

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, October 15, 2003*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

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

[Fifth Day]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, I rise to take part in this debate and let me begin by congratulating the Minister of Finance for an excellent presentation which should provide tremendous satisfaction and hope to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I would like to join the Minister of Finance in thanking and congratulating all those public servants and others who worked in the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Development in the preparation of this budget. Mr. Speaker, from where I operate at the Ministry of Planning and Development, I have a responsibility as that Minister, to respond to some of the matters raised by hon. Members on the other side, who have taken time out to comment on the Government's approach to the management of Trinidad and Tobago's affairs.

The Member for St. Joseph took a lot of time to point out that last year's budget and this year's budget could not have and did not have any nexus to the Government's approach to our stated intention of making Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by the year 2020. Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that when the Government came into office we continued to speak to the country about this Vision 2020, our intention to take Trinidad and Tobago to another plane. It was the Member for Couva North who, as usual, tried to belittle anything that Trinidad and Tobago stands for or represents and to "pooh pooh" any good idea which could benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to mislead and take them off-track.

He said that we copied from Malaysia our Vision 2020 position. Mr. Speaker, I would come back to the point as to why he chose Malaysia as against any other.

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That statement that Trinidad and Tobago is copying anybody else's plan to impose on Trinidad and Tobago can be easily dismissed by referring you, Mr. Speaker, to our exercise that was done in full public view way back when we were in the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, when I wear this Balisier tie in this Chamber; and when I stand here as a PNM Minister; when I operate in the PNM political movement, I do so with a certain sense of pride, commitment and confidence that we are doing the right thing for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is why, even while we are in Opposition, we are able to plan for the day when we would be in Government in the not too distant future. That is the PNM's approach to Opposition.

So while we found ourselves in the Opposition in the period 1995—2001, we did not spend that time trying to ferment racial discord in the country, bad mouth the country, pull down the country, poison relationships and tear the social fabric; we spoke publicly to the country within our party, saying that we have a vision for Trinidad and Tobago and we would formulate that vision through consultation and participation. Documents went through the party and we took it to various levels and invited the public to comment and so on, and eventually, while in Opposition, the PNM finalized its document on Trinidad and Tobago's future, confident in the knowledge that we would soon be in Government, and when we come into Government we would implement this Vision 2020 for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is how we arrived at that. That was not done at Balisier House or at the Chaguaramas Convention Centre, it was done in full public view in Trinidad and Tobago. So for the Opposition to come here and say that we are copying Malaysia's plan, is just a nonsense that should be dismissed out of hand. Mr. Speaker, I would tell you why he chose Malaysia at a later point in my contribution.

We understand very clearly that Government has a responsibility to operate every single day. It is not reasonable to presume that we would stop what we are doing, wait until a plan is finished and ready and then we begin to implement that plan. It was possible, as we began to look at our exercise and our objective that we could see what we could do now, and to begin to put those things in place now even while we are formulating the very plan itself for the next 20 years.

In fact, in a way, because we are the PNM and because we are building Trinidad and Tobago as we have always done, it is as though we are constructing and renovating this building while we are living in it. But we do so quite responsibly. I am sorry the Member for St. Joseph is not here. I wanted to

demonstrate to him the fallacy of his assumption that there was no nexus between the budget and Vision 2020. This document is dated August 05, 2003. It says:

“Subcommittees’ Reports on Issues, Strategies, Short-term Goals and Necessary Actions.”

This is a document which we used to extract from our exercise for the last nine months. As we worked on Vision 2020 we were able to produce this document, which focused on some things that we could address now.

In fact, the basic concept of Vision 2020—the Member for St. Joseph said that we do not know what is Vision 2020; I do not think he meant it when he said that. In fact, I want to congratulate him and the Member for St. Augustine. Because they, as Members of the Opposition, against tremendous pressure within their political circles—with their own testicular fortitude; and as Members representing their constituencies; and as exemplars in this country—came to Crowne Plaza when we had the public launch of Vision 2020, where the President spoke of this national exercise. I was happy to see them there. Mr. Speaker, it indicated to me that they firstly wanted to find out what was going on and I dare hope that they wanted to be a part of it and to contribute to it.

When we say Vision 2020, what are we talking about? It is very simple. It says that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago wants a standard of living for the people of Trinidad and Tobago which now exists in developed countries. Mr. Speaker, when Vision 2020 is examined, we would be classified as a developed country, based on the fact that our people can enjoy a standard of living in health; opportunities in education; our country would have certain infrastructure; our social support systems and our environment would be so managed that the quality of life of our people would be of a standard equivalent to those experienced in virtually the best parts of the world. That is a programme that we have. It is about the quality of life; it is about the human condition; it is about our economy; its sustainability; its growth; it is about the future of our children and opportunities for their future. That is Vision 2020.

In fact, even as we have those who are championing the cause, those who are skeptical, those who are opposed, those who are destructive and obstructive, the fact that Vision 2020 featured so prominently in this debate this year indicates to me that we are making some progress. Because something is going on in this country and people are taking notice, whichever side you are on the issue.

Mr. Speaker, how do we go about this? The Cabinet appointed a multi-sectoral group to guide the process. The Government did not take control of it to

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make it a PNM thing or a Government thing. We appointed nationals from the public and private sector. We invited and received contributions from the international agencies and any persons that would help us. This small sectoral group took on the exercise with gusto, with enthusiasm and it has been working tremendously well in the last few months and we have made a lot of progress.

Arising out of that progress, we were in a position by August, to make some specific inputs into this year's budget. And the whole exercise says that sooner rather than later, the entire budgetary process would be guided by the objectives we set ourselves in Vision 2020. As we construct this national strategic plan, which we call Vision 2020 road map, we are accepting that whatever the plan says, in print, in the future, there are some things that would inevitably have to end up in that plan: improvements to the health sector; education; housing; transportation; trade negotiations; human resource improvement and all of those things. Whatever the plan says in the end, we can work on those things because they must form part of any plan. [*Desk thumping*]

So when one looks at the national budget one would see that certain items of expenditure dominate the national budget of Trinidad and Tobago: health expenditure; education; infrastructure; housing; and, most importantly, the social services. Because we say, as my colleague from San Fernando West said quite eloquently yesterday, we want the horse to be fed while the grass is growing. My colleagues on the other side speak with glee about the crime problem in Trinidad and Tobago. We all acknowledge that there is a crime problem. They speak about it with glee.

One of the ways of treating with that problem is to have in the country an understanding of the need for these social support systems. That is why in this budget you would see the kinds of allocations and programmes spoken about by my colleague in the Prime Minister's Office, Sen. The Hon. Christine Kangaloo. There is method to what we are doing. Initially, it was our intention to have a document available by the end of this year, or a Vision 2020 first draft. But as we embarked on the exercise, there is a scope, the perimeter is so wide and so much work has to be done, that we are taking our time; making here slowly but thoroughly.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce to you today that in Trinidad and Tobago, arising out of our exercise of Vision 2020, there are 600 persons of all skills and experiences working for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, crafting that road map by involvement of all persons who believe they have a contribution to make. We would go further. There would be public participation in this

process, because the whole idea is to have as much buy in as we could, so that people can take ownership of the plan, so it would be Trinidad and Tobago's plan; so we can all work together as a people to achieve that objective of Vision 2020, which is to raise the quality of life and standard for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Six hundred persons operating in 28 subcommittees, under the chairmanship of one of our most successful and eminent persons in the business community, Mr. Arthur Lok Jack.

Mr. Speaker, this morning I want to put on record, just the chairmanship of the various committees so that their work can be acknowledged, and those who say they are not hearing about Vision 2020 and they are not seeing anything. Okay, you are not seeing it as yet outside; you are hearing a lot from us, but the documents generated by the exercise are coming in fast and furious. Very soon—given the structure we put in place, where there is the multi-sectoral group, there are the subcommittees working on the sub-sectors, reporting to a subcommittee of the Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister—we anticipate the Parliament would get involved, because it is our stated intention to have a Joint Select Committee of the Parliament receive and treat with the findings and the work of these subcommittees.

Just to put in perspective the subgroups that we have broken out into:

VISIONS 2020
Status of Work of Sub-Committees

Sub-Committee	Reports Submitted
1. Energy Chairperson Mr. Trevor Boopsingh (MSG)	Final Report (June 30,2003)
<u>No Vice-Chairperson</u>	
2. Agriculture Chairperson Dr. Ranjit Singh	Interim Report (May 12, 2003)
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u>	
Dr. Kusha Haraksingh	

Sub-Committee	Reports Submitted
<p>3. Industry and Entrepreneurship <u>Chairperson</u> Mr. Bernard Dulal-Whiteway</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Anthony Rahael</p>	<p>Progress Report (June 10, 2003)</p>
<p>4. Tourism <u>Chairperson</u> Dr. Brian Harry (MSG)</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. William Aguiton HBM</p>	<p>Final Report (August 2003)</p>
<p>5. National Security and Public Safety <u>Chairperson</u> General Ralph Brown</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Lance Selman</p>	<p>Interim Report (June 9, 2003)</p>
<p>6. Infrastructure <u>Chairperson</u> Mr. David O'Brien (MSG)</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Ian Telfer</p>	<p>Interim Report (August 21, 2003)</p>
<p>7. Financial Services <u>Chairperson</u> Mr. Selby Wilson</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Lyndon Guisseppi</p>	<p>Final Report (September 2003)</p>
<p>8. Health <u>Chairperson</u> Prof. G. Norris Melville</p>	<p>Interim Report (July 17, 2003)</p>

Sub-Committee	Reports Submitted
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Dr. George Laquis	
9. Housing	Final Report (August 18, 2003)
<u>Chairperson</u> Mr. Anthony Fifi	
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Dr. Asad Mohammed	
10. Culture and Attitudes	Final Report (August 8, 2003)
<u>Chairperson</u> Ms. Marcia Riley	
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Keith Byer	
11. Environment	Interim Report
<u>Chairperson</u> Mr. John Agard	
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Eden Shand	
12. Poverty Alleviation and	Interim Report (July 25, 2003)
Social Services <u>Chairperson</u> Dr. Ralph Henry	
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Ms. Sandra Bapiste-Caruth	
13. Governance and Institutional Structures for Development	Final Report (July 15, 2003)
<u>Chairperson</u> Dr. Shafeek Sultan-Khan	
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Dr. Kirk Meighoo	

Sub-Committee	Reports Submitted
<p>14. Science and Technology <u>Chairperson</u> Prof. Clement Sankat</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Ms. Maureen Manchouck</p>	Interim Report (July 30, 2003)
<p>15. HIV/AIDS <u>Chairperson</u> Dr. Anton Cumberbatch</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Roger McLean</p>	Interim Report (June 23, 2003)
<p>16. Population <u>Chairperson</u> Mr. Desmond Hunte</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Dr. Jacqueline Sharpe</p>	No Report Submitted
<p>17. Regional Development and Sustainable Communities <u>Chairperson</u> Mrs. Nan Ramgoolam</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Dr. Deborah Thomas</p>	No Report Submitted
<p>18. International Relations, Regional Cooperation and Trade <u>Chairperson</u> Mr. Eustace Seignoret</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Dav-Ernan Kowlessar</p>	Interim Report

Sub-Committee	Reports Submitted
<p>19. Labour and Social Security <u>Chairperson</u> Mr. David Abdulah (MSG)</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Kyle Rudden</p>	Interim Report
<p>20. Youth, Sport and Recreation <u>Chairperson</u> Mr. Douglas Camacho</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Deryck Murray</p>	No Report Submitted
<p>21. Gender in Development <u>Chairperson</u> Ms. Denise Noel De Bique</p> <p><u>No Vice-Chairperson</u></p>	No Report Submitted
<p>22. Administration of Justice <u>Chairperson</u> Master Christie-Ann Morris Alleyne</p> <p><u>Vice-Chairperson</u></p>	No Report Submitted
<p>23. Law Administration and Legal Affairs <u>Chairperson</u> Mr. Russell Martineau S.C.</p> <p><u>No Vice-Chairperson</u></p>	Interim Report (August 2003)
<p>24. Public Utilities <u>Chairperson</u> Prof. Winston Suite</p>	Interim Report (August 2003)

Sub-Committee	Reports Submitted
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Harjinder S. Atwal	
25. Macro Economy and Finance <u>Chairperson</u> Dr. Terrance Farrell (MSG)	Final Report (September 10, 2003)
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon	
26. Preprimary, Primary & Secondary Education <u>Chairperson</u> Dr. Carol Keller	No Report Submitted
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Dr. Anna Mahase	
27. Tertiary Education <u>Chairperson</u> Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie	Progress Report (June 6, 2003)
28. Skills Development and Training <u>Chairperson</u> Mr. Keith Crichlow	Progress Report (June 5, 2003)
<u>Vice-Chairperson</u> Mr. Cipriani Davis	

Those are the persons who are guiding this process at the operational level under the convening of the Permanent Secretary under the Minister of Planning and Development reporting to a subcommittee of the Cabinet, chaired by the Prime Minister and very soon to come to this very Parliament. I hope when we come to the Parliament we would meet a new attitude from our colleagues on the other side, one of participation, eagerly reaching out to this exercise to build Trinidad and Tobago for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when they talk about us copying Vision 2020, we are not the only people in the world who have a vision to elevate our people. If you go to the Internet you would see a series of states in America and of cities with similar kinds of approach. Some of them call it Vision 2020; some of them call it other things; some have a 15-or a 20-year plan. The names of the States in America are: Iowa, Louisiana, New Hampshire, Minnesota, Montana, Oregon and Washington. They each have a plan like this. The Cities of Ottawa and Hamilton in Canada, each had a plan like this; the City of North Hampton in the United Kingdom; Jordan, Saudi Arabia; the City of Moscow; wherever people see the need for planning specifically within a specific time frame, to do what we are doing, we are all at one. But in Trinidad and Tobago this evolves out of the thinking of the political party, the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to draw one other distinction. In October 1996, the PNM in this country went to a convention to decide who should lead the party. The build-up to that was quite exciting for my colleagues and I, and the national community observed, and quite a lot of statements were made. On the other side, they would have thought this was the end of the PNM. By 1997/1998, we were not into a banker and trying to destroy ourselves and the country, we were talking about a vision for Trinidad and Tobago. The PNM in Opposition, having gone through internal turmoil was able—within a matter of 18 months—to move on from that, to a vision for Trinidad and Tobago and today I can report that that vision is the policy of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Contrast that with the behaviour of the current Opposition, who had an election for a deputy political leader and that was the end of the party and the Government. E-N-D! One election to elect one officer! In the PNM's place, an election sent us on a vision to the next future and in their case that was the end of the party. Ask yourself what would Trinidad and Tobago have been without the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to some of the offerings of my colleagues on the other side, because you see a penchant, an attitude of coming to this Parliament and putting on record for the public's consumption, a number of statements which are diametrically opposed to the facts, and as the Government and the custodian with the people's interest we have a duty to correct those situations when they occur.

If I look at the comments of my colleague from St. Augustine, as reported in the media, he spoke about Vision 2020, and that it should be about planning a vision for the future. I hope I have demonstrated for you, Mr. Speaker, in the last

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10 minutes that that is what it is, so my colleague need not fear. It is about planning a vision for the future. He says the Government is painting a picture of plenty. In great sorrow, their attitude indicates that they would have preferred if we were here reporting on the most dire circumstances for Trinidad and Tobago.

It is a cause of great concern to him that we can speak of the potential of plenty for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Why should we not speak about our potential? Why should we not speak positive to our people about the need to make sure that our future rises to the level of our potential as determined by our natural and human resources? That is a problem for the Opposition. We should not come here and talk about the potential for the energy sector; for the manufacturing sector; for the personnel development; we should not do that. So he criticized us talking about a period of plenty.

Then he says, "If we do not take appropriate action now and save some of our new-found wealth, invest and generate income from this revenue, then in the medium term we would pay a high price." That is precisely why we have embarked on Vision 2020. Because we are approaching the management of the country's affairs in a systematic way, having taken on board the inputs of all persons who can contribute. Vision 2020 is doing exactly that. Because we know, as he has said, if we do not do that, things can go wrong and the country would suffer in the future. So we are at one on that.

Interestingly enough, they speak from both sides of their mouths. He then goes on to say that the Central Bank report contained warning signals which he cited as domestic deficit, debt repayment ability, the quality and nature of the growing unemployment, and persistent excessive liquidity. The reports suggested that Government pursue a policy of fiscal prudence and consolidation. Here is a Member of Parliament warning the Government to take note of the Central Bank's warnings about the need for fiscal prudence. But then immediately he and his colleague launched into a defence of what is or was Caroni (1975) Limited, and the Leader of the Opposition said if they were allowed to stay in Government they would not have done anything about Caroni (1975) Limited. They would have expanded what was going on there.

Mr. Speaker, while he is saying that in one breath, chiding us, imploring that we take fiscal prudence as our measure, in the budget document he made no mention of what is contained at page 45 of the *Review of the Economy*. He is an economist. I am sure the former Governor of the Central Bank read this. So when he was talking about the need for fiscal prudence—as though he was being prudent—he was aware of this statement.

10.30 a.m.

Operating surplus and deficit: Caroni—deficit—\$1.146 billion; WASA—\$629 million; the Airports Authority—\$204 million. Those three agencies about which those on the other side had some comments to make to us, they are saying, “Do not interfere with the Caroni situation”, and they invoke all kinds of racial barbs, and they invoke race in everything that has to do with Caroni. In one breath he is telling us to observe fiscal prudence but his leader is telling us they would have expanded this deficit, a deficit which saw in the last 10 years \$5 billion of direct government support, and that does not include the guarantees in the bank which the government has to pay anyway. They cannot have it both ways. You cannot be telling us to be fiscally prudent but at the same time telling us, expand a billion dollar deficit in a sunset dead industry.

Then, when they were in government, they took action to put WASA in a position where, every 13 months, the authority has to come to the Cabinet for US \$30 million to pay for 20 million gallons of water. As a result of the carryings on of my friend, the Member for Caroni East, when I stood in their position then, I begged the UNC Government please do not get involved in that “desal” scam. It is going to cost the people of Trinidad and Tobago dearly. They were running ads in the papers, “Not one red cent, not one red cent”.

You would have read in the newspapers last week, Mr. Speaker, that before the Cabinet today to be adjudicated on is a desperate cap-in-hand request from WASA for US \$30 million. What they did not tell us then is that a few days before the election of 2000, the government gave a guarantee to raise US \$30 million for WASA to pay for desalinated water for 13 months—\$200 million TT—and that is to go on for 20 years, the same WASA that is running a deficit in one year of \$629 million. This Cabinet now is faced with that. So after the “Not one red cent” we have to decide now. WASA that produces on its own, without desalination, 180 million gallons of water, was not in this position, but just for an extra 20 million gallons of water, they got themselves in a contract for 200 million gallons every 13 months.

The first US \$30 million has been used up. They now have to get the Government to provide another US \$30 million because the contract demands that. What we are facing now, as a result of their fiscal prudence, is the option to break the contract, which we cannot do as a responsible Government, or the people of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Treasury—not the PNM, the people of Trinidad and Tobago—honouring that contract and every 13 months finding \$200 million to give their friends who, in the newspapers said, “Desal is a cash cow”. Yes, the

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“desal” is a cash cow. What we have to figure out is who has the cash and who is the cow. [*Desk thumping*] That is their idea.

The other one, the Airports Authority—\$204 million in deficit. Do you know how they meant to deal with that? Just before the election when they were in office, they tried to impose a charge on the people of Trinidad and Tobago for using the airport, an extra \$100 to pay for this. That has not been addressed but the fact remains that the same airport about which they were talking shamelessly, the Leader of the Opposition came here and talked about “airport at Piarco”.

You have absolutely no goddamned shame to come here and raise that airport as a symbol! It is a symbol of corruption; it is a symbol of the worst kind of governance anywhere in the world. You come and tell me now, with a \$204 million deficit—but you have contractors up there with contracts to maintain at the airport—\$500 million—while the material has guarantees and you have all kinds of carryings on, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are faced with that. So when we are cautioned about fiscal prudence, the horse has bolted. What this Government faces is, how do we treat with the WASA situation, how do we treat with the airport situation? The fact of the matter is that whether the people like it or not, the UNC government put the people of this country, by contract to pay their friends \$200 million every 13 months for a bucket of water at WASA and at the airport similar types of arrangements—that is what we are facing. So “doh” come here and lecture us on fiscal prudence. [*Desk thumping*]

As for the Caroni situation, I am so happy that the East Indian population in this country has chosen by and large to ignore the failed politicians in the UNC and not rise up and burn down this country [*Desk thumping*] because that is what they want, you know. That is what they want. They would like the East Indian population to respond to their exhortations based on racial lines and get up. I mean, what does the Opposition Leader mean in a society like ours when he calls on the people in this country to boycott the businesses of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources? What if other people in this country “trump and follow suit” and we start to boycott? They will be happy because we would be creating the kind of environment in which they see some possibility of coming back into government, you know.

The only chance they see of coming back into government is to create mayhem and racial discord in this country, destroy the country and come back up through the ashes. [*Desk thumping*] So they actively engage in trying to ferment racial disharmony in Trinidad and Tobago. A company that has \$1.1 billion in deficit after you write off \$2 billion, that used up \$5 billion in 10 years and the

Government comes and restructures that company, you see it as race! Go to the *Hansard*. On the very day that Caroni lands were vested in Caroni (1975) Limited, Minister Mervyn de Souza made the vesting order in this House, Basdeo Panday responded, a very short response, and his response was talking about saving the sugar industry.

From the very day Caroni (1975) Limited was born as a state agency, the challenge of saving the industry was there but this Government had the will to act and treat with this situation and “they talking race”. I mean, the vitriol of the Member for Couva North against the Minister did not destroy this country only because we are a stronger people, because when I heard how he spoke about the Minister’s action, governmental action, personalized it against the Minister, if this was a different country the Minister could not walk the street, and that is what they want, you know, that is what they want. However, our people are smarter than that, whether they are Indians, Chinese, Tobagonians, where, whatever, “we smarter than that”. [*Desk thumping*]

That is why when we talk about Vision 2020 we talk about looking at countries that have done well and trying to see what they did well to see what we can learn from those countries in building our own circumstances. So we talk about Norway, Ireland, Costa Rica, Chile, Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan. Those are the countries the PNM looked at, not to be like any of them but they all went through what we are going through now and we do not have to reinvent the wheel, we can look and see what they did and learn from their experiences. Who do they look at when they see Trinidad and Tobago?

Hear my friend, the Member for St. Augustine. “When one looks at the world today, for example where the nation state failed”, so we are looking at success to learn from success, they are looking at failures to learn how to mash up the country. Hear their examples—Haiti, Colombia, Guyana, Somalia, Yugoslavia and Rwanda. [*Laughter*] Those are the examples that they look at and they want to add Trinidad and Tobago to that list. Haiti—an example of all that is bad in humankind in the world, ignored by the world, internal strife—trying to build that here; Colombia—the origin of cocaine and the killers; Guyana—the less said the better; Somalia, where at one time anarchy reigned, no government whatsoever in Somalia a few years ago; Yugoslavia—that is the land of Bosnia, Herzegovina. That is the place where the term “ethnic cleansing” was coined and, of course, Rwanda where genocide was demonstrated in the recent past. Those are the UNC examples for Trinidad and Tobago. So there is method in their madness. [*Desk thumping*]

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When the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Fyzabad and others spend all their time trying to stoke racial war in this country, they know what they are trying to achieve, but the people of this country are smarter than that and they will stay resigned temporarily in their position because they are on their way out of that too in the not too distant future. [*Desk thumping*] It only disturbs me that it was their so-called intellectual, the Member for St. Augustine, who carried this argument in this way. I expected better from him.

Mr. Speaker, while the PNM produces a budget and we are talking about empowering our people, talking about building the finest community in the world—we can aspire to that; we may never achieve it but we can aspire to it—while our leader is telling the country, “If you are downtrodden and you need help the Government will support you, we will give you support”—[*Interruption*] the country’s leader in case you do not know. “Maybe yuh neck too short to see him.”—[*Desk thumping*]—while we are telling our people that we brought together all our talent to design this Vision 2020, our road map, and if we do it right we can craft a life for us equal to anywhere in the world, that is our vision, what are they offering our people?

Newsday Tuesday, October 14, hear what they are offering people. Basdeo Panday tell supporters “Be ready for jail”. So while we are offering you a future, a bright future, based on the promise of our natural resources, our foundation and our intellect, Basdeo Panday is offering his supporters jail. It says:

“Former Prime Minister and Opposition Leader Basdeo Panday...called on his supporters to join him...”

Of course join him because when you are before the court there is a good chance you could go to jail, “eh”, you could get off:

“to join him...that they—have to do even if it means ‘going to prison 300, 400 or 500 at a time everyday.’

He said, ‘we have to go to prison by the 300, 400 and 500 and when they lock up the first 500, we must have 500 more...’

That is because Basdeo Panday, my friend, the Member for Couva North, the Opposition Leader, believes that “Indian people stupid”. If he is going to jail I guarantee him he is going alone. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I will dismiss the comment from the Member for St. Joseph that this budget is based on no plan so it can take us nowhere. I think I have said enough to debunk that. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance spoke about

this idea of the resources running out was a concern since 1905. That is what he was saying. He said he saw a document since 1905 saying that the people then were worried about it running out. It is something that will be with us all the time, no matter how big your reserves are—Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Nigeria. It is a wasting asset.

We do not need a lecture on a wasting asset running out, but then, you know, what I took issue with is being advised about how to manage this asset by the Member for St. Joseph because he was an architect, or as my friend, the Member over there would say, an “archeetect”—I think it was page 14 in the NAR manifesto. They so misunderstood this country’s potential that in 1986 when they were writing this manifesto and my friend, the Member for St. Joseph, was an “archeetect”, do you know what they wrote in here? I heard him praising Point Lisas. Some one of them, the Member for Couva South, was saying that Point Lisas is one of the finest industrial complexes anywhere in the world. He did not tell you that when they were the “archeetects” of this manifesto it was the opposite. It was the worst idea any government in the world could have had. However, once again, as we did then, as we are doing now, the PNM stuck with its commitment to good sense and in the end good sense prevailed. [*Desk thumping*]

They tried to cry down Point Lisas, to show that the PNM was wrong, that we were irresponsible and we had no vision and “we this and we that”, they wrote in their manifesto as a commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that under their stewardship this country will never invest in any megaproject again. That is in this manifesto, “eh”, of my friend, the Member for St. Joseph and his sidekick, the Member for St. Augustine. They were the two architects of this manifesto and they wrote in this manifesto misunderstanding the Point Lisas experience. Today, through Point Lisas, we are the world’s leading supplier/exporter of methanol and urea, we have a number of methanol plants, the steel industry has expanded and we now export LNG. I mean, our prospect for a good life in the future is now based on the opposite of what was written in their manifesto.

Left to them alone there would have been no other methanol plant built in this country. That was their manifesto commitment. Left to them alone there would have been no LNG in this country. That was their manifesto commitment. Left to them alone there would have been no expansion in anything in the industrial complex because their understanding, as guided by my friend, the Member for St. Augustine, was some Mickey Mouse economics that we all sell to each other here and all be happy. We understood our potential as players on the world stage and today we are players on the world stage. [*Desk thumping*] So when you hear

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them talking now, it is not the first time they have spoken, it is just the most recent event of their misunderstanding of the potential of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank God for the PNM! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, there was one gentleman, the Member for Caroni Central, Minister of Health, who said to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, “Forget the money allocated. There will be no improvement.” I want to correct something he also said. He said that the Ministry of Health was allocated \$78 million and they only spent 58 and he tried to chastise my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin East. Mr. Speaker, I want to go on record, miserable as he is, the Minister of Health is one of the finest ministers any government ever had in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

As a performer, at the Ministry of Planning and Development, we told the Ministry of Health that, notwithstanding what is allocated in the budget, \$78 million, if the Ministry’s development programme exceeds that, the Government would be able to pack it up. In fact, not only did the Ministry of Health utilize the \$78 million, they exceeded it to the point where we were able to have a development programme, actual expenditure, of \$108 million [*Desk thumping*] in the health programme and the reason for that is this, Mr. Speaker. We were behind hand on the health reform programme.

Let me take this opportunity to correct the misinformation put on the record by my friend, the Member for Caroni Central, because, being a former Minister of Health, anybody hearing him talk, and, being a Member of the Opposition, they will believe what he has said is the truth. Mr. Speaker, in 1996, and I am reading here from a Cabinet Note of September 22, 2003, reporting on July 12, 1996, the government signed an agreement, the UNC government, with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) for a US \$134 million loan to reform the health sector. Those discussions started under the PNM, were concluded under the UNC and they signed the loan on July 12, 1996.

According to the work programme for that loan, by December 1997 they should have spent \$156 million of that loan—TT dollars. Do you know how much they spent? One fifty-six to be spent, they spent 22. Out of 156 they spent 22. By September of ’98 they should have spent 344; they spent 44. By the end of the next year—target 529, they spent 69. By the following year, 2000, they should have spent 718 million, they spent 174 million. By the end of the next year they should have spent 893, they spent 290. Now, what happened there? It meant that the life of the loan was expiring.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues for the extension. So they come here trying to point fingers at this Government and this Minister of Health when their record is that the life of the loan was expiring and, when they should have spent \$1.2 billion in the programme to which they committed, they spent \$557 million. The bank then was going to close the loan and the people of Trinidad and Tobago would have been denied this loan for the health sector reform but then there is a change of government and I came into this portfolio as Minister of Planning and Development.

I spent the first nine months, Mr. Speaker, trying to persuade the bank to give this new PNM Government a chance. We said to them, "We can do it. Give us an extension and we will do what our colleagues did not do in the previous five-year period." I met with the bank's president in Brazil last year in May and, as part of the initiative to change our image in the bank, I invited the president of the bank to come to see us in Trinidad and Tobago, "Come and visit us, see that we have a new dispensation, see that we are serious and we will work out this thing". The president of the bank agreed to come and he came here. The UNC launched one attack on the president calling for his impeachment. They wrote Washington asking that he be impeached because he came here to see what was going on in Trinidad and Tobago to find out why we could not meet our commitments.

What is worse, Mr. Speaker, we had our friend, the Member for Siparia, talking about commitment fees. You see, when you borrow these moneys and you sign the contract, you have to pay a certain amount of money every quarter, whether you draw the money down or not. While these moneys were not being drawn down to reform the health sector, we were paying these millions of dollars in commitment fees. I have the record. If you think it is health alone, you only have to look at the education system. It was probably even worse there because at that time we also had an education loan and our friend, the Member for Siparia, had a lot to say about the education loan, she had a lot to say to the Minister of Education and the press spoke about her fiery presentation and how, "She lick up Manning's presentation"; all of it "licked up" with a tissue of lies.

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Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, this blue book is the Forty-First Annual Report of the Board of Governors of the Inter-American Development Bank, Fifteenth Meeting held in New Orleans, Louisiana on March 27, 2000. It reports on the 1999 period when that same colleague of mine, the Member for Siparia, was the Minister of Education overseeing the education loan portfolio. If you heard her talk the other day you would have thought that she was some champion performer. Let me tell you what the bank was saying to the whole world in Louisiana where a UNC Minister was present and had this document so she knows about it. Listen to what the bank told the world in this document.

“Projects Experiencing Lengthy Implementation Delays in 1999

Trinidad and Tobago

- Agriculture Sector Loan
- Agriculture Sector Reform
- Health Sector Reform Program
- Pre-investment Program II
- National Highway Program”

In other words, the whole bank portfolio was classified under “Projects Experiencing Lengthy Implementation Delays in 1999” but this report said, under “Country Performance”:

“The analysis at the individual country level has shown that for the third consecutive year, Trinidad and Tobago has had the worst performing portfolio in the Constituency. Of the 11 active operations in that country almost one-half received unsatisfactory ratings, including one project, the Health Sector Reform Program, that received the lowest rating possible in terms of prospects for achieving its development objectives and implementation progress.”

That is the bank’s report. Our Health Sector Reform Programme was the worst one for the bank in the world but he comes here—while I spent my whole year begging the bank, giving them a PNM commitment, “Give us a chance and we will do it” and thankfully the bank agreed. [*Desk thumping*] So because the bank agreed we were able to initiate the Tobago construction, the Scarborough hospital and the San Fernando hospital, and this Minister has broken a record this year, performance 140 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] That was 1999. You would think—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, order.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: After that dismal report in Louisiana, the next year, March 2000, the meeting took place in Santiago, Chile. You think they pulled up their socks? No. The report for Trinidad and Tobago, page 17:

“Country Performance

The analysis at the individual country level has shown that for the fourth consecutive year, Trinidad & Tobago has had the worst performing portfolio in the Constituency.”

This is for 2000. This is the March 2001 report for the year 2000. Who was in government then?

Mr. Imbert: Them.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Them.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Then for 2002 it reports for the year 2001. It says, and I am talking about the portfolio management, Trinidad and Tobago. This one, the meeting took place in Milan, Italy and, unfortunately, I was there representing Trinidad and Tobago. I was ashamed; I was embarrassed. The report was:

“At the end of 2002, Trinidad and Tobago had a portfolio of eight loans in execution, with an average age of six and a half years old.”

