

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, October 13, 2004*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) for the year ended December 31, 1994. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Regulated Industries Commission for the year ended December 31, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority for the year ended December 31, 1999. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on a special audit of the celebrations fund and borough day expenses of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation for the financial year 2002. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the non-receipt of financial statements from certain entities—erratum. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the National Settlements Programme Second Stage—Phase I as per Loan Contract No. 1402/OC-TT for the financial year ended September 30, 2003. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the National Settlements Programme Second Stage—Phase I as per Loan Contract No. 1402/OC-TT for the period May 22, 2002 to September 30, 2002. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
8. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Agricultural Development Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2001. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

Papers 1 to 8 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

Minister of State in the Ministry of Community Development and Culture (Hon. Eulalie James): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to enquire into and report on government ministries with responsibility for areas listed in Part I and on the statutory authorities and state enterprises falling under those ministries.

CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY BILL

Bill to give effect to the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy and for matters related thereto [*The Minister of Foreign Affairs*]; read the first time.

ANTI-TERRORISM BILL

Bill to criminalize terrorism, to provide for the detection, prevention, prosecution, conviction and punishment of terrorist activities and the confiscation, forfeiture and seizure of terrorists' assets [*The Minister of National Security*]; read the first time.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 08, 2004]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Basdeo Panday (Couva North): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this response to the budget, I propose to deviate from the norm. In the present circumstances of oil price being at \$50 a barrel and gas prices at its highest; with a budget of more than \$27 billion, a \$100 more for pensioners and 5,000 more food hampers cannot be the issue.

What is important in a budget statement at the time of our development is how we will use this oil and gas windfall to ensure that future generations continue to improve their standard of living and the quality of their lives. I shall argue that while things that can be measured quantitatively are important, they are not everything. Matters such as vision, leadership, democracy and the quality of life of our people on a sustained basis are equally important, if not more important. We must, therefore, never lose sight of them.

When I heard all the “robber talk” contained in this \$27 billion budget presentation on Friday last, I wondered if the date for Carnival 2005 had been shifted to October 08, 2004. When we eliminate all the “robber talk”, repetition, irrelevance and double speech in this budget, it is but a glorified shopping list enumerating most of the problems facing the country, but with very little serious analysis of their depth, underlying causes and what has to be done to deal with them now and in the long run.

Despite the mere three hours taken to read this budget, it lacks depth and vision as much as it lacks strategy and understanding of the society. There is no coherent link between vision and action, between strategy and objectives. This so-called budget is the work of confused minds; it is the work of people who are unable to see the whole picture; who talk of the future, but do not know how to come to terms with it.

What comes across as a simple budget is really the work of the simple minded. At a time when we have everything it takes to launch Trinidad and Tobago into a period of sustained growth, with continuing improvement in the standard of living for all for a very long time, the kind of economic mismanagement we see enunciated in this budget would very likely lead us to negative growth in the future. No wonder the cynics are winning! People are fed up, angry, disgusted and pessimistic about the future. Alienation is higher than it has ever been and the brain drain is at a dangerous level. Loyalty to institutions and institutions’ loyalty to people is sinking like a stone. National unity as a vision for our people and our country is hardly ever referred to by this PNM Government, far less the enunciation of a strategy to deal with this historical legacy of slavery and indenture. The result is the deteriorating ethnic relations and the growing feelings of alienation are moving along at breakneck pace.

Mr. Speaker, without a resolution to this historical problem of a divided society, we shall never be able to mobilize our human resource. Without the full mobilization of our human resource, we shall not be able to achieve a single objective attempted in this budget.

We are becoming increasingly and painfully aware of the perilous weakening of our social structure. Drugs, criminal gangs and gang warfare, functional illiteracy, poverty, crime, violence, breakdown of the family, youth alienation and HIV/AIDS continue in an upward spiral. Every aspect of our society is at risk. Individuals, neighbourhoods, communities, churches and families are not taking responsibility anymore and there is a reason for that. Such is the feeling of despondency and helplessness that they are no longer willing to fight. They would

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rather switch—switch off, that is. The population is cynical and cynics do not participate in changing things.

While this budget makes many boasts, largely having to do with improvement in numbers, many of which we on this side have great doubts about, our quality of life deteriorates before our very eyes. In this context, I remind the Minister of Finance of the famous words of Albert Einstein:

“Not everything that can be counted counts

And not everything that counts can be counted.”

Einstein’s words form the theme of my budget contribution for this year.

At the heart of our society’s malaise is leadership or the lack thereof. It is one of the very important things that count, but cannot be counted. The PNM has not been able to mobilize the seemingly unwilling citizenry towards an unknown and even uncertain future. It is not the fault of citizens. Why should they want to be led by this Government and this Prime Minister whose most distinguishing characteristic, despite his laser treatment, is his worsening myopia and astigmatic Stabismus?

Mr. Speaker, a leader must be able to spark the imagination of his people with a clear vision of a worthwhile end that stretches beyond what is known today. He must be able to translate that into clear objectives that people can follow. Instead, we have this puerile exercise called Vision 2020, which is itself a borrowed title that has so far inspired fewer people than can be counted on the digits of a single hand. Vision 2020 will probably go down as the hoax of the decade.

Can anyone listening to this debate truly say that they know what this silly phrase means in the context of our economic and social development? If you do, can you tell me please what this country would look like when we shall have achieved this vision? And will you please tell me how we are going to get there? Show me the Promised Land and tell me the strategies and tactics for reaching there.

There is an old saying: “If you do not believe the messenger, you would not believe the message”. That is why the population is so cynical. The inherent capacity to choose, to develop a new vision for ourselves, to re-script our lives, to begin a new habit or let go of an old one, to rid oneself of anger, hate and bitterness, to forgive someone, to apologize, to make a promise and then keep it, in any area of life is and always has been and always will be the moment of truth for every true leader.

This Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, however, is characterized by vindictiveness, dictatorial tendencies and delusions of grandeur. Soon he will

declare himself father of the Caribbean but he is afraid of the strength of his opponents and even more so of his own associates. Ask the Minister of Housing and Settlements about the vindictiveness of the Prime Minister if you really want to know how. His leadership style is best described in the statement by an anonymous person who has now become famous, that is: if you do not know where you are going any road will get you there.

Mr. Speaker, people expect their leaders to stand for something and to have the courage of their convictions. They do not expect their leaders to dignify criminals with the title of community leaders. They do not expect crime plan after crime plan that warns criminals that the police are coming, rather than a strategy that actually catches the criminals. They do not expect criminals to be rewarded with resources of the State like: land, quarries and contracts in sensitive state enterprises. They do not expect criminals to have unfettered access to the corridors of power through senior Ministers of Government who act for the Prime Minister whenever he is abroad. When leadership tries to hoodwink the population, credibility simply sinks deeper.

For example, does the Prime Minister think he is fooling anyone, when he gives a token to the flood victims of Central and South, simply because he wants to legitimize his gifts to the rest of the Caribbean? Central and South Trinidad have been flooding for years, how is it that it is only now that he finds the time to visit? He does not want people to say that he is playing Santa to the rest of the Caribbean while he ignores flooding in his own backyard, so he has tossed a crumb to the people of Central and South.

As I listened to this longwinded predictable budget presentation, rehashing last year's presentation, I knew it was only going to be a matter of time before he blamed the UNC for something or other, to cover up for his own Government's incompetence. I was not disappointed. I predict that it would not be long before the PNM blames the UNC for Hurricane Ivan. That is their style of politics. There is an old saying: "To err is human". To blame someone else is even more human. They are not focused on creating value for the population, intelligent skills for the students, wellness for the patients and pride for the citizens. They are focused solely on staying in power. That is why house padding is more important than creating living and sustainable communities, where the residents have jobs and human development facilities. That is why CEPEP and URP are more important than recreating sustainable jobs. That is also why the PNM is more interested in the satisfaction of their supporters only, instead of the satisfaction of the nation.

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Leaders, in the words of the ancient Greek Thucydides, have knowledge of their duty and a sense of honour in their action. Duty number one in this country is to unite the nation and so bring to an end the historically most persistent stumbling block to our development as a nation and as a people. Duty number two is to rid our society of the crime. Duty number three is to create a sustainable basis for the future prosperity of our citizens. Instead, under the watch of this Prime Minister, crime is at its worst. Murders are growing in geometrical proportion and we are becoming the kidnapping capital of the world. The ethnic division is now a gaping chasm in our society, and that, too, grows worse daily. Meanwhile, the PNM economic model is to consume in the present and borrow in the future, while the social model is to buy votes with political handouts and keep the supporters in a state of dependency syndrome or servitude; both mental and physical regardless of the consequences to the nation.

Mr. Speaker, it is said that an effective leader is not only someone who is loved and admired. He or she is someone whose followers do the right thing. When therefore, one Member of Parliament physically assaults a Deputy Mayor at a polling station on election day and another loses his temper and launches a flying saucer, together with a teacup, at another Member, it is not only the fault of the violent Member, it is also a reflection of the effectiveness of the leader. Violence is the way of the PNM. It has now become a habit, part of the culture of the PNM. What do we expect from such MPs, when their leadership shamelessly uses violence of terrorist thugs to win an election? Mr. Speaker, popularity is not leadership. You measure the success of leadership by results. On that score, this leadership cuts a very sorry picture. Their results are crime, drugs, murder, kidnappings and simple-minded economic strategies.

The good people of this country cannot live in peace, even in their own homes. What does it matter that the economy is statistically growing, that the Revenue Stabilization Fund has funds and that unemployment is declining if we cannot live in peace, if we cannot walk the streets safely and if we must hire private security to protect our homes and our families? The tragedy is that none of this will change. It cannot change as long as the Government keeps criminals in its bosom. It also cannot change as long as the Government pretends that passing new laws is the solution to the problem. It would only change when the leadership changes its attitude, or the people change the leadership. Quite frankly, I am not optimistic that the leadership will change its approach.

