the day, but the reality is that those who may appear to benefit from those welfare measures are,

in fact, in the long run, the real losers; for they cannot survive economically when the cycles turn and plenty is no more. Sometimes in the name of those who we want to help, probably, we do them a great disservice if we engineer that whole process. What is important is to use the revenue and income to generate incomes, so that there would be a sustainability of that income, but not to have each year larger and larger provision to support that programme. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for St. Augustine for giving way. What specific suggestions would the Member like to make in relation to what should be done with those revenues, in the context of sustainable incomes to which he is speaking? Are there any specific recommendations that he would like to make? In particular, hon. Member, do you believe that those revenues should be invested outside Trinidad and Tobago in businesses similar to what has been done by other countries, which are acknowledged to be quite risky?

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. P. Manning]*

Question put and agreed to. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Singh: Hire him as a consultant.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: You fired him and now you are asking for advice?

Mr. Ramnath: I work with you and you do not take my advice. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. W. Dookeran: The question that has been posed by the hon. Prime Minister as to the choice between government expenditure locally and foreign investment, brings into the debate the entire issue which we have discussed in this Parliament on the Revenue Stabilization Fund. It is prudent to find ways and means to prepare yourself to deal with the instabilities of the future. It is in that context that the Revenue Stabilization Fund, in a format that would be able to provide that support, had been proposed and put into place by the hon. Member for St. Joseph when he was Minister of Finance. The Government has only grudgingly supported it. To date, after 22 months, they have said that they are reviewing it to come up with a solution and they cannot. Perhaps, they are hiring the wrong consultants to advise them on these issues. Perhaps, they should open up the consulting world to independent thinkers, rather than those who would become apologists for the system.

Mr. Manning: Answer the question “nuh” man! [*Crosstalk*] I asked you a question.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Mr. Bernard Marin who is a well-known expert on social welfare, recently predicted in an article that there would be a collapse of the old welfare system some time in the early part of the century. He was more specific, he said that about 2012 we would begin to see the collapse. Already what you are seeing is that courses are being redesigned in universities and elsewhere to talk about social programmes in a market-based economy, not social programming based on State support that would have to remain on State support forever. There is an entire process of change going on, that is why we said that the models are old-fashioned. It is to find the State support programmes for welfare that is built into the market economy. That is what the new courses are all about.

So when they talk about Vision 2020, they should inform themselves with the new thinking on these issues before they decide on providing some hope for this country. [*Desk thumping*] That is the fundamental issue; that you devise market support programmes. To some extent, the micro enterprise programme of which the Minister spoke, is a beginning in that direction, but that is a very small part of her programme. [*Interruption*]

By giving people a contract does not give them the capability to sustain themselves in the market.

Mr. Manning: Initially!

Mr. W. Dookeran: Where will they get the income? Who will pay the income? It would have to come from the market or the State. [*Crosstalk*] It would have to come from the State, that is why you have to keep increasing it all the time. The programme has to be designed like the micro enterprise, which would provide the market to support it. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Singh: You know CEPEP is not meant for that.

Mr. W. Dookeran: A very large part of this budget is about social programming. In fact, the Minister of Finance went on to subtitle his budget as empowering people; that is a falsehood. I want it to be seen clearly; it is a falsehood. This budget is not about empowering people. It might be more appropriately called, “Creating Clients of the State”. That is what this budget is all about.

In today’s world all social policy must be integrated with the market economy. What is most frustrating about this is that in the days of plenty, which

is what we are in today, this is the opportunity to do so. Let us not fritter this away through political engineering; through electoral engineering. Let us not fritter this away through old model programmes for social welfare. Let us grasp the opportunity now to use this period of plenty. We are fortunate in this country.

I have come from a period in which I had to be involved in rescuing this country in the 1980s, with my colleagues at that time, after that period of plenty had gone astray. [*Crosstalk*] What you inherited in the 1990s, any government would have been proud to inherit, and you are now benefitting from that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: I will respond.

Mr. Ramnath: I volunteered my service in the 1980s, but it was not accepted.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Some years ago we invited a Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, to deliver the Eric Williams memorial lecture. He is a modern philosopher who received his distinction because of his work in welfare economics. He defined development as freedom from political repression; freedom from the lack of economic opportunities; freedom from systematic social deprivation. He developed the basic idea that the enhancement of human freedom is both the main object and the primary means of development.

The objective of development relates to the actual freedoms enjoyed by the people. In other words, social policy must not be anchored in creating clients of the State, but enhancing the freedoms enjoyed by the people. [*Desk thumping*]

12.00 noon

Mr. Speaker, we need to implement those policies with a vision of something great that we would create. We cannot keep fighting the last election every budget debate. Every budget debate this Government is fighting the last election. They believe the next election would be fought as the last one, but I can assure you that would not be so, the country is going to respond to a new vision.

Mr. Speaker, he admits that he is fighting an election in the budget; he says it is the next one he is fighting, and that is the very point I am making. A budget is not about fighting the election whether it is the last one, or the next one. A budget is about creating a vision for the people which they can move towards. [*Desk thumping*] But he is confined with fighting election. I thought he was fighting the last one, he says he is fighting the next one. I am saying fighting any election is wrong. To use the entire philosophy of the budget to fight election that is why he is—

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

We have already forgotten the document, which he speaks about in Vision 2020. It is not a vision of the future. Those who were not imprisoned by the philosophy of becoming clients of the State whether they are consultants, homeowners, welfare recipients, whatever, they are the people who want freedom in this country and on whose behalf I speak today. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: We want to put an end to slavery.

Mr. W. Dookeran: The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance said that he was introducing something called social capital, then he goes on and I began to read to see whether we are in fact generating a whole programme for social capital formation. Social capital is based on building trust in communities and creating a network and interchange of ideas at the grassroot levels. Social capital is not what he is talking about. Social capital is a challenge larger than what the Prime Minister comprehends in his budget speech.

So on social policy, we are on the wrong track. We are on the wrong track in designing our social policies apart from a few. We are on the wrong track in trying to create clients of the State as opposed to generating a programme to unleash freedom for all walks of people of this country.

Let me go next to the issue of financial policy. The Minister of Finance claimed that in 2003 the public accounts will generate a surplus of \$28.9 million after allocation of \$497 million to the Revenue Stabilization Fund and in 2004 the fiscal deficit would be \$313 million.

The consulting firm KPMG in their tax newsletter had this to say on that issue.

“Depending on how you present the numbers, the deficit is projected at \$520 million (2003 - \$1.4 billion). As expected, projected expenditure on debt servicing is the largest single line item at \$5.8 billion (2003 - \$6.3 billion).”

Mr. Speaker, this raises doubts as to the accuracy of the information before us, but in the absence of my own calculations I am unable to come to a definite conclusion, but the very query of the data is a matter for concern.

On the issue of financing of the budget, there was complete silence as to how the Government would finance their deficit and I presume that they would not be going into the international markets in order to raise international financing and we should see that explicitly because that is an important element in the debt strategy.

We are told that the new oil tax regime will be effective from January 01, 2004. It is remarkable that a new regime can be introduced so soon without the

proposed legislation being available for the public. The public has a right to know what the taxation and energy policies are. In fact, Price Waterhouse Coopers went on to say that many energy-based companies might delay additional investments prior to such proposals being disseminated.

In spite of the assurances given by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries on the onshore energy operations in Trinidad, there is no doubt as the Leader of the Opposition said, that activities have ground to a halt and it would be inappropriate for the Minister of Finance to suggest how he intends to revive that, but he leaves that untold.

The budget has been so preoccupied with the millions of dollars it has to spend and the public image it wants to create that it forgot what are essential elements for economic management. The tax regime relating to the exploitation of mature onshore fields needs to be revisited, but the budget does not say.

With respect to financial services, these are important issues for the economic survival or reactivation of the south economy. With respect to financial services, the repeat promises of legislation for the Insurance Act, the Financial Act, the Securities Industry Act, the Cooperative Societies Act, and the Mutual Funds Act have been made for one more time. I sense what has happened. There is complete inertia in the bureaucracy on these matters so year in, year out, we keep promising these legislative changes but the market is changing. Each time we are about to enter with the changes, there is a new set of forces at work and you have to go back and review them again.

The regional credit rating agency is a new addition to that list, but there is no mention in the budget of encouraging companies to list on the stock exchange or to support a vibrant stock exchange. These are some of the specific issues that are necessary to revive activity in the stock exchange.

The capital markets need a climate of certainty, which comes about through transparency. The budget proposals we had hoped would have dealt with that issue are silent. The current withholding tax on foreign borrowing is a disincentive to financial institutions that might wish to borrow externally for on-lending to domestic enterprises especially those in the sizeable petrochemical sector. This tax should be removed to allow our financial institutions to compete more effectively in project financing.

Where is the plan to create competitiveness even of the financial sector? Where is the plan to create competitiveness in the manufacturing sector, the service sector? Where is the plan to do it in the manufacturing sector?

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

What we see are the repeated promises of things we have heard many times and many years in and out. No wonder the country has lost interest in the dissertation that the Minister of Finance has put forward. There may be a picture of plenty, but if you do a survey today in the country, you will get the definite feeling that little is happy.

One of the most encouraging contributions I heard today was from the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro on his plans for the next few years. I hope they come to pass. Why is a government with all these resources unable to engineer the excitement to generate a belief that we can build something great in our little nation? It is due to the Government's obsession with itself, its own power at the expense of civil society and the people's interest. In the name of the clients of the State, the Government systematically accumulates power for its own use.

Otherwise, how can we explain the outright use of its power in the Unit Trust Corporation debacle and the complete disrespect for the legitimate actions of the board and with no regard for the damaging effects this episode is having on the financial confidence of the institution. The Government is irresponsible and Mr. Hubert Alleyne, a dedicated and loyal citizen of the country has had to face the onslaught of the use of raw political power. The growing distance between civil society and the State is a matter of utmost concern for all those who are concerned in ensuring that democracy remains intact in Trinidad and Tobago.

I now turn to the issue of political economy, the winners and the losers. After 22 months in office, the Government is still at the conceptual stage in defining Vision 2020. The paralysis in policy formulation is evident for all to see. There is need now for new policy space, not high-sounding words of intent, but specific measures that would make things happen.

For months now, we have been fed with the talk of Vision 2020, thus creating an anticipation that this budget will be the beginning of something new; new policy space, new excitement, almost as if we are about to embark on a new beginning. It is now blatantly clear that our anticipation was false and there will be no such excitement and there cannot be such excitement in a strongly divided society.

Mr. Speaker, one thought that this budget would have laid the platform for Vision 2020 but once again we have been disappointed. Vision 2020 is off track and maybe used to hoodwink our population into believing that there is profound economic transformation on hand and that it would take a long time. Are we just buying time so that the clients of the State would support the administration for the next 20 years?

Mr. Speaker, the calls for the labour sector which is calling for Occupational Safety and Health legislation which we are happy to see is on the Order Paper and a rationalized minimum wage, are they going to be the losers in this new dispensation? Who are going to be the winners and who are going to be the losers? Are the winners going to be the clients of the State and the society going to be the losers? Are we concerned about the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited as they cry tears of hope that they would not be discarded as a piece of used newspaper? Or the forgotten generation of the last decade who is in search of a sustainable programme of involvement of which they shall seek their freedom and their development?

The students are calling for new opportunities in this challenging world of commerce, information technology and genetic engineering. They want to be part of this new dynamic revolution but what is the response?

A University of Trinidad and Tobago once again outlined with a School of Engineering, a School of Science, a School of Applied Arts and a School of Humanities. Sadly, we shall, at enormous cost, replicate what we have at present at the University of the West Indies, oblivious of the thinking that the challenge now is to build networks of institutions to link us with the rest of the technical and academic world and draw on the pooled talent of professorial resources in the networked economy in which we live. [*Desk thumping*] Will the new student community be losers in that university or will they become the clients of the State? Nation states exist to deliver political goods security, health services, economic opportunity, and social mobility.

Mr. Speaker, we have had many where nation states have failed: Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Rwanda are extreme examples. Nearer home we have Haiti, Colombia and Guyana, but what is important is that in all cases of nation states that fail, the root cause lies in ethnic, religious or inter-communal conflicts and in the growth of criminal violence and repressive political tactics. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ramnath: You summarized it in one statement; I do not have to talk again.

Mr. W. Dookeran: In which case we face the risk that the whole society can become losers. The political elites of today are indeed dancing in their suites while there is gloom in the streets. [*Desk thumping*] The distance between the State and civil society is widening and the clients of the State line up for the goodies, and when the losers become larger in numbers than the winners, there will be utter confusion and chaos.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. DOOKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

This is why the budget statement of 2004 has been such a dismal failure and we have not yet talked about external affairs. We are still coming to terms with the reckless statement made by a Minister of Government that foreign governments are bribing nation States. We are yet to hear of the framework for our country's readiness to compete in the Free Trade Area of the Americas. Our geopolitical strategy is ambivalent, and our regional security agenda and international commercial interests are not clear.

What is the vital economic interest that informs our foreign policy? Trade arrangements, whether they are multilateral or bilateral would inevitably result in a less protected Caribbean region. Would special and differential treatment really prepare us for that reality? These are some of the concerns.

I conclude my contribution today by challenging our society to think outside the box. Let us not have narrow visions and historical myopic lenses. Let us not use every opportunity to fight the last or the next election, let us fight for the country for the future. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance in his budget has confirmed that he is not up to the task of Minister of Finance at this time. [*Desk thumping*] He has not been able to diagnose economic social and financial problems correctly so his solutions are inappropriate for a modern Trinidad and Tobago State.

The Government, instead of being a source of inspiration to our people, is now a source of despair, but all is not lost. We cannot afford to lose yet another grand opportunity to create a great society. We can be awakened and redirect our efforts at good governance, if only we can collectively agree on how we govern ourselves.

I end my contribution with a quotation as I talked about Caribbean integration and the failed states. The quotation states:

“Once there is true integration among all the units of the Caribbean... and once all the vestiges of political, economic, cultural and psychological dependence and of racism have been removed from the Caribbean, then and only then can the Caribbean take its true place in Latin America and the New World.”

This is how Dr. Eric Williams, our first Prime Minister and founder of the PNM ended his *History of the Caribbean*. I urge us to take note. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Jarrette Narine): Mr. Speaker, I join the rest of my colleagues and the country in congratulating the Minister of

Finance and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago for the vision he has had in the last budget and the continuation of that in this budget.

The Member for St. Augustine probably will do better at poetry instead of Economics. [*Desk thumping*] I would like to remind this country because for a number of years people feel we are a nine-day country and people forget after nine days.

In 1986, the Member for St. Augustine won an election for a political party 33/3. I was working with the Trade Union Movement at the time and I had the opportunity to listen to his lectures on many occasions and I carefully remember he spoke about trickle-down economy at that time. He was “Mr. Trickle-down Economy” which never worked and it would never work again because the people of Trinidad and Tobago have confidence in the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

I will tell you what happened at that time. When one said trickle-down economy it meant that the money would be put into the hands of the rich in Trinidad and Tobago and that happened recently again and we saw what happened to that government. When one puts money in that bracket of the society, the first thing they do is computerize the industry and send people home. They will buy lands and build big houses and unleash dogs in the yards so you cannot get near them. If they make more profits, they would put a Mercedes Benz and then they put a yacht on the sea.

Listen to what happened to trickle-down economy your style. Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) gone from the middle society; teachers, public servants, daily-paid workers in this country lost COLA; \$15 million went from the economy which would have been on the ground and the multiplier effect would have given everyone a better living in Trinidad and Tobago.

Apart from that, 10 per cent of our salaries was taken away and increments were taken away. It took a PNM government to return in 1991 to settle this score for the workers of this country. [*Desk thumping*] By that time teachers who had mortgages had lost their houses, lost their cars, children suffered because their parents could not send them to school and you come today to talk about trickle-down economy.

Do you remember what happened on July 27, 1990? Do you remember the coup in July 1990? [*Crosstalk*] I understand the poor people who suffered during that period and I will never forget that, because my family and I suffered too. So to come here and perpetrate all kinds of fancy language on the people of Trinidad and Tobago and feel that this Government is not looking at a way forward is wrong.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. J. NARINE]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries talked about the money we have to make in the oil industry and how it must be shared and given to other sectors of the economy to build this country. It did not work then, it will not work now.

In your reincarnation into politics you have joined a bunch of people who kidnapped the Treasury for six years and because the money is growing in the economy and we are expecting—

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

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Ramsaran: Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: Please continue, Member.

Hon. J. Narine: Thank you Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know——

Mr. Speaker: I have ruled you out of order; you have to take your seat.

Hon. J. Narine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The point is you have reincarnated yourself into the politics. You have joined a political organization that was thrown out last year by this population. [*Desk thumping*] They were in charge of the Treasury for six years and up to yesterday you heard the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro telling you that we could have paved all the roads in Trinidad, Grenada, Barbados, and all the Caribbean roads could have been paved with that \$1 billion they wasted. [*Desk thumping*] I am saying to you never again would Trinidad and Tobago allow anyone to kidnap the Treasury. Trickle-down economics.

Mr. Speaker, the Local Government Authority—the 14 regional corporations were well pleased last year because the last budget as read by the United National Congress gave \$6.5 million to development funds of local government.

In last year's budget the Minister of Finance found it fit that if you have corporations you cannot divide that into \$6 million so he gave us \$28.775 million last year which we utilized effectively although, coming back as a Ministry of Local Government we had to encourage the corporations to apply for their funding. In some cases during the last year some of the corporations faltered, but this year, in the documents in the budget statement, which I copied so I would not have to walk with the big books—\$35 million.

Truly, this is a Prime Minister and a Minister of Finance who recognizes that the total regional corporations all over Trinidad must be dealt with equitably and more money must be given to develop the areas in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to go through these documents and indicate to you the funding that we have received. As a matter of fact, we have received money in this year's budget for improvement and renovation to Kent House. The Public Services Association wanted to shut down Kent House last year because there were workers in the Ministry working under very strenuous circumstances. Sometimes there are five and six workers in one room, working in turns. I am pleased to note that last year the Ministry received money to start a new building and in the budget allocation for this year we have received \$1.2 million so we could continue that work and the public servants in the Ministry would have a better atmosphere in which to work which is the only way they would be productive.

We have 14 regions in Trinidad, and Diego Martin has the same problem of accommodation where workers have problems functioning. For instance, the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation is renting at \$60,000 per month; in Tunapuna also, where we have received money this year to extend their building to make accommodation. Arima Borough Corporation is also renting; Sangre Grande is renting; Mayaro/Rio Claro is renting. After six years and caring so much about the people of Trinidad and Tobago, you have a place like the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation where some credit union bought the building out and they have to be removed, so an old house was renovated to accommodate the regional corporation.

What has happened in this year's budget was that we went to the Ministry of Finance to ask for money. We have land in certain areas already and we could start doing the designs and so on, so that from next year we could ask for money to develop these areas. We have been given \$5.230 million to do that this year. I am certain that the corporations would benefit from that.

We talk about economic activities. One of the problems that we have right here in Port of Spain is street vending. Over the years a benevolent PNM government always did things that would put the persons on the street into buildings like the Tent City Mall at Eastside Plaza. They were removed from the streets and put in those buildings. It is now history that we have inculcated

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. J. NARINE]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

entrepreneurship into the people who live around Port of Spain. They have moved on to greater heights. That is what we are talking about. When you put money on the ground—and I am speaking as a layman—then it would move up—the multiplier effect. When the rich man has money, like what some of them did in the last six years, they filled a container in Miami with everything for their house and brought it down here. They would not buy at Courts, so nobody would work at Courts.

When poor people can sell “doubles” at the side of the road, if you have the economic power you would buy the “doubles” by the side of the road and that would enhance business. Many entrepreneurs in Trinidad and Tobago who are very rich, started from very humble beginnings. So what is wrong with creating hundreds of contractors under the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) who would bring themselves out of the doldrums that you all have put them in?

I am saying this is an example of a poor man’s budget, which would go up and treat with everybody in the society. [*Desk thumping*] When you remove income tax from earnings and savings, that is a government that cares about the people of Trinidad and Tobago. When you have a situation where we have revived the credit union movement in Trinidad and Tobago, that is a government that cares about the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Many of us, including myself—my number in the Agricola Credit Union was 651. Now I am able to put money into the credit union and reclaim it on my tax returns. This is the Agricola Credit Union. [*Member shows bag*]

We have over 50,000 members now. I can tell you that my family and I have benefited from being in the credit union movement. My colleague from Arima would tell you that the Eastern Credit Union has done so well over the years and it is poor people who save their money there and are able to build homes, buy cars and send their children to universities.

For this fiscal year, the Port of Spain City Corporation would receive \$2.630 million for development. We are not talking about the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) as yet. The Arima Borough Corporation would receive \$1.850 million; San Fernando City Corporation, \$2.310; Point Fortin Corporation, \$1.510 million; Chaguanas Corporation, \$2.250 million. You are talking about equitable distribution. The Chaguanas Corporation is receiving as much as, and even more than, Diego Martin, which is receiving \$1.490 million. This is not discrimination;

this is a benevolent government, which understands that we need to share the wealth throughout the country, unlike the last government. That is why they are there and we are here.

The Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation received \$2.350 million. I have some statistics here that would amaze you. The last Elections and Boundaries electorate count, Tunapuna/Piarco had 127,348, which is the highest number in Trinidad and Tobago, and in Chaguanas you have 46,500. Yet Tunapuna/Piarco got almost the same amount of money as Chaguanas did, because we are recognizing that Chaguanas is a growing place and they need some money to expand themselves. They need a municipal policing building; they need an abattoir and part of it is provided for in this budget.

The Sangre Grande Regional Corporation received \$1.425 million. The Members opposite have gone because they cannot take the jamming. In the last local government election, the Member for Nariva stood here and said that we stole an election. He told his political leader that they would have won seven seats in Sangre Grande but he did not tell the political leader who would have won the seven seats. Obviously it was the PNM. If he wants to know how to win an election let him ask his colleague from Siparia, where we never won a seat before and where your humble servant alone went down to work for an election—not pad an election—we worked in an election in Penal, their stronghold in the Siparia constituency, and we moved a seat from 500 votes to 2,235. We did not voter pad; we worked in that area and people were telling us that they were fed up of getting representation from one set of people all the time and not seeing any progress. They feel that under the PNM there would be progress and we would be able to make the difference.

We have done that in Couva; we have increased seats in Chaguanas; we have increased seats all over the country. We won 83 and the Opposition won 43 and that would continue to happen because we are going to be here by the year 2020 but I hope that we would have a better Opposition.

The Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation received \$1.205 million; the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, \$1.450 million; Siparia Regional Corporation, \$1.8 million; Debe/Penal Regional Corporation, \$1.7 million; Princes Town Regional Corporation, \$1.3 million. I am saying to you, Mr. Speaker, that we have shared the money equitably throughout the corporations. We have used that based on the statistics that we have on the corporations and we use these statistics for many other things.

So when someone comes here and says, “We have an estimate of \$830,000 that would fill some of the vacant posts in local government”—we also have under the Draft Estimates, a number of areas. For Goods and Services we now have an increase of \$1.852 million for the head office, and we have an increase for life guarding, and I would indicate to you what we did with the lifeguards between last year and this year when I go further into my contribution.

We also have here for General Administration an increase of \$1.355 million. It was \$6.5 million in 2003 and in 2004 it is now \$8.616 million. We need qualified people in the ministry to carry it forward and this is the only way it would happen. We also had an increase in Weights and Measures Inspectorate. You would understand that the Ministry of Local Government inherited a Weights and Measures Division and we are trying to bring some legislation to Parliament that would change that archaic Act which governs weights and measures. That means that the clock scales and digital scales that we use in the supermarket are not under the present Act, so we need to have some amendments.

During the budget debate, my colleague from St. Joseph raised a matter that I would like to deal with at this time. He spoke about the women’s programme in the Unemployment Relief Programme and he said it was not equitably distributed. He compared the figures in the Opposition areas to those in our areas. To start with, in 1991—1995, the People’s National Movement, under the same leadership of Mr. Manning, came up with a programme under the Unemployment Relief Programme for women.

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

12.45 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.45 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. J. Narine: Mr. Speaker, when we took the break, I was replying to the Member for St. Joseph who had raised a matter here on the women’s programme on many occasions and he raised it again today. I hope that when I am through he would understand. Although he is not here I hope he would read the *Hansard* and understand what the women’s programme is all about.

When the PNM administration assumed office from 1991—1995, we had come up with this programme in 1992—1993 for women in the Unemployment Relief Programme. It is a programme where we used the single heads of households, that is, mothers who have children to care for, and we took them to work from 9.00

a.m. to 2.00 p.m. In that way we were giving them an opportunity to prepare their children, take them to school and after school they would take them home so that the children would be well secured and monitored throughout their time.

This programme was a successful one during that period. However, when the UNC took office, they felt that treating with single parents was not the way to go. As they normally did with all the programmes, they shut the programme down. When we returned to office last year, we restarted it with help from the Cabinet, where we got additional funding. For this year we had to use the money from the Unemployment Relief Programme to continue that programme. Thanks to the Minister of Finance we have heard in the budget that the Unemployment Relief Programme would now have \$200 million, \$15 million of which would be added to the women's programme. Of course, we need to send some of that money to Tobago. When the allocation was \$136 million, they got \$11 million. So to administer the programme we would have to look at other areas for women in terms of training and so on.

When the Member spoke about the disparity in distribution, in the women's programme we were targeting the school population, where the women in the schools programme did work like painting, cleaning of the schools' compound, kitchen gardening, landscaping, flower gardening and general maintenance. It is not based on constituency; it is based on regions. The Unemployment Relief Programme works by regions. We used the Central Statistical Office Report to look at unemployment in certain areas. Of course, where there are more schools there would be more employment.

So you had a situation where, in this programme for the last year the women working five hours a day would get \$10 an hour which may be increased this year. We are looking at it and at the amount of money we have for the programme. We were able to employ 16,310 persons in this programme on a short-term basis and out of a total of \$16.282 million allocated to the Unemployment Relief Programme there was an allocation of \$125,000 for the programme in Trinidad.

What we have to look at also is the population. As I said before, the last EBC report has shown us where Tunapuna/Piarco has the largest population among the regions and Laventille is second, with 106,000. Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo has a large amount, almost 100,000. So in this situation we look for where the schools are located and obviously the East/West Corridor has the most schools in the country. So when the Member says that we have given more to this constituency and less to the UNC constituencies, I want to know who is the Member for

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. J. NARINE]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Barataria/San Juan; I want to know who is the Member for St. Joseph. It is the same person who is speaking who has women working in all the schools in St. Joseph, doing this excellent job that they have been doing between 1991—1995, and which we started last year.

We must compliment the Ministry of Finance for seeing a vision for single parents, some of whom do not have an education. They are able to take their children to school, work during the school hours, collect their children after school and take them home.

This programme would continue and it would be expanded and money would be sent to Tobago to do the same thing so that Trinidad and Tobago would benefit from it. Since I am on the Unemployment Relief Programme, let me indicate to you that in the last budget I indicated here that in the year 2001 the UNC rushed into Cabinet on the Friday and passed money for the Unemployment Relief Programme. I would tell you what we found when we came into office last year.

Over the period 1997—2001 we owed almost \$30 million and I had to go to Cabinet from time to time to ask for money and this year we received \$4.7 million based on audited reports. This was an audited report when they took it to the Cabinet, but I would deal with that in a while.

The situation is, we have already paid out \$4.7 million and \$11 million, and out of that sum we still owe \$15.9 million. I am certain that the Minister of Finance would make sure that we use part of the funding that we got this year to settle the outstanding debts that they left for us.

Listen to what happened at that time. When I looked at this document, I asked the auditors in the ministry to review it because I was not satisfied. I took it back to Cabinet and asked them to look at it again because the first thing I saw here was \$230,000 for “Repairs to Government Quarters Penal – Opposite Penal Market.” But hidden in other pages in this document they had \$279,450 for “Work done on MP’s Office, Siparia.”

Fortunately, I am a person who goes all over the country and when I saw this I realized it was the same building. The building that the Member for Siparia occupies is the same building they have twice here, confusing the two things, to say “government quarters opposite the market” and the next thing to say “MP’s office”. I am pleased to report to the Minister of Finance, that money which we were supposed to pay because the UNC Cabinet had passed it, I say no way. They came here and accused me of all kinds of things. From that half of the money that we have paid, we have saved \$2 million. [*Desk thumping*]

How did that saving come about? I would not call the contractors because when my auditors went to the Siparia office, the Member for Siparia came here and complained that there was a police officer with them and I should not send police to her office. Listen to what happened to this. When the contractors saw the police—many of them have cheques in the Ministry to collect and they are afraid to come for it, because they feel that they did not do the work and we cannot see some of the work. Mandirs were built in Gurahoo Trace and it was confused in that report to say “Sports and Culture Centre”. Yesterday the Member for Fyzabad was saying that we should take our programme and clean mandirs for Divali.

We have had a policy in Government for years now that once it is private property you do not send government workers there. Over the six-year period they did all kinds of things. They built mandirs, masjid, churches, all over the place, wasting taxpayers’ money, when there are drainage problems in Trinidad and Tobago. There are wooden bridges breaking down all over the place and you take this money and wasted it.

Last year I also raised the question of the Fullerton Fishing Complex, Cedros. That claim that was outstanding was \$846,727. The reduced claim is now \$551,000. We have saved \$295,727 on that project because of astute management by the Ministry of Local Government.

The next project was the “Water Project, Chatoor Avenue, Roots Avenue and Small Trace”. I do not know where that is. We do not think that we would have to pay that because it is a problem. We have not seen any pipelines. It does not exist. So that is another saving of \$165,701.

Then you had “Renovation to Point Fortin Government School”. When our workers went there the principal reported that nobody came there over the last five or six years and they did nothing. So that is another saving of \$328,900. The “Renovation Work to Fyzabad Secondary School”, no work was done and the sum of \$241,500,00 was saved on that project.

Then you have “Works on MP Office, Siparia”. This is what I was speaking about. The contractor indicated, “I do not know anything about that invoice.” The invoice was for \$279,450. I spoke here about Burkett Corner. The Member for Oropouche is always saying to report. I am reporting. Do you see what is happening here? And there is more to go. They are afraid to collect their cheques from the ministry because the police is waiting on some of them. Those are some of them where we could not ascertain whether the work was done or not, because

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. J. NARINE]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

if you have done some filling of potholes on some roads, obviously a number of years after you would not recognize whether that work was done. The auditors indicated to me that they would have to pay those types of jobs.

But Burkett Corner, I told you last year that I was not satisfied with that corner. They spent \$1.4 million. That is a saving again of \$700,000 because only half of the work was done.

2.00 p.m.

There was one hard surface court with a bleacher on a hillside and they used old drill pipes from Petrotrin to put up a bleacher on the second side. [Interruption] When you go to Rio Claro you must stop there and look at it. If you are not ashamed of that project you are real UNC. As a matter of fact, the chairman lost his life for that project. They on that side had to stay out of the Chamber today when I started to speak. They knew that I would not stop and I would continue. If we have saved \$2 million, I am certain we have more money to save before we pay off these people. [Interruption] You could accuse me of what you want. I am here to ensure that the funding that is provided by the Ministry of Finance is utilized to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in a transparent and accountable manner.

When the Prime Minister said that in his presentation of the Budget Statement, Members on that side laughed. They are not accustomed to hearing about transparency, accountability and good management. The Ministry of Local Government is not quite there because last year we came back as a ministry. They joined the ministries. The Ministry of Works and the Ministry of Local Government were one as the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. Now, there are two separate ministries and the workers are happy. They are working and are here with me in Parliament. They gave the information.

Since I am on the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP), I will indicate that although we paid some of the outstanding bills and the sum of \$16.8 million was used for the women's programme—

Mr. Ramnath: Did you pay for my office?

Hon. J. Narine: Your office costs \$250,000 for a garage. I am going to investigate that too!

In the normal programme we offered 112,775 ten-day opportunities. If a person had worked for one fortnight, that person would have been included in this amount. That cost \$68,384,251. The Member for St. Joseph said that there is less

money for the police service and the army and we have given money to URP to buy arms for the bandits. What a sad day, that the people who have no opportunity to be employed elsewhere, are employed by the URP and the women's programme and he said that they take the money and buy guns. He is a representative of people. I wonder how he represents people.

We did some pilot projects in the Unemployment Relief Programme. According to the financial regulations of this country, you have to follow them by the teeth. That is a PNM government. We never gave out the whole programme as the UNC did to their contractors, friends and families. One lady said that she did landscaping at the cremation site at Waterloo. Today, you cannot find the grass because she said that they did not maintain it and it died. Some of the plants also died. The auditor said that if she said that she did the work and somebody ascertains that the work was done, pay them. I have no problem with that.

We did pilot projects in Laventille East, Laventille West and Port of Spain. In Jacobin Street, we built a bridge with a box drain at the cost of \$45,000. We gave that project to the community. We gave them the materials and paid the labour cost to the workers. The supervisors got bonuses at 20 per cent of the money that they had utilized because they came in on time. If they did not come in on time, they would not have qualified for the bonuses. Through the Prime Minister's initiative we started this project. We feel that these projects were successful and we are looking at the new programme to continue putting some of that money into some of those projects within the community. We can give a community council a project and the profits from that project would go towards the council. We would do that where there are good community councils and non-governmental organizations.

We have in La Paille Circular, the box cover and drain which cost \$35,000; Ninth Avenue, \$43,000. Members here laughed when I said that I looked through a fence in Sea Lots to see how far the drain went. I was looking to see if we got value for money. Off course, even in Sea Lots we got value for money! We got a box drain for \$48,000. The workers there got the benefit of it. That was when I told a young man that if he wanted to clean drains for the rest of his life he could stay there. If he did not want to, he had to find one of the social programmes for on-the-job training. He had to learn a skill so that he could be gainfully employed.

At Straker Village, the box drain cost \$72,000. We also did a pilot project at Laventille Serenaders Pan Yard. The steel roof was done for \$70,000. Serenaders has some money to move on with. In general, the Unemployment

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. J. NARINE]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Relief Programme has performed. While we had mixed construction with sanitation because of the funding that we had and we wanted that to carry through until September 30, the close of the financial year, we were able to fence the basketball court in Covigne. We still have much work to do. That was left in abeyance for six years. Nobody interfered with it because it was in the constituency of Diego Martin West. That is the kind of discrimination that went on over the six-year period. Covigne basketball court pavilion is 50 per cent completed.

Scorpion Power Boats Pan Complex is 90 per cent completed. It consists of a toilet, fence and a bar. There is also a total of 2,170 feet of box drain and 1,463 feet of retaining wall. We knew what happened in Port of Spain. In addition to that, we did about 318 feet of box drain.

For years, there were unsightly shacks at the Croisee. The Member of Parliament for Barataria/San Juan tried to have the people removed. He never understood how that should have been done. We built the first section of the market and ensured that everybody had room to get in. When that happened we had demonstrations because people who were selling outside did not want to go in the market. There was a street from the Eastern Main Road leading to the entrance of the market. Nobody knew that was a street until we removed the vendors. We now have the Croisee Promenade. Anybody who passes there on any night of the week would realize how people are enjoying that area. The Croisee has now come back to what we knew years ago. I compliment the workers for that.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Narine: The community centre at upper Seventh Avenue is now 90 per cent completed. I heard from the residents that that centre was started 40 years ago. I cannot imagine that. I am saying that is not true. That is a small community centre in a nice community where people fight each other when they get up there. Probably, that was the problem. If you do not put amenities for these people to be trained, you will continue to have a problem on that street.

The community centre on Shen Street belongs to the constituency of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. During the time of the UNC, the Member

for Barataria/San Juan thought that area belonged to him and they started a centre not knowing that it was in the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant. That centre is now about 75 per cent completed. I am certain that as soon as we start the programme we would open that centre.

Mon Repos Community Centre, Ebonites Community Centre, Caledonia Harmonites Craft Booths are in the early stages of construction. Those are programmes in the San Juan/Laventille region.

You must have seen a beautiful retaining stonewall at Marie Road, where the Member for Laventille East/Morvant turned the sod. That job was done through the Unemployment Relief Programme. It is one of the best stonework that I have seen for a number of years. The people are talented but you need to put the facilities there for them.

Persons were scaling the wall of the Barataria Anglican School and vandalizing it. We carried that wall up to 4 or 5 ft. We did perimeter fencing and razor wire was put at the top. They are happy now but we still need to do some work for them.

Projects were done in the Arima and Sangre Grande areas, but I want to talk about the Matelot Kindergarten School, which the people started on their own. That is almost completed. Toco Main Road footpath is nearer to Sangre Grande where some children died recently in an accident.

The UNC government built Valencia High School far away from the town. It is dangerous for the children to walk there. It is off the Valencia Road going on to the Toco Road. It is one motorcar width to get to that school. We built a footpath from the school and extended it for a mile. It is almost completed. The road is extended so that the children can walk on the footpath and even use part of the road. You know how children are. I am proud of that project.