A six-year loan, six and a half years old, so the loan period expired with those kinds of reports.

“These approved loans amounted to US \$443.5 million of which US \$128.5 million...had been disbursed, leaving an undisbursed balance of US \$315.0 million.”

However, my colleague, the Member for Siparia, comes here to misrepresent and gives the impression that we have not spent loan funds available to us. This is the report. It says:

“Of the total loan amount the Secondary Education Reform and the Health Sector Reform Programs account for 54%...Highway Program...27%.”

These projects:

“...were classified as problem projects and unlikely to achieve their development objectives.”

That was the bank’s position. As Minister of Planning and Development of Trinidad and Tobago I have to spend my time begging the bank cajoling and

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working with my staff, the Permanent Secretary as the director, I as governor, to try to give us the opportunity and we have been given that opportunity. That is why the Minister of Works and Transport could have reported what we are doing now and it will be done. The Minister of Health reported it is being done. The Minister of Education reported it is being done. We are changing this country's face at the bank. [*Desk thumping*]

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I need not say anymore about this, except that if one goes to another document, one will understand why this is happening. Other bank documents will show that the bank was warning the Government and withdrawing its support because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had a problem with procurement. All of that nonuse of the cheap funds, 4 per cent interest on those moneys, our colleagues on the other side not using it, at 4 per cent interest, but they were borrowing money at 11½ per cent interest in the local market and trying to do the project. Why? Because if they use the bank's moneys, the bank is insistent that they have to have proper tendering procedures to eliminate corruption.

They chose to borrow money and spend as they see fit with no bank oversight. So they denied the people of Trinidad and Tobago hundreds of millions of dollars at 4 per cent interest while they incurred debt at 11.5 per cent interest costing us hundreds of millions of dollars in repayment over the life of the loan. That is the prudent management that they spoke about yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, my friend from Siparia said that the World Bank programme had been stopped by the bank and it has not performed, and so forth. Nothing is further from the truth. I quote for you from page 4 of the bank's report: Ministry of Education Overall Assessment of the Basic Education Project Sustainability and Performance.

It says:

“—achievement of most of the Project stated objectives and the rectification of initial difficulties in Project implementation. This is made evident by a very satisfactory financial disbursement rate of nearly 93.9 %, which compares favorably with other World Bank financed education projects in the Latin America and the Caribbean Region.”

While that is the report, while their report was the worst you could read about poor performance, when the bank reports that all is well, 93.9 per cent

performance, the former Minister comes here and misleads the country with a tissue of untruths.

Mr. Speaker, we can demonstrate, but there is one thing I want to demonstrate and take issue. I spoke at my constituency conference a few weeks ago and I said that this year we were very disappointed with the performance of our students at the CXC level. But I also said, and I am saying it again, that if we think we had bad results this year, in 2005 the results will be horrendous, and I am putting the country on notice that in 2005, the results will be horrendous. They come here and say I am attacking my colleague, the Minister of Health. No! I am speaking as a parent, as a citizen, as a Minister. I am speaking about the reality of the education outturn, because we have thousands of children in Trinidad and Tobago who are just passing through school.

I know, and anybody else should know what it means to get the opportunity to go to high school. I was the first person in my family to go to high school, and it made a difference. But you see, Mr. Speaker, when we knowingly railroad primary school children who have not met the basic minimum standards into high school and I have been asking a question from day one, when you put those children in high school, what curriculum are they following? Are they following a primary school curriculum? If the answer is yes, then what are they doing in high school? If the answer is no, that they are following a secondary curriculum, then if they are not up to basic primary school standards, how can they be expected to follow a secondary curriculum? But, as a result of the politics in the education system in the year 2000, thousands of children are in high school now waiting to fail.

Mr. Speaker, I want to demonstrate to you one of the most criminal acts ever done by any government to any people and their children. In 1999, the UNC entered into a loan with the IDB. The objective of the loan was after a six-year period or over a six-year period, the Government would build a certain number of schools, would address the primary school situation, and over that period, the objective at the end will be that all children at 11-plus would move smoothly into high school. That was the loan agreement that they signed in 1999.

I want to quote to you from a document dated February 17, 2000. Mr. Speaker, take note. The year 2000 was the general election. The UNC was under pressure. February 17, 2000 they entered into an agreement for this programme to put all primary school children in secondary school, but the plan was, it would have been done over a seven-year period. So, in the first year, they will prepare, year one. In year two they would build five schools, fill those schools with more

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students. Year three, five more. Year four, four more. Year five, three more. Year six, three more.

That arrangement would have seen prepared students very smoothly moving into high school. They had the loan for that, and the bank was supporting that but, as part of their political difficulty in 2000, they decided to use the nation's children as part of their election campaign for 2000, so out of the blue, we wake up one morning and we hear that all primary school children who write the exam will be going to high school, pass, fail, ready or not. Even where there was no school.

Imagine, she has the unmitigated gall to come here and say, as the newspapers quoted my colleague from Siparia saying, that we are building factories to put criminals and dropouts. This was the Minister who put a school in a furniture store with no window on Sackville Street. Mr. Speaker, \$30 million worth of warehouse as a school right now not being used—condemned—but comes here and talks about us building factories for dropouts.

When they entered into the IDB programme to very orderly put children into high school, they crammed that whole programme into the year 2000, and that is why we had children being put on top “rum shop”, in Pastor Cuffy’s basement and elsewhere in the country. That is not what they arranged with the bank. They had US \$134 million to put an orderly programme in place. They chose for election purposes, education for all now! So, children who had difficulty reading and writing were put in secondary school. They went to Form I. They went to Form II. They are going to end up in Form V and they have to write CXC. What do you expect, Mr. Speaker?

When I tell you, Mr. Speaker, that in 2005, when the CXC results come in, we will see horrendous results because those children who were not ready for high school are in high school and have virtually no chance of passing CXC exams and they have the UNC to thank for that. [*Desk thumping*] Because even as they put them in high school, we asked, what was the remedial programme for them? None. It was all pure naked politics to be able to say that, “We put all your children in high school”, and poor parents who are happy to have their children go to high school, you have to ask yourself, it is not that my children are going to high school. It is what are they not doing in the school. What are their chances of benefiting from the opportunity in the high school? This was the most criminal act! [*Desk thumping*]

While this money was available, they did not draw it down. They went and borrowed money to award contracts without bank oversight, without

transparency, without accountability. All of that is now in the lap of the People's National Movement to fix and, by God, we will fix it. [*Desk thumping*] They must not get up here and try to mislead the public that they had any tenure and that they had not left us a legacy so horrendous that, Mr. Speaker, your grandchild will still be paying for their actions.

The bank is now quite happy with Trinidad and Tobago. When we look at the projections in the budget, you will see that by September 2004, according to the target for health programme, it should have been at \$764 million. It is now \$557 million, and when you add the \$200 million we allocate in the budget, you will see us in the order of \$750 million, which is bringing us back on track to where we should have been from the beginning and the bank is quite happy with that. We are now in a position to make full use of the bank's resources, not only in this programme, but future programmes. The Minister of Works and Transport is pulling that programme back on track.

The bank said to us, Trinidad and Tobago, in Brazil, the bank is not in the business of making money from Trinidad and Tobago. "We are a development bank and we are only interested in lending you money, not to make money, but to develop Trinidad and Tobago." Trinidad and Tobago, in the period 1997—1999, under this UNC government paid US \$7.9 million. That is approximately TT \$50 million to the IDB, commitment fees. The highest in the region.

Paying out money to the bank while not using the bank's money to borrow. That is the record! I had to spend time convincing the bank that Trinidad and Tobago will do business differently. We will not be a net payer of money to the bank. We will be drawing down the loan funds and the bank will be our development instrument, as we have done it over the decades.

The IDB is the single largest supplier of development funds to Trinidad and Tobago, and if it had been allowed to close its doors to Trinidad and Tobago as a result of what I have just described, this country would have been denied its major source of development funding. Why would Trinidad and Tobago be spending \$50 million in commitment fees to a development bank when there is need to spend the money—you agreed to spend the money, you signed the loan contract to spend the money. San Fernando Hospital is overcrowded. Instead of doing that, they were doing other things for six years.

Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of other matters that were raised. One of them was that the Member for Siparia goes on *Hansard* and says "Vision 2020 will wreck this country". That is a hope. When I tell you that they really want to see

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us self-destruct, why would a sensible person say that a national strategic plan will wreck the country? If we are saying we will develop the country with no plan and she said that, I would say it is reasonable, but we are going out of our way and foreigners are helping us, you know.

The Government of Costa Rica, seeing and hearing what we are doing, they sent us assistance by way of a former Minister of Planning. He came down here to give us his experience as to how Costa Rica did what it did. Foreigners trying to help us! United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). One of the most excitable persons on this project is Dr. Halstrop at UNDP. The IDB is helping us with the programme. The Chileans are offering to help us, but a Member of the Parliament is saying that this programme will wreck the country. They have an expectation that they will succeed.

That is why of all the countries, cities, states and regions that are using this kind of approach for development, Vision 2020, the Member for Couva North, our Opposition Leader, chose to focus on Malaysia to tell you that we are copying the Malaysian model in Trinidad and Tobago, the reason being is that he is hooked into his racial arrangements, because in the Malaysian situation, Malaysia is peculiar. Malaysia has a population that is diverse; not quite like ours, but diverse.

Malays make up 58 per cent of Malaysia; Chinese, 34 per cent; Hindus and other people, the minority, and Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who is an international figure, and the government, they have pursued a very aggressive and controversial approach in Malaysia whereby by virtue of some kind of abrasive and controversial affirmative action, they have adjusted the balance of power in Malaysia to put the Malay population in control *permanente* by governance.

That is the example that he raises here signaling to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to one columnist who wrote that that is what we are trying to do. Trying to invoke in our Vision 2020 some arrangement of racial balancing of the successes. So whereas Malaysia tried to suppress the Chinese population and raise up the Malay to bring balance according to them, he is saying that we are trying to do that. I want to put on record that we are doing no such thing in Trinidad and Tobago. This is for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

To give you an example of the blatantness of their untruths, my friend from Siparia got up here and said, and I want to quote what was printed in the newspapers because the public would have read this. They printed, that:

“Manning—”

Meaning the Minister of Education.

“—had recently agreed to a proposal that only the first thousand children who sit this year’s Secondary Education Assessment Exam would be able to attend their first choice school, while the remainder will be distributed by lottery.”

That was said in this House by the Member for Siparia. Mr. Speaker, that is a lie!

Mr. Speaker: Say untruths, Sir.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, is the word “lie” unparliamentary?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I withdraw it. That is a fabrication, a vicious falsehood and is meant to cause disquiet to parents who have children who are writing exams in this country. Everything they do has a negative objective! This is meant to disturb parents. No such thing has come to the Government. No such policy exists. No such policy will exist in this country.

When you see prestige schools, 28,000 children writing exams, they all or most of them would put the prestige school as their first choice, but only some of them can go there. There is no lottery after that. There is no lottery in the school system. After that it is straight merit and geography. So, when a former Education Minister comes in here and tells the country that the Minister of Education has agreed to put children in school by lottery and limit only 1,000 children to their first choice, she is seeking to create discord in this country.

I have no doubt that there is a deliberate attempt on the part of Members opposite to create social, racial and economic discord in Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] and statements like these have that objective. That is why every time they raise it, we will rebut it, because it is not true. She comes here, my friend from Siparia, and she wants to ask why has construction not taken place with two schools in the Debe area—Shiva Boys and Parvatee Girls. Those two schools. I could have joined her and asked in the same breath, why have the two schools in Westmoorings not been constructed? But if I had said that, I would not have had available to me the follow up.

The reason the two schools in a PNM stronghold have not been constructed is because they are Methodist, Anglican, Tobagonian, what? But she had available to her, it is because they are Hindus. That is their attitude. So the Government is having difficulty building two schools in an area, and she invokes into it, racial

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discord. I want to answer, the reason the schools were not constructed is because they chose a site in a swamp, flood-prone, the technicians have advised that the schools cannot be built there because the area is a flood-prone swamp, and we are now going through the CEC and the EMA to get a new site approved to build the school.

Finally, those two schools are the only two schools in the loan programme which are being built for a private church. No other religious school is being built by IDB funds and I want to ask the Government, at what point in time did they tear up the Concordat? In this country we have a concordat—state and church—but somehow, under the UNC, they are able to violate the Concordat, throw it out the window, and go build two schools for one particular religion, and I am asking, is it that—

Mr. Singh: We also built the Anglican schools. Racial motives.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Race? I am not the one who invoked race in the school location. It was the Member for Siparia who asked whether the reason the schools were not built is because they are Hindus. The answer is no! It is because there are difficulties with the site. [*Desk thumping*] In Westmoorings they were not built because there are difficulties with the roadway. It has nothing to do with race.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity. These issues can be addressed over and over, and we intend to address them over and over. This budget is a good budget for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I support it. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to join the debate—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you continue, please, let me appeal again to Members to observe some decorum in the House. While the Member is speaking, please try and listen to him. As I said, if you cannot, the tearoom is open. Please let us try to hear his contribution.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will try my best to keep the tone down and maintain some calmness in the midst of what was a very loud—I would not say racist, but others would—a sort of raving lunatic type of contribution we heard for the last 75 minutes.

Several matters have been raised by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West and I am certain that the Member for Caroni East, when he addresses the House

later, would deal with some of these issues as they pertain to bank loans, and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that when this hon. Member is caught with his pants down, wherever, and he has been accused quite rightfully of undermining the wife of the Prime Minister and Minister of Education, he came back into this House to play clever with stupidity, and sought again to cast aspersions on the integrity and credibility of the Minister of Education and suggest to us that children will be doomed by the year 2005 because of policies undertaken by the UNC government and, because of those policies of, according to the other side, placing children who are unable to cope with secondary education into the secondary school system, that would lead to some chaos and failure and drop out.

As if suggesting to this House, and more so suggesting to his Prime Minister that the Minister of Education is unable to address the issues as they relate to curriculum development, address the issues as they relate to dealing with children at all levels in the education system, and address issues as they deal with upgrading the quality of education in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the point. That whatever may be the problems in the education system and the levels at which the children are, it is left to the Minister of Education and the Ministry of Education, in partnership with other ministries, to address those problems.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is wrong for a Minister of Government to send that message to the children and to the parents of this country that their child got into secondary school because of the ill-advised policies of the UNC and they are doomed to fail in 2005. That is the thinking that led to a lost generation of the '80s. That is the thinking, when they conveyed the message to thousands of children in this country that they are hopeless, they are doomed, they cannot get through the secondary school system and they are not of university quality, and we heard it today.

Mr. Speaker, the time has changed, but I am not surprised that an International Monetary Fund team came to Trinidad and it was at pains to point out to this Government that their social sector programme is built on sand, and warned this Government not to waste and squander the resources that they are getting from the oil and gas sector.

When that IMF team came to Trinidad, they would have seen different faces, but I tell you, they would have recognized that Balisier tie and they would have looked at that tie in shock, in awe and say, "Oh my God! It is the same bunch from the 1970s that wasted \$60 billion during the oil boom!" So I am not

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surprised that the conservative IMF team would have warned this Government about their spending.

Mr. Speaker, if you listen to those on the other side you will think really that all is merry, all is good. You would not believe that this is a country in which the general hospital in San Fernando issued a press release and told citizens “Do not come here. If you need healthcare, go somewhere else. We are not prepared.”

You would not believe that this is a country where a police station closed down in Gasparillo and moved into a school. You would not believe that this is a country that has a national library and the library banned schools. Have you ever heard about that in your life? I have heard about banning students. A student might be noisy, and so on. This is a library in Port of Spain that banned schools. This happened in Trinidad and Tobago, and we are on our way to Vision 2020. That is Vision 2020!

This is a country where the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation presents himself to this honourable House, 178 murders and counting. Today is 182, around there maybe, but on that day when he spoke, it was 178. Parents are waiting to hear from kidnappers. The Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation came here and told us do not worry. He is dealing with passport fraud. We have a radar system to come into effect next six months. It was surreal.

I believe a few months ago in preparation for a major change in my life, I was asked to read a book entitled *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, by Dr. John Gray, 1992 edition. Notwithstanding why I was asked to read that book, I believe that the Minister is from Mars and the Attorney General might be from Venus! They are not of this world. They are of their own world.

The statistics on crime tell the story. I have been here sitting and listening attentively. I have been taking my notes, and so on, and on the last occasion, on the last evening, Mr. Speaker, you would recognize that I lost my cool, and the only time I did, I could not accept the hypocrisy of the other side.

When one gets into bed with criminal elements for the sake of winning a marginal seat, one embraces them on election day to help one get 50 more votes and keep 50 more people home. One embraces them. Then, when they go back to their jobs, which really is criminal activity, one comes to this House and sheds crocodile tears in that moment of hysteria and emotional outburst about crime. It reminds me of the former president who said he puffed but he did not inhale. They walked with criminals on election day, but then condemned that after. That

is gross hypocrisy, and coming from Members for whom I had some respect. It came from a Member for whom I had respect. It is hypocrisy that they are in bed with the criminal elements. The average citizen knows that.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the average citizen knows that there is a reason we cannot deal with crime in this country, so whether you appoint Peter Joseph, Tommy Joseph or Learie Joseph, it makes no difference. The PNM cannot deal with crime because they are in bed with the criminal elements. I challenge the Member for San Fernando East, if in the month of November the murder rate is cut by 50 per cent, I would give him my parliamentary salary, as meager as it may be; but I know it would not be cut, because they are part and parcel of the problem. And now they want to play holier than thou!

I challenge the Member for San Fernando East to bring his family Bible to the House; I really want to see it. I suspect he may be down to seven commandments, at this time. They ignore certain fundamental principles that are important to govern a country, and that is the problem they now face.

It was just 22 months ago in this country that we were debating education for all; a technology centre; we were talking about dollar-for-dollar education. I would come to that later. We were also talking about a nest egg for the newborn. Incidentally, the British Labour Party this year adopted a nest egg policy for newborn children. [*Desk thumping*] When we were doing that, they were conspiring to remove the then government.

I want them to never ever forget that they got into office through an 18/18 situation, where they did not have the popular vote. The will of the people was defeated when they assumed 100 per cent of the government. I would not be against them if they had assumed 50 per cent of the government; they had 50 per cent of the seats, but the will of the people was violated. When you get into power that way, what do you expect in a society like this one? You will continue with fraud. Then they gave themselves one year, enough time to give away money and employ criminal elements to retain a parliamentary majority; and so said so done. The country is now experiencing the evil forces that follow from that type of grab for power.

Mr. Speaker, when you get into office by democratic means, under free and fair elections, the society feels free; there is a sense of ease; your policies register; there is little social instability. But when you come into office the way they did, you cannot help it, but the society will not have a certain amount of ease or confidence in the government, because it is a minority government.

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They gave away \$1 billion, and they employed criminal elements and got 1,200 more votes over five seats, and they are proud of that. The good Minister from Ortoire/Mayaro, whom I will talk about later, knows what I am talking about. He knows the names of the people who went up there and assisted. He knows about giving away water tanks and so forth, and taking them back after the election. There is a cruel irony here: those people who embraced criminal elements in Ortoire/Mayaro are now complaining that people have threatened to kidnap them in Westmoorings, Woodbrook or wherever they live.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, those persons who embraced the elements are now being kidnapped. They want police protection; they want guards. I hope they send MTS guards and not waste the police time. This is the irony of those who presided over the legitimization of criminal elements, now complaining that people are trying to kidnap them.

This budget lacks vision, purpose, clarity and depth. It is not, “We care”, but “Who cares”. What bothers us is not the policy contradictions between education, investment and labour policy, it is the attitude of the other side: It matters not; we have gas and oil. I listened to the Member for Port of Spain South, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. I was waiting to hear it, but the only thing he did not say was that, initially, Trinidad and Tobago was located somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea or in the Pacific Ocean, and the PNM pulled these islands here. His speech was, “We are lucky that we have oil and gas, and a foreign private sector would develop that and help us so that we would have good growth figures,” and so on. That is their perspective.

When the Member for St. Augustine presented to this House a critical appraisal of the Government, commenting on their economic and social policy and their ideology, he gave a brilliant presentation. [*Desk thumping*] What was their response? Regrettably, they sent in the Member for Arouca North to bat, after the Member for St. Augustine spoke. The Member for Arouca North crystallized the difference between the PNM and the UNC. He said that he Member for St. Augustine was using fancy words. That is the problem, we are using fancy words. Then, of course, my friend from Arouca North got into the material that he is comfortable with, discussing Dog Patch Avenue in Penal, and so on. Their response is that the Member for St. Augustine used fancy words.

I remember an experience I had on Monday, October 06, 2003, when innocent citizens were brutalized in Chaguanas. When Dr. Kirk Meighoo, the political scientist, was detained by the police, he kept shouting from the back of the police van, “What am I charged for?” It was a call for reason, for logic. After asking

the police officer 12 times, the police officer looked him in the face and said, “Doh spit on me, yuh know!” [*Laughter*] Two worlds came together. Likewise, we had a similar experience yesterday: a social and economic critique of the Government to be followed by, “You are using fancy words”. That is the difference that we have to deal with.

I will try to deal with the issues of employment and labour policy as they relate to our industrial strategy and developing this country. It is clear to us on this side that there can be no sustainable development or growth, unless we create a labour market that will sustain the competitive economy, which is what the Member for St. Augustine spoke about. It is in that area the PNM Government has all but given up. They are presiding over a process that will wreck the labour market and have long-term implications for this country’s development. I would attempt to deal with some of the issues.

In the period 1995 to 2001, we are proud that we created over 80,000 new jobs in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We are proud of our job-creating record. We are proud that the majority of those jobs came from the productive sector, manufacturing, services, the retail and distributive trades and so on; we are proud of that achievement. What is their response? Their response is to come to the country and produce a job-creating plan that is really a dozen 10-days programmes held together.

The PNM, whether it is the new or old or any PNM, have a fixation with 10-days; it is both historical and pathological. It might be the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP), Geriatric Adolescent Programme (GAP), Helping Youths Prepare for Employment (HYPE), On-the-Job Training (OJT), military led this or the Citizens Conservation Corps (CCC); it may be whatever, but it will be 10-days, short-term, low-wage, low-skill, outside of the productive sector, and will not contribute anything to this country’s economic sustainability. That is how they operate.

In the area of the development of small and micro business enterprises, there are several reports produced over the years by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Employers Consultative Association, indeed, by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and by several organizations inside and outside of Trinidad and Tobago, to which I would make reference later on. They advised that one direction all governments should move in, whether PNM, NAR or UNC, is the creation of small business. It is widely held that small business development will create sustainable jobs. In the United Kingdom and

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the United States the figures are there. In all the developed countries, it is the small and medium sized businesses that create jobs that are sustainable.

This Government does not know how to create jobs in the productive sector. It presides over an economic decline in the non-energy sector; manufacturers and investors are leaving Trinidad and Tobago. Kings Jewelry, a Guyanese investor, chartered a plane to take all his goods out, he said that he felt safer in Georgetown than in Trinidad. Imagine Guyanese investors leaving! Twenty jobs were lost. I will come later to figures for the loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector.

The Government came to us with another scam, a scheme to create micro entrepreneurs through the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO). When we first heard of this, we knew their record and their pattern, and we knew it was a scam. They launched the programme on August 01, 2002 at a gala ceremony on the Brian Lara Promenade. We were told by the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development that the launch cost, easily, \$112,756.50.

We were asking all the time that the Minister tell us the names of the recipients of these loans; we wanted to know who these people were. Of course, we had in mind our experience with the CEPEP contractors who are, generally, general council members of PNM. We suspected that these NEDCO loans would be in the same direction, in that, it would really be party activists, supporters, relatives and so on. More than that, they could be some elements to whom money was being filtered through NEDCO loans, under the guise of small business and wanting to create entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker, they want to create entrepreneurs through NEDCO, while crime is running all the entrepreneurs out of Trinidad and Tobago; that is the paradox there. We pressed the Government to give us the names of the recipients. We heard from the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development that as of October 31, 2002, the sum of \$17.4 million was disbursed in loans. Now, something sounds a bit fishy there. Even by PNM standards, that is a bit difficult to understand. If the programme was launched on August 01, 2002, and as of October 31, 2002, \$17.4 million was distributed, something must be wrong.

In the period between August 01 and October 31, we have calculated that there would have been, more or less, 63 working days. If you have 63 working days in that short period, and you give out \$17.4 million, that arithmetic suggests to us that you have given out almost \$277,000 per day. October 07, 2002 was the general election, keep that in mind, and they gave out money like that. Money going left, right and centre.

In San Fernando we have heard, and we know of one character who got a NEDCO loan. He produced an invoice, went to the NEDCO office and borrowed money. He got a loan of \$30,000 to pay back in five years, then he was convicted of attempted murder. He got seven years in jail. He has five years to pay back the loan, and seven years in jail. [*Laughter*] That is what we have picked up on the ground; that is the scam of this NEDCO.

In the budget statement the Prime Minister indicated to us at page 12, when he was dealing with NEDCO, that in the small business sector the Government disbursed through NEDCO over \$30 million in loans to small entrepreneurs to expand business activity. However, when we look at page 40 of the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2004* under NEDCO, we see that in 2003 new businesses were started and jobs created at an estimated expenditure of \$19,556,000. This is not just a matter of \$10 million we cannot account for between the budget and the Social Sector Investment Programme.

It is not as bad as with the CEPEP. Under CEPEP, when you look at page 81 of the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2004*, the estimated expenditure for 2003 is \$48,000,268. Mr. Speaker, when you look at page 38 of the same document, the estimated expenditure for CEPEP in 2003 is \$184,000,671. Now, that is just a difference of \$138 million; added to the \$10 million that would be \$148 million. And we want to know where all this oil and gas money going; that is it.

Then they cannot find the money from the Green Fund, which is \$200 million. The Chairman said that he does not know where the money had gone. The Prime Minister assured us that he would find it, but even if he did, it could go into CEPEP, because it could be charged on that account. We got his assurance, and so on. Mr. Speaker, \$138 million cannot be accounted for in the Social Sector Investment Programme 2004 in CEPEP. That is only two; I have more to go there.

I want to speak more on NEDCO because small and micro enterprise development is a pillar of job creation in industrialized economies. You have to create jobs. When you corrupt, pollute and taint these types of programmes, you impede job creation, and you use it to transfer money from the Treasury straight to the pockets of the criminals. Then you declare war on the criminals!

Mr. Speaker, it is said that poor generals always fight the last war, and this is the last war. You say that the gloves are off. I suspect that might be unparliamentary language, if not conduct, but you come here with these statements, you declare war, as if the criminals are sitting on the Brian Lara

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Promenade looking at a big screen television, shaking in their boots, trembling at the knees of this declaration of war by the Prime Minister. That is why I am so angry with this NEDCO fiasco, because it is a genuine and tested policy prescription to promote jobs, and they are in the process of polluting it.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development will have a chance to reply in this budget debate. I cannot imagine that they would hide the names of the recipients of NEDCO loans and hide the Minister as well. It is not physically possible, but the scandal continues. I have in my possession a document, Estimate of the Funding Requirements for 2003/2004 from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, NEDCO, prepared by the finance manager of NEDCO. The finance manager indicates the programmes for 2003/2004, deficit financing estimated to the tune of \$99 million over the two-year period.

What is fascinating about this data is that NEDCO has anticipated losses in the years 2003 to 2004, 2005 to 2006. Mr. Speaker, hear the magnitude of those losses: \$28 million to be lost in 2003/2004; 2004/2005, \$25 million; 2005/2006, \$21; a whopping \$75 million estimated to be lost by NEDCO over that three-year period. I will come back to that.

There is another issue. The operating cost for the bureaucracy: development support services, training, special projects, networking, marketing, technology, and so on, is estimated to cost in 2003/2004, \$33 million. So you want to spend \$33 million to disburse \$83 million! Now, I mean the former Governor of the Central Bank may have to intervene here. I do not know what is the ratio between the administrative costs that you normally undertake when you are distributing loans. The administrative cost should be what percentage of the loan? *[Interruption]* I am reliably informed that it should be 6 per cent; that is the practice and policy. But this is almost 15 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, they are taking \$33 million to lend \$83 million. In the years 2004/2005, they will spend \$34 million to lend \$96 million. This is money. Listen to this one: In the year 2005/2006, they will spend \$33 million to lend \$100 million, to create 5,000 entrepreneurs, while all the real entrepreneurs leaving the country because of murders and kidnappings. This is a serious issue, because what they would do is use this programme to give more jobs. So you line up at Balisier House for a job at NEDCO. NEDCO just became a State enterprise, and this is another issue that I want to raise in this budget debate later: the expanding role of the State, bureaucracy into social welfare.

Mr. Speaker, let me stay with this for a minute. They are spending \$86 million in 2003/2004, the revenue expected is \$5 million. In the second year, 2005/2005, revenue expected is \$8.7 million; third year 2005/2006, the revenue expected \$12 million. Massive losses; massive squandermania PNM style. No wonder the International Monetary Fund (IMF) looked to them and bawled and told them, “Hold up, hold up, you are going to squander the resources again, as you did in the 1970s”. The IMF understands this.

The one I like: there is a section here under “Expenditure” called “Personal Costs”—they said that they would create jobs to give out to friends and family—travelling allowance, entertainment, training, pension costs, health plan and so on. There is one item called “Club Membership” which is about \$300,000. [*Crosstalk*] That is either to go down to the pier, or go to Toco where there is another PNM resort that is advertised at ministries. It is owned by the brother of a minister, and advertised at ministries; they tell them to have retreats there. Club membership would run into thousands of dollars as they squander away, on average, \$28 million of taxpayers’ money.

As if that was not bad enough, and I am sure people paused to take a breath when they heard about that money, we learnt from page 9 of the *Sunday Express* of August 24, 2003:

“\$.7m judgments against 2 NEDCO bosses

It wasn’t me, says CEO”

It was an exposé which suggested that those persons running NEDCO, are themselves owing and defaulting on payments, and have court judgments against them for payment. Look who you give to disburse these loans! A man who could not pay his own loan, disbursing \$100 million in loans!

This is very serious, because I have a special concern for small business development. I know the importance of that sector to employment creation. This economy has never created mass amounts of jobs in the energy sector. The energy sector gives us 5 per cent or more, in terms of the gross domestic product (GDP), but it really gives us 4 per cent direct employment. In the non-energy sector you have to create those jobs.

The squandermania of over \$100 million over the next three years is a serious matter, when you measure that against the fact that we do not know the loans that went out before. We have heard that recipients of NEDCO loans are in jail. We have heard that they cannot find some recipients, who put one name on the

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application, and they cannot locate them, and millions of dollars have gone, because that was part of the scheme to give away money before October 07, 2002. They were calling it small business.

They brought out the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development staff over the weekend. People came with torchlights to fill out papers and so on, so people could get loans from NEDCO. Workers came out on Saturday and Sunday nights with torchlights to go into the office. They did not want to put on all the lights in the building, because it might look fishy; reminiscent of Watergate.

Mr. Speaker, this is a serious matter. We raised it in the Parliament and waited 10 months for a reply. A reply came to Question No. 27 from the Member for Nariva, I think it was. What did the reply say? They had already compiled the list of names of all the NEDCO recipients:

“The National Entrepreneurship Development Company Ltd...is a public authority to which the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act No. 26 of 1999 (Act) apply.

Unreasonable disclosure of information arises wherever the disclosure of personal information would result in an unreasonable invasion of an individual’s privacy.

The requested information is personal information...disclosure of this information would amount to an unreasonable invasion of an individual’s privacy...”

Taxpayers’ money gone; we cannot find out who got the money, because that is their personal business! [*Crosstalk*] Money gone, man gone in jail! This is the contempt they have had for the Parliament.

What they are suggesting is that when we asked the question and it was approved by the Speaker, the answer would have been in violation of a freedom of information provision. This would be the subject of a court matter by itself, I assure you, but we cannot wait on the court, and we cannot wait on the Minister; for sure we cannot.

12.00 noon

Mr. Speaker, such is my concern on this matter, and the Government has not only squandered the money but also wrecked our prospects of creating jobs.

On October 14, I wrote a letter addressed to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and I wish to put the contents of this letter on record:

Mr. Jeffrey Henderson
Director of Public Prosecutions
Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
Henry Street
Port of Spain.

Disbursement of \$17.4 million in 63 days by NEDCO

Dear Sir,

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago in August, 2002 launched the NEDCO with the express objective of supporting and promoting the establishment of micro enterprises.

This programme was launched on August 01, 2002 at a gala function on the Brian Lara Promenade. The parliamentary Opposition has tried on several occasions over the past 14 months to get critical information on the funding to and disbursement of loans from the NEDCO.

After waiting for almost 10 months in the nation's Parliament, we are informed by the Government in response to a question filed in the House of Representatives that the disclosure of the names of recipients of loans constitutes an unreasonable invasion of an individual's privacy.