Many years ago I spoke of “PNMism”. This Prime Minister is one of the creators of the phenomenon. Like a horse wearing blinds, his only concern is to

stay in power. He is leading this nation to fragmentation, poor work ethics and spendthrift behaviour. I warn him that he is riding the back of a tiger. As long as he can feed the tiger whose appetite expands with each meal, he is safe. But the day he runs out of feed, he will become the food of the tiger. They will have him for breakfast.

Mr. Speaker, Warren Dennis says that leadership is like beauty, it is hard to define but you will know it when you see it. When we look on the other side we do not see it, but the nation deserves to see at least some kind of vision. For now, all we see is the tide ebbing lower and lower as the days go by and we ask: “When will it end?”

The second important matter that counts—as far as this budget is concerned—but cannot be counted, is the state of our democracy. If this budget is intended to be implemented in a democracy, then you can say from now it is doomed to failure. Our democracy is being eroded daily and as long as the trend of undermining our democracy continues, there is little hope for us. This Prime Minister thinks that his country is his own private property. He has set some dangerous precedents in motion, that threaten our very way of live. The dictionary definition of democracy is: “government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system”. The more internationally acclaimed definition is: “A government of the people, by the people and for the people”.

When Trinidad and Tobago became independent in 1962, the nation thought that we would be seeing the end of colonialism and the beginning of freedom in our land. The irony however was that having given freedom on the one hand, our present rulers held on to a culture based on a hidden admiration for our colonizers. You can see it in their thoughts and hear it in their speech and expressions and see it in their actions. Frantz Fanon referred to this phenomenon as black skin, white masks.

When you look at the budget as a whole, you are forced to ask: “In what mode is it being cast? Is it still in the colonial paradigm or is it within a democratic context?” When a country such as ours; rich in natural resources, talent, beauty and brains proclaims to be the lighted torch for democracy, are we speaking merely of the ability to run a country without colonial intervention or do we mean that we are intellectually and psychologically free from the shackles of our colonial past? In attempting to answer this most important question we must not mistake freedom for democracy, for these words are not synonymous. We must always remind ourselves that democracy is the institutionalization of freedom and

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that it is in this context that we can refer to constitutional government, human rights and equality. When we assess the overall situation existing in our country, do we really feel a sense of freedom? Are we really a sovereign people? Are we exposed to governance, based on our consent? On the surface we proclaim to be a democratic nation, even in the light of the perpetual dictatorship initiatives made on the part of the PNM; a political party that has from its inception undermined the power of the people.

How many of us can forget the chilling words of the former Prime Minister, the late Dr. Eric Williams, at an Arima public meeting in 1971? Drunk with power of the colonial ruler, he is reported to have said: "I alone have the power to say come and go and when I say come you cometh and when I say go you goeth". Is this the result of the engraved authoritarian traditions of a crown colony mentality? My argument is that it is in this fashion that his budget was made.

Mr. Speaker, time and time again, we see instances where the presence of democratic rule and legitimacy has slipped under the carpet. According to Dr. Kirk Meighoo in the *Sunday Express* of June 27, 2004, he says:

"After independence, we have believed that rule by the majority equals democracy. Majority rule, exercised badly, can be a form of institutionalised bullying."

The Government is building a dangerous level of indignation among its party supporters and critics alike. Trust and respect have been eroding for a long time. However, the Government must remember that trust matters, since it contributes to the continued development of social capital. Potman 1995 and Coleman 1990, purport the argument that social capital refers to features of social organization, such as core values and norms, including social trust and networks that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Those are things that count, that cannot be counted.

10.30 a.m.

So when your Prime Minister for democratic republic can ignore the lost trust and respect from the entire south and central regions of Trinidad and Tobago, leaving approximately 9,000 persons displaced, and in need, just so that he could have a ruling hand over the distribution of Caroni (1975) Limited lands, what do you expect the citizens to think? Did this decision truly rest in the hands of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

The citizens would recall that on February 06, 2002, Mr. Manning, in addressing his largely PNM audience at Woodford Square told them that Caroni (1975)

Limited would suffer if UNC did not co-operate, and that Caroni (1975) Limited workers would suffer if Parliament was not convened as soon as possible. When such threats are made in public, it signals to the conscious population that something is wrong.

Democratic governance is not a matter of divide and rule. Is the Trinidad and Tobago Government concerned with the interests of the PNM political party or the interests of the citizens of the nation? Majority rule must coincide with the guarantees of an individual's human rights which then protect the rights and minorities, be it ethnic, religious, political and even the losers of a debate on a piece of controversial legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I warned the former employees of Caroni (1975) Limited to be aware of a Trojan Horse wearing a sari, who comes into their homes and villages, mockingly calling senior citizens "nana" and "nani" so that she may further betray them. She is like the proverbial Putna, who with poisonous milk in her breast, offered them to the baby Lord Krishna, to kill him, while pretending to feed him. I need not tell you what was the fate of the ill-fated Putna. Krishna had no mercy in exposing the evil-doer for what she was, before taking her very life.

Mr. Speaker, in this context, it is interesting to recall the political victimization of one Marlene Coudray. The Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning, was accused by Miss Coudray, the Chief Executive Officer of San Fernando City Corporation, of threatening her with removal because she would not co-operate with him on an illegal scheme. His exact words were: "I will deal with her". Miss Coudray had the unenviable task of defending her constitutional right, by taking legal action against the Government for attempting to have her removed from the San Fernando City Corporation without just cause. All of this occurred as a reaction by the Prime Minister, to the refusal of Miss Coudray to co-operate with the PNM over the illegal construction of NHA multi-storey apartments in San Fernando, as part of the PNM house-padding scheme to win the constituency of San Fernando West. Mr. Speaker, this is a prime example of the institutionalized bullying of the PNM.

We should also notice the modus operandi of this Government, when their dictatorial tendencies are brought to light. In this instance, after ordering the Statutory Authorities Services Commission to transfer Miss Coudray from the San Fernando City Corporation to the Point Fortin Corporation, Miss Coudray filed legal action and the courts temporarily prevented the Statutory Authorities Service Commission from transferring Miss Coudray, pending a reply from the Prime Minister. Did the Prime Minister reply? Of course, not.

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In order to prevent exposure in public, he did not contest the matter—he did not even issue a statement denying Miss Coudray’s allegations. This is the same Prime Minister who told this nation on Friday last that his Government wants to reform local government so as to democratize and decentralize administration. This is our sovereign nation that we live in today.

Mr. Speaker, we must not forget that we are a plural society; a phenomenon that could have been a beautiful asset, if the PNM had not converted it into a tragic liability.

In a democratic system, the government is one component of the equation. It must coexist with other institutions, political parties, organizations and associations. When plurality is examined, it assumes that these groups and institutions are independent of the Government for their existence, authority and legitimacy. If this principle is being adhered to: how do you explain the actions against Mr. Renwick Nickie, who was fired from his job as Executive Manager, Marketing Operations and Information Systems of the Unit Trust Corporation (UTC)?

In a newspaper report of December 31, 2003 the public was informed that the UTC Board had sent Mr. Nickie a letter dated December 19, 2003, stating that his position at the UTC had been terminated with immediate effect. The dismissal letter noted that Nickie’s employment was being terminated because of gross misconduct which breached the ethics of the UTC, and failure to comply with instructions of the former Chairman, Mr. Hubert Alleyne.

When asked to comment on the matter, the Prime Minister, Mr. Manning, said that the structure of the board was something with which they have had reservations for sometime and he thinks that it requires legislative action to rectify it. This is an indication of the undemocratic connectedness of the Government, the Central Bank and institutions in our society. Political expediency is at the centre of the administration of our country. In this instance, the Prime Minister wanted a merger between the UTC and the First Citizens Bank (FCB), as punishment for those who would not do his will.

The recent eruption of action via protest and trade unions gatherings, in that context, Members of the Government were pressured to perform in ways to which they were not previously obliged. In this context, you would recall the earlier part of this year, when the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin, the honourable Larry Achong, resigned from the Cabinet, after he supported the strike by Atlantic LNG construction workers. For a Minister to give up his portfolio in this way,

there must have been strong feelings on the part of the Prime Minister which were inconsistent with the Government's position and the Member's position in the Cabinet. Of course, one would resign, if pressure is being placed to conform and the right of the individual to have an opinion is being taken away.

Every society is comprised of great diversity of interests and individuals deserving of the right to have their voices heard and their views respected. This is a component of a very healthy democracy. This PNM Government lacks the value of tolerance, co-operation, pragmatism and compromise, so even its top Members are not immune from the dictatorial tendencies of their leader.

There is much lip-service in this budget about transparency and integrity. What has been our experience? Mr. Speaker, due process of law, separation of powers, and constitutional limits on government are three major pillars of democracy. Were these three major pillars of democracy upheld when in January of this year, Mr. Everald Snaggs was appointed Commissioner of Police, after acting in that post since July, 2003? There is a conventional way of handling such an appointment, which ensures distance between the Executive and the coercive arm of the State. Instead, the commissioner's letter of appointment was handed to him by Prime Minister Patrick Manning, at Whitehall on Friday, January 02, 2004, a day before the appointment was announced.

The Police Service Commission Chairman, Mr. Kenneth Lalla, was reported in a newspaper article dated January 04, 2004, to have said that the delivery of Mr. Snaggs' letter of appointment by the Prime Minister was the first time that has happened, and the customary procedure was to have the letter delivered by the Director of Public Administration. Mr. Manning responded that the entire affair was a non-issue. The real question is: how did the Prime Minister get his hands on that letter? Who gave it to him? Why? Was there a breach of duty by someone in the Office of the Director of Public Administration? Who was that person? Is this person still employed there? What nonsense the Prime Minister spews when he talks about integrity and transparency. The Government's interference in the operations of supposedly independent institutions is a non-issue for the Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, that is transparency for you.