In Couva, Diamond Basketball Court is 50 per cent completed.

Mr. Ramnath: Where is that?

Hon. J. Narine: That is lower down Couva South, when you pass Phoenix Park. I visited it. We started that basketball court in 1994. For six years nothing was done. Last year we did not have the amount of money to use, but we started it this year and we would finish it. The community centre extension in Indian Trail, Couva is 50 per cent completed. The perimeter fence of the Tabaquite Composite School—*[Interruption]* we do not care about votes. We won Dow Village this time and we have a PNM councillor there. Look out we are coming!

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. J. NARINE]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

We are working all over the country. The Member of Parliament for Oropouche is happy now. He is boasting to the people that he has now come in and he got the whole of Harrypaul Village paved. The people know that it is the Road Improvement Fund. We sent the money to the corporation. They were in office for six years and did nothing in their areas. That is why we were able to win a seat in Siparia, Penal and Couva.

The Parent Teachers' Association of the Tabaquite Composite School has begged for material and the Self Help Commission gave them some money to buy it. They had no expertise and labour to do the wall around the school. It is a massive job. Since last year, we have been working with them. We are going to secure that school before the end of this year. Sometimes material is not there and we have to shift the gang to do sanitation.

The Cheshire Home in San Fernando is 100 per cent completed. Refurbishment and sanitation are ongoing.

The recreation ground on Wilson Road, FCB Clarke Road is the club that produced Ganga. *[Interruption]* You said that we did nothing in south Trinidad. The India A Team was here for the West Indian Cricket Board of Control. It is a squatting area and Petrotrin's land. They did some work but left all the bleachers uncovered. You will bring children to see India A Team play against Trinidad on that ground and put them in the sun to sit. That is the kind of people UNC people are. We covered three stands for \$108,000. The High Commissioner from India and I met the team on that day. Mr. Alloy Lequay wrote a letter thanking the ministry for helping the club.

We paved roads in Third Company, Fifth Company and Smart Avenue. That avenue is an area called "Dog Patch". Because a certain ethnic group lives there, "nothing for dem". We did drainage for them. They had a recreation ground that Debe/Penal Regional Corporation does not cut. The people have to collect the money to do it. We have carried about 100 loads of earth fill. We now have a proper recreation ground. I am certain that next year we would refurbish the pavilion and hard surface court to make them comfortable. They never did anything for the people in Lachoos Road because they feel that they would vote for PNM. Some of them would vote for you if you would work for them, like what PNM does. We have done work in Enterprise North and South in the Unemployment Relief Programme.

They talk about discrimination. There are two candidates who fought elections for them; one is Miss Martinez who fought for Port of Spain South and

the other, Elizabeth Awai who fought for Port of Spain North. They got nothing from the UNC. They fooled them. The people were suffering. They went to the Prime Minister at his office and he sent them to me. They worked all year in the Unemployment Relief Programme as monthly paid clerical assistants. How can they treat people like that? They would want them again. Next time they would have to take vagrants out of Port of Spain to fight elections for them. There is a gentleman called Kenrick Thong. In 1990, he lost a leg here from a gunshot. He was not employed for years. He was employed at Couva. That was a big thing. Our Prime Minister, the hon. Patrick Manning is not only for one section of people in Trinidad. He is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Where you falter he would take up the slack. You have seen the results in the last election. A perfect example is 83—43 of people dissatisfied with your representation over the years you have sat there representing them.

We got \$23,749,000 for the Road Improvement Programme. We put \$20,048,000 for paving of roads. Wooden bridges all over Trinidad were being broken we thought that we would utilize some of that fund to build bridges. The Member for Nariva told me that when I am opening the next bridge to call him. He wants to be there to cut ribbon. He did nothing for six years, but he wants to cut ribbon.

Mr. Partap: The contract was awarded by your ministry and supervised by you. One of the abutments to the bridge was leaning. It was demolished because you failed to provide the supervision. Could you tell us what was the kickback? Did you receive it?

Hon. J. Narine: I would tell you what was the kickback? Where was that \$2 million that we saved out of the URP? The MP for Nariva does not even know his constituency. That bridge is on Martin Saza Road and not on La Salle. We paved La Salle Road with the Road Improvement Fund. You have to turn on to Martin Saza. Because of the soil one of the abutments leaned and we had to demolish. It was rebuilt at no cost to the Government. The contractor had to replace it. If it were in UNC's time, you would have received it. We are not in that. He does not even know where the bridge is. I would carry him to show him.

We are doing the Sin Verquenza Bridge. There are three bridges to link Guatapajaro to the Cumuto Main Road going to Coryal. There are many roads in the country districts. If we fix those roads and build bridges we will shorten time. In Siparia, there is a bridge in Boodhoo Trace. They said that the Member of Parliament grew up there and used to bathe in the river. That has been broken for

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. J. NARINE]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

the last 15 years. People have to take half an hour to get home. We would build that bridge. Sin Verquenza would be finished.

A long tray truck was passing to go to Velasquez Road where they were building a community centre and it fell in the river. I am proud to tell you that those abutment walls are up. A contract is out at Pres T Con to put up the slabs.

He would not know where Beharry Bridge is. That is in Fishing Pond and it is completed. All those works are taking place in Nariva constituency, yet they talk about discrimination. He has just lost two seats in local government, one in Cumuto/Tamana and the other in the southern part of Sangre Grande. When the next local government election comes, we will wipe him out.

On the Sin Verquenza Bridge the contractor put a wooden bridge on the side for the people to use. Because he was playing politician, he went to a wedding and went with television cameras to say that they built the bridge and we did not finish it. The bridge would be finished but to your detriment. He has done nothing. We got 12 votes in Guatapajaro; in the last election we got 80. My family who are pundits; remember that PNM has 10,000 new members. Watch “yuhself”! We are doing much work to improve the situation in the country.

The people in Moruga knew that the Western Bridge would fall. When the television cameras came it was almost completed. As soon as Pres T Con is ready with the slabs we would pass the top of the bridge. They would have one to last them 40 years. In Housa they burnt the bridge after it fell. They started one abutment and the second one would be finished in the next two weeks. In the meantime we are giving out the contract to get the slab. If we can build ten bridges a year with the funding that we have, we would be helping the Minister of Works and Transport with his programme. Everybody would be developing at the same time. That is 2020 vision, which is to have a holistic approach to make life better for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have inherited a lifeguard unit in the Ministry of Local Government. Last year the lifeguards in Mayaro rescued 15 persons and there was no drowning. Why? The hon. Member asked question No. 148, which I answered. He was surprised to know how much equipment we had bought for the lifeguards in Trinidad. I do not want to go through this because my time is short. This year up to August, in Mayaro, one person was rescued and two drowned. One was a lifeguard who was struck by the propeller of a boat.

In Maracas Bay last year, there was one drowning and 74 persons were rescued. We provided equipment for them. In 2003, we had 38 rescues and two

persons drowned. One was a big PR thing on television where a doctor said that he wanted to do mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. When we investigated that person was not a doctor.

In Las Cuevas last year, there were 19 rescues and one person drowned. In 2003, 13 persons were rescued up to this time and no drowning. In Salybia, Matura part of the beach is bad. We have put a unit with eight lifeguards and we bought equipment for them. That is now a safe beach to bathe.

During this period, The SRC's report carried up the honorarium for mayors, chairmen, councillors and aldermen.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant, you would have your full 75 minutes. We can hear the Member. Let us listen to him.

2.30 p.m.

J. Narine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When the Prime Minister announced that we were going to accept the SRC's Report and it came here, the Members on the other side told their members not to take the back pay. All the other mayors, chairmen, and councillors collected the back pay before they did. We are proud to know that we have been able to upgrade the salaries for councillors and aldermen. Although it is a part-time job, we recognize that they have a great part to play in local government. Mayors and chairmen now have transport facilities where they could get a loan at 6 per cent to purchase a vehicle; subsistence allowance, entertainment allowance, vacation leave, telephone facilities and corporation constituency allowance. We are now allowing them some funding for stationery and so on to run an office within their electoral district. They also have medical benefits. When one looks at the other councillors and aldermen they almost have the same facility. From time to time, the PNM recognizes the service that is provided for our people and we would honour the councillors, aldermen, mayors and chairmen.

Mr. Speaker, within the Ministry of Local Government we have a Municipal Policing Unit. The Cabinet approved a core establishment of 140 municipal police officers. They are as follows:

- 10 municipal police inspectors
- 10 municipal police sergeants
- 20 municipal police corporals
- 100 municipal police constables.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. J. NARINE]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

What I have done with the ministry since last year—this is including the nine corporations that are not boroughs and the borough of Chaguanas. We went to the Police Service Commission and they put out advertisements and had interviews. Appointments have been made as follows:

- 1 municipal police inspector
- 5 municipal police sergeants
- 1 municipal police corporal
- 32 municipal police constables

We are hoping that with additional interviews, persons will fit in there. Mr. Speaker, when we have developed this policing unit, it will help the normal police service in that our people could take some of the smaller cases so that police could concentrate on the larger matters of crime and so on in the country.

We had sent 32 former estate police officers, who were working in the ministry, to the Police Training College and they have already been trained. We had some problems with the uniforms where the Commissioner of Police, at the time, thought we should not use the same buttons as the police service. We have the uniforms now and we have been given permission to get our own—I announced that here last year—a draft policy paper that we have produced for local government. I think it was the Member for Caroni Central who asked whether that document would be brought to Parliament for discussions. Yes. We had some adjustments to make to that draft policy paper on local government. Last year I spoke about it, probably you cannot remember. You had asked if we would bring it here.

In the Ministry of Local Government we had advisors for a period and we felt that a draft policy paper should come in when the new corporation takes place. This is why there was a little delay. The Prime Minister was very helpful to the Ministry of Local Government in that he gave us advice, he went through the first document, suggested changes and so on. We are going to Cabinet with the paper. We would have a period of time when we are going to send it out for consultation so that nobody would be left out. When it comes to the Parliament, Mr. Speaker, it will be a policy decision for the people of Trinidad and Tobago as far as decentralization and other things are concerned for local government. This paper outlines proposals that will continue to reform the local government system; it emphasizes on systems of decentralization—we spoke about that and we are committed to it—to make the system more effective and efficient.

Apart from that, we had a committee set up looking at the workers in the Ministry of Local Government to get productivity out of them—not half an hour's work and they leave and go home. We are now training the supervisors so that they will be monitoring the situation and we would get them to work. It may take a little while because we have some delinquents at the corporations where people feel they just have to collect salaries and not work. I am there on the field working with them and I am certain it will improve.

We have to improve greater citizen involvement and participation. This is what this Government is about. All the communities must have a part to play in their local government representation, as to what a councillor should provide for them and what he should know about his district. Mr. Speaker, you see how the Member of Parliament for Nariva did not know where the bridge was? We do not have councillors like that. They know their areas well.

Mr. Speaker, this is to ensure that there is transparency, good governance and accountability to the respective local communities that will allow open and accountable decision-making. It means that where I live in Samaroo Village our village council must be part of our progress. We must say what we want. We must prioritize what we want. We must say that our recreation ground—which I started as a county councillor and which is incomplete—is a priority for us. We must say that we need a community centre for the area, which we have been trying to get for the last 30 years and was unsuccessful.

We are also to ensure there is a greater responsiveness to the local community. Many times people write the Ministry of Local Government and get no acknowledgements, nobody listens to them and they end up with a letter in my office feeling that the Minister runs the corporations. The Act is clear. The corporations are responsible. I am the person to ensure they work, open the doors, and make sure they have funding. We have been equitable in our funding for the Road Improvement Fund. This year is another successful year for the Road Improvement Fund to the various corporations.

The draft policy paper on local government for the year 2003, as prepared by the Ministry of Local Government, is to come in this financial year. We have to be certain of what we are doing. There are some amendments to be made to Act No. 21 of 1990 and to do other things to carry local government forward but we need proper managers so we have been training people. We cannot have CEOs, mayors and chairmen not knowing what they are about. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has been taking six to eight persons per year for

training. Last year, six persons went for training and this year six also went for training.

We had an induction programme for the first time after a local government election. We went to the University of the West Indies for two days. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie was there for the opening and we trained them with respect to Act No. 21 of 1990; the Standing Orders; about their responsibilities and how they should perform as councillors. We did not only do it for PNM councillors, we did it for all councillors, aldermen, mayors and chairmen throughout Trinidad and Tobago. It was very successful in that it was a joint effort with the Ministry of Local Government, the University of the West Indies and the Association of Local Government. People now know how they are to operate.

Let me say, Mr. Speaker, my doors are open to all mayors and chairmen. The Mayor of Chaguanas visited with us already. I have a request from Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, and we are treating with them. All the problems they have, we are there to guide them to solve them. We are not going to sit there and allow people to go into restaurants with their friends and spend all the refreshment money and say they are councillors. We are not going to do like what the Member for Fyzabad wants us to do, to take money and put it in a mayors and chairmen fund and the mayor is renting out a car park to a credit union and passing the money through his funds and we do not know what is taking place with it. There must be accountability and transparency. [*Desk thumping*]

I am happy to be part of this budget debate and I am also happy that the Minister of Finance takes local government very seriously by providing this funding for us this year. From last year to this year we have had increases and for the next vision for 2020, I hope that we will continue to get additional funding. We will have to utilize the taxpayers' moneys properly.

I thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*): Thank you very much. Let me make it abundantly clear, Sir, that my intervention is to speak on the budget and not reply to the pedestrian contributions that I just heard. It appears to me that the spirit of debate has died and that we should now shift from the item on the agenda "Statements by Ministers" to the debate. What we have been treated to by Members on the other side—I rather think it is a strategy of the Prime Minister—is a reading out of a speech, contrary to the rules of the House. I know the Speaker can give permission, and I trust that you did. We have been treated to a list of accomplishments, achievements and so on, without regard to what the previous speaker had to say.

My intervention at this stage is because I have to be elsewhere tomorrow at a very important international conference on Climate Change, which the Prime Minister was invited to open but, unfortunately, he would not be there. The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment will grace us with his presence. We will be discussing the implications of the Kyoto Protocol and the clean development mechanism under the protocol.

I have entered the debate now so that I can prepare myself for this most important meeting. After all, I was set back a great deal having to sit here and listen to the regurgitation by Ministers—who, for the time being, sit on the other side—on things they have been talking about for the last year. What is most striking is that for them the world began in 1991; it came to an end in 1995 and then it was recreated by 2001. There was a very interesting missing period.

Mr. Manning: A hiatus.

Mr. K. Ramnath: A hiatus between 1995 and 2000, so every time you hear Members speaking, it will be up to 1995 and beginning at 2001. Nevertheless, the point I am trying to make is that we have reduced the level of debate in this House to one of propaganda. When I heard the brilliant contribution, the masterpiece delivered by the Member for St. Augustine—[*Desk thumping*]*—An extraordinary contribution, contemporary thoughts based on a review of history and a review of experience. Mr. Speaker, this could have only come from the Member for Chaguanas. [Interruption] I beg your pardon, St. Augustine. We were serving at the same time when he was Member for Chaguanas. No offence meant to my friend from Chaguanas. After such a contribution, the contempt of the PNM became self-evident with the intervention by the Member for Arouca North, clearly an attempt, Mr. Speaker, not to debate serious issues, but rather to become involved in insulting behaviour and so on.*

I would have thought that as the Member for Diego Martin Central had said to me repeatedly: “Do not raise Iscott, Methanol Plant and Northern Construction’s—a very famous company—role in the racing complex, Sam P. Wallace, and the role of Prof. Ken Julien at the National Energy Corporation, the people have discounted them by changing the Government.” The Member for Diego Martin Central cautioned me. Yet nothing about what they plan to do is coming from the Ministers, it is all about what this gang of nefarious politicians did six years ago. It has nothing about any plans.

I was not in the Government but as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, I was delighted in my travels abroad, which were frequent, to tell the world what a great

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. RAMNATH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

country Trinidad and Tobago was under the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] I was delighted to hear from visitors from the Global Environmental Fund, the World Bank, the Inter-Development Bank, Apell, Caricom members—I am a member of the Advisory Committee to Caricom on setting up the Climate Change Centre. You know that. I was delighted to hear them talk about the direction Trinidad and Tobago was heading, under a UNC government.

I was most delighted, whenever I travelled. When I landed at Piarco International Airport my feet never touched the ground. [*Desk thumping*] I came from an air-conditioned cabin all the way to the immigration and I saw smiling faces of custom officers, for the first time, because they were comfortably housed in one of the world's finest airports; if not the finest. All we heard about was people who stole. I just want to caution my friends because if we want to look at cost overruns, we have all the documents to show what happened at Iscott. I am not seeing my friend, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who is also my line Minister as an employee of Petrotrin. I remember him quoting the vision of Dr. Eric Williams. I particularly noted and drew it to the attention of the current Prime Minister that not once during his speech did he speak about the vision of the current Prime Minister. But I understand his difficulty! I was a minister of energy who was treated in the same way by a former prime minister. I was asked to go and count the number of wells that they drilled, while somebody else was given the portfolio to do the work of minister of energy. As I said, I understand my friend's difficulty. I understand that Prof. Julien has taken over everything; the Energy Sub-Committee; all the negotiations. He now has to check how many miles or kilometers of seismic line they run in the southern basin in south Trinidad.

The point I want to make is that I want to caution him—I was there when Dr. Eric Williams spoke, you know. I was very young at the time. He said that “King sugar must now give way to steel.” [*Interruption*] Were you there?

Mr. Manning: I was there.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Okay, but you did not learn very much. [*Laughter*] The conceptualization of the Port of Point Lisas, as the Prime Minister would know, was a project of the South Chamber of Commerce, headed at the time, by the Robert Montano. The Prime Minister knows very well because he was having discussions in his capacity then as the Member for San Fernando East.

I want to pay tribute to the men and women who came up with the idea of a port in central/south Trinidad, which today is one of most remarkable energy

centres in the western hemisphere. I want the PNM to know that in the six years we were in office that Point Lisas was also expanded; that industries were being constructed. You would think nothing happened and then the world began, and the world began when they returned to office; when the coronation took place; when a certain gentleman, through moral and spiritual values criteria, decided that he was going to install our dear Prime Minister into office. The rest is history.

The vision is one that we share. It is wrong to say that because a lot of those projects were started in 1977 and beyond, when we took office, we abandoned such a very noble goal. We never abandoned, Mr. Speaker. In fact, as I said, there was constant expansion. Exploration drilling continued on the east coast. The work that BHP was doing was being done under the aegis of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, led by the visionary Finbar Gangar—*[Interruption]*—legendary and visionary.

They could not account for the cost overruns at Iscott that were twice the price. They could not account for the cost overruns at the Hall of Justice, \$64 million to \$164 million. They could not account for the cost overruns at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex Mount Hope. They could not account for the cost overruns at the Twin Towers. I will repeat to you; we had to bring Prof. Julien by summons to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee and he refused to come! Mr. Speaker, these are the people who continue to have the eminent professor in their company. These are the people who do not have any idea of what it was like to deal with a two-dollar company in the Cayman Islands named after the wives of two functionaries, Jane and Esther. The company was called the Estane Corporation in which Prof. Ken Julien had a personal interest. They will not tell you that Prof. Ken Julien has a long-standing business interest with Dr. Lenny Saith; a questionable business interest and every day they talk about corruption. They will not tell you—Let them go and reopen all the issues that were raised in Point Lisas during the period. *[Interruption]* You will get a chance to talk; you were not around at that time. They do not wish to remind themselves because their world began in 1991, but the Prime Minister's world began in 1971. Being an accident in history, he won in 1971 in a no-vote campaign.

Mr. Manning: And never looked back. *[Laughter]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: He was made Prime Minister under exceptional circumstances, through a coronation by his former colleague and guru—the former President. He escaped the coup in 1990; I do not know how he knew there was going to be a coup. He left the Parliament just before they took us as

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. RAMNATH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

hostages—[*Interruption*] When we sit on this side and listen; when we hear about our association with Northern Construction, they will not tell you that it was the very same company that was building stands in the Queen's Park Savannah under the aegis of the PNM that was with Sam P. Wallace who was building racetracks in which TT \$120 million at a rate of 2.42 per US dollar was buried in the swamp.

Mr. Speaker, they targeted three people: Kuei Tung, their former ministerial colleague; Ferguson, Advisor to the Minister of Finance and Galbaransingh. So they knew; they had them in their bosom. They comforted them during their term of office and from the moment they left and they sought work and contracts with the government in power they became public enemy number one.

I remember Kuei Tung's house was searched immediately after he resigned from the Cabinet. [*Interruption*] The Inland Revenue, instructed by the Prime Minister, went to the house of a former minister to search his house just a few days after. [*Interruption*] I do not buy into being heckled and so on, but you see they cannot take the jamming. They cannot deal—I know the difficulty the Member for Diego Martin West has. In his case he has to appear as if he is loyal to the Prime Minister. [*Laughter*] I understand his problem so he has to heckle me. He understands very well that the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) was not introduced to discriminate only against us but there are party groups designed to ensure that he would never again see an attempt to lead the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] So my advice to him—We have a job for you at the University of the West Indies as the head of the Department of Geosciences. You are a very bright man so we will give you a job. When your candidate loses an election in your own constituency, as Chairman, you think he hopes to win the election as chairman of the party? [*Interruption*] I beg your pardon, Sir. So I understand your difficulty. Give me a chance—[*Interruption*] That is because of my admiration for him.

I get increasingly irritated in spite of my experience here with attack after attack. They chained people and paraded them through San Fernando close to your chambers on charges of voter padding; decent, wonderful, people. They have not convicted a person in spite of their years of campaigning on the issue of voter padding. They shackled them and walked them through. Do you know something, Mr. Speaker, certain sections of the police force—[*Interruption*] I am talking about the police.

Hon. Member: You are talking about the police now?

Mr. K. Ramnath: You will not distract me.

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Mr. K. Ramnath: The PNM campaign of voter padding resulted in their friends in the police service arresting and charging people. Those enthusiastic and exuberant policemen had no difficulty in arresting my friends from Chaguanas and Caroni Central.

I went there on the day of the budget—I was driving to Port of Spain to listen to the Prime Minister. You lost an opportunity to speak to me, Mr. Prime Minister, because of the action, which clearly was not necessary in the circumstances, but the police can act when they want to act. That is the point I want to make.

3.00 p.m.

The police can act when they want to act. I do want to get into that before I am distracted. I have a lot to say.

When the campaign of voter padding failed and through the grace of the almighty A.N.R. Robinson, you became Prime Minister, the first thing they did was to set up a Commission of Enquiry into the Elections and Boundaries Commission, and that was an absolute and total shame and disaster. So they lost underground.

As if that were not sufficient, they thought the honourable Justice Sealey would have done their bidding not knowing we still have decent and respectful jurists in the country. They appointed her to head a Commission of Enquiry into the Biche High School. A report they have hidden from this Parliament and from the public. Do you know what Justice Sealey said in that report? That we should have—she was very careful not to do like Deyalsingh and behave as if he was an authority on matters of elections. The honourable Lady decided that she was going to look at the law and facts and not make a judgment on geo-science and geology and on the issues relating to the school, civil engineering and so forth. She recommended—and a bit of that was hinted by the hon. Minister of Education yesterday—that a consultant should be hired with the view of trying to find a solution to the problems raised at the enquiry.

I do not want to spend time on that here today because everybody knows that the Point Fortin Secondary School is sitting on one flank of the Los Bajos fault that is running through Point Fortin, that there are seeps of oil, Prime Minister, which you know about in the school compound; that the St. Peters Primary School is on the central range fault; that the Augustus Long Hospital is on the central range fault; that behind every home in Barackpore, Wilson and Santa Flora are oil

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. RAMNATH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

wells; and inside people's yards of people are oil wells and nobody gets poisoned from volatile organic compound and so forth. So we know that when you excavate to the extent that they did at Biche, you were expected to find that because it is not even a secondary fault, it is an extraordinary minor fault, associated with the Central Range fault. But in order to spite the UNC they want to spite the children of Biche and hon. friend, the Member for Nariva. They know that. We conducted a number of transect ambient air-quality surveys, internal surveys inside the schools for weeks upon weeks to ascertain whether there was a problem with respect to noxious gasses. There was no such problem. We did not only do that with the EMA and Cariri, we hired an independent consultant out of Alberta and they agreed that we did not have that problem but the school remains closed. That commission of enquiry has turned out not only to be a colossal waste of time but a waste of the public funds.

Then came the other commission of enquiry into the airport. Now we are told that the matter is so sensitive that it has to be sent to Bob Lindquist and some lawyer in Canada. So it looks as though we are really cutting our ties with the Privy Council. We have now gone to the Canadian Council looking for advice on what to do with the report of the Airports Authority. I feel the problem they have in dealing with this matter is a problem with Bernard and not a problem with what the report contains. They had a problem concerning the conduct of the chairman of the enquiry rather than problems with the contents of the report of the commission of enquiry.

I came from Costa Rica last week. Always out. I make enormous contributions to the world of science. I went to an Environmental Manager's Conference and I congratulate the Minister for the removal of leaded gasoline in the country. I agree with him on that but I may not agree with him on whether it was necessary for us to raise the price at this time, but we are one of the few countries that still have leaded gasoline. Arpel has made a dedicated effort in Latin America and a large number of Latin American countries have now gone the way of removing lead. We went there to discuss that and many other things. They built an airport in Costa Rica, which is a fine airport. The Costa Rican Ambassador in Port of Spain does not agree but I think we have a better airport than they have in San Jose. You must talk to him and find out the cost of the airport in Costa Rica. You must find out what happened to Mirabel Airport in Montreal.

I was a student in Montreal at the time when they decided to remove the airport from Dorval to Mirabel. The terminal building and all the associated runways, parking areas, and so forth. [*Crosstalk*] I know what I am talking about.

You see I am really encouraging them into debate rather than regurgitating what they did or did not do. In the hon. Member's case he would have to account for two days a week of work because he is not there most of the time. I have difficulty in finding him at his office. [*Interruption*] He would find out just now whom he is working for.

Mirabel Airport in Montreal turned out, after almost US \$1 billion to be not the most desirable location and not the best decision. It has turned out to be what we called the proverbial white elephant.

Cost overruns associated with the Piarco Airport is nothing new. I have no difficulty if anyone who had violated the people of Trinidad and Tobago, if anyone who has become corrupt as a result of their intervention in these matters, I have no difficulty for you to take them to the court and let the court decide what it should do with them. I am not here to defend anybody who has been dishonest. But what I find strange is that they behave as though they are judge, jury and executioner. Their time would come when people are going to start asking them once again as I will do today, about certain things that are happening.

I have a few questions to ask. One pertains to the NGC of what I consider to be blatant corruption in the award of the 56-inch pipeline. I wanted to speak to you privately but since your Members have chosen to use this forum to continue to act—it is difficult to deal with you on a personal basis when sensitive matters come to our attention. I will raise it nevertheless and I would try not to call names.

Let me get back to the issue. Let justice take its course. You paraded an eminent citizen of this country, Dr. Gopeesingh. Whatever you think of him is not important as a politician. [*Crosstalk*] Your police paraded him—I never knew that my hon. friend, laid charges against people and walked them through. Nine counts. You see, the PNM and certain sections of the police are in collusion and I will show them.

I enjoy speaking here because I must be the only one who gets all this attention. The PNM and their associates in the police service who are delighted to walk people in chains through San Fernando under voter padding charges, Mr. Gopeesingh, an eminent professor of gynaecology and obstetrics at the University of the West Indies for nine counts of misbehaviour in public office. You did not charge Julien for misbehaving in public office. The magistrate freed him without even any debate on the issue. The magistrate said, in my own language, that there is no such charge and a lot of nonsense but it is what has happened to the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. RAMNATH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

reputation of the eminent doctor is what is the issue. And it was all part of a whole PR campaign of the PNM, in the public service, in the police service, everywhere in the country, and their little cronies to destabilize the government of the United National Congress. All of the building blocks are now collapsing. They conspired with the police to charge Dhanraj Singh. [*Desk thumping*] I am not going to pursue the argument. I will leave some for another time. Of course, Mr. Prime Minister, since you were so expedient and so concerned about an article which appeared in the *Express* about the Leader of the Opposition having a bank account in London, which ultimately got the Attorney General involved, and ultimately got the Integrity Commission involved, and everybody on the opposite side are so concerned about accountability and so forth, and since the concern led him to have police officers parading Heathrow in London, going to a bank and whatever it was; police officers who cannot find the killers that roamed this country, police officers who cannot deal—lend me the newspapers. Every day kidnap spree, murder. There is a charge here in the newspapers by a woman who said one of the persons who came to investigate a murder was one of the persons who committed the murder.

Do you know this so-called high official of the police force, pictured leaving Piarco; he is going to look for Panday in England. Based on newspaper reports and based on their mutual assistance programme, they pursued this with such great ferocity. I invite him and hon. Ministers, since they are so concerned that they should declare their assets to the public, not to the Integrity Commission, since they have caused Basdeo Panday's account to be published in a newspaper called the *Newsday* which is supported by drug money.

I fear no one and you know that. A newspaper funded by drug money and a newspaper that has certain people working there who are on drugs. Since they got them to publish Carlos John's account and Panday's account, why not be good gentlemen and ladies and make your accounts available as I would do in the *Newsday*. They would publish it! Or the *Express*. Let us forget the Integrity Commission and publish it for all to see. Ganga Singh too! [*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

You understand how they are trying to make this frivolous. I am told that certain Ministers have been the beneficiary of certain payouts relating to the sale of companies. I do not believe it. And I could use the privilege of Parliament and call names but I would not do that because it is not fair to any individual in the event that I am wrong. The point I want to make is, since you have pursued accounts of people with the objective of destroying them, I say to you be like

Caesar's wife, beyond reproach, and let me see your accounts published in the *Newsday*. I take up the Prime Minister's offer that the hon. Member would make his account available.

I listen to my friend, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, a man for whom I have much respect, extremely bright geologist. He was trained in Petrotrin as I was. So too was the Prime Minister, who did not take up the training seriously. He left very early and, of course, you know his history, all the wells he recommended were dry holes. I do not blame him for that because it was not his fault. But I was really taken aback by his rationale about the 1905 letter that he discovered. As I said earlier while he was not here, I really was a bit disappointed as I thought we would have heard much more from him. But as I said, since he is not in charge of the energy sector and Dr. Julien is, I imagine that we would be hearing much more from Dr. Julien than we would be hearing from him.

I was very interested in the statement he was making about plotting GDP per capita vs percentage of GDP exported and percentage GLP exported and then coming up with an index which demonstrated our state of development. I really want to find out because I need to talk to him about that. What was it all about in the context of Government's strategy?

I know that he sought to spend some time showing the relationship between developed-status country and one's need to have greater exports and so forth but there are very serious problems facing the energy sector. What is written in the budget statement was not elaborated upon. For example, the Prime Minister told this honourable House that he had spoken enough about the matter of ExxonMobil and the Soldado Field and that Mr. Malcolm Jones delivered a brilliant presentation on PowerPoint on the issue. He was not prepared to go into any details while he was addressing the honourable House, because he had spoken sufficiently about the airport. I want to raise that issue here again.

ExxonMobil was involved in the production-sharing agreement contract with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. ExxonMobil defaulted. They should have built a certain number of wells. There were certain financial commitments and I understood that the amount of many that were not expended would be in the vicinity of US \$47 to \$50 million. Now we are hearing something else. I would like the Prime Minister to say what the financial commitment was and what they had met because this is the first time we are hearing this. I have his address to the House of Representatives dated December 13. We are now being told ExxonMobil would now become involved in exploration activities in Trinmar.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. RAMNATH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

There has been no explanation with respect to the role that company would play in Trinmar. One of officials of Petrotrin made a public statement saying that will be doing 3D seismic work and they will be doing some exploration drilling but the terms of the agreement were not clearly arrived at.

All I am asking the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy is for him to tell the Prime Minister precisely what ExxonMobil will be doing in Trinmar. He had a Minister to do it and he did not do it. The reason for that is very simple. Is there going to be exploration work taking place in Trinmar for which we have to pay, and we are utilizing the services of the world's biggest company? Or do we have an arrangement with Exxon that there would be some sharing of discoveries that they may have found below certain horizons and so forth? People need to know that. Trinmar is an extremely viable company producing 36,000 barrels of oil at this time and I know that we are capable of doubling that production. In fact, if we bring one platform that was abandoned, which was the subject of another set of propaganda with FW Oil and so forth; if we bring a platform we can bring on 5,000 barrels a day without having to do anything.

The concern is what role would ExxonMobil be playing? Who is going to pay for it and who is going to benefit from the discoveries? I thought that was a rather simple matter for the Government to talk about since the Prime Minister boasted that this was a great opportunity to have the world's largest company.

Now, I am of the view based on his statement of December 13, that the reason ExxonMobil agreed was that there was a kind of swapping between their commitment under the production-sharing agreement and work at Trinmar, and that the basis for their presence there was for whatever moneys they would have expended in their exploration programme on the east coast would go into 3D seismic and exploration work at Trinmar. Nothing at all in a major debate such as a budget debate, which points in a certain direction. And that is how we are going to increase oil production particularly in the state-owned company? All we heard was that the Government intends to do 3D seismic work on land in south Trinidad. That is nothing new. That is an arrangement that Petrotrin has already put in place to do 3D seismic work on a limited basis at first in the southern basin, which we control all of. So to give the impression that they are going to do this big amount of work is to tell people what they already know.

What I find most amusing is that the production levy in and the budget statement is not clear on that and the Minister agrees with me on that—if you are producing less than 3,500 barrels a day you will not pay the production. There is not a single lease operator in the entire southern basin that is producing more than

1500 barrels per day. I do not know what Venture is doing since my hon. friend from Ortoire/Mayaro—we did pass on the Briton platform to him—whether he added any value before going into politics, but that might be the only company and more recently Vermillion, through the efforts of a joint venture with Petrotrin that was able to bring on 50 million standard cubic feet of gas. So you are doing no favour to anybody. You are not encouraging any of the on-land producers with the cap that you are putting on production levy in the industry. No benefit.

The Member for San Fernando West if I may give her some credit in her capacity as a former president of the South Chamber of Commerce spent a considerable amount of time and energy advocating greater opportunities for entrepreneurial skills in the production area in the oil industry. We were able—I come from the scorched earth, the earth the mafia has scorched in Central Trinidad so forgive my pronunciation.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Ramnath: While we are concerned with finding the elephant as the Prime Minister would describe the big find he feels that would take place, that has now gone to block 2C, on land, there are hundreds of persons who are interested in expending money in a very serious way in land operations.

Petrotrin production is declining annually and continually. We are dealing with very old fields. There are many acreages of producing wells which would be better managed by the people we call lease operators. But we need to give them incentives. There is need for a review of the whole taxation structure. I was told in an oblique way that the Government is coming with a new taxation bill for the oil industry. I have not seen anything nor has there been any discussion with the participants and with the stakeholders. In the budget debate nothing has been said about it. I do not know if he is waiting on his replay when he would usurp the function of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Couva South for giving way. Just to put on record that a very clear statement was made in the budget on this issue of taxation. We said that a new tax regime would go in place effective January 01, 2004 and the hon. Member having been a former minister of

energy himself knows that you can only do that by way of legislation. It has to be legislated since the existing tax regime is in place as a consequence of the actions of this honourable House.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I thank you for your attempt. When a Minister gets up and spends 75 minutes on reading out every bridge in Trinidad and worries about my multipurpose hall which is used by the Ministry of Community Development, the Ministry of Education, Sport—Minister Boynes went there to speak and he described it as a garage. He spent 75 minutes talking about bridges on roads and somewhere in the back of Nariva, and the Prime Minister did not do this honourable House the courtesy of spending five minutes to talk about an important instrument of economic development such as the taxation regime in the oil industry, and I was told that I should have just read that and staid quiet. Why could there not be some elaboration?

Mr. Williams: I will try to be very brief. Again, I sought to explain the production levy in my presentation. The fact of the matter is that oil companies that are producers now, the operators pay the production levy and it is companies that produce less than 3,500 barrels a day that are now exempt. This is one of the measures that had been requested by members of the South Chamber who are themselves oil producers. This goes directly to their bottom line as an incentive for them to produce. There are a number of other issues you raised but I would have to make other statements in other places to answer them.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, I am so happy that I have now returned the dignity of debating to this House, and I am happy for the explanation. We are not on opposing sides on this matter. The issue here happens to be incentives for operators in the industry. There should be no supplemental petroleum tax on people who are making five barrels a day and they have 20 wells and so forth. That should be something completely removed. There are a number of issues which should be raised when the bill comes to this House, but while you are looking forward to the deeper horizons and for larger production, you must make sure that the people who now work in this industry have an opportunity to expand their operations. I want to see more incentives offered to the local oil producers.