Given the public scandals associated with the disclosure of the names of the contractors in the CEPEP programme and the public outrage felt when it was learnt that many of those contractors who have benefited from the disbursements of hundreds of millions of dollars were PNM party activists, party officials and very close friends and relatives of government office holders.

Many have received such contracts without satisfying proper tendering requirements and acceptable levels of transparency. I believe that the ultra secretive withholding of the names of recipients of the NEDCO Programme may constitute another case of Government officials siphoning out millions of dollars to party operatives and relatives without meeting established criteria and by corrupt means.

I have received a document purportedly compiled by the finance manager to the NEDCO. This document presents remarkable evidence of the

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Government's reckless, possibly criminal conduct by way of abuse of public funds.

In light of the Government's own projection to incur huge losses to the tune of \$75 million in the period 2004—2006, we believe that your office should direct that an investigation be conducted into the operations of the NEDCO for the period 2002—2003.

To date, the Government has failed to release information on the recipients of NEDCO loans. The apparent rampant abuse of State funds, which constitute misbehaviour in public office, is further evidence when one considers that in the recent budget statement, the Minister of Finance indicated that the Government disbursed over \$30 million in loans while the Social Sector Investment Programme reported that figure to be \$19 million.

If the above information is correct, the Government and officials connected to the NEDCO stand responsible to the law. Their conduct may constitute misbehaviour in public office, and may be tantamount to the violation of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago as they relate to the Integrity in Public Life Act, No. 83 of 2000.

Since there is a strong and reasonable perception that public officials may have used their respective offices to unfairly disburse millions of taxpayers dollars to party supporters and relatives of party office holders, I respectfully urge you to refer this matter to the police with the recommendation that an investigation be launched into this matter.

I await your response.

Mr. Speaker, I have done my duty as a representative, of a Member of Parliament. Information came my way, no answers were forthcoming in the Parliament and I have now addressed this matter to the DPP. Whatever the DPP may or not do is—my conscience is clear. I saw something happening, it was suspicious and I acted. We got no information in the Parliament and I passed it on to the DPP. We will wait to hear what the DPP has to say about that and take it further when that time comes.

I raise that issue to suggest to this House and country that the Member for St. Augustine was really on the right track when he said that they have a model of government; they call it special works in one incarnation, and CEPEP and NEDCO in another incarnation.

While nothing is wrong in principle with these programmes, and their objectives laudable, we can trust the Government to corrupt and pollute those

programmes to the extent that they are counterproductive and wreck our labour market and economic prospects.

Already the effect of the CEPEP has been to perpetuate an imbalance in the labour market. Today, able-bodied young men, will not sign up for jobs in the private security industry, nor seek jobs in the private sector at stores and warehouses and so on. Do you know why? They say: Why go there and work from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. in the private sector? Why go there and work so hard when you can get an end in CEPEP every few months and when the money runs out go back to the CEPEP again? So already it is creating an imbalance. Apart from the work ethic it is creating an imbalance where the private sector cannot source employees in that bracket. That is the problem, and it has long-term implications.

Mr. Speaker, it is not only that those programmes lack strong accent on training and a strong focus of development, they are designed in a way that the PNM, through their party groups will recruit and continue to perpetuate a dependency and almost a pattern of slavery where individuals in this country will feel that they cannot do anything but get 10 days in one programme or another and that is the tragedy we face now.

Notwithstanding economic growth and the beautiful figure of 9.7, I believe in the energy sector and 6.5 in the general economy, they are embarking on a course of action that would destroy our labour market and impede our prospects for long-term economic and social development.

Mr. Speaker, I call it the CEPEPization of the labour force. That is my term for it and that will wreck us. There are several programmes the Government has introduced in its Social Sector Investment Programme which—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We on this side have been making a fundamental point against the Government's policies and approach in that they have some resources available to them. The issue is how you prioritize, how you take the money that is available to you and according to some priority distribute resources. That has been a fundamental point we have been making. They lack purpose and priority. This is a Government that had no problem blowing \$6 million on an airport enquiry.

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Every day the enquiry was full of allegations, counter allegations, betrayals, stories and drama, but so too is the Bold and Beautiful. So people wait to listen to the airport enquiry followed by the Bold and Beautiful, and it cost us \$6 million to see a lunatic on Richmond Street. That is the problem this country is facing; their priority.

They take the money, quarter billion dollars in the CEPEP while police officers are threatening to boycott—I dare not say civil disobedience—they are threatening to boycott and march against the Government because they do not have bullet-proof vests to go in Laventille, but \$6 million has gone into the airport enquiry and umpteen millions in other enquiries, and we cannot see the report because we are waiting for it to be sanitized. This is the fundamental issue we face; how that money is spent and invested, and the Government cannot escape the charge of abusing the public purse.

In its Social Sector Investment Programme, Government has put in train several schemes and youth programmes and so on. It is really admirable that there are some programmes geared to helping the poor, the underprivileged, disabled or differently abled as they like to be called these days. The programmes left to a Government that is based on equality, meritocracy and fair play are wonderful ones, but we cannot trust this Government. I am really commending the Government and the hon. Prime Minister.

By the way, the Government has now moved into homes, it is now into parenting. I do not know if that was motivated by any single event on the other side. The Government wants to intervene into people's homes and parent them. Conscious parenting, it's family time let's talk; life management and parenting education which is under the Office of the Prime Minister appropriately placed, Family Life Management Programme, family media programme, community-based family meeting and training for parental programme. So the Government moves into parenting.

While I support these initiatives, the risk is that we create a state bureaucracy, public servants that go into the villages and homes. These programmes are better left to be conducted in partnership with NGOs, community-based organizations and private sector. The model is one of partnership, of networking; it is not a model of creating a state enterprise and calling it Ministry of Family Affairs. This is the line they are taking and which we want to warn against. Of course they have other programmes for another area.

Mr. Speaker, when I was growing up in San Fernando, if I were to be caught liming on High Street in front Stephens & Johnsons or by Chicken Unlimited in

Carlton Centre by a member of my family, my uncle or aunt chances are I would get two taps on my head right there and they will tell my mother and father and when I go home in the dark hours I do not think I would have had a chance to answer. I would have been in some trouble. I remember occasions on a Saturday morning when I had to go for lessons and unfortunately I was not at that place and a relative saw me somewhere else and told my mother, the very sight of my mother coming in my direction, made me weep immediately. There was a family network, a family structure, a community that helped to keep children on the right path.

Today, unfortunately, that network and family is not as strong, and as we try to rebuild it, the Government is going into another direction. There are programmes like the provision for mediation services, peer mediation training; caring adult programme; adoption of children and foster care programme appropriately placed under the Office of the Prime Minister. I do not know why they have free computer-generated birth certificates in that section but it is located there.

Mr. Speaker, there is another risk here that we create a state enterprise to go into the community and call my big brother and I and say: "Mr. Moonilal and Mr. Moonilal, settle all yuh differences. All yuh shouldn't quarrel over this or that." There is a state bureaucracy, there will be a public servant, someone paid by the taxpayer.

Mr. Speaker, the approach should have been that you get into partnership with the churches, mandirs, mosques, community organizations and the NGOs, even the sporting clubs, you get into partnership with those organizations and help to build institutions that deal with community level.

That is the approach we recommend, not the approach of creating a mega-bureaucracy where you hire and contract party supporters and suddenly somebody is named peer mediation counselor to tell Mr. and Mrs. Ramgoolam to sit and talk. It does not work that way. There is a culture existing in the community as well. People do not discuss their business with strangers. You wear a badge from the Office of the Prime Minister and you come to discuss the problem they had last night. Somebody wanted to see Lifetime and somebody wanted to see another show. There is a culture.

The mandirs, mosques and churches would have been better able to adapt to that culture rather than sending someone from Port of Spain to Tulsa Trace in Penal to tell people they should not quarrel if somebody's chicken goes into the neighbour's yard. That is what we see here.

Mr. Speaker, another concern is that this budget focuses sharply on dropouts. I have always had a problem with this PNM Government using that term “dropout”. They focus on dropouts and prisoners and that is good. I commend that, the dropouts. If you read this budget you are focusing on dropouts, the Member for Diego Martin West apparently has no faith that the Minister of Education would take appropriate steps to ensure that we do not have a high rate of delinquency and dropouts. The Member for Diego Martin West has no confidence in that Minister but that is their family business, and a peer mediation counselor would deal with that when the time comes. That is their problem.

If you are in Form I, II or III and you drop out of school you can decide, you have a choice of the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre, Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, there is \$17 million for that. If you do not want that, there is the Youth Facilities Development Programme, \$10 million; you drop out of school and need some disciplining, you have another choice, you may join the Civilian Conservation Corps, and there is \$20 million for that. You can also get involved in a new programme called Retirees Adolescent Partnership Programme (RAP), life after school. If you still have some problems with remedial training and so forth, you did not do too well at school, you have the RAP, if that does not work, you have the Military Led Academic Training Programme (MiLAT), but there are still too many dropouts, so stay in Chaguaramas by the Defence Force and go into the Military Led Youth Apprenticeship and Reorientation Training Programme. If all that does not work and you still drop out and the menu is still not good enough, then you get involved with the National Service Programme.

Mr. Speaker, the dropouts are well catered for and if that does not work, they will join an institution at Mucurapo as they do now.

Mr. Manning: Thank you very much. I just want to tell my friend that the three programmes to which reference has just been made are the three programmes to be introduced this year; MiLAT, Military Led Youth Apprenticeship and Reorientation Training Programme and the National Service Programme; is for those who fall out of the school system, the second one is for those who completed the secondary school system but did not complete with a full certificate and, therefore, the programme allows you to complete your five O’levels or CXC but under military training, therefore you will get military discipline, and the National Service Programme is for those who graduate with a full certificate and are now being encouraged to give something back to society that did so much for them. They are all quite segmented and very carefully worked out. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you for the clarity. Mr. Speaker, the point I am making and the Prime Minister is agreeing with me is that the dropout that will be created in the next four or five years—according to the Member for Diego Martin West—the rate will be well taken care of. [*Interruption*]

My friend, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, I am sorry he would not get the opportunity to speak so he is hurling platitudes across the floor. That would be his contribution.

Mr. Speaker, the point I am making is when you drop out in Trinidad and Tobago, this Government will embrace you in these programmes, but you know if you have five O'levels, A'levels and a university diploma you have nowhere to go. Young people in this country come to my office every week with eight O'levels, A'levels and diploma in human resource management and there are no jobs for those persons who have succeeded because the economy is not creating jobs in the manufacturing services technology sector and there are no opportunities for those persons who succeed.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that 44 per cent of all Trinidadians and Tobagonians with higher-level education end up working in the United States? All our human resources are going because the Government will not respond to those people who succeed because to be rich in this country is to be robbed, and to do well in academic work is to migrate. That is the point. What are the opportunities? You apply to the Teaching Service Commission for teaching and wait 10 years for a letter of acknowledgement. They will not have an opportunity in this country for higher-level education.

We introduced the Dollar-for-dollar—the Member for Caroni East will deal with that. If you are bright and successful in this country you have to leave. There are no opportunities for the young people who do well and there are many opportunities if you drop out and that is a fundamental problem with this budget and this administration and it is hypocrisy for Members to bang the table in support when the Minister of National Security speaks. They bang the table in support and then send their children abroad. It is hypocrisy, as though they have faith in the Minister. He should be fired forthwith.

Mr. Speaker, the problem with this Government is not the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, it is not the Minister of Health, and it is not even the Attorney General. It is all of them; they are at the will of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister took a young businessman from Chaguaramas who was doing a good job running a seaside nightclub and made him Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation. That was unfair to him, he should be

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relieved of that responsibility and return to do what he does best; organizing Latin night and ladies free before 11.00 p.m.; cooler party and so on.

Today we hear from Members on the other side that it is not really the Minister to blame, it is the cops. Somebody returned from England two days ago and talked about the constabulary. The Member for San Fernando West, with crocodile tears told us it is not the Minister, it is the police and the Minister is irrelevant. Could you believe that, Mr. Speaker? The Member for San Fernando West said that the Minister is irrelevant, it is really the police.

The Member for Diego Martin West in an article in the newspaper said it is the cops we have to look at not the Minister and in the *Trinidad Guardian* of November 22, 2001 on page 8, Beckles blames UNC for spate of murders.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Member of Parliament for Arima, Penelope Beckles criticized the UNC for the spate of murders which had been rocking the country recently. She was speaking at a public meeting in Arima. Beckles said the number of murders to date is 121 and it had increased by 41 per cent from last year's total of 85. Beckles blames UNC.

They got in office through the back door and they are saying that has nothing to do with any Minister or the Government, it is the police. That is the problem. They will not take responsibility. They blame the Member for Couva North and the UNC when they have an incompetent group of Ministers parading up and down the country. There is the Attorney General who we confidently felt would have been fired before the budget was read. It did not happen; we do not know what they are waiting on.

Mr. Speaker, they must take responsibility for the crime situation and not blame the Opposition. When we were in office, there was no Anti-Kidnapping Bill.

Mr. Ramsaran: There was no need for that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: It was the same police when we were in office. Eighty-five murders in one year, 121 the next year and today it is 185. I want to tell those opposite, particularly those who will bark whole morning that we on this side take no pleasure that citizens of this country—*[Interruption]* We take no pleasure in the murder rate.

The Member for Couva North in May this year predicted that there would be 200 murders this year. Do you think we take pride in that? They are the fellow

citizens of our country, but we knew what was happening. We knew they sold their souls to the criminals and they have a copy of the receipt and anytime you try to deal with crime, we have a receipt around.

The Member for St. Joseph pointed out that 60 per cent of the money from the URP and CEPEP programmes would go into the hands of criminals. I do not want to go in a direction to talk about discrimination and racism, I think the Member for Fyzabad raised that issue. I do not want to go there.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM Members know what they are doing. Privately they might be embarrassed but they cannot say anything publicly. They know what they are about, so when they take \$225 million for CEPEP, they know where that money is going. We must have confidence in them that they know but it is not going to Oropouche, or Naparima.

I heard the Member for Arouca North, the loudspeaker. We are on the verge of celebrating a national holiday, Divali, which is a national holiday and all the Members on the other side will put on all their expensive and exquisite Hindu garb and come match in hand to light the first deya.

12.30 p.m.

When the mandirs ask the Government through the agencies to clean the grounds of the temple in preparation for a national festival, do you know what their position is? “We do not go into private people’s lands and clean their property”. That is a national holiday. A mandir is a community centre.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members for Laventille East/Morvant and Nariva, I am sure if you listen to the contribution of the Member for Oropouche you may find it interesting.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really was not listening to them. They would not allow CEPEP or URP to clean a church in the community in preparation for a national festival, because the Member for Arouca North said it was “donkey years” that they had that policy. Regardless of whether it is a “donkey” policy or not, but it is “donkey years” they had that policy. This is the approach.

You know, it is only when they talk—I was happy I stayed until 12.30 last morning to listen to all the speeches, because I like listening to my friends on the opposite side—not all. When my friend from La Brea spoke last evening, I do not know if my friend was tired—it was into the late hours and he had to rush through a speech and so on—but you know, “mouth open and story fall out”. The Member

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for La Brea said to us—and it is in *Hansard*; he would correct it when they edit it; make sure he takes that part out—that the UNC did nothing for Caroni (1975) Limited workers. We left them to the wolves. Who are the wolves? These are wolves in wolves' clothing. Take that part out. It would not reflect well at all when he reads that. Edit that, please. [*Crosstalk*] I do not want him to explain anything; he explained himself already.

This is what we have to deal with. I want to get back on track. I am making an argument here to suggest to this Government that they have their priorities all wrong. While they invest millions of dollars on programmes for dropouts, delinquents, what they call “Youth at Risk”, and so on, that money could be better spent in the school system to help build self-esteem, to prevent them from becoming dropouts. Their challenge is to prevent people from becoming dropouts, not catch them when they drop out. That money should go into the school system with community institutions. Assist the Lions Club, the Rotary Club and all these clubs in the school so that they would find young people who are at risk, as they call them, and prevent them from becoming dropouts and sending them into the Civilian Conservation Corps and military-led this and military-led that.

They do not like to hear about Guyana, but in Guyana when Burnham and Hoyte had all these national services and military this and that, do you know what is happening today in Guyana? All those institutions that they built are just abandoned and the young people who got all this military discipline “cyar find a work”. They cannot get “no work” in the private sector because nobody in that sector is hiring them to do anything; sales clerk or anything like that. They cannot get any job; they are on the street. But what do they have? They have Burnham and Hoyte military discipline. This is the risk this Government runs with perpetuating that type of dependency on the Government. More would be said, I am sure, on this CEPEP, HYPE, YAPPA, GAPP and so on.

I have written to the DPP and I have read into the record the letter sent to the DPP. I would now write the Director General of the International Labour Organization. The ILO has declared this year, the year to focus on equality at the workplace. “Time for Equality” is their global report. In that report they take a hard line against state agencies and governments that perpetuate what they call “employment apartheid”. We must now address the ILO and compile the record of this Government on hiring—and firing too—and promoting that type of discrimination at the place of work. [*Interruption*] Well, Kevin Baldeosingh dealt with him already; the class clown.

This is the next step we must take because I am afraid, like many people out there that, really, this Government, when they get sworn into a PNM minister's office, they first go to Balisier House and get some injection that immunizes them from this type of discussion. They are immunized from the reality of discrimination, racism, crime and so on. I am sure there is somebody there injecting them at Balisier House.

I am not confident—you may be, Mr. Speaker—that this Government would listen, learn and would change their ways. That is why we must write to the DPP and the ILO and expose them at every turn, whether it is in the waste of money at NEDCO, the employment discrimination—

Mrs. Seukeran: Would the Member give way?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Take appropriate note, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Seukeran: Mr. Speaker, I am listening with some concern to the very learned Member for Oropouche who was a very sound student, I remember, of the Hague where he did his PhD at the ILO and I am hearing him talk about the ILO and writing to the ILO. We have had examples where Members of the other side have taken the reputation of this country into the international forum in a manner that impacted very badly for this country. I want to ask the Member for Oropouche whether what he is quoting about the ILO and the right to equal employment, whether in point and in fact he is going to write the ILO and say that the training opportunities that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is offering to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and our children, so that they can have the opportunity to be trained to access long-term gainful employment, whether, in fact, those training opportunities that we are offering our people are breaking the rules of the international labour market.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I would address that question on the corridor. Before I close, I want to make two points. The first is that during the period 1995—2001, the UNC government created over 80,000 new jobs in the productive sector in this economy. It is very interesting. We are talking small business and I have the data. During the period 1995—2000, data released by the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development in their bulletin, which we launched the other evening, suggest that the number of employers increased in this country by 41 per cent. It increased from 16,000 to 23,000 over the period of the UNC government. The number of own-account workers, which is really micro-business, increased from 75,000 to 81,000. We created 1,220 small businesses per year without NEDCO, without that corruption and wanton waste. They must look at some of the policies of the UNC government and stop wasting the money.

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The final point I make in my last minute is: This country is under threat and siege from the criminal elements, dealing with a government that would not respond to crime, dealing with an incompetent administration that would preside over crime. What we are now seeing is the genesis for a police state, where there are members of the Government, senior Ministers, who are now in alliance with senior police officers to oppress the innocent and the poor of this country. We have seen the detention and questioning of a journalist in this country. A journalist at the *Express* was held without charges being pressed. We have seen a political scientist wrongfully arrested and now before the courts. These are really the signs of state police, of state terrorism, presided over by the Prime Minister and an incompetent regime.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let me correct an impression which I think is wrongly held by Members. When you give way, you give way out of your own time. There is no such thing as injury time. That is for football.

Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch and will be resumed at 2.00 p.m.

12.40 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

CONDOLENCES
(DR. J. D. ELDER)

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the budget for fiscal 2004 and to compliment the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for an excellent presentation last Friday.

Before I get into the meat of my contribution, permit me to pay tribute to an outstanding son of the soil, Dr. J.D. Elder, who passed away two or three days ago. I lived in Tobago for a short time and I can tell you that the name, Dr. J.D. is well known all over Tobago. As a folklorist in later years, you would know, Mr. Speaker, that he can be credited for the Tobago festival, which is now a national festival of Trinidad and Tobago.

As we pay homage to the life of Dr. Elder, we, of course, are reminded of our own mortality and the fact that we are here to be of service to mankind. Perhaps it is appropriate that at this time as we debate the national budget as we prepare our country for 2020, that we, like Shakespeare, understand that "All of life is a stage; that we pass this way but once".

Condolences (Dr. J. D. Elder)

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We celebrate his life and we compliment the Tobago House of Assembly for taking the decision to pay all expenses with respect to his burial.

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*): Thank you very much, Leader of Government Business, for providing me with the opportunity and the time.

We on this side would like to pay tribute also to Dr. J. D. Elder. In my brief stint with responsibility for culture, I interacted with Dr. Elder and, in fact, one got the distinct impression that he was a living repository of knowledge and experience in that sector. I think that he certainly took every opportunity to make his national contribution and we join with the Government in paying homage to him and will extend sincere condolences to his family.

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The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, permit me also to say a few words on the contribution of the Member for Oropouche. It is not always that I take into consideration No. 16. However, the Member made a few points that I think ought to be answered rather quickly. The Member was speaking about the Government not being democratic, not getting the popular vote in the election of 18/18 and buying time, as it were.

Mr. Speaker, I think you were around in 1995 when the result that year was 17/17/2 and the PNM in that year, got more votes than the Opposition. The Opposition joined with the other party and formed the government and the PNM went into Opposition. There was no noise with respect to who had the popular vote at that time. That is the fact. They were in government from 1995 until 2001 and there was no issue. They slept with the devil, and so be it.

The second issue I want to touch on rather quickly is the National Entrepreneurship Development Company (NEDCO). The Member was making the point—I think some useful points—that as a new organization—and he knows it is a new organization—he finds the losses are too high. An institution such as NEDCO, a financial institution whose income would be interest income over time, but an institution which has to have a certain minimum operating infrastructure, with known fixed costs, must of necessity have a high fixed cost in the early period. It is going to reduce in time. That is a normal state.

Perhaps if one were to look at some of the more established institutions, such as the National Insurance Board (NIB), even at the normal state one sees operating expense allowance of some 15 per cent. There is no magic about NEDCO. While

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the Government will be the first to admit that, yes, we will take some corrective action—and we have said that in the first year we have established certain programmes and what we will be concentrating on now is to expand those programmes to ensure national treatment or national spread, and also to ensure that the controls and accountability are in place. We have no difficulty with that. I would want, perhaps, to return to NEDCO later on.

One of the issues I thought I should answer at this time was the issue the Member raised with respect to crime, because this has been an issue in this budget debate. The Leader of the Opposition raised it; it was raised by, perhaps, every Member on the other side, as though crime is a new issue. We have made the point from time to time that dealing after the fact with crime is really using a palliative; that crime is best dealt with before the fact. That is why you would see an abundance of social programmes in the budget. I would want to deal with that in my substantive contribution.

I want to put on the record for the benefit of the Member for Oropouche and for other Members on the other side; I want to read extensively and I ask your permission, Mr. Speaker, from the *Daily Express* of Wednesday, November 28, 2001, page 5. The article says:

“PM: Govt can’t win war on crime.”

That is the Prime Minister at the time speaking. So when they come here and want to preach to us about crime and what we ought to do, the Prime Minister at that time, the Member for Couva North stated:

“Prime Minister Basdeo Panday yesterday conceded that the Government can’t win the battle against crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

Panday said this in response to a question on the crime statistics in the country.

He said serious crime was down by nine per cent but murder, rape and robbery continue to increase.

Panday, who holds the National Security portfolio and whose party came to power on a platform promising to face crime head-on declared: ‘So that the battle is going on. We do not think we will ever win this battle.’”

I want to repeat that. These are the people who want to come and preach to us. But as late as November 28, 2001 he was telling us:

“...We do not think we will ever win this battle. What we have to do is not to give up in the struggle to minimize the incidence (of crime). As I say, it is

an international problem and those who perpetuate these crimes have enormous resources.”

The article goes on to say he was speaking at Whitehall and so on, and giving some crime statistics, and somewhere in this article it is mentioned that at that time there were some 151 murders to date. I heard the Member speak about 121. That had to be another year.

There is another article here by the former Prime Minister’s very good friend at that time, Mr. Ramesh Maharaj, who was then the Member for Couva South. He was making the point that it was the Prime Minister, Mr. Basdeo Panday, who was responsible for crime, because as Prime Minister, taking on the portfolio of National Security, he could not handle it and therefore it was left without a leader. That was the situation. It is here.

So I want to put it in the record that crime is not a PNM thing. We met a problem and like so many of the other problems that we have met, we are attempting to deal with it.

Lastly on the issue of crime, I would just put in the record a small article that is of current value.

“The Republic Bank Consumer Confidence Index for the just completed third quarter of 2003 suggests that there is not much substance to the claim that there is a crime situation resulting in the reduction of consumer spending.

The Market Facts and Opinions/Republic Bank Consumer Confidence Index showed a continuing rise of 5% in the third quarter of 2003. An increase in current consumption by 2 points. It cites the increase in consumption expectation for the period as being largely driven by the increase in those who saw positive conditions for buying major household items, which itself was driven by current bargains haggled out by the intense competition among major market players.”

It is fresh off the press. Of course, you would have noted that the crime rate was reduced yesterday. It is on today’s newspapers and, of course, that is simply going to add to investors’ confidence and making loans cheaper.

I want to start my substantive contribution at this time. I start by saying that when I listened to contributions—where is my friend, the Member for Oropouche; he is not here? Anyway, I want to deal with Front Bench speakers, the Members for Couva North, St. Augustine and St. Joseph, because as I sat listening to their

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contributions I could not help but realize that they were confused, muddled; there were inconsistencies and there were contradictions.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, let us examine what we are being told. The Member for Couva North tells us, as a fact, that today, competitive advantage; is much more important than comparative advantage; that competitive advantage is measured by productivity and that productivity is a function of human resource development. Yet in a budget that talks about the priorities in human resource development he criticizes the budget, saying that our spending is out of whack; we do not know what we are doing and so on. In one breath the Member for Couva North tells us that we should use our energy resources to provide sustainable development. While his colleague, the Member for St. Augustine, is concerned with what he calls the non-energy fiscal deficit. He told us about an emerging non-energy fiscal deficit, as though there was ever a non-energy surplus.

What is the reality of our country, Mr. Speaker? The reality is that we earn oil sector revenues, surplus to the expenditure that we have in the oil sector and that helps us to finance the non-energy expenditure. It is increasing at this time because as his leader points out, there is a need to use energy-sector revenue for sustainable development. So that we are using part of the energy sector resources for our priorities in education, health and security. *[Interruption]* You had 75 minutes, did you not? I will give five.

Mr. Dookeran: Thank you for giving way, Member for Diego Martin Central. I wonder if you would concede that there has, in fact, been an increase in the level of the non-fiscal deficit and projected to increase even further in the years to come?

Hon. K. Valley: But you are making my point. The point I am making is that, traditionally, there has been a non-energy deficit that is financed by the energy sector. That is clear. Today, if we are saying, as conscious policy action we will be taking funds in the energy sector for sustainable development in the non-energy sector, knowing, as you say, that it is a wasting asset and it might go at some point, obviously the non-energy deficit must be increasing. We must be using more of it to build Wallerfield, in education and to prepare the structure, as it were, for Vision 2020. It must rise! "Ent?" Commonsense! If it is 4 per cent, it cannot be 4 per cent if we want to increase the level of diversification, if we want to do certain things to prepare for 2020! That is fundamental!

Mr. Speaker, that is what happens when we read two books and decide we are going to quote from the people without understanding the context, and come in

here with airy-fairy ideas. It is no wonder on the last occasion; at the end of a contribution we were told that “after five years as Minister of Planning and Development I achieved nothing.” That is not the tone of this Government, Mr. Speaker. I want to continue a bit longer on some of the contradictions in their statements.

We hear that competitiveness—and we know, I agree with that—is the key driver of economic activity. Competitiveness is measured by productivity. Yet, Mr. Speaker, in the next breath they are complaining about the rationalization that has been taking place in the manufacturing and service sectors. When you hear, in the short-term, that there is an increase in unemployment in the manufacturing sector—so many people lost their jobs—you have to look behind that and see what is happening. The next thing you need to do is look at productivity. When you look at the table on the productivity index, you would see that the index of productivity increased by 11.9 per cent in 2002, and it is estimated to have increased by 18 per cent in 2003.

Mr. Speaker, if you are using fewer employees to do the same work, you are increasing productivity. But more importantly—I have here the latest information from the Central Bank. The report says:

“Monetary Policy Report

September 2003

Volume III Number 2

Labour Market and Employment

Based on data compiled by the Central Statistical Office (CSO), conditions improved in the labour market...in the second quarter of 2003. The unemployment rate fell to 10.2 per cent of the labour force from 11 per cent in the previous three months.”

Short-term adjustment; rationalization—[*Interruption*] Which figure you think was wrong? No, no, you are an analyst, you tell me! The last time they told us the manufacturing sector lost 7,500 jobs in the last quarter. Which figure do you think is wrong? I am asking you as an analyst, do you think this one is wrong or is the last one wrong? I will leave it to you. Credibility is a hell of a thing, I keep telling you that. It says:

“The fall in employment in the Manufacturing sector slowed significantly to 0.9 thousand...”

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The manufacturing sector, Mr. Speaker, has to rationalize—they know that—to face world competition. You cannot complain about that when at the same time you are telling me that the economic focus of the budget must be micro enterprises and manufacturing. If you are telling me it must be on manufacturing then you have also to know that your manufactures must do what they have to do to maintain competitiveness to increase productivity.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we are saying that we are hand-in-hand with the manufactures. We are sitting with them. We are not telling them what is best for them—Let us sit and talk. They tell me what is required in the Trade Assistance Programme. I think it was in February last year that I went to Washington and spoke with the IDB about the Trade Assistance Loan—trade support for our manufacturers. But that is not the end of the inconsistency.

Again, the Member for St. Augustine talked about the existence of structural unemployment. He tells us that in one breath and then he criticizes the social programmes. The analyst that he is, the brilliance that he has, does not allow him to say well, no, what you need to do with those social programmes is to have an educational component. Mr. Speaker, if you have structural unemployment, then you need to provide retraining and education. Retraining for new industries for those who could be retrained. But you may need simple education for most of the people. That is why it is critical, as we go forward and we think about how we structure these programmes, we have to think of the need to have that educational component, so that whether one is on the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP), the Civilian Conservation Corps, what have you, one must spend about two evenings a week in adult classes doing some English, reading, mathematics. We are talking about competitiveness and human resource development, and if we want that we must involve everyone. We must move from the known to the known that, yes, if CEPEP is there and they come for CEPEP it easy to say: “Now that you are in the programme, you have to get involved; you have to do more.” *[Interruption]* You agree with that, “ent?” We must have the schools—the teachers and so on. We must get them back in the classrooms to understand the benefits, not only for the parent but also for the children. When mammy and daddy come home reading a book, there is demonstration effect for the young ones.

We have to be serious about our human resource development if we know that it is the critical driver for competitiveness. We already have the comparative advantage in natural gas. If we can have a competitive advantage also by our

human resource development, there is nothing that can stop us in spite of what they attempt to do.

We had the situation where the Leader of the Opposition was lecturing us on the importance of human resource development. We must remember that this is against the background of 23 per cent of the adult population in functional illiteracy when they were in government. That was the report that came out of the UNDP. A further 32.7 per cent were not able to read and understand some parts of the newspaper or simple directions on medicine label. I do not know whether we are dealing with Rip Van Winkle, whether he is just getting up to understand the importance of human resource development.

I find it difficult to comprehend that the Member for Couva North was telling me that he now appreciates the importance of human resource development, when at the same time he said in his contribution; “friend, all you have to do to solve the fiasco of the 11-plus is to build more schools.” He understands so much about human resource development that he thought to solve the 11-plus situation was to simply build more schools; put the kids in and they will get “bright”. As my colleague said a while ago: He put children who were really not prepared for a secondary education in schools rather than taking the time to prepare the children at the primary level—where it would have been cheaper—he pushed them, taking them through like an assembly line, so that when they get to fifth form they would, other things being equal, still be unprepared. Mr. Speaker, human resource development must be a serious issue and that is our focus.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine tells us that the focus of the budget must be micro enterprise and the manufacturing sector. His leader does not agree. The most important thing for his leader is competitiveness and I must tell you we agree with his leader. We believe if we focus on competitiveness, then the manufacturing needs, as well as micro enterprise, would fall in place.

Mr. Speaker, when we listen to them—first of all, I formed the impression that there was real conflict between what I call the modern man and a confused mind. The modern man pushing and saying: “Yes, it is competitiveness, it is human resource development; it is productivity.” The confused mind says: “No, we have to criticize what they are trying to do. We know it is right but we have to criticize.” That is what we got, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: It is the system.