When the Prime Minister of our nation considers violations of all constitutional norms and conventions to be a non-issue, we could now understand why there is the ignoring of the rights of citizens; threatening individuals who will not slavishly follow his wishes and ordering the hiring and firing of specified individuals are for him, all, non-issues.

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The words “transparency” and “integrity” are probably the two most abused words in the budget. I ask the Prime Minister: is the covering up of the planting of drugs and missiles in the water tank of Opposition Member of Parliament, Sadiq Baksh, just before an election, by the police on the orders of high PNM officials his version of transparency? What has happened to that enquiry? What is transparent in the cover up of the LABIDCO scandal, the Project Pride scandal, the release of the Barbados fishermen and the debt forgiveness of some \$50 million to one Lenny Saith? Is it transparency or integrity that prevents the Government from responding to a raging allegation that there has already been a \$20 million cost overrun in the construction of the Scarborough Regional Hospital project, after only the foundation had been constructed?

The *Tobago Pillar*, a local Tobago newspaper, has openly accused the Minister of Housing of being in bed with the contractor, NH International Limited, which is a company really owned by Emile Elias.

Mr. Ramnath: That is a fact.

Mr. B. Panday: There has been no reply from the Government or the Tobago House of Assembly. Is that the Prime Minister’s version of transparency? Is the Government prepared to have an enquiry into this allegation of corruption, when it refuses to answer legitimate questions in Parliament on National Entrepreneurship Development Company (NEDCO), the Central Bank and other sensitive matters? What kind of transparency is that? Was this Government trying to encourage transparency when it removed the Central Bank from the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act? So much for transparency. The more this Government sinks into the corruption, the more it talks of transparency.

Mr. Speaker, the good citizens of Trinidad and Tobago should all remember the debate on the Police Service Reform Bills that was recently held in Parliament. The Prime Minister thought it fit to bring this issue into his budget representation, so there is need to reiterate what is the central issue in this matter. The police service is one of the most important institutions for ensuring the proper functioning of a secure and democratic nation. The overwhelming power invested in the hands of the police service needs to be carefully monitored in order to ensure the proper performance of the task of preserving law and order, while refraining from the abuse of innocent citizens.

It is clear to everyone in this country that the police service has a serious imbalance with respect to the two ethnic majorities. For whatever reason, Afro-Trinidadians are the predominant majority in the service, as indeed, they are in the regiment and the coast guard.

The Chairman of the Police Service Commission, Mr. Kenneth Lalla, said at page 5 of The Report on the Police Service Commission 2002 that the commission was informed, inter alia, that, at least, recruitment exercise revealed that the recruitment process was marred by nepotism, favouritism, partisanship and improper background investigation. I suppose you could include racism under nepotism or favouritism. It is also clear that there is a clique in the hierarchy of the police service that is loyal to the PNM. While the majority of policemen support the PNM, one only has to look at the special votes at every election time to see what I mean.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, when a situation like this exists in such an institution, citizens need the comfort of knowing that the administration of the police service will be conducted in accordance with objective criteria. The Police Service Commission (PSC) acts as an independent authority to monitor the exercise of power by senior police officers. Many young police officers complain that they are frustrated into succumbing to the culture of corruption that is endemic in the police service. In spite of all this, the Government proposed the potentially catastrophic change of dismantling the PSC and replacing it with the Police Management Authority. This body was to be empowered to promote and discipline the senior-most ranks in the police service.

The initial reason for having an independent service commission was, of course, to maintain the democratic procedures and to remove the public service from the jaws of political expediency and interference. It has not worked this way, because of the manner in which the commission is appointed. The new proposal reeks of underhandedness and a desire for direct political interference and control over the police service. The UNC will never put such power in the hands of this PNM Government that is daily undermining our democracy while, at the same time, asking us to give them more discretionary power. If there is to be fundamental constitutional reform, that will be another matter. As long as this Government continues in the present manner, the concept of the PSC must be preserved, if we as a people are to continue to believe in accountability, responsibility and transparency. This Government has a track record of undermining democracy, which is fearsome, and that is why the UNC, while recognizing the need for reform, demands that such reform take place in the context of wider constitutional reform.

Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister wanted to relocate the Parliament building and occupy it as his office, for whom was he speaking? Was he speaking for the Parliament, the Government or for himself? A newspaper report dated December 09, 2003 quoted Sen. Prof. Deosaran as follows:

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“Government cannot violate with such arbitrariness the country's legislature, moving like a landlord who evicts a tenant.”

His words, as well as the words of the former Senate President, Michael Williams, express the level of national concern of every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. He said:

“I am frightened by the haunting spectre of Manning installing himself in the Parliament's traditional home; of Cabinet decision replacing parliamentary committees' decisions; of Manning surrounding himself with well-paid sycophants in Cabinet and other State bodies, all to subvert the intent of our Constitution and to entrench himself as a constitutional dictator.”

Mr. Speaker, we also recall the issue of the former Attorney General, Mrs. Glenda Morean, and the Prime Minister in withholding the report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Piarco Airport. On Wednesday, September 03, 2003, the Attorney General announced that the report would be laid in Parliament. The report had been submitted to the President the previous week on August 30, 2003. The next day, at a post-Cabinet press conference, the Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning, said that the report would not be laid, as stated 24 hours earlier by the Attorney General, because it had to be sanitized before its release. Does this not trigger questions in the minds of citizens concerned about the due process of law? What did the Prime Minister mean when he said sanitized?

The dictionary meaning of the word “sanitize” is to make sanitary, as by sterilizing, to free from anything considered undesirable, damaging, et cetera. What was in the report that the Prime Minister considered damaging and damaging to whom? It could not have been the UNC or its supporters, because the whole point of the enquiry was to damage them; so it must, therefore, had been something damaging to the PNM or its agents. The end result is that the report has died a slow and painful death by strangulation—so much for robber talk on transparency. “Sometimes me thinks the gentleman doth protest too much”.

One of the most important principles of democratic practice consists of a system of checks and balances, ensuring that political power is dispersed and decentralized. What was the pressing need, in that instance, to hide such a report? Was there a conspiracy between the Attorney General, the Prime Minister and the President of this country—himself a creature of the PNM—to conceal the report? When the Government consistently presents itself in such a questionable light, it earns the title, slowly but undeniably, as a dictator. Is that the context in which this budget statement was cast and intended to be implemented?

It is also instructive to recall the comments of the Law Association with respect to the Airports Authority enquiry. These comments were reported in the newspapers and I quote from an article in the *Express* of March 06, 2003. Mr. Karl Hudson-Phillip QC, the Law Association President and the man who initiated the airport's probe, called for the immediate revocation of the Bernard Commission of Enquiry. Hudson-Phillip, who was last week appointed to the International Criminal Court, in a sharply worded letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning, expressed concern about the very dangerous precedent being set by the Bernard commission, which had been sitting for almost 80 days.

In a four-page letter dated January 28, and copied to the Attorney General, Mrs. Morean, Mr. Hudson-Phillip said:

“It is essential that in any civilized society such as ours, which adheres to the rule of law, that basic and fundamental standards of fairness and fair play should never be departed from or compromised. In the interest of fairness and justice, the Counsel of the Law Association is of the firm view that the Government should give serious consideration to the immediate revocation of the Commission.”

Pointing out that the association had seen it fit to issue, not one, but two press releases on the matter, Hudson-Phillip said:

“Notwithstanding this, the Counsel notes with regret that the Commission of Enquiry continues to be conducted in a manner which, in the considered opinion of the Counsel, is manifestly unfair, lacking in objectivity and/or impartiality and calculated to render the proceedings in any conclusions and findings, which it may make, valueless.”

He listed seven points of objections, among them:

- “1. The naming of the Commission of persons as ‘subject’, when no subjects were named in the Commission issued by the President;
2. the failure of the Commission to supply persons, with an interest in the matter, copies of any memoranda which may contain allegations against them;
3. the failure to inform persons whose conduct and/or actions have been called into question before prejudicial evidence is given and the denial of that person's right to raise objections and/or to cross-examine witnesses.
4. the taking of evidence unrelated to the terms of the Commission, for example, the racial composition of the Airports Authority staff; and

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5. the highly prejudicial statements being put into the mouths of witnesses, not only by Counsel but by the commissioners themselves.”

Mr. Hudson-Phillip’s exact words were:

“It cannot be fair that while persons’ reputations are being seriously and, possibly, irreparably damaged on a daily basis, and in their absence proceedings which are being televised live and publicized widely, sit back and wait until some unspecified time in the future...”

He said that it was customary practice in commissions of enquiry throughout the Commonwealth that:

“...witnesses were permitted to testify only after submitting statements of memoranda, in this way it is possible to give copies of statements to those against whom allegations are made. It also places a requirement on the Commission to inform those criticized when the evidence will be presented against them. It does not appear to be any good and sufficient justification for the Bernard Commission to depart from this established practice. Most importantly, while evidence is incomplete and untested by cross-examination, the commissioners have, from time to time, made statements highly prejudicial of persons, giving the impression that conclusions have already been arrived in the matter.”

The Prime Minister and his Government stood gloatingly by and watched this travesty of justice being perpetrated by a kangaroo court on helpless citizens, not in private, but on public television. And they now speak of justice, fair play and transparency?

Mr. Speaker, the UNC demands that the unsanitized report of the Bernard Commission of Enquiry be made public or that good and cogent reasons be given for not doing so. This nation spent a fortune in time and money on this commission and so far the only beneficiaries have been the commissioners and the lawyers who earned substantial fees; indeed, the Chairman is reported to have earned millions of dollars. Their report is public property; the people of Trinidad and Tobago paid for it. This Government must not be allowed to continue to plunder our democracy in this way. It is destroying confidence in the country and people are suffering and leaving in the process. This budget cannot be implemented unless you have the confidence of the people.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago must become aware and fiercely protective of its future as a prosperous, democratic nation. Let us not forget our regional islands that struggle to obtain democratic reign and sovereign rule. We earned

independence the hard way and we must not allow this Government to continue to undermine our democracy.