Mr. Speaker, when I joined Texaco in 1975, we were producing about 60,000 barrels of oil per day. In 1978 or 1979 this country was producing 228,000 barrels of oil per day, and peaked at 240. Today we are down 125,000 or 130,000 with some condensate and so on. For all these years all we ever did was to export

that commodity, in one form or another. We added some value at the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery—which is another issue—and we sold it abroad. It was like the export of brown sugar, and we did make some white sugar at the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery. When you look at what happened to the industry we have to pray that successive governments do not treat future production, as well as gas production that we are experiencing, in the same way.

I wonder sometimes what is the real value added in liquefying natural gas to sell in the same way we are exporting oil for the century we have been exporting oil.

I understand very well that it is a wasting asset, that you need to monetize your assets and so forth, but we need now to have a new look. There should be a national debate in this country—with the businessmen, the technicians, people from the university and the politicians—on the best use of our natural resources. PCS had closed down one of their plants demanding a certain price for natural gas. The price which they pay for natural gas in the petrochemical industry cannot be found anywhere else in the western hemisphere. Nobody is selling gas at that price to produce methanol, urea and ammonia.

Mr. Manning: It is twice the price of Venezuela's gas.

Mr. K. Ramnath: We are not dealing with Venezuela here. Venezuela has a lot of risks. There are people who do not even want to talk about investing in Venezuela. When I heard that you were signing a memorandum of understanding with Mr. Chavez, I realize now that it is either you were going mad or you had a serious problem with the Bush administration. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, let me say Venezuela is a very bad example. This cross-border field development plant had already been scuttled when BP had refused to have any further discussion with the Venezuelan counterparts.

Mr. Williams: That is not true.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I read that in the newspapers and that is what I know. I do not know whether anybody would want to talk to Venezuela and build any plants in Trinidad or in Venezuela based on the current political state in that country. Let us talk about Trinidad and Tobago for the time being.

We have come up with a very fancy agreement for the Atlantic LNG Train 4 and we are told that it is one of the best agreements we have arrived at. We are going to have them continue to pay 10 cents MMCF at the well head. We are virtually giving it away. I remember Trevor Boopsingh has been talking for the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. RAMNATH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

longest while about making sure that we guarantee our income at the well head and increasing the royalty at the well head.

Are we going to give, according to the statement made by the Prime Minister, allow ALNG some 15 years of this? For that they are going to give us a special tranche of gas and we are told that this will be a direct benefit to the ordinary citizens of the nation who would have the comfort of a stable price of electricity from the year 2003 to 2017. These companies are going to continue to benefit.

Mr. Manning: How much gas are they going to give us?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Why did you not tell us that?

Mr. Manning: We did.

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, you did not. You will have your chance with it. Mr. Speaker, I would like to work out the economics of that. The point I am making is that between the years 2003 and 2017 they will continue to pay 10 cents. After that we would then have an increase in the royalty.

When we entered into the agreement with Atlantic LNG, they have a contract with Repsol in Spain and it is based on what is called "net back" pricing. It depends on what price they fetch in Spain for power generation, the degasification cost in Spain, the transportation cost between Trinidad and Spain, the cost of operating the liquefaction plant with a guaranteed rate of return of 12 per cent and the cost of transport from Point Fortin to Galeota. When you back-off all of that cost then you determine the price of gas that you are selling to them.

Mr. Speaker, they have a novel way of ensuring that we lose and they benefit. When politicians come to this House and say they have gotten a better deal than on the last occasion that might be true. The ring fencing is an extremely good proposal. The fact that no tax holiday would be given to Train 4 is a good proposal. I am saying that when we commit ourselves to such long-term supply of gas, and large volumes of gas, we find it extremely difficult to change the rules of the game if we do not make those rules properly in the first place. I want the Government to understand that we are not on different sides on this matter. This is an issue of the national patrimony.

Mr. Manning: The national interest.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The national interest and the best we can obtain for the sale. You know what ALNG did? When the Henry Hub mark-up price went up in Southern United States, in Georgia I think it was—I visited the Elba Island in Georgia myself—and they discovered that there was a great demand for gas in the

United States, they turned the ships that were headed for Spain around into the United States. When the time came to check the price at the well-head they did not use the Henry Hub marker of \$6 or \$8 per million standard cubic feet, they used what the contracted price was on the Spanish market.

Mr. Manning: But who contracted that price?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not know who contracted it. I am saying that I do not care who was in government and who is in government now. I am saying that successive administrations must make sure that we do not export all the gas as we have exported all the oil and that we get the best price for it. I am not here to tell them that they should have gotten a little more than \$100 million, I am saying that it is an issue of national concern and not to win points. I want to just move on.

I thought we would have heard from the hon. Minister what is going to happen with our entry into the FTAA with respect to our refining industry. At this time major upgrades are required at the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery to keep us at same level of refinery throughput; not to improve the product mix nor to improve the throughput of the refinery, but just to keep the refinery running, we require major upgrade. An is omerization plant, which is responsible for converting the products of the catalytic cracking unit into high octane gasoline, has to be constructed: an alkalization plant has to be constructed. There has to be an upgrading of the fluid catalytic cracking unit at Pointe-a-Pierre and there has to be a continuous cracking regeneration unit.

The cost to keep us alive and to keep 5,000 employees employed—not to make a cent profit—is US \$300 million, which is TT \$2 billion, but not a word from my hon. friend with respect to where we are going to find the money, what is the state of negotiations or how we are coping. We would not be able to sell to Barbados, Jamaica or any of the countries that are going to subscribe to the FTAA with the kind of products that we are going to produce at the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery.

This has to be before the year 2007. By 2009 we have to find US \$500 million, over TT \$3 billion, to introduce a coker at the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery in order to deal with bottom of the barrel. What is happening at that refinery today? Do you know what gets me? The Prime Minister knows all of this. What is happening today is that 45 per cent of the products we produce at Pointe-a-Pierre are sold at a price less than the barrel of oil we put into the refinery. Forty five per cent of the barrel of oil that we refine there is sold at a price less than the barrel that we put in, the raw material. It is totally unacceptable which means that

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. RAMNATH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

the 65 per cent of products that we produce must now be sold at a price that will compensate for the loss of that 35 per cent.

We need to expend \$3 billion by the year 2009 and we need to expend \$2 billion by the year 2007, a total \$5 billion, at the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery to keep us alive and to keep the 3,000, 4,000 or 5,000 people employed. This Government has chosen not to say a word in one of the most important debates of the year on the state of the oil industry and particularly the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery. This is a serious matter.

I come, Mr. Speaker, to this issue of the National Gas Company (NGC). The NGC, as we are told—the Government has boasted and so forth—issued a tender document, dated May 06, 2003--and they particularly said that the tender shall remain open for acceptance for a period of 180 days. The acceptance of any tender shall constitute a binding agreement and so forth and the company is under no obligation to award the contract to the tender with the lowest price. I say it again. The people who tendered, the NGC budget was \$88 million to run this 56-inch pipeline. The tenderer: Bechtel International Houston, \$65.2 million. They were under by US \$22.8 million; Wilbrust International, \$68.9; Techkin from Argentina, \$74.6 million; ARB Inc., \$88.9 million; Speeg Capag, \$91.6 million and Napcap International of the Netherlands, \$109.3 million.

The award has not been made, but a certain PNM financier known very well to my friend from Ortoire/Mayaro, has already began to mobilize equipment—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: In anticipation.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Not in anticipation, knowing very well that the company with whom he is associated has already been granted the contract by the NGC. [*Desk thumping*] I want to repeat what I am saying. A bank in Trinidad has confirmed that, based on communication, moneys have been made available to this PNM financier for the purchase of 55 pickup trucks and other pieces of equipment to mobilize this contractor who has been selected, but the NGC has not awarded the contract. The NGC, instead, has called in the four lowest bidders—because they are not obliged to give the lowest tender—to hold discussions with them based on the submissions of tenders; all those people who were the under NGC estimate of \$88 million, and that is reasonable. So discussions are taking place, they have called them but the contract has already been awarded. I will tell you today that Bechtel has been given the contract. [*Desk thumping*] You tell me, at any later stage and I shall apologize to the Prime Minister and the country if Bechtel was not given the contract. I know the bid, I have it.

Mr. Manning: Who is the lowest bidder?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Bechtel. The problem is the NGC is not obliged to accept the lowest bid and the NGC has said so, in writing, and they have not made the award up to today. They have not made the award and they are interviewing people. I am telling you that Bechtel have already been assured by your NGC Board that they have been granted the contract. *[Interruption]* Let them make excuses. I have made the point that there is collusion, corruption—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order.

Mr. K. Ramnath: There is collusion and corruption in the award of this contract. If the NGC had made a public statement and they had issued documentation saying that Bechtel had been given the contract, Bechtel would be entitled to find a local partner in Trinidad. I am saying to you that no award has been made and yet I can assure you here today, because of the conspiracy involving a Member of Parliament and his financiers and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this matter has been settled before so that people will now get their payback in lieu of the millions that they pumped into Ortoire/Mayaro in the last election.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to assure the hon. Member for Couva South that if it is discovered that there is any impropriety in any aspect of Government's operations then the Government will take appropriate action. However, is the hon. Member for Couva South aware that long before we signed the agreement with the partners for Train 4 LNG that the various partners had taken action up front and had committed themselves to expenditure in excess of US \$100 million before any arrangements had been arrived at? In other words, the partner decided to take a calculated risk and, in fact, it was something that assisted Trinidad and Tobago in the conduct of the negotiation. Companies are free to take risks and it is very possible that what you are saying in this case is that a company has decided to take those risks. It means nothing else.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, I am more confused than when I started. This is a case— trust that you will give me compensatory time. This is a serious matter and Members could talk lowest bid, but I am saying there was a contract provision, a tender document, which said that there is no obligation to the lowest bidder. It said nothing about risk.

I want to tell you also that Atlantic LNG was quite prepared to bear the cost of the pipeline, that 56-inch pipeline—and to hand it over to you after a certain period of time at no cost to you.

Dr. Rowley: How do you know that?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I know that as a fact. Anyway, I do not want to be sidetracked. There was a tender—

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

Mr. K. Ramnath: They cannot take the jamming. [*Interruption*] The Member cannot take it. This corruption that they started on is now backfiring. There is no obligation to give the tender to the lowest bidder. No award has been made. I want the Prime Minister to stand up here today and tell me whether any award was made with respect to this contract.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Couva South for giving way once again. I want to assure him and hon. Members of this House that we have heard the allegation. On the surface there appears to be absolutely nothing to it, but we will look into it. We will investigate it and if any impropriety is found, the Government will take appropriate action. However, may I ask the hon. Member, please, whether he is prepared to tell us the implication of a private company owning and controlling the 56-inch line as opposed to the Government. Before he answers it, he should please take into account the fact that the Government has its own objectives in terms of gas development and by controlling the ownership of the line it controls the line's use to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Prime Minister can file a question to me in the House. I just have about 15 minutes left. Mr. Speaker, you understand they are trying to divert my attention. We are dealing here with a tender and insider information that the board of NGC has not yet awarded the tender but Bechtel has been told they have been given the tender. Everything else the Prime Minister would tell me I am not prepared to listen because it is irrelevant.

The NGC board is still interviewing people but Bechtel got the contract and API—the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro's good friend who financed his campaign—is the company I am talking about API. Do you know who, API is? The one who was handing out money in Ortoire/Mayaro.

Mr. Speaker, I come to one final point, Sir. I want this loquacious Minister from Arouca North to probe the granting of a contract by the Point Fortin Corporation—if it is still under his portfolio—to a company called Earth Company Limited, or Incorporated, for the management of the Guapo landfill site on Petrotrin lands.

A contract was signed between Earth and the Point Fortin Corporation and there were no invitations to bid. None. *[Interruption]* I do not come to this House and lie, and talk about a doctor and so forth. I do not do that. *[Interruption]* Dr. Mahal is well qualified. I want to know whether a certificate of environmental clearance, which was issued by the EMA, states what categories of waste could be dumped at the landfill site.

My information is that oilfield waste, hazardous waste, and toxic wastes are being removed by this company and dumped into the Guapo landfill site and the company has an arrangement with the Point Fortin Corporation. I do not want to associate anybody here today with this Earth Company, but I want to assure you that much more would be said about the matter.

Mr. Speaker, I have two hours to speak about LABIDCO, but I have two minutes. I want the Prime Minister to tell me, through his Attorney General and Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, what is the state of investigations by the police into LABIDCO and the role Prof. Julien played as chairman of LABIDCO?

The DPP wrote and instructed—advised or however you want to put it—the police to conduct investigations because based on legal opinions the DPP was satisfied that serious acts of corruption may have been committed by certain people associated with the NGC and LABIDCO. The police, having received instructions, my information is that the police has done nothing in this matter but the police is anxiously carrying out other functions rather than a directive from the Director of Public Prosecutions. In Trinidad and Tobago one has to be careful. The police were instructed to carry out investigation on Prof. Julien, but the Government of Trinidad and Tobago gave him a Trinity Cross while the police refuse to carry out their directives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. John Rahael): Mr. Speaker, today I feel privileged to stand in this honourable House in support of the 2004 fiscal package presented by the hon. Minister of Finance and Prime Minister. As Members are aware, the theme of this year's budget is "Charting the Course to 2020, Empowering People". This year's budget is a continuation of the successful fiscal policies that were implemented by this administration last year.

Hon Members may recall that last year's theme of the budget was "Vision 2020: People our priority". Our focus then was poverty alleviation while

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

simultaneously building the capacity of our people. At that time we established the mission to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by 2020 or before. The mission is now etched into the psyche of every citizen of the country including our friends opposite.

Mr. Speaker, the significant growth and development that has occurred in the economy over the last year is a good indication that the policies and fiscal measures implemented by this administration are working to the benefit of the population of this country. The overall success obtained at the national level of the economy has also been reflected in the agriculture sector. Significantly, we have been able to stop the secular decline in the agriculture sector and have even been able to generate a modest but significant growth in the agriculture GDP.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is critical that we put on the record of this honourable House that when this administration assumed responsibility for governance of this country, we inherited an agricultural sector that was in decline. From 1996—2001, the decline was steep. The domestic agricultural sector experienced its worst performance ever under the stewardship of the Members on the other side.

The fact that there were three ministers during their six years in government did not really help. At one time, there were two ministers in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and they were not speaking to each other. I will return to demonstrate the performance of the agricultural sector during the years 1996—2001.

What I would like to do now is to address some of the statements that were made by the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North. The hon. Member for Couva North stated, in his contribution last Friday, that to date there has been no national consultation on the future of Caroni (1975) Limited and that the PNM had failed to state what would be their plan for the industry.

The whole question of Caroni (1975) Limited goes back to the year 1978, three years after we bought it from Tate and Lyle. The very first report was presented in December 1978 and is referred to as the Spence report. In 1980, two years after, we had the Rampersad plan; in 1984, the St. Cyr report; in 1986, the three-year corporate development plan; for 1998—1992, we had the direction plan, also referred to as the Dookeran plan. There was plan upon plan.

There was another plan referred to as the Action Plan for Caroni (1975) Limited, 1998—1990; the report of a cost production survey of sugarcane farmers in Trinidad and Tobago, April 1999, Programme for Implementing Government

Decision for Restructuring of the Sugar Industry, March 1989 and a Diagnostic Review of Caroni (1975) Limited by Price Waterhouse. In 1993, we had the Tripartite Agreement. I can go on and on. There are over 27 different reports, studies and papers about Caroni (1975) Limited.

During the year 2002, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago also held discussions with the various unions representing Caroni (1975) Limited. On Friday, June 28, the hon. Kenneth Valley, Minister of Trade and Industry, and the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources met with the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers' Trade Union and initiated discussions about this administration's plans for Caroni (1975) Limited.

On Friday, July 12, again, the Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Marine Resources met with the trade unions, that is, the Association of Technical Administrative and Supervisory Staff (ATASS), the Estate Police Association, the Sugar Boilers' Association and the Sugar Industry Staff Association.

On Wednesday, July 17, 2002, the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, Mr. Kenneth Valley, met with Estate Police Association. On Friday, July 26, 2002, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources met with the Cane Farmers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago. On Tuesday, August 13, 2002, again, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources met with the Trinidad Islandwide Cane Farmers' Association. On Friday, August 16, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources met with the Cane Producers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago (CPATT).

On Tuesday, August 20, again, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources met with three trade unions—the Association of Technical Administration and Supervisory Staff, the Sugar Industry Staff Association and the Estate Police Association. On Friday, August 23, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources met with the Sugar Boilers' Association. On Tuesday, August 27, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources met with the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers' Trade Union and its President General, Mr. Indarsingh. On that same day, All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers' Trade Union, together with the Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago, the ECA, met with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

On Friday, September 20, again, both the Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources met with various trade unions, including the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union. On Friday, January 10, 2003, an inter-ministerial committee, headed by Dr. The Hon. Lenny Saith,

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

together with the hon. Kenneth Valley, the hon. Colm Imbert, the hon. Franklin Khan, the hon. Martin Joseph and yours truly, met with all of the stakeholders in Caroni (1975) Limited to put on the table the Government's plan for the company.

So, the question of consultation and discussion started since 1978. The Member for Couva North is very much aware of all of these discussions and the plans that have been submitted with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited.

During the year 2002, there was no sign of the hon. Member for Couva North. At no time did he attend any of those meetings, nor did he attempt to meet with any of the Ministers of Government with respect to the company. So now he comes to the Parliament as some saviour of the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited when he did absolutely nothing when he was Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. For six years, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, then Prime Minister, from 1996—2001, did not lift one finger to help any Caroni (1975) Limited worker.

Mr. Speaker, he went on to make a statement last Friday: Let me at this point make it unequivocally clear that it was never the UNC's intention to close down Caroni (1975) Limited. In fact, our plan included the expansion of the company's activities by the invitation of private sector participation in the company's operations. That plan would not have seen a single worker fired and would instead have seen the retention and the extension of the existing workforce.

I repeat: he said not a single worker would be fired and instead the plan would have seen the retention and extension of the existing workforce.

I wish to quote a Cabinet Note dated February 09, 1999. There is a lot here, but I am just going to focus on what the Cabinet Note states:

- That government should take immediate steps to implement a phased divestment of the operations of the company.
- Cabinet was advised that the social cost of adjustment must be dealt with, which means pursuing the intention of providing severance benefits and retirement packages.

Does that mean retention and expansion?

Arising out of this Note, a committee was formed, a Cabinet-appointed committee, employing Ernst & Young to carry out that exercise. The firm Ernst & Young was engaged by Caroni (1975) Limited to provide technical advice on the formation of the implementation plan and, subject to the approval of Cabinet, on the first segment of its implementation.

I want to quote minutes of meetings between Ernst & Young and various companies with respect to Caroni (1975) Limited, coming from that Cabinet Note of February 09, 1999.

“Meeting of June 30, 1999

Present:

Mr. Anthony Buxo, EY

Angela Persad, EY

Miss Danielle Cazabon, EY

Mr. Cecil Camacho, DNI.

Mr. Boysie Moore-Jones, ATS&GWTU

Mr. Sylvester Maraj, ATS&GWTU

Mr. Roopnarine Chaitlal, ATS&GWTU

Mr. Kenneth Benjamin, ATS&GWTU

Mr. Pooran, ATS&GWTU

Mr. Chaitram Kapur Rampersad, ATS&GWTU

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh, ATS&GWTU

Let me now read the minutes of that meeting under the heading, Retrenchment/VSEP:

The union believes that any VSEP plan must represent an enhancement of the current VSEP plan contained collective agreement.

So, the union is saying that any VSEP plan must have an enhancement on the current collective agreement. The union is also not averse to a plan whereby workers receive part of their VSEP or severance in the form of a land lease. It is quite clear that the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers’ Trade Union, in a meeting with Ernst & Young on June 30, 1999, was prepared to accept a VSEP plan or severance, but it wanted an enhancement of the collective agreement.

Not only did Ernst & Young meet with All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers’ Trade Union, they also met with the Cane Farmers’ Association of Trinidad and Tobago (CFATT). They also agreed that, for cane cultivation at Caroni (1975) Limited, which is currently costing between \$450 a tonne, the payment towards purchasing of cane should go toward quality. However, this

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

group was not happy with the core of the sampler pilot project. So that they, too—the cane farmers—agreed that the purchasing of cane should move toward quality.

The Sugar Boilers' Association also said that Caroni (1975) Limited should get rid of cultivation and leave it to the farmers. There was also the suggestion to separate sugar processing from cultivation, as is the usual model in other countries. Again, this is the Sugar Boilers' Association meeting with Ernst & Young on July 2, 1999.

Mr. Speaker, Ernst & Young did a very comprehensive report, having met with all the various unions and stakeholders and it was agreed that a VSEP plan should be offered and that Caroni (1975) Limited should get out of cultivating and harvesting cane because the cost that was being incurred for the price of cane was between \$400 and \$500 per tonne and the company was purchasing the cane from cane farmers at \$170 a tonne. This is the direct cost of the cultivation and harvesting of the cane. It does not include all the other overheads. They were comparing apples with apples. Being an accounting firm, one would expect that.

The management of Caroni (1975) Limited in a meeting with Ernst & Young expressed the belief that retrenchment was inevitable. They too agreed that cane cultivation and sugar processing should be separated from each other and that they were distinct areas of expertise. The company should follow the Belize model where the farmers produce the cane and the company processes it. There is a lot more in this report.

Mr. Speaker, we have the Member for St. Joseph making his presentation. He said:

We all agreed that something had to be done about Caroni (1975) Limited. If you want to think about downsizing, could that not have been done over a period of time? You could have carried Caroni (1975) Limited (1975) Limited to 2006.

But, Mr. Speaker, what have we been doing since 1978, but talking about restructuring Caroni (1975) Limited and every time a plan is put forward, for some reason, it is never implemented? It has always been postponed, no action taken and this is since 1978.

In 1996, Caroni (1975) Limited's subvention deficit for the operating performance was \$175 million. In 1997, it went to \$246 million; in 1998, \$305 million; in 1999, \$349 million; in 2001, \$367 million; in 2002, \$480 million; in 2003, it is \$579 million. When would it end?

In 1993, the PNM Government wrote off over \$2 billion for Caroni (1975) Limited. We gave the company a clean bill of health. Since then, over \$3 billion in direct cash subventions were given to the company. In addition to that \$3 billion, today Caroni (1975) Limited is in debt by \$2 billion; from 1993 to now—over 10 years—over \$5 billion.

You know what is sad about that, Mr. Speaker? Caroni (1975) Limited, we all will agree, is sitting on a very valuable asset. Caroni (1975) Limited has 77,000 acres of land. Can you imagine a company that has an asset of 77,000 acres of land and instead of the people of Trinidad and Tobago benefiting from the revenue earning capacity of that asset, that is owned by all the people, we have been subsidizing that company?

What did we do? The Frank Rampersad plan for Caroni (1975) Limited in 1980 was based on a VSEP package for all workers that included an option to lease the lands of Caroni (1975) Limited at market prices, strictly for agricultural purposes. This, if implemented, would ensure employment for workers directly involved in planting cane, and their dependents.

The farmers could choose to plant whatever they wanted, either for local consumption or export. Business advice, not funds, can be given to train transport and machine shop workers using their VSEP to start small businesses in transportation and equipment rental.

This is since 1980, Mr. Speaker. After all these consultations and meeting after meeting with all the trade unions and stakeholders involved—individual workers, management, people from all different levels of Caroni (1975) Limited—this Government came up with a comprehensive and holistic plan.

The first thing we decided was that because of the world market and because of the Cotonou Agreement that would come to an end by 2006, our guaranteed market, which is the export of over 55,000 tonnes of raw sugar to Europe at a guaranteed price of US \$450 a tonne, will come to an end. We have seen it happen in other industries. The banana industry is one of them and the World Trade Organization (WTO), together with Australia and Brazil, is clamouring for the WTO to remove that preferential treatment that African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries have.

So we have decided that one manufacturing factory will be retained to grind and manufacture raw sugar and that we will keep the refinery. Usine Ste. Madeleine is the more modern factory and the one that has been identified to produce, with some refurbishment, up to 70,000—75,000 tonnes of sugar.

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

The purchasing of cane, whether by quality or the purchasing of clean cane, will make that transition much quicker than the old method of buying cane, not only by weight, but also purchasing everything else that comes with the cane. We have to understand that our ratio of cane to sugar is one of the highest in the world. It takes 13.7 tonnes of cane to produce one tonne of sugar, while the norm in the international industry is more like nine tonnes of cane to one tonne of sugar. The reason is that when we purchase the cane, we purchase trash with it and it goes into the factory. In processing the cane, some of the sucrose itself will go with the trash because when we squeeze the cane and extract, the sucrose will obviously also be lost. Mr. Speaker, you have to understand that when we are processing cane, it must be clean cane.

A pilot project was done two years ago and by putting clean cane through the factory, the ratio came down to 10:3. So there is tremendous opportunity to purchase clean cane and reduce that ratio of 13:7 to 10:7.

The question of the economics was not all that we took into account. We wanted to make sure that, in offering the VSEP, we created a soft landing so that the workers would be able to be provided with opportunities after VSEP. We enhanced the collective agreement by an average of 30 per cent—in some cases, some people got an average of 50 per cent above the entitlement of the collective agreement. The average was a 30 per cent enhancement.

We could have easily decided that Caroni (1975) Limited would no longer be involved in the cultivating and harvesting of cane and go towards retrenchment and pay off that 5,000-odd workers, based on the collective agreement. We could have done that legally and it would have been within the company's right to do so, but we wanted to make sure that the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited would have been given the opportunity, not only to get a cash enhancement, but also other opportunities.

We said, in restructuring the lands of Caroni (1975) Limited, we would make lands available to former workers—those who are interested in agriculture and who wish to make it their career and not a side-line job, because it is about time people see agriculture as a career and full-time business. That is what we are all about.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have put within the package, a commitment, because I see also that the Leader of the Opposition is calling on us to ensure that we make the lands available for the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited and his former sidekick whom he referred to as a real estate agent. I never saw a real

estate agent dislodge a Prime Minister before, but nevertheless we will ensure that lands are made available to the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited.

We have already made that commitment. It is part of our agreement. Remember, All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers' Trade Union went to the High Court and the Industrial Court and all that is part of what we put forward. So, coming now after the fact, to try to say that he is going to make representation to the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited is too little, too late.

Not only are we providing lands for the former workers to get involved in agriculture—you know what their plans were, Mr. Speaker? Their plans were to take the 3,300 acres of citrus and make it a business unit and give it to one individual. That was the UNC's plan. With respect to rice cultivation, again, to take this rice acreage of over 2,000 and make it available to one investor.

We said that is not the way to go about it. We should make land available to the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited, by surveying various plots of lands, depending on the type of agricultural product and based on the acreage that is required, so that it can sustain a farmer and his family so that they could earn a decent living.

That is what we are doing. When it comes to transparency, what have we done? We are saying that we are vesting the land in the Estate Management Development Company. That Estate Management Development Company (EMBD) has all the applications from the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited and is going through the process of identifying those who would meet the criteria, to ensure that those who receive the lands for agricultural purposes would use it for that purpose. There will be a clause that will ensure that if the land is not used for agricultural purposes, the lease would automatically be revoked.

After that process is done by the management of the EMBD, it would go to the board of the EMBD and even then it would go to the line minister who would take it to Cabinet for approval. Although it may seem that there is a process, that is to guarantee the integrity of the process to ensure that at the end of the day no one person sitting on a board would take the kind of decision that Caroni (1975) Limited took during 1996—2001.

Mr. Speaker, that is not all. We also said that those workers—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended for tea and will be resumed at 5.10 p.m.

4.31 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. J. Rahael: Mr. Speaker, before we took the tea-break, I was indicating the kind of support that we gave to the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited, in addition to the enhanced VSEP, the question of making lands available for agriculture purposes; also for former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited who do not have their own homes, to be given preference to access homes that the Government, through UDeCott and National Housing Authority (NHA), will be building in all areas of Trinidad, particularly on Caroni (1975) Limited's lands.

In addition to that is the opportunity for the workers to access many of the training programmes that are being provided by Caroni (1975) Limited to the former workers, so that they will be able to access these programmes and develop new skills, so that they would be able to find jobs in the workplace other than in agriculture. Those various programmes are very wide and the opportunity is given to them. The Government has provided \$25 million in order to fund the retraining counselling programme for the former workers.

More than that, I think it is important for us to understand that the 8,700 workers that we keep talking about, in fact, were all not permanent employees of Caroni (1975) Limited. Over 2,000 workers were really temporary workers that would be taken for certain periods in the year when, I believe, the harvesting is taking place. In addition to that, we also had seasonal workers. Almost half of that workforce was not permanent workers. Yet, the VSEP and the enhanced VSEP were offered to all of the workers. This PNM administration really provided for the workers more than any other worker previously that received from any VSEP package. The question of how we treat with the former Caroni (1975) Limited workers in fact has been the best that any worker has ever received in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Singh: Is that a fact?

Hon. J. Rahael: That is a fact.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to put on record that some of these workers have already taken the opportunity to get into farming. I want to quote from the *Newsday* of Friday, August 22, 2003, two weeks after the workers accepted their VSEP and were disengaged from Caroni (1975) Limited. It really talked about the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited. I quote:

“Scores of workers who accepted VSEP from the now defunct Caroni (1975) Limited have plunged into heavy agriculture.

This, according to agriculturalist and store manager, Roger Teeluck of Agroer Limited of Harry's Plaza, Princes Town. Teeluck reported, a total sold out in nurseries within two weeks at his shop. 'I had more than 4,000 nursery vegetables that were sold out. Caroni workers came from...Cedar Hill, Barrackpore and many other areas asking for plants. Many said that they have gone totally into large scale farming and are now ordering chemicals for gardening,' he said. Apart from the nurseries there was a huge sale of seeds and cuttings for plants.

Workers who received part payment of VSEP from the government following the closure of the sugar industry—Caroni Limited, were eager to give agriculture a try. Many went for the long-term crops such as citrus fruits and fruit trees but a large percentage went into vegetable farming. There were a few who chose horticulture with flowering plants and decorative plants as their choice.

Teeluck who has been in business for the past 12 years said that the time is right for planting. 'The soil everywhere is inviting to agriculture and I am predicting that farmers will harvest profitable crops within a six weeks period,' he said. He noted that there are crops such as peppers, ochro...bodi, tomatoes, corn, bhaji, and melongene bring crops within the six weeks period.

Former Caroni worker, Kandal Seegobin, 43, of New Grant told *Newsday* that he has chosen agriculture because he believes that it is not difficult to rear crops and that it will be a profitable venture. 'Everyone has to eat. I believe that there will be a reduction in the sale of vegetables but the farmers will survive.' he said...

Although Seegobin has been employed with Caroni, he did vegetable gardening as a side job. Therefore, it was not difficult for him to get back into this field. 'Nobody is willing to employ someone who is in their 40s and has no skill expect cutting cane.

The workers of Caroni must find some means of survival and agriculture seems like the only option right now..."

This is a company that is in fact in agriculture, selling plants and seedlings, talking about being sold out with respect to all the various plants and seedlings that he has. Already, the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited—some of them have not yet taken possession of Caroni (1975) Limited's land—have been able to get lands of their own, because they own their lands and have been able to accelerate the whole question of production in agriculture. I am convinced that

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited, because of their resilience and work ethics, would be able to survive and will be better off than working in the sugarcane industry.

As evidence of this again, there is a story in the *Express* of March 8, 2003. This article, an interview, was about women in agriculture, particularly women in the cane industry. I am just going to quote:

"Molly Bondy has been working the sugarcane fields since the age of 19, just a few weeks after her honeymoon, almost 40 years ago.

Today, she is one of the women who is tired of the routine, tired of working and tired of the canefields. She cannot wait to get her VSEP—

To Molly, work in the canefields took away her beauty, her ambitions, her dreams, her life. True enough, it was the only work her husband could do since he only had a primary school education.

It was no easy task and she hated waking up at 2 a.m. or sometimes 3 a.m. every day to go into the fields.

"I should have been hugging my husband at that hour, but instead, I have to put on long-sleeved shirt, pants, and a skirt on top of all of that I tie my head with a piece of cloth and then put on a hat, and boots to go in the fields—to cut cane, so we could make a living, '...

Molly Bondy, is not her real name. Her husband did not want her to talk to the media but she believed it was important to tell her story. 'It's a life the younger generation should know about. Cane work is no bed of roses,' Bondy admitted.

Bondy was once light-skinned, but she now has a permanent tan, and there is visible discolouration around her neck from the ash, soot and dust of the canefields...She counted the permanent 'corns' on every finger—all of this come from cutting and bundling the sugarcane stalks for nearly 40 years.

'If I have to walk five or six miles to work, I wake up at 2 a.m., but if I have to go just two or three miles, I awake at 3 a.m.

Many of the women of the canefield have never enjoyed a boat or plane ride. They have never vacationed abroad. Most of them do not have passports. A 'hard drink' (alcohol) at nights is sometimes necessary for instant sleep,...

She continued describing a life of constant toil. 'You don't work, you get no pay. Pregnant women have been known to work in the fields up to day of delivery, and back in the fields as early as six or 12 days after delivery.

'Some women will band their bellies with cloth to support the weight during and after pregnancy to cut canes, that's how much their lives depend on the job,'...

In her early days in the fields, Bondy remembers only too well, the cuts from the cane thrash, and the effects of scorpion stings and snake bites.

Her mother-in-law was crippled after she was stung by a scorpion in the fields. 'I remember, the old people stick a tamarind seed to pull out the scorpion sting, because they could not get her out of the fields quick enough to the hospital. Many others have died from such stings.'"

Mr. Speaker, Molly is just one of the many persons who, because their parents, foreparents and generations before, worked in the canefields, it was as if they were destined to continue working under these types of conditions. We are now providing the opportunity to break that cycle. There is a lot more that she said in that article, but time does not permit me to read the entire article which is in the *Express* of March 08, 2003.

Mr. Speaker, as we move on, we have to now look to the future. In looking to the future, we also have to look back and see what was done in the agriculture sector between 1996 and 2001. We witnessed a dramatic decline in almost every aspect of our agriculture. There were significant declines in the production of livestock, citrus, milk, cocoa, vegetable and food crops. Employment in agriculture and agriculture-related industries decreased by over 10,000 workers during the period 1996—2001. This fact seemed to have escaped the attention of members of the previous administration. There was no hue and cry about those jobs. The agriculture gross domestic product was also at an all-time low. During the period 1996—2001, there was a dramatic decline in the agriculture exports.

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. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Rahael: Thank you for the extension of my time.

We inherited an agriculture sector where drainage, irrigation and access roads were in a dilapidated state, through lack of maintenance. The general bad state of

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

the agriculture infrastructure contributed in a significant way to the sector's poor performance. It would appear that the previous UNC administration intended to wipe out the agriculture sector. They formulated plans to shut down the Agricultural Development Bank. The National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) was also marked for closure. The UNC administration withdrew financial support for Caribbean Agriculture Research Development Institute (CARDI) and that would have seen the demise of CARDI.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC also terminated our membership in the international cocoa producers alliance, an important international association of cocoa producers.

In 2002, we set about the task of repairing and revitalizing the wounded agriculture sector. We firmly believe that the domestic agriculture sector is of tremendous strategic importance to the sustainable development of our economy. Development of the sector is also very critical and integral to Vision 2020 and to our mission of achieving developed country status.

We recognize that we could not remain food insecure and achieve our stated objectives. Our food security must be assured if we are to achieve the development we are pursuing and our domestic agriculture is extremely critical in achieving this goal. Because of the strategic nature of the sector, this administration has not spared any effort to ensure the sustainable development of our agriculture sector.

When this Government assumed office in 2002, we recognized that there were formidable challenges to be addressed. Among those challenges, certainly, was the halting of the general decline in the agriculture sector, increasing agriculture production and productivity, modernizing the agriculture through increase research and development, and the introduction of improved technology, the development of agriculture marketing systems, developing the capacity to become trade compliant and competitive in a global and trade liberalized environment, identifying recruiting and training to the next generation of farmers and promoting sustainable, rural development. These fundamental issues became formidable challenges, since they were generally overlooked, or totally ignored during the six years of the UNC's administration.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC Members of Parliament are in the main from agriculture constituencies. Where the UNC failed to represent the agriculture sector, we will come to their rescue and that of their constituencies. When we reviewed the performance of the agriculture sector for the last fiscal year, we found that after

six years of decline, this Government was able to halt the decline; certainly an achievement. In doing that, we were able to generate a modest, but significant growth in the sector. For the very first time, the sector contributed over \$900 million to the national GDP. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, during the last fiscal year, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources formulated a number of programmes and projects that were targeted at halting the decline in agriculture; stimulating increased production and productivity, while generating interest and investments in agriculture, and generally revitalizing the domestic agriculture sector.

A major strategy for addressing poverty alleviation is to empower our rural communities by providing them with the necessary resources to transform themselves into viable, sustainable, economic enterprises.