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, it is not the system. I have spent two periods in opposition and I do not know that system. When we were in opposition we looked

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at things objectively; if it was right, it was right and if it was wrong, it was wrong. We supported a number of pieces of legislation they brought. Take a simple example, Mr. Speaker, Rent Restriction, that legislation which comes here tri-annually, I think, they brought it; it required a special majority; they got our support. We brought it last year; they refused to support it because they want constitutional reform. Does that make sense? But that is taking away from my time and I have quite a lot I want to say.

Mr. Speaker, a big issue in this budget is the framework of the budget. Most of them said the PNM has no vision; there is no innovation; the budget is not based on any plan. The Member for St. Joseph told us: "They are not finished with the 2020 vision as yet so neither last year's budget nor this year's budget could be based on 2020." The only Member who came close to understanding what is happening is the Member for St Augustine: that there is a concept in place, Vision 2020; that we have to move to a strategic initiatives, benchmarking and so on, and that there are committees working on that. Mr. Speaker, it is just as when you are building a house, one of the things you know you must do is to clear the land, because while the architect is doing his drawings, whether he is building rectangular or square, the land has to be cleared.

I will give you another example, Mr. Speaker. My friend from Chaguanas, I do not know where he lives in Chaguanas, but if he invites me, I know I would have to take the Solomon Hochoy Highway to get to Chaguanas.

Mr. Manohar: The Uriah Butler Highway.

Hon. K. Valley: You know that I am from long time. But they know, and we know, as they have said, that if you want to get to 2020 you must have competitiveness, and competitiveness is measured by productivity. Competitiveness relies on human resource development, so we know, clearly, what we have to do. I make the point that the budget framework starts with Vision 2020. My colleague, the Minister of Planning and Development dealt with the issue, but let me just make the point. This is a report on the Cabinet retreat and I will read one paragraph. It says:

“Report on Cabinet Retreat

Strategic Positioning for Vision 2020

The Government has articulated a vision for Trinidad and Tobago to achieve developed country status by the year 2020. This vision is referred to as Vision 2020. The Vision 2020 exercise is intended to be a road map, which would

include targets and milestones for achieving, developed country status. One of its central purposes is to serve as input to recast and direct the budget process into the areas of highest priority towards achieving the vision. In this regard, resources will be applied to specific targets. The final output from the Vision 2020 exercise would be a Strategic Development Plan together with a strengthened institutionalized national planning and budgeting process.”

That is what we expect to get from the committees that have been appointed, clear strategic initiatives. At this same seminar, one of the things each Minister was asked to do was to go back and look at his ministry to determine what part his ministry would have to play with respect to Vision 2020; and ministries are doing that. So, as the Member for Diego Martin West said, we do not have to wait until the strategic plan is there to start implementing. We know certain fundamentals—the foundation—and that is what we spelt out in our manifesto.

When we went to the population last year we said, clearly, our manifesto is based on Vision 2020. Then we said that over this five-year period the emphasis would be on setting the foundation; we would develop the institutional underpinning; that we would concentrate on certain core concepts, social equity, human resource development, wellness and well-being; poverty eradication; affordable housing; personal security and safety. That is what it is. If the 600 persons who are doing their planning take five years, we know where we are going for this five-year period. We are putting in place the institutional underpinning for Vision 2020. That is so simple! We have outlined that in our manifesto. It is from the vision to the manifesto to the budget statement. On page 2 it says:

“Firstly, Mr. Speaker, this Budget focuses on an investment programme that expands the stock of human and physical capital.”

It continues on page 3.

“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:

Education...

Health...”

Wellness and well-being, following the manifesto, Mr. Speaker, not jumping based on “no” plan. It is mad they mad!

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“Housing...

Social Services Delivery...

Strong and cohesive communities...”

You would remember that our local government manifesto emphasized the importance of communities.

“Unity in diversity...”

In other words, social equity.

“Safe Streets, homes, places of recreation, and workplaces...”

So that the budget document fits clearly into the manifesto, informed as it was by the vision statement. Then you go further in the budget statement and you see priorities for Trinidad and Tobago. If you turn to education; universal pre-school education; health, Mr. Speaker; what are they talking about?

Mr. Speaker, while we agree with those on the other side that what we are working toward is competitiveness; obviously, we disagree on how to get there.

Our position is extremely clear. We have to take all on board: the person at CEPEP; the person at URP; that person, too, must be brought into the educational upgrading. It is not for some. All must be involved. This country is a small country with 1.3 million people. We need every man on board.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about trade liberalization. I find it rather interesting. In the early 1990s, the last time we were in government, you may recall the Nafta initiative. The United States had entered into a free trade agreement with Canada and Mexico. We, in Trinidad and Tobago, even at that time, with our ambition to position the country as the manufacturing hub of this part of the world decided that we wanted in. We made noise and said that we wanted to be in Nafta, too. We made sufficient noise that we were placed in the queue, after Chile, because Chile was supposed to be the next country with which the US would negotiate a Nafta agreement. Trinidad and Tobago was right there. That did not happen by chance. We had signed the Bilateral Investment Treaty and the Intellectual Property Rights Agreement. We had done that with Canada also; one of the other partners.

I remember when we went to Canada on the first occasion the Minister, at the time, told me Trinidad and Tobago was No. 64 on the list. He said: “Why do you want to negotiate an agreement with us, just have your own investment Act; put what you want in the Act and that would be satisfactory.” Mr. Speaker, we told him a thing or two and the next thing you know, the Prime Minister, Cretien, on a

trip to Brazil, stopped off in Trinidad with his Trade Minister and Trinidad and Tobago moved from 64th to 4th. We were able to sign the FIPA, as it is called in Canada. So we were there with Nafta.

Mr. Speaker, there was the summit of the Americas in 1994; the Prime Minister attended. That is where the whole idea of the Free Trade of Americas was born. President Bill Clinton was there with all the 34 countries in the hemisphere, excluding Cuba—the democratic countries, they say. So this has been going on for some time. Could you imagine my amazement, when I sat here last Monday and I heard the Member for Couva North say: “It is time for Trinidad and Tobago to put trade negotiations on the front burner of our foreign commercial policy.” Mr. Speaker, I do not know, I hope this is a parliamentary word; where the hell has it been all the time? I do not understand it! What is he talking about? This FTAA, I did not start it! As a matter of fact we were out of Government. They started it! Now, it is a fact they did not put it on the front burner, because up to two years ago I do not think anybody in Trinidad and Tobago had even heard about the FTAA. But at the Ministry of Trade and Industry work was going on.

More than that, Mr. Speaker, you must have heard—about two weeks ago we had the Trade Negotiating Committee meeting here in Trinidad and Tobago and, of course you know that, Trinidad and Tobago has a bid in for the headquarters of the FTAA. But that is not our doing. It is one of the things they did with which we agreed. It is their Cabinet that agreed. I am telling you, that gentleman used to be sleeping, as Prime Minister, you know. He has to be Rip Van Winkle, because I cannot believe the Chairman of the Cabinet would agree—[*Interruption*] He does not sleep! Where is he? What is he doing right now? [*Interruption*] He is here! [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, let me put it on the record:

“Cabinet, by Minute No. 1592 dated November 07, 2001 granted approval for Trinidad and Tobago to submit a bid for the location of the permanent secretariat of the FTAA to be situated in Port of Spain. The rationale for seeking to host the FTAA secretariat is that Trinidad and Tobago should maintain and enhance its profile and presence in regional and international foray and be active in deepening the regional integration process.”

I do not think I need to read more, Mr. Speaker. Here is the Cabinet Note. All of this is happening.

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In 1994, when we had this Nafta initiative the PNM government established a standing committee on trade, chaired by the private sector; someone from the manufacturing association, the committee included Members of the Opposition. I think Sen. Wade Mark was the first nominee from the Opposition on that committee.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the people from the university, the people from labour, the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (OWTU), were represented. Last week I heard the Leader of the Opposition said that the Government was leaving out civil society. That committee is still functioning. It functioned during their time, and I am sure if Meryvn Assam heard him he would be more than annoyed with him.

Mr. Speaker, in their period they established a technical coordinating committee, including other persons to give advice to the Minister of Trade and Industry. Thus there are two committees. The hon. Member is asking whether the Government has people for these negotiations. There are persons from the private sector and persons from the university assisting us. The hon. Member is telling us to put it on the front burner. I am letting him know it has been there for quite some time, and the Member for St. Augustine knows that. He knows everything that is happening but he is not telling his leader anything. He is waiting for his leader to go back to London to take his place. He is saying if he could not get Governorship of the Central Bank then the position of Leader of the Opposition is just as good. He is playing sly.

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. Dr. K. Rowley*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Valley: Thank you very much, for the extension. Let me just quote the International Monetary Fund Report from which they have been quoting:

“Trinidad and Tobago appears well placed to take advantage of trade liberalization (FTAA) and CARICOM's single market and economy (CSME).”

I do not think I need to read the excerpts. You can read better than I can. I have to move on.

Mr. Speaker, there is the trade support programme which was negotiated with the IDB. It provides for institutional strengthening of the ministry; it provides for the trade assistance as I mentioned, and we are working on this.

My good friend, the hon. Member for St. Augustine, at times in an effort to get headlines, takes pot shots. He took one on the Prime Minister. Let me make this point. It is downright rude for any hon. Member to be saying about the Prime Minister that with girlish ecstasy and so forth, much less for a former Central Bank governor. There is no time in his life as the Central Bank Governor would he ever have done that. The Parliament is free but there is respect one to the other. Similarly, he took pot shots in his contribution when he spoke about the hon. Member who goes about saying other countries are bribing countries. For the record, nobody said that any country was bribing another. As a fact, in this campaign for the FTAA, the information coming out—he just has to ask for the information. The information coming out is clear, and it appears as though some persons are acting on it.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether you saw yesterday's *Express* newspaper: "Don't not come here, UNC activists warns." In other countries this would be seditious or treason. This is an initiative of the UNC. Imagine, they are writing countries to inform them not to support Trinidad and Tobago. That is high treason! I have to believe that perhaps Miami is getting to the UNC.

Here is an article from Miami on its bid for the headquarters of the FTAA. The article talks about the person who is in charge of this initiative, Mr. Charles Cobb, who was here recently. He met with me. This article said the gentleman, a former runner, Ambassador to Iceland under the first President George Bush: the former chairman and chief executive officer of AVIDA Corporation and Business Development who is overseeing the development of some 25 resorts in the United States, France and the Bahamas. He is using his vast network of international business and political connections to raise funds for the secretariat effort. They raised some US \$13 million. The first indications of his performance would come in November where some \$13 million is to be used for their headquarters and to spread around.

There was an article earlier which said quite clearly that they were not averse to using inducements to countries given the benefit coming from the FTAA. It stated that! It is a fact. It is not a figment of anybody's imagination.

On the issue of economic diversification, I refer to the conflict on what has been said from one hon. Member to the other. One is saying yes, we must use the energy resources for sustainable development and, I agree with that view. The other one is saying to us that no, one must put those revenues into the Revenue Stabilization Fund rather than prepare one's country for a period after the energy resources. We must just stack it away in the Revenue Stabilization Fund so that if

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they come back in Government they would get it to thief. It is harder to thief a university at Wallerfield, or the education in our young people's head—I am sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Couva North referred to the TDR Reports that they commissioned. He stated that they were acting on them. These reports are 1977—1998, vintage. They were filed away, typical of the hon. Member for St. Augustine. They got people from Ireland to do the reports. When the reports were completed they shelved them. The hon. Prime Minister recently formed the Business Development Committee where different sectors were identified that the Government would be looking at. We do not believe, first of all, in picking winners. Some persons say the Government has a comparative advantage and, as I said earlier, I believe in competitive advantage. I agree with that concept. I believe we have a comparative advantage in natural gas. I do not think in this world one can speak of comparative advantage in other areas any longer. As a base product, natural gas is a comparative advantage since it can allow for diversification by using it as a raw material and by using part of the surplus it generates for diversification. One has two bites of the cherry as it were. One could use it as the raw material, as a feedstock as in the case of electricity or go downstream as in the case of methanol and so forth. Also, you can use funds from natural gas to help in the diversification process. Other than that, I have little faith in the concept of comparative advantage in today's world. We are looking at certain industries that the BDC felt that they could look at and save as it were, and we are willing to assist them in that. These reports, as they were completed, were shelved. It does not have a mark. When you read a report one must at least make a mark on the document.

The other thing about this whole concept of diversification is that it appears to be not easily understood. I remember in the 1970s when there was only oil and people used to say one needs to diversify the economy, and we went downstream into petrochemicals. Now they do not talk about oil. Long ago when they were looking at GDP they had oil and non-oil but you do not have that any longer. Now there is energy and non-energy and I do not know what it is in the logic that they cannot see that there has been diversification; that one is using what one has; that there is natural gas, and you have gone downstream. There is petrochemical and you have diversified your economy.

Mr. Speaker, even with that diversification, one would note that the petroleum sector—in other words, the energy sector, whether it is oil or energy, the ADP contribution remains roughly constant at, about 24 per cent. What this suggests is

that for every dollar spent in the energy sector there is a co-efficient that translates into the non-oil sector so that unless one takes direct action to change the co-efficient it is going to remain roughly about the same, 24/25 per cent of ADP. People can talk about diversification, but it is happening under their nose and they cannot appreciate it.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, when we met at that session on the strategic planning for the 2020 vision, the Prime Minister told us quite clearly that one has to go back given Vision 2020, to try to determine what is one's part in this. At the Ministry of Trade and Industry the medium term need has been identified. We need position Trinidad and Tobago. We need to integrate the economy of Trinidad and Tobago into the Latin American diaspora. We have, in effect, as the Leader of the Opposition noted, already conquered Caricom. We need more running space in Trinidad and Tobago. Eighty per cent of the trade in Caricom is Trinidad and Tobago's. The Leader of the Opposition in his address said it differently. He said when you speak about Caricom, you speak about Trinidad and Tobago. I shall not go that far!

Mr. Speaker, as you know, we believe we owe an obligation to the Caricom Market and that is why we have put in place the Caricom Support Programme. Caricom is still our domestic market. We are moving to the Single Market and Economy.

Let me say to the Leader of the Opposition that Caricom has moved away from the nine protocols long ago. We are now talking about the Single Market and Economy. A unit has been established in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the mandate to achieve CSME readiness by December 2004. Mr. Speaker, the main point, is that we have to provide our manufacturers with more running room because the reduction in the growth rate in GDP in the manufacturing sector this year is occasioned largely because there is no running room in Caricom given the recession occasioned by the 09/11 disaster and Iraq and so forth and the fall in the tourism business.

There has been a recession in the Caricom market and that affects our manufactures. There are the new markets. There is the Dominican Republic market, Venezuelan, Colombian and so forth, but one needs more running room. More than that, they need the support and that is what we are about to give them. We have been working with them to provide them with that over the last two years. And that is why one would find that the Small Business Company has been restructured and redirected. It is now the Business Development Company rather than small business and that company's mandate is clear. That is, to make small

businesses large, to work with them, to provide consultancy functions to help them to grow. The EXIM bank has been re-capitalized. They were talking about closing down the EXIM bank. They said that the banking sector could provide the financing required. At the same time they were talking about FTAA. No wonder they want to put it on the front burner because at the same time that we were talking about FTAA, this large market, they expected the commercial banks, the traditional banks to provide financing to go into those markets. It is inconceivable that the traditional banks will do so. This is where the Government must come in. The governments must make credit available at reasonable rates for the manufacturers to go into these markets. They must be able to underwrite the credit of the purchaser, the importer in those markets here in Trinidad and Tobago. We have restructured the EXIM bank and have asked them to work with the manufacturers as they go into those new markets. We have told Tidco clearly to get out of road paving and get back to their core function of marketing Trinidad and Tobago as a location for investment, in other words, promote inward investment.

In the old days we used to attract investors to come to Trinidad and Tobago to sell to us and after a time to sell to Caricom, locate here and you can have the Caricom Market. Today, we were saying when you come here you can have economies of scale which is going to assist you in your competitiveness because there is a market of 800 million. We are not asking them to come here to sell to us but to sell to that market of 800 million.

Similarly, we are trying to attract investors from the FTAA to locate here to sell to the ACP market base, and that is what it is about. Tidco has been brought back to their core function to market Trinidad and Tobago as a location for investment and as a destination for the tourist. And that is their function as well as to assist manufacturers in their export markets. But in going into those markets the first thing that is clear to us is that there must be transport, and we must be able to speak the people's language. So it follows naturally that we need air links, because if one looks at it, sea transport is adequate at this time. Air transport is important and that is the reason for our initiatives for Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and, of course, we have to do things to minimize cost but we must know that this is the long-term objective in order to develop the market. Just as Point Lisas!—the Point Lisas that everybody is happy about today.

I remember, especially the Member for Couva South, in the late 1970s and early 1980s talking about Point Lisas, ISCOTT in those days, how much money it was losing and what one should do with it and so forth. Today everybody is

happy about Point Lisas and it is the same thing that is going to happen with Wallerfield and it is the same thing that is going to happen with Couva city, I promise you. Understand! It was ISCOTT but even before, ISPATT, we were already going down that road. There was a management agreement with someone else. You had nothing to do with it. You were planning for five years. That is what it was. When they talk about vision I do not know what they are taking about. We know, whether it was Eric Williams; whether it is Patrick Manning, we have it. [*Desk thumping*] We know where we are going and when we are saying to the nation that the Government is taking it to 2020, you can bet one's dollar we are going to be a developed country by 2020.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Joseph, made the point that our per-capita income at present is US \$7,000 and that the minimum per-capita income for developed country status is US 20,000. While this may be true, his calculation of the required growth rate to achieve this level by 2020 is incorrect. It is not 10 per cent, it is 6.37 per cent.

Our growth rate this year was 6.7 per cent. So in year one, we made it, we have to keep on course. There is a little point zero something there. That is the point I am making. It is not unachievable. We are going to do it. We are going to integrate this economy into the Latin American diaspora, in the medium term. We are going to learn the Spanish language, there are going to be flights from Trinidad and Tobago to all through Latin America. More than that, Piarco Airport is going to be an alternate hub to Miami into and out of South and Central America. We are going to have the FTAA headquarters. That is going to bring additional benefits to Trinidad and Tobago. All one can do, is invite them to come with us. This is our land. It is merely 1.3 million and we can disagree. You know if you do something wrong I am going to disagree with you; if you do something right I am going to agree with you. That is in my nature. It cannot change. I am too old!

I want to touch on some other things quickly. The hon. Member for Siparia talked about legislative agenda. Let me make the point that in our period here there were some 26 pieces of legislation in the last session of the Parliament. In the period January 01, 2001 to October, that period when they imploded in October, they had 14 pieces of legislation and they are talking about legislative agenda. If one looks at the 14 pieces of legislation one would see they are piecemeal, trivia things. We can go back to the period 1995 in the first period when they had 35 pieces of legislation. One would remember there was no problem then. We were voting for their legislation. In the last session they would

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not, even though they agreed on the Police Service Reform (Amdt.) Bills—they met with us, they were not voting for the Bills. As I mentioned earlier, the Rent Restriction Bill that comes up every three years, they were accustomed to voting for it and they would not vote for it now. In the first period they had 35 pieces of legislation and then they went downhill after that. It was not until the year 2000, in their last year, that they had a reasonable legislative agenda where they had 114 Bills, 94 were enacted and most of those which were enacted we spent our time in the last year correcting.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is the scarcity of legal draft persons. In Barbados, there are persons who do a year programme in legal drafting. The question that one has to ask, is why over the six years in government, that government did not employ some of those persons so that the people would have been available for drafting of the legislation? We have taken steps to do just that. At the Ministry of Finance we told the people to find out who is the dean and let us get some people to draft the legislation. The policy papers are there. The drafting is the bottleneck. It is not today. It is there for some time and they know it. When they come and talk about legislative agenda, first of all, ours compares admirably with theirs but, more importantly, one has to move to get help. We would have to start sending persons on scholarships on the year programme. But we need to get people in the short term.

Increase in public debt. First of all, hon. Members should understand that GDP increases over time and that a percentage has a nominator and a denominator. The effect of this is that the public debt expressed as a percentage of GDP for 2003 is 51.8 per cent.

The public debt increased by \$2.3 billion in the year—not the central government—contingent liability. As a matter of fact, the central government's debt reduced over the year. It is the contingent liability that increased and of the 2.3—let me tell you some of the big ones: Caroni (1975) Limited—\$1.7 billion; about \$500 million for operation and \$1.1 billion for the VSEP. After that the largest one is NHA with \$320 million and that is simply to allow for contractors to get their programmes going.

The fact is the public debt, which was 18.6 billion in 1996, was \$30 billion in 2001. It was \$12 billion that they added to the public debt during their period. The Government is clear. It will manage the public debt and as a percentage of GDP one would expect it to continue on its declining path.

I want to touch on the statement made by the Leader of the Opposition that there has been a devaluation of the currency. I want to comment on it because I do

not know how it got into his response. Who put it in? A government that met when they came in 1995, an exchange rate of \$5.75, and left it \$6.30, has no business complaining that it moved from \$6.18 to \$6.28, because there is a devaluation of ten cents.

3.15 p.m.

Obviously somebody wrote the speech. One thing for which I want to congratulate him is that it was better than last year's. I hope it demonstrates to him the importance of a team. Last year, he thought he was a one-man show and that he could do his thing and come here and "bluff"—35 minutes. The people whom he chooses to help him write his speech had better know what they are talking about otherwise they would get him in even more hot water, like telling me about putting FTAA on the front burner and confusing his head. I think the modern man was the advisor. I think he was the confused mind. He had to be the politician.

I just want to make one other point to the Member for Oropouche. More persons are employed today than at any other time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago—526.4 thousand persons are employed at present. When they left office, there were 514 thousand persons. More persons are employed today. The foreign reserve is increasing.

Let me make this point about foreign reserve. In 1993, when we took that decision to allow for domestic US dollar accounts, we were simply saying that there is capital flight and the owners of that capital may feel more comfortable to have it here, near to them. That has worked to this country's benefit in ways untold. Let me explain.

At present, we are earning a lot of foreign exchange. Since 2001, Trinidad and Tobago has been having a favourable balance of trade with the United States. Whereas before we ran a deficit with the United States, we are now running a surplus on our trade because of LNG. Because we are the main exporter of LNG to the United States, we are now running a favourable balance of trade with the United States as well as with Caricom—our second largest market. We are earning good foreign exchange. That is the reality at this time. The commercial banks are earning foreign exchange.

Prior to 1993, the commercial banks had to surrender the foreign exchange to the Central Bank and get TT dollars. If that situation had not been changed, could you imagine the liquidity problem we would have been having today? People are talking about the issue of liquidity. When you look at the commercial bank

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lending to the private sector, it has been increasing. The problem is that we have been doing so well that we simply do not have the investment opportunities at this time to match. That is why we find money going up the islands; our banks and other commercial ventures are buying businesses in the islands, and so on.

This is a good time. Come with us. Let us build Trinidad and Tobago together. I thank you.

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Caroni East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that, having listened to the Member for Diego Martin Central, having read the newspapers this morning as to the team to fight the executive election in the PNM political party, having recognized that the hon. Member is an incumbent deputy political leader and not seeing his name appearing on the Prime Minister's slate as a deputy political leader, I see why he had to take a certain approach.

Normally, he is very sober and measured. At times I saw him engaged in all kinds of fantasy—not really girlish fantasy—but I thought that he engaged in bits and flights of fancy. Generally, I am hoping he retains his position as incumbent deputy political leader because I know the lean and hungry look of the Member for Diego Martin West was very evident today. In fact, in his contribution to this budget debate, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West did what they call in the country areas *gorlargau*—he stood at the feet of his leader and bowed and said, “Leader, I want to be your deputy”. I will deal with some of the matters he raised later in my contribution.

We are in the fourth and final day of this budget debate and I congratulate Members of the Opposition for setting the agenda for the debate from day one. It is clear that whilst the debate is still taking place and that the *Hansard* ink is not dry on the contribution of Members, commentators have formed a clear opinion on the budget presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance, the Member for San Fernando East.

Some have likened the budget statement of the hon. Minister of Finance to that of a rehashed old recipe from 2002/2003. This chef, notwithstanding his two kitchen assistants in Conrad and Christine, has not been able to come up with any measure of creativity or innovation to deal with the options for today's problems in the society. No doubt the deleterious effects of that budget statement will be felt by the population in the coming weeks and months.

A good indicator—not as scientific as it ought to be—of the feeling of the population of this country is the people meter question only yesterday evening. From memory, the question was: “Do you think that the budget of 2003/2004 will

cause chaos in Trinidad and Tobago?” Seventy-eight per cent of the respondents said, “Yes, this budget statement will cause chaos in this country”, resonating a position enunciated by my colleague, the Member for St. Joseph, that the policy prescription in the budget would cause instability in the society.

It is clear, when you look at the response of the commentators—over two weeks now have elapsed, so they have gotten time to respond—that some are saying that the budget statement of 2003/2004 is scattershot in approach, not scatterbrain as yet, but scattershot in approach.

I make reference to the *Express Trinidad and Tobago Review* of October 06, 2003. In a column on the budget, “Gregory McGuire sees worrying signs: Scattershot approach”. I quote:

“We can expect Prime Minister Patrick Manning, in the capacity as Minister of Finance to present a budget in excess of TT \$22 billion for fiscal 2004. In nominal terms, this would represent a threefold increase on the \$7 billion budget presented by Mr. Wendell Mottley in 1994, a measure of the extent to which this economy has grown. As the size of our expenditure allocations matches up with the growth in revenue (largely from the offshore economy), we are reminded of the words made famous by Jamaican Reggae Superstar, Bob Marley. ‘In the abundance of the water the fool is thirsty’. In years of plenty, Governments are prone to improvident expenditure and inefficient tax collection than in times of need. These are years of plenty and already some worrying signs can be discerned on both the payments and collections side.

The first cause of concern is the Government’s apparent reluctance to save a consequential portion of the gas surplus. On the question of the Revenue Stabilization Fund and or Heritage Fund, Government’s response has been nebulous at best.”

Mr. Speaker, Gregory McGuire goes on to say—and I quote further down in the article:

“T&T is like the individual whose life was progressing quite normal until he won a national lottery. Suddenly, the budget discipline vanished as he attempted to do in the shortest possible time frame all those things he always wanted to do. Before long disaster sets in, and he is back to square one, hoping to win another lottery. A balanced distribution between savings and investment and consumption would have provided John Public with the foundation for an extended period of relative prosperity. The same holds for the country.”

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Mr. Speaker, so the point made by my colleague, the Member for St. Augustine, about spending millions here and there is echoed by Gregory McGuire in this article. Gregory McGuire goes on to say:

“The problem is that the scattershot approach, driven by the desire to score election points, does not send clear signals about where the country or a specific productive sector is heading.”

So, the oil and gas dollars, are not only giving rise to girlish fantasies, but also giving rise to orgies of spending.

Lennox Grant, writing in the *Guardian*, Sunday, October 05, 2003 in the byeline., “Budget festival of spending power”.

“On the eve of his second Budget, Prime Minister Patrick Manning said he feels helpless ‘regret’ over the rising toll of murders and kidnaps. But he can always look forward to the consolation of spending power.”

Spending power becomes the new aphrodisiac in this society.

“In T&T political power brings spending power, but little else, it seems.

Once again, under another PNM administration, the country is about trying to spend itself rich with leading man Mr. Manning in the role of the latest (surely not the last) of the big spenders.

In this, he is luckier than George W. Bush who will have trouble persuading the US Congress to make available \$87 billion for his pet project in Iraq.

Were the T&T chief executive minded to spend a billion or more on CEPEP, he need only wait out the ineffectual cussing and shouting in Parliament, before signing the cheques in his other capacity as Finance Minister.

The money is just there—with no other hands tangling the purse strings. That’s the simple truism of power in the age of Manning II.

For highways criss-crossing the cane and the coconuts; a monorail over flying the Priority Bus Route; a radar gun in each police car; a library in every school; a public library in every district; an expatriate doctor in every health office—the money is there...

It is the golden age of possibility. The country is invited to dream dreams of becoming ‘developed’ by a fixed timetable.

What used to be *mauvais langue* abroad in the early-1980s, the oil-boom years—that T&T had ‘applied’ for graduation from the Third World—is now official policy in Port of Spain.

The oil boom vanished before the reputed application could be considered by whichever authority gives nation status labels like an academic panel awarding degrees.

But today's billions are imagined to have a longer life expectancy.

In body language and in words, the billions are advertised by the Manning administration to be reliably in place for fulfilment of every fantasy, or for ensuring a soft landing should any project soar too close to the sun.

So the marriage of Unit Trust and FCB is devoutly to be wished as a consummation involving multi-billion-dowries from each side.

Who would preside over this swollen empire of State-sector finances?

Who knows? But the wishful exchange of the aging Clarry Benn for the even more aging Ken Gordon can be seriously entertained. All in the confidence that, under the aegis of either of these ageable men, the conjoined billions will remain in place and even in that magical T&T way, reproduce themselves many times over.”

Mr. Speaker, already it is clear that the PNM prescription for the society is destined for failure. In today's *Express Business*, the editorial entitled “Excessively optimistic and inherently dangerous”, deals with the whole question of the pegging of the oil price upon which this budget is predicated and about which all the speakers on this side have said that he is being too optimistic with the oil price.

I know the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central dealt with this, but this is the editorial of today's *Express Business*. They are quoting the Prime Minister in his budget presentation:

“‘Mr. Speaker, our Budget for this fiscal year is based on a projected average oil price of US \$25 per barrel, a GDP growth rate of four per cent, and an inflation rate of 2.7 per cent.’

That was one of Prime Minister Patrick Manning's many key statements during his two-hour speech before Parliament on October 6, unveiling his 2003/2004 Budget.

While reference to the anticipated GDP growth rate and inflation rate caused no major concern, many experts and energy market observers, however, have expressed surprise at Manning's excessively optimistic and inherently dangerous oil price projection for the next year.

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Although an average oil price of US \$25 or more would be more than welcome and would go a long way in funding many multi-million-dollar Government development projects, the Prime Minister, who also is Finance Minister, would be well-advised to take a more conservative approach when it comes to an oil price projection for budget purposes.”

In other words, they are telling the Prime Minister that even at this stage, he is becoming delusional. He is getting involved in grandiose schemes and his delusions of grandeur are impacting upon the price he uses to predicate all his budget.

The editorial goes on:

“In the first place, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has absolutely no control over world oil prices, which are influenced by a wide range of political and economic factors, such as the turmoil in the Middle East and economic development in the industrial world, namely the United States, Japan and the European Union...

Interestingly, the Government of Norway, an important independent world oil producer, recently announced that its national budget for 2004 was being calculated at a little more than US \$21 per barrel. Also, neighbouring Venezuela, the world’s fifth largest oil exporter and the largest oil producer in Latin America and the Caribbean, is preparing to unveil its 2004 national budget based on an average oil export price of \$18.50 per barrel.”

So, Norway is putting it at US \$21.50 and Venezuela, right next door, is pegging their national budget on US \$18.50. When Chavez signed the Memorandum of Understanding with him, did he understand what he was doing? He knows what he is doing across there, but I am not too sure he knows what he is doing here.

It is clear that even on the basis of the fundamental premise upon which this budget is based—the oil price—we have serious reservations and, clearly, the international considerations point otherwise.

It is clear that this budget was meant to provide a panacea, a kind of feeling of goodness. It is like when you take a shot of pethidine and you go into the realm of wellness and goodness and forget the reality of your existence. This is what this budget was meant to do. The budget was meant to deflect people from the harsh reality of the brutish oppression and the oppressive nature of crime in the society.

Mr. Speaker, in any society, there is a hierarchy of political goods. No good is as critical as the supply of security, especially human security. Individuals alone, in special or particular circumstances, can attempt to secure themselves, or groups of individuals can band together to organize and purchase goods or services that maximize their sense of security. Traditionally, and usually, however, individuals and groups cannot easily or effectively substitute private security for the full spectrum of public security. The State's prime function is to provide the political good of security to prevent border invasions and infiltration and any loss of territory, and to eliminate domestic threats to or attacks upon the national order and social structure; to prevent crime and any related dangers to domestic human security and to enable citizens to resolve their disputes with the State and fellow citizens without recourse to arms or other forms of physical coercion.

So the number one public good that a state has to provide is the security of its citizenry. What is the reality of Trinidad and Tobago today? The reality of Trinidad and Tobago today is that crime is rampant. The hon. Prime Minister recognizes that reality and in his budget statement pointed to that.

He said, and I would quote from page 4 under the rubric "National Security":

"Mr. Speaker, the level of security enjoyed by citizens is the most critical problem facing Trinidad and Tobago today. The population is being terrorized as the criminals have declared virtual war on this society. The Government must and shall respond. Accordingly, we now declare war on the criminals and shall do whatever is necessary, within the law, to return this nation to that state where our people can conduct their lives in the full safety and security to which they are entitled."