It is said that bad things happen when good people fail to take action. On this matter of democracy, therefore, I call on every citizen, non-governmental organization and business organization, churches and the International Religious Organization to let their voices be heard and not let this Government further erode our democracy. No amount of wealth will ever compensate for the loss of freedom that we have suffered in Trinidad and Tobago; indeed, in the absence of freedom, we will achieve neither the full potential of this nation nor the individual citizen. We have to restore law, order and respect for the Constitution if we are to make any progress.

Mr. Speaker, the leadership crisis coupled with the rape of our democracy has had inevitable consequences of crime. While we can count the number of crimes that have been committed, we cannot count the adverse impact on the psyche of our society or the pain, grief, sorrow and suffering of the families of the people killed, kidnapped, robbed and raped.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the opposite of organized society is anarchy and that is exactly what we have today. The crime situation is not a chance event; it is not something we can blame on fate. Crime in this country is a creation of the PNM, and in particular, its leadership, and increase in budgetary expenditures as we have seen last week is not going to resolve that.

One merely has to refer to a newspaper article in the *Trinidad Express* of September 06, 2004 to understand what I am speaking about. It clearly identifies a high-ranking Government official as the facilitator of the individual who should head the most wanted list in Trinidad and Tobago, but I will return to that subject later.

The increasing threat of violence to individuals reflects the deteriorating quality of life and the decline of social development. Over the past few years, there has been a significant decrease in the sense of security by citizens. Major crimes such as murders, assaults, shootings and kidnappings, have all increased, with the families of kidnapped victims negotiating with kidnappers for the safe relief of abductees.

In some cases, families of kidnapped victims have had to ask the Anti-Kidnapping Squad to leave their homes so that they could negotiate the release of their relatives on their own. What an indictment on those hired to protect and serve?

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Trinidad has also become a key transshipment point in the drug trade and with this has come the importation of illegal guns and ammunition. Business people and their families have had no choice but to migrate to seek security from the constant threat of kidnapping. As a large proportion of these business people are of East Indian descent, this community is beginning to feel as though it is being targeted.

Human/capital flight and brain drain are the consequences of this feeling. Middle-class professionals and university graduates, more and more, seek to migrate to safer ground. Indeed, a whole layer of potential entrepreneurs, the next generation of business leaders, are migrating as parents send their children to safer environments.

Are the Government and its friends, drug lords and community leaders, deliberately driving away certain groups of future business leaders? Is this their brand of affirmative action? If it is, then I ask: Where is the human capital that will service and implement this budget, assuming it made sense in the first place?

International advisories have not been favourable to Trinidad and Tobago and have been a deterrent to foreign investment. How will you diversify the economy as stated in the budget if investors are afraid to come here to invest? Are we going to end up with a new colonial cadre of absentee investors who make money in Trinidad and Tobago but live abroad?

It seems that while the good guys are leaving, the bad guys are coming in. With the new security measures being stepped up throughout the world, Trinidad and Tobago has seen the return of many deportees with criminal records. This Government however, has done precious little to deal with the problems caused by this development.

If I am not mistaken, I thought I heard the Prime Minister mention in his budget presentation, for the umpteenth time, the need for prison reform. The report on prison recidivism conducted by Prof. Deosaran in 2002 states that 56 per cent of inmates were recidivists showing clearly the urgent need for prison reform.

More recently, the Chief Justice has had to refer to this problem warning that if things do not improve our prisons may well have an uprising. There is need for greater investment into improving security and upgrading this country's policy on crime prevention and detection. He said that some recommendations are: to increase police presence day and night, increased sea surveillance, and increased searches for drugs and weapons. From every quarter in this land, concern is being expressed about the crime wave. Whatever action needs to be taken is the responsibility of the Government.

In the business section of the *Trinidad Express* newspaper dated September 08, 2004, crime was identified as one of this country's major challenges. In the article, the chamber, in what it considered to be recent developments in the disintegration of all respect for law and order, urged the Government to take immediate and decisive action even if it includes implementing a limited state of emergency to stem crime.

With the murder toll growing at an alarming rate, the chamber noted that the solution of crime problems by the police service was appalling and questioned their ability to apprehend criminals. Indeed the chamber described the level of detection and prosecution of criminals as abysmal. The chamber also said there is little evidence of police officers being held accountable, answerable, or responsible for what are absolute negligence, recklessness, and dereliction of duty.

The comments were made in reference to the conduct of the police in the case of murder victim, Sylvan Lochan, who would have been saved if his home were in the jurisdiction of the investigating police.

The chamber also made reference to the police's tardiness in responding to Acting Inspector Edward Williams's murder. Many members of the public have also expressed their dissatisfaction and frustration through the media over the response of the E-99 Unit.

Mr. Speaker, since the PNM came into office in 2000, there have been 588 kidnappings, 100 being for ransom. For this year alone, there have been 116 kidnappings. Since January 2002, there have been 609 murders under the PNM Government. When I wrote this a day ago, it was 609, I think it is 611 now.

For this year alone there have been—I wrote 208—210 as compared with 111 in 1993. So it is really one murder for every 34 hours, the highest this country has ever known.

There were 23 murders in January alone as compared with 17 in January of last year. From 1993 to 2003, the crime of murder has risen over 100 per cent with more murders totalling 111 in 1993; 229 in 2003.

As a consequence, human and capital flight continue as businessmen and their families and professionals are seeking to leave Trinidad in the face of the unrelenting crime situation.

The scourge of crime in our country continues to rise unabated despite the Government's plethora of plans and continuous promises of reduction.

Kidnappings continue to have a negative effect on the economic developers and employment providers of this country. This crime has seen a significant rise

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over the 10 years from 1993 to 2003 from a low of 16 reported kidnappings in 1993, to 236 in 2003.

In December 2003, in an address to Howard University in the United States of America, the Prime Minister was quoted as saying that many of the kidnappings in Trinidad and Tobago were bogus. In other words, as far as he is concerned, kidnapping is not a problem. The Anti-Kidnapping Squad stated in the *Trinidad Guardian* of December 24, 2003 that there were only three bogus kidnappings.

Many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, especially victims and their family, expressed their anger and shock over the Prime Minister's insensitive statement but, then, he is also the one who said that crime does not affect the average citizen, and that ordinary people suffer only collateral damage.

The comments and promises of the Prime Minister remind me of Einstein's comment on infinity. He said:

“Two things are infinite: the universe and human stupidity.”

I am not sure about the universe. The comments of the Prime Minister remind me of Mc Guffins principle: It is easy to see the bright side of other people's problems.

The Prime Minister rides around with 24-hour security and the community leaders as friends, so he does not have to worry. He will hire them again for the next election, so he does not have to worry about that either.

Mr. Speaker, over and over, our local business groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association, and DOMA have called for a limited state of emergency firstly in December 2003 and as recently as August this year.

In 2003, Sen. Joan Yuille-Williams held the position of acting Prime Minister. She did not think that the crime situation was so terrible as to declare a state of emergency, she said. One understands why she thinks so in view of the *Trinidad Express* article that Yasin Abu Bakr is a regular visitor to her office.

The point I am trying to make is that when a society has degenerated into chaos, the people are willing to surrender their freedoms to the Government and give absolute power to the dictator who promises peace. That is a dangerous situation into which one finds oneself.

Mr. Speaker, in November 2003, there was a Cabinet reshuffle and a new Minister of National Security was appointed. The newly-appointed Minister of

National Security, Sen. Martin Joseph, was quoted as saying that crime was a blip on the radar, and that the country will recover. Mr. Joseph even vowed to stem the crime wave and restore a more comfortable level of security to our nation.

Minister Joseph's utterances on crime reminded me of Green's Law: Anything is possible if you do not know what you are talking about. Again, on January 12, 2004, Minister Joseph stated that only time will tell and that newly introduced crime initiatives dubbed the "Service Delivery Action Plan 2004" would be revealed by the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Everald Snaggs. The results of this plan are yet to be seen. Time has only told us one thing; things have gotten worse.

11.15 a.m.

In 2003, Rudolph Giuliani and Associates presented crime management plans to the Government. The Government declined the offer. Understanding the Government's response is not difficult. One merely has to observe who the friends of Government are. Why should they want to deal with crime? Just note who gets ushered straight through security checkpoints on the occasions of visits to the Ministry of Community Development; who is treated as an honoured guest and who gets red carpet treatment when they visit that Ministry.

In January 2004, the Police Service Welfare Association forwarded its own crime plan to the newly-appointed Commissioner. The goal of this plan was to reduce the number of illegal guns entering the country. This initiative by the association bore no fruit. Again, the reason for this could be found in examining who the friends of the Government are. Is it that their best friends are the gun-runners in Trinidad? We all know that the drug dealers and money launderers are their financiers and staunchest supporters.

In order that any crime plan should succeed, it requires confidence of the population, not merely flinging money at it. The actions of this Government have succeeded in achieving the exact opposite. On July 28, 2004, the Prime Minister addressed this nation with his crime plan and during the Prime Minister's address to the nation he initially identified drugs, unemployment, the confidence of criminals over the national police force, hopelessness and the inadequacies of the education system to be responsible for crime. He noted that a Scotland Yard Report in 1994 stated that due to Trinidad and Tobago's small size, the drug trade could be completely eradicated. White collar crime and money laundering also pose a threat to the country. Mr. Manning proposed to purchase and implement a radar system which would do surveillance of the coastline at a 360-degree angle every 24 hours. I thought we had left one in place when we demitted office. This was being installed and would be operated by the end of 2004.

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Sophisticated and armed helicopters were mentioned, together with improved security on all seaports, airports and of Customs and Excise inspection stations. Recently, however, reports indicate that piracy and the flow of drugs into the country continue unabated.