One of the most important inputs for agricultural development is land. However, the longstanding inefficiency in the legal, administrative and institutional framework for land administration, meant that the landless farmer often experiences great difficulty in gaining access to this vital resource. More than half of the farmers in this country do not have legal title to the land on which they farm. Almost 90 per cent of farmers on state agriculture lands do not have valid leases. This situation demonstrates that even people with access to land are unable to use this land as an asset to obtain credit for investment purposes.

We recognize that land distribution and regularization programmes will not succeed, unless the underlying problems of land management, including the legal framework, were addressed. In order to facilitate the accelerated land distribution programme and make more agriculture land available to deserving farmers, we had to repeal Act No. 78 of 2000, which was enacted by the UNC government. That legislation created great difficulties with respect to potential beneficiaries of state land receiving their leases. This administration has enacted the State Land (Regularization of Tenure) (Amdt.) Act, 2002, which has greatly facilitated the process.

During the last fiscal year, the Ministry regularized occupants on 14 blocks of state lands, comprising 1,400 acres. Over 150 leases were executed for 907 acres of state land and letters of offer were made to 280 farmers. We also have a total of 3,629 leases in various stages of regularization.

Mr. Singh: Are any Caroni lands?

Hon. J. Rahael: None is Caroni (1975) Limited lands. We have also conducted significant activities in strengthening NAMDEVCO, to facilitate and promote domestic marketing as well as international trade.

We have also successfully completed the operationalization of the Northern Farmers Wholesale Market at Macoya. In addition to the establishment of the wholesale market in Macoya, we have strategically located a packing house facility at Piarco. This packing house facility will provide farmers with a place where they can bring their produce, which will be inspected, washed, dried and can be stored. It will also give the opportunities for farmers to enter into contracts with supermarkets locally and also with international supermarkets in New York, Miami and Toronto; where they can give a guarantee that whatever is shipped, would be inspected by this packing house, which is certified. When the produce comes in, it is inspected, weighed, washed, dried and then it is also packaged. It is packaged in such a way that in the packaging, not only is it weighed and labelled, but it is also priced with the name of the supermarket on it. Farmers can now contract with any of the local supermarkets or international chain of supermarkets where they will be assured of the quality and correct weights and will be ready to be placed on the shelves of the supermarkets. This is of a great advantage to farmers and to the industry. What that will do is guarantee the purchasers that their product will in fact be inspected and properly packaged for local or for export.

Marketing is a very important arm in any business. Agriculture is viewed now as a business. NAMDEVCO is the marketing arm of the agriculture sector. Not only are they operating the packaging plants and keeping tabs of all the farmers and ensuring that farmers practise good agriculture, but also identifying markets and the type of products that we have a competitive edge in. So it is that NAMDEVCO is now ensuring that marketing is going to be a critical arm of the organization.

The ministry's infrastructure development programme will include the rehabilitation of agriculture roads, water management and flood control. Our water management and irrigation programme targeted the desilting of drains and rivers in major agriculture production areas. It also included the construction of drainage channels and sluice gates to prevent flooding in saltwater intrusion.

We expect that with the opening of these new lands, there will be an increase in the production of agriculture. More than that, we have also identified certain subsectors in agriculture that we believe there are tremendous opportunities and a future in. Those subsectors that are targeted are cocoa, poultry, small ruminant and dairy cattle. These subsectors are of strategic importance to our agriculture development and to the diversification and development of our national economy.

Mr. Speaker, during the last fiscal year, we established working groups comprising stakeholders from respective subsectors. We are, therefore, involved

in an intensive process of consultation with all the major stakeholders in our effort to chart the way forward.

One of the impacts of the UNC's six years in government is the mismanagement of the agriculture sector. This is what we see as a strong rural/urban migration. This migration has been particularly intense among the youths. Consequently, we observe a very high average age among our farmers. The average age of farmers, if you take cocoa, is over 60 years old. Having recognized that, the Ministry came up with a programme to attract young people in agriculture. The programme, the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) is intended to address the need for succession planning. We were able to identify, attract and train youths in agriculture. During the last fiscal year, almost 3,000 young people between the ages of 17—25 were trained in this programme. The programme is designed to encourage youth in agriculture; to develop practical skills in areas of farm management, agriculture production and marketing, post harvest technology and agro-processing techniques. Over 172 farmers and agri-businesses establishments participated in this programme, because we place these young people in farms and in agro-businesses so that they can get first-hand experience in agriculture.

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are now moving into the second phase of this programme. Persons who have graduated from the first phase and wish to continue—if they view agriculture as a serious opportunity for them to have a career in it—the Government will be creating the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) farms in every county in Trinidad. We are hoping to place these young persons on these farms. These young persons will be planting, cultivating, harvesting and marketing whatever crops they have planted, and the money earned from doing this exercise, they will be able to keep for themselves. The Government is encouraging young persons to get involved in agriculture, so that they will be able to benefit from it.

After these young persons have gone through the second phrase of this programme—which would probably take them between six to eight months—if we see that their commitment, and they wish to go forward, then we will provide them with a parcel of land which will be suitable for agriculture. The Government will lease this parcel of land to them. They will also be introduced to the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB), and with the assistance of our extension officers, they will be able to become farmers in their own rights—the Government will be making them entrepreneurs, and making them dependent

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

upon themselves. This is what this Government is about. This Government is about providing opportunities for persons. The Government will train these persons so that they will have the skills, and they will become self-sustainable and entrepreneurs in their own rights. These persons will not have to depend on the State or any other institution.

In the coming year, we propose to continue what we have started in 2003. The Government believes that in the medium and long term, agriculture will take its rightful place in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town*): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West should continue to sell Reebok shoes, whether they are genuine or not. The Member does not know anything about agriculture. I wonder if the Member knows how to hold a pair of scissors to cut a piece of cloth? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, the Member comes here today and misleads this honourable House. There is a book at the University of the West Indies entitled: *How to Lie Using Statistics*. I do not know if the Member has mastered that book. The Member comes to this honourable House today, and reads out a number of meetings that he held. The Member never said what were the contents of those meetings. It may have been that the Member merely went to a meeting and had a drink, and then left.

People who have studied what this wicked Government has done have written a book. I ask that the Member read this book because it puts a lie to everything he has said. This book is entitled: *A Framework for National Development: Caroni Transformation Process* which was produced by the University of the West Indies.

Mr. Rahael: What is the year?

Mr. S. Panday: What is the year? I will also give you the month. It is dated July 2003. This document talks about the total separation enhancement plan. I ask the question: Why did the Government separate workers of Caroni (1975) Limited? Why?

Hon. Member: It was a business position.

Mr. S. Panday: It was not a business position; it was political. The Government wanted to damage the Trinidad and Tobago Canefarmers Association. Sen. the hon. Dr. Lenny Saith has said—and it is on record—that the

Trinidad and Tobago Canefarmers Association is the cradle of the Opposition, and the Government has to get rid of it. So, all the talk about factors and so on has nothing to do with the closing down of Caroni (1975) Limited. It was a political decision to break up the United National Congress (UNC). That is clearly what it was. Why did the Government have to send home the workers?

Mr. Speaker, hear what is the sting in the tail. The Government said that it would take back some workers and hire them on a contract basis. Of course, what the Government will do is hire their friends on contract, and they will not be able to join any union. The plan was to break up the Trinidad and Tobago Canefarmers Association. That was the plan. So, you see, the point is that when “mout’ open cat jump out”. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, I mean, when “mout’ open tory jump out”.

Mr. Speaker, when the Government takes back its friends to work in the factory, they will be giving them individual contracts. When the Government gives them individual contracts, they will not be able to join any union. This is the aim of this Government.

Mr. Rahael: That is good business sense.

Mr. S. Panday: Good business! The Member is taking advantage of workers at Queensway; they are walking barefooted on the streets. That is the Minister’s business sense. He is grabbing up everything and bringing in genuine and other kinds of Reebok shoes; working people for nothing. That is business sense! This is what this PNM Government wants to do with the sugar workers and other workers engaged in the sugar belt. That is the aim of this Government. That is good business sense!

The Member talked about a social net, but the social net is for his people alone. The Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) is only for PNM people, and not for anyone who belongs to Caroni. Why the Member did not apply the same principle for workers at Caroni (1995) Limited? These workers were already on the market. Why did the Government not phase out Caroni (1975) Limited? [*Interruption*] If the Member wanted Caroni (1975) Limited to go, why did the Government not phase it out? The Government could have phased out Caroni (1975) Limited over a number of years.

In the meantime, the same \$225 million that the Government will be using to train persons in order that they could get experience in business: why did the Government not give Caroni (1975) Limited workers the same training and

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

extend it until 2007? This is the Government's vindictiveness and bitterness against the people in central and south Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, I quote now from a document entitled: *A Framework for National Development: Caroni Transformation Process* and it says:

“The Caroni Transformation Process is being governed by the assumptions of two plans: the first, the Total Separation Enhancement Plan (TSEP) and the second, the Future Direction of Caroni Ltd.”

These two plans were in the hands of the Government. The first plan was produced in 2001, and the second plan in 2002 and it says:

“The Total Separation Enhancement Plan (TSEP) of 2001 called for a total shutdown of the operations of the sugar industry...The following are the striking features of the Plan.

- ❖ It was economic rather than developmental. It gave pre-eminent value to saving costs...
- ❖ It placed an inordinate reliance on externally-appointed market driven factors...
- ❖ It was lacking in equity.
- ❖ It gave the workers no real choice. The plan was construed without consultation with the labour force.”

And it goes on:

- ❖ “It undervalued the assets of Caroni (1975) Ltd. This was true, not only of the workers, but the land.
- ❖ Its plans for agricultural were ill-devised.
- ❖ The plan was lacking in vision.

The 2002 ‘Future Direction of Caroni (1975) Limited’ was fashioned after the same imperatives: cost cutting without sufficient attention to local or national development; the undervaluing of the labour force and the land; the excessive reliance on externally-appointed, market driven entities to rescue the Treasury; the absence of serious attention to pre-conditions for successful, competitive agriculture; and cursory attention to the Ecology of the area.”

Mr. Speaker, hear what the 2001 plan says: [*Interruption*] The Member is behaving as though he is in a Syrian shop cutting cloth, but he is cutting off people's neck, but I will talk.

“However, this later Plan called for a downsizing rather than a total shutdown of the sugar industry.”

The Member had this document in his possession.

“Additionally, it strongly recommended a phasing of the closure of part of the sugar industry, detailing a statistically elaborate plan for closure in 2007.”

Mr. Speaker, if the Member wanted Caroni (1975) Limited to go, the question is: Why was the Government so hasty? They were sending people on the breadline. The Member also said that some people were temporary, seasonal and casual. The Member knows, as a matter of fact, that these workers were at the lower end of the wage bracket, and these workers did not go home with anything. Eighty per cent of Caroni (1975) Limited workers went home with less than \$40,000.

Mr. Speaker, one would have thought that since this Government is a caring Government it should have retrained Caroni (1975) Limited workers first, but the Government sent home these workers, and put gramoxone in their mouths. The Government is now telling us that it will be spending \$225 million on training. Why did the Government not do that before closing down Caroni (1975) Limited? Why did the Government have to take a swiper and cut off the necks of poor suffering people in the sugar industry? Why did the Minister not have a heart and train these people?

In the Prime Minister’s budget presentation he boasted that the Government took courageous decisions. On page 11 of the budget presentation it says:

“Mr. Speaker, we do not seek to deceive the population with our Budget Presentation. We acknowledge that largely as a result of the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited, some jobs have been lost and total debt increased...we are convinced nonetheless, that our economic policies will...lowering of the unemployment...”

So what the Government is in effect saying is that while they are creating employment in the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and CEPEP, the Prime Minister was boasting to the national community that he has decimated the sugar industry, and his PNM Government has sent home workers at Caroni (1975) Limited. This is what this PNM Government has done. The Government does not have a heart. I now turn to page 13 of the budget presentation and it says:

“To complement further our small business development thrust, we established the Community Environment Protection and Enhancement

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Programme to provide the opportunity to develop the entrepreneurial skill of our traditionally dispossessed people, as well as provide long-term employment opportunities, while addressing the requirement to enhance and protect the environment.”

So, in the Prime Minister’s budget statement he is saying that the PNM Government has decimated the sugar industry. The Government has thrown people out and put them on the breadline and now they are unemployed. When we asked about CEPEP, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant said that CEPEP is for their people. The Member went on a radio talk show programme and admitted that CEPEP is a political organization for only PNM people. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant went on a radio talk show and admitted that!

Mr. Speaker, when one reads the entire budget presentation, one would see what the Government did and the direction in which it is going. *[Interruption]* To show the intention of this Government, I will quote from the document entitled: *A Framework for National Development: Caroni Transformation Process* and it says:

“The following are some of the ways in which the principle of heterogeneity may be applied to the Caroni transformation process.”

Mr. Speaker, after the Government has committed a brutal act on Caroni (1975) Limited there were some of the recommendations for transformation and it says:

“The process must be a shared one. It must guard against undue and disproportionate influence of Corporate and Cabinet powers.”

Mr. Speaker, I feel sorry for the people of La Brea, because they are suffering. I will be happy to see development in south. The Member came to this Parliament and he said that the people in La Brea were eating mango leaves and sucking green mango seeds for dinner. We want to see La Brea and Oropouche developed. There are forests in that area. We want to see a total development of the country. I recommend an area in La Brea—which is east of the Southern Main Road—for development. Mr. Speaker, I continue to quote:

“It must be shared between the diverse stakeholders; the densely variegated Caroni workforce; the sugar cane farmers, the residents of the North South Coastal Corridor; the untenured residents and agriculturists; the Trade Unions; the communities of manufacturers, farmers, industrialists; all the State entities including the Ministries, the Town and Country planners,

and the Opposition Party; civic institutions, particularly those involved in research and developmental planning.”

Mr. Speaker, what this Government did was to set up a new company. Workers will now have to fill out application forms for jobs in this new company. When these applications forms are processed, the Minister will cut off whom he does not want, and then he would take it to Cabinet. This Government speaks about consultation, but it has a plan. What this document is saying here is that everyone should have a say in the development of Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Speaker, I thought the hon. Minister would have come and told this honourable House what happened with the workers at Caroni (1975) Limited, for example, whether or not the workers have been trained or whether they have gone into business. The Minister just comes here today and says that the Government will be running some classes. There was no planning. It was a political decision and it has nothing to do with economics.

Mr. Speaker, in the Government's haste to deal with Caroni (1975) Limited, I would like to ask the Minister of Agriculture Land and Marine Resources: What has happened to the buffalypso stock?

Mr. Imbert: They eat it!

Mr. S. Panday: There was a herd of buffaloes at George Village and Mora Valley. This was a special strain that was developed in Trinidad. We ask the question: Where are the animals? What has happened to them? Were the animals distributed? I am talking here about hundreds of animals. This is a very serious matter. Where are the animals? Were these animals distributed? To whom were these animals distributed? What is the state of these animals? What are we going to do with the animals? Which parcel of land is the Government going to designate for these animals? I do not know, but the Government has a plan. The Government's plan was to get rid of all the workers at Caroni (1975) Limited. The only good Minister on that side is the Member for Point Fortin. In order to save 400 jobs the Member took Carlisle Tyre Company to court. That is a Minister! [*Desk thumping*] That Minister is a man for the people, and with the people in San Fernando.

Mr. Singh: And Marlene will also say that.

Mr. S. Panday: While the Government is trying to save 400 jobs in Carlisle Tyre Company in Point Fortin, the Minister decimated 10,000 workers.

Dr. Moonilal: She is a brilliant Chief Executive Officer at the San Fernando City Corporation. I do not know why the Government will want to transfer her.

Mr. S. Panday: There is a large acreage of land in Longdenville under citrus. We ask the Minister: What did the Government do with that plantation, since the maintenance workers of that plantation were also sent home? Has the Government abandoned the plantation? The Government just sent home the workers without thinking. *[Interruption]* That is a clown.

Hon. Member: What is a clown?

Mr. S. Panday: A clown spins all the time and dances with a ball.

Mr. Speaker: Member, please, address me.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, the Member is a clown. He had to write a letter to the newspaper saying that he is not a clown. *[Laughter]* So, I am not taking him on. The Member also boasted that the Government has given Caroni (1975) Limited workers enhancements, but what the Government did was put honey in gramaxone and kill them. The real problem will be when this Government puts a dagger in the backs of canefarmers.

Mr. Speaker, this Minister does not know anything about the culture, the history and the interlocking relationship between the canefarmers, workers and the companies. The Member did not say anything today about the canefarmers, but the Member is on record saying that if the farmers do not produce high-quality cane, the Government is going to shut down the industry. That is the Government's plan.

Although the Government has spent much money supporting the University of the West Indies in its research in cocoa, citrus et cetera, the Government did not do any research on sugar cane. The only place in Trinidad and Tobago where one could do sugar cane research is at the Sugar Cane Research Centre.

Mr. Manning: It was set up for that purpose.

Mr. S. Panday: What has happened is that in order to have a good cane crop, one has to deal with froghoppers and other pests. Presently, in Trinidad and Tobago, we are using BJ4271 variety, and this variety was developed in Barbados, and over a period of time the variety weakens. Therefore, there must be constant research to produce new varieties in order to get a good TCTS ratio. In 1957 it was the HBJ5511 variety and the quality of that variety is now deteriorating. Mr. Speaker, we ask the question: What research is being done in Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that we have the proper variety of cane?

In the past, what has happened was that Caroni (1975) Limited—being the largest cultivator of sugar cane—did research and developed varieties for

canefarmers. The canefarmers and the company were in synchrony in producing cane. Now, what will happen is that in a short period of time—since a variety lasts for 40 to 60 years—we are coming to the end of a cycle, and we do not know what would be the position as to the propensity of the farmer to produce high quality cane. Where is the research? Is the Government going to produce any new variety? When does the Government expect a new variety? Now that the Government has closed down the cultivation section of Caroni (1975) Limited, there will be no interest on the part of Caroni (1975) Limited, because Caroni (1975) Limited will be dealing only with the manufacturing of sugar cane. So, there will not be anyone to assist farmers.

Mr. Speaker, although no assistance will be given in developing a TCTS ratio, and farmers do not have the wherewithal and the capabilities to do this kind of research, they are being put into a position where they will be getting payment by quality. What I am seeing is that in a very short period of time, the cane farming industry will also go. One would have thought that when the Minister comes to the Parliament he would have put some comfort in the hearts of canefarmers of this country, but the Minister did not do that.

Mr. Speaker, the Member said that the company produces cane at \$400 per tonne and canefarmers buy it for \$471 per tonne. The Minister does not understand the sugar industry. What happens is that canefarmers get \$170 per tonne for their canes; they are paid a first interim payment of \$92 and the balance, which is \$82, is paid sometime in September. So after farmers cut their canes in June, the company—as it is involved in agriculture—purchased chemicals and fertilizers on a large scale, because they get it at a cheaper price. The benefit that the company gets from purchasing chemicals in bulk is then being passed on to the canefarmers. The canefarmers first payment would be to pay its workers.

6.10 p.m.

So that in a timely period in the cultivation of cane—in June, July and August you get fertilizers and you get chemicals to deal with the weed. So that although the farmer has to wait until October/November for his final payment, the company gives him that buffer so that he could continue the production of his cane in the next year. My question is: Have they addressed this, Mr. Speaker? What would be the position of the cane farmers? Would they have now in June and July to face the high prices in the company? Where would these farmers get this kind of money to pay? What would happen eventually is that those farmers would not be able to practise good husbandry in the development and cultivation of their canes. If that happens how could you take away or change the culture of

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

the sugar industry which is aimed at producing a high TCTS ratio, and then take away that assistance which is really no burden on any group or person? You would take that group and slap it on the shoulders of the cane farmers and then you are asking for high quality. What would get you high quality? Mr. Minister, what plans are in place to sustain the cane farmers?

There is a department called the Agricultural Services in Caroni (1975) Limited which has been sent home. Mr. Speaker, the farmers would go to those persons in that section of Caroni (1975) Limited, and the company, knowing that the farmers are selling at a cost price with a system of cylinders; with a system of agricultural traces; with a system in the fields, when you close Caroni (1975) Limited down—when they buy cylinders they give you one or two extras to help the farmers. What would now happen to the farmers? The farmers would indeed be going and at the end of the day, just like how they killed the rice industry, it is as night follows day, this Government plans to kill the sugar industry. Not only the sugar workers, they plan also to kill the cane farmers. When the Prime Minister spoke to them did he go through these areas? He does not know what he is doing.

Mr. Speaker, to show you how they really have no plan. Last year, 600,000 tonnes of sugar cane was produced. If you multiply that by 170—do you know what this Government did? They sent home all the workers and they left the fields to be abandoned. If we had worked over 600,000 tonnes of sugar cane while you were sending people home, if you had planned it—I see the Member for Tunapuna, who spent his life in the sugar industry, nodding his head. If he had permitted those workers, given them a licence to occupy the land and just cut the cane. You go on the land with a licence to cut the cane—you would have maintained it, you would have gotten five and six ratoons with cane. Did they find out what was the level of development of those cane stools that just callously abandoned it? When you look at the abandonment of these sugar cane fields, you could see a kind of spite on the part of the Government in trying to get rid of the sugar workers and the cane farmers.

Mr. Speaker, we also ask the question: Why did you not offer the land simultaneously when you were sending them home, so there would have been a smooth transition? Why? You see the Member for Diego Martin West said that the lands belong to all of us. So the people who are working it, you rather throw away \$15 billion or \$16 billions in crops that were already in the ground, because the lands belong to us. Do you see the thinking, Mr. Speaker?

This Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources really does not know what he is talking about when he speaks about the plan for Caroni (1975) Limited. Mr. Speaker, if the Government had such a good plan, why do they have to do such a good plan? My instructions are that more moneys were being spent on public relations than moneys to some of the workers. But as we say we would watch and see how it develops. How can that really be? Does this Government have a land development policy? Does this Government decide to take the arable land and leave in agriculture and put the waste lands to it in housing? As you see, Mr. Speaker, this Government has a history of being unable to see how to develop and use land.

In St. Joseph, for political purposes they are taking away the most arable lands from the Northern Range on which farmers are growing their crops, causing farmers to cry when the Government destroys the crops, and they are taking the best arable lands in the country and putting housing in marginal constituencies. But this Government has a history of that. They take the best lands and they allow Town and Country Planning to develop Valsayn. On the most barren lands in Wallerfield and Carlsen Field they put farming. That is why none of the farms there has been successful.

So, Mr. Speaker, one would have thought that marketing strategies would have been developed. They did a land capability survey; you go through Trinidad and Tobago or go through the lands of Caroni (1975) Limited, and do a land capability survey and see what kinds of crops could be planted in what kind of soil to see which is best suited for the soil. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has come with nothing like that. It seems to me, in those circumstances, that they really have no plan for agriculture. Between 1996 and 2001, the contribution of agriculture to the economy had been reduced and it was stopped last year. I wonder if this hon. Minister is right in his head. Agriculture is not something like a manufacturing process where you could switch from today to tomorrow and develop a thriving business. You have to nurture agriculture. Cocoa takes four to five years to come. The clonal cocoa takes three years to come. So he said that they went to the Government last year and they stopped it. But he has not been able to tell us where is that increase in production. Increase in which area of the agricultural sector? Mr. Speaker, he just comes here to fool the people. But the people would eventually find out and the people would see what is the real objective, as they have been telling them the real plan with the Government. Mr. Speaker, so much for my introduction.

I want to indicate that not only has the Government no plans for agriculture, but it also has no vision whatsoever. If one looks at the number of bills that were

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

passed in this First Session of the Eighth Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, one would realize that this Government has no vision and it does not know where it is going. Mr. Speaker, if you look at the kinds of Bills, they are merely amendment Bills, except for the Bill to provide for the financial service; the variation of tax; an Act to provide for the election of the President; amend the old aged pension; amend the public assistance because of the election promises; an Act to validate the cancellation of certain postage stamps—it has one page and two sections; an Act to amend the Pilotage Act—one page, one sentence, one clause; another Act—one page two clauses; an Act to amend the Registrar General's Act; An Act to amend the Children's Authority Act—one section; the next one is the Children's Authority Act—one section; state lands—one section; and I could go on and on.

Mr. Speaker, this Government, during that last year—we keep on begging to see their legislative programme. Let us see what vision there is towards 2020. But Vision 2020 is merely a catchword. Because for one year there was no need to come to Parliament, but the following year when they came to Parliament they did not produced any legislation of great significance. That is an indication of not only a lack of vision of this Government, but the incompetence of this Government. This has been the most incompetent Government we have ever seen.

When we go on and we continue to say that this Government has no vision; this Government is incompetent. Everything they do is for short-term political advantage. It says, Mr. Speaker—and I again, as an attorney—would look at the national security. Page 4 of the budget speech says:

“...declare war on the criminals...”

He says on page 5;

“With immediate effect Colonel Peter Joseph is relieved of his command as Commanding Officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment and mandated to establish a Special Crime Fighting Unit. For this unit, within the ambit of the law, we shall draw on persons from any of the services in the country, the Police, the Regiment, Coast Guard, Volunteer Defence Force...One of the main pre-requisites...to pass a polygraph test...This shall be a unit of professionals.”

Mr. Speaker, page 3 of the *Express* dated Friday, October 10, 2003, is headlined: “Police: We won't serve under soldier.” But yet the Prime Minister had indicated at the beginning of the Budget Speech that they have had 300 to 400

massive consultations. Creating such a fundamental change one would have thought that he has consulted with the police. Did you? He says:

“The Police Second Division Association does not expect any of its members to serve under newly promoted Brigadier Peter Joseph in the new Special Crime Unit (SCU).

Yesterday, Association President Insp. Christopher Holder said he would not serve under Joseph’s command if asked to do so and asked other members to take a principled stand and do the same.

Holder made the comments yesterday at a press conference at the Association’s headquarters at Besson Street which was called to deal with Prime Minister Patrick Manning’s announcement during Monday’s budget speech that a new anti-crime unit would be set up under Joseph.

Joseph, who was a colonel and commanding officer of the Regiment, was promoted to brigadier on Monday morning and removed from his duties in the army...

Holder said he viewed the setting up of the new unit ‘as political nepotism and a dangerous thing’.

That is what your police service association is saying. He almost said that the Prime Minister was creating jobs for the boys. Mr. Speaker, if Mr. Joseph was so good, why did the Prime Minister announced in the budget speech that he be promoted to the highest job in the army and then remove him from the army?

Mr. Manning: He was moved first.

Mr. S. Panday: And promoted after.

Mr. Manning: Yes.

Mr. S. Panday: What was the need for the promotion? Job for the boys! *[Interruption]* Thank you. We just want to have it on the record for posterity.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, that is one of our boys.

Mr. S. Panday: Thank you. It is recorded in the *Hansard* that the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Diego Martin West have said “jobs for the boys”. I continue to quote:

“The Association, in response to Manning’s proposal, has called on its members to stop participating in joint army/police patrols in Laventille until

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

and unless officers are provided with ‘bulletproof vests and other necessary’ ...it was a slap in the face of police officers that Manning has so far refused to appoint Snaggs as Commissioner and has promoted Joseph to head the new anti-crime unit.”

Mr. Speaker, I would come back to the appointment of Snaggs as commissioner in a few minutes.

“He has called the new unit a ‘political animal’ and said that he felt it has been set up to serve a particular political agenda.”

When one reads this document and one reads the budget statement on page 4, where he says:

“Accordingly, now we declare war on the criminals and shall do whatever necessary, within the law...”

Let us read what is necessary. Paragraph two on page 5 of the budget says:

“The Government recognizes that demonstrations are a legitimate expression of dissent in any democratic society. However, the Government wishes to make it absolutely clear that we will not tolerate acts of civil disobedience...”

Hon. 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. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, I continue to quote:

“...and will enforce the laws of the country rigidly and fearlessly.”

Even if it means parliamentarians trying to set up units to deal with crime on the outside. But in the second paragraph he says that he wants to enforce the law for people who have legitimate expression even if it meant Parliamentarians. Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that if we had said it was a political unit they would have said that we are only speaking politics. But when one reads what Inspector Holder says here and ties it with the budget, one juxtaposes it. One sees the intention of this Government. I repeat.

“He called the new unit a ‘political animal’ and said he felt that it had been set up to serve a particular purpose.”

They are not setting up any crime units to deal with crime you know; they are setting up units to deal with their opponents.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: That is the mongoose gang.

Mr. S. Panday: They are setting up a mongoose gang. And what has happened? There are still many good people in the police service except those few people in the homicide bureau in South Trinidad, which is a PNM party group, who had told Dhanraj to squeal; “We want to hear about corruption; do not go down alone, boy.” Mr. Speaker, those senior officers in the homicide bureau were on a daily contact with the Member for San Fernando East. [*Desk thumping*]

The plan is not to appoint Commissioner Snaggs; recently, this man has already been sent on a course, so skip them and put a commissioner at the head of the police service who would bend to the beck and call of this PNM. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, that person has been in contact with the Member for San Fernando East everyday. He is denying it, Mr. Speaker, and that is what is getting me annoyed. Just like the criminals in Moruga. There are 400 foot soldiers of a certain organization which head that organization in Mayaro to win the seat by brutalizing and terrorizing persons. And now do you know what was that? That the boss was charged for the conspiracy to murder. The hon. Member used them and now trying to disassociate himself from them. But they are waiting for “all yuh” to come to Mayaro. It continues.

“Lawlessness will not be tolerated from either the criminals or from any other persons.”

even if it means Members of Parliament—

“who wish to disrupt the society, no matter how strongly they may feel about their cause.”

That is not the way to deal with that kind of crime. That kind of crime is not disturbing anybody. We thought that when they were going to set up this unit it was to deal with kidnappers, rapists and robbers. Mr. Speaker, just like Inspector Holder [*Interruption*] That is the next Commissioner of Police. It is going through the police service already, and he is put there and the unit is set up it would be sealed. And the policemen realized what is being done to them and the police officers have started to revolt. That is why the police officers were so bold to say it is a political animal they are creating. They know! Throughout the police service it is being heard. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. S. Panday: That is okay, Mr. Speaker. Let quote the last line of this article. It states:

“Holder said that morale in the Police Service had been further deflated by Manning’s disclosure and that the PM has shown ‘scant courtesy to police officers’.”

Read between the lines! Do not look at it superficially. The scant courtesy is what they know the plan you have to put that man from down there; a PNM henchman in the police service to be the Commissioner of Police. And Snaggs, Roach, Paul and those other officers would be gone.

Inspector Holder is also questioning the legality of the new unit and wants to know to whom would Joseph answer. I have looked at the law on this and Chap. 01 says, that, “the maintenance shall be in the hands of the police service.” I have also looked at Chap. 15:01; I have looked at Chap. 15:02 which speaks about the supplemental Police Act and Chap. 15:02 speaks about the rural constable and the estate constable. So it does not mean that. But I heard the Prime Minister say, “no. let us go at Chap. 15:03; and Chap. 15:03 does not create any special force as the Special Reserve Police Force, but it says that these people who are SRPs that the part-time people can be called upon by the Commissioner any time. Just like the estate and role officers to assist the regular police officers in maintaining law and order. So there is no legality.

My question is: Is Inspector Holder a police officer? Is Phillip a police officer? Is Joseph a police officer? The people who they are bringing in would they be police officers? Or, would you cause the Commissioner to give them VSEP? The only you can get to do that is the homicide person. No Commissioner of Police worth his salt and no Commissioner of Police who has any self respect would compromise his office to such an extent to go out to the whims and fancies of the politician. And this is what he has in mind. The hon. Member wants to have a compliant Commissioner of Police to put their thing in place to brutalize your opponents. It is clear Mr. Speaker.

At page 34 in the budget presentation he says that they are going to introduce 1,000 police officers at the end. He is trying to introduce constitutional reform without having constitutional reform. By putting there and hoping that persons would legitimize it.

Mr. Speaker, to show how this Government has no vision; they do not what they are doing; they cannot see. He says that they are going to put 1,000 police officers on the road by the end of the year. That means they are going to put 1,000

young recruits on the road. What do they know about solving crime? I thought the hon. Attorney General and the hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation would look at the police service. In every court in Trinidad and Tobago there is a senior officer, a sergeant, an inspector prosecuting, and that officer has a clerk, who is another police officer. If you recruit young attorneys from outside there and you make them prosecutors, immediately about 300 to 400 police officers would be set free. The whole process department, in every district and every division would be released to go out and fight crime.

Those officers would be trained officers in the rank of sergeants, corporals inspectors. The senior officers who are doing the secretarial work for the prosecutor officer would surely be more competent to go out in the streets and that could be done immediately. So you do not have to train young persons; There is expertise in the police service, why can not use it? Mr. Speaker, they talk because they have mouth, and they barely call a number and we are going to put 100 police officers on the streets. I you go through the police service there are a number of police officers who are doing clerical which could be done by civilian. If they weed that out they can get their 1,000 right there.

Hon. Member: I have heard all of that already.

Mr. S. Panday: Did you ever try it? Did you ever look at it? Have you ever look at the officers? This is because there is no vision. What do these young people know about solving crime? Well, Mr. Speaker, you are hearing 10 years now. Question: have you ever made an attempt to see if you could source that kind of material from the police service? [*Interruption*] I beg your pardon?

6.40 p.m.

Dr. Rowley: “Why you don’ join the police service?” You have flat feet. Lance corporal.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, this Government read a \$22 billion budget this year. It says also:

“We shall increase Police Patrols in the main business and residential areas...”

I heard that about 10 years ago too and, having heard that, yet we see that serious crimes are on the increase. Mr. Speaker, when the United National Congress was in office we brought in the E-999 and when the E-999 was working there was a high presence of police on the road and that was indeed giving the people comfort. You know, when this Government came they “run down” all the E-999

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

vehicles! Do you know the master control set? They call it the centre of control. They have damaged it.

The way that unit is supposed to work is that you have a central command centre and you could keep on calling the vehicles at any time when they are outside on patrol, ask them where they are, if they get a call, they could move to that call immediately, if they are not in the area where they are sent, they would be told "Go back in that area". They have destroyed that master control unit and now when the E-999, the few that they have remaining, go out, do you know that they cannot trace or track them? So, Mr. Speaker, this Government really has destroyed the police service, not only the morale but also the equipment.

Mr. Speaker, it says, to show you how this budget is really trying to fool people:

"We are also taking the fight to the drug traffickers..."

"Bad John" talk:

"who are responsible for much of the criminal activity in this country. The Coast Guard will acquire two new fast patrol vessels with the capability to launch two fast interceptor boats and carry a helicopter with an attack capability. These, operating in conjunction with an ultra-modern radar system will give Trinidad and Tobago an unprecedented level of protection and capability."

We ask the question, what has become of that \$60 million instrument, that spy equipment that was brought from Israel? Why has it not been used by the police? Or is it being used by the police and nothing is happening because crime is escalating?

It says—but hear this, Member for La Brea. I want you to laugh at this one with me:

"This system will be available in about two years' time."

You are spending a budget of \$22 billion, you know crime is on the rise, you know people are being kidnapped every day and you are saying, "I spending \$22 billion, I am dealing with crime but you will get it in two years' time."

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Princes Town for giving away. What in fact we are saying is that we unveiled a package of measures, most of which will have had relative immediate effect but we also mentioned one other thing that we were doing which had a longer gestation period which itself, when it comes into play, would be quite effective. That is reasonable.

Mr. S. Panday: By that time the criminals would have gone ten steps in front of you. You are letting them know what you are coming with. This is the problem with it. The criminals are more equipped than the police. They are ahead of the police and when you tell them now, “Look, we are bringing this unprecedented—this radar and these new fast boats that you are supposed to bring”, you are putting the criminal on guard and notifying them so that they can become smarter than you. [Interruption] You will say, “Oh no, it is an investment in technology and you know what is coming.”

So, Mr. Speaker, it says:

“The Government is committed to implementing stricter laws to deal with persons...charged with kidnapping.”

You also say that you are going to put stiffer penalties. Now, when you pass legislation, yes that is so, but we ask you, what is the penalty for murder if you are convicted? The penalty is the ultimate penalty, that is death, and still you find that the murder rate is going up. So to put this in your budget is really trying to fool people. This is “ol’ talk” that you are going to put stricter measures and give them stiffer penalties, “ol’ talk”, trying to fool the population and you say you hope to get the Opposition’s support in this legislation. Mr. Speaker, we say here today and now that unless provisions are put in place to ensure that persons can be protected, we are not going to support them on any of these draconian pieces of legislation because we know that this PNM Government has been collaborating with certain elements in the police service to terrorize their opponents, the last two being prisoner one and prisoner two.