How did we get there? It is clear to every ordinary citizen of this country how we reached this stage of virtual anarchy. In fact, His Excellency The President made reference to that state of the nation, in his address to this Parliament. We have to understand the connection I made in a previous debate in this honourable House of the linkage between the criminal elite and the political elite in the society. When we have that linkage, that intimate association of the criminal elite with the political elite, then what we have, in Trinidad and Tobago, is a total breakdown of law and order. So the Prime Minister is now attempting to retrieve the situation.

When I talked about the intimate association, I mean when you embrace these so-called community leaders and make them part of the state apparatus by providing them in the mainstream of society, you are laying the basis for a virtual

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breakdown of law and order. You are funding criminal organizations that will utilize the funding gained from taxpayers' money to terrorize the very taxpayers.

We do not need to go far to recognize that reality. We have only to look at our sister Caricom neighbour, Jamaica. In a book entitled, *Police and Crime Control in Jamaica* by Anthony Harriott, published in 2000. I was making the point that when the politicians embrace the criminals there is a legitimation and a validation of that kind of activity. When I read this recently, I recognized where we are headed and it is my duty to point it out to Members on the other side.

I read from page 20:

“The criminal élite is likely to even be more powerful if socially integrated with the economic and political élite. Increasingly, there is an identifiable overlap and interchangeability of persons across these three groups, resulting in more intricate and extensive social relationships that provide protection for criminality...For example, the dons provide a range of services, including various types of security services, the harassment of competitors, customs evasion, and may even involve collaborative illegal economic ventures so forth...

Organized crime is in the process of redefining its relationships with the political élite as the control of the state via its coercive apparatus and patrol-client relationships weaken, and as the economically marginalized and socially excluded population of the inner city communities appear more threatening, the dons are able to exploit their position as gatekeepers to these communities and their capacity to impose discipline on community members. By regulating access to these communities and leveraging their capacity to deliver the votes and their powers of control, the dons are able to assert their importance in the two-party competitive system and to continue to extract resources from the state and private business.”

When I read this, you could have brought this wholesale and put it into Port of Spain.

“Their policing services guarantee the preservation of politically homogeneous communities, the protection of the business enterprises within their domains of power and internal order more generally. They have fully exploited the failure of the police and are effectively becoming extrastate (rather than illegal vigilante) policing authorities. These crime networks have become socially embedded.”

3.45 p.m.

In order to corrupt the voting process, the Members on the other side utilized the services of the criminal element in the society in 2001 and 2002. Since then we have had the perpetrating and unleashing of violence in the society.

I notice the Member for San Fernando West is not here now. Last night she demonstrated her passion in a cackling manner. I wanted her to listen to this. I know that in Embcadere there was a role for the criminal element. Right after the election, like hyenas, they were after her. *[Interruption]* We will see.

This is what is happening in Jamaica today. Here the dons enjoy high status. They are part of the economic and political elite now. This document speaks about the shower posse. We have all kinds of posse across here. This will be very revealing. In the shower posse in Jamaica, there was the presence of the leader of the opposition and members of a governing party attending the funeral of another posse leader. These posses are worth between US \$200 and US \$300 million in figures carried out by the DEA.

We understand what is happening in Jamaica. We see that the Member for San Fernando East was linked to the criminal element, through the community leaders. I make reference to the *Express* article, which only crystallizes what we know in this country such as "Cops link Jamaat to crime wave". We see the role of the now deceased Mark Guerra on a walkabout in Laventille with Prime Minister Patrick Manning. Patrick Manning and hon. Eric Williams were in a walkabout. We have another picture of Mark Guerra on top of a pick up vehicle waving the balisier. It was only after he died we learnt that he was questioned in the shooting of the presidential vehicle when Mrs. Zalayar Hassanali was in the vehicle. He was involved in a string of assassinations, murders and car thieving.

To add insult to injury in this situation, even when Mark Guerra died his wife visited the residence of a high political official and was given further contracts in the National Housing Authority (NHA). Subsequently, she was held for questioning in three murders, committed in board daylight in this country. *[Interruption]* There is the President's House and the Prime Minister's residence. "Residence" refers to only one official residence in this country. When we see these crocodile tears we understand. These are the measures we have to take: Cops link Jamaat to crime wave. There are members within the Jamaat, linked to the Muslimeen, to participate in elections. I know that the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro knows what I am talking about. I know he would attempt to make some distance now that he is the Prime Minister's nominee for chairmanship

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of the PNM. I understand that. When there is that political link, when the economic, political and criminal elite get together what do we have? We have an unleashing of violence like never before. I want to read into the public record, the victims of that violence; the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.

Kidnapping became an industry under the watch of the Member for San Fernando East. The names are as follows: March 25, 2002, Premnath Geelal; May 10, 2002, Kenneth Medford; May 11, 2002, Alberto Serrano; July 14, 2002, Anthony Sabga III; July 2002, Budath Bob Ramlogan; July 2002, Michael Beepath; August 01, 2002, Allan de Boehmeler; August 05, 2002, Mohess Persad and Darlin Rampersad; August 24, 2002, Ishwar Maharaj; August 29, 2002, Jacklin Aking from my constituency—a young girl; September 05, 2002, Kallipersad Ravi Maharaj; September 05, 2002, Khalil Khan; October 02, 2002, Ronald John; October 22, 2002, Kallawatie Godek; October 29, 2002, Winston Seepersad; November 02, 2002, Clint Arjoon; December 17, 2002, Rishi Permanand; December 2002, Dennis Jodhan. The list of kidnapped victims continues. January 25, 2003, Maria Hector; February 23, Saran Kissoondan; March 14, Micah Bernard; March 19, Adrianna Ramsingh, April 02; Geewan Geelal; April 03, Cindy Mahase; May 07, Anslem Choo Woon Chee; May 14, Marc Prescott; May 14, Kerri Greaves; May 14, Vanessa Phillips; June 01, Outhar Maharaj; June 22, Wayne Pierre; June 29, Peter De Freitas; June 30, Darryl Chootoo.

Mr. Speaker, this thing is occurring so often that we may find ourselves developing a measure of immunity to kidnapping in the society. We must guard against that kind of immunity. Whilst we seek to go for this oasis of 2020, there is a policy of scorched earth in the kidnapping in this country. July 13, Damien Schneider was murdered; July 04, Syam Ramkisson; July 15, Wood Lam Wong; July 17, Yves Ayoung Chee; July 17, Benedict Barret; July 17, Kendra Kisson; July 17, Mark Samlal; September 04, Vernon Roopnarine; September 15, Tricia Shirkisson-Suryadevera; September 21, Ryan Singh. I knew that young boy and his father. They struggled for more than 20 years to build their business which is legal. Any reference to any drug dealing is nonsense in any way; September 29, Shamshoon Mohammed, which precipitated the protest in Caroni; October 12, Nigel Singh; and the latest was a 14-year-old boy, Christopher Thackorie. *[Interruption]* You had your chance, you spoke about the PNM being wolves in Caroni.

Mr. Speaker, in this society there is the linkage between the PNM, the criminal elite, which has now become an economic elite by virtue of the state funding in

the National Housing Authority (NHA), URP, CEPEP and now NEDCO. There is a strong economic, criminal elite in the society that has political support.

Ira Mathur in the *Express* of Monday, October 13, 2003, talked about the “Reign of the hyenas” in this society. Listen to what she said:

"With the coming of the hyenas everything changed. In their myopic and obsessive thirst for power they ran ramshackle throughout the land, grabbing at precious resources, living for the day, failing to plan for the next, clambering over one another for power, slaughtering the innocent, creating a wasteland.

They are menacing, greedy, unimaginative, with a flimsy intellect but also flashy and charming because power is attractive. They are utterly indifferent to those sharing their environment and lack empathy. They are self-seeking and wily and stupidity only makes them even more dangerous.

The hyenas have been running wild amongst us...”

It is because the hyenas are in the body of the politics of the PNM.

The hon. Member for San Fernando East, in his budget statement, spoke about appointing a new team headed by Brigadier Peter Joseph. We were in government and there were certain things that were happening. Where are the resources for certain areas in the intelligence agencies in this country? The Special Branch is under Supt. Diaz. I want to talk about the various intelligence agencies. When we listen to the trauma of what happens when a kidnapping takes place in the country, one would think that we are still in the donkey cart age. What are the units that currently exist within the system? People do not know that there are several units; each with intellectual competence of their members and the necessary wherewithal within the police, army and coastguard. Why are these resources not being utilized to solve and put an end to the crime of kidnapping in this country? There is the Homicide Bureau, the Anti-Kidnapping Squad and the Organized Crime and Narcotics Unit. There are several intelligence agencies such as the Security Intelligence Agency (SIA). What are they doing? There is the Strategic Services Agency. What are they doing? There is the Special Branch, the Customs Preventative Unit, the Special Operations Group, the Joint Operations Command Centre and the Counter Drug Task Force. Why is there a need for a new unit? It is clear to me that these units are not being utilized. The SIA is under the command of retired Army Captain Lyn Williams. I want to tell what both the Member and I know about OGNU, that is why he licked up Craig.

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Mr. Speaker, the special crime-fighting unit in the budget is a ludicrous plan. The Prime Minister said that this new unit would be drawn from various uniformed services in the country. Each member of his unit has to pass a polygraph examination. We had the Counter Drug Crime Task Force that drew personnel from the police service, immigration, Inland Revenue and other agencies. Each member of this unit had to pass a polygraph test administered by the American DEA. This task force was extremely effective in developing intelligence on drug trafficking and was being studied by other Caribbean countries as a model to follow. Prime Minister Manning must explain to this nation, why the head of this unit, ASP Raymond Craig, was immediately sent on one year's leave as soon as the PNM was handed power in 2000. This effectively killed the work of that unit. Now you understand why cocaine is coming through Moruga. Bodies; and cocaine in hundreds of millions of dollars are coming through Moruga, Mayaro and Manzanilla.

Prime Minister Manning announced plans to acquire two new, fast patrol boats. What happened to the two 80-foot coastguard cutters and six fast patrol boats which were donated by the US Government? Are they still operating, or were they sabotaged? The US Government also donated two C26 aircraft equipped with the latest surveillance equipment, what happened to these?

Mr. Manning: They are operational.

Mr. G. Singh: If they are operational, how it is that you cannot solve the kidnappings that are taking place in this country with such frequency?

The Prime Minister said that the Government would acquire a new, ultra modern radar system in two years. What happened to the coastal radar system also donated by the US Government? This system had the capability of detecting low-flying aircraft and boats entering the territory of Trinidad and Tobago. It was being manned from the Twin Towers by the Joint Operation Command Centre, which drew personnel from the police, customs and the coastguard. It was headed—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I really wonder if the Member for Caroni East believes that he is serving the national interest by the contribution he is making at this time, with the kinds of things that he is saying. It is irresponsible in the extreme!

Mr. G. Singh: Do you know what is irresponsible? It is irresponsible to have a Prime Minister overseeing the kidnapping of citizens of this country with impunity and not utilizing the resources and intelligence agencies of the State to

solve the crime, but is afraid when a Member of Parliament tells the population: "This is what we have available." When you go to the families of the kidnapped victims, the police do not have a tape recorder. The Prime Minister is now telling me that we must not use the intelligence services to go after the criminal element, because they are part of his community leader structure. That is the height of prime ministerial irresponsibility. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I had known these facts for sometime. I was hoping that the Prime Minister would utilize these agencies to deal with the criminal elements in the society. I have come to the position that they are engaged in a measure of political engineering and that the criminal support system is for the electoral engineering. Now we have a Crime Commission. We all know about Anaconda, Operation Baghdad and zero tolerance. Just now it would be Arnold Schwarzeneger in the California elections.

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. [*Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. G. Singh: Thank you Members. I take what the Prime Minister has said very seriously because I am not irresponsible by any standards. If we have a crime, what is Peter Joseph going to do. Who is Brigadier Peter Joseph going to report to? We need clarity. We need a clear expression of the rule of law. A state cannot function outside the rule of law.

The Prime Minister, in the budget statement, spoke about threats, the right to public protest and the beefing up of the riot squad. We are not countenancing that. This is a Government that must function in accordance with the rule of law. It is the demonstrations in the society that help to win democracy worldwide. It is our right to demonstrate, within the ambit of the law. When the Prime Minister, in an overt attempt to threaten people and suppress the democracy—we know what road he is heading to and we are looking at Peter Joseph, brigadier without a brigade squad.

It is clear that there is an attempt to suppress dissent in the context of the budgetary speech. I find it was distasteful, too. The Prime Minister should read an article by the erudite and very experienced George John. George John would have gone through Dr. Eric Williams, George Chambers, ANR. Robinson, Basdeo

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Panday, Patrick Manning, Basdeo Panday and now Patrick Manning again. I quote George John, in this article of October 08, 2003:

"The battle lines in the sand

The eruption at Chaguanas had, from the national perspective, reduced Manning's budget speech to a sideshow,..."

What is important for purposes of this debate is, I quote:

"Indeed the language of the Chaguanas protesters left no doubt that Trinidad and Tobago is now on the brink of communal conflict, the tragedy that brought our neighbours in Guyana close to destruction during the regime of Forbes Burnham, not that Manning can be compared in any way with Burnham."

This is a very experienced man who is saying: "Look, when you unleash state power against the ordinary taxpaying citizenry who are protesting for what they consider to be the threat to their very life, you are sowing the seeds for communal conflict." He is saying to the hon. Prime Minister that it is time to draw back, do not continue on this path of instability.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues pointed out what Christopher Holder said with respect to the Peter Joseph squad, so I would not get into that. There is a link between the criminal elite, which has now become an economic and political—The next step is to attack the independence of the Judiciary. I want to appeal to the Prime Minister to read George John's article. In this highly plural society, we must be very measured in what we are saying and doing with respect to what can provide the trigger for communal conflict.

There is the perception out there—I am happy my colleague from Diego Martin Central raised the issue of social equity. In the context of where you have a society, it is dependent upon the Judiciary to act as the final arbiter in the scheme of things. This is what the Chief Justice had to say:

"There can never be any complaint, however, if this question of the independence of the Judiciary is raised over and over again. It is far too important a pillar of our Constitution and for the adherence of the rule of law not to be raised time and time again, particularly since there are many insidious ways of undermining this independence. The attack is not always frontal.

Interference from the Executive can take many forms: withholding of funds, preventing judges from obtaining training, preventing or impeding the hiring of staff to fill posts, assuming the power to decide what recommendations from the

Chief Justice should be put before Cabinet, interfering in the daily decision making jurisdiction of the Chief Justice, limited and insufficient budget allocations, a grave reluctance to modernize court facilities...”

The Chief Justice went on to say:

"I have discovered that many persons, some occupying very high positions, are unaware of the role and function of an independent Judiciary."

I had a look at the estimates of expenditure. It is clear that there has been an increase in the allocation of the Judiciary.

I want to bring to the attention of this honourable House, a Cabinet Note that is currently engaging the attention of Cabinet. In the Industrial Court, which is a superior court of record in Trinidad and Tobago—meaning that it has similar powers to the High Court of Justice—five judges' contractual term comes to end on October 22, 2003. Consistent with the established procedure and convention of the Industrial Court, these five judges wrote to the President of the Industrial Court, Judge Addison Khan, in July of this year, indicating their willingness to continue to serve as Industrial Court judges. In August of this year, the President of the Industrial Court wrote to the hon. Attorney General, recommending all five judges for reappointment. The law is very clear in the Industrial Relations Act. Section 4(8) of the Industrial Court Act states that:

“A member of the Court appointed, other than under sub-section 3(a)(i),” which deals with the President.

“may be removed from office during his term of office only for inability to perform the functions of his office (whether arising from infirmity of mind or body or any other cause or misbehaviour), but shall not be removed except in accordance with section 106 of the Constitution”

which provides. It is a subject matter of litigation in the Crane case in which their good friend, Eustace Bernard was thrown in the dog house by the Privy Council.

The President of the Industrial Court recommended all five judges to the hon. Attorney General. The Attorney General then drafted a Cabinet Note indicating that the President of the Industrial Court only recommended two of the judges. One might say that the Attorney General, knowingly and deliberately misled Cabinet. [*Interruption*] I heard the Member for Point Fortin say he will fire all. It is his right.

What is the role and function of an attorney general? The Attorney General's role and function is that of the guardian of the Constitution, but not this Attorney

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General. She is misleading Cabinet. The matter went before the Finance and General Purposes (F&GP) subcommittee of Cabinet and they could not decide on the matter of the appointment of judges in the Industrial Court. I want to tell the Members because they may not be aware of it. Maybe they did not read the Cabinet Note as yet. Mr. Speaker, there was a subcommittee of Cabinet, headed by the Hon Dr. Keith Rowley, Minister Lawrence Achong, Hon. Colm Imbert and the Hon. Attorney General. These are the four persons who sat on a subcommittee of the F&GP to make the recommendations.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would love to take the words from my colleague that there will be “social equity”. Let me tell you who are these judges that are going to be removed. The Member for Point Fortin said that he is going to fire the five judges. Mr. Speaker, who are the sitting judges? I want to make sure that Cabinet adjudicates appropriately, so I am here to guide Cabinet this afternoon. The judges are Ramchand Lutchmedial, attorney at law; and a junior partner in the esteemed law firm of Hobsons; Bindimattie Mahabir, she holds a master of science degree from the Hague, and is an economist; Sandra Ramparas, an attorney at law. Now, my understanding is that her husband, who is a supporter of the PNM, supported Keith Rowley the last time he attempted to unseat Mr. Manning. The fourth judge is Judy Rajkumar-Gulbance, who holds a master’s degree in economics, and the fifth judge is Dave Lai, an accountant. So there are five judges: Ramchand Lutchmedial, Bindimattie Mahabir, Sandra Ramparas, Judy Rajkumar-Gulbance and Dave Lai. I want to know what the Member for San Fernando West and the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro have to say about this matter. They are sitting judges. The convention is that if the President recommends someone that person should continue.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you who will replace these judges. They will be replaced by Deborah Felix-Thomas, who is a good friend of the Attorney General; Miss Sloan Seale, Registrar of the Tax Appeal Board; Joy Donaldson, the daughter of the vice chairman of the party in the new slate, and a member of the National Security and Rehabilitation “think-tank”; Miss Beckles and Miss Victoria Harigan. Where is the ethnic equity in this? This is what it is! When I talk it is share race. The Member for San Fernando West gets up and buries her head—I do not know where. But you see, for a ministerial position, you will sell your ancestry. [*Desk thumping*]

This is contamination and interference with the Judiciary. So, here is a case where the Judiciary is becoming a derivative of the Executive, rather than being

an independent body. When the citizenry and the trade union community go before that court system, they will know that they will not get significant remedy, or redress from this court, because the Industrial Court is now becoming—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I think the Member is raising a very interesting point, but what is at the back of my mind is, the Member called five names, and I simply want to know that if those people are there, how come there is not a mix? That is the same thing that the Member is asking for. Who put them there?

Mr. G. Singh: Okay, I will answer the Member. The Industrial Court has a complement of 20 judges. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: Well, if that is so then you should have looked at the 20 judges instead of looking at just five judges.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. We have been going very well today. Today is one of the best days of the debate so please, let us maintain some order. The Member for Caroni East is on his feet and the rest of us should remain silent.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Speaker, there is a complement of 20 judges and they are going to open up a division in south. I think that the former Attorney General Building will be rented. I have no problem with that. Maybe it is a very commodious and a very suitable building. I am talking here about the principle. That is why we are saying constitutional reform is required, so the Judiciary will not become a derivative of the Executive.

Mr. Speaker, when there is Joy Donaldson, who is a close relative of John Donaldson being an Industrial Court judge, what is going to emerge in this society? Do you understand! If the process was a transparent process and it was not a political process of choosing judges, then I will have no problem with that, but once the process is a political process I have a problem. I am saying, remove the appointment of judges from the politicians, [*Desk thumping*] Cabinet ought not—whether it was done previously or otherwise, all Attorney Generals have abused that position—to be appointing judges. If it is wrong, it was wrong then and it is wrong now. It is very clear to me what is operative in the mind—by your deeds they shall know you.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on the issue of agriculture. This Government has come to the Parliament and refused to present a plan on Caroni (1975) Limited. I want to refer the Prime Minister to the university position paper on the issue which is entitled: *A Framework for National Development: Caroni Transformation Process*. I want to read quickly into the record the nine

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recommendations of this paper. The University of the West Indies is saying, “Look, we have not seen your plan.” While the Government is talking about Vision 2020 and it is moving towards that oasis, the University of the West Indies is telling the Government that it has not seen its plans and they are making recommendations to the Government, and I quote:

- “1. That the Government move immediately to prepare and publish a comprehensive plan detailing how it intends to restructure Caroni (1975) Limited.
2. That the Government take urgent steps to convene a national consultation on the Caroni resources and on the published plan.
3. That, in respect of the use of Caroni Lands, any departure from the National Physical Development Plan—the substantive legal document framed to govern land use in Trinidad and Tobago—must be done through the legally stipulated process, which includes bringing amendments to this Plan before Parliament.
4. That all conditions for the lease and tenure of the Caroni lands be detailed to the public in a published document, to meet the requirements of transparency.
5. That the Government immediately establish a mechanism for consultation and information gathering with the Caroni workers...
6. That the State establish an independent Screening Committee to stringently screen potential investors who seek Caroni lands as their location of business.
7. That the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources establish an independent Authority charged with the implementation of plans for agriculture and agricultural related industries.
8. That Government establish a comprehensive system of water control on Caroni lands, in order to facilitate irrigation, as an essential pre-condition for the establishment of agricultural enterprise on the Caroni land.
9. That the Government establish a Lease Income Funding Enterprise system and embark upon a comprehensive joint funding venture with companies in the heavy industrial sector, in order to fund national platforms for development, such as the following ones proposed by the Position Paper:”

Mr. Speaker, when one listens to the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources as to the process for the allocation of Caroni (1975) Limited lands—one must understand that you have to go through a process internally within the Estate Management Company then to the board, which is another filtration; then to the Minister and then to the Cabinet. As Cabinet embarks on its Vision 2020 it is going to determine the allotment for farmers. That is political interference. It happened in Carlsen Field and Wallerfield where there was political interference in the allocation for land for farming purposes; we ended up not producing one chicken or one egg.

Mr. Speaker, last year, when the hon. Prime Minister imposed the punitive taxes on gambling and betting, I told the Prime Minister that must have an appreciation of what is happening in the world, and gambling and betting is part of the leisure industry worldwide. It is a growth industry. I made references in the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order to the *Sir Allan Budd Review on Gambling and Betting*, which is a comprehensive white paper on gambling and betting. The Prime Minister went ahead and imposed punitive taxes and he said he did it on moral grounds. Do you understand the hypocrisy!

Today's *Express* newspaper deals with the issue. They are telling the Prime Minister do not play God for them. The Prime Minister must not allow his moral position—as hypocritical as it is—to be crystallized into public policy, and if the Prime Minister is taking that position, he is playing God for them. I urge the Prime Minister to look at the *Sir Allan Budd Review on Gambling and Betting*, and see how a First World society—as the Member flies up in the air towards 2020—deals with that issue.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to deal with the issue of the increase in petroleum prices. There exists out there a certain group—but primarily maxi-taxis drivers—who mix kerosene with diesoline in order to get a better performance from their vehicles. I am not a petroleum engineer so I cannot verify or corroborate whether there is better performance. What I do know is that a lot of poor people in rural communities use kerosene—or “pitch oil” as it is known—as their primary fuel for cooking and lighting. When the Government raises the price of kerosene—under the guise of improving the environment—what the Government is doing is imposing a punitive tax on the poorest of the poor in this society.

One does not make public policy to impact in such a negative manner on the poorest of the poor. I will really want the Prime Minister to rethink his position before the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order comes about. I know that in the

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budget speech, the Prime Minister spoke about a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) being signed for an aluminum smelter plant. I know that one was done with Norsk Hydro and that did not come to fruition. What I would like to find out is whether this is a new reincarnation of Norsk Hydro? I do not know. No one came to Parliament and told us anything. Who are the parties to this agreement? What are the terms and conditions? Consistent with Government's approach for Vision 2020—transparency and accountability—we ought to be told, because that is an important plan in the whole question of the diversification of Trinidad and Tobago. I feel that it is the duty of the Prime Minister to explain that.

It is clear that this budget will not be able to sustain itself for the coming year. It has sowed the seeds of instability, as my colleague from St. Joseph had indicated. We have seen in the Industrial Court, a perpetuation of discrimination or racism. How can the Government seek to embrace a significant section of the population in calling for social equity, when right before its very eye there is that blatant act of racism and discrimination? It is a sad approach. Several areas call for an opening-up and dealing with the agricultural sector.

The budget is silent on liberalization of the telecommunication sector. Liberalization of the telecommunication sector will give rise and lower the cost of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. How could the Government talk about FTAA and not have a liberalized telecommunication sector in this country. How could the Government do that? Where is the agenda for liberalization? One would have thought that during the budget presentation, at least, someone would have dealt with that issue. It is such a fundamental issue. All over the world where there is liberalization, there is a positive impact on the growth and development of economies. The budget is silent; so acts of commission and acts of omission this budget falls.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea and we will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased for this opportunity to address this honourable House and to participate in this debate in circumstances where we on this side could do no less than to congratulate the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the Prime

Minister and Minister of Finance, on what has been described by the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association as an excellent budget. [*Desk thumping*] In circumstances where we have listened to—what I could only describe as a tirade—Members on the other side, who are trying to imply—and sometimes very overtly, that we on this side are not operating in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

In my contribution, I will debunk most of what they have said, just as my other colleagues have debunked what they have said, and that is that this budget is without vision and a plan for Trinidad and Tobago. Before I actually get into the substance of my contribution, I would like to deal very frontally with the Member for Caroni East, and the several assertions that he made in his contribution to this debate. Let me start by saying that the Member for Caroni East leads the Opposition in this House. Let me indicate that the Member for Caroni East was a member of Cabinet. Let me reiterate that the Member for Caroni East sometimes acted in the portfolio of Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago and, yet, the Member for Caroni East has demonstrated that in no uncertain terms that he does not have the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago at heart.

The Member for Caroni East stood in this House today and indicated almost all the intricacies of the national security issues. The hon. Prime Minister made an attempt to indicate to him that what he was doing was putting national security issues into the public domain where there should not be—in the interest of securing the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

In circumstances where, as the Member has acted as Attorney General, there would have been times when the Member for Caroni East may have sat on the National Security Council, the Member would have therefore been aware that there are certain things which do not need to come into the public domain. The Member would also be aware—as a person who sat in the Cabinet and as one of the persons who participated in the debate on the Freedom of Information Bill—that national security issues is one of the activities that is excluded in the Freedom of Information Bill. Yet, the Member stands in this Parliament, as a representative of the people, and put national security issues on the public information system, in an attempt to jeopardize the efforts being made by this particular Government.

Mr. Speaker, the Members sat on the other side and made spurious claims about those of us on this side not wanting to do anything about crime and pretending—as the Member put it—to be a part of the criminal elite, and the criminal elite is now fraternizing with the politicians. But the question is: which

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political party on more than one occasion asked for convicted criminals to be candidates in the local government election? We have at least two examples of persons who were UNC candidates who were either before the courts, or who have been convicted for criminal offences. Mr. Speaker, while the Members opposite sit on that side and pretend to be paragons of virtue, their objective is to bring discord, disquiet and disunity to the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member for Caroni East was apparently reading from a Cabinet Note when he indicated that this Government's objective is to fire five east Indians—as the Member puts it—and hire five people of African descent to the Industrial Court. Nothing could be further from the truth. The hon. Prime Minister again attempted to correct the information—and because they want their misinformation to pervade the society—the Member did not allow the hon. Prime Minister to make his statement and to correct the misinformation.

The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago has not adjudicated on that particular issue. If the Members opposite were fair to the people of Trinidad and Tobago—to show their consistent attempts to mislead this Parliament—when the term of the previous members of the Industrial Court ended, three persons were removed: Ruby Thompson, Lenore Harris and Larry Archong. These judges were replaced by Mr. Lutchmedial, Mrs. Gulbance, Miss Bindimattie Mahabir, Mrs. Sandra Ramparas, Mr. Sam Maharaj and Mr. Paul Lai. If the Member wants to talk about what is happening in this country, when they adjudicated, three persons of African descent were removed and four persons of East Indian descent and one person of African descent were replaced.

The President of the Industrial Court is Mr. Addison Khan, the Vice President is Mrs Gladys Gafoor, and the former president was Mr. Ramchand. We are presiding over a situation where those Members on the opposite side have one agenda and one agenda alone, and that is to foster racial hatred in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Once we sit on this side, we will not allow that to take place, and neither will the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, that is why in the local government election, we have won a seat in Penal/Debe for the first time; we have won a seat in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo region for the first time; we have won seats in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation where we have never won before; we have won Ecclesville; we have won seats in Nariva constituency where we did not win before; and we have won seats in the Siparia constituency where we did not win before. While Members opposite live in a situation where they are hoping that by

being racist, the people of Trinidad would be captured, the people of Trinidad and Tobago will not allow racism to divide them. [*Desk thumping*]

The reason why the people of Trinidad and Tobago will not allow racism to divide them is that they have recognized that it is only under a PNM administration that citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are treated fairly. [*Desk thumping*] So while they sit on that side and say that the social programmes are not for their people; social programmes have been opened in Couva, Chaguanas, Penal, Siparia and Fyzabad, and they are talking about their people—as they put it—not being able to access social programmes.

5.15 p.m.

When there was flooding in Trinidad it was their people—as they put it—who were taken care of first. The first set of cheques was distributed in Chaguanas with the help of the Member for Chaguanas. The Member for Chaguanas came to the distribution of the first set of cheques by the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister responsible for Social Services Delivery. Mr. Speaker, they would not preach racial hatred and create discord in this country once we are the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We will not allow it! On each occasion that they get up and speak race we counter it with every fiber in our bodies.

The theme of our budget is “Chartering the course to 2020—Empowering people,” and we have not said empowering only the people who support us; we have said empowering all; every single person and group that needs empowerment. We have said in this budget that it will touch each and every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

Our objective is to ensure that there is an improvement in the quality of life of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We on this side recognize that those on the other side do not understand the concept of empowerment, because when they sat in government it was only to make sure that they stayed in power and empowered themselves. We are aware of one of their Members who said that when he is finished with his term of office as a government Minister his grandchildren would not have to work. That is why we on this side cannot understand that kind of concept. That is why when the Member for Caroni East stood up in this honourable House today and told us on this side that he is surprised that the telecommunications sector has not been opened up and he does not know what we are doing, we asked him to cast his mind back to the time when there was an attempt by those on that side to open up the telecommunications sector. But that was only for the purpose of ensuring that one of their ministerial

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colleagues got the contract and the particular radio frequencies that would be of benefit to him alone. That was their concept of opening up the telecommunications sector.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you remember that that entire matter ended up in the courts of Trinidad and Tobago and the then Prime Minister and Member for Couva North were before the courts of Trinidad and Tobago—and for want of a better word—convicted. A judgment exists in the records indicating that he must have no activity in relation to that telecommunications issue, and in relation to any other type of issue, because he was using overarching control; he was biased and he was operating in a way that was to the detriment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. At that time he forgot what was his oath of office, and it seems as though their memories are short. Today, the Member for Caroni East would stand in this honourable House and ask us why the telecommunications sector has not been opened. The telecommunications sector has not been opened because they attempted to corrupt the process, and as a consequence of that, we on this side now have to start the process over from scratch. That is why the sector is not yet opened. [*Desk thumping*]

As we talk about empowerment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we recognize that our objective is to ensure that our children and our children's children do not have to subsist in the same kind of communities that we necessarily have to subsist in. In circumstances where our country is existing in a globalized age where trade liberalization is part of what is happening in our country, where there would be the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the Caricom Single Market and Economy (CSME), we have to prepare our citizens for what is going to take place.

As we empower our people, our objective is to prepare them and to ensure that they operate at their optimal potential. That is why it is shocking to us when Members opposite indicate that we have no plan, no form of moving forward in circumstances where we have said, without a doubt, that at this time when we are in a situation where there is liquidity in the system; where our oil and gas revenues are at a very high level, now is the time for us to assist the people of Trinidad and Tobago to move to another level.

When we talk about having increased old age pensions that is for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to ensure that nobody exists under the poverty line. When we promised and now we have delivered on our promise, to ensure that the NIS pension is at least \$1,000, that is for all the people; empowering all those who need that type of empowerment. When we say to those persons who

have cried out to us that the disability grant was for persons 40 years and over, but there are disabled persons 40 years and under, we have said that we have heard your cries and we would not only increase the disability grant, but persons from ages 18 to 40 would now be captured by the disability grant. That is empowering all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank sat with the banking community on a situation, that affects all the people, which was brought to our attention. Today, we are seeing a drop in interest rates; today we are seeing bank charges being reduced and in some instances being removed, where you no longer have to pay a charge for utility bills. We did not do it for only the people on this side or who supported us; every one of your supporters who use a bank, who pay a utility bill, who need to borrow money would benefit. It is amazing how they could sit on that side and behave in a way that gives absolutely no credence to what they have said.