The Prime Minister further promised that legislation for an improved police service, strengthening of forensic capability and non-bailing kidnapping proposals are to be introduced in Parliament. He said that cutting-edge technology and increased intelligence procedures are needed to stop kidnapping. Recommendations were also made for new programmes and changes in the education system. We have not seen any. Spending on social sector programmes such as On-the-Job Training (OJT), Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA), Helping You Prepare for Employment (HYPE)—you name them, they have them—are all measures to combat the scourge of crime.

He continued that the Ministry of National Security has been advised to review its budget to accommodate these new undertakings. The Commissioner of Police has been advised to zoom in on hot spots around the country. All of this has been rehashed in the budget.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has missed the point in all of this. He failed to recognize the problem is the loss of trust and confidence of the citizens in this country. The institutions of a society and the credibility of Ministers have all been completely eroded. That is the problem. The population sees the Prime Minister's promises for what they really are—empty promises. When that happens, you are on the brink of anarchy. But I will return to this subject later.

On May 16, 2004, the body of Ashmead Baksh, son of Naparima Member of Parliament, Nizam Baksh, was found burnt beyond recognition, after he was kidnapped, shot in the head and set alight. His face was blown off and his hands were tied. Three calls were made to the family's home demanding \$5 million for his safe return. No money was ever paid. But Mr. Baksh has told the story of his son's kidnapping to this House and the crux of the matter is that the institutions of society were absolutely of no help to Mr. Baksh. Therein lies the loss of trust and confidence in institutions. That is what I mean when I say, not everything that counts can be counted.

As at August 22, 2004, we have seen 14 murders allegedly committed by policemen, amounting to a crude policy of police brutality. Extracted from the *Trinidad Guardian* article dated August 24, 2004, 13 victims were identified. The name of Galene Bonadie, allegedly killed by a police officer on April 02, 2004

was inadvertently left out. How can the population be expected to have confidence in the police, one of the most important institutions of democracy, when they continue to operate above the law by terrorizing and murdering citizens who depend on them for assistance and protection?

Government attempted to pass the Police Reform Bill which was dubbed “anti-crime”. Everyone recognized that this legislation was not really intended to improve the crime situation but was really an attempt to place power over the police service in the hands of the Government. The Bill gives the President the power to choose a Commissioner of Police. But the PNM has a habit of interfering with the institutions of our society. The Prime Minister is known to have called a police station in order to secure the release of his former driver. Again, in the case of the Barbadian fishermen, the course of justice was interfered with, when it was alleged by a foreign newspaper that the Prime Minister ordered the police prosecutor to offer no evidence against the trespassers. Does anyone expect the UNC to support legislation to give this Prime Minister discretionary powers to appoint officials who are supposed to be independent? As we say in Trinidad and Tobago, over our dead bodies.

If they are prepared to talk constitutional reform, we are prepared to listen. In a televised address to the nation, the Minister of Planning and Development, Camille Robinson-Regis, urged the country to convince the Opposition to support the touted anti-crime legislation. In addition, millions of dollars were spent on an advertising campaign, both print and media, to stir up support for the passing of the Bills. The PNM seemed convinced that public relations and advertising are the way to run this country. Every day we can see their expensive advertisements “in the mirror.” In evaluating Minister Robinson-Regis’ statement, I would be charitable and follow the guideline which is called Hanlon’s Law. It is: “Never attribute to malice that which is adequately explained by stupidity.”

In this regard, the UNC wishes to advise the Government once more that constitutional reform is the only way forward. This Government is steeped in hierarchy and bureaucracy in an age when information technology and knowledge-driven industries are the keys to success. Read the budget as a whole and you would see that that is exactly what comes out of it. Hierarchical government structures and bureaucracies are anachronisms in the 21st Century. But again, I would return to this later.

As promised in last year’s budget, a special unit made up of members of the defence force and the police service was created, headed by Brigadier Peter Joseph, to solve the crime problem. Moneys allocated to this unit in January

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totalled \$30 million. Brigadier Joseph stated at a news conference in January that the objective of the unit would be to “build and implement a sustainable offensive that would positively impact on crime in the shortest possible time.” Brigadier Joseph stated that SAUTT—that is the organization—is an intelligence-driven organization which will source and concentrate intelligence from numerous state agencies to tackle specific criminal activities. The two main reasons for its existence are “to rein in the rapid rise in crime” and “to engage in a more holistic approach to crime-fighting, creating a critical mass from the nation's security forces to confront the problem head-on.”

The unit comprises one assistant commissioner, one superintendent, two acting superintendents of police, six inspectors, 13 sergeants, 17 corporals and 35 constables. Questions were raised as to the authority the defence force had over the police service and the Commissioner of Police, and whether the Commissioner was answerable to the army. The establishment of a parallel organization to the police force to deal with crime and security raises questions with regard to the authority, responsibility and accountability of each unit.

The police second division stated publicly that they would not engage in joint patrols with this new unit and take instructions from defence force personnel. Recently, a dispute has been reported between the defence force and police service members of the unit over unequal remuneration and compensation. I raise the issue of SAUTT to highlight once more how poorly this Government thinks through issues before taking action. This is no different from when the PNM tried to give lands to the Jamaat and then had to reverse the decision. But they would not erect the fence.

It is once more a reflection of the dictatorial appetite of this Government. He thinks that an idea is good simply because it comes from him, and that something is right simply because he says so. But the UNC will not let him get away with this type of behaviour. We would expose it every time. It seems that the Government's real strategy for fighting crime has been to inundate the population with promises and full-page, coloured public relations advertisements as crime and criminal activity go unabated. Promises and public relations are their panacea. It follows Baruch's law: If all you have is a hammer, everything else looks like a nail.

There is a saying that you cannot be part of the problem and also be part of the solution. In this context I refer to a *Guardian* article dated January 16, 2004, when the PNM administration's cozy relationship with the Jamaat was raised. There were reports that some PNM MPs had concerns over the Jamaat. The Prime Minister denied knowing of any arrangement involving Ministers being appointed

as liaison to former Jamaat member Bilaal Abdullah's group. A newspaper report on January 17, 2004, says that members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force were about to demolish a building illegally constructed by the Jamaat in Canada, Laventille. It is reported that the Prime Minister intervened and it was subsequently declared that the structure would be used as a community centre. It did not say to be run by whom. I merely wish to ask: Is it now, in fact, being used as a community centre? And if so, by whom is it being run? If not, for what purpose is it being used?

The Jamaat al Muslimeen again was highlighted as Financial Concepts Limited, a company in which Yasin Abu Bakr has a significant stake, was robbed on February 03, 2004 of a hard drive which reportedly contained confidential financial information about Government Ministers and businesses.

11.30 a.m.

A source quoted in the *Guardian* article, dated February 04, 2004 said Financial Concepts Limited helps to raise capital for Government ministries at various business organizations, and is also involved in management consultancy and investment advisory.

On August 15, 2004 the *Sunday Express* reported the Jamaat al Muslimeen taking control of State-owned aggregate-producing lands on the Tapania Forest Reserve in Valencia. In an extraordinary arrangement with the Manning Government, the Yasin Abu Bakr-led group was reselling sand and gravel back to the State. Let me read that lest it be misinterpreted.

“In an extraordinary arrangement with the Manning Government, the Yasin Abu Bakr group was reselling sand and gravel back to the State. Bakr has been allegedly using the 20-year old agreement in the name of a defunct religious organization called Dar-ul-Islam to take hold of prime aggregate-producing fields in Valencia.”

The article goes on to state that:

“...original agreement with Dar-ul-Islam, of which Bakr was identified as principal, was for a period of one year, according to insiders. The 20-acre field was reported to have been mined out years ago.”

Mr. Speaker, in an *Express* article dated September 05, 2004 headlined:

“BAKR'S BROKER”

It is reported that Community Development Minister Joan Yuille-Williams, who has acted as Prime Minister on at least 10 occasions has a relationship with the

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Imam that goes back to school days, and that he is a regular visitor to the Ministry where he gets red carpet treatment. The article states:

“Yuille-Williams was the backroom broker of so-called peace negotiations held between the Prime Minister and Bakr at Balisier House and later at a city hotel between the Prime Minister and gangland bosses, who Manning would later describe as ‘community leaders’.”

Mr. Speaker, I am quoting it; I would have said Mr. Manning or Prime Minister Manning. The article also reported:

“...that Yuille-Williams was not too far in the shadows when Manning countermanded an order issued by one of his line ministers to the security forces to tear down an illegally-constructed Laventille mosque which was being used by the Jamaat al Muslimeen for prayer meetings.”

Further the article stated:

“Sources also identified Yuille-Williams as a key architect in the State’s disbursement of millions of dollars worth of public-funded works to Muslimeen associates, among them...Mark Guerra.”

The article also contends:

“she is recognized by the police as one of the Muslimeen’s most important links to the ruling party.”

Then we speak of crime; we devote money to crime in the budget. With such a symbiotic relationship, how can the Government be expected to deal with crime? The criminals are their bosom buddies. The criminals put the PNM in power and they will have to pay for that for the rest of their lives. The unfortunate thing is that the country can expect no reduction in the crime rates as long as the PNM is in power. It is a simple case of, “as you make your bed, so shall you sleep”. The problem for the rest of us is that while the top hierarchy of the PNM is safe in the company of their community leaders, we must constantly watch our backs.

Moreover, the cost of doing business is rising significantly as everyone must now employ—for simple things such as going home after work; such as going to the grocery; such as sending children to school—security officers.

I wish to remind the good citizens of our nation the words of William Jennings Bryan:

“Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be wished for, it is a thing to be achieved.”

I therefore ask: What is our destiny with the PNM at the helm of Trinidad and Tobago? Are we going to chance our destiny to them? They have already made us prisoners in our homes. Should we now let them hand over our country to their community leaders?