Mr. Speaker, to show you how this Government has infiltrated and has damaged the integrity of the police service, they had instances of voter padding. There is the CID in San Fernando: “No, doh take them.” Voter padding is a kind of fraud. There is the fraud squad in Port of Spain and in San Fernando: “No, no, no, no; we doh want the fraud squad.” Again they put the homicide division to deal with it, homicide which has no training in dealing with the thing. That is why we said the homicide bureau in San Fernando was a PNM party group. [Desk thumping]

They went to Nariva, Mr. Speaker, and they were speaking to a young lady who they had intended to charge for something and the senior officer of the homicide told her, “If yuh say that the Member for Nariva, Harry Partap, knows about it, if he encourages it and he conspired with you to do it, we will let you go and we go charge he. We really ain’ want you, we want him.”

Mr. Singh: “Dah is de Hypolite formula?”

Mr. S. Panday: “Yeah, de Hypolite formula.” That same homicide squad that told Dhanraj to, “Carry down all dem fellas with you, doh go dong alone”, is the same homicide squad which, on another occasion, went to Rio Claro police station, charged a girl and was investigating her for voter padding and said, “If she only say that Harry Partap, the Member for Nariva, was involved, they will let her go and lock him up”. “We going to support draconian legislation?” [Interruption] “We going to support draconian legislation where you say kidnapping—no bail?” [Interruption] “All yuh ha to do is get one ah your PNM henchmen to kidnap somebody and then say we tell them to kidnap, nex thing we charged for kidnapping, no bail for us!” [Interruption] Political opponents. [Interruption] This is the aim of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. S. Panday: So, Mr. Speaker, unless there is constitutional reform to protect the rights of every citizen and ensure that this Government cannot undermine the due process of law, we are serving notice on them today that we do not trust them and we not going to support any draconian legislation under these circumstances. [Desk thumping] “Put that in yuh pipe and smoke it!” [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, to show you how this budget is really what they call in the courts, pulling wool over the eyes of the people, it said:

“Banks will be mandated to provide adequate security systems to prevent unauthorized access to Bank Accounts. It will be the responsibility of the Central Bank to police this arrangement.”

Is there any law in place to give effect to that? This is because you are saying you are now going to mandate the bank. If the bank refuses, are there any penalties? This is what we thought when we heard the Minister of National Security come here. Instead of saying “how much ladder” he will get and how much for the firemen and whatnot, one would have thought that he would have come to this House and indicate whether there is legislation, if legislation is coming and how soon we could expect legislation.

Mr. Speaker, that is only half the story. The PNM has not thought out the process. What about asking TSTT to do the same? Tell me something. Most of the negotiations, when there is kidnapping, are done by telephone. You tell me that you cannot mandate TSTT to monitor those calls so you could find out from

whose phone the calls are being made, whether it is cellphone or a line phone?
[Interruption] No, no, no, I am not saying to tap the people's call as you are accustomed to doing, all I am asking you is to monitor. If I am kidnapped, my parents are there, monitor the calls that are going from their phones. "Wha' happen to TSTT?" TSTT cannot give the police that kind of help? Why can you not say you mandate TSTT that if there is a kidnapping any calls to the people will be monitored? So this thing with the bank is only—Mr. Speaker, I "doh" want to talk for the sake of talking. I will wind up in a few minutes. *[Interruption]*

"You doh provoke me, yuh know, because I will tell you, start paying for dem dresses you dus wear and I will talk about that on a next occasion."

Dr. Moonilal: Paying for what?

Mr. S. Panday: "Meiling ain' want to gih she no more clothes. She doh pay fuh it. But I won' go into that." *[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: My God!

Mr. S. Panday: I would not go into that. *[Interruption]* I would not go into that, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]* I will say expunge that from the records. *[Interruption]* "You want designer wear and you ain' want to pay for it." *[Interruption]* Let us go, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, TSTT. Just recently we saw where the bag of mail with people's bank account information and other mail was found in a ravine in Chaguanas. Has anybody in the Government, the Ministry of National Security, anybody from the Ministry, asked TSTT to investigate that and to put a mechanism in place where, when people's records of bank accounts are sent in the mail they ensure that they are delivered?

Mr. Singh: TTPost.

Mr. S. Panday: TTPost, sorry. This is because, Mr. Speaker, there was a kidnapping in Princes Town and when we did subsequent research we found that, for two months prior to that date, the bank account slips, or what they call it, never reached—statements—and when he went to the bank and enquired, the bank said they had sent them and he never received them. So we have to really look at this from a holistic point of view. So, Mr. Speaker, telling the bank to put in place security systems to prevent unauthorized access, I say that is really trying to mamaguy the people.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would not even go into 9 and 10. I think they do not deserve comment. However, when we go to 11, I quote from page 8, number 11:

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

“And finally, Mr. Speaker we shall establish a Special Security Commission to act as a Think Tank on crime prevention...involving former Ministers of National Security, Mr. Overand Padmore, Ambassador John Donaldson, Mr. Herbert Atwell, Brigadier Theodore Joseph...”

Mr. Speaker, the question is, what have they been doing all the time, not advising? Padmore, has he not been advising?

“The committee will be headed by...Mr. Overand Padmore.”

The question is, could those old bulls—really, when they were there as ministers they could not deal with crime. If they put one stupid “fella” and ask him for advice, would it be different from putting four stupid “fellas”? So this is what we are doing here, putting some old bulls to deal with it. Mr. Speaker, I have very little time and I think I need to give not only to the—[*Interruption*] I would not have time for this. You want to deal with crime?

When one looks at the *Draft Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial Year 2004* at the DPP’s department, it says the DPP, Director of Public Prosecutions, is a department of the Attorney General. One DPP, two deputy DPPs, three assistant DPPs, nine senior counsel, four state counsel II, four state counsel III and five state counsel I. That establishment has been so for many, many years. Crime has increased; the number of courts have increased; there are more judges yet this establishment has not been increased to meet the demands of the department. So, Mr. Speaker, what do they do? They hire young persons coming out of the University of the West Indies, no experience, give them contracts which are not very good so they just stay there for a little while until they could get a better job and that is why the DPP is under that kind of pressure. On another occasion I will talk about that.

Today I want to give some suggestions on how to deal with the crime. [*Interruption*] “Fire Fritz from WASA because he is not working WASA.” [*Interruption*] “One, and he take it—one that he borrow from a contractor and de contractor come back and take it.” [*Laughter*] [*Interruption*] “Fritz gih mih ah tank. Ah ask fuh ah tank.” [*Laughter*] “People ain’ ha no water. Take ah tank, take ah tank.” [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*] “Yuh know, is ah contractor tank he borrow and then de contractor come and take it back.” [*Interruption*]

But, Mr. Speaker, coming back to serious talk, Sir, criminals are people who, when they commit their crimes [*Interruption*] they “doh” want anybody to know who they are. [*Interruption*] So what is necessary, for example, is that anybody who has been charged with kidnapping [*Interruption*] or anybody who has been

charged with any serious crime of robbery with violence, [*Interruption*] we feel that the mug shots taken when they are charged, [*Interruption*] your name, your address—

Mr. Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. S. Panday:—and all the information that they have, that that should be made available to various organizations that want to protect their people.

As a matter of fact, when I broached the item for the first time, an old lady said, “No, no, no, no; not only for the businessmen but the Commissioner of Police should put their photographs in the papers.” They should have pull-outs in the papers over a period of time so that the granny, like the granny in Marabella who says, “My child is a good child. That child dus only go out in de night, you know. I see him going out with ah fella and I didn’ know dis man was ah criminal”, the poor grandmother has her work to do, has her chores to do, has this grandchild and is trying to help but if we have these photographs in the papers and if we have these photographs as pull-outs, granny and everybody in the district will know.

As I said, you have to go into the mind of the criminal. “He want to do he crime in de night and in de day put on he \$1,000 shoes and walk like a saga boy down de road. He want to lime with de prettiest woman, he want to lime on de road as though he decent”, but the moment you expose him and put his photograph, his name and address, et cetera, in the newspapers and everybody gets to know, everybody will shun him, then he will not have the ability to influence any young people like the little boy who was killed in Marabella. So, Mr. Speaker, anybody who has been convicted for any crime of kidnapping or for robbery with violence for the last five years we say also, let us put it there.

Finally, I have about nine points but time has run out on me. We are asking the Chief Justice and the chief magistrate, whenever anybody is charged for kidnapping or for armed robbery, to put a condition on the bail because the law says you can give them bail but section 2 of the Bail Act says that the court may give you bail on any condition it deems fit. So what you do is say, “You must report at the station not between 9.00 and 5.00 but at 9 o’clock every Monday morning”. So this man who has been charged has to go to a particular station at 9 o’clock every Monday morning. You make that known to the people in the area so anybody who has been robbed or has had any untoward thing happen could go to the station without telling anybody and watch to see if that is the criminal they saw around their house. So we form a new paradigm, Mr. Speaker, in terms of

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

identification, not only after they arrest the man, having to go in an identification room, but also they can have an identification in the natural surroundings. I know “my time finish”, Mr. Speaker.

Last point—Crime Stoppers—they must be proactive. What they do is wait until after the crime has been committed and then give you a reward for reporting the crime to try to solve it, but during that time, Mr. Speaker, your daughter, my daughter or my sister would have been kidnapped and kept for eight days. “Imagine a girl under a tent ain’ bathe for eight days!” You could imagine the trauma she has gone through? Let us be proactive. Let us deal with crime in front. Mr. Speaker, when we get all that information about these criminals, you pass it to Crime Stoppers, they can hire private detectives, “monitor de man, see who he liming wid, see which motor car he moving wid, so the moment anything happens you already have his photograph, you could easily find de ring and break de ring”. I have more for you, Mr. Prime Minister. I am willing to assist because crime affects all of us and we must come together to deal with crime.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for protecting me from that clown and that lady there. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Diane Seukeran): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was so carried away by what the Member for Princes Town was saying, particularly his two last thoughts—which I thought were excellent thoughts and I think that we might want to look at them very seriously—that it now becomes a little difficult to get back to the subject on which I intended to speak which is that of trade.

However, to get back to the budget, Sir, it seems to me—and I am not saying for a moment that the Member for Princes Town was not talking about the budget because he was referring to it—that a budget charts a course that the country is going to be taking over the course of the year and it is one step along a chain of events that will lead us in the direction we hope to go and what is within the budget is the proof that we are taking the right direction. So that Members of the Government have to propose what we are doing, Members opposite ought to be examining, as should the national community, measures that are proposed in the budget that deal with economic and social issues—all the issues that relate to development of our country.

A budget is a means of accounting also to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We need to question what is the methodology that we are using, what are the revenue projections and I was very pleased with the performance for the Member

for St. Augustine. We have to question the measures, et cetera, of what is proposed in the budget.

Sir, having listened to all the contributions, having listened to the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance deal with the budget I have to tell you that I rise with some pleasure and pride to support the budget on this side [*Desk thumping*] because it seems to me that in every statement emanating from every Minister who has risen in defence of this budget, it proves the point that it is a strategic document determining the strategic path measures meant to take this country to developed nation status which is exactly what the Government of Trinidad and Tobago intends to do. It is not Vision 2020. Vision 2020 is the date at which, for the latest, one achieves developed nation status. That is the objective, developed nation status and this budget, Sir, is a very sound step upon which to say we shall achieve developed nation status in the time frame that we project, if not shorter.

You know, Mr. Speaker, it was the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North, who pointed out that a budget is not—and again it was both the Member for Siparia and I think the Member for St. Augustine who pointed out that a budget is not just about numbers. The Leader of the Opposition said that it had to have a human face and I think that any reading of or listening to the budget will have proved that the human face is indelibly stamped not only on the face of the budget but also throughout the entire content of the budget. [*Desk thumping*] This, Mr. Speaker, I say clearly because of the emphasis on education, on health, on housing and in every measure, and I am so happy to see the Member for St. Joseph is present.

Sir, the objective of the budget and of this Government is to stimulate the economy to develop the human resource base of our country to meet the global challenges that we as a developing country face in a global environment. Trinidad and Tobago does not operate as an island unto itself; it operates in the global environment. The world is a liberalized one and therefore we must operate under it and what we do cannot be done simply along the parochial grounds of Trinidad and Tobago, UNC and PNM, us and them, it is a question of Trinidad and Tobago in the world, Trinidad and Tobago fighting with Caricom for all the things for which we must fight and a chance to survive in a global environment. Therefore the objective of the Government, as is stated clearly, as is shown by all the measures of the budget is to close the gap, to create the enabling environment in the first place, to develop the human resource, to stimulate the economy, to close the gap in the income base of people to improve the quality of life of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago from the base to the top regardless of their race or their colour, so that everybody in this country benefits from what we do.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Our intention is to make every sector of the economy, all our peoples, productive and competitive so that they can exist in today's day and age. Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me that every time I come to this House and I sit and listen—very much like the Minister of Works and Transport, I am a very new Member of this House, comparatively—I have to ask myself whether the distinguished Members opposite understand any of the real problems that are facing the country of Trinidad and Tobago. Sir, that is a very honest question, “eh”. I do not mean to be making fun of anybody, I am not trying to be political; it is simply that I genuinely am puzzled by what I hear, the contributions from the other Members as to whether they really understand the problems facing Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]*

No, Sir. Sir, I judge you only by your contribution. *[Interruption]* I am not talking about whether you yourself in your other capacity—I beg your pardon, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, please. Hon. Members, hon. Chief Whip, please, you know better than that.

Mr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, that is a rhetorical question that needed answering.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, if I might just for a moment answer the Leader of Opposition Business.

Dr. Rowley: He did not call his own name as understanding it.

Hon. D. Seukeran: No he did not, yes. *[Interruption]* Sir, just to clarify a point, you know, the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, the Minister of Works and Transport, determined that some of the Members on the opposite side sit in the balcony. Well, I have to tell you that, given the contribution of the Member for St. Augustine today, given the contribution of the Member for Couva South, there are Members on the other side who sit in the balcony and we have no problem on this side admitting that.

In fact, some of them, including the Member for San Juan/Barataria, very often rise to that challenge, but that being said, Sir, that is on a very rare occasion so that when—I mean, it is rare that the Member for Couva South finds a moment of lucidity. He is so often lost in that which is divisive and when he does, when there is a moment at which he is lucid, he adds value to a debate and it is a wonderful thing to hear, because that is what this House should be all about. It is not about what I hear on that other side and I, sitting on this side, Sir, as a new Member, am extremely concerned and ask the question: what am I doing here?

Mr. Ramnath: May I ask that too? [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Seukeran: What is this all about? Are we united in the—I know you do—in the people’s business? Are we here to represent the interest of the people? [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, you know, sometimes I wonder if Members opposite are just plain “bad mind” but I refuse to accept that. I would prefer to believe that they do not know what are the real problems and challenges facing the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Khan: From 1995 to 2001 ask them across there—look the Member for Diego Martin West can tell you what they did us. They did worse than that.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, you know, national security and security in general is not just about physical security, it is security and many of them have touched upon it, it is a very serious subject and it is something that touches all of us, but physical security is not the only security about which we need to be worried. We need to be worried about the economy, we need to be worried about job creation, we need to be worried about business development, particularly in a global environment, and therefore we need to be looking at some of the things that affect the ability of Trinidad and Tobago to succeed in a global environment and we are part of that global environment whether we like it or not and whether we are prepared for it or not.

Mr. Speaker, our budget and the budget that I heard here over the last few days considers all the challenges facing the people of Trinidad and Tobago and it plans very well I thought for the future of our people. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance premised the budget upon a \$25 a barrel price of oil and, with the greatest of respect to the Minister of Energy and Energy Resources, the Member for Port of Spain South, I would like his permission and would crave the indulgence of this House to touch for a moment upon that premise of a barrel of oil of \$25 because it is that on which we are basing the budget, oil being an energy—continuing to be the very basic—the fuel that is going to power the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

7.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in the newspapers many questions are being asked as to whether the price is correct. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition and the Members for St. Augustine and St. Joseph have also raised questions as to the validity of the price. There is a motive for the Government pitching the price of oil at \$25 per barrel. The Minister of Finance said categorically that we had put the price at \$25 in order to make it too high to have any surplus to put into the Revenue Stabilization

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Fund; that is what the Member said. The question of the Revenue Stabilization Fund and what we do with the surpluses are being discussed in the country. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, since these and energy power the economy, I thought we might want to look at it.

What the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said, and which was so simple to understand, therefore I think it bears repeating, is that the price is based upon three particular components, and that is evident. One does not only have to listen to what the Minister said; if you follow the news, if you look at BBC or CNN or you simply read the newspapers, you would see that the geopolitical conditions of the world are still very unstable, particularly, after the events of 9/11, as they affect oil producing countries. So production then has a question mark over it.

On the other hand, we are seeing the demand sector, the countries of the developed world like the United States and Japan, their economies have begun to turn around; the indicators are there, and so the demand side is growing. In the middle of that sort of lever upon which you are judging, is the fulcrum, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which is saying that they are determined that the banding should be between \$22 and \$28 a barrel.

Mr. Speaker, it would seem to me that the price the Government has set for a barrel of oil and, therefore, the engine that is fueling the economy, and all that we want to do in business, has integrity. The price is honest and fair; it is not something that we ought to be questioning. I think, therefore, the pundits should be reasonably happy with that part of it. Mr. Speaker, I wanted, particularly, to raise this because fuel is the driver; it is the energy that is going to be used as a lever to develop all the other businesses in Trinidad and Tobago; it is the plank upon which we rest. Mr. Speaker, that was one aspect of it.

The other part of it was the question of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as raised by the Member for St. Augustine. I think if you were listening, and if you understand energy interests, then what the Member for Port of Spain South, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, said on the question of the GDP rising, would be very heartening. Given the quantum of the capital injections that we are going to have in the energy world, GDP is going to rise. The question that we need to be asking ourselves is: What are we going to do about the Gross National Product (GNP)? It is about closing the gap between GDP and GNP that we ought to be worried about.

I know it sounds crazy, but it seems to me that the GNP is what touches people. It is not about figures; it is about what touches people. How does the money reach the people? These are questions that I think we ought to be looking

at in this House. I am convinced about GDP, but I would like the Member for St. Augustine to tell me, at some point in time, what exactly GNP does. You have this big gap. Are you not supposed to be narrowing the gap? Do you remember the days when we had lots of GDP and we could not even borrow money, because we had too much money, and yet people were starving? That is the question. We have to look at exactly what the Minister was saying to narrow that gap, to bring the leverage in, in some way or the other. All that is for the stimulation of the economy.

Given what the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has said, we are not going to see an oil boom. What we are seeing is a predicted revenue stream for the years to come, upon which we can base the plans that will deal with the quality of life of our citizens. [*Desk thumping*] The question then to the Member for St. Augustine, since he knows that I know none of the terms is: What are we going to do with the money? If we are going to get all this money from energy, the question then is: What do we do with the money? Do you put it away while people continue to starve or do you put some of the money to good use and stimulate the economy, narrow the gap?

Mr. Speaker, you will remember the biblical story of the talents. Do you hide away your money or do you use your money? This Government is guided very clearly by that; at least, I would be if I were the Prime Minister and leader of this country.

Mr. Singh: Some day.

Hon. D. Seukeran: The question does not arise that no money is going into the Revenue Stabilization Fund; money is going there. We have to put 60 per cent of the money. The question is: What are you going to do with the next 40 per cent? I would think that the objective of using that 40 per cent is instead of putting all away, do not develop the country, save, save, save, just like the talents, for a rainy day, and not do anything with your money, while people continue to starve.

There is massive poverty in this country that we have to address. All of us, including the Member for St. Augustine who has walked the field, understand only too well the amount of poverty. In fact, crime is a spin-off of poverty; it is not a total answer, but it is a tremendous spin off for it.

It was the Member for Couva North, the Leader of the Opposition, who suggested the Norway model, which was, basically, to put all the money into the Revenue Stabilization Fund. He was comparing Trinidad and Tobago, in its

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

developing state, with a country like Norway. It seemed to me that he had not considered either the amount of resources of Norway, the landmass of Norway or the size of its population to that of Trinidad and Tobago. At least I was grateful that he had not called for the Alaska model, which I am quite sure the Member for Couva South would be familiar with. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Rowley: He was already implementing it for himself.

Hon. D. Seukeran: So, for the benefit of Members who do not know the Alaska model: The government of Alaska has to put every cent of its money into its revenue stabilization fund; it is called by another name. Everyone who lives in Alaska, man, woman and child, is given an amount of money from this fund. In this day and age, it is \$1,000 or \$1,200. It used to be \$1,900; it depends on what the fund is yielding, but every citizen gets.

In the meantime, the state of Alaska, given the vagaries of the stock market, is starving. That State alone is running a deficit of either \$400 million or \$400 billion. It cannot touch its money, and the people are using their \$1,000 funds. Do you know what they call the \$1,000, Mr. Speaker? You know the reputation of the indigenous peoples of Alaska. It is called “happy hour” money. So the indigenous people of Alaska are kept in a happy state, while the rest of the country suffers. I am grateful, at least, that the Leader of the Opposition did not suggest that we should be using the Alaska model.

The Alaska model is a classic example of exactly what we are talking about in terms of Trinidad and Tobago and the utilization of some of the money from the oil surpluses, the horse starving in the middle of the sweetest green meadow that you have ever seen; that is something that we have to avoid.

We have a Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) of \$1.6 billion and a social sector programme of close to \$2 billion, not of handouts, but out of programmes intended to empower our people and designed to stimulate our economy. I think we have to move from the Alaska model and back to the subject matter. *[Laughter]*

The budget as presented by the Prime Minister runs true to the philosophy of using our energy resources as leverage for our economic diversification and to bring value added trains into the country, as well as to develop our private sector including the small and medium enterprises and the business sectors and to grow. Other than that, also developing our entrepreneurial climate and the entire productive sector of Trinidad and Tobago.

I heard the Member for Couva South asking the most rhetorical questions that could mislead this country. I want us to consider what the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was talking about; what it means for the development of our local private sector in the energy sector. It would be a tremendous boon for that sector of the economy. What does the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with Venezuela mean?

Mr. Speaker, for myself, in another capacity as the South Chamber of Commerce President, this was something we had proposed over time. Long before the South Chamber of Commerce or before anybody else, the question of the linkage of the gas pipeline had been on the table, and the value it would bring to Trinidad and Tobago in the positioning within the Free Trade Areas of the Americas (FTAA), and as the gas pipeline goes up the islands to the countries of the Caribbean allowing for their industrialization in a global environment, where there is no protection for small island states, so that we could move from the one-crop banana regime.

Mr. Singh: Where is the feasibility for this?

Hon. D. Seukeran: Were you not listening to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries? I have to insist that the Member for Caroni East has no understanding of energy; hence it is very good that I am talking about energy today.

Mr. Singh: I will drink some Lucozade.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, we are determined to bring a better life for our citizens, while Members opposite grasp at straws, while they continue to divide this country with rhetoric—I cannot find the words to tell you what it does to the country—busy dividing us, not half truths, but with outright lies. That is what offends me as a new Member, just as the Minister of Works and Transport said, that you can stand there using language to divide this country; talking about race constantly. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: You are practising it!

Hon. D. Seukeran: How can I practise it? You are accusing the PNM of being racist. In other words, what is being said is that the PNM is an African party and the UNC is an Indian party. Well, I am Indian too, and so is the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*] I do not think we are any different from you, so this nonsense that goes on while we have major challenges facing this country is something that we have to deal with it. I am appalled by their ignorance of what

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

is important to the country, by the wicked, wilful, malicious division of this country. [*Desk thumping*] That, Mr. Speaker, is something that needed to be said. Members have to understand that we are not stupid across here. The Members across there are not stupid; the general public is not stupid.

I think that if you were to look at the results of the last local government election, what you lost was your own people in Caroni, all over, saying to you, “Enough is enough, get down to the people’s business!” [*Desk thumping*] Everyday you come here you listen to the same diatribe, the same rubbish that is rending this country apart, polarizing it. For what?

Mr. Hinds: For wickedness!

Hon. D. Seukeran: We are in power for the next five years, God willing, so in the meantime, gentlemen, until we come to an election, let us work together. We have battles to fight. The battle is not against you and I; it is in the international forum. It is about business development, job security and national security. [*Desk thumping*] It calls on all of us to get together. Stop wasting time!

Mr. Speaker, let me get back to the budget. It is something that I have wanted to say for a long time. [*Crosstalk*] I am Auntie Diane instead of an Uncle Tom. Well, I cannot even remember the book, I read it many years ago, but I remember her as being a very nice character. I hope that I can continue to be a nice character. I prefer to be an Uncle Tom than a racist whatever. [*Interruption*] I will not be distracted by the Member for Couva South.

To get to the business of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, because we are talking about trade here; whether we are talking about energy, whatever we are talking about, we are talking about business. You cannot sufficiently stress the importance of trade as an essential element in the development of an economy, both in terms of business development and job creation. [*Interruption*] I am very sad to see the Member for Couva South leaving, particularly when he is, perhaps, one of the most venomous on the other side.

Mr. Speaker: Order, order!

Hon. D. Seukeran: Last year we achieved a surplus of \$2 billion, and that is a remarkable achievement, given what was going on in the global environment. [*Desk thumping*] You will remember the events of 9/11, you will remember events prior to 9/11 in which the entire economies of the world, the stock market, the whole demand in the world was drying up, so that producing countries were having difficulties selling their goods. Then you remember the events subsequent to 9/11 which exacerbated a situation that was already bad.

Mr. Speaker, the spread of terrorism, war as we know it, continues to cause insecurities. My comments about the Members next door are based upon insecurity, because business thrives in a secure environment. Therefore, it would seem to me that all these events, including the Members opposite, are causing insecurity. There are events around that are dampening consumer demand so that business is slowing, reducing the flow of business throughout the country.

Whether the Members opposite are ignorant, wilfully blind or deaf, it is necessary for the Government of today to reassure our business community and our workforce, including the generations coming, that we are determined to plan ahead, that we would take and implement the measures to safeguard the interests of Trinidad and Tobago and all its people; not some, but all. We have to get our act together, because the challenges outside there are real for Trinidad and Tobago both locally and internationally. In fact, whatever happens in this liberalized, globalized connected world affects Trinidad and Tobago.

For instance, 9/11 which happened in the United States thousands of miles away, impacted directly upon our tourism and manufacturing sector, upon the demand outside, that caused some degree of pain to our manufacturing sector. In fact, I would say that 9/11 is not only to say that people died, but that opportunity and hope died in the world; fear and paranoia have taken the place of that hope and opportunity, and just as in the instance of crime, we must reverse that trend.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, I think that the hon. Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, has touched substantially upon the portfolio of trade and the measures that we will use to assist our manufacturers and producers as we position Trinidad and Tobago to be, not only the commercial, but the manufacturing centre of Caricom and the gateway to the Americas.

Mr. Speaker, it is extremely difficult to express clearly and categorically what is the business of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. It has a long gestation period, because in this changed environment it is no longer where you are granting or pulling back licences, the world is liberalized. The PNM Government of the 1990s changed the rules by which we operated, so that the job and the living conditions in which you operate in the Ministry of Trade and Industry are both easier. What is complicated is the negotiations, because that is particularly what we are doing: negotiating trade agreements for business conditions to exist in Trinidad and Tobago. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I wish you would tell the Member for San Juan/Barataria to stop heckling me. *[Laughter]*

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

We are talking about the manufacturing sector, and what is good is that there is ongoing conversation between the members of the Manufacturers Association and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. There is a Standing Committee of Trade which, in fact, the ministry does not head, but the Manufacturers Association. That give us the ideas and measures that we need. The tell us what they need for us to implement to assist them, so as to deepen the opportunities for business expansion and market penetration for the producers of goods and services in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, you know that these markets exist. You cannot just sell goods in Trinidad and Tobago anymore; you have to sell them globally. The market is in Caricom, Venezuela, Cuba, the United States and the United Kingdom; it is everywhere that we have favourable bilateral trade. What is absolutely critical is to understand that it is only if we are successful in accessing these markets, can we determine the success of Trinidad and Tobago and the development of the non-oil sector. What is important to that access, and the only way that you are going to succeed, is if the country and the goods manufactured are both productive, that our manufacturers become more and more productive and more and more competitive in the global and highly competitive environment.

As the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, has already indicated, we are heavily involved in negotiations with the FTAA and the Cotonou and WTO agreements. In all these negotiations, what the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and the Minister in particular, are attempting to do is to get for Trinidad and Tobago what is termed special and differential treatment; so that small island States are given a window of time before they have to fully liberalize their economies, the removal of tariffs and barriers. This is a degree of protection. The Cotonou talks are between the European Union and the countries of the ACP, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

In those talks, which are designed to develop an economic partnership agreement (EPA) eventually, there are things like commodity protocols. Our rum, sugar, there is cotton for other countries, coffee and so on are depressed things, and people are starving in the world today. The World Trade Organization is the umbrella body, and all the rules of all other trading agreements have to be compatible with that body, so we are trying to insist on special and differential treatment with the FTAA, Cotonou and the WTO so we can phase how we free our markets and give our producers a degree of time, before the world becomes absolutely equal, because there is no equal playing field. We are trying to level it in as many ways as possible.

Mr. Speaker, we negotiate as a group with Caricom; we do that for very sound reasons, and I do not think that I have to stress them here. One is the numerical strength of small islands getting together to form a degree of mass. We continue to work on the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) that is scheduled to come on stream by December 31, 2003, which would create an environment for the free movement of goods, services and human resources between Caricom countries. Although you hear about some people, especially the workforce, looking at it with a degree of skepticism and fear, in fact, it is to the benefit of this country, because as anyone in the sector can tell you, we do not have enough of the skills that we need, so there is no problem with us using our Caribbean counterparts, or our people going to work in their countries. *[Interruption]*

We are very active in trade negotiations with the FTAA, the European Union (EU) and so on, and all these negotiations in the WTO are very, very interesting to Trinidad and Tobago and the islands of the Caribbean. We cannot change the World Trade Organization or the rules or the environment in which we operate; we can just get very prepared for it. Trinidad and Tobago and the islands of the Caribbean are too small. This is not to be defeatist, it is to be proactive, to think and to strategize what you are going to do in that environment.

I think that we need to look very seriously at the benefits of the Minister of Trade and Industry's lobby for hosting the FTAA permanent secretariat here. Mr. Speaker, do you have any concept of the number of jobs, the kind of profile that this country would have internationally, the kind of foreign exchange? Our construction and hospitality sectors, every sector of this economy, will benefit by this. Trinidad and Tobago's profile would rise in the world; it can only be a benefit to the country. That is one thing that we need to look at and discuss. That is why sometimes I am so disappointed in what comes from the other side.

What has happened recently that is of absolute signal import to Trinidad and Tobago is the breakdown of the WTO talks in Cancun. *[Interruption]* Yes, the Minister of Trade and Industry attended, and he has been speaking about it, but we ought to be talking about it in this House, because it affects Trinidad and Tobago. It is not a disaster; it is a glorious opportunity for the developing world. If you looked at what happened there, it was the subsidy for agriculture that developed nations used against us; it was getting agriculture on the agenda. That is the first time that the developing world actually got its act together and did something for the benefit of its own economies.

Do you realize, Mr. Speaker, it was the first time that we were able to successfully get an agenda for sustainable development for the rest of the world

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

on to the world agenda? That is something that we ought to be debating. It is something of absolute essence to this country, and we ought to be looking at it for the benefits, because now we need to be talking to each other: that side and this side, the Members of Caricom talking together. So whether we go into the EU, the FTAA, the WTO, or talk to Africa, the Pacific or other developing countries, we can continue to press successfully for special and differential treatment.

I have just come back from Brussels, and I saw it so clearly. The last time I was in Brussels the EU was like, "Oh, well, what are you talking about?" It seemed almost *infra dig* for the commissioners to talk to us. Suddenly, after the WTO, nothing was good enough; they would have signed any agreement if the countries of the developing world had an agenda on the table; so we must have an agenda. It was amazing what had happened. That is something of tremendous import to business development and to what we need to do.

We need to be very serious, therefore, very alert and strategic. We need to be thinking and focused, not dividing this country, but unifying it, so that our manufacturers and the productive sectors are working, so we can galvanize employment. Not distracting the population with nonsense; but having them focused on the real issues facing this country. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, that is free trade. That is a serious problem.

We are determined to rationalize our trade sector and to provide targeted assistance. There is the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) funded trade sector reform support programme, which helps strengthen institutions of the country and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and provides adjustment support for the private sector. There is the trade assistance programme; there is the legislative agenda. Let me just highlight for a second what the Prime Minister was saying with respect to the legislative agenda. For instance there was the amendment to the Anti-dumping legislation.

7.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, let me explain what that is; that is closing the loopholes that exist. When somebody says you are dumping you have to investigate that and it takes time and there are loopholes that one can hide behind. For example, the question of cement coming into the market, all of these things.

Those loopholes have to be closed so that we do not have to go to court so often. It can be done successfully and quickly so the consumer and the producer are safeguarded. There is also the safeguards legislation which deals with problems caused by surges in imports damage felt by the local producer.

The United States of America uses this particular bill very often in the importation of steel. This kind of particular safeguard mechanism is used to protect their local manufacturing sector. So this is the kind of legislation we have.

The Investment Promotion Bill removes impediments to investments, there is the Fair Trading Bill to maintain effective competition; this is what we need in our society. When we are talking about fair trade, it has to be effective, no more monopolies but effective competition.

We have seen recently with the Member for Arouca South, the Minister of Consumer Affairs, the issue of the price of chickens where you have, not a monopoly, but where one could form a cartel where the consumer is badly affected. So this piece of legislation is particularly important, not only to the business sector but the consumer or the producers.

There is the Venture Capital Bill, and again the Member for Couva South was referring to the quality of Petrotrin's product and this is extremely important, standards regulation, because more and more standards are being used as barriers to trade. There are all kinds of barriers; there is one that is called a phytosanitary barrier. [*Crosstalk*] It is a barrier. It is used as a barrier to trade. You may understand it as a control but how it is used against you is like a barrier to trade. For instance, you could not export fish because the water in which they were swimming might have been contaminated because you caught them with hooks that hurt the fish, or you were slaughtering your animals and it was done in what they would term an inhumane manner. The Muslim community and the way they kill their animals, they would have a problem there. There are so many ways that they are slaughtered; whether the stalls are clean, the condition of the abattoir, the condition of the fish market, all these things are barriers and standards. So whether it is energy or fishing, these standards are important.

Then there is the question of all the substandard goods that are coming into Trinidad and Tobago. Do you know how often people buy brand new, pretty "dan dan" and when it is washed once it is done. Substandard goods are coming into Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, he is harassing me, I ask your protection.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Chaguanas, you would have your say.

Mr. Ramsaran: We are debating.

Mr. Speaker: A debate is not when a Member is on her feet and you keep crosstalking all the time.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. SPEAKER]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Let me say this, Members, this constant crosstalking has to stop, I have had enough of it during this debate. The Standing Order says while a Member is speaking, other Members must be silent. Please, you have to be silent when another Member is speaking. If you want to interrupt, ask her leave to intervene, but do not engage in this constant crosstalk. This is a Parliament Chamber, it is not a Town Hall meeting, or a meeting at the side of the road.

Mr. Ramsaran: May I ask your guidance?

Mr. Speaker: No you cannot. Please continue, Member.

Dr. Khan: What about talking among ourselves?

Mr. Speaker: Do it in undertones.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, to be fair to the Member for Barataria/San Juan, he is always very gentle and very nice, but in true form I have to appeal for protection. I still need protection.

So we continue to strengthen our institutional capacity and in particular, what we are trying to do is stop the bureaucracy and duplication. Those agencies within the control of the purview of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, like Tidco, are being streamlined to avoid duplication, so that the mandate of these agencies is particularly clear and there is no problem of people knowing what they have to do.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for San Fernando West has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Barataria/San Juan for his kind intervention. What I want to point out is that far from fostering a dependency syndrome, this budget and this Government is committed to developing self-sufficiency in all our people; productivity, competition, and self-sufficiency so that throughout the budget document one would see it is not just the Ministry of Trade and Industry that is galvanizing activity.

In the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, there is NEDCO; in the Ministry of Housing with the home ownership programme, the way the National Housing Authority (NHA) will be structured and what UDeCOTT is doing. There is business activity in Tidco, SBDC, sports; in science and

technology; all the training programmes in the new university, in the Wallerfield estate, in the business incubator that is going to be there, in how local government is conducting itself; in agriculture as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources was saying, with YAPA, the whole potential of Caroni (1975) Limited lands are yet to be explored.

It was very nice of the Member for St. Augustine to compliment the Government on NEL because NEL does galvanize and it is not only to galvanize existing business, it is to create and expand the base of business so that people can help themselves. That is what it is all about. Why should we be dependent? We want to move people from dependency and that is what this Government is about. Even in social services, NEL, community development, public utilities, the way you are going to replant the forest and in particular what happens with CEPEP.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk for a while about CEPEP because it seems to me that there is a great misunderstanding of it. CEPEP is intended to create new business. It is as if Government has developed a business incubator. There are 110 businesses in there that create many jobs. It is operated as a private sector company, the Government is the bank, it is a business incubator and gradually these contractors, overtime, will gradually come into their own. At first they had never done business, you are starting it, it is an incubator so you are paying for it in the initial instance, but as you get used to business, as you learn, it will hatch and they will go out into the wider community and will be able to grow more and more. CEPEP is doing a wonderful job and that is why it is the *bête noire* of the Members opposite.