When the Member for Couva South got up in this Parliament and said that his understanding is that the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is now a partner—for want of a better word—in a particular company and that is why that company has got a particular contract, we look on in amazement. First of all, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is not a Member of that particular company. Secondly, the contract has not been awarded to that company. In fact, the contract has been awarded to Bechtel; and Bechtel is an international construction company that would even be doing construction in Iraq. The lowest bidder. Yet, the Member for Couva South stood in this honourable House and just let loose on the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, not evincing a shred of evidence or even the smallest amount of truth. Mr. Speaker, it gets worse than that.

Imagine the Member for Couva South stands in this honourable House and says that the *Newsday* is funded by drug lords, and that members of staff of the *Newsday* are drug addicts. How in heaven's name could this be allowed? How could they even come into the Parliament where they have the privilege of Parliament, and make all kinds of spurious allegations about people and institutions? They are using this honourable House of Representatives as a mechanism for revenge. They are so disturbed at not being in Government and, by the fact that this Government is moving this country in the shortest space of time to heights that they never achieved in their six-year period that they are going to the besest emotions to attempt to undermine everything that is being done in Trinidad and Tobago.

When hon. Members on the opposite side talk about constitutional reform it is amazing that that was never an issue when they were in governance. Everything was all right with the Constitution, but as soon as they come out of office, now we must have constitutional reform at all costs, or they will not support. But we are telling them that with or without their support we will take Trinidad and Tobago forward.

One of the concerns that members of the public have been indicating is that the gas price has been increased, and as a consequence we are hearing that the transportation costs will go up. In fact, in some areas the transportation costs have already been increased. We just want to remind the public that the maximum increase was 15 cents after several years of not having an increase at all, and 15 cents in circumstances where one of the objectives is to remove lead from the gas that we now use. Lead is one of the environmental factors that have been proven to poison people and as a consequence of that, as we take Trinidad and Tobago forward, our objective is to remove the lead from the gasoline in Trinidad and Tobago. In circumstances where the gas price has not been increased for quite some time, and now the increase is only about 15 cents, that benefit of the removal of lead should really indicate to the people of Trinidad and Tobago the kinds of concerns we have for their level and welfare.

It has come to our notice that Members opposite are bent on discord and because they have not been able to find anything truly wrong with this budget, the basis of their presentations has been a tissue of creating discord and making misleading statements and not really getting to the heart of what this empowerment budget is all about. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind you and the national community that with this budget the SHARE programme, which assists several people in Trinidad and Tobago, has been increased to serve 15,000 persons per month. The SHARE programme has been improved to, not only a food distribution programme, but also it now has a component of skills training which did not exist before. So that those persons who previously just got their food baskets are now being trained in a skill so that they can move to the next step of not having to depend on a food basket, but having a skill that is marketable. So that they could be empowered and make a contribution, not only to themselves but to the society of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ours is a belief that access to basic needs is a human right. Mr. Speaker, when they sit on that side and talk about creating a dependency syndrome, our belief is that for a time there would always be persons in the society who would need their basic human needs taken care of, and we would not deny anyone who

is in that kind of need, access to the social programmes that we have put in place. We are in the process of moving our people to the next level. So whereas they are on a programme of moving their people to the best of feelings and existence, ours is a vision of moving our people to the next level of existence.

That is why, in recognition of that fact that access to the computer and Internet is no longer a luxury, ours is a vision for all citizens to become computer literate and achieve certain Internet savvy. It is for this reason that the Social Services Delivery, Office of the Prime Minister has already established the first 15 community-based telecentres, in an effort to ensure that throughout the country all our people have access to computers, the Internet and access to an opening world so that they could participate.

We recognize that as Trinidad and Tobago moves forward we must prepare for the CSME and for the FTAA. So while we talk about getting CSME ready and FTAA ready, they talk civil disobedience. If they want to stay in that time war it is up to them, but ours is the objective to ensure that all the people are ready when CSME and the FTAA are here. As a consequence of that, we are working diligently to ensure that not only are the people of Trinidad and Tobago ready, but also our businesses are ready for that onslaught.

We have had to sit here and be bombarded by totally misleading information. We have sat here and heard the hon. Members for Couva North, Caroni Central and Siparia put into the *Hansard* record several misleading comments and statements about our health services; about the education system; and about an entire process that is not factual. We heard the Member for Couva North indicate—and he was backed up by the Member for Caroni Central—that no new hospitals were built; no new health centres were built. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth.

The Member for Diego Martin East, the Minister of Health, indicated an entire list of health centres and hospitals that have been opened and refurbished under this administration. When the Member for Caroni Central indicates that there are no drugs in the hospitals and people are suffering generally, this is a total fabrication. I asked him to ask the people of the Erin region what type of health centre they now have in Erin in a circumstance where they never had that type of access before. That health centre was completed at a cost of \$2.8 million. The Iacos Health Centre was completed at a cost of \$2 million. Clearly, the hon. Member for Caroni Central was not present when the Member for Diego Martin East and Minister of Health talked about the 30 health centres and hospitals that

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have been opened in places like Gran Couva, Las Lomas, Talparo, Debe, Williamsville and Gasparillo, just to name a few.

It was painful to listen to the Member for Siparia when she tried to mislead the population in circumstances where education is so important, and she stood there and told the people of Trinidad and Tobago that my friend from Diego Martin West explained it so clearly this morning that there would no longer be fairness in the placement of SEA students, and the first 1,000 students would get their first place, but the other students would be placed by a lottery. Mr. Speaker, so untrue that it is painful to believe that someone who represents people would stand up in this honourable House and make such a statement. Nothing could be further from the truth. The real situation is that children would be placed, as they have always been placed according to merit and geography. Why do they persist in trying to upset the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

One of those issues, in terms of upsetting the people of Trinidad and Tobago is that statement by the Member for Caroni Central, who is predicting doom and gloom and strikes in the health sector; lack of basic drugs and untold suffering of the people of this country. Those were his words, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Caroni Central is apparently competing with his leader in trying to bring comic relief to this honourable House. It is ridiculous the kinds of statements that he has made.

Imagine the Member for Caroni Central trying to convince this honourable House and the national community that the Cuban doctors cannot speak or understand English. Trinidad and Tobago is a small country and if that were true we would already have been hearing that outcry from the public. We would have heard it on the talk shows; Radio Shakti; FM 90.5; FM 101; FM 106—which is hosted by the Mayor of Chaguanas—and we would have heard it on radio FM 95 and radio FM 102. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the Member for Caroni Central—*mentiras puras mentiras*—that is Spanish for all lies. I have said it in Spanish. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you can say it in any language it still translates into that. So you need to rephrase that.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the statement in circumstances where I really thought if the Cuban doctors—by any stretch of the imagination— could not understand English, then when I told them this they would understand what is taking place in the House of Representatives of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] An entire fabrication! In Latin America

most people are bilingual. In the same way that we have said it in Trinidad and Tobago, that one of our visions is to make this country bilingual in circumstances where we are seven miles from the continent of South America.

Mr. Speaker, what makes it even worse is that the Member for Caroni Central is spreading a lot of *mauvais langue*—I know that is French—mischief and what some of us would like to call bad rake, generally. The Member for Caroni Central had the unmitigated gall to indicate that the Cuban doctors have failed in Guyana and Grenada. Mr. Speaker, the truth of that is all Caribbean Ministers of Health confirmed at a recent Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) meeting in Washington, that they are moving full speed ahead to employ more Cuban doctors. Since this programme has been of tremendous success to the people of the Caribbean, he would stand there and try to mislead the entire population.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side are thankful that the population of Trinidad and Tobago is seeing right through them. It seems as though the people of Trinidad and Tobago already have 2020 vision when it comes to those on the other side. [*Desk thumping*] They are seeing them perfectly for what they are. So when they stand on that side and say to us that we are fostering the crime and it is our fault that the criminals are doing whatever they are doing, we say to them that the only Prime Minister and Minister of National Security to throw his hands up in the air in despair and say that crime could not be handled was the Member for Couva North when he was Prime Minister and Minister of National Security on the way to the courts of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in circumstances where the crime was going out of control, we said through the then Leader of the Opposition, the distinguished Member for San Fernando East, “This cannot be allowed to continue. We will join with you in attempting to get to a stage where we can handle crime because it is affecting all of us.” We sat with them and for three years worked on legislation that, on both sides, we were of the view would assist in reforming the police service, allowing them to be able to handle crime in a more effective way, allowing them to be able to handle a police service that should be modernized, and, because they are no longer sitting in Whitehall, they will not support that very legislation that really came from them.

It came during the time of their governance. It was a bipartisan effort. We joined with them in the interest of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago and it is unfortunate that, when we talk crime, we have to reduce ourselves to either laying blame on that side or laying blame on this side. That is an unfortunate situation.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues for this extension.

Mr. Speaker, I said that it is unfortunate that we have to be reduced to laying blame on either side but it is in these particular circumstances very necessary because those on the opposite side would like history rewritten and they think that, by standing there and producing a tissue of misinformation, history will be rewritten. However, there are those who have said that one of the main elements in this upsurge in crime is the issue of the criminal deportees. I just want to place on record what happened with that issue of the criminal deportees.

It was in June 2000 that the Member for Couva North and the then Member for Couva South, in his capacity as Attorney General, hosted the then Attorney General of the United States of America, Miss Janet Reno. One of the documents that was signed at that time was a document which would allow what is called criminal returnees to Trinidad and Tobago. In the year 2000 a document was signed between the government of Trinidad and Tobago and the government of the United States to allow—and, Mr. Speaker, I am reminded to ensure that the *Hansard* record shows that it was under the administration of the Member for Couva North, the year 2000, the month was June, when the US government representative came and that document was signed to allow for criminal returnees.

One of the reporters who was at the signing asked the question of the then Prime Minister, “Is anything in place to ensure that when these criminal returnees come into Trinidad and Tobago they can be rehabilitated, they can be put back into the society as functioning members of society and that they could be traced so that we would have an idea of where they were and what they were doing?” Mr. Speaker, the then Prime Minister indicated—even before I indicate what was said, I want to make the point that another question was asked of the Attorney General of the United States. “Is this happening in other Caribbean countries?”

Let me give the answer to that first. Mr. Speaker, the answer was, no. No. Trinidad and Tobago is the first one, and we are so grateful that Trinidad and Tobago had decided to step out and lead the way with accepting criminal returnees. Nobody else at the time in the year 2000 in the region was accepting

criminal returnees. The answer to the other question, whether anything was put in place, the hon. Prime Minister and Member for Couva North and the Member for Couva South, then Attorney General, tried to evade the question and just gave a very bold answer, that nothing was as yet put in place but they will do something about it.

Mr. Speaker, when in the year 2002 the REMJA-V Conference was hosted by Trinidad and Tobago, our current Attorney General still had to be making appeals to the current United States Attorney General to assist us in putting a system in place. In 2000 there was nothing in place but they signed the agreement, and in 2002 when the criminals had already been coming into Trinidad and Tobago, they had put absolutely nothing in place but they were very happy to lead the way in the Caribbean for allowing criminal returnees to come to Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, Mr. Speaker, they are sitting on that side and behaving like Pontius Pilate, as though they know nothing about what happened, as though they were not there, when they did absolutely nothing to ensure that this country would be able to trace criminal returnees, that this country would be able to determine when criminal returnees were coming here so that proper procedures could be put in place. They stand on that side and talk glibly about crime is our fault and “Is because we with community leaders and the criminals are in the elite”, but the real crime is the fact that they sit on that side and will do nothing to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago moves forward. [*Desk thumping*] They only sit there and they “bad talk” the country in the country and they “bad talk” the country out of the country. That is their objective in life. They write foreign countries and “bad talk” the country, they go to foreign countries and “bad talk” the country but while they sit there and do that, Mr. Speaker, we on this side are moving this country forward. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when in 1994 the then Government of Trinidad and Tobago decided that there would be a Health Sector Reform Programme and one of the aspects of that programme was to put in place a population registration system, it was with two objectives. One, to ensure that there would be a National Health Insurance Scheme so that all the people of Trinidad and Tobago would have access to good health care and, secondly, to ensure that every citizen and resident of Trinidad and Tobago could be tracked by having a personal identification number. In the effort to ensure that national security issues are dealt with, this programme has been expanded and we are now moving to a point where eventually every citizen will not only have a personal identification number, but also every citizen’s fingerprints would be part of the record in the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation.

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So that when criminal returnees land in Trinidad and Tobago, immediately they will be fingerprinted, we will know where they are and we will be able to do what they failed to do because they did not have the country at heart. I just want to indicate very clearly that when they talk about condemning our society to lawlessness, to misbehaviour and disrespect for the rule of law, we will not sit here and allow them to do that. So when they stand on that side and say that the Member for San Fernando East in his statement indicated that civil disobedience will not be tolerated, that those who break the law will be dealt with, and that even if they march in circumstances where they have not got permission, they will be dealt with. Let it be known, Mr. Speaker, that lawlessness at any level will not be tolerated by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Speaker, when they stand on that side and say that they were arrested in a peaceful march, I just want to remind them, because I know their memories are short, of a time when two trade union leaders were arrested, not at the site of the protest but at 3 o'clock in the morning. They were dragged out of their beds, Gestapo style, because they had marched previously, and this is so amazing, Mr. Speaker. They brought this antiquated law and said that they were beating drums and beating drums is an offence so they were arrested for beating drums, and they did not find anything was wrong with that. They did not find anything was wrong with that but now they are saying, "is a police state" and "everything wrong" with the fact that they have broken the law and we must say that they should be commended for breaking the law. That will not happen once we are in government in Trinidad and Tobago.

I take this opportunity to reiterate that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to giving all citizens equal participation in the growth of the economy and in their own growth and development. Mr. Speaker, as we move toward achieving Vision 2020, our society will be one that looks after our elderly and our less fortunate. What is clear is that the Opposition appears to have what they have called a wish list. They are saying that we have—our budget is a wish list but I would say that they have what is, in fact, a wish list for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I have reduced their wish list to 16 wishes. With your leave I would just like to read them.

Wish number one, civil disobedience; wish number two, racial disharmony.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Number three, chaos; divisiveness; total misleading of an entire population; mayhem; boycotting Parliament; marching illegally; going to jail and taking 500

and 500 more; lawlessness; arson; ignorance; backwardness; crime; slander and, number 16, corruption. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have reduced it to 16 because there are 16 of them and each one can be targeted with any one item of this list.

Ours, on the other hand, is a vision for Trinidad and Tobago that will take this country forward and, going through the budget statement of the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, we can outline 36 projects that will take Trinidad and Tobago and, in particular, the people of Trinidad and Tobago forward. Mr. Deputy Speaker, quickly I will give you those 36.

On-the-Job Training; HYPE; the Geriatric Adolescent Programme; the Civilian Conservation Corps; the YAPA programme; the establishment of a light industrial manufacturing park; the harmonization of NIS and the old age pension; the military-led academic training programme to focus on youth; the disability grant; homes for the relocation of the socially displaced and the elderly; halfway houses for male ex-prisoners; remand homes for young female offenders; the national service programme; the reconstruction of the Scarborough library; the expansion of the Scarborough jetty; a new financial complex for Tobago; the Roxborough plaza and market; scholarships in abundance; the Harris Promenade development; the Chancery Lane complex development; housing construction throughout Trinidad and Tobago; road improvement throughout Trinidad and Tobago; the waterfront redevelopment programme; NEDCO; the Naparima Bowl refurbishment and upgrade; the SHARE programme; the San Fernando transit hub; the new ferry for Tobago; new equipment for the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation; 40 brand new, right-hand drive Mercedes Benz ambulances; 18 new health centres; the establishment of the national AIDS coordinating committee; the Wallerfield business park; the academy of performing arts; the mobile pan institute and the management information system improvement at the Central Statistical Office.

Mr. Manning: “Yuh go kill dem!”

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Member for San Fernando East, I would kill them if I could but I would kill them with good. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I named 36 and there are more. I named 36 because there are 36 Members here and if, as we have said on this side, they would support what is happening for the good of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we will achieve all and more and, even if they do not support, we will achieve all 36. If I had time I would give you the same number for the Members of the other

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place because we have so much in place for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, just in circumstances where you may have been feeling left out, I can name 37, the university of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker—

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Apparently I have to name 38, [Laughter] one for the Speaker? Mr. Speaker, you were not here but I named 36 programmes for us. I gave the Deputy Speaker an extra one and I am now going to name 38, the highway to Point Fortin that they could not do. [Desk thumping] If I had time I could go on and on and on and on. I will stop here because I not only need to catch my breath but, Mr. Speaker, I need to be able to proceed with our plans for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

No group of people who feel they can use civil disobedience, racism and hatred, and no group of dissidents—because that is, in fact, what they are, they have no love for Trinidad and Tobago, but we on this side say to them, we will continue with our Vision 2020, we will take Trinidad and Tobago forward and we will sit here in government for five years, five years more, five years after that and five years after that and, just for spite, Mr. Speaker, we will sit here for five years after that.

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

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*): [Desk thumping] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, before I get into my contribution I would like to make an announcement and an appeal to the hon. Prime Minister because I have been looking through the various allocations and I have yet not found—today heavy rainfall and strong winds resulted in serious damage to several homes in the Charleville area of my constituency. The Member for Diego Martin Central only threatened to visit Chaguanas and we had this storm this afternoon. [Desk thumping] So I would say “Storm Valley hit Central”.

The people whose homes were affected, Mr. Speaker, are Dhanmattie Soodal—entire roof blown off, Cemetery Street, Charleville; Boodhoo Dass, Abidh Road, Charleville; Manuel Kalick, Soomaria Trace; Khemraj Ramkissoon, Soomaria Trace; Ramdial Sohan, Soomaria Trace; Rajpaul Sohan, Soomaria

Trace; Shivan Mulkraj, Soomaria Trace; Yolande Shah, Soomaria Trace and Dilip Sampath, Akaloo Trace. The borough corporation councillors of the UNC, Gopaul Boodhan, Felicia Asack and Joey Samuel visited the scene. They have so far collected 10 to 15 tarpaulins and have covered the place temporarily but I am sure the hon. Prime Minister would look at his social delivery services. I appeal to him to assist these people who have an emergency and I do not know if anything would—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Chaguanas for giving way. Those facts have only now come to my attention but I assure him that immediately action will be taken on it and it is normal for the Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation in these circumstances to be very proactive and to act even before the details come to the attention of the Government. The Member for Chaguanas and indeed his constituents and others in Trinidad and Tobago who are adversely affected by the weather of today—Woodbrook and Maraval included; my colleagues have raised that—can be assured that the Government will act in their interest. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Thank you very much. Just to inform you, the Minister of National Security has not yet responded.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that when you come to this Parliament and attempt to hoodwink a nation, you come and present a budget, I would put on record that a Minister of Finance and especially a Prime Minister who acts as that Minister of Finance, when he comes to this Parliament I would expect a review of the economy and to examine the social status, the social sector and try to put the two together because, as my colleagues have described it, it is a time of plenty but we have a time of plenty finance available and yet on the social side, the social sector, we see a time of plenty.

We have now broken all records, Mr. Speaker, in murder and kidnappings, records in various forms of discrimination in this country—racism, nepotism and cronyism—and we have here being established a social instability. I want to put it very early, Mr. Speaker, that when people feel they are or are cornered they will come out fighting and this is a perception—if it were a perception, as they claim, we on this side believe it is a reality and this must be addressed, too, immediately. Mr. Speaker, I will say that people will stand so much for so long but not forever.

I would just reply quickly to the Member for Arouca South on this Industrial Court fiasco and blaming each other. This again sets the stage for constitutional reform. You know, we have in office a Cabinet that will be accused of doing this, another Cabinet comes in and does the opposite and we blame each other and go

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at each other. That is why the time is right in Trinidad and Tobago for constitutional reform [*Desk thumping*] and this will be dealt with, I am sure, in a more meaningful manner where the judges will be appointed by somebody in consultation with Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition and anybody else, because when we put judges in place they must not be under the control of any Cabinet or any political party, Mr. Speaker.

Another untruth, Mr. Speaker, is the Member for Arouca South said that I delivered cheques to people in Chaguanas together with the Minister of Social Delivery Services.

Dr. Rowley: She did not say that.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely untrue. It is false and misleading and I would like the Minister to get her facts straight and then maybe if she has the dignity she would apologize to the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas.

The Member spoke about various programmes over which they preside. I want to put on record, and I will go through it in detail, that 90 per cent of the developmental programmes in the social sector started and actually worked when I was the Minister of Social Development. [*Desk thumping*] So to come here and claim it, I will never—you know, people come and claim various things. I cannot forget when the hon. Minister of Education claimed the school in my constituency where I live, Mr. Speaker, Cunupia High School, people in Form IV, yet this Minister claimed that the Member opened that school. This is totally misleading and, you know, when I use the three-letter word I am now not allowed to use it. We might use Spanish, English, whatever, but the fact is that she told an untruth in this Parliament and we must not allow this. There were many untruths said on that side trying to claim what was done by this side and put it into their records.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I will go into that later. I will never make that mistake again. I am going to take care of my people.

Trinidad and Tobago is a country made up of 1.3 million people. Here in this beautiful land, the inhabitants include descendants of our first people, the Amerindians, the Spanish Conquistadors, the Dutch, the British, the Africans, the Chinese, the Portuguese and the East Indians. As it is today, East Indians make up just over 40 per cent of the population followed by 40 per cent, or thereabouts, of people of African origin. The remaining per cent are considered others which

include the Europeans and Asians, as earlier mentioned. This population also includes some later immigrants from India, Syria and other places. These are mainly businessmen joining lately but not really the early builders of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, who then was the hon. Prime Minister referring to as he spoke about “my people”? He must tell us what he meant by that. I shouted “racist” and I cross-talked to the Member for Arouca South. Did you see her response, Mr. Speaker? If you did not, she showed her fist.

I want to make a point here. When a country is divided against itself along racism, class, tribal or any other lines, it will never move forward or be peaceful. Mr. Speaker, white supremacy, British Raj, the colonial masters, however we may call them, divided and ruled us for centuries. Yes, they waved carrots and other foodstuff in front of our faces and succeeded in making us slaves, indentured and meek, subservient masses to the smart few.

In today's Trinidad and Tobago, CEPEP, URP and other social programmes are handed out here and there like the carrots of the past, destined to keep our people subservient. But, Mr. Prime Minister, people would not wait centuries to shake off this yolk. They will understand the scam quickly and surely realize that you too, like our white colonial masters, are using your people to stay in power and only to stay in power—I will prove that later on. In South Africa, the white minority government never concealed their plots to separate the races to build their own power base. Of course, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Ahmed Katrada—who incidentally was an East Indian—and others saw to it that Apartheid was dismantled.

In mid-1949, the South African Government enforced Apartheid with drastic laws, each person to be classified by race. These races were in different parts of the cities where mixed marriages were forbidden. Mr. Speaker, to stay in power using force and divisive tactics never worked. History is replete with examples. In our region, you might be powerful for a while—Papa Doc, Burnham, Gairy—but in each case the Government fell, and what was worse, countries became poorer, some yet to recover.

Please, Mr. Prime Minister, listen before the same calamity would befall our country. Your budget inspired no one. There is a feeling of disenchantment by more than one half of the population. Unemployment, VSEP, crime, especially kidnapping and, poor health services—that is rundown facilities, and I visited the health centre in the Chaguanas constituency, no medicine, no drugs, no nothing for the poor people of this country, Mr. Speaker.

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Discrimination even to school children when we have a Minister of Education coming to the nation's Parliament and speaking untruths. How could the children of today follow that example? What would the children of Cunupia High School say when the Minister said that that school was opened a couple days ago when, in fact, it was opened four years ago? This is what we are telling our children out there. Discrimination, even to school children. Lack of public utilities. Yesterday I understand there was no water in half of Trinidad. The non-even distribution of social programmes, and I will go to that in a while; these are all seeming to be directed to one portion of the population.

One of the Johnny come latelies to Trinidad, Member for Port of Spain North, Hon. John Rahael, presides over the death of Caroni (1975) Limited. Let me quote the Member for Couva North, the former Prime Minister who lives for national unity and fights for equal opportunities when he said in this Chamber on Thursday, October 24, 2002. I want to quote part of what he said, Mr. Speaker, with your permission. He said:

“The offer of a Voluntary Separation of Employment Package (VSEP) to all of Caroni (1975) Limited workers is clearly designed to get rid of the workers. If the plan succeeds thousands of workers and their families will go on the breadline.”

Truer words were never said.

“This will bring untold suffering to tens of thousands of families and dependants but the Government does not seem to care about that. Their main concern is to destroy Caroni (1975) Limited so they can grab the valuable lands of the company and share it among their friends.”

Mr. Speaker, this was said one year ago.

“The rest (of the land) would be shared out among the friends of the PNM for the purposes of light and heavy industrial manufacturing, agricultural estates, housing and commercial complexes.”

Mr. Speaker, we are seeing this coming to past.

I wonder if the Member for San Fernando East realizes that without the sugar industry there is no rum industry, and that 120,000 persons depend directly on the sugar industry for a living? It continues:

“The UNC's plan for Caroni (1975) Limited involved the creation of a number of separate subsidiaries, which would take over the several activities of the company. For example, a subsidiary of rice production, one for the rum division, another for beef and dairy farming, another for citrus cultivation.”

Mr. Speaker, when you understand what is happening in South and Central Trinidad, without the sugar industry, you have destroyed an entire region of this country. You have put them on the breadline, and I want to say it further, we are all here in this country—except the latest few, the Syrians and others—we are here because of the sugar industry, and what is taking place today is the destruction of our history. The Member for Arouca South talked about the rewriting of history. Much more will be rewritten. So, they have destroyed the lives of thousands. Let me warn them, these poor people's tears will be like acid. They will burn you. Mr. Speaker, enough said that suffering will come to the people and it will fall where it may.

I visited the health centre in Chaguanas and despite wasteful boasts by the Cuban Ambassador at large, conditions deteriorate every day. Medicine never seems to be available. *Los Medicos Cubanos no comprenden que pasa en los hospitales, todo el mundo es mucho triste. Señor Imbert damos doctores de Trinidad.* [Laughter] [Desk thumping] To translate, because we have to be bilingual, “The Cuban doctors do not understand what is happening in the hospitals, everybody is very unhappy. Mr. Imbert, give us doctors from Trinidad.” [Desk thumping]

I heard something recently about the Cuban doctors and the nurses. They seem not to understand what is taking place. I do not know if it was said in Parliament, and my friend for Caroni Central, who might be sharing a cell somewhere, we shared a joke where one of the doctors asked the nurse, “How is the patient?” And the nurse replied, “My name is Gabriella and I have four children.” This might sound like a joke but it is very serious. They have now started. They have not yet been given permission to go ahead and deal with patients, but when these patients die, I am putting it on record here that the blood will be on the Member for Diego Martin East. Mr. Minister of Health, stop your PR—Propaganda. Get down to work, and if you cannot, I am sure the Member for San Fernando East will have the Cuban airlines waiting. So may I say adios!

The Minister of Education is two years behind on school building. Thousands of children still suffer in dilapidated structures. Secondary school students up to Form III are still in temporary locations. School grants are not yet paid in many instances. The Minister, I am told, has reintroduced the textbook racket. Scandal! Shame and scandal in the family.

Let me quote the hon. Prime Minister:

“Having said that, Mr. Speaker—Member for Chaguanas, you may get away this time. You may feel that you have been smart by half, you may feel that you

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pulled a stroke on us, but all you have done is abused parliamentary privilege.

I want to warn the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas that he is going to be the subject of very close scrutiny by the Prime Minister of this country.”

Mr. Singh: Threat!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: When he said that?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: In this Parliament. All I spoke about on that occasion was his offspring. Shame and scandal in the family. What happened on Monday 06, October, 2003 with the arrest of the Member for Caroni Central and myself, Mr. Speaker, I now feel that it has been something very scary and, as I go along, I will try to make that point. What happened, as I said before, is now history.

Mr. Speaker, right in Chaguanas, when there was the 18/18 deadlock, the hon. Member for San Fernando East, together with some activists of his in the Chaguanas area, took the same route that I did and walked from Montrose into the mayor's office in Chaguanas and nobody arrested them for walking or marching. He walked the same route and went into the mayor's office and there it was he discovered Rhonda John-Bartholomew, and nobody told him anything. He is the Prime Minister, the big boy.

He went into that office, he saw the then secretary of the mayor, Rhonda John-Bartholomew, a beautiful woman. He said, “Mr. Mayor, where you get that woman from?” He said, “My secretary”. The Prime Minister said, “I want her and I will get her.” Mr. Speaker, the rest is history. Of course, she was working for about \$2,000 as a secretary, then she was given a job within a couple months at the Port Authority with a salary of \$5,000 and, today, she is now a councillor in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.

Mr. S. Panday: Mobility!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: More importantly, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that when we debate in the honourable House, I heard the Member for Arouca South say she would like to kill us. I do not know if it was a figurative slang. It was not! If I get a chance to kill them, I will kill them!

Mrs. James: Kill them with kindness.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: That is okay. People on this side will die in defence of our country, and I want to show you that that will happen, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Let me warn them that I will continue to talk inside and outside Parliament. We on this side will not lie down and allow those on that side to destroy and divide this country for mere political gains.

Mr. Speaker, I have been a Member of Parliament for seven or eight years and I have seen politicians walk on many a street in Trinidad and Tobago and I have not seen anybody arrested. This march was so peaceful, and I will just put it on record, I want to thank the Deputy Speaker for his contribution yesterday when he said—let me make sure that I get the *Hansard* and quote him correctly.

I will come back to it in a while, but to continue on this point, I quote a newspaper article by Ria Taitt on Tuesday, October 07, 2003:

“Manning said he regretted that the Opposition did not come to the Parliament but ‘by no means’ did they upstage his Budget presentation. ‘Whether they come or they don’t come, we press on. We knew they weren’t going to come a long time ago,’...”

Mr. Speaker, may I pause here to say that I, myself, and I am sure Dr. Hamza Rafeeq, never knew that we were not coming to Parliament on that day, but here we have the hon. Prime Minister and, again the plot thickens when he said:

“‘when the Parliament is called who is there is there, who is not there, is not there.’ He said that ‘while we understand demonstration as a legitimate method of expressing sentiments in a democratic society we just wouldn’t tolerate civil disobedience. The police were doing their job and it is for a Court to decide.’”

As we move on, I just want, my friend—not really my friend, the person I know, I heard his name this evening—Kirk Meighoo went as a political analyst. He was walking the streets of Chaguanas. When he was arrested he screamed, “What am I being charged with?” And this further agitated the crowd which now moved up on the Chaguanas Main Road. Let me read this from the *Guardian*:

“Ramsaran advised his supporters to walk in twos.”

But I would not go into the case. Let me stay away from that.

As I said, the plot thickens. Listen to Mr. Manning again:

“Manning said he was being kept informed of developments in Chaguanas.”

Mr. Speaker, by whom? I know the police officer, Mr. Allard, was on his phone all the time. When we reached the particular place where we were arrested, that phone of his kept ringing every five minutes, but the plot thickens. The fact is that Mr. Manning said he was being kept informed of developments in Chaguanas.

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Mr. Speaker, we must understand that freedom in this country is being threatened, and if we talk about stability, we want to take a country forward and they are continuing to oppress the Opposition. They are continuing to scare the Opposition. I want to tell them that despite all the grandeur plans, that cannot help put this country forward. It cannot. History is replete with examples that once one oppresses people, they cannot move forward.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about crime. I want to just quickly touch on it because I think it is important that it was repeated a few times that in this country—let me go to my friend from La Brea, and I want the media, if they are here, to see. He said, last night around 11.55 p.m.:

“I see the hon. Member for Chaguanas is still here—”

Mr. Bereaux: Hon. Member, would you please read it so that we could hear it?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It says:

“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 speak, 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.

He went on, contrary to the others on that side:

“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]*

I asked him: “But you marched too, MP for La Brea. You closed down the streets in La Brea for two days and you got \$70 million to fix the road.” He said: “I know how to do it. Come by me and I will teach you how to do it.” He closed down a road for two days, not arrested. He admitted it here in Parliament. Thank you again, Member for La Brea. He said:

“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. [*Desk thumping*]

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.”

Mr. Bereaux: Would the hon. Member please give way? You now realize, hon. Member, I hope, that in 1998 when I was making that plea, if all the honourable ministers of that day had listened carefully and discussed with us, maybe you would not have been in the plight with which you found yourself on that day.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Again, thank you sincerely. I hope the people on that side will understand, at least, there is one person on that side who might want to be like Nelson Mandela, and when we quote Nelson Mandela and bring him to this debate, Nelson Mandela understood that he could not move South Africa forward without the unity of all the people of all the races. He knew the importance of that and this book speaks to that and tells us how we must unite a country to achieve freedom first, and then move on to some form of development.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a few points. If he wants to take this country forward, I want the Prime Minister to listen to me. Fair distribution or no distribution of Caroni lands. Second, even distribution of URP and CEPEP, and all other social programmes in Trinidad and Tobago. This is needed across Trinidad and Tobago and this foolishness must stop now. Third, goods and services to be divided fairly among all constituencies. I will come to the Minister of Local Government.