Mr. Speaker, once again the Prime Minister has announced a new set of crime-fighting initiatives. But no one believes him because the nation asks itself: Will they arrest their bosom buddies? I wish to emphasize that no crime plan will work as long as the community leaders remain the friends and campaign managers of the PNM.

I now wish to turn to the subject of constitutional reform. Here again we will deal with something that cannot be counted but would certainly count. When I spoke in the 2004 Budget debate, I pointed out that in going forward Trinidad and Tobago will have to face five major challenges. These were:

- (a) the challenge of a knowledge-based economy;

We heard about that in the budget.

- (b) the challenge of global competition;
- (c) the challenge of innovation and the convergence of new technologies;
- (d) the challenge of bridging the digital divide; and
- (e) the challenge of sustainable economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to repeat what I said then. The Prime Minister has repeated them for me in his budget presentation. I merely want to point out that these challenges are still with us and the major characteristic of these challenges is their complexity. In this context, I am aware that the Prime Minister has said that he agrees with constitutional reform. But each time he speaks on the subject, he trivializes it. I must warn him of Marking's principle:

“Complex cases have simple, easy to understand wrong answers.”

The UNC has been calling for constitutional reform for a long time and many people think it is all about political power. We do not deny that political power is one variable in the constitutional reform equation but let me assure you, Mr. Speaker, it is not the only one. Indeed, it may not even be the most important one.

The challenges of the 21st Century are complex. In addition to the ones I identified earlier, we could also add terrorism, deterioration of our natural environment, the breakdown of family life and increasing social economic anomie. Human society

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cannot confront these complex issues on the basis of hierarchical authority systems. Mr. Speaker, remember I spoke about hierarchical authority systems earlier. Hierarchical systems work on the basis of compliance but complex problems can only be solved on the basis of commitment and trust. In all these complex issues there are no quick fixes. There is no one villain to blame. There is no magic pill. Significant changes would require imagination, dialogue, deep caring and a willingness to change on the part of the entire population.

Mr. Speaker, significant change cannot occur if it is driven from the top. Buy-in from the top is no substitute for commitment at every level of the society. In fact, if executive authority is used unwisely, as we are witnessing here in Trinidad, it can make such commitment less, rather than more likely.

When genuine commitment is needed, hierarchical authority becomes problematic. People cannot be pressured into adopting new values and behaviours. Values have to be chosen voluntarily. In the words of the old Zen proverb:

“Awakening leading to transformation versus process leading to change.”

What this change needs is an awakening. People do not want new behaviours. They want it for the right reasons. They believe that openness, localness, merit and other guiding values will lead to a healthier and more productive Trinidad and Tobago.

The other problem with the way this Government runs the country is the complete loss of trust that has resulted. People do not believe that the Government is doing enough about crime. Needless to say, people are not impressed with the results of the crime-fighting efforts. People do not trust the police even though, I hasten to add, I still think that the large majority of the police officers consist of decent, hardworking, dedicated officers. People do not trust institutions because this Government has shown it has no qualms about misusing the institutions to punish political opponents and to reward their friends. But trust is essential if people are to cooperate.

In this context, Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote from a research paper entitled: “How Political Institutions Create and Destroy Capital: An Institutional Theory of Generalized Trust.” This was written by Bo Rothstein and Dietlind Stolle.

On page three the authors write:

“More specifically, in the political sphere, generalized trust allows citizens to join their forces in social and political groups, and it enables them to come

together in citizens' initiatives more easily. In the social sphere, generalized trust facilitates life in diverse societies, fosters acts of tolerance, and acceptance of otherness. Life in diverse societies is easier, happier, and more confident in the presence of generalized trust."

Mr. Speaker, the author also points out that:

"Generalized trust has been shown to be associated with economic development and growth"

And that:

"Generalized trust has also been shown to explain democratic stability and democracy."

The authors also note:

"Governments can realize their capacity to generate trust only if citizens consider the State itself to be trustworthy. States, for example, enable the establishment of contracts, in that they provide information and monitor legislation, and enforce rights and rules that sanction lawbreakers, protect the minorities and actively support the integration and participation of citizens."

Mr. Speaker, but when trust breaks down, the criminal element develops because people stop believing that the State will create the conditions for them to grow and prosper.

Add to hierarchical authority, such as is the foundation of our Constitution, all we can evoke is compliance. Hierarchy does not foster commitment. The more strongly hierarchical authority is wielded the more compliance results. And yet there is no substitute for commitment and awakening in bringing about deep and lasting change.

Mr. Speaker, constitutional reform for the UNC is mainly an issue of leadership and trust. Instead of the leadership of a single person, who in our case is the Prime Minister, we have to structure our society in a manner that permits leadership to develop at every level of the nation. This is the kind of leadership that will foster commitment and trust. People must share in the decision-making; otherwise they would neither participate nor cooperate. It is only by constitutional reform that we will move from a hierarchical authority structure to genuine democracy.

We are spiralling downwards at a frightening pace. We have to do something urgently. I, therefore, once more, call on the Government to put constitutional reform on the front burner. If we do not gain the commitment and trust of the

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entire nation, there is no way we would be able to deal with the complex challenges of the 21st Century.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the economy. Once more, I must refer to what I said last year without repeating all of it. I pointed out that the time had come for a new generation of economic strategies, and that new knowledge-based industries had to be targeted for development. I also pointed out that competitiveness, rather than competitive advantage, must become the basis for sustainable development and, that at the level of the firm, the strategy of creating internationally competitive clusters was imperative.

Mr. Speaker, even if the Government did not listen to me, other people listened and agreed. Once the idea comes from the Opposition, the Government rejects it in its entirety. However, I have noticed that the proposals of the UNC have found favour with the IADB and we hope now the Government will take notice of them.

11.45 a.m.

On July 13, 2004, the Inter American Development Bank (IADB) presented a document entitled, *Trinidad and Tobago, Long Term Challenges and Opportunities, Building The Competitive Advantages of Trinidad and Tobago, Business Environment Assessment Report*. I will refer to this document extensively in this part of my contribution because they repeat what we have been saying. The following quote comes from the executive summary of that report on page 5.

“During the last half of the twentieth century, Trinidad and Tobago had—and has—a strategy for building prosperity. This strategy met with failures, but over the course of time, the successes have far outweighed them. Trinidad’s strategy resulted in strong growth, although certainly not relative to peak global performers in its income band. Whether Trinidad and Tobago has employed a better strategy can be debated. What has become clear, however, is that this strategy was designed for a time in which the country no longer lives. The world of natural-based advantages and cheap labor as a growth strategy for a small island nation is behind us. It is time for a new strategy.”

Mr. Speaker, it is almost as though the authors had read my budget contribution last year. The document continues.

“Yet while the Trinidadian business platform looks sound, Trinidadian firms are weak. Despite the comparative advantage of abundant oil and natural gas, true competitive advantages are almost entirely absent. No healthy

clusters have been developed outside the energy industry, and few local firms are able to provide sophisticated services for foreign energy companies.

Trinidad and Tobago is over-blessed with subsoil assets, location and sunshine, and has underinvested in the more complex forms of capital such as human skills and capabilities, institutional capital, such as laws that promote innovations and efficient government departments that sponsor the development of the private sector, and firms outside the energy sector that maximize value for their shareholders and compensate their workers accordingly.”

Mr. Speaker, I do not like to say I told you so last year, but that is the fact and anyone who doubts it is welcomed to a copy of my last year’s budget speech. The UNC has been constantly repeating that the nation’s business must be conducted along sound economic principles, but the PNM is wedded to nepotism, patronage, make-work schemes and jobs for the boys, and sometimes the girls, of course.

This document said,

“Here is the country’s real story. The model for change in Trinidad and Tobago rests upon the following four premises:

- (1) natural wealth and resource capabilities;
- (2) structural incentives as the catalysts for change;
- (3) government led actions and top-down change processes;
- (4) the belief that change can occur rapidly.

In reality, the opposite model for change is true. Insights are driven by human capital. Cognitive shifts, knowledge and diffusion of innovative behavior for the entire country; this is a slow process that takes time and patience. The challenge for the country is to understand and play the role in this change process by endorsing a new model based on:

investment in intangible assets;

cognitive shifts as the catalysts for change;

shifting the locus of change from the government to the private sector;

practice and discipline to stay focused on these three things over the long term.

While the challenges to Trinidad and Tobago are considerable, there are resources with the insight and capability to move the country forward. The next step is to provide a shared vision which is correct, informed and explicit.”

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Make no mistake about it, the IADB is telling us that we have not got it right. If we do not make changes that have been recommended and to which the UNC was committed while in power, I am afraid that this economy would be in serious trouble going forward.

The document also states that:

“Oil income, however, has not led to the development of world-class companies. While foreign investment has been consistently high, there has been little development of sophisticated upstream industries, such as geological modeling, information processing, deep-sea drilling or equipment manufacturing. There has been some development of downstream industries, but these have tended to low-end commodity goods, such as the use of PET plastic to create inexpensive patio furniture. According to one oil executive, although he would prefer to spend most of his US \$500 million outsourcing budget with local firms, so few exist that the majority of his budget goes to Houston-based firms over 4,000 kilometres away.”

This Government’s reaction to criticism has always been to say that our circumstances are different and strategies and tactics that have worked elsewhere cannot work here. At other times they would blame the UNC. It has now become urgent for us to change the way we do things. I strongly urge this Government to take the advice that has been given.

The IADB document continues:

“The downside of this natural resource driven growth is what it lacks: long-term sustainable competitive advantage. That is, successful firms that innovate, upgrade and export complex products by staying abreast of consumers’ needs. This allows them to charge premium prices for their products which they invest in their workers’ skills and pay rising salaries, leading to a virtuous cycle of national prosperity. Like the energy industry itself, Trinidad’s manufacturers have used their advantage to generate income, but have not built the types of products and brands that would lead to wealth in the absence of comparative advantages.”