The Member for Barataria/San Juan was making the point last night that it was not spread evenly, and perhaps there is merit in what he was saying but the fact of the matter is that it is an excellent way in which this country has never been cleaner, and as much as you scoff at the uniforms, people wear them with pride. They have a job that pays them well, they are making a contribution to the country by cleaning the country in which they live and doing a great job of it. It has to be because it is successful. That is the only reason.

Mr. Speaker, I have tried to highlight some of the issues affecting business development and expansion and what the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Government are doing to promote business development and, therefore, job security. I want to make sure and link this very carefully, lest it be said that this is a Government of business.

This is a Government that recognizes that employment security and growth are tied to business development, hence it is a chicken and egg story. You are

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

focusing on growing businesses so that people could either be employers or be employed in the country. In a global environment, that is the danger; job losses. So that is what I think I have been doing, looking at the methodology and the direction of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and laying the thoughts of the ministry as we attempt to give our people every advantage in this very competitive environment in which we operate.

I think that every speaker on this side has defended the budget very successfully and none can be faulted for what he or she has been doing, and it is far from being a \$22 billion damp squib, which is what the Member for Couva North called the budget. He said it should have been an inter-ballistic missile. I do not think that anyone of us, given today's environment wants it to be an inter-ballistic missile.

The budget is a very thoughtful strategic plan of inventions that will stimulate the economy and prepare for growth in our country. [*Desk thumping*] As I close, I want to touch on something very seriously because business growth and expansion is built upon confidence and hence my raising my voice this evening and expressing what I feel about some of the contributions from the other side because it does not do anything for building confidence.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that the national community would be heartened and confident by what they have heard from the Members on this side so they will know that the Government's objectives are correct and the measures we are using to improve them would deliver the goods and we would do so in terms of good governance. That is what we need the country to be confident about, because it is confidence that builds business expansion. The entire business world, whether it is the entrepreneurs or whoever, they need to be confident. If business is built upon confidence then national security becomes an issue that business has to be concerned about; the physical security.

I began by talking about the aspects of security of confidence that you needed to look at for business development, but all the Government is doing is worth nothing if the confidence of the local environment is not there. So national security becomes a major issue because it is the plank upon which all business investment is built. Given the contribution of the Member for Princes Town, I think I really do have the capacity to talk about national security, as a citizen, as Minister of Trade and Industry, and as a Member of the Government.

This country is under siege, there is a criminal element that is now roaming, it is growing and seeding in this country. Bold, without conscience, brass faced,

callous, brutal, less than human and all of us in this country, not just the Members on the other side could talk about it, but every Member of Government of Trinidad and Tobago is conscious and feels it and that is something I want to state very categorically. Crime touches all of us and kidnapping, in particular, is a crime that offends all of us.

Mr. Speaker, in San Fernando West there is a family that you as a resident of San Fernando know extremely well who has a 14-year-old son who has been kidnapped. In San Fernando West, this weekend, a child was kidnapped; a week ago, there was an 18-year-old woman from Carlton Lane talking with her friends and she was shot in the stomach. She is not a drug pusher, a nice child. The week before that a young man, again from Carlton Lane, was shot, and the week before that, a member from the Prime Minister's constituency was shot.

As a representative for San Fernando West I am extremely touched. As a businessperson, I understand that confidence is built on national security. As a citizen I feel it, as a mother, a grand mother and as the representative for San Fernando West, I am extremely touched by what is going on in San Fernando West. Drive by shootings! What kind of country are we living in? Is this the United States of America? It would seem to me that the only thing we have yet to develop nation status in this country is the state of criminal activity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is time for Trinidad and Tobago to take back its country and so the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has declared war. I listened to the contributions on the other side making fun of what the Government is attempting to do. You have to ask yourself why is the Government setting up a particular unit. I keep hearing the question of whether Brigadier Joseph is going to head. The Prime Minister said that Colonel Joseph was relieved immediately of his command to become Brigadier in order to form this unit he was talking about. The question of whether the police were going to answer to Mr. Joseph, or he was going to lead did not arise. So why are we pulling apart instead of saying the Government is trying something? His hands are tied and it is because of you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, crime and kidnapping has no discrimination; it has no race in it. It does not care whether you are black or white, whether you come from Morvant, Laventille, or Goodwood Park, whether you come from Marabella or Sumadh Gardens. It does not matter what your colour or race is. The mother whose child is kidnapped, whose son is shot feels the same pain whether she is black or white.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

[*Desk thumping*] Pain and human emotion are the same under the colour of the skin, so this nonsense that I hear, this division that goes on offends me.

Mr. Speaker, I am afraid because I, too, am affected as a woman going home every night driving on the highway by myself. Do you not think I am afraid? I have children. Think of that little boy in Sumadh Gardens who was about to enter his own house. I have grandchildren playing on my lawn unsupervised, I am afraid. So this nonsense that goes on here is not as if the PNM does not care, we are human beings. [*Desk thumping*] I say it very categorically and clearly. Every Member in this House is affected by crime.

Think of what is happening to that family in Sumadh Gardens whom many of us know. This is a child and we are starting with trends. It began with Pooran Ramsingh's family where the little girl was kidnapped, now we see another 14-year-old. The trend is getting worse. You grow your child for 14 years, watch him/her every day, you bathe him/her, you change him/her, you feed him/her, you do his/her homework with him/her, you dry his/her tears, you fix his/her cuts and suddenly he/she is not there and some idiots are calling you saying they are going to kill your child. Do you know what is going to happen to that child, or in what condition he or she is in, whether he/she is going to come home? Can you think of what is happening?

I want to ask very seriously what is the Opposition—[*Interruption*] I know what the Government is trying to do. The Prime Minister has said categorically what he is attempting to do. He did not throw his hands up in the air like the Member for Couva North who was the last Prime Minister and say I do not know what to do. This Prime Minister has said let us try something so he has come up with two ideas that at least can work in light of the circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, I need to calm down a bit. This really makes me feel helpless. What do I do? What do I say to a constituent? How do I address a mother? It is a very serious issue. What would I do if it were me?

Hon. Member: Call Abu Bakr.

Hon. D. Seukeran: What arrant nonsense! Are you not tired and fed up of the nonsense?

Dr. Moonilal: No, we are not.

Hon. D. Seukeran: You are not? You obviously are not. You do not have a child yet, wait till you have one. Such callous disregard on the other side! They have no knowledge of the terrors, no concept of the terrors facing the population.

I sense they do not know what is happening in the global environment and the local environment and they do not know about crime.

Mr. Speaker, we have to join our forces, we have to be unified to survive crime and trade liberalization. I want to ask the Members on that side to join with the Government. I am lashing out at you, yes, but I am asking you to consider not yourselves, not your political future, not whether you make fun of us, or we make fun of you, whether it is your bill or our bill. That is irrelevant in the face of what is happening in this country, in the battle we must wage against the criminals of Trinidad and Tobago.

We need to have confidence and we are talking about building confidence. Confidence is in ourselves, our protective services; confidence is that we have a hope in hell.

Dr. Khan: Well change the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation.

Hon. D. Seukeran: What does the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation have to do with it when Mr. Panday, who was Minister of National Security, threw his hands in the air? The Minister is irrelevant, nothing is going to happen until—[*Interruption*] Crime is a business and kidnapping is an easy route to money. It thrives on fear and on love. Of all the tragedies of life, kidnapping lives, feeds, breathes of the love that a mother has for a child, that a man has for his daughter. That is the sadness of life; that this most dastardly act should cede of love. [*Interruption*] Never mind the raping of a woman and who says that has not happened already? It happens. How do you know what happens when people are kidnapped?

What I am sure about is that the Government is trying to do everything that it can, because in the final analysis it is not the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, it is the police, the army, the coast guard, the protective services that protect Trinidad and Tobago, not a Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation. And it is when they will do and can do their jobs that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will be safe. [*Desk thumping*]

All of us have to do our part; every citizen has to do his part no matter how small. Set the right example for your children, and I am not going to talk about the example set on that side. The seven years of the kind of example set, the three years of absolute insecurity bred in this country while the Members fought each other.

Crime is a business that flourishes in the conditions of instability and the depths of poverty and we must reverse those trends. [*Desk thumping*] I do not

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. D. SEUKERAN]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

want to say that instability is being fuelled on that side, but I am hearing talk about Abu Bakr. Why are you all fuelling nonsense? You are fueling instability and it is time to stop it. I call upon the Members opposite to do what is right for Trinidad and Tobago and I call upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to tell you to do your job.

Dr. Khan: We are doing it.

Hon. D. Seukeran: Doing what! Sitting here talking nonsense instead of supporting the Government? Let me tell you what I am talking about today. I am talking about a package of legislation that is absolutely essential that they support because it is that package that will allow for an efficient police force. Do you know the tragedy of it all? That package of legislation was designed by the Members opposite when they were in office, and we were in the Opposition. We knew this was about the people's security and agreed to sit and work with them and the Member for Arouca South, hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, sat with Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj who was the Attorney General and Joseph Theodore who was the Minister of National Security at the time. They worked together and came up with this package of legislation and Sir Ellis Clarke, a distinguished legal person then and now sat with this. It has nothing to do with party politics, it has to do with the security of our people and every time you come here—and the Member for Couva North leads civil disobedience, constitutional reform or we “ain’t” doing nothing. What rubbish! [*Desk thumping*]

We talked about the Alaska model and said the horse was starving in the middle of a green pasture. People are dying and getting kidnapped, what is wrong with you all? Are you sleeping? Where are you, do you not live in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, Member for Oropouche, you have 75 minutes to respond to the Member. You cannot sit there and crosstalk as I have said before. I want to remind Members again of Standing Order 43(3).

Hon. D. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, in the final analysis who has to protect us? It is the police and that package of legislation is what will bring about the kind of police service that will protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is not the Prime Minister, it is not the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, and it is not the Opposition. It is the police who have to protect our people and children.

I want to call upon every member of the national community to make sure that this—Mr. Speaker, let me calm down—inanity, this nonsense that passes for

debate in this House ceases and desists while we get the business of the country going and that is national security and international trade.

I know that the Member for Chaguanas constituency is well hit by this crime, and the Member for Barataria/San Juan who is in his own way trying to deal with an issue whether we support him or not, whether what he is doing is legal or not, he is trying to do something and I commend him for it.

Mr. Speaker, all of us are trying, what we need is support from that side. Can you please get your people and the Leader of the House on that side to put country first?

Mr. Singh: I thank the hon. Member for giving way and applaud her for the kind of high statesman-like position she is taking. But would you agree that there is need for dialogue, and politics is the art of compromise and if there are polarized positions on both sides then compromise is what is necessary?

Hon. D. Seukeran: In the face of an issue of national importance like crime, there can be no compromise. [*Desk thumping*] This is about people, this is not about Government and negotiation and international trade. This is about life and death, about fear. It has no question about negotiation. We negotiated already when we had a bipartisan team that designed this legislation and we agreed with you when the PNM ate humble pie. When a PNM Minister stands here and says it is a UNC legislation with pride, that is giving way. You cannot do more than that, there is nothing to trade, no life of any child. There is a 14-year-old child's life on the line. You cannot barter with that. None of that will go on. It is either you support it or you do not and the country must understand that.

Mr. Speaker, if they do not support this Bill after what I have said, then I think every one of them in this room and outside this room in the Upper Chamber in the UNC should hang their heads. You say the businessmen are leaving, pack your bags and leave too, we do not want you here. [*Desk thumping*] Trinidad and Tobago does not deserve you. We want people—Member for Barataria/San Juan, I commend you for what you are doing, but my God, Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. There is a child's life in San Fernando West hanging on the line. What are you doing? Playing? Come on, whose child will be next? Yours, mine, the person next door? Whose? The Member for Chaguanas has a wonderful wife, a beautiful woman who has a magnificent voice; when she goes out singing and does not return, what would you do?

Mr. Ramsaran: Pray.

8.10 p.m.

Hon. D. Seukeran: I am getting there but I am really moved by this. They say that the Government is undermining the rule of law in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what the Member for Princes Town was saying. What utter rubbish! Who is undermining the laws of Trinidad and Tobago? They are! It was strange when someone was talking about the arrest of the last chairman of the board of the North west Regional Health Authority he said that it was “your” police. In other words, the police were PNM police who were doing things. They did not talk about the same police who went to arrest Dhanraj Singh under a UNC government as being UNC police. How is it that the poor police got caught up there? There are very decent policemen outside there, you know; 90 per cent of them. There may be more, we do not know. What we know is that we have to give them a chance. They are all branded by whatever a few of them do, so we must help the good ones.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something. There are good policemen who are ashamed of wearing their uniform today because the country has lost confidence in the police force, because of the kinds of laws under which they operate. A good policeman is stagnated. A bad policeman is allowed to do anything because you cannot punish him; you cannot move him. That is what happens and therefore we need to change the laws so that the good officers of the police force could rise to the challenge. That is what needs to happen.

I want to wind up here because I think I have said enough. I do not think I need say any more on this subject. This is not a time for anybody to be a pacifist or a conscientious objector. This country is at war. We are at war! It is time for the Opposition and the Government to be doing everything it can. We cannot go and solve the crimes but we can put the legislative agenda in place, both sides. It cannot be done; it needs a special majority. They have to help us do this so that the police can do their job. [*Desk thumping*] Every citizen has to do his or her job. People cannot sit back and say it is only the police. Just like the Member for San Juan/Barataria, you have to come up with the bright ideas; you have to have community policing, community groups; not vigilantes, but concerned citizens so you know your neighbour, so when your neighbour is getting raped you know what is going on.

That is what we need to do. This is a war zone and in this battle we have to take sides. So it is either the Members opposite support this piece of legislation; that it be brought to the table quickly so that it can be supported, or they pack

their bags and go, because there is no room for anybody who is not taking sides in this country on this subject. Enough is enough!

Suffice it to say that this budget has been a very focused one; it is based on very sound fundamentals; it has a clear plan of where we want to take the country; it is an integrated plan involving all the productive sectors and brings all our resources to play towards achieving a national vision, that of developed national status that none of us, however we see it, could object to. It means a better quality of life for Trinidad and Tobago in a safe country.

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

Mr. Nizam Baksh (*Naparima*): Mr. Speaker, The Member for San Fernando West started off in a very philosophical manner but as she continued she got worked up. Where I come from they would say she “get hot”. This is just a colloquial phrase.

I want to commend the Member for acknowledging that this country is under siege. I am going to be calm; I am not going to get worked up like her. She made a very passionate plea for action and I wonder if she is asking us to solve the crime situation, but she belongs on the side which needs to generate the action. I am wondering if it is not crocodile tears, because there is information that she colluded with criminal elements—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, you are in flagrant breach of the Standing Order. I would ask you to withdraw the statement and apologize.

Mr. N. Baksh: I withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: No, no. There are two things the Standing Order requires you to do: You have to withdraw the statement and apologize.

Mr. N. Baksh: Okay. I withdraw and apologize. [*Desk thumping*]

Some of the issues that the Member mentioned, the Vision 2020, CEPEP and other things, I would address as I continue with my contribution on the budget. I want to read what the budget statement says in two sections here: the Vision 2020 and the Social Sector Programmes. I quote from page 3 of the budget statement.

“Today, all of our experiences have been honed into ‘Vision 2020’ as we focus our population on the objective to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a first world nation.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Our theme this year is—Charting the Course to 2020: Empowering People. The first phase of our plan requires that we focus our attention on the following specific issues.

1. Education;
2. Health;
3. Housing;
4. Social Services delivery;
5. Strong and cohesive communities;
6. Unity in diversity;
7. Safe Streets, homes, places of recreation, and workplaces.”

In my view, Nos. 5, 6 and 7 would fall under those first four. This actually is the main plank for this year’s budget presentation. I continue here on another section on “Investments In Social Capital” at page 59. It states:

“Notwithstanding the strong growth performance of the economy over the years, we continue to be challenged by the need to empower significant sections of our national community.

You will recall that last year we introduced a number of programmes to assist the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. I must report that these programmes have been very effective and it is now our intention to intensify this effort.”

When we speak about strengthening our people and putting focus on the social capital, in my view, building social capital is a core element in empowerment, a pillar of the poverty reduction strategy, and there are three pillars to that strategy: Promoting opportunity; facilitating empowerment and enhancing security.

Social capital is defined broadly as the institutions, relationships, attitude and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development. Let us see how Government intends to implement and achieve these strategies.

We have been hearing a lot about this 2020 Vision. When we hear about “vision”, we think about something that you are going to achieve in a particular time frame, a definite period. They are saying 2020 and we agree with that. I wish our country could achieve developed status by 2020 but, in my view, you must have a mission. You must establish a benchmark by which we would go through

that route and to measure our success or failure as we travel along that route. But so far we have not seen any plan or chart to tell us how we are going to get there by 2020 and what we would achieve to say that we have achieved first world status.

So I have a little difficulty. When we could see the plan that could measure the progress as we travel along that route, then we could really say that we are moving towards a 2020 Vision. So far, I think that this 2020 Vision is only an intellectual exercise.

My own understanding of a first world nation is as follows: When you have a highly industrialized, self-sustaining economy where we are going to see a lot of development of industrial parks, physical structures; we are going to see a lot of training for people to meet the specific needs of those industries; the creation of an environment where citizens feel free and secure—and this is what the debate is all about—a highly motivated, experienced and knowledge-driven workforce; full employment of our citizens and enjoyment of high standards of living; the establishment of stable, dynamic, vibrant and cohesive communities with a profound sense of belonging and self-worth; a process of governance that would ensure that equity is practised in the distribution of goods and services.

There is a lot more we could add to those but in my humble understanding of Government's 2020 Vision, I would like to pause and say that the course they have charted so far would guarantee that their 2020 Vision would never be realized. I feel that with this budget, and even the last one, what we should have been doing here is rolling out the red carpet for this 2020 Vision, and this was the ideal opportunity for us to throw in those benchmarks to say exactly what we are doing this year so that we would get along the right route for that 2020 achievement.

Again in the 2004 budget, I have seen that the social programmes have been allocated sizable chunks of the budget without any established linkages and goals. We see it is 10 per cent of this budget, which is a little over \$2 billion. We are seeing millions of dollars being pumped into the social sector, but if you really scrutinize them, my perception is that when you sit there around the table you just decided, "Well, look, let us put so many million for this; so many million for that and another couple million for the other programmes." Perhaps the intent of those programmes is not known to us or to the public.

What we have been told also in the budget is that they are now formulating policies for these social programmes. So what you are actually doing is putting

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

the cart before the horse, because we should have those policies well established so that we would know exactly what route we are traveling along.

I feel it is unfair, without a policy, to spend money in that direction and, really, we are not getting anywhere with it. So the absence of clearly identified goals and objectives would continue to precipitate the PNM's dependency syndrome. In the absence of mechanics the proceeds of these programmes would continue to be skewed and lopsided in favour of the PNM support base, as I would show as we go on.

I feel that the entire budget statement in respect of the social programmes represents a thesis clouded with flowery language skills which are deliberately concocted and disguised to deceive the citizens of the country as they are used to a great extent as slush funds. It makes me feel as though we have won a lottery. You know, some individual wins a lottery and just calls in all his friends to share. "Let us have this and you can have that" and the money is going down the drain.

Let me just read what two commentators had to say about the budget. In the Business Supplement of the *Guardian* on Wednesday, October 08, 2003 Dr. Tewarie had this to say:

"Too many gaps in Budget

UWI Principal Dr. Bhoë Tewarie says the national budget's silence on the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector was counter-productive to the achievement of vision 2020.

'Absolutely missing was any concept of the new economy. Everything was about energy', he said, at an AmCham's post-budget panel discussion yesterday.

He said there were gaps in education, information, research, science and technology which needed to be closed in order for the country to attain developed nation status by 2020.

He said the budget did not address the role of ICT in the primary and secondary school system, even though the future workforce will be heavily ICT-dependent.

Tewarie also referred to the delayed liberalization of the telecommunications sector until 2004/2005.

'There is some disjointedness in terms of national development and in terms of Vision 2020 which has to be driven by the knowledge sector', he said.

Tewarie also said although he would never oppose increased spending in social services, programmes like CEPEP and the URP, but CEPEP and the URP were not the best options.

‘A lot of the programmes are State-funded and have no education component. When they’re over, those individuals are not integrated into the economy,’ he said.”

I read another one here from a former Member of Parliament as well, Trevor Sudama. He wrote in the *Newsday*, Sunday, October 12, 2003:

“The Budget statement, despite all the propaganda about empowering people and charting the course for developed status in 2020, was indeed very ordinary. It focussed primarily on the allocative and distributive function. It kindled little hope and enthusiasm. People are empowered through inculcating discipline, responsibility, proper education, skills upgrade and entrepreneurial development. Citizens are not empowered through a system which puts a premium on indiscipline and irresponsibility or the lowering of educational standards or distributing largesse in the form of CEPEP, URP, NEDCO, etc for political purposes. To talk of developing entrepreneurial skills through CEPEP can only be laughable. However, the irony is Government’s inaction on crime is causing the entrepreneurial skill to migrate by the hundreds.

The Budget statement mentioned no new significant initiatives to kick-start the sustainable development process through the autonomous growth of the non-energy sector or how, as a small economy, we are going to meet the challenges of trade liberalisation and globalisation.

To speak of the huge allocation of \$225 million to CEPEP, which caters almost exclusively to Afro-Trinidadians in dubious make-work schemes, as an investment in social stability is certainly to send a signal to others that the Government only takes notice if it is confronted with a threat of social instability.”

I am sure you would agree that the points these two eminent personalities raised are very valid concerns and it is something we have to focus on if we are really to improve the image and the perception of these programmes.

My colleagues, the Members for St. Augustine, St. Joseph and others, have laid the platform for us to continue discussing some of these issues that we feel could really enhance, strengthen and improve this country. I want to assure you that what I look at here, I am just not being critical of the programmes. Like

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

others, I would like to see the country we live in really improve; that we remove crime completely. We have to address this issue.

We would like to see the money that we are spending could really bring people together and educate them, train them, so that the community we leave for our children and grandchildren, they are going to speak about us; that the contribution we made while we were here—I am not talking about the Parliament itself but the place we occupy in this land—they are going to praise us for that.

As I said, I am going to make some constructive criticisms. Sometimes I feel that most of these programmes, while the budget statement says it is addressing the disparity in incomes and facilitating the new poor and the aggressive poor, I want to feel sometimes that all we are doing is creating a cash flow which could only be temporary. It cannot be forever. So I am attempting here in the form of a balance sheet to overhaul some of these programmes.

The Member for San Fernando West made reference to the Alaskan model and now that she has mentioned that, I feel some of these programmes have some semblance of the Alaskan model, because when I see what is happening, especially when the evening comes, it makes me feel as though it is just a “happy hour” we are creating for a number of people in the country. So we need to address this. A little later I would speak about this “happy hour”, but let me look at some of these programmes.

The Social Help and Rehabilitative Efforts (SHARE), in 2003 we moved from 8,000 hampers to 15,000 and we took a decision that instead of three months we are now distributing this for six months to one family, and it moved up from \$150 to \$200. They are saying that in 2004 they want to move this up to 18,000 households. For this programme they have spent \$23 million. Their target group is between the ages of 18 to 65. Once you are getting a pension or public assistance you cannot access this programme. There is a means test and once you earn under \$1,000 per month, I think you could gain access to this programme.

I feel the six-month period is a little too long. What I find is that people are actually making themselves poor to access this programme. [*Interruption*] There are a number of other programmes. I would come to it and develop this as we go along. So they are saying they are going to spend a lot more money and bring in a lot more people. I think this is one of the programmes that is actually spread out a bit.

When you look at the Transformational and Development Centres, prior to 2003 there were three centres. In 2003 they said they were going to establish 17

centres and they gave the venues: Mayaro, Sixth Company, Torrib Trace, New Grant, La Brea, Basseterre, St. Joseph, San Juan, Barataria, Aripo, Arima, Tunapuna, Ste. Madeleine, Carolina, Sangre Grande, Maracas, San Fernando, North Manzanilla and four centres in Tobago.

I would like to find out how many of those centres came on stream, how much was spent and how many beneficiaries there were. This is what we called before, the soup kitchen, but the budget did not say a word on what we were going to do in 2004. We want to know what is the status of those Transformational and Development Centres.

They speak about the Adolescent Mothers, pregnant teens and young mothers. There were three centres in 2003 and they are going to expand this in 2004 to 10 centres with an allocation of \$3.6 million. It was \$4.2 million in 2003. I would like to know how many benefited and the criteria used to disburse this sum. I also want to know what is the qualification for this. Is it when you are walking with your pregnancy showing, very visible? Is that the only qualification for you to benefit from this?

There is another programme called the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) where they said 7,000 were trained during 2003 and \$22.5 million was expended. For 2004 they are targeting 8,000 persons. I want to know, from the 7,000, how many received gainful employment and where do these people come from when they are selecting them for training.

The Export Centres is targeting the unemployed women 25 to 50 years and they are being exposed to micro-entrepreneurship in the field of craft development with the export market. They say in 2004 they are going to establish 14 centres. We would like to know where are these centres located. I ask these questions because as I continue down, I want to raise another issue.

They are going to spend \$5 million in 2004 and expect to get 250 beneficiaries. Since this is an export programme I would like to know what countries we are exporting to and what FOB value we are talking about that we have been able to benefit from.

I now look at the Community Education and Support Programme. I am told that 9,000 persons benefited here, but we are not told what amount of money we spent for these persons who benefited from this training. In 2004 we have no information in the budget statement or the *Social Sector Investment Programme*. I also looked at the Civilian Conservation Corps Programme, in which it is said that 2,500 persons benefited and 32 completed a computer literacy course. May I

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

ask the question again? What are these 2,500 persons doing now? Do they have any gainful employment? This was really targeted for people 18 to 25 years and \$25 million was spent for this. They are saying that in 2004 they are going to increase the intake to 3,500. Again, I ask the question: What is the criteria for taking these people into the programmes and where did they come from?

I move on to the On-the-Job Training (OJT). It is a pre-employment training programme focusing on the acquisition of educational and occupational skills. They are saying that when these people are on the programme their remuneration is based upon the educational level and that 2,832 young persons benefited from the programme after an expenditure of \$33.4 million. In 2003, 2,832 people received training and in 2004 they are targeting 10,000. So again, we want to know where do these people come from and what is the selection process.

8.40 p.m.

I look at the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP). You have proposed seven centres for 2004, but in 2003, 564 persons were trained and 20 were employed with the Ministry of Health and 10 with the senior citizens as caregivers. We trained 564 persons and 30 gained employment. We are not sure if this is temporary or long-term employment. In 2004, we would spend \$3.7 million on this programme.

I now come to the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA). It is aimed at youths 17 to 25 years. You said that 300 would be settled on state lands. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West indicated in his contribution that they would have YAPA farms. Where would these farms be allocated and how would people get them? I do not think that all those who are trained and those to be trained would get farms. We want to know what criteria would be used to allocate farms to these trained farmers.

I move on to the Community Enhancement and Regeneration Programme (CERP). There are 19 communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago to benefit. Over 100,000 persons would benefit after an expenditure of \$193,509. I want to know if Rock City was part of this project. If this is so, I am sure the figure of \$193,509 is incorrect. We have no information for 2004. I would like to know if this Programme has been disbanded.

With regard to the Community Action for Revival and Empowerment programme (CARE), I want to find out the criteria for getting grants under this programme. I want to find out if there is a monitoring Programme of approval to determine the success of the project and proper accounting for funds. In 2003, the

sum of \$1.128 million was expended in 250 projects. Who are the recipients? Were they groups or individuals?

I come to the Information Made Easy Through Technology (ImaT) centres. You said that you would place seven new centres in Arima, Chaguanas, San Fernando, El Dorado, Laventille, Malick and Sangre Grande. You would spend \$1 million. I am mentioning this to give a pattern of the locations and money that we are spending on these programmes.

The Community Development Scholarship Programme would be for youths in traditional and non traditional areas. How many benefited from these programmes? In 2004, you would spend \$3.4 million. This is now called the Community Development Bursary Programme. There is another youth programme called the Specialized Youth Programme. You did not give any idea of what we would do there. You have in 2004, an allocation of \$3 million. We need to know so that we would try to get people from our constituencies to access these programmes.

The National Social Development Programme (NSDP) is a Programme to assist communities to obtain water and electricity. In my constituency we tried to access some of these programmes but without success. We have made enquiries to find out the source to go through, but we are not recipients of them. I hope it is not deliberate. We have \$100 million and in 2004, \$100 million with 52,000 self-help projects and 240 electrification projects. We want to know whether or not these programmes would be spread across the nation.

We have the Community Improvement Programme. This is an incorporated company and we need to know more about it. What are the status and objective of this company? We have an allocation of \$5 million in 2004.

I looked at the non traditional skills training of women. The programme is designed to provide technical and vocational education and training to low income women between the ages 19—25 years. The objective is to increase the level of skilled labour in the country by providing access and employment opportunities. A total of 348 women benefited from an expenditure of \$3.5 million. The venues for these are John S. Donaldson Technical Institute, San Fernando Technical Institute, Corpus Christi Vocational College and Roxborough Trade Centre. We have been told that in 2004, there would be additional centres in Sangre Grande, Mayaro, Chaguanas and Scarborough. Why not other areas?

There are three youth development and apprenticeship centres and in 2004, you will extend this to ten centres. In 2003, 544 persons benefited and were exposed to occupation skills, computer literacy, agriculture and certification was

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

done by the National Training Agency targeting high-risk youths between the ages of 15—18 years male and females 15—25 years.

I have looked at some of these programmes to show the amount of money we are spending on training, but we are not focusing on training to make people employable. They are being occupied for a certain period of time and prolonging a frustration period. It is possible for one family to access a number of these social programmes.

Mr. Manning: It is designed for that.

Mr. N. Baksh: The programmes are not going throughout the country. They can do this simultaneously. You have SHARE and the adolescent mothers, the Civilian Conservation Corps, On the Job Training Programme, GAPP, YAPA, CARE, CEPEP, NEDCO, URP and HYPE. One family can access all those programmes simultaneously when it should be spreading around.

In 2003, there were 21 social intervention programmes; in 2004, we see 26 added to those of 2003, making a total of 47. These programmes could have been distributed throughout the country with equity. We snatch a couple millions here and there and during the end of the financial year when the money has not been spent, ministries divert it to other areas. You have that kind of success but money that could be shifted. My objective for looking through these programmes is that if we had the opportunity to look at these through visual aids in the Chamber, I would have liked to put a chart here, locate all these programmes and plot on a map of Trinidad and Tobago where all these programmes are placed and how many communities are not receiving any benefits from all this money that is being spent. It is more than \$2 billion. We have to address this. In spite of all these training programmes, thousands are unskilled and unemployed. These programmes do not add value to enhance the lives of citizens.

You have SHARE with 1,500 beneficiaries; YTEPP with 7,000 trained; 250 export centres; community education and support, 9,000 benefited; Civilian Conservation Corps, 2,500; On-the-Job Training, 2,832; GAPP, 564; YAPA, 1500; URP, 6,000 and 23,800 women; HYPE, 1,100; Women In Harmony, 413. When you look at those numbers they are large figures, but really, we are not providing training for permanent employment for these people.

I have come to the conclusion that this Government is taking the country “Bunji” jumping without the “Bunji”. You are introducing a number of new social programmes, but these programmes have been on the last budget. Out of the four programmes that he said are new, three were repeated in the last budget.

The Community Development Bursary Programme came under the Community Development Scholarship Programme. There was an allocation of \$3.7 million for last year. In 2003, the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme, 563 were trained at the cost of \$2.9 million. You have an allocation of \$3.7 million in 2004. There are three centres for the Adolescent Mothers Programme with an allocation of \$4.2 million. In 2004, you have an allocation of \$3 million. The Member for St. Joseph identified repetition in other areas.

I would now look at the Social Sector Investment Programme. This is the programme for displaced workers. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education holds responsibility for this programme which focuses on developing competencies in the areas related to heavy industry, automotive care, building construction technology, information technology, entertainment, hospitality and other related areas. The major objectives of the programme is to develop a cadre of trained industry ready individuals; to equip individuals with skills that would allow for re-entry into the work place in as short a period of time as possible. Currently, the programme is offered nationally and targets retrenched workers, training them in new skills and preparing them for work in an industrial environment.

During the fiscal year 2003, the programme had 840 beneficiaries, 510 of which graduated. In addition, 45 training providers and internal verifiers were trained as assessors with the National Training Agency and the accreditation process started. Estimated expenditure on this programme for the fiscal year 2003 is \$4.6 million. It is estimated that in 2004, 900 trainees would benefit from the programme.

I have some difficulty. On one hand, in this country, 9,000 workers were severed from an industry. Just like in other programmes, you are making direct intervention for training and employment, here is a golden opportunity to show that you are really interested in developing the country. The sum of \$25 million is not mentioned in the budget. I am talking about a particular programme here. What is wrong with me linking this here? This is the opportunity I have. If you were focusing on these people you would have mentioned it. I am talking about retraining for the national community. You are giving absolutely no consideration for those severed workers. I hope that you will look at this as well.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Naparima has expired. Before I take the motion for the extension of time, may I inform the House that we will break for dinner and resume at a quarter to ten. At that time I would take the motion for the extension of time.

9.00 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

9.45 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. N. Baksh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, colleagues on this side and the Member for Diego Martin Central. Now that I am full I am sure that I can go for a longer duration.

Before we went for dinner, I was making the point that we have expended much money in these training programmes. Those programmes were designed with a training component for employment. We have trained 30,000 persons and expended \$150 million. When I look at the employment and unemployment figures in this country they tell me a different story. Unemployment for the first quarter of 2003 increased by 6,200. The unemployment figure went up to 62,400. The employment figure went down to 523,300. This came from the *Central Statistical Office Labour Bulletin*, first quarter of 2003.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed that in this country 270,000 persons live below the poverty line.

Mr. Valley: If the Member would give way, I wonder if he could give us the year of that data.

Mr. N. Baksh: I do not have the year for the UNDP figure. I was told 2002/2003.

Mr. Valley: It is 2000.

Mr. N. Baksh: I did not see the year but I saw it in a publication dated July. If we are spending \$2 billion and there are 270,000 persons below the poverty line, if we are giving these people \$2 billion, they would have been off the poverty line in one stroke. They would have received \$7,474.

With regards to the social programmes, every comment in the Public Sector Investment Programme states that they are national in scope. I recommend to the Government that if it wants to make this national in scope, it should advertize these programmes on the newspapers and have the venues where people from the various constituencies could obtain application forms for them. The way the programmes are being operated people are not having access to them. This is a free country but not a fair one. We could change that perception. I love my country and I want to feel that I am patriotic.

I take the opportunity to share some ideas with regard to the strengthening of CEPEP. This programme has been in the forefront and people have showed a negative aspect. I am not aware of any training programme designed to prepare workers after or beyond the programme. I am not aware of any programme designed to train contractors towards sustained growth and development of self-reliance after or beyond the CEPEP handout. Research has shown that more than 70 per cent of small business failed within the first three years of operation. The reasons are inadequate support services; lack of relevant training and experience and the inability to cope with profitability constraints during the early period of business venture.

The CEPEP programme in its present form is doing more damage to the cohesive fabric of our society than it is functional in nature. If this programme is to create any positive impact and justified use and diversion of hard earned taxpayers' money, the following recommendations should be executed. It must be national in scope and content. Its distribution should reflect equity on the basis of needs. Some areas have been grossly discriminated against especially Opposition controlled areas via the current distribution system. The expertise in environmental protection and enhancement must be a critical element in the supervision content of the programme. The Environmental Management Agency (EMA) should perform an itinerant role in the programme to ensure that the standards of ecology are maintained. The question of the training should be equally emphasized to the contractors and workers.

The aims and objectives of the training programme should be designed to equip them with the basic skills in environmental conservation; to enable them to develop a healthy work attitude, ethic and team initiative; to provide knowledge and career options and training opportunities; to inculcate the need for continued training.

I also recommend some topics such as environmental management. This includes vegetation, conservation and control, pollution of the environment; environmental policies and practices; village improvement; beautification projects; collection and disposal of waste; skills in landscaping, pruning, trimming and cutting; service erosion and soil destruction. Another area we could look at is safety practices. I would not go through the details. Other areas are job retention skills; money management skills; family budgeting and financial control; consumer information and guidance, needs, evaluation, assessment, savings and investment; career information and development.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Finally, the training areas recommended for contractors are principles of small business management; accounting and budgetary control; preparation of financial proposals for funding; personal management; industrial relations; marketing, public relations, banking and investment.