Mr. Prime Minister, stop crime now. I accuse you of being the person who encourages this evil scourge. I join with the Members on this side to say that what we have read, what we have seen in the newspaper, presented here as evidence during this debate, it shows clearly that you are the person responsible for crime in Trinidad and Tobago, and I make no apologies for that. As I said, I fear no one. I have one life to live. If it is to be ended, let it be ended on a good cause. Call off your religious leaders, your community leaders and their spouses.

Mr. Speaker, to point to a few things and move on, as we talk about crime, kidnapping, the list was read, what is happening was said here and it is so

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emotional. Yes, I did call on the people from Caroni Village, as reported in the *Guardian*, to close down Caroni for the day. Not Caroni (1975) Limited; the village that is Caroni. Because I visited, and unlike the Member for San Fernando West, I do not cry crocodile tears.

When I visited the home of this kidnapped young lady on the Friday afternoon and I saw the condition of family, Mr. Speaker, let me put on record, this is worse than a death. When one goes to the home of a dead person, no matter how young, how popular, how friendly that person was to you, you learn to accept and move on, start to organize the wake and so on. When one goes to a kidnap victim's home, especially a young person, and look at the people in the village, the family sitting there, nobody talks. This is worse than a wake.

I went in there, I know the family quite well, and I could not talk to anybody. When I went inside, I came back out, just shook the father's hand, spoke to one or two of the brothers and I left. In my zeal as being an MP, representing my people, I made a press release asking for the people to protest, to please close down the village. All the businesses in that small village could maybe start something for people to listen to us, and what happened the next day, it shows the strength of a people threatened. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we have the pictures here of that nefarious Saturday morning with three armed soldiers with guns standing and some tyres, and so on, burning in the background. I myself only saw that picture yesterday, and when I saw that picture, I could not believe it was Trinidad and Tobago and yet we have people on that side denying that there is a problem!

That entire village turned out! Even children came out to protest, and the women, especially, when they came out there in all the numbers and said to me, "Mr. MP, we are not leaving here until our daughter is released." That was touching. I want to tell you quickly, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to stay on this because to me it is quite emotional, when the fire brigade came to out the fire that was on the road, the women went and stood and said, "We are not moving until we get our daughter back."

After that they sat on the ground and the Guard and Emergency Branch, police like hell. I did not know Trinidad had so much police. We on this side used to be asking for more police, more weapons, but when they arrived in that village by the bus loads, then we understood the strength of the police and we were wondering why they did not react to the kidnapping.

I remember one particular police officer being very angry. As he reached there he snatched a baton and charged into the crowd and I ran behind him. He

had his baton upraised and when he saw the ladies sitting on the ground, he melted. The baton dropped to his side and he walked back to the jeep. This is the power of civil disobedience. That is what we mean by that. Not to shoot anybody, but to sit there and protest for the rights of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to tell you that as we continue, the murder rate of 2003 surpassed that of 2002: 172 murders, 174 kidnappings. Read the names of the kidnap victims, it will look like it is an Indian movie, but this is not a movie, this is a horror story.

Let me go quickly into some of the programmes that I want to talk about. When I was Minister of Social Development, it was really a pleasure to work in that ministry with people who understand the social sector, and 90 per cent or more of these programmes were borne under my tenure as the Minister, and they know that. I could lay claim to one or two of these programmes myself. The disability grant, Adopt-a-Community were my ideas and they were borne under my stewardship. Even Paramin refused. Let me not get into that.

Let us go into some of these programmes. I want the Prime Minister to listen to me and understand how we feel on this side. Maybe even Members on my side did not read this carefully. This is the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2004, Charting the Course for 2020, Empowering People*. Mr. Speaker, women in harmony. The Women in Harmony Programme is national in scope and is under the aegis of the Ministry of Community Development. It is a training facility in agriculture and elderly care. During the year 2003, 413 persons were trained at a cost of \$2.6 million.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, who were the people trained? Who were the trainers? I ask the Prime Minister to tell us if there were any East Indians in the Women in Harmony Programme. Maybe they were all East Indians; I do not know. I am asking for answers. I am not the Minister. There were 413 people trained at a cost of \$2,597,551. So much money to train 413 persons? [*Crosstalk*]

I move on now to non-traditional skills training for women. When you talk about waste, mismanagement, nepotism and cronyism! Listen to this social programme: In the financial year 2003, 348 women benefited from this programme. That estimated expenditure was \$3,478,077. Forty-eight women benefited from a training programme that cost \$3.5 million! If you had given them the cash they would all have been millionaires. Is that corruption or what? The underlying question is whether any East Indians took part in that programme.

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If you put people against a wall, you better watch out. I am an East Indian, I represent my people, and I am proud to do so. I cannot see people suffer under this Government; we must not allow that. If you are right, you are right.
[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres (YDAC): In 2003 that programme reached 544 persons. [*Interruption*] The estimated expenditure in that programme for the fiscal year was \$16,864,000 for 544 people! What is this? Is this corruption or what?

Dr. Khan: Total corruption!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Do you know what this is about? It is about giving away to win elections; that is all they care about. Burnham destroyed Guyana. He was the third richest man in the world, yet Guyana was down to shambles. Mr. Prime Minister, I am warning you, do not go down there. Do not do all this to remain in power. If you are a good Prime Minister, you will win elections; you do not have to do this. Again the question is: Were there any East Indians involved in this programme? [*Crosstalk*] Would you answer me; if I am wrong, I am big enough to apologize. I am a big man; I will apologize when the time comes, if I have to.

Mr. Speaker, let me repeat this: 544 persons in the programme, estimated cost \$16,864,000. Do some mathematics; these people would be millionaires if you had given them the cash. The Member for Arouca South boasted about these programmes, but that is the kickback and the feedback. [*Crosstalk*]

The Youth Facilities Development Programme: The number of beneficiaries for 2003 was 700; that is 0.6 of the population. They spent \$7,578,200 to train 700 people under this programme! Is this madness or what? What is going on? How can you end poverty with this spending? You end poverty by empowering people; encouraging them to work, to do something, not just by giving them money. You know what, Mr. Speaker? Ninety per cent of this money would go to the trainers and facilitators; the 10 per cent below would get nothing; I could bet on that. [*Desk thumping*] Again, I have to ask: Were there any East Indians involved?

I move on now, Mr. Speaker:

“National Skills Development Programme...is administered by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and focuses on developing the manpower base required for plant construction.”

In 2003, 168 persons were targeted to be trained, and the full target was achieved. Bravo, full target! But do you know what was the expenditure? Make a little guess? To train 168 persons, \$13,338,000 was spent! *[Interruption]* I am reading your glossy book; public relations, the Prime Minister's picture, full-page advertisement. Dr. Rafeeq and I were on every newspaper for the entire week, thanks to the Prime Minister, and we did not pay a cent for advertisement.

Retraining programme for displaced workers: Again, this was under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. There were 45 training providers of which 510 people graduated. The estimated expenditure for the programme for fiscal year 2003 was \$4,600,000. Mr. Speaker, no wonder why this country is being destroyed. What is this money being spent? Social programmes are under the watch of the Prime Minister. Poverty is now over 40 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago, and growing; unemployment is on the increase. There were 9,000 people sent home from Caroni (1975) Limited. This money is nothing in comparison to what was spent to facilitate 9,000 people in the sugar industry, and those people benefited the rest of the country. Contrary to what the other side said, there was revenue from Caroni (1975) Limited. *[Desk thumping]* *[Crosstalk]* Even if it was a dollar; there was revenue. *[Crosstalk]*

The Youth Training Employment and Partnership Programme (YTEPP). During the 2003 fiscal year, 7,000 persons benefited; that is a good number of people. But do you know what it cost? It cost \$22,574,000! *[Crosstalk]* Do not get involved between us. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. Ramsaran: You must not "steups" in public, it is bad manners. Do not steups at the Speaker. He said, "Order," and you "steupsed".

The Civilian Conservation Corps:

"The Ministry of National Security and Rehabilitation administers this programme which educational and vocational training to young adults..."

I wonder if there were any adults at all or if there were any people. Do you know what happened to the CCC? In the fiscal year 2003, approximately 2,500 persons benefited from this programme. Mr. Speaker, we know what happens in that programme. I see a couple of people in my constituency, and when you look at them—*[Interruption]* I could answer it; Chaguanas is UNC. According to the statistics of this country, Chaguanas is about 90 per cent East Indian. My constituency won all its seats.

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Mr. Speaker, we know what is CCC: some “fellas liming” on the block. I see them playing wind ball cricket these days. I do not know what they do. [*Crosstalk*] Is it insulting to play wind ball cricket? The estimated expenditure on the programme for fiscal year 2003 was \$19,992,000. Were any East Indians involved?

The Minister of Local Government has come here three years in a row boasting that he got more money than any minister, but his total budget has not even reached the CCC. He is talking about delivering to 14 regional corporations in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] You got \$35 million for the Public Sector Investment Programme, but this programme alone is \$22 million, and you come here boasting?

Mr. Narine: Would you give way? The man is telling untruths. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, let us move on. Building construction technology. In fiscal year 2003 163 persons benefited from this programme with an estimated expenditure of \$744,000. It gets get more and more interesting. [*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I could go on for the next half hour to talk about discrimination, but I want to ask the underlying question to give us an account of this money spent. Tell us how many people benefited and, more importantly, were there any East Indians involved?

I move to the serious programmes, the one that would make a difference like the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP), community centres construction, which allocations paled in comparison to others. In some cases, \$12,000 was given to important programmes that would improve the people.

We can also look at the disabled. Again, I want to claim responsibility and put on record that the disability allowance grant was the brainchild of the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas. To see in this budget document that the PNM introduced it is amazing. [*Desk thumping*] In 1998, when it was introduced it was \$600; you were in this honourable House Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] I am talking about the disability grant for people 40 to 65 years old; it was equal to old age pension. When we left office, it was \$600 to the \$800 for old age pension, and it was our

intention to make it on par with old age pension. I know they would say that we always “shoulda” and “coulda”.

Mr. Speaker, what they have done is to bring it to \$650, and there is a ceiling. Again, this started under us. [*Crosstalk*] The ceiling is the same, \$3,600. In today’s world where the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) and others are getting millions of dollars, if a disabled person earns more than \$300 a month he gets no money from the State. Disabled people are very independent, as they showed in front of the National Flour Mills (NFM).

I was minister when the Blind Welfare workers were on strike for some reason, and within 24 hours I had met with them, dealt with their problems and corrected what they were asking for. [*Desk thumping*] That is the performance of the UNC. You have people protesting out there for almost 200 days, and what happens? The Minister comes to the Parliament and says that he will give them some pittance. This is not all; we have to talk more about that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on another point before I come back to the social sector. I want to put on record that when the people on that side try to cast aspersions on Members of this side, we have a problem with that. Yesterday we talked about what happened with Bechtel and who is connected with the corruption; much more would come.

Remember yesterday they said something about the lowest bidder? This is from MTS: September 2002, SIS Programme, perimeter fencing at Malick Senior Comprehensive School. The company that bid \$1.659,904,000 got the contract as opposed to people who had less than \$1 million. When they talk from the three sides of their mouths to impress the people of this Parliament, they must understand their own corrupt ways. I always say that corrupt people know other corrupt people. According to Gypsy, my good friend who was a Member of this House, “When tief see a man with a bag, tief get jealous”. The poor fella might be carrying his lunch to work.

Let me repeat: the SIS Programme contract for the perimeter fencing of the Malick Senior Comprehensive School was not awarded to the lowest tender. For the perimeter fencing of the San Juan Senior Comprehensive School, Aston and Son General Contractors bid \$12 million and got the contract, although three people made lower bids. For the perimeter fencing of the Chaguanas Senior Comprehensive School, which is in the constituency of Caroni Central, the highest bidder, JB Contractors, received the award. What is happening? Yesterday they said that they could give the lowest bidder; no problem with that; they boasted that the person could gallery and so on.

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Mr. Speaker, racism even goes to sports. I was the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs; I always have respect for my friend from Tunapuna. When you put sports and people first, and you have a sports policy and you do this and that— Let me ask: Where is the sports policy? But that is another story for another time. Where is the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs?

In 1985, when all of us were in this Parliament, except, maybe, for the Prime Minister, Trinidad and Tobago last won the under-19 championship under Brian Lara's captaincy, Rajendra Dhanraj and others. It took 18 years for us to win another title. We won two titles: the limited overs and the league competition, but there was not one word from the Minister or his ministry. Maybe it was because the team was captained by young Dennis Ramdin. If that is the case, we want to talk about racial discrimination again.

The boxer, Manswell, started under my purview as minister. Cuban coaches were brought to Trinidad. I was glad for him, and I supported him. I have followed his progress. When he won the silver medal, I thought that anything he got he deserved, because he too started from the St. Michael's Home; he learnt boxing there. I am proud of his achievements, as I am of the achievements of Darrel Brown and others. Why the discrimination now? Why when Dennis Ramdin and Tishane Maharaj, captain and vice-captain of the under-19 team won that championship, there was not a word from the Government? Is that not racial discrimination? All they gave those people was a little cricket pack for \$1,000. [Interruption]

Mr. Narine: Would you give way please?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I will only give way to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. [Crosstalk] We could talk, but if they do not correct this discrimination, I warn them that we would not be responsible when people get up to get what they honestly believe is theirs. Everybody pays taxes; sometimes perception is greater than reality.

The hon. Member for Arouca North now wants me to give way, but I will not. I came to this House and begged for an Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) to be given to Chaguanas, but nothing happened. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I want to touch on two more pieces of the budget: The sport and culture fund and the donations by businessmen. I want to thank the Prime Minister for increasing sponsorship to \$1million. It is something I want to genuinely see happen, so I ask the Prime Minister to bring the legislation quickly.

Mr. Prime Minister and the Minister of Trade and Industry, the last time we discussed this, I warned you that nobody would come forward because of the lacuna. Only three sponsors came forward. You have got to sponsor well-organized clubs, put them into the loop. These are the people who play the game; you cannot just sponsor events. You have got to go to the clubs, Mr. Prime Minister, if you are really serious about changing the landscape in this country, if you really want to get the youths involved.

Mr. Speaker, I still run a cricket club; it is very, very difficult. With national cricket in Trinidad and Tobago, if you do not have \$150,000, you cannot do it, and that is a minimum requirement to run a cricket club here. If you go higher—I understand we have one division above us—it would cost about \$250,000. Mr. Prime Minister, you left it out of the loop last year, but I am glad that you raised the ceiling for sponsorship to \$1 million.

I am asking you again today, if you really care about the youths, include clubs into the loop. Member for Tunapuna, the sponsorship only includes events. I spoke to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, and he was disappointed. He was not here last year, and he is not here again this year. If you only include events, and not clubs, do you know who you will be giving money to? The rich people; the people who could afford to run Hampton Games. They would benefit, not cricket and football clubs. I am not saying that you give any and every club, you must have criteria. I am sure the Member for Tunapuna would help in that respect, because we understand the plight of the people and the clubs out there. We need that help, Mr. Speaker, I am begging for that on behalf of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We look at the increase in taxes for casino games and so forth. I am not so au courant with that, but I think we could establish a gaming commission. When my case was finished, I was driving home and heard that part of your budget presentation. [*Crosstalk*] I had my interest in the budget, you know. Those games should be put under the supervision of a commission to be dealt with. My friend from Caroni East talked about it. You just do not say you are going to legislate against something to make it difficult to play. I do not know about these things, so I am talking on control.

I did not mention the Community Action Revival Empowerment (CARE) programme, which was another programme that was very close to me. Again, corruption seems to be the order of the day; maybe you do not know. When you are in a Cabinet, you do not know everything. Do you know the meaning of CARE? I think you know about almost everything in your Government, I have to

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congratulate you. The CARE programme was established to empower community organizations, but not individuals.

When I was a minister, Cabinet issued a directive on the administration and accountability of the programme. All applications from community groups had to go to the District Community Development Office. The district staff had to evaluate and put them in format with recommendations. When the applications reached the head office, they would go to a committee set up by a cabinet of technical officers who would look at the applications again and recommend them for final approval of the minister. In giving the final approval, I would look at the list and ensure that there was an even distribution of approved projects in all counties.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Member whether he has the records, otherwise I would have to ask my colleague to get them, for the spread of that programme over the last six years of your government.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Sure, I was available for scrutiny at any time by anybody, when I was a minister in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I know how I ran my ministry, and there was no discrimination at all. Now we have a Minister of Community Development and Gender Affairs who had disbanded the CARE committee. This was written by a senior officer in that ministry who is not East Indian. Applications for funding are not made through the established processes, approved by the Cabinet, but directly to the minister. The Minister is using the CARE funds as her own personal slush fund.

Mr. Singh: Who is that Minister?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: The Deputy leader, Sen. Yuille-Williams. She is giving grants to individuals. Over 95 per cent of the money approved by her goes to PNM party supporters. People are just writing requests on a piece of paper to the Minister and she is doling out money. There is absolutely no technical input from officers of the ministry. Friends, family and party supporters are the beneficiaries. There is no accountability or fair play, as in the past, to distribute public funds in a just manner. The situation is scandalous and deserves a criminal investigation.

The Minister has removed a man with a master's degree, as coordinator of the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP), and put one of her relatives to act in the post. [*Crosstalk*] You could investigate this. Records will show that the present Acting Coordinator, who was paid for the past year in the post, does not have one single O level subject. [*Crosstalk*]

The Minister has established a Community Scholarship Fund; look at the beneficiaries—and they are talking about fair play and transparency: the daughter of the Director of Community Development, \$18,000 to study at the University of the West Indies; a community development officer's university fees are paid, plus \$7,000 for living expenses; a community development aide, \$70,000 to pursue a degree at the University of the West Indies, this officer is a recent recruit to the department. There is no competitive bidding for these so-called scholarships. Funding is based on favours. This fund usurps the function of the Personnel Department of the Chief Personnel Officer's training section. There are thousands of citizens out there who are in more deserving situations. There is no chance for equal opportunity.

I have made my contribution to show that we in Trinidad and Tobago love this country. We do not want to see it destroyed. All that we are asking is for fair play in the distribution of goods and services across Trinidad and Tobago and the distribution of the social programmes, not to come here and score political points, as the Member for Arouca South did. Do you know what is curious about that? You should examine this, Prime Minister: Not one of the 54 promises she made is from the Ministry of Legal Affairs or the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. *[Laughter]* She might be replacing the Ambassador to Cuba, because she spoke about health. *[Crosstalk]*

There was a little tête-à-tête, I do not know if they said that she is going to be the new Minister of Health, but she spoke nothing about her ministry. This is what we call in Trinidad and Tobago "not minding your own business". Consumer affairs, chicken prices; all over the country there is a war with chicken prices, but she is studying "mi amigo's" job, and not looking at her own. Mr. Prime Minister it is a dangerous trend.

It is not to say that we cannot help or speak for each other but, at the same time, understand that of the 54 things the Member for Arouca South said, one could, at least, have been from her ministry. We on this side were accused by her of all the negative things that were taking place in Trinidad and Tobago, but not one of the things that we have been accused of could be proven to be correct.

Mr. Prime Minister, what you did to us on this side will not be forgiven. You went to this country and the international world and talked about corruption, and here we are two years later waiting for somebody to be arrested, prosecuted and, maybe sent to jail. *[Crosstalk]* Do not say that you do not want to do it. As two peaceful Members, two of the quieter ones, if I might say so myself, we were walking in our own constituencies: my constituency to the right and Hamza's

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constituency to the left, representing our people, and you had the heavy hand of the law come upon us. That is something we must never forget. The police made accusations and innuendoes against us, and we just smiled. We enjoyed ourselves; my colleague could tell you that we enjoyed it.

7.15 p.m.

Do you know why we enjoyed it? We showed how foolish the Prime Minister of a country could become, and the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation, who cannot solve a crime in Trinidad and Tobago, will say that he arrested two Members of Parliament. That is another record. When last were two Members of Parliament arrested in Trinidad and Tobago? Chin Lee will now say: I arrested two Members of Parliament, I have 184 murders, 178 kidnappings, I have crimes all over the country, I am breaking records one after the other. Chin Lee breaking every record; 18 persons were arrested in a peaceful march in Chaguanas.

Mr. Speaker, even if there are 1,000 persons who remain loyal to the UNC—and we know there are many more—those 1,000 persons could reign havoc in Trinidad and Tobago. So I am calling on the hon. Prime Minister to correct the situation. All we are asking for is fair play and equity.

I am making my contribution not to condemn or criticize, but to ask the Prime Minister to understand how to govern a country. You cannot divide a country along any lines. We on this side say things about the Members of Parliament opposite, it is not that we want to; you think if we could have a good relationship with the Ministers, we can go to them and say we want to do this or that, but because of the divisive way the country is in, nobody is willing to give anything to the UNC constituencies and it is because of the system. [*Interruption*] The people are fed up with excuses.

When January comes and people who expect to work in the cane fields wake up and do not see the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources with his cutlass cutting the first cane which is a tradition, and realize they do not have a job to go to, what would happen? The \$40,000 is finished already. We all know that is no money. But you wave this big dollar sign in people's face and threaten them to accept or else. These people would be jobless on January 01, 2004. They would feel like they are dead. They are accustomed to not working now because it is the habit that they do not work between June and December, but when the year starts and they go to URP which is under the Minister of Local Government, there is nothing for them because they do not look like a PNM. CEPEP is out of the

question, so is YAPA and NEDCO. These people would not get anything. What would they do? Understand this is a serious problem, it is not an emotional one, and it is real. The people are asking us but we cannot talk too loudly.

I want to thank the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security and Rehabilitation for being well protected these days. I was never followed when I was minister. Security officers shadow me and I feel comfortable that at least I would not be kidnapped in a short time. [*Interruption*] The fact is that I am now protected by the State without my asking. We have to understand that we have many good police officers, but the real threat to social stability in Trinidad and Tobago will come on January 01, 2004 when 9,120 and more persons would not have a job to go to.

Mr. Speaker, they talk about boycotting the stores of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, maybe that would come later. People must show their strength, they cannot allow themselves to die. We need to send our children to schools. If we dream or imagine things, it is the reality we are facing. Doctors are discriminated against and sent away; sugar workers are discriminated against and sent home; every sphere, our lawyers too, and the Director of Public Prosecutions, you name them. Anywhere you turn today, it might be the judges next. When will it end?

Mr. Speaker, in the editorial of the *Trinidad Guardian* dated Wednesday, October 15, 2003, it says about the Unit Trust Corporation:

“Even more troubling is the summary dismissal of Chairman Hubert Alleyne, an apparent casualty of conflicts at the upper levels of management that sent Renrick Nickie home on extended leave.”

Mr. Speaker, everybody who opposes this Prime Minister—it is not only now you know. We had a former Minister from this Government on our side for a little while and the things he told us, I would not say because it is really unparliamentary. We know when you oppose him you are in trouble. We heard stories of the late Morris Marshall, I would not even go into that. I am scared, not for my life, that is why I am talking today. Maybe for my children, and my wife may miss me, I do not know, but the fact is, we have to let the country know what kind of person we face. If he apologizes this evening to the nation for the way in which the two Members of Parliament were handled, we are willing to accept it.

There is another article in the *Trinidad Guardian* October 15, 2003 “On the road to Fiji” by Sat Maharaj. This is what he says:

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“This is a political budget. The vision is about perpetual power, not about 2020 or raising the level of welfare fairly...

Mr. Manning’s Budget takes money from the productive sector of our economy and gives it to CEPEP or to increase consumption and imports. There is very little for investment. Nothing is given to farmers or to the agriculture sector, except fine words, promises and visions.”

This is the part I really want to see in the record.

“The Ramayan, a holy religious text of Hindus, teaches that a good king (or government) must treat all the people equally, without discrimination. Lord Rama...instructed the regent (Bharat) as follows: ‘The farmers, cattle breeders and cultivators must enjoy your favour. You must protect all who live under your jurisdiction.

The women must be safe under your care. Your income must be greater than your expenditure. You must not give liberty to criminals for motives of personal gain. The tears of the innocent bring about the ruin of kings.’...

That is not justice. People are not fools. They may not be economists but they know that the Budget is a massive rip-off which transfers from some groups to give to others.”

That is not the Ramayan, that is Sat Maharaj.

“It is not too late to turn away from the road which leads to Uganda, Fiji or Guyana. The Budget must abandon affirmative action. It must target those who are needy.

The vision must be about justice and fairness. About love and a meritocratic society.”

Mr. Speaker, I end by commending to this honourable House to let the Government forget about winning election—it is a few years away—and let us see how we could improve the quality of life. Let us end racism, let us end discrimination, let us end spite and vindictiveness, let us give our people hope instead, lead them from despair, give them what is good, and let us not be spiteful. People on the other side, I commend to you, let us save Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I beg to move

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under section 91 of the Standing Orders the suspension of Standing Order 63(6) to enable the completion of this debate beyond 7.50 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning):
Mr. Speaker, we have come to the end of a fairly long debate on the Appropriation Bill for fiscal year 2004. I will like to begin by thanking my colleagues on both sides of the House for their contributions in this very important debate.

Our team on this side comprises people of different levels of experience, as a consequence of which some of the Ministers who spoke would have done so from prepared texts and would have taken the opportunity to articulate to this honourable House the performances and achievements of their ministries for the last year and what they hope to achieve in fiscal year 2004.

Others, in addition to taking that approach, would also have engaged in the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate that is customary in Parliaments of this nature. But whether they subscribe to the former approach or to the latter—before I make that point, let me also say that over the last year I think that the Ministers of the Government had done quite well. [*Desk thumping*] Some of the Ministers have done particularly well and we will see the effects of that very shortly when we put in place new arrangements to ensure the implementation of the budget for fiscal year, 2004.

Whether the Ministers subscribed to the first approach, or whether they subscribed to the second approach, all the Members on this side subscribed to truth in their utterances before this honourable House. [*Desk thumping*] None of them made a contribution as disgraceful in its intent and malicious in its effect as the contribution of the hon. Member for Caroni East. That contribution was closely followed by the contribution of the Member for Chaguanas. Both those contributions will go down in the history of this Parliament as two of the worst and most racist contributions ever made in any budget debate in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

As Prime Minister, I try to stay out of all the race talk and I propose to do so again today, but I think I have a responsibility to say to hon. Members opposite that you may feel that you are gaining political points with that approach at this time. What in fact you are doing is dividing this society on the basis of race, and I

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can tell you, and experiences elsewhere in the world will tell you that those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is the Member for Caroni East who talked about community leaders, and sought to give the impression to this honourable House that Members on this side, and particularly the Member for San Fernando East is in the bosom of community leaders whom he described as criminals, and he went further to say, ably supported by the machinations of a most warped and demented mind in the Member for Chaguanas, that the crime in this country is as a consequence of the actions and relations of the Member for San Fernando East and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, to put it that way is to conveniently forget our antecedents. You see, long before the Member for San Fernando East in any capacity met with any community leader in the run-up to the general election of 1995, the Member for Couva North, the then Member for Couva South, and one other person who is the person who made it public, drew to the attention of the national community the fact that on a daily basis four of them would meet with a gentleman who heads a particular group in this country and who was involved in an insurrection in 1990. Every day Mr. Speaker! Mervyn Dymally is the man who made it public and that is how the national community knew.

So none of us was surprised when on accession to office in 1995, the very first meeting that was held by the Member in his capacity as Prime Minister, and flanked at the time by the Minister of National Security, the then hon. Brig. Joseph Theodore and Members of the government and Cabinet—[*Interruption*] The Attorney General was not there; he was not yet Attorney General. A photograph shows on the front page of one of the newspapers, at Level 20 in the Central Bank Building which is upstairs of the Prime Minister's office, the government sitting on one side of the table and on the other side, a group of people who were involved in an insurrection being accorded the status that is equivalent to that of those sitting on the other side. The government sitting on one side and an alternative government sitting on the next, and it was photographed. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, when the members of the Jamaat al Muslimeen were campaigning up and down the country for the UNC in 1995, none of them felt anything was wrong with it then, but all of a sudden when persons, who free as they are to select the political party of their choice are campaigning for the PNM, as happened in the 2002 general election, they are the first to suggest to the national community that not only is something wrong with that, but it has led to a

situation where criminal activity is now a source of concern to the national community.

Again, they conveniently forget. It was not a PNM government that put Mr. Bill Francis as a candidate in the Local Government Election. I call his name because he was a candidate in the election. Mr. Francis was a candidate of the UNC when they were in office. I do not want to go into details of the history of the gentleman, but let me say it would have been very nice if it were the hon. Members opposite who were seeking to bring about a shift in the thinking of the individual. It would have been quite laudable, but that is not the point. The point is that the person comes from a particular background and all of a sudden it is wrong for the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, a PNM Prime Minister, to be talking to community leaders. But it would have been all right, and it was all right when one of the very community leaders was given the status and prominence of candidate in the local government election for the United National Congress.

Mr. Speaker, they speak out of both sides of a twisted mouth. [*Desk thumping*] What is the PNM's approach? The PNM is saying that there are persons in this society who are not always living on the right side of the law and there are many options available to governments in treating with situations of this nature. We felt that the time had come to take an approach that seeks to convert these persons and move them away from a life of criminal activity, showing them an alternative to which they can subscribe and which could guarantee for them not just the economic life to which they aspire for themselves and children, but one that can lead to the social acceptability to which they all aspire. That was the approach. I do not understand them, everything they say the Member for Caroni East—

Mr. Speaker, you could say that the Member for Chaguanas is a neophyte, which he is of course. The Member is seriously misled but I cannot say that for the Member for Caroni East because he should know better. They see everything in the context of race.

Mr. Speaker, why do you think it was so easy for me to predict in 1986 when everybody else was saying that the PNM would have been in Opposition for 20 years, and the NAR would be in office for 20 years, or some said the NAR would be in office for 15 years and the PNM would spend 15 years in the wilderness, and the more generous among us said it would be 10 years. Why was it so easy for me to predict and with such confidence that we would do it in five years?

There are two reasons which they did not acknowledge but we did. One was that the NAR was a coalition government and, secondly, their attitude. It is known

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to us in circumstances of economic stringency whenever a government in a country like Trinidad and Tobago is called upon to divide a pie, such an exercise calls for understanding and tolerance. I was certain you could not get that from them and the NAR would have fractured as it did.

Mr. Speaker, the records would show that within five years the PNM was back in office and they have not analyzed it properly. The attitude that led to that situation in 1988 is precisely the same attitude that led to the prediction in 1995 that the PNM would be back in office soon. It is the same attitude.

It has led them to grief in 2001 and 2002 but they come in the Parliament in 2003 on the occasion of a budget for fiscal 2004 with the same divisive, racist attitude that will do no good to Trinidad and Tobago and certainly will do no credit to them. It is painful for someone like me to sit here and listen to what some of them had to say, painful. Do you know why? Because I could see through them, they are transparent and their intentions are clear.

Mr. Speaker, in a multiracial society a government has to be very careful because it is quite easy to misinterpret any action a government takes and put it in the context of race. It is easy to do that and in this society, there is no shortage of persons who are prepared to do just that.

Early in his contribution, the Member for Chaguanas talked about the Member for San Fernando East, talking about “my people” in some speech and he wanted to know what is meant by the term “my people”. Then he goes on to say, like he forgot what he had said earlier and I quote. I do not subscribe to these things but I will quote him.

“I am an East Indian, I represent my people and I am proud of that.”

I now ask him the question, what does he mean when he says “my people”? Precisely the question he put to me.

Mr. Speaker, it is not the PNM that talks of the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago. When we talk we say the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We recognize that the country is diverse, but out of the diversity, we are seeking to build one nation and one people. [*Desk thumping*] We know it is not easy and we have no illusions about the pitfalls that lie in the path of those who choose to walk that route, but we try.

When he talks about “peoples” and not “people” what does he mean? When I say my people, since we recognize the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it is easy to interpret what I mean. [*Desk thumping*] I mean all the people of Trinidad and

Tobago. When the Member for Chaguanas says “my people” as someone who insists on talking about the “peoples” of Trinidad and Tobago, I ask the question: What exactly does he mean? Does he not recognize that as a Member of Parliament, you are here to represent all the people of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we have differences you know. The Member for Chaguanas read a quotation just now that all people must be treated equally. I assume that he enunciated the philosophy of the UNC. The philosophy on this side is that all people must be treated equitably and there is a difference. [*Desk thumping*] While it is said that all of us are born equal, some are more equal than others. I do not think there is any case for dispute that your circumstances are far more favourable than mine, Mr. Speaker.

In other words, the responsibility of the State is to intervene in the life of those who are in need of the State’s benevolence. In other words, some people need it and some do not and different people need it to varying extents based on their own circumstances. That is the problem. You see, in determining equitability there is a judgment and the exercise of such a judgment can always lead to questions being raised and aspersions being cast. Hon. Members opposite specialize in casting aspersions and raising the wrong questions.

7.45 p.m.