The document describes the national business model as follows:

“Import raw materials, manufacture basic products far less expensively than your neighbors, and export inexpensive substitutes to their local consumer items.”

The problem with this strategy is that:

“Put more bluntly, Trinidad and Tobago has been de-capitalizing the country by converting natural resources to currency. And what turns out to be more troublesome is that fluctuating energy prices—and energy substitutes—make Trinidad’s much enjoyed stability an outcome beyond their own control. However it is within Trinidad’s power to make the choice of continuing at the mercy of energy fluctuations or craft a future that creates high and rising standards of living for all Trinidadian” (and I add Tobagonian) “citizens.”

Mr. Manning: So what are we to do?

Mr. B. Panday: The mere fact that the Prime Minister just asked me, “So what are we to do?” is indicative of the fact that he does not know what to do. [*Desk thumping*] Please do not disturb me by applauding. [*Laughter*] This is a serious argument.

“Trinidadian”, and I add, Tobagonian “leaders must understand that the nation is currently de-capitalizing itself and in the process may become victimized by spurious success, its over abundance of natural resources and its failure to learn how to make difficult economic trade-offs. Private and government leaders must also acknowledge that this is the country’s last chance to invest the oil and gas rents in higher forms of capital and create the conditions for increased prosperity. The country can no longer be captive of a future determined by the likelihood of discovering new oil and gas reserves. Trinidad’s increased dependence on energy resources through recently discovered natural gas means that any price shock would be disastrous for the economy.”

I spoke of the leadership crisis in this country and, now, the IADB has also addressed the issue. It is clear that Trinidad and Tobago has all the resources that we need to be a prosperous nation, but without visionary leadership we shall go nowhere. This Government is focused on searching for skeletons to embarrass their political opponents. They concentrate their energies on house-padding to win the next elections. In the process, they divide the nation and now the racial divide is a gaping chasm. I advise that we continue to examine the IADB’s document.

On page 9 it says:

“Government institutions have become large, with loosely defined strategies and visions, leading to duplicative tasks, bureaucratic processes and inefficient use of government resources. For instance, as suggested by Trinidad’s comparatively low ranking in the Growth Competitiveness Indicator’s Public Institutions sub-index, the country needs to pay attention to important shortcomings in the area of public institutions. Specific examples include favoritism in decisions

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of government officials, irregular payments in exports, imports and public utilities and in the area of organized crime. Knowledge and human capital is strong but unfocused—academic institutions are not well linked to R & D efforts to support innovation in the private sector and the perception of the role of innovation in company's performance appears to be lacking.”

12.00 noon.

Finally, the most important, Trinidad and Tobago's historic provision of employment as a form of income-distribution, has created a culture that lacks an innovative spirit and a sense of true self-determination—exactly what we have been telling this Government year after year.

Mr. Speaker, can anyone deny that the United National Congress has, for as long as one can remember, been preaching that public sector projects for job-creation create a dependency syndrome that one will come to regret?

When we were in power, sustainable job-creation was our mantra. It was one of our highest priorities, and education and training were the tools with which we sought to create jobs. In other words, the UNC was firmly entrenched in a strategy to create higher forms of capital. Sustainable development was our goal. The Inter-American Development Bank report concluded with ten imperatives which I urge this Government to seriously consider.

The first was that Trinidad and Tobago must understand that this is the last chance for the country to invest in its future prosperity. The fact that recent relative success of our economy has more to do with good fortune than design of inspiring policies or great business strategies to promote growth, the IADB document notes although Trinidad and Tobago Vision 2020 explains the need to diversify the economy, one is hard-pressed to find tangible evidence of action.

Mr. Speaker, in other words, Vision 2020 is all talk and no action—a con-game.

Imperative No. 2 is that Trinidad and Tobago needs to go micro. The report correctly observes that it is firms that compete, not nations, therefore the first step in creating a robust foundation for prosperity is to shift the locus of responsibility for the private sector's growth to the private sector. This means bureaucracy must be reduced to enable firms to interact more with customers and less with officials; customs must be overhauled and public sector employment must be shifted to the private sector.

The report notes that government policies and government officials exhibit the familiar pattern of over-responsibility for the success of the economy and that the

strategy is unsustainable because oil and gas are wasting resources and energy industries are capital-intensive. For future prosperity therefore, it is essential that Trinidad and Tobago develop competitive clusters of non-energy based industries.

Imperative No. 3 is to improve the competitiveness of the business sector. The report notes that Trinidad and Tobago has several nascent clusters based on competitive advantages, but it needs to convert and upgrade by building competitive advantages. The report notes, however, that an important issue that has become a major impediment to the development of the private sector is crime, which is increasing at an alarming rate.

As the Growth Competitive Index indicates, organized crime is one of the country's most notable competitive advantages. Trinidad ranks 45th out of 80 countries surveyed in this criterion; the factors that can radically undermine stability and scare away investors.

Mr. Speaker, I have already commented extensively on crime. At this point I merely wish to point out to the Government that the international community is watching us and that its Government "bosom buddy" relationship with criminals has already started to cost the country big time.

Imperative No. 4 is to improve the conditions for innovation and entrepreneurship. The report notes on page 34 that "the espoused urgency of the Government is in stark contrast to the complete lack of urgency evidenced by their action—legislation moves at snail's pace, bureaucracy is daunting and customs is inefficient even by low regional standards."

This is a sad commentary on the way this Government does its work. The nation cannot allow this to continue. Our future and the future of our children are being jeopardized by this bunch of corrupt incompetents—and it is time for us to take notice.

Imperative No. 5 is to diversify into new products and services. It speaks of it. It has been observed that today most successful nations create wealth by exporting products and services with insight. Insight into customer needs of technologies and processes, of distribution channels and their relative competitive positions.

Imperative No. 6 is to create digital links between Trinidad and Tobago, its customers and its suppliers. The report notes:

"With today's technology there should be international distance between Trinidadian firms and their target markets. Trinidad has already invested in data collection by the Central Statistical Office and other public institutions.

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But the national data collection system has not been geared to serve the business sector, to produce market insight and incentives for collaboration inside industry groups. In fact, the National Business Survey identified lack of information as the number one problem encountered by small firms attempting to export.”

The report further notes that:

“Trinidad can radically transform its economy and use technology to generate market insights by acting along the following three dimensions:

Platform,

Firm level; and

Cluster.

Unlike less developed environments, Trinidad (and Tobago) does stand at the ideal development point to use new and emergent technologies to migrate from its current level of sophistication to a level much further advanced.”

Mr. Speaker, the UNC has always articulated the view that Trinidad must leverage technology for competitive advantage. This is the context in which we started the Wallerfield Science and Technology Park. We understood that it was necessary to create an enabling environment before such a project could be a success.

I am happy to see the Government has copied the project but I see no attempts to create the enabling environment. Where is the industry’s specific law? Where are the industry’s specific incentives? Where is the international marketing regime? Where are the studies of human resource requirements and the plan to produce these resources? Where are the strategic alliances? What are the bureaucratic reforms that will be undertaken?

I wish to warn the Government that if the project is not handled properly, it could easily turn into a glorified industrial estate.

Imperative No. 7 is to streamline and strengthen private sector institutions.

The report notes:

“The Trinidad Government has been a prolific creator of Government Ministries and business development institutions.”

Every second page you turn in this Budget you see they set up a new committee.

“The resulting dynamic has given little time for ministries and institutions to coordinate with each other and connect with their stakeholders in the private sector or to implement long-term policies.

Institutional weaknesses are routinely addressed by creating entirely new organizations or by adding new functions to existing structures.”

I might add, or by renaming them.

“As a result private and public institutions remain disconnected and sometimes operate in a vacuum, and new public institutions concentrate their successes in areas where interactions with the business environment is least critical.

For instance, there are currently more than thirty ministries in the country and a fair amount of Cabinet reshuffling is more the norm than the exception. Not surprisingly, only a few core functions are set as top priorities and addressed adequately; while many programmes are backlogged and lack continuity. As an illustration, take the telecommunications policy; cultural policy and tertiary education; these have been articulated as key priorities of the Government, however, they have been handed over from ministry to ministry, considerably cutting short the process and momentum of reform.

In contrast, the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) aggregates functions related to business development, trade incentives, fair competition practices and international trade negotiations. It remains virtually impossible for the Ministry to connect with stakeholder groups economy-wide in all the key policy areas it is designed to serve. Further, the institutions placed under its mandate remain out of touch with the business environment and operationally does not reflect their strategic intent.

Moreover, this institutional gap extends to both the Business Development Corporation and the National Entrepreneurship Development Company. Apart from being deficient in technical capabilities and strategic intent, these organizations are perceived as either instruments of political patronage or social development programmes rather than private sector initiatives. In the words of one prominent businessman and academic, these institutions are just mechanisms for redistributions or grant-giving agencies with no entrepreneurship behind them.”

Mr. Speaker, the performance of this Government in managing the economy is enough to bring the average citizen to tears. Incompetence, confusion, contradiction, counter-production bureaucracy and the lack of vision are the order of the day. Where are we going? Clearly, this is a case of the blind leading the blind. If this nation does not take stock in a hurry, we shall all be led over the edge of the precipice.

Imperative No. 8 is to fast-track and implement key pro-market legislation. Competition policy must be fully implemented and laws for consumer protection and the deregulation of telecommunications are urgently required.

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It is to be noted that Trinidad and Tobago was the first country in the Caribbean to talk about liberalizing its telecommunication sector more than a decade ago; however, to this date, it has been the last to enact it. The process has been stalled by Cabinet changes and the continuous reshuffling of ministries, vested interests and an unsatisfactory commitment from authorities.

Imperative No 9 is to understand that small countries that are prepared for globalization will benefit. The report notes:

“There is much that the private sector associations and business support agencies can—and should—do to prepare for the coming competitive wave. Government agencies need to help understand and negotiate the voluminous agreements with which they are woefully unfamiliar. The level of resources being spent on the other side of the bargaining table, in both the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) puts Trinidad (and Tobago) at an enormous preparation disadvantage.

Trinidad and Tobago has to understand that reaping the benefits of these up coming trade negotiations hinges on its ability to negotiate strategically. What this implies is the crafting of a trade strategy that incorporates and is aligned with the future economic strategy of the country.”

12.15 p.m.

Last year, I spent some time articulating the imperative for Trinidad and Tobago to participate meaningfully in international negotiations. You will note that nothing has changed and now the IADB is making the same point. This Government is a slow learner. This is the knowledge area and slow learners are at a disadvantage; indeed, they are a liability.

It is urgent that we allocate the right people and resources to prepare for globalization, hence the need for constitutional reform that ensures meritocracy. They have to put the best people in the job, not cronies. For us to participate in the mainstream of the new economy we must participate in the decision-making bodies that lead trade negotiations and thus strengthen our capabilities in dispute resolution.

Imperative No. 10—and this is the final one—says that we must see the energy sector as a market. The report notes:

“In the words of upper management at BP, they would much rather outsource some services they use locally, than having to pay consultants and engineers from Houston. Why pay workers from the USA to drag drilling platforms across thousands of miles of ocean, when they can be constructed in Trinidad?”

Literally billions of US\$ are spent every year for these upstream activities. The customer—international energy industries—is right down the street. For instance, BP spends almost half a billion dollars in geological work, design engineers, deep sea drilling, and fabricators to build platforms and other services. It has been projected that almost 40% of those outsourcing services could be contracted out to Trinidad firms. However, a whole range of skills and capabilities are missing since training and education has not kept up with the labour market demands in this sector.”

Mr. Speaker, you will now understand why the UNC placed such emphasis on education and training. We made sure that every child had access to education because we had a vision. Now that the IADB has made its comments, maybe the PNM will listen.

The conclusion of the report is worthy of note.

“Trinidad has a stable platform, rich potential, and energy resources. This can be a starting point for the creation of an extraordinarily productive economy or for the gradual recapitalization of the nation.

What is needed is not a massive infusion of capital or government-led action. What is essential is that Trinidadian firms build the competitive advantages that will create wealth over a long time horizon. The nation has been lulled into a false sense of wealth and entitlement, by the existence of sub-soil assets that are the envy of its neighbours. This blessing has both facilitated and disguised extreme weaknesses in local firms.

The only way forward is the fostering of truly competitive companies and the only large-scale way we know of to make this happen is to provide the technical tools required for the growth of competitive clusters of related and supported firms.

Free trade will change the balance irrevocably, with or without energy. If T&T invests in its future now, it may be a rich nation when the energy is gone. If it does not, it will surely slip into poverty. With each year that passes, making this investment gets more expensive and less likely to bear fruit. Indeed, this is the last chance for a better T&T to invest in future prosperity.”

I have quoted extensively from the IADB report because it confirms so much of what we have been telling this Government. Maybe they will accept it now. The future is not about the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP). It is not about house-padding and dividing the nation on racial and ethnic lines for political patronage. It is not about going to

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bed with criminals and calling them community leaders. It is not about expensive public relations campaigns to fool the people. Pettiness has no place in the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago. This nation must leverage knowledge and new industries for competitive advantage. The world of the future is complex. The challenges are enormous and this Government is not up to the task. This leadership is clueless, therefore the UNC must continue to point the way forward, even while out of office. That would not be for long. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, even you can feel it in your bones.

On the question of poverty, it continues to be one of the big problems of Trinidad and Tobago. We can count the numbers of the poor, but the effect on the psyche of the poor cannot be counted. Poverty would not go away while the country is being managed as it is. It is said that if you do tomorrow the same thing you did today, you cannot expect to get results tomorrow that are different from the results you got today. In fact, there is a Chinese proverb that defines insanity as doing the same thing over and over in the same way and expecting different results.

A recent study noted that the percentage of the population that was poor was 24 per cent. It also noted that female heads of households of African descent were more likely to be poor and that Africans had greater representation in the lower quintile and the lower representation in the highest quintile than Indians. The report said that the largest concentration of the population is in St. George where there was the highest concentration of poor people. Another point that was noted was that there was a significant difference between Africans and Indians in respect of home ownership. The latter were more likely to own their homes than Africans.

Since political independence, the country has been ruled by the PNM for the vast majority of the time. What has this party done for its supporters, except keep them in a state of helpless dependency. It has kept them in a kind of servitude because this is how they stay in power. They keep the people dependent and they will be forced to vote for them. That is inhumane and calculated cruelty, a legacy of the PNM since its inception.

In a study of several similar countries, it was noted that Trinidad and Tobago has a lower life expectancy than all the selected countries and a higher infant mortality rate than all except Mauritius. It also had the second lowest number of physicians per 100,000 of population after Malaysia. While the Minister of Health constantly picks fights with doctors in the health sector, the population suffers. It is our information that since this Minister was installed—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. B. Panday: I think he probably wanted me to read it over.

While this Minister of Health constantly picks fights with doctors in the health sector, the population suffers. It is our information that since this Minister was installed, there has been a veritable exodus of doctors from Trinidad and Tobago and that is why it had become necessary to bring in foreign doctors into the country.

A recent documentary pointed to overcrowding, rodent infestation, staff shortages, industrial action by pharmacists, inadequate maintenance and equipment breakdown at the San Fernando Hospital. The most recent Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) report paints an equally sorry picture. Our health services are classic Third World and the Minister of Health in his usual manner takes no responsibility for the state of affairs. He simply blames the South West Regional Health Authority and the hospital management. It is as though he lives in another planet. There is a pious look on his face as though he was palming off some false Reebok on somebody. He claimed he was disappointed; that things should not be this way. No wonder he has been banished from the family business to politics. He simply does not understand responsibility.

More recently we have been told that the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP) is one big corrupt scheme and that the Minister is benefiting directly from it. I do not know that. That can only be determined if there is an enquiry.

Having used raw power to decimate the sugar industry, the Minister of Health is now, with precision, destroying the health sector. We all know why. PSA has told us why. Mr. Minister, last year I warned you that you had scorched the earth in Central Trinidad and that the earth will not forgive you. I assure you it has not, and your day of reckoning will surely come.

I am told that if it is Caroni lands they are looking for, all they will get is six feet of it. This year I warn you of what is called Issawi's law, which says:

“Society is like a mule, not a car.

If pressed too hard, it will kick and throw off its rider.”

The situation is no different in housing. The housing needs of the poor are not being addressed. Of course, we see a flurry of housing activities, but this is not housing for the poor. This is housing to win votes. It is not creating communities, it is creating ghettos. There is an IADB report entitled *National Settlements Programmes: Second Stage, Strategic Evaluation Exercise*. I will read some of the comments of that report. It says:

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“What complicates the issues of efficient delivery is the lack of coordination and integrating mechanisms in state management except at the highest level in Cabinet. At any one time with shifting Ministerial portfolios, changing administrations and a growing quasi-state sector involving private partners, the coordination becomes more involved. With a lack of statutory development plans, clear policies and programs in the sector, ad hoc committees and task forces become the modus operandi for coordination and overcoming bureaucratic inertia.”

The report further states:

“It is clear that the broad intentions of the business model of phase I of the Second Stage Settlements Program are not being met and that most of the mid-term benchmarks or triggers for a second phase need to be reviewed and revised.”

12.30 p.m.

Another IABD report, entitled *Trinidad and Tobago National Settlements Programme, Second Stage* states as follows:

“A review of the selling prices of houses constructed by the NHA reveals that they were initially offered for sale at prices well in excess of \$200,000 and even as high as \$350,000. A quasi-governmental institution is currently planning to build 900 square feet houses for prices in excess of \$200,000. This is not affordable housing for lower or middle-income families unless very substantial Government subsidies are made available.”

Mr. Speaker, yet another IADB report entitled, *National Settlements Programme, Second Stage, Mortgage Financing for Low Income Households* points out:

“There is considerable evidence that some of the subsidy delivery mechanisms have resulted in directing the major benefits of subsidies away from the avowed market targets of households in the lower income groups and towards households in middle and higher income groups. The evidence of the results of the AMC Programme is that over 90 per cent of the funds that were available were directed to households earning more than \$4,000 per month.”

Mr. Speaker, there is the evidence for you.

The PNM will have us believe that their housing programmes are targeted to the poor but objective, unbiased researchers tell us otherwise. The poor are not the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries are the PNM supporters who serve the house-padding objectives of the PNM.

I also wish to refer to a recent newspaper report on the issue of poverty that has figured largely in the budget. The report was quoting from a speech of the former Chairman of the FCB, Mr. Ken Gordon, fall guy in the FCB/Unit Trust merger fiasco. Now he is the recipient of thanks a la PNM. Quoting from a study on poverty, Mr. Gordon pointed out the concepts of learnt helplessness among youth in certain parts of the country. He further quoted the study by saying:

“That malaise is largely the result of make-work programmes which were politically driven, but not carefully thought through and had the effect of institutionalizing handouts, making them virtually a way of life for unemployed youth, many of whom became rudderless, dependent and unemployable. Tragically, many degenerated into crime.”

That was Mr. Ken Gordon.

Mr. Speaker, this is what programmes like CEPEP and URP and all other make-work programmes do to our people. In the long run they do not help anyone. Instead, they result in low levels of labour productivity, long term dependency and impair the competitiveness of the nation.

The UNC's strategy for poverty reduction was to educate and train the population so that people would have employable, productive skills. This is the knowledge era we have always said. There is no other solution. Instead of building social capital, this Government is papering over the cracks, merely putting a plaster on the sore. A recent UNDP report said that the youths of the nation are not benefiting from the wealth