9.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, since so much money is circulating in these programmes, on weekends one could see—I am referring you to today—“payday time” or “happy hour time” and people are just spending their moneys. When they used to buy just one beer, today they are carrying around four and five beers in their hands. This tells you that people are more consumer-oriented and we have to do something to encourage them to save some of that money. I recommend that the Government encourage savings by allowing tax credits as an incentive to those people who are getting that cash flow in their hands at the moment. This would encourage them to save—as the Government should—for a rainy day. Those are some of the recommendations I would make to improve the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) and other programmes like that. Mr. Speaker, I am making these recommendations only because of my patriotism.

Mr. Speaker, I move on to another area that is of concern to me and I am sure to all of us here and to a number of people in this country, that is, National Insurance Scheme (NIS). I quote from page 25 of the budget statement. It says:

“To further the reform process and make the National Insurance System more relevant to the needs of the population, the Government took the decision to increase NIS retirement pension to a minimum of \$1,000 per month per person with effect from October 01, 2003. The increase in contribution rates to fund this guaranteed minimum retirement income will be spread over a three-year period commencing from January 05, 2004. In addition, the level of insured earnings will also strengthen the financial integrity and relevance of National Insurance System.”

Mr. Speaker, I will just deal with this to some extent and to give some reasons why we should have to pay increased contributions to NIS to benefit from the \$1,000 per month. This scheme was introduced on April 10, 1972—that is the date this programme commenced—and if one started contributing from the very inception, today, we would have made 1,645 contributions to that programme. I am sure a number of us would have made that quantum to date—that is the week of October 13—1,645 contributions.

Mr. Speaker, at the lowest rate of \$8.79, from the inception, someone would have contributed \$14,459.55. At the highest rate, with 16,045 contributions, one

would have contributed \$111,925.80. If one were midway there, one would have contributed \$63,192.67. This is a programme that is really bringing in a lot of money to its coffers. Mr. Speaker, with these new figures many NIS pensioners are confused. There are rumours that all beneficiaries, regardless of scale of contributions, will receive a total of \$1,000 per month. If this is so then it is unfair, there is unequal treatment, because it is a contributory scheme.

Under the old rate, if you would have been contributing \$216.67 you are going to get \$1,000. If you are benefiting \$333.67 you are going to get \$1,000. If your pension was \$385.67 you are going to get \$1,000. If your pension was at the level of Class 6 at \$513.50, you are going to get \$1,000. So there is inequity in the payment here because you are contributing according to scales but now with respect to your benefits, classes 1 to 6 are getting the same. So as I said, there is inequity in this part.

There is another section which is unfair. The contributor at the lowest contributory level, let us say with 751 contributions, will receive \$1,000 per month as pension, whereas contributors at the level just above the lowest, with 1,500 contributions—twice as the lowest—would also get the same quantum of \$1,000 per month. So there is a disparity there as well and we need to address this. Mr. Speaker, what about those who contributed at the highest levels of all scales, would they also receive this \$1,000 per month?

Another issue of concern is that a contributor at the age of 60 with less than 750 contributions could collect a lump sum of over \$74,000. Once you have made less than 745 contributions and have reached the age of 60, you are entitled to a lump sum. On the other hand, however, contributors at the age of 60, with 750 or more contributions, would get only a monthly pension of \$1,000. If you die one, two or three months or a year after, there is nothing else to get. Mr. Speaker, this benefits those who would have contributed less than 750 contributions and reached the age of 60 years and got the lump sum of \$74,000-plus as against those who would have made over 750 contributions getting \$1,000 per month and could die at any time with the family not benefiting after that from those contributions. That is another area of concern.

I would give some reasons why contributors should not have to pay higher contributions. We have heard the National Insurance Board saying there is going to be an increase in contributions from next year. Mr. Speaker, the National Insurance System should be made national in scope. The present form only targets salaried persons in the public and private organizations. After 31 years we have still not included self-employed persons like shop-owners, garage mechanics,

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

even the professionals: lawyers, doctors and accountants and so on. These could be a substantial amount of persons brought into the net.

Another reason is that the National Insurance System has to be made equitable. At present it divides the targeted workforce into 12 classes with the minimum from \$374 salary up to \$3,510. This system may be equitable for those in the first 11 classes with salaries up to \$6,000. Earning classes over 11 should be extended and contributions progressively increased to reflect the “Pay as you earn” system. We have many people in this country now getting salaries \$6,000, up to \$20,000 and more. We need those people to contribute a greater amount to the National Insurance Scheme so that the few people who are in the net would not be asked to contribute more. This is another area of concern that we need to address in this National Insurance Scheme.

The first quarter of the CSO report on employment reveals that there is a labour force of 523,300 persons, but the NIB 2002 report says that 306,216 employed persons are insured; a big difference. It means here that 41.48 per cent of the workforce is not into the NIS net and this says something. Those contributions are not reaching NIB or are not in the net because the compliance officers need to ensure those employed are included in the contribution net. This is a serious situation because if your workforce is 523,000 persons and just 217,000 are in the NIS net, there is a big difference.

I also want to recommend another point where the investments of the NIS proceeds could be improved in the following ways. Investments could be made in low-risk areas. Secondly, the category of average risks investments. Thirdly, a category of high risk calculated investments, which would yield higher returns. All of these would help to cushion the extra funding so that the contributors would not be asked to pay additional contributions.

There is another area of concern. Some of us who have dual employment—according to section 45 of the Act—mandated NIB to make regulations to determine which employer could pay contributions where an employee works for more than one employer. Mr. Speaker, after 31 years they have not done that. Employees, therefore, have to pay NIS for all the places where they are employed but the NIB says that such a person cannot get any benefit. They are refunded their contributions when claims are made. Mr. Speaker, I make this strong contribution in support for NIS contributors not having to pay extra contributions to benefit from the extra funding. I am also making a plea that the pension they are receiving is unequal and we have to address this as well.

I want to look at another issue, which my colleague from Princes Town raised, and to add a few points, which are of great concern to my constituents, and me: the Sugar Manufacturing Company, which has now been established. Let me read what the budget says about it. I quote:

“The Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited has been established to assume responsibility for processing sugarcane and the refining of sugar. This company will purchase cane from farmers and will sell raw and refined sugar on the local market and to the European Community under the Cotonou Agreement.”

Mr. Speaker, as a new company and a new direction, I felt we should have given much more information than just those few lines. The farmers outside there are concerned. They are anxiously awaiting information from the Government and Minister concerned to address their issues of concern. This is the time when they start preparing for the harvesting of sugarcane for the next season which will start in January 2004, yet we have nothing definite on what is going to take place.

We have over 6,000 canefarmers in this country. Under the old system, Caroni (1975) Limited used to purchase these canes at various points. I understand that there were 42 purchasing points in this country. Today, what we have found is that this Sugar Manufacturing Company has said its duty is only to purchase the cane and it is going to do this only at the gate of the Ste. Madeleine Sugar Company.

Mr. Speaker, imagine in the past there were 42 points and they had problems, most of the time, in selling the canes at those points; it used to take an average of two to three days. Now, they are going to bring all those people—In those days there was, what was called, a regulatory system by offering a spell, where a number of farmers would be allowed to cut at the beginning, some a little later on and the smaller ones would come. Now we have a situation where there is going to be no control, no regulatory framework in place—*[Desk thumping]* This would mean that 6,000 farmers are going to start cutting cane on January 01. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, their policy is just to buy at the gate but you are going to have 6,000 farmers coming with cane, and you are talking about buying cane by quality. The cane is going to remain there for weeks, so we need to address this; we need to put systems in place. That Sugar Manufacturing Company has to have additional powers because the canefarmers are now your clients, so you have to address them in a particular way. This is very critical.

We are also talking about the farmers' cost for production. We have heard from the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources that the cost of

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BAKSH]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

production at Caroni (1975) Limited was in the vicinity of \$500 but we need to give a basic price to the canefarmers and this has to be above \$170 they received over the past couple of years because they now have additional costs. Mr. Speaker, before, Caroni (1975) Limited purchased the cane they used to transport it from the purchasing point to the mill. The areas where you had the scales and the cranes to lift and so on and that is another aspect of it. Who is going to do this now and at what cost? Is this going to come from the same price you are giving the farmers? This is a problem and they would have to take this into consideration as well because this is an additional cost to the farmers. [*Interruption*] You are really going to have chaos on a first come first serve basis on the scale.

Mr. Speaker, I will deal, very quickly, with the cost sampling. When one talks about quality it has to do with the sucrose content and the dry season. Everyone would want to reap their canes between the months of February and April, which is the dry season, when the sucrose content is going to be higher in the cane. As I said, everyone would rush to harvest at the same time. What is going to happen with those people who cut their canes early, when you open the scales and it is still raining in January, or when you go into the rainy season, April/May/June?

Mr. Speaker, in Jamaica and Louisiana there was the cost sampling system. In South Africa there was another system, the hatch sampling, where the canes were tested when they moved along the transport belt.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, unfortunately, your time has expired. I will give you two seconds more.

Mr. N. Baksh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one more point to wind up. There was another system that was tried; the relative payment, where, when farmers sold their canes in the rainy season, when the sucrose content is lower, the company gives them something extra to cover the losses. These are some of the issues we need to address. I had a couple of points again but I thank you for the opportunity. We have a number of other issues like transport, lifting and handling charges, access roads, froghoppers and so on.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I hope the Government takes these issues because it is very critical to the sugar and canefarmers industry.

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation (Mr. Anthony Roberts): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to make a brief intervention in this budget debate of 2003/2004. First, I wish to place on record my distinct pleasure with the performance of the hon. Minister of Finance and distinguished Prime Minister of Trinidad and

Tobago, as he sought to put our beautiful twin-island State on the course to achieve developed nation status in the shortest possible time.

I extend, as well, my commendations to my dear friend, my colleague from San Fernando West constituency—[*Desk thumping*—]—for her fiery and honest contribution.

I commend the Member for Naparima for enquiring into the programmes of this Government. As a representative he is seeking to ensure that the members of his constituency benefit from the measures of this budget. As a result, I want to indicate that the programmes, as mentioned in this budget, are for all people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is in this spirit; the spirit which pervades throughout the People's National Movement, that I wish to join my colleague from San Fernando West to extend an invitation to our friends on the other side to collaborate with the Government, so that upon achievement of the Government's Vision 2020 they, too, can truly celebrate with the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, that is how all-embracing we are as a government. If they are unable to demonstrate that level of maturity and responsibility, I can understand, because it appears to me that they are having a bit of difficulty in coming to terms with the political "tabanca". I can also understand the kind of pain they are experiencing as they sit over there and look across the floor to see a government with a clear vision, focused on the development of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want to really emphasize "all" because when they were in government, they excluded certain sections of the national community but today, in their contributions they spoke about discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, their claims of discrimination have no credibility. A number of my colleagues on this side dealt with that issue. The country has already unmasked the UNC. The country knows of their dishonesty. They are now politically dead and they know that. They are using the question of discrimination merely to appease and appeal to the support of the East Indian community.

Mr. Speaker, this Government will continue to govern Trinidad and Tobago in the interest of all the people. I will say it again and again that people ought not to hold on to the myopic view that the approach to dealing with crime and criminal activities in Trinidad and Tobago could be partisan. It cannot be dealt with overnight. We have to change a lot about the way we behave as a people because we contribute to this situation daily. When some of us want to absent ourselves, like my good friend from Nariva, I am saying to him that he is only fooling himself.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. ROBERTS]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

This Government takes a holistic approach to dealing with crime in Trinidad and Tobago. I wish to remind this House that prison reform must be seen in the context of this Government's crime-fighting initiative. The Minister of Finance, in his presentation, indicated that prison reform is a most critical matter, It is in this context that it is, indeed, foremost.

Mr. Speaker, the approach to crime fighting at this time has to be one of zero tolerance, but responsible, not ol' talk and emotionalism, it has to be systematic and sustained. The hon. Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, when he made his contribution, indicated that when the UNC was in government they left the units of the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation without resources. The units were a bit too weak to fight and it is my view that the UNC was never really interested in fighting crime. Maybe, their intention was to protect the criminals or maybe they were the criminals themselves. [*Desk thumping*]

10.25 p.m.

The hon. Minister informed this Parliament, and the national community by extension, that this Government provided resources in a short time to the units, and made adequate provision in this budget so that all the units are in a better shape to respond to the needs of the national community.

Mr. Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service is focusing on correction administration. The old retributive approach—lock them up and throw away the key has failed us miserably. While we agree that persons transgressing against the society must experience some form of punishment for their wrongdoings, we are also saying that positive attempts must be made to correct the deficiencies in those persons.

The national community cannot divorce itself from that. It has a role to play. These offenders came out of communities and they would have to return whether we like it or not. We must prepare for the paradigm shift from punishment to corrections, and that is what restorative justice is all about, bringing all the stakeholders, the offenders, the victims, the communities and the corporate citizens together, to make Trinidad and Tobago a safer place. That is why there is absolutely no room for civil disobedience.

Mr. Speaker, when persons are convicted and sent to the penal institutions, the first thing that happens is they are thoroughly assessed to determine their needs and deficiencies. This could be referred to as a sort of orientation phase since they would be introduced to the rules of the institution. The purpose of this assessment is to allow classification of the inmates so that the institution would be

in a better position to administer the required remedial approaches to the respective inmates.

In this regard, if an inmate were a drug addict, a habit that is responsible for his deviant behaviour, instead of incarcerating the inmate so that upon his release he would return to his old habit, in this programme he would be treated; he would be taught a skill. If he were inclined to academics he would be given an opportunity to pursue his academic pursuits. If he were illiterate, he would be given every opportunity to become literate. Particular attention would be paid to his cognitive development and so he would be exposed to anger management and conflict resolution. He will participate in parenting and family life training. He will be taught moral reasoning and how to make responsible choices. He will be allowed to participate in discussions to allow him to have an understanding of the impact of his own behaviour on the society, and more importantly, their spiritual development is very, very important. You see, God must have his way in the affairs of man.

The church has a very important role to play in the rehabilitation programme, but what is really interesting at this time, is that the Government has started a programme. Albeit, it might be a bit limited, I am pleased to inform this honourable House that in this year's CXC examination, the prison enrolled 139 inmates in subjects as: Mathematics, English Language, Social Studies, Accounts, Principles of Business and Information Technology. I am happy to report today that we have received an encouraging success rate of 74 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

We are about transforming lives; we are about giving these inmates an opportunity to reach their true potential so they can re-integrate into the society as law-abiding citizens and turn away from crime. There are examples of this success.

There is an inmate who is a volunteer coordinator tutor and he did O'level and A'level examination while being incarcerated. He went on to obtain his BSc in Economics. There is another inmate who, at present, is pursuing a BSc in Information Technology, while there is another pursuing his studies at the School of Continuing Studies in management, and we can go on.

Mr. Speaker, their former colleague was so enthused about the programme that when I visited him after they turned their backs on him—advised me that he wanted to pursue studies in law. The programme is working.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. ROBERTS]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

I wish to indicate as well, that there are some three to four hundred inmates at this time who are involved in the vocational fields of carpentry, masonry, woodwork, tailoring, technical drawing, drafting and designing for which we are working on the certification of a nationally accepted level.

I mentioned before that the level of illiteracy among the inmates is very high, and it must be addressed. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of National Security are working feverishly to assist in correcting this situation.

Only on Monday, a team of technical officers met to put a design in place for the construction of a school at Golden Grove. Tomorrow, Wednesday, another team will be meeting to continue discussions to arrive at a curriculum that would be tailored to meet the needs of inmates. So when they return to their communities they can be marketable, and can find gainful employment. We recognize as well, the need to commence an intensive programme of retraining for prison officers. They have worked and lived in the retributive system to the extent where they themselves have become mentally imprisoned and in some cases it has impacted negatively on their family life. In this regard, retraining in restorative philosophy has begun. They would also be exposed to training in correction administration, and I am pleased to indicate at this time, that one officer is pursuing studies in project management that would assist the prison service as we pursue a number of other projects.

Mr. Speaker, you will appreciate that the buildings at the prisons are very old and dilapidated and were never really designed to facilitate rehabilitative programmes. If we were to build self-esteem among inmates, which is so sadly lacking, we must create the right kind of environment. It is, therefore, necessary for us to commence an infrastructural development programme, and I am pleased to indicate to this honourable House that this programme is on its way.

The construction of an administrative building at Golden Grove is in progress, as well as the construction of a workshop to facilitate programmes for inmates for which allocations were made in this year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, negotiations are taking place at this time to facilitate the construction of dormitory facilities for inmates at the Golden Grove Prison. Construction is expected to commence in this financial year. These facilities are expected to house 1,400 inmates. Mr. Speaker, we are attempting to deal with the overcrowding situations at the prison.

Mr. Speaker, the distinguished Minister of Finance spoke about the construction of correction facilities for Tobago, and I am also pleased to advise this honourable House that discussions in this regard have commenced.

This year's budget also made provision for TT \$4 million to be spent on the Maximum Security Prison at Arouca. This facility is not new, but it never became fully operational because there were a number of deficiencies to be corrected. A sewer system has to be constructed. The feasibility study has been completed and a contract is to be awarded shortly. The electronics to that building has to be overhauled. There are no alarm systems and this is to be installed, among other things.

Mr. Speaker, the question of inadequate staffing is being addressed as well. The recruitment process is taking place while the training facility is being prepared. These problems existed under the watch of our colleague, the Member for Couva North, while he was the Minister of National Security. So the Opposition's attempt at scoring cheap political points on a serious issue like crime is pathetic. But this Government would be resolute. It would continue to adopt a responsible approach to this vexing issue of crime. I need to, like my colleague, really get this off my mind. If one wants to refer to it as a gut feeling, yes it is.

I took some time during this debate listening to the hon. Member for Couva North. I hoped to hear a contribution that will have convinced me that he has, in fact, thoroughly earned the name 'fox'. And more so, since the hon. Member boasted that he spent some 27 years as an hon. Member of this honourable House, one should expect a bit of statesmanship. One would expect that the children and the young people of Trinidad and Tobago should look to him as an exemplar. When I listened to his contribution in this debate and his ranting, particularly, on the crime situation in the country over the past months, as a junior parliamentarian I felt saddened. The hon. Member must remember that very recently he was the Minister of National Security, and more so, he was Prime Minister of this country when crime had already escalated to an unacceptable level. I love the hon. Member, and ask this honorable House what did he do to curb that situation. Maybe, the hon. Member for Princes Town should have given him some of the advice that he intended to give to this Government. As a leader of this country, how has his behaviour contributed to the levels of crime in Trinidad and Tobago today?

Can we on this side take the hon. Members on the other side seriously at any time when they themselves are supporting the recklessness of their leader? But I ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and I am really sorry that he is not here at this time—whether the persons who were charged because, I read the newspapers and saw that persons were charged for faked kidnappings. I want to know if this is part of his civil disobedience. Maybe he could tell us as well if, as a result of

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. ROBERTS]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

his behaviour, if he had any role to play in this whole scam which is affecting the lives of so many decent citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The hon. Member for Couva does not possess the moral authority to criticize the PNM's approaches to fight crime. He had his opportunity and he failed miserably. This Government would be resolute in its efforts to humble the criminals and this Government will not relent. The distinguished Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation indicated that there is no quick fix to this situation. Coming after the UNC and the level of destruction that they had occasioned on the moral fiber of this society, it would only take the will and the commitment of the PNM to repair it.

In conclusion, I assure this Parliament, and the entire country that we are aggressively pursuing the rehabilitation programmes at the prison. I am certain that my colleagues on the other side would also benefit.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stanford Callendar): Mr. Speaker, I too, join with my colleagues on this side of the honourable House and the majority of people in Trinidad and Tobago in congratulating the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and those public servants who work tirelessly in the preparation of the 2004 budget.

The hon. Member of Parliament for Tobago West, I join with the 99.9 per cent of Tobagonians who feel that for the first time in many years, Tobago has been meaningfully and respectfully placed on the path of true development. I am not surprised, because since this PNM administration took over Governance of this country in 2001, it has demonstrated and continues to demonstrate a genuine commitment to the people of Tobago and Tobago's development. Like the Prime and Minister of Finance, I am pleased and particularly happy to be a part of a fruitful and harmonious relationship that now exists between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. I also agree that this is due in no small measure to the quality of PNM governance on both islands of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I sat in this honourable House and listened to the contribution of hon. Members on the other side I am saddened, because coming from Tobago, we do not have the luxury for talking about race, victimization, alienation and so forth. To me those things represent foreign language and, therefore I hope that they would take some of the good advice that was given by the hon. Member for San Fernando West, to come together in the interest of the people of this country to deal with the concerns of this country.

I congratulate the Government and the Tobago House of Assembly for presenting to the people of Tobago a most attractive package ever, and giving Tobagonians the best opportunity to accelerate their development and to realize the 2020 vision with the rest of this country. [*Desk thumping*] This budget gives the Tobago House of Assembly access to \$1.3 billion in fiscal 2004. In this fiscal year it is the most amount of money ever allocated to Tobago in its history prior to the advent of the PNM Government, and almost four times the allocation in just four years ago. The only individual, because one would recognize as I spoke about 99.1 per cent of Tobagonians who is not comfortable with the budget, is the present minority leader in the Tobago House of Assembly. But one can understand the recklessness that we experienced in Tobago during his tenure. I am confident that the present Tobago House of Assembly administration will continue to demonstrate the maturity, sensitivity and prudent financial management necessary to manage the resources available for the benefit of the people of Tobago and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago residing in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as a Tobagonian resident in this twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, this budget for us is not just about numbers. This budget signals a number of positive initiatives. It signals the benefit of meaningful cooperation between the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. It signals the benefit of responsibility, transparent PNM governance in Trinidad and Tobago. It also signals that this Government cares and has taken responsibility for the welfare of the citizens regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, class or geographical location. That is why I am disappointed when you hear all these types of loose talks.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Nariva, you had your 75 minutes already. Please, the hon. Member has just started his contribution. Let him have his say in peace.

Hon. S. Callendar: Mr. Speaker, I do not normally take on, but thanks for the protection. Where I grew up in Tobago it is a different type of culture and my will say to me, empty barrels make the most noise.

Like the hon. Member from Ortoire/Mayaro and Minister of Works and Transport, I was extremely disappointed with the approach to this debate by the hon. Member for St. Joseph. I was in the budget debate in this honourable House in 2001 and I had the occasion to commend the hon. Member for St. Joseph for his positive response to London administration in Tobago treating with the over \$200 million dollars of debt the PNM administration in Tobago inherited from the Hochoy Charles administration. As I said, I was convinced that the hon. Member

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. S. CALLENDAR]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

for St. Joseph was a good man who found himself in bad company. Today I feel the same way. The only difference is, it is said that show me your friends and I will tell you who you are. So by association, the hon. Member for St. Joseph is coming across as a terrible man and that is my disappointment. Birds of a feather flock together.

Mr. Speaker, I am not totally disappointed with the hon. Member for Couva North because he never fails to amaze and disappoint me. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. S. Callendar: Mr. Speaker, how can one explain the statement that not a single school was built over the past two years? The Minister of Education dealt with that. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, hon. Member for Chaguanas, what sort of behaviour is this? You cannot sit down in your chair and accuse another hon. Member of lying. Do not encourage me to put you out at this hour. Do not do it!

Mr. S. Callendar: Thank you Mr. Speaker. How else can one explain those statements? But, I will take this opportunity to set the record straight and inform the hon. Member for Couva North and other hon. Members on that side, because I suspect that the Member for Couva North was out of the country when the Mason Hall Government Secondary School was built; when the Goodwood Government Secondary School was built. Those schools were recently opened in the new term. When the Speyside Government Secondary School began and it is expected to be opened in the new term. I am convinced that he was out of country when construction took place on the Scarborough Methodist Primary School and the Mason Hall Government Primary School, and also the design for the Scarborough R.C. School.

It is interesting, that when I decided to re-enter active politics in 2000, it was for the objective to save this country from the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] I am saddened when I hear the hon. Members opposite attempting to degrade and to discredit the former President of this country. They look for all kinds of ways and means to describe him but in Tobago one would say that ungratefulness is worse than witchcraft. In 1986, under the NAR government, if that goodly gentleman had taken the advice from Tobagonians and the experience that he had among the hon. Member for Couva North and his friends, he would not have in 1995 handed the two Tobago seats to the UNC to allow them to enter the reins of power in the country, but my intervention in 2000 put an end to that. We would ensure that the UNC never returns to governance in this country. [*Interruption*] Well I am convinced that you will not reopen your office in Tobago. I am convinced.

10.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I sat and listened to the Minister of Health who went through pains to correct the statement made by the Member for Couva North that not a single health facility was built in this country. The Minister of Health went through pains to explain to him—again, I believe he was out of the country—that construction has begun at the Scarborough Regional Hospital. A new health facility was constructed in the Canaan/Bon Accord area. We had major upgrade facilities in health centres in Castara, Delaford, Pembroke, Speyside, Mount St. Gorge, Parlatuvier, Bethel, Mason Hall, Les Coteaux, Belle Garden, Goodwood and Plymouth. The Minister of Health was at his best dealing with his ministry and the work for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is now clear to me that the difference between the Member for Diego Martin East, the present Minister of Health and the Member for Caroni Central, the former minister of health is that the Member for Diego Martin East is a performer and the Member for Caroni Central is a bluffer. [*Desk thumping*] This is why the Member for Diego Martin East could have stood up in this Parliament and speak for 75 minutes about the achievements of his ministry.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to inform this Parliament that for the first time under this present Government, and the present Tobago House of Assembly, kidney dialysis treatment is taking place in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Gone are the days when Tobagonians had to travel to Trinidad three times per week. Because of the caring PNM, and a caring Minister of Health, with the initiative of the Secretary for Health in the Tobago House of Assembly, two brand new dialysis machines were made available to the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Desk thumping*] As I was listening to the response from the Member for Caroni Central, I was reminded of a calypso made popular by a Tobagonian, Lord Nelson, which said that "Teacher Percy say if yuh tell a lie yuh going to hell as soon as yuh die".

Mr. Speaker, the only passing comment I heard of Tobago by the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North—that is how they treated Tobago when they were in government, just a slight passing comment—was that it is time for a new airport in Tobago. I agree it is time for a new airport, but I recall when the decision was made to build Piarco International Airport the decision was also made to build one in Tobago. He is right that it is time for a new airport in Tobago, but apparently he has now recognized that the money they spent on the airport in Piarco could have built two others and Tobago would have benefitted.

The Member for Couva North also said that it was time to review the tourism plan. I inform this House—I think the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, the Minister

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. S. CALLENDAR]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

of Works and Transport, indicated in his contribution, that when we came into office in 2002 this Government established a tourism standing committee and that committee immediately began to work. One of the benefits that is now coming out of the work of that committee is the decision to expand the Crown Point Terminal building. [*Desk thumping*]

We began to address the issue of airlift, marketing and product development as we seek to address the critical and important area of tourism in Tobago. The committee's work would have resulted in the increase of passenger arrivals in Tobago over the past two years. To complement those initiatives the allocation for the Tobago House of Assembly for tourism development has been significantly increased which will give the THA more flexibility and greater influence in the management of the tourism sector which will continue to be pursued as the economic pillar for the island of Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to the Tobago's PSIP which speaks to transport and communication. It says that the sum of \$3.0 million will be utilized to complete designs for improvement to the Crown Point Airport Development Project for which a loan facility of \$110 million was approved.

With regard to the extension of the Scarborough Deep Water Harbour estimated to cost \$12.0 million, evaluation and tenders are ongoing. The works will be undertaken over the next five-month period including piling and extension to the jetty to facilitate the berthing of large cruise ships. Because of the emphasis we placed on tourism in Tobago, in the PSIP for Tobago, in this budget, the sum of \$5.9 million would be utilized to increase the supply and distribution of water and to facilitate the improvement of wastewater sewerage treatment in Tobago and in Tobago West in particular. [*Interruption*] Yes, in my constituency.

The treatment of wastewater is of primary importance given the fragile reef eco system which is one of the platforms of the island's tourism product so the sum of \$3.8 million has been allocated to undertake the initiatives in this area. Some of the other initiatives will include the updating of the existing technical report related to the development of an environmental wastewater project on the southwest end of Tobago with assistance from the IDB; extension of the Scarborough wastewater collection system from Scarborough to Signal Hill, the sum of \$2.0 million; commencement and refurbishment of the sewer system plant in Buccoo, estimated cost, \$1.3 million. These are some of the initiatives we have taken.

Mr. Speaker, one must evaluate this budget, not merely from the impact of the numbers contained in the Tobago's allocation, but also from the prospective of

measures at the national level that would impact on Tobago such as the HIV/AIDS programmes; programmes under the social sector reform, the URP programmes and the badly talked about CEPEP, but in Tobago the CEPEP is managed by the Tobago House of Assembly and employs 900 individuals, more so single women who, otherwise, would not have been employed. So we support those initiatives of this Government—[*Desk thumping*]*—the reintroduction of the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Helping Youth Prepare for Employment (HYPE) Programme, Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) and various other training programmes for the youths in Tobago. The Tobago allocation does not include the ferry that the Minister of Works and Transport spoke about; the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP), the rehabilitation facility that my friend and colleague, the Member for St. Ann's East, spoke about; new police stations at Roxborough and Old Grange and several water-winning initiatives. I do not care how they rant and rave, I continue to support this budget because I see the benefits that are coming to the people of Tobago. [Desk thumping] Charting a Course for 2020, empowering the people.*

Mr. Speaker, programmes within the THA's allocation are national programmes designed not only to ensure that Tobago catch up with Trinidad but also prepare Tobagonians for a developing Tobago; emphasis on human resource development from the cradle to the grave; funding for the establishment of and entrance to early childhood care centres. We in Tobago are excited about the plans to establish a university of Trinidad and Tobago and a Tobago campus. Already the University of the West Indies School of Humanities Programme has started at Mount St. George, an initiative, again, by this Government and the Tobago House of Assembly. Tobagonians can now do first year courses in English and History.

Hon. Member: After 40 years.

Hon. S. Callender: Including six of the UNC, not forgetting that it was Tobagonians who helped the UNC into the corridors of power. That is why I say in Tobago you will dismiss that by saying ungratefulness is worse than witchcraft.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, \$4 million for human resource development at tertiary level allows for the continuation of financial assistance programmes for the young people in Tobago and an allocation for institutional strengthening capacity, building within the divisions of the Tobago House of Assembly.

Plans have already been in place for the establishment of the AIDS walk-in centre. The consultant is already on board, we would begin screening—we invite

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. S. CALLENDAR]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

the Member for Fyzabad to be screened in Tobago—and we recognize that true development is first and foremost about developing people. One of the most encouraging aspects for Tobagonians in this budget presented by the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister, was the statement made with respect to borrowing. For Tobagonians it is a powerful statement that the THA is coming of age and a demonstration of mutual trust and confidence; a reward for fiscal discipline in marked contrast to the recklessness of the previous administration both in Tobago and in Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*]

With this initiative and with the support and approval of the Minister of Finance, Tobagonians can access borrowings to the tune of \$400 million. [*Desk thumping*] It signals a new dawn. That is why I continue to support the programmes and initiatives in this budget because it signals to Trinidad and Tobago, in Tobago in particular, that we intend to take Trinidad and Tobago to developed country status on or before 2020 walking side by side as a people. [*Desk thumping*]

The budget theme this year is "Charting the Course to 2020, Empowering People" and our plans focus on specific issues; issues of education, health, housing, social services delivery and strong and cohesive communities—unity in diversity—and safe homes, places of recreation, work places. We recognize that the level of security enjoyed by citizens is the most critical problem facing Trinidad and Tobago today, that is why I compliment the Member for San Fernando West on her sterling contribution dealing with crime and criminal activities in Trinidad and Tobago. While in Tobago we are not faced with the serious challenges of crime, as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago what affects the people of San Fernando, Port of Spain, Diego Martin, Carenage, Tunapuna or Chaguanas are my concerns. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, as a Tobagonian I give full support to the Government's initiative to dealing with this issue of crime.

Mr. Speaker, crime is a complex societal problem. It is not going to be solved by old talk, grand charge, rhetoric or blaming of ministers of national security or prime ministers. The approach we must take should be more philosophical and with moral perspective. In that context the Government is soliciting the support of every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and every voluntary organization including the Opposition because no one is immune from crime. We need to create an environment where the public and communities get involved. It is difficult for criminals to thrive and develop in an environment not enabling them to develop. That is why I support the Government's social programmes because we have to look at crime in a holistic manner.

Mr. Speaker, one of the critical issues in this budget, from the level of the operations of the Tobago House of Assembly, is the cost differential between Trinidad and Tobago. I know discussions are taking place and, as a Tobagonian, I look forward to continued discussion that will bring relief to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago resident in Tobago as it relates to the living conditions and cost differentials.

Mr. Speaker, I know of the bad old days of which the Prime Minister spoke in his budget presentation. I am confident that the present Tobago House of Assembly administration would continue to demonstrate prudent management and we will never return to the bad old days of neither the UNC nor the NAR in the administration of the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I am satisfied with the orientation and direction of the budget on the road to 2020. We, in Tobago, are pleased with the increase in the share of the development programme from under 5 per cent in 2003 to about 10 per cent in 2004. We welcome the measure of an increase in overall spending while bearing in mind the national macro economic objectives of economic growth, increased employment and price stability. We welcome the deliberate attempt to balance genuine spending objectives with the realities of fiscal prudence and the desire to enhance productivity. We secure value for money in Government's spending. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, Tobago joins with the Minister of Finance in applauding the developing Trinidad and Tobago for all our purposes. Between a PNM-controlled Tobago House of Assembly and a PNM central government, gone are the bad days and we welcome the new dawn. [*Interruption*] The new dawn. One of the new dawn is a brief statement made by the Member for Port of Spain South and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, that the Government is seeking ways to improve the facilities in Tobago by seriously looking at a gas project in Tobago which would primarily be for the purpose of electricity generation with the likelihood of other usages by like industries. The Tobago House of Assembly has already identified Cove Estate as an industrial estate in Tobago and the possibilities of air conditioning in hotels and homes.

The time has come to bring Tobago directly into the petroleum activities of Trinidad and Tobago and this Government has taken steps to ensure that economic activities in this industry, wherever possible, take place in Tobago. Towards this end a decision was taken at the ninth meeting, second session, of the standing committee on energy, held on February 17, 2003, to establish a committee comprising the National Gas Company, the Ministry of Energy and

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[HON. S. CALLENDAR]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Energy Industries and the Tobago House of Assembly, to conduct a study to explore the feasibility of supplying gas to Tobago. This initiative will transform Tobago's economy and create diversity away from the sole dependency on tourism activities in Tobago. As a Tobagonian I look forward to the day when this project will become a reality. That is why I could stand tonight, in this Parliament, proud not only to be a member of this present administration, but to be part of this new transition that will transform the lives of the people of Tobago forever. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Mr. Hedwrig Breaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, I join this debate to make a very brief contribution on the Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the fiscal year October 01, 2003 to September 30, 2004, the Appropriation Bill, 2004, so ably presented by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

I congratulate him, wholeheartedly, for a masterful presentation, a work of true excellence in which he managed to assimilate the claims, concerns, desires and anxieties of various interest groups, while at the same time never losing sight of the fact that the common thread which must connect all the disparate interests and indeed pervade the entire budget presentation and application, is a need to chart the course which will eventually lead the twin-island State of Trinidad and Tobago to developed country status by the year 2020, if not before.

Mr. Speaker, the budget is visionary in its concepts while at the same time it is practical in its application. It is grounded on solid economic principles and prudent fiscal management. To the extent that the country can now revel in the fact that its credit rating varies between triple B for foreign long-term debt to A plus for local long-term debt. It is stern and resolute in its multifaceted attack on crime and criminal activity yet overflowing with compassion as it proposes measures to rehabilitate the prison inmates and wean them away from a life of crime for it addresses, with vigour and commitment, the introduction of prison reform so ably detailed by the Member for St. Ann's East; and social services and community-based programmes designed to eradicate the root causes of criminal activity.

As I have listened to a number of my colleagues opposite, and even some commentators, giving the impression that we may be involved in handing out or creating a "gimme gimme" syndrome, I want to tell them that it is cheaper to assist or train a person, and even to pay a person to learn, than it is to support them in jail.

11.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if we lean on the side of training, if we lean on the side of social services, all we are doing is trying to give hope and ability to persons to support themselves. I am not supporting the view that poverty is the cause of crime, but if we give people hope, the likelihood of their resorting to a life of crime is substantially reduced.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, the budget is a demonstration of even-handedness, equity and fair play, which has only returned to the budgeting process since the advent of the PNM in office. The budget displays a concerted effort to ensure that the petroleum revenues are utilized for the benefit of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and not a chosen few.

Indeed, the budget statement is replete with references to development work being done throughout the country, neglecting no community—a welcome change from the policies of the previous discredited and disgraced administration, whose members would do well to observe, learn and eventually participate in the effort to build a Trinidad and Tobago truly representative of the diverse religions, races and cultures with which we are blessed.