Our vision is to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by the year 2020. We know that this country has to move forward as one country, one people, to be able to achieve that. A prerequisite to it is proper race relations in Trinidad and Tobago, and because we have a political situation in which hon. Members opposite insist on trying to divide this country on the basis of race, we have had—and we would do shortly—to reintroduce the Centre for Ethnic Studies, headed by two persons of different races. The objective of the Centre is to do research on the issues that surround a consideration of race relations and to publish the findings so that the discussion in the country on race relations would proceed not on the basis of surmise and emotion, but on the basis of fact.

In our last incarnation we had it, but do you know why it disappeared? When hon. Members opposite came into government in 1995 they did not find it convenient to leave it in place because it suited their purposes that the national discussion on race relations should not proceed on the basis of fact, but on surmise and emotion. That is how they live. That is how they divide this country. They have done it all the time and continue to do it again.

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So God, in His wisdom, put the PNM back in office and we have determined—

Hon. Member: God in his wisdom?

Hon. P. Manning: Yes, in His infinite wisdom and mercy put the PNM back in office and we would reintroduce the Centre for Ethnic Studies, as we have already reintroduced the round table discussions on race relations at Whitehall. I like to describe them as the main protagonists around the same table. What happens is, discussions take place around that table and the only rule is that they do not fight, physically, but they could have exchanges. It is all designed for each to bring about a better understanding of the position of the other. Since the persons involved are influential in some of the major organizations in this country, we believe that the effects of those discussions around that table can filter down in their own organizations and reach those at the mass level in the society who need to benefit from a better understanding of the position of each other.

It may or may not work, we do not know. We are prepared to try it. If that does not work, we try something else; and if that does not work, we try something else. We are going to be relentless in our pursuit of proper race relations and racial integration in this country and making Trinidad and Tobago a model nation for all countries of the world in terms of people of different ethnic backgrounds and cultural strains living together in harmony. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in contrast to the Member for Caroni East and the Member for Chaguanas, I would like to commend the Members for St. Joseph and St. Augustine. [*Crosstalk*] It is obvious, and the reasons are clear. Mr. Speaker, you were here. If we remove from the Speaker the inability to speak, I am sure you would express views similar to the ones I am expressing; not that I am trying to bring you into the debate. I do no such thing.

But you see, even if I did not agree with the Member for St. Augustine and some of his assertions, and even if I did not agree, as indeed I did not, with some of the assertions of the Member for St. Joseph, what I recognized was a sincerity of purpose in their contributions that was painfully absent in the contributions of their two colleagues, the Members for Caroni East and Chaguanas. It is there. I sat here.

The Member for Couva North cannot make that statement, you know. He was not here. He is not here now; he was not here for most of this debate, an act of gross discourtesy, not to the PNM, not to the Parliament, but to the people of Trinidad and Tobago who elected him to represent them. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when my contribution is concluded before this honourable House, we will resolve ourselves into committee to consider the estimates and the Member for Couva North is not going to be here to make his contribution on the estimates, as the people who elected him expected him to do. For yet another occasion he is not here. [*Crosstalk*] All this talk about he is well represented on the other side, the Member for Nariva could hardly represent himself and I do not know that he can represent anybody else. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine accused us of presenting a budget without a vision. Several of my colleagues have already addressed this matter. Permit me to add my two cents worth. This document is entitled “*Positioning Trinidad and Tobago for the Global Age, 2000—2020*”. This is a PNM document that was arrived at after three and a half years of activity inside and outside our political party. We started with the Members of Parliament. We started with discussions and the expression of views and a scribe doing some writing and so on. We went all through the party, inside and outside. Those outside of the party who would listen to us, we were prepared to talk with them. We did so. At the end of the day, on January 23, 2000, the occasion of the 44th anniversary of the formation the party, a document was placed before the party for discussion in a special convention. It was not two or three persons—a convention at the Red Cross building on Wrightson Road.

After discussion we went back to modify the document to take into account the views that were expressed in that special convention. Then on April 30, 2000, we met again at the same venue and adopted the document in a modified form. It had already gone back through the party. Each party group, every citizen who was a Member of the PNM who had a view to express on the document, did so, and we took every view into account. So when we modified it and adopted it on April 30, we had a document that had been the product of an internal process in the PNM which also involved people outside the party, a process of democracy ensuring that it was a document on which we were all agreed. It was published finally on September 24, 2000, the 44th anniversary of the PNM winning its first election.

When we say, therefore, that our vision for Trinidad and Tobago is to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by the year 2020, I am not expressing my view alone—it is my view—I am not just expressing the view of the Member for Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin West, Diego Martin East, Arouca North, Arouca South, Port of Spain South, Arima, Point Fortin, or any of my colleagues on this side—all of them are of this view—I am also expressing the views of the people of Trinidad and Tobago as expressed by the members of the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

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If they wish to accuse us of something, do not accuse us of not having a vision. It has no basis in fact. I challenge my colleagues opposite to come forward with their version of this and to tell us the process through which they took it to arrive at their position, whatever that document may or may not be. The fact of the matter is that the PNM is the only political party that has enunciated a vision such as this as a consequence of one of the most democratic of processes. [*Desk thumping*]

As we move forward, we are therefore seeking to move Trinidad and Tobago forward along a path that has been discussed and agreed upon. What we are now discussing are the mechanisms and strategies that would achieve the vision on which we are already all agreed. If they have not yet read it, I commend it to them again. But you see, the way they spoke, I was sure that they had not seen it. Perhaps they lost the copies that we gave them last year so we would give them again this year. I mean no discourtesy. The PNM forms the Government; this is the document that is the basis for our policy action. We suggest that Members of the Opposition familiarize themselves with it.

The Member for St. Augustine talked about the situation that faced him and his government, the government of the NAR, in 1986; that it was a very challenging situation and he sought to give the impression that in addressing this very challenging situation they had done well; indeed, that they had brought about a turnaround in the economic fortunes of Trinidad and Tobago. I think that is a fair representation of what he had said and the view was echoed, to some extent, by my colleague from St. Joseph.

Mr. Speaker, with respect, we disagree. We agree that a very challenging situation faced the NAR in 1986, but we are of the view that the whole situation was mishandled. I would credit them with one other thing, that they, in fact, were talking about a change in the method of economic organization of Trinidad and Tobago and that they began the move in the right direction to bring that about. Regrettably, they did not travel far along that road and they made some mistakes.

The first one was in 1987 when they unilaterally removed the cost of living allowance from public servants, captive employees of the State. The next thing they did one year later was to stop all increments to public servants and they cut the salary of public servants by 10 per cent. When the Public Services Association moved to take the matter to court, they hurriedly brought a bill before this Parliament and rammed it down the throats of an Opposition at the time that constituted only three of us—it was 33 of them; three of us—and they legitimized by parliamentary action what otherwise would have been illegitimate acts.

That is what they did and we are paying for that to this day. Recently we have come to an agreement with the PSA and the other public sector unions on how to fix it, but it is not yet settled, because every teacher who should be accorded less than \$40,000 has queried it. Therefore, we have a whole set of queries now in the teaching profession and the matter continues to remain as one of the thorny problems that face the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The genesis of it, of course, was NAR actions in 1987 and 1988.

They did one other thing. They entered into a programme with the International Monetary Fund and rescheduled the public debt, postponing the payments to the year after the election, which was anticipated to be held in 1991, so that debt service doubled in 1992, 1993 and 1994, reaching a level of between US \$600 million and US \$650 million in the three years. That is what we had to face. Even when they were doing it we saw it and cautioned them and the national community that what, in fact, was happening, was that the government of the day was laying a bed of thorns for the government that would succeed it, which they knew would not be them. They knew it even then.

So we faced it! We had to face it. Imagine a new Prime Minister coming for the first time with a new government, very little experience, having to face a doubling of debt service, not in one year or two years, but in three successive years. We were forced, and we did it. We had the courage of our convictions to bring about the economic change.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: You had the oil boom.

Hon. P. Manning: What oil boom? I will come back to the Member for Siparia in a minute. When we left office in 1986, we left them with \$1,183 million in foreign exchange, and they squandered it. The NAR here is not under inquisition. All I am trying to do is to set the records right because, you see, my friend from St. Augustine skilfully put things in the record here which I feel that we on this side cannot leave unattended. They had all of that and they handled it in a particular way.

Mr. Speaker, it was the PNM, with the courage of its convictions that brought about the transformation of the economy. We moved post-haste to remove the negative list and price controls. Do you remember it? We removed foreign exchange controls. When everybody was saying not to do it, we floated the currency and they wanted to know if we were mad. Today, as Minister of Finance, I can report to this honourable House that our foreign exchange holdings are in excess of US \$2 billion, which means the action of 1994 was correct. [*Desk thumping*]. But, of course, we did not live to tell the tale.

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More than that, economic decline set into the country in 1983 when oil prices fell. The developed countries were able to assail the OPEC countries in that year. The price fell from \$34 a barrel to \$28 in the first instance, and it collapsed in 1986 at \$9 a barrel. Therefore, we went into a period of contraction. The first year of economic expansion was 1994, on cue as the PNM promised. We said it would do it in three years and in the third year, not only were we able to report expansion in economic activity, but today, 2003, on the occasion of the budget for fiscal 2004, we can say that the action then was not haphazard; it was not a fluke, as we would like to call it; it was not happenstance, but that it, in fact, was rooted in sound economic policy and today, 10 years later, we can say that we have had economic growth for the last 10 years as a result of that. [*Desk thumping*]

Similarly, they would like to give the impression that they had something to do with the economic prosperity into which the country is going. I use the word guardedly—"enhanced economic circumstance" would be better. Would it not be?

Mr. Speaker, I was never a believer in liquefied natural gas (LNG). Most of my colleagues were not. In 1992 there was a policy change in this country and we took the decision, after three Ministers had gone to the United States—they went to Houston—and they were exposed to a presentation by Amoco, at the time. They came back here and reported to the Cabinet and we took the decision that we would change our policy and allow natural gas to be exported in the form of liquefied natural gas. The consequence of that decision is Trains 1, 2, and 3, all exporting at this time—and Train 4 to come—800 million cubic feet a day.

More than that, last year when the dust had cleared and we looked at the position in terms of US imports of LNG, 68 per cent of all LNG imports into the United States came from Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is the only exporter of LNG in the western hemisphere at this time. [*Desk thumping*]

But Venezuela also has gas. For whatever reason Venezuela has been trying to get an LNG programme off the ground for the longest while but has not succeeded in doing it. We talked with the President of Venezuela. Which one of them was it? One of them, wanting to know whether—

Hon. Member: Couva South.

Hon. P. Manning: It was the Member for Couva South. Let me get the exact words. I do not want to misquote him at all; I want to get his exact words. He said: "When I see you signing MOU with Chavez, I think that you are either going mad or have a serious problem with the Bush administration."

Mr. Speaker, if I chose, and if this Government chose, to take the advice of hon. Members opposite, we would crash the economy of this country and invoke every enemy in the western hemisphere. The gas demand in the United States is going up; the gas supply is going down. The market is increasing. The United States is hungry for gas. When we sign a memorandum of understanding with the Venezuelan government—the Chavez administration—it is because we recognize that significant discoveries of natural gas have taken place just over the border on the Venezuelan side, much closer to Trinidad and Tobago than to Venezuela. Therefore, what we are seeking to do is to monetize Venezuelan gas in Trinidad and Tobago's processing facilities for the US market, which means a decision and a course of action designed to give the United States of America greater energy security as the situation now faces them. So it is greater security for the Bush administration and gas sales for the Venezuelan government. So far from having something against the Bush administration or not knowing what we are doing in respect of Venezuela, we are seeking to assist both countries—a small country, Trinidad and Tobago; a little country but one governed by people who know exactly what they are about. [*Desk thumping*]

The way it was said on that side, I do not know what they would have done. It is entirely possible that Train 5 of LNG in this country would be a Train based exclusively on Venezuelan gas. Trinidad and Tobago would get an economic rent. We would gain something out of it, but we would be a major facilitator in circumstances where there is political instability in the neighbouring country. We can still pursue a course of action designed to marry the demand with the supply and bring about security to three countries, Trinidad and Tobago being the third.

The Member for Couva South also had a lot to say about Point Lisas. Many years ago when the PNM was building the Point Lisas Estate, they were not in support of it. I was here. I was in this Parliament before any of them came and before those momentous decisions were being implemented. On that side they disagreed with it. All of a sudden when they got into government, Point Lisas is the show piece. All of a sudden, after Point Lisas had become full, hon. Members opposite find themselves in government and decide that rather than look elsewhere in the country to construct these large plants, which, because of their size, can stand alone economically and therefore act as nodes of social development, which is how we saw it, do you know what they sought to do instead? They sought to do precisely what they condemned and converted good agricultural land for industrial development. That is what they did, just what they had condemned.

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The PNM had intended to put the Farmland Plant in the La Brea Industrial Estate and there was an agreement. More than that, because it was a new industrial estate—and a green field industrial estate—we gave a concession on the gas price to Farmland, an incentive to go down in La Brea. It was the first time Farmland was building a plant outside of the United States. It was the first time they were going offshore and they were very nervous, so as part of our policy the Government had to do what had to be done to give them a measure of comfort, as it were. We gave them a price break.

In comes the government of the UNC and for narrow, partisan, political considerations, take the view that La Brea is not a safe place and they “bad talked” La Brea up and down the country. They held enquiries. They tried to jail me. They questioned me, you know, Mr. Speaker. I answered all the questions they asked me, and if they wanted to question me again, they were free to do that, because I know they would look and look and find nothing, because there was nothing to be found.

Do you know what they did? They “bad talked” the estate so much, so they now had to demonstrate to the national community that the estate was not proper for industrial development. And smart Farmland comes to them at the last minute and tells them: “If the estate is not good for industrial development, we do not want to put any plant here; we want to transfer to Point Lisas.”

They found themselves with their backs to the wall and do you know what they did? They agreed to the transfer of the Farmland Plant from La Brea to Point Lisas, except that the terms and conditions did not change. So that the concessionary gas price that was given to Farmland to establish itself in La Brea now became applicable to Point Lisas and the Farmland Plant is constructed one and a half miles off the estate to the north. You should go and see it, Mr. Speaker. There is a long conveyor belt—a mile and a half—down to the pier. But they did not know at the time that all the ammonia producers on the estate have in their contracts a “most favoured nation” clause, that is to say, “If you sell gas to one of my competitors at a particular price that is below the price at which you sell me, then automatically I am entitled to the same price”.

Do you know what the upshot of it was? All the ammonia producers went to the government and were able to secure a downward reduction in their gas price to the detriment of the revenues of Trinidad and Tobago. While we have not quantified the figure, we are going to quantify it, because they were forced to give every one of them the same price that Farmland had, which initially was intended to be a concessionary to encourage Farmland to build in La Brea.

All the political ‘ole’ talk, that was the upshot of it. If ever there was a government whose policies were disastrous to Trinidad and Tobago, it was the government of the UNC. [*Desk thumping*]

I did not wish to get into all this because, you see, we considered all that history and we were moving forward, but they come to this Parliament and say all kinds of things. The Member for St. Augustine is not here, but they took an energy position—and it has been alluded to by my good friend from Diego Martin West; the NAR manifesto is here; check the manifesto—that they would no longer engage in mega projects; that there would be no more construction of ammonia, methanol and urea plants; that they would develop new sub-sectors—that is how they put it—whose viability will not be dependent on export markets which are quite volatile and which make you quite vulnerable, but they would develop new sub-sectors whose viability is based on the domestic market. Could you imagine a sub-sector in the energy sector that depends on the domestic market for viability with \$1.3 million people? Such a sub-sector does not exist.

8.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we produced so much ammonia and methanol in this country that today, we are the largest exporter of ammonia and methanol in the world. That was the mistake they made. But fortunately, Mr. Speaker, they stopped it. After three years they realized they had made an error and it is to the credit of the NAR that they changed their policy after three years in government. It was already too late, however, the damage had already been done. The Member for St. Joseph is smiling because he knows. [*Interruption*] Quite true! It is the finest mind that did it. That is right. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, even though we were in opposition we used to have a field day in this Parliament. We knew they did not know what they were doing, but they did not know that they did not know. But they soon found out. It is to their credit that they found out.

Mr. Speaker, what has emerged on the energy scene in this country, is the makings of the PNM. If today Trinidad and Tobago holds pride of place and pre-eminence in the international community in respect of LNG, ammonia and methanol, it is as a direct consequence of the policies put in place by the government of the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, just as we demonstrate prudence in our energy policy—I will return to energy policy in a few minutes—we demonstrate prudence in our

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agricultural policy. All the ol' talk you hear from Members on the other side about Caroni (1975) Limited—I have a document before me dated May 2001:

“The Working Group Report, Recommendations 2002”

[*Interruption*] May 2001 is the date of the document. We were in opposition then. It says:

“The working group for the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited presented its report: Working Group Report, April 24, 2001 and May 15, 2001 at a meeting with the Minister of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism and the Minister of Finance.”

And the Minister of Finance? Was that my good friend? [*Laughter*] I did not realize that you were involved. [*Interruption*] I am sorry? I see what you mean. But this is May 2001. We came into government on Christmas Eve day 2001, so this is a few months before. I continue:

“After discussion it was agreed that...”

And my friend must tell me if I am misquoting him now.

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

I repeat. “...cannot become financially viable.”

“A total shutdown of the industry is therefore inevitable.”

Mr. Speaker, I did not say that. It was not a PNM government that considered any report, and it was not two PNM ministers who came to any such conclusion, you know. It was the Minister of Enterprise Development, Foreign Affairs and Tourism—he had too much—and the Minister of Finance, who, Mr. Speaker, is still with us and therefore in a position to correct the record, if there is anything I am placing on the record that is inaccurate or improper. My friend. [*Pause*] I continue to quote:

“A long-term solution for Caroni (1975) Limited must be developed and implemented and fallouts from restructuring are inevitable.”

This is what they agreed on. [*Interruption*] “It ain't have no racism here, eh.”

Dr. Rowley: Read the last line again.

Hon. P. Manning: I repeat:

“...fallouts from restructuring are inevitable.”

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you why they came to that conclusion. You will remember in 1994—

Dr. Rowley: It was in 1992.

Hon. P. Manning: I am corrected by my friend; he was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources at the time. In 1992, we wrote off \$2.4 billion of Caroni (1975) Limited debt. We did some restructuring and we had a plan that was agreed to by government, the company and the trade unions.

Dr. Rowley: It was in July 1992.

Hon. P. Manning: And one of the signatories, on behalf of the trade union movement, was one Basdeo Panday, who incidentally, is the Member for Couva North today. Since then, funding to Caroni (1975) Limited from the Treasury Department amounted to:

1993	-	\$87 million
1994	-	\$85 million
1995	-	\$89 million

Mr. Speaker, I am rounding it of. Now 1995 is the last year of PNM governance. 1996, Mr. Speaker, guess the figure. I would give you three guesses. You cannot guess it. It was \$326 million. Something happened in 1996! While I do not want to dilate on it, I want you to know that something happened when they came into government.

1996	\$326 million
1997	\$92 million
1998	\$148 million (January to September)
1998/1999	\$106 million (The financial year had changed)
1999/2000	\$417 million (Treasury funding to Caroni (1975) Limited)
2000/2001	\$171 million
2001/2002	\$175 million
2002/2003	\$213 million
Total:	\$1,853,788,960.

Mr. Speaker, that would have been bad enough if it were the total story but that was not the total story. This was the cash injection of the Treasury

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Department into Caroni (1975) Limited: \$1.8 billion. The estimated liabilities of Caroni (1975) Limited as at August 31, 2003: Government Guaranteed Loans—Mr. Speaker, do you know what Government Guaranteed Loans mean? They cannot pay; it is our loan—contingent liability. Government Guaranteed Loans \$1.6 billion, that is Republic Finance and Merchant Bank, but for Royal Merchant and Finance Bank, it is \$719 million.

Under Pension Obligations for daily-paid workers, Mr. Speaker, it is another \$245 million and additional funding on VSEP and other benefits, \$146 million, giving us a total of \$3.7 billion. When you add that to the funding from the Treasury Department, the total Caroni (1975) Limited liability amounts to \$5,554,408,000. So that when a decision was taken to bring about a major transformation of Caroni (1975) Limited, it was not race as my good friends from Caroni East, Chaguanas and, incidentally, Oropouche would like to have us believe.

Mr. Speaker, You see my friend from Oropouche, I am going to give him a warning in a minute. He is heading down the wrong road and he is going to pay a dear price in this Parliament for that. *[Interruption]* No, no, no, he is my constituent and, therefore, I would choose to talk with him privately, in the first instance. I am prepared to visit him to let him know that he is on the wrong track. *[Interruption]* I am sorry?

Dr. Moonilal: Just do not visit me like Manohar. *[Laughter]*

Hon. P. Manning: No. He was visited upon. I will visit you. Mr. Speaker, it is not race. They took the decision before. They saw it! Mr. Speaker, at \$5 billion what was the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to do? It had no choice in the matter. Mr. Speaker, we did what we had to do. All the noises you are hearing today are coming, not from the workers, you know, it is coming from the Opposition Members. I give the workers this assurance that the Government is going to implement every commitment it made. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I think it was the Member for St. Augustine who talked about the economic policy. Of all people, Mr. Speaker, I thought my colleague from Arouca North dealt very effectively with him on that matter. *[Desk thumping]* I want to commend you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you.

Hon. P. Manning: Economic policy, the trickle-down theory. Mr. Speaker, the two people who gained notoriety around the world for the trickle-down theory—they became world famous for it—is the Prime Minister of the United

Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher and the President of the United States of America, Ronald Reagan: “Reaganomics”, “Thatcherism”. What was the policy? The policy was that if, in fact, you created economic activity that puts wealth in the hands of the rich or those of a certain economic status, as they spend that money, it would trickle down to the base of the society. That is the trickle-down theory.

Mr. Speaker, the trickle-down theory has not worked. A lot of right-wing governments came into power on the trickle-down theory. Today not one of those governments is still in power. Every one has floundered and the PNM saw that. When we left office in 1995—say what you want, you could chastise me as much as you want. God works in mysterious ways; His wonders to perform. What, in fact, Almighty God was saying to me is: “I take you out of that situation; you watch and tell me what you see.” Mr. Speaker, I watched and what I saw is an economic education. I also walked all over the country and listened to what people had to say. Mr. Speaker, 36 constituencies, and I had discussions in every one; discussions in the PNM general council; legislative council; youth league; women’s league, at every level of the party. What emerged is that the trickle-down theory does not work. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, so the PNM came back into government with a different approach. The approach is, yes, you create the climate and the circumstances that would allow for investments and the generation of wealth but the State has a responsibility to intervene directly in the lives of those who are most in need of the benevolence of this country. [*Desk thumping*] So that what you are seeing today, is a shift of the PNM towards expenditure in the social sector.

That is why I am the Minister of Finance, Mr. Speaker. I took the portfolio of Minister of Finance to ensure that shift in the pattern of public expenditure took place. I am pleased to say: It has taken place, Mr. Speaker. What you are seeing today is economic activity that is, indeed, creating wealth in the society but the State is an effective instrument in the distribution of that wealth and as the society moves forward nobody is left behind. That is the PNM policy of today; I am very proud of it.

The Member for Couva South came back here with talks about corruption. In a very dramatic fashion he sought to indicate to hon. Members of this House that there is corruption in the award of a contract for the 56-inch natural gas pipeline associated with Train 4, and the expansion of LNG production in the country. He started off by saying that the companies would have built the pipeline at no cost to the State—Atlantic LNG—and that Government had no right to take over the construction of the pipeline from them. Mr. Speaker, there were two reasons why

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we did it. The first is that who pays the piper calls the tune. Who owns the pipeline is in a position to decide who puts gas in the pipeline and at what price. Since we are thinking in terms of Venezuelan gas in Trinidad and Tobago, we did not want that to be in the hands of a private company and the Government to lose control of it. Secondly, by taking that decision the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has saved in excess of US \$10 million. Those were very good economic reasons—no corruption.

In relation to the 56-inch pipeline itself, tender documents were issued on May 06, 2003. Tenders were invited on April 22 and six contractors received those tenders. Closed tenders were opened publicly on July 18, 2003. In other words, the figures that the Member for Couva South called today are figures that are in the public domain because the tenders were opened publicly. He gave the impression that he was in receipt of some kind of secret information that the Government was hiding from the national community. It was no such thing, Mr. Speaker.

The tenders were opened publicly as a consequence of which all of us knew what the figures were. Six companies bid, one of which was Bechtel International Inc (Bechtel). The tender prices as recorded at the opening of the tenders, ranged from US \$65 million to US \$109 million.

The tenders were evaluated by a team of NGC personnel, in conjunction with NGC's Engineering and Project Management Consultants (EPM), Kellogg Pan American Corporation. Kellogg, Mr. Speaker! The evaluation process involved analysis of commercial, technical and contractual terms and conditions. In addition, there was a consideration of local content, training and community relations proposed. Bechtel attained the highest evaluation score. I want to repeat that. Bechtel attained the highest evaluation score. The NGC met with three of the bidders, Bechtel's bid was the lowest of the three bidders. Not only were they the lowest bid, they also attained the highest evaluation score.

At a special meeting of the board of directors held on August 15, 2003, the board accepted a recommendation from NGC's management, in conjunction with NGC's EPM consultants for an award of a contract to Bechtel as a preferred supplier, in a sum not to exceed US \$69,318,585. On September 29, 2003 the Ministry of Finance approved the award of contract to Bechtel as a preferred supplier, subject to the finalization of contract terms and conditions.

During the period August 18, 2003 to date, NGC had been meeting with Bechtel with a view to finalizing contract terms and conditions. In other words, Bechtel were told that they were the successful bidder and they had entered into

discussions with the NGC to ensure that the contractual arrangements were signed, sealed and delivered.

If, therefore, today API Pipeline Construction Company Limited, which is a subcontractor of Bechtel—selected by Bechtel—is taking action to get the contract going, it is not because of any sweetheart arrangement, as suggested by the Member for Couva South. It is in accordance with the accepted processes that are associated with contract awards by the National Gas Company. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, it was put in such a way to give the impression that the PNM is in the bosom of corruption.

In the same way that we have been able to demonstrate that the NGC's 56-inch pipeline arrangements are entirely above board, we could demonstrate it with Exxon and any of the other issues that they may wish to raise in this regard.

In the case of Exxon, Mr. Speaker, that company had met their contractual arrangements in respect of expenditure. They did not meet it in respect of number of wells drilled. They argued that if you drill additional wells—their interpretation of the geology is that you would get dry holes anyway, so why waste that money. They therefore would have incurred a penalty.

Mr. Speaker, we were very concerned that Exxon, which is the largest oil company in the world, was about to pull out of Trinidad and Tobago in those circumstances. We have fond memories of Exxon involved in the Southern Basin Consortium—I am sorry the Member for Couva South is not here—doing a lot of exploration work, which today, the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro will tell you, is really the base work that has led to the cretaceous discovery of Talisman. It is the largest oil company in the world, and a company that has available to it advanced technology.

We thought that if we could enter into some acceptable arrangement to keep Exxon here, it would redound to the credit of Trinidad and Tobago. The arrangement was that they would do some exploration work in Trinmar, at a cost of \$25 million, a little less than what their liabilities would have been, but if the exploration work was successful, the country was in a position to gain far more than the difference in the Exxon liability. [*Desk thumping*] Quite reasonable, a business proposal. Exxon has agreed and we are proceeding in that direction.

Mr. Speaker, next year we hope to have a much better performance of the PSIP. We have put new arrangements in place in the Ministry of Finance to ensure proper monitoring of expenditure, and more timely availability of resources to various ministries. This year a lot of work has gone on in terms of

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capacity building in the various ministries that gave us the confidence that next year things would be considerably better. That is why we have come forward with an initial PSIP allocation of \$1.677 billion as opposed to \$907 million of last year, almost double but we have done this with great confidence, Mr. Speaker. We are confident that we can achieve it in the year under review.

Next year also, we propose to begin a review of the entire tax system. We would like to simplify the system. If we have a simpler system then the opportunities for leakage are considerably reduced and therefore the level of compliance is considerably greater. My friend from Caroni East is quite right on that.

We also propose to examine a system that would target our social benefits to the people for whom they are really intended. If we can identify a system that successfully does that, and if we are able to put in place a new tax system that does what we say it would do, then we are in a position to considerably enhance the revenues of the country to make the operations of Government much more efficient, consistent with our aspirations to become a developed country in a certain time frame. So, Mr. Speaker, we will try that.

We have increased our expenditure at the social level. The problem is, however, that the hot spots in this country are, by and large, in the East-West Corridor. Therefore if you were to allocate resources to hot spots as an investment to social stability you run the risk of being accused of racism. That is really what our friends opposite are saying. A country like this is not easy to govern, Mr. Speaker.

May I also say that next fiscal year the social sector committee, which comprises seven or eight Ministers and chaired by the Prime Minister—it comprises other technocrats from the public and private sector. We are going to spend our time next year trying to make existing programmes more and more efficient, and to ensure they are given a completely national reach. We admit that some of our programmes have not yet attained that level, but we have moved so fast, trying to intervene so rapidly, particularly in the areas which are hot spots, that on occasion when such an allegation is levelled at us, it is not entirely without foundation, but our objectives and reasons are not what they are said to be. Our intentions remain honourable. This year we will spend some time trying to rectify that situation. We confidently believe that when we come here next year with the budget for fiscal 2005, we will be able to report very differently to this honourable House and to the national community on the performance of our budget.

We are re-examining a system for the dispensation of social services and that has turned out to be very difficult indeed to arrive at. We have also been engaged in a lot of discussions at the Social Sector Committee with a view to achieving this. Mr. Speaker, we are not yet there, but we are getting there. Kairi Consultants Limited is on board; we are working closely with them and a lot of discussions are taking place at the level of the Social Sector Committee. We are confident that these discussions would arrive at amicable solutions to the problem.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we have taken possession from the Minister of Local Government of a policy document on the reform of the local government sector. It is a very important document because it has the potential of advancing a system that can lead to power sharing in Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to have that as a major item on the national agenda in the new fiscal year, and we would begin to advance that document, at various levels, including within the political parties, which as you know, Mr. Speaker, is the vehicle for social, economic and political transformation.

Mr. Speaker, a word to my friends in Tobago. I am very proud that Tobago has done so well in this budget. I was looking at the television and I saw a former chief secretary of Tobago make the comment: "But when I was chief secretary we used to get \$300 million. Those fellas get \$1.3 billion this year; they are going to waste the money." A very big change from what would normally have been the case. Normally, what they would have been saying, Mr. Speaker, is that "Tobago have been done in again, we have not had a proper allocation." Mr. Speaker, for the first time, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has agreed to allow Tobago to borrow money under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance. Tobago's allocation is \$900 million and they would be allowed to borrow up to \$400 million, which would put them in a position to embark on a capital programme in Tobago which is really outside of the existing arrangements, but which have the potential of accelerating, considerably, the rate of Tobago's development and hopefully attaining a level that is consistent with Tobago's aspirations.

Mr., Speaker, I look forward, as indeed my colleagues do, with great anticipation to what lies before us. We are confident that Trinidad and Tobago is going to see accelerated rates of development. We are confident that with the various programmes that we would put in place in the new year, our young people will see a better future and that unemployment rates in the country will fall.

Mr. Speaker, incidentally, talking about unemployment rates, permit me just en passant to mention that we established earlier a committee under Prof. Julian to identify opportunities and to come up with a plan for creation of full employment

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within two years. This is the draft report—the final report should come in about two weeks. Essentially, what the committee is saying is that it is doable; it will have to be done in three years if we are to contain inflation in the country. We are going to be targeting full employment in Trinidad and Tobago in a three-year time frame if we find the report acceptable. The Cabinet has not yet considered it—I am anticipating the Cabinet, Mr. Speaker—but we have the plan and that is the important thing, the details of which, for obvious reasons, we are not going to make public, but the plan exists, and beginning this fiscal year the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will be embarking on this plan which is designed to give us full employment within three years.

Mr. Speaker, this and other measures in the budget have given us great cause for optimism. I think that our technocrats, right through the public sector, have worked well right through this budget. I specially want to commend our technocrats in the Ministry of Finance, who have worked long hours and very hard to ensure that this budget is as forward-looking, as indeed it is. We look forward with great anticipation, not only to its implementation but to our reporting at the next occasion that we present a budget, that budget fiscal year 2004 has not only met its objectives and surpassed it, but that the budget has been quite successful and has taken Trinidad and Tobago, significantly, along the road to developed status by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve itself into Finance Committee, and in accordance with Standing Order 64(1), I now ask all strangers to leave the Chamber during the deliberations of the Finance Committee.

Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.

8.45 p.m.: *House resolved itself into Finance Committee.*

9.18 p.m.: *House resumed after Finance Committee.*

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Schedule ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment, read the third time and passed.

Motion made and question proposed

, That the House do now adjourn to Friday, October 31 at 1.30 p.m. [Hon. K. Valley]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.20 p.m.