Mr. Speaker, I feel constrained to deal with the examples of the effort to spread development and budgetary expenditure throughout the country. Page 12 of the budget statement: New industrial estates in Wallerfield for high tech industries; in San Fernando for light manufacturing and agro-processing.

On page 14: Health centre construction in north, south and central; new construction of hospitals in Tobago and a wing in San Fernando.

Page 15: Sewerage treatment plants in Harmony Hall, Couva, Maloney, Malabar, La Horquetta; infrastructure in Rice Mill, Arouca; Harmony Hall, Gasparillo; La Paille and Caroni.

Mr. Speaker, I have some assistance to give to the hon. Member for Chaguanas, coming from Central, like myself, originally.

On pages 16 and 17, new highways: one to Point Fortin and the other to Mayaro. The Minister of Works and Transport took time to outline a comprehensive road programme, touching every part of Trinidad and Tobago. That is PNM performance; that is our concept of even-handedness and equity.

On page 35, strengthening agricultural infrastructure—roads, drains, electricity and water—Duck Pond, Moruga, Carlsen Field and Depot Road. I know where Depot is. It is in Caroni East. I used to live there at one time. *[Interruption]* Longdenville, that is right.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BÉREAUX]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

On page 50, health centres, construction of the oncology centre at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, St. James District Health Facility, 18 health centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago and six other district health facilities. *[Interruption]* I do not want to speak too long, so I want to get through these basic things quickly, but if you want me to, I will read.

On the redevelopment of San Fernando, we have Harris Promenade, Naparima Bowl, the Chancery Lane Complex, San Fernando Transit Hub, police stations, Gasparillo, Brasso, Roxborough, Arima, Belmont, Matura, Besson Street, Matelot, Manzanilla, Piarco, Oropouche, Old Grange and they left out La Brea. However, I know my share will come. La Brea and Guapo are not in it, but I am not complaining because I know it will come. This is the PNM administration and we will be fair to all.

We even have the army camp: one in Golconda, Hope Estate and Champ Fleurs.

Mr. Speaker, you might wonder why I took some time to itemize the various areas in which the budgetary allocations are being made. I did it particularly because during the period 1995—2001, the constituency of La Brea was visited by a most vicious attack of discrimination and victimization of its citizens, which I want to put on the record of this Parliament—and I know that it would be the last time I have to put it—because I have heard my fill of talk from the other side. They think we have forgotten.

I want to point out that Delhi Village, Los Bajos, Salazar Trace and Vessigny were all in the process of being constructed when the UNC came into power and they did not touch them. *[Interruption]* Hon. Member for Chaguanas, you may say what you want, but you will have your opportunity. I am putting on the record what I have to say. Just give me the chance.

Playing field and basketball court in Riccoveille, playing fields in Quarry Village. They discriminated so badly that Quarry Village in the La Brea constituency is one of the strongest parts for the UNC and yet they discriminated against them.

Sobo, La Brea. They would not do either the playing field or the basketball court. Sobo is the place from which we had Gus Logie, Philbert Jones, Debisette and other footballers of note. Then we had water and electricity and we got nothing.

I could remember coming to this Parliament Friday after Friday and complaining about the roads. I brought pitch here to show them that I had asphalt

in my constituency and yet they would not fix the roads. They had the Road Improvement Fund and not a penny was spent. So when you are feeling sorry for Dhanraj today, it could not happen to a better person. They discriminated against La Brea. The only time we were able to get any work done on the roads in La Brea was when we arranged to block the whole road from Point Fortin right down to almost Oropouche and we kept it blocked for two days. Atlantic LNG put up \$70 million to have the roads repaired. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, they did not arrest me. The difference between him and me is that I am not only a trained lawyer, but also quite a skilful person in doing things. I know the law; what not to do and how to behave. That is why I was not arrested. I knew how to do it. That is why I said I wanted him to remain here—so that I could teach him a few things tonight.

The unkindest cut of all was the La Brea Industrial Estate. Farmland MissChem drilled 94 boreholes and they were ready to put down their plant in La Brea and the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, as he was then, turned the sod and then that government, the members of the UNC government, induced Farmland MissChem to leave La Brea, with the lower gas price, costing the company concessionary gases, and come this way.

Trevor Sudama came here, when he was a member of their government, and told me: “I keep my political promises. I said a UNC government would not develop that estate and it did not develop it.” But line is longer than twine. They can do as much as they want, but not for as long as they want. *[Interruption]* That does not matter. He got us in government, but he is still no good. I have no qualms about that. When thieves fall out, honest men have their due.

I come to the final point on the question of discrimination. The hon. Member for Fyzabad, although honourable is not a word I would normally associate with his name, came into Quinam Road, Riccville, and told the people they would get water if they got out of the PNM group. Poor people, they wanted water, so they left. They put pipes in their yards, but they only got water when the PNM came back into power. This, and others, is the sad tale of discrimination under the UNC government in terms of the constituency of La Brea. As they say: Talk about discrimination and pressure! That is pressure!

Mr. Speaker, the time has now changed and I take this opportunity—when I hear the Members on the other side, day after day, talk here about the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP)—to remind them of what they have said and how they behaved. CEPEP

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BÉREAU]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

came into operation when they were boycotting the operations of the Parliament and did not want us to choose a Speaker. That is when you do not know the law and how to do things. They did not realize we were already in government and if they had come here they would have been able to do whatever they do as Members of Parliament—they would have been able to do their job.

They did not. They stayed away from their jobs, although now they want salaries. However, that is our problem. More importantly is that their leader, the Member for Couva North, told all their supporters not to cooperate with the Government; not to apply for anything they were giving and not to take anything from them. Poor constituents and supporters, they listened to him so when the CEPEP contracts were advertised, very few applied.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you how I know this. You would recall a question to this House; I think it was for written answer. The question was asked about those persons who had applied for CEPEP contracts and were not given. I took a look at the list and looked at the names. I looked at the Indian names. All Indian names are not Indian because my first cousin is Denzil Gobin and he is no Indian. However, that does not matter. It is usually a reasonable guide. I saw that less than 10 per cent of the people who were rejected had Indian names. So, I said: It is only so few. Then I realized what had happened.

They set up their own people not to get contracts and they are complaining about it. I understand how they feel because a UNC councillor from the Siparia Regional Corporation told me—and I have no reason to doubt—that when he went into the Rienzi Complex, their leader—I am not going to say the words he said—was most abusive to most of them and asked them if they, fools, could not come up with a programme like CEPEP. Now I understand how they feel. I am telling them what he told me and if they want, I would call his name, too. *[Interruption]* That is their problem.

He went ahead and misbehaved and they follow him all the time and it gets them into trouble. It is the same thing that the Member for St. Ann's West has been saying about Caroni (1975) Limited—and do not tell me I do not know anything about Caroni (1975) Limited. My grandfather was a cane farmer long before most of them had anything to do with cane. He used to be a cane farmer superintendent for Woodford Lodge Estate and we had our cane too. So do not even start that.

What happened was that they had all those six years to assist the sugar workers—they were representing people—but they did nothing for them. Do you

know why they did nothing? That was calculated to keep them as a client group. When they were all bundled into the sugar workers' union, they had them there. They were a bank of votes they could get, so they wanted the union. It served three instances: first to give the union size and get money; secondly, to influence them; and thirdly, Comprehensive Insurance did all the insurances for them. So, typically, they rode their backs and did not have time to help them when they were in government. Now they are coming and talking about it.

Look at something! When I heard the hon. Member for Princes Town—having come out of the sugar industry myself to some extent—talking about cane and what we have to do, the scales and so on and someone said if we reap at a certain time and the sucrose content and all of that, if these persons had discussed with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, maybe the programme would have been better. We asked them to talk about it; they ignored us, not cooperating even in trying to straighten out an already difficult situation with their own constituencies. They left them to the wolves. [*Interruption*]

If he is unable to understand the similes and metaphors, it is not my fault; it is his. He was a teacher and he is supposed to know. I am not going to let him disturb me. They did not help in trying to get a good system. They are not cooperating.

All the Members on the other side are well qualified and they are supposed to have minds of their own and not allow a leader, no matter how they respect him, to mislead them. It is always said that if you give a person a name, or if you have a young child and call him “bully”, he would grow up behaving badly. If you give certain persons certain other names, they behave badly. I am not surprised that your leader behaves like that. In fact, he operates in accordance with the Punjabi translation of his name. If you do not know it, let me tell you what it is: Pun day, pun day, mash it up, mash it up!

You can ask the Punjabis if that is it. That is how his name translates. That is why he behaves like that.

I see that the hon. Member for Chaguanas is still here. I do not know if he recalls when we were doing the amendment to the Summary Offences Act in 1998. I remember speaking from where the hon. Member for Nariva is now sitting and saying that we should not extend the time frame to get notices and, in respect of Members of Parliament, they should not be put into that category because a Member of Parliament would be going on his merry way and see his constituents, and, if he is a good Member of Parliament and they call him to

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BÉREAUX]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

speaking, he would not think about applying for permission to speak. He would stop his job and speak to his constituents. They should leave out ministers, Members of Parliament and ministers of religion because the nature of our work is to attend to people's business.

I am sad that he was arrested. He did not know how to handle it. I am now a consultant so he will have to talk to me. [*Interruption*] He will escape. I am certain that the magistrate, even if he finds him guilty, would let him go under the provision of section 71 of the Summary Courts Ordinance. If his lawyer does not tell him, he should ask about that treatment. I am certain he would get it. If I were there in court, I would plead on their behalf.

That is why we spoke about it. We begged them and pointed out that they should at least leave Members of Parliament out because if a Member has to do his job, he cannot think about writing. How dare a man say to his constituents when they ask him to talk to them, that he has to get permission from the police? He must talk to the police, if it is necessary to get things to represent his constituents properly. I wanted to point that out to him.

This budget is important. It is steeped in the philosophy and belief that if our nation is to advance it must do so, not only on the revenues that will come to us through the bounteous natural resources with which our country is blessed, but also by developing our human capital, educating and training our population, not only our young, but all ages. Indeed, ours must be a nation committed to life-long learning.

It is in that context that we see the University of Trinidad and Tobago. For nations that have either reached developed-nation status or that are now seen to be developing at a phenomenal rate, there is one common characteristic and that is the large percentage of the persons in the countries, whether they do it in the day or night, attending tertiary institutions.

I have heard others say here today: Why do they not move to assist the University of the West Indies—since Caricom has said they want the 18—22 age group to have tertiary education attendance of 15 per cent—and allow the University of the West Indies to improve? The University of the West Indies is a regional institution. It deals with persons from as far as the Bahamas in the north to Trinidad and Tobago in the south—different countries with different situations to ours.

It is common knowledge, as your own leader has said, that Trinidad and Tobago is the powerhouse of Caricom and we are best situated to be the gateway

to the Americas. Our natural resources give us certain advantages that we must follow. If we are to do that, we need a skilled, healthy and motivated population.

How are we going to get that? We have different natural resources from the other countries in the Caribbean. For instance, we have a law school in Trinidad, Barbados and the Bahamas. The Trinidad law school is situated in a country with comparatively large deposits of petroleum. By that I mean oil and gas. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that they do not teach petroleum law in that school? We have had oil and gas here for more than 100 years. When anyone wants to learn petroleum law, he goes to Scotland.

When I was studying, 30-odd years ago, England had no oil, but Dundee had a Chair of petroleum law and they teach other people there. Our university must cater for what we need here. I not only mean law. I just used that as an example. We have 21 plants at Point Lisas. There is no Trinidadian—and the University of the West Indies has none—who can design one of those plants. It is not because we are dunce. They do not teach design engineering per se in the University of the West Indies.

11.55 p.m.

If you intend to have an industrial society, to a certain extent, you have to train your engineers, not only to fix machines when they break down but they have to be prepared with design, so they could literally go into other places and steal the promethean flame. If the Members opposite do not understand that they should learn from the other societies, but they must be trained to do it.

Why do you think the hon. Eric Williams, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the hon. Franklin Khan, Minister of Works and Transport are so erudite in what they are doing? I will tell you. It came as a result of the fact, not only that they are bright, but, that the company to which they worked a certain time did not take money, they made sure that they caused these gentlemen and others to be exposed to big companies and see how they operate. That is why they could perform at such high levels even today.

I am proud to say that I am one of the executives. I could not take the education. I am not that bright, but I made sure that they sent real bright men to handle that. [*Laughter*] That is what we must do. This is the technological age. We are talking about telecommunications and ICT. We have to train them. We cannot expect, and we would be silly to expect, that the other islands, smaller economies, put money into a university for us to train our young people to go in the direction that we want to go. They want to get a few engineers to fix some

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BERAUX]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

plants, but we want engineers who are going to build plants because we had it. There are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are holding high positions abroad. They are not coming. Do you know why they are not coming? It is not because they do not love here; it is because they cannot swing big as yet. We want to be the financial hub of the Caribbean. We need to train people.

I want to take this opportunity to digress slightly. I hear people speaking about the oil boom. It was a PNM oil boom. I will tell you how it became a PNM oil boom. It became a PNM oil boom because the methods by which we taxed oil and the way we audited the oil companies, they were getting away, not with murder but with "thiefing" plenty money from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1960 or thereabouts, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago sent 70 persons abroad to study accounting. When those persons came back, they and the Indonesians got together—they met the Indonesians in the United Kingdom—and collaborated and began the reference pricing mechanisms, which is the basis of our oil revenues even to this day. Every now and then we have to shift the base. That is why when the hon. Minister spoke, he kept referring to West Texas Intermediate (WTI), because we use the basket of crude to do certain things. The oil boom did not come because of what the Arabs did. The oil boom came as a result of the intellectual capital, which we had put into our students who then came good for us.

Several of them are wellknown. They did extremely well. I just wanted to point out to you, that is how wide we see that we must have a University of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why the PNM, or any government that wants to move a country to the heights that we want to move it, cannot discriminate. If you do that will not succeed. [*Desk thumping*] I will tell you why. Two of those accountants whom we spoke about in one year, two Trinidadians, Calvin Gidharry and Randolph Core came first and second in the entire world. [*Desk thumping*] If we had discriminated and left back one, you would have heard about it. I want to put this on record, that a country must not discriminate and it has to assist people along. I believe that. You cannot. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: That is why you were removed from the Cabinet.

Mr. H. Beraux: That is all right. You see this Cabinet thing; the Member should not let that disturb him. A man of my age can afford to relax now. I am happy as you can see. [*Interruption*] I will deal with that when we go into the other part of the debate.

I want to refer to the statements made by some other commentators outside this House, the increase in the price of gas. This reminds me of some people who

would save their money, not spend it and then have to pay US \$150,000 for a bypass because they did not exercise. It is quite clear that we must deal with the environment. When we did not know we did all sorts of nonsense. Now that we know the harm that it has done to the environment, we must deal with it. I was pleased to hear the Member for Couva South talk about the influence Arpel is having on the South Americans in dealing with emissions. All that has happened, with the increase in gas prices—we are talking in some instances about 5 or 10 per cent. I spoke to a taxi driver who works on the Siparia-Erin route. When we worked out the number of trips, the price and the capacity of his car, all that was happening is that every day he was paying approximately \$10 more in gas when you work out the cost.

The other point is that they are talking about transporting. When you work out the price, if he had to commensurate with the increase in gas, all he could increase by is \$0.12 on \$1.00 fare or \$0.25 on a \$2.00 fare. Obviously, nobody does that. They will either not increase the fare or hit you \$1.00. When you talk the about costs to foodstuff as a result of the increase in gas, you have to remember that most of the trucks use diesel, so that is not affected. I just dealt with that point to identify that this budget is a good one.

There are many elements in the budget. When you think about the fact that the disability benefit now comes down to—not 40 years anymore—but 18 years, even if some people pay more, the span over the age group that will now be able to receive disability benefits more than compensates. There are some elements in this budget that I cannot leave. I wanted to stop but I cannot.

There is the housing subsidy, whereby persons earning between \$2,000 and \$2,250 a month, could get a subsidy up to \$36,000 to build.

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. [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. H. Breaux: I want to thank Members for having my time extended. I do not think I will take all of it, but one never knows.

I was dealing with the subsidy given to persons earning between \$2,000 and \$2,250 per month to build or repair a house. If you are between \$2,251 and \$3,600, you could get a subsidy of \$24,000. That means, I want to emphasize the

Appropriation Bill (Budget)
[MR. BÉREAU]

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

question of the subsidy—the subsidy is not a loan; it does not have to be paid back. That is money we got from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). I recall when that loan was signed. It was a loan to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago utilized to subsidize housing. I know the housing question has its concerns as to whether we are house padding or not. I am not dealing with that now. Construction generally, is the quickest means of dealing with the unemployment situation. When you are building; especially when you are building houses, everybody gets a play: the carpenters and masons. This is not only the State building houses.

I used to build houses and sell. If you give me \$60,000 I could build a 10' x 12', three-bedroom house with that. Just to help you along, what you would have to do is keep straight lines and make sure that you limit the rooms to the size of wood you have to buy. You must have no waste. You could build it. Such a large subsidy is equal to almost half the size of a house for a modest family. If you want to build a house like mine, you will have to do it differently. It took me a long time to be able to do that. The importance of the subsidy is the fact that, with all those houses being built and having regard to the fact that we are going to be building 6,000 houses this year, you can see what that will do to the economy and the unemployment situation in Trinidad and Tobago. It will do even more because people—when they get their own homes—tend to reform their behavioural patterns, because they have something to defend.

Above all, there is a sinister wind that blows through to keep people poor and depressed. I will tell you what it is. If the police come on a block and pick up five persons, what do you think will happen? They may take five of them for possession of marijuana, or cocaine, but they will carry all five and they all have to get bail. But the only way you will get bail is if you or your parents have something to use as security. If the poor and destitute or almost destitute young person, no matter how good he is, does not have that bail, would have to get a bailor to take his bail. If you do not have the money to get the bailor, then you run into more problems and are likely to plead guilty when you are innocent just to get out of jail because it is remand yard after remand yard. Giving property ownership to people does not stop only at a shelter for themselves; it also goes on to give them a certain sense. It does other things too. When the parents have something and the child is bright they would mortgage their home to help him or her. Therefore, it lifts the entire society.

I do not want to keep us any longer. There are some other points I had to make, but I think I want to keep the tenor of my speech at this level. I am sorry

the Member for Barataria/San Juan is not here, because I wanted to tell him something. I know he is concerned and worried whether he would be padded out. He thinks this is his last term. As much as I may want him to believe this is his last term, if a man of his capability continues to think like that, he will believe that he cannot influence anybody else but those who have always voted for him to vote for him. That is not true. He is selling himself short. I know there is a part in my constituency where I used to get six and eight votes. I do not get that anymore. Now I get more than that. I am satisfied that it is because of the effort I made to understand those constituents why some of them are voting for me. I may never win by a lot, but I got more. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Tell them what Panday means.

Mr. H. Bereaux: I did not tell them. I did not know those words. Those words were only explained to me on my last trip to England. That is now how I happened to know it.

I know the Member wants proportional representation. I believe that will institutionalize certain things that I do not think are not good for Trinidad and Tobago. Having regard to what I know, my political leader thinks about broadening the base of the PNM as he always says. I do not think there is any fear of discrimination.

Mr. Speaker, I commend this budget to the Members opposite and the general population. I believe that we are well on our way. We have started. It is said that the longest journey starts with the first steps. We have taken a giant step towards moving to developed country status in 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Culture and Tourism (Hon. Pernelle Beckles): Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity, first of all, to thank you for the privilege afforded me to register my contribution on this budget for the financial year 2004. I am speaking at a very interesting time in the life of this Government, as this month represents our anniversary, after successfully winning the general election of 2002. Therefore, we on this side we can well understand some of the difficulties and challenges that our friends on the other side are facing, having realized that they are definitely in opposition for the next five years.

I want to join with my other colleagues in congratulating the Prime Minister for presenting yet another budget in this second year of the life of this administration. We are aware that, based on the contributions of the other side, that they have failed to realize that in order to properly understand a budget, you

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

have to not just read the budget document, but you have to evaluate all the other documents that would have been laid before this honourable House. Mr. Speaker, I refer to the *Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP)*, the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2004*, the *Review 2003*, the *Social Economic Policy Framework* and the *Draft Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial year 2004*.

I propose to say very little in my contribution about culture, since my colleague Minister Hart, already gave an excellent contribution about the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's success, and our programmes and projects for the year 2003/2004. Coming to the end of my contribution, there are just a few things I want to say on culture.

I want to focus my contribution this morning on tourism. You would recall that the Leader of the Opposition, in his contribution, referred to the fact that he was of the view that this Government had not indicated its seriousness about the tourism sector. We are quite aware that over the last two years, with SARS, terrorism, wars and September 11, there has been a considerable reduction in persons travelling worldwide. Notwithstanding that, we know that the travel and tourism industry remains the world's largest and fastest growing industry. It accounts for one-third of the value of the total worldwide service trade and 10 per cent of the global GDP.

Notwithstanding the setbacks, world tourism arrivals are still projected to increase by 4.3 per cent. Regionally, there are 32 member states in the Caribbean Tourism Organization, of which Trinidad and Tobago is a member and can be described as the world's most tourism-dependant region; welcoming, very often, approximately 20 million stayover visitors and approximately 15 million cruise passengers in 2002. The tourism industry is the major economic activity for this region with close to 50 per cent of the population engaged in some measure of tourism activity.

Trinidad and Tobago is currently viewed as an emerging tourism destination, with the tourism industry contributing approximately 2 per cent to the GDP and employing approximately 5,000 persons. The data indicates that in 2002, there were about 317 arrivals and cruise arrivals of just over 640,000 persons. We recognize, therefore, that this sector is a strategic one, given its significance potential, for promoting economic diversification.

As enunciated by several of my colleagues, the Prime Minister has stated that the commitment of this Government is to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by the year 2020 and our budget of 2004 signalled the commencement of

the march towards achieving that developed status. In so doing, as it relates to the tourism sector, we are looking therefore, specifically at job creation, environmental and cultural preservation, community development and social cohesion, by encouraging community tourism and the building of a sense of community spirit.

In order to position ourselves in the vanguard of change, we have adopted a vision for tourism development. Our mission in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is to act as a catalyst in the transforming of the tourism sector into a dynamic, responsive and technologically driven industry. We seek to undertake the functions by focusing on policy formulation, monitor and control, research and intelligence gathering, investment facilitation and a public education programme.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has been identified as having a number of positive aspects and strengths in the tourism sector. Trinidad and Tobago possesses a product which offers unique cultural diversity in our foods, festivals, music, clothes and so many other things. We have achieved a high standard of physical infrastructural development, inclusive of sporting infrastructure, and have gained international sporting recognition.

We are very fortunate in that Trinidad and Tobago is located outside the hurricane belt, thus making this destination safe for hotel and other resort investment: marina investment, yachting services and aquatic services. We therefore, have access to a wide variety of recreational and leisure opportunities. We have looked at some of the critical success factors for the tourism industry. In order to achieve that success in the tourism sector, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism is putting in place the structures and processes to strengthen the tourism institutions, to initiate a campaign of widespread buying, national tourism, to undertake continuous development and improvement of the tourism product. We intend to use greater facilitation of technology and to continue to attract investment.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Tobago West mentioned some of the achievements as they relate to Tobago. I would just like to develop on some of those achievements. Specifically now, we are relating to the airlift. We are talking about the Monarch Charter. That service is now continuing twice weekly from Gatwick, United Kingdom, to Grenada to Tobago. That service maintains a high level of arrivals, particularly during the winter period.

12.25 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, a comparison of winter arrivals over summer 2002 showed that there was an increase in tourist arrivals in Tobago by 42.8 per cent. In comparing the periods May 2002 to October 2002, a 23 per cent increase in sales was achieved. Of accommodation types used by visitors, hotels accounted for the highest percentage, which was 46 per cent, and private homes, 33 per cent.

There is also the Monarch London/St. Kitts/Tobago Charter—the Monarch charters flights from London to Tobago via St. Kitts—and this started in May 2003. The load factor from May 2002 to August 2002, ranged from 76 per cent to 99 per cent. In September, the load factor fell slightly to 54 per cent. It was noted that generally in the industry, the lowest net revenue is realized during the month of September and, therefore, we were not very concerned about that.

The Virgin Atlantic has also commenced service in Tobago in May 2003, and visitors were afforded a cultural welcome on their arrival. The British West Indian Airways (BWIA) commenced in October 2002, from Washington Airport to Tobago—this flight is once weekly. BWIA was responsible for 2,225 arrivals to Tobago between November 2002 and December 2002. Finally, Condor Airlines of Germany operates one weekly flight from Frankfurt to Tobago. It was agreed that the Government would guarantee an average of 90 seats on each flight over the life of the agreement.

Mr. Speaker, you would realize from the figures which I have quoted that all these increases have occurred within the last two years. This was primarily because there was an airlift committee which was set up by the Cabinet. That committee was given a specific terms of reference to increase the flights to Tobago and, therefore, there was an increase in passenger arrivals. This has contributed immensely towards employment in Tobago and the improvement of the tourism sector.

We are aware of the concerns that have been expressed over the last couple of years about the tourism sector and marketing in that sector. My colleague, the Member for Tobago West, has already indicated Government's injection of capital into the marketing sector. Additionally, the Tourism and Industrial Development Company (TIDCO) has started advertising in the CNN Traveller and the High Life Magazine. Tidco has also initiated press, radio and TV campaigns in Suriname, Martinique, St. Lucia, CBS Television and other areas in the United States of America.

Mr. Speaker, you will know doubt recall that under the United National Congress, Tidco had developed a reputation for being the implementing arm of

Tourism, and was specifically involved in road paving and the Miss Universe Pageant, which was expected to bring thousands and thousands of dollars and visitors to Trinidad and Tobago. Approximately \$200 million was spent at that time. This Government has sought specifically to ensure that Tidco's responsibility is to market Trinidad and Tobago as a tourist destination, and to stay away from such activities as road paving, which is properly placed under the excellent guidance of the Minister of Works and Transport, my colleague, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. Notwithstanding the challenges that have taken place over the last couple of years in the tourism sector, it is our expectation that we would see an improvement in the tourist arrivals in Trinidad, as we have seen in Tobago, over the last two years.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has recognized, as well, that sport tourism is as important to Trinidad and Tobago as other tourisms such as culture, food and many other aspects of our tourism product. Tidco has also been involved in yachting, sailing and the promoting of trade shows. Next week, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism will host the first yachting consultation in Trinidad and Tobago, having recognized the importance of the cruise industry. The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has just completed a study that will guide us for that consultation, and it has given us data that would inform us of policy-making decisions for the cruise and yachting industries. We propose to share that document with the stakeholders in the tourism sector and the cruise industry, and together with the ministry and the stakeholders, we could move forward in implementing some new policies for the yachting sector.

With respect to investment, a number of investment conferences were also attended, the most important being the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Investment Conference. It was projected for the period January 01, 2002 to September 30, 2002—the Ministry of Culture and Tourism granted interim approvals for a total of 22 tourism projects in Trinidad and Tobago. Fourteen of these projects are to be constructed in Trinidad and eight in Tobago. The total capital expenditure for these projects is estimated to be in the vicinity of \$485 million.

Tourism projects earmarked for Tobago are expected to be approximately \$129 million. During the construction phase of these projects in Tobago, a total of 862 persons would be employed on a temporary basis. On the completion of the projects 860 persons would be permanently employed. In Trinidad, the approved projects will generate a capital expenditure \$356 million. Temporary employment during construction will account for 1,056 jobs. When these projects

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

become operational, 634 persons will be permanently employed. Of the accommodation projects, Trinidad will generate 150 additional rooms and Tobago 28 additional rooms, bringing the total of additional rooms to 178.

Under the present Tourism Development Act, provisions have been made for a wide array of concessions and tax benefits. All things being equal, the Government will forego some \$7.9 million, by way of revenue exempt from custom duties for the tourism projects in Tobago, and \$56 million for projects undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that there have been some difficulties with the Tourism Development Act, particularly as it relates to issues of relief on interest payments. An amendment to that Act will be coming to Parliament to remedy a defect in the Act which was amended two years ago, under the previous administration.

There are some other initiatives that have been started by this Government, specifically the Integrate Resort Development Tourism Project. The objective of this particular initiative is to articulate the Government's equity participation in those integrated resort developments. What that says is that the Government will consider equity where a hotel has, at least, 200 rooms and where there are major amenities such as a golf course, a mariner or other sporting cultural or eco tourism facilities. There is a minimum capital expenditure of \$350 million which would be invested in that integrated resort development. Applications have already been received for the purposes of qualifying under that particular resort development policy. We are looking forward to ensuring that the Government participates in projects for which persons are qualified.

Much has been said about the concerns of the tourism sector, especially as it relates to the issues of visitor safety and security. For the first time in the region, Trinidad and Tobago hosted a Tourism Safety and Security Conference bringing together 180 persons from throughout the region. At the end of that conference, it was agreed that there were certain policies and practices that were necessary for us to put in place to ensure the safety and security of our visitors.

We have realized that there are some persons who have taken the approach of giving the impression and making statements publicly that would discourage persons from coming to Trinidad and Tobago. I do not want to reiterate what was said by many of my colleagues, on the other side, but the fact that we have agreed on the necessity to diversify our economy and recognizing the importance of the tourism sector, I could just only urge my colleagues, on the other side, of the

importance—whilst speaking the truth about what is happening in the country as it relates to crime and criminal activities—of our responsibility to ensure that we give an accurate account of what is happening, and to ensure that persons or potential visitors coming to Trinidad and Tobago are not given the false impressions that we often see in the newspapers that are sent abroad for public consumption.

Mr. Speaker, we have been able to secure from the Organization of American States (OAS) a programme called STEP. That programme is really to assist small hotels in terms of training, technology, security training and other particular kinds of skills which will improve training for their employees and also for themselves, in order to deliver a better product for the tourist industry and for our country, Trinidad and Tobago.

In enhancing our tourist destination, we have realized that the product that Trinidad and Tobago offers, as I said, is second to none. At the end of the day, there are other factors which were decided at the conference that we need to look at namely: crime against visitors, harassment of visitors, security sector, public tourism management, the media and tourism-oriented policies. We are now compiling a document, which we would share with some of our colleagues in the region who participated in that conference. That document is expected to be a working document for the way forward for the tourism sector.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will continue to promote the tourism sector as an economic pillar for national development; national identity tourism; public awareness; tourism development products and tourism promotion. In financial terms, the sum of \$68 million has been allocated in the budget for the fiscal year 2004 for tourism administration, promotion, marketing and investment in projects and programmes in the sector. These projects and programmes are to be funded and will include: development of sites; development of river facilities; community tourism and, of course, most important, environmental enhancement; support to industry projects; and tourism research projects, which we refer to as institutional strengthening.

An additional sum of \$10 million has been allocated in some cases for the continuation of the development of some other projects in the cultural sector. I refer specifically to Queen's Hall, Naparima Bowl, Naipaul House, continuation of works at Nelson Island; the expansion of the National Museum; the establishment of a museum in San Fernando; the establishment of the academy for the performing arts and the upgrade of the Little Carib Theatre.

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Mr. Speaker, even while we seem at times to separate tourism and culture, we know that in Trinidad and Tobago, the reality is that they are inseparable and this is particularly so based on our position on the global village and on the international scheme of things. I want to indicate to this honourable House that last week, Trinidad and Tobago entered a culinary arts and chef competition, which was held in Jamaica. Our local chefs and bartenders were so outstanding that Trinidad and Tobago was able to bring home five gold medals, three silver medals and a bronze medal, and we also won “Chef of the Year”. [*Desk thumping*] In total, Trinidad and Tobago brought home 12 medals. The participants depicted the taste of the Caribbean and both the bartenders and the chefs particular product was based on indigenous food from Trinidad and Tobago. On behalf of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and all my colleagues on both sides, we congratulate them for making Trinidad and Tobago proud and putting us on the map.

Mr. Speaker, there are just a few matters that I would quickly like to rebut as they relate to matters raised on the other side. One of the matters raised was in relation to Carifesta, and my colleague, the Member for Nariva, raised this matter. I am sure that for those of us who have read the many reviews about Carifesta—the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, Minister Edward Hart, lead that contingent—the Surinamese Government and the President were so pleased with that production, they specifically asked that the production be repeated before Trinidad and Tobago left Suriname.

For those of us who know about Suriname, the racial composition of Suriname is very similar to ours; both in terms of their indigenous peoples, and in terms of their overall make up of persons of African and Indian descent. All the reviews clearly indicated that all races were represented at that golden masquerade. I am quite satisfied that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism made all the efforts to ensure that all different groups of Trinidad and Tobago were represented in determining that product called the “Golden Masquerade” for which we were extremely proud. [*Desk thumping*]

My friend, the Member for Fyzabad, wants to hear a little about tassa. I am hoping that the Member is skilled enough to play that very great instrument. The Member indicated in his delivery that I had mentioned that there was some intention by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to make tassa the second national instrument. I am sure that my friend, the Member for Fyzabad, knows that “national” means indigenous. We already have the pan which is national. [*Desk thumping*] Tassa is not indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago. What I did say

is that the National Tassa Association approached the Prime Minister requesting that tassa be made the second national instrument.

Mr. Speaker, may I say further that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has been engaged in activities to ensure that it recognizes the multiplicity of the races and the richness of the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. My friend, the Member for Fyzabad, sought to compare Ramleela with Carnival. He compared the contributions and he said that the Ministry gave Ramleela \$300,000 and Carnival \$40 million. Of course, the figures used by the Member were inaccurate. The point is—and my colleague Minister Hart was making the same point—that for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago this Government has recognized the fact that for 120 years our indigenous brothers and sisters have been celebrating Ramleela, and it is under this Government, and this Ministry of Culture and Tourism that we paid tribute to those forefathers. [*Desk thumping*]

When we talk about recognition, we are not only talking of recognition in terms of moneys worth. Very often, we recognize that people do not always ask for money, but what they often ask for is the Government to recognize that they have contributed to the advancement of culture in Trinidad and Tobago. We will also be recognizing the contribution that tassa has made for Trinidad and Tobago, as we have done for Ramleela. Also, for the first time this year, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism also recognized “Rapso” music, which is also indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition talks often about the issues of discrimination and that is a word, which should be eliminated, particular as it relates to culture. We are not saying that over the years there were not concerns as they relate to how moneys were distributed. The fact is that is an issue that was raised by all governments—and I imagine that it will continue to be raised—but the responsibility of this Ministry of Culture and Tourism is to reduce all chances where people will continue to say that there are inequities.

In so doing, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has acknowledged and celebrated every single festival. In the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, we have made a policy that every festival which is celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago, one could enter the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and be educated on it. There are officers with the knowledge of these festivals in the ministry who would give the relevant information about any festival. We also go out into communities and people come to us and tell us exactly what they want.

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

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Mr. Speaker, next week, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism will go to the Brian Lara Promenade to celebrate Divali.

Mr. Sharma: Will you wear a Sari?

Hon. P. Beckles: I will wear more than a sari, especially if you purchase one for me. You have promised to purchase a sari for me and I am still waiting on it. I want to let the Member know that I have worn a sari before, and I will not wait until I am the Minister of Culture and Tourism to wear a sari, but I am hoping that the Member will wear a Dashiki.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, next week, we will be celebrating Divali on the Promenade starting from 6.00 a.m. [*Interruption*]—I will purchase the Dashiki for the Member for next year's Emancipation celebration, and we will see if the Member will wear it. In Trinidad and Tobago, we should be proud because we have a product that is second to none, and that product is our rich cultural heritage. [*Desk thumping*] In acknowledging that, culture should not be used as a racial tool by Members opposite as they do from time to time.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has done exceptionally well, and where we deserve credit, credit must be given. I have listened to all my colleagues who have spoken before me, not just with eloquence, but with quality, honesty and determination—and one could see that hard work is responsible for the PNM delivering so well over the last two years. [*Desk thumping*]

My colleague from San Fernando West was extremely passionate about her concerns about crime and she said that crime knows no race and it knows no colour. I have listened to many of my colleagues on the other side—particularly the Member for Princes Town, giving suggestions as to how the Government could deal with kidnapping, what the Chief Justice should do and what the Government should do as it relates to police officers and young attorneys. All the suggestions that Members have given, on the other side, require legislation and us coming together to ensure that we pass those pieces of legislation. It makes no sense criticizing the Government and giving solutions and then not participating in order for legislation to become law.

I will end by saying, notwithstanding the fact that Members opposite may have indicated that they will not cooperate, there are 20 Members on this side, and whether or not we can pass legislation over the next five years, and with God's willing, the Government will do its best and Trinidad and Tobago will be better off by the year 2005.

Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Appropriation Bill (Budget)

Tuesday, October 14, 2003

Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. today. [Hon. K. Valley]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.55 a.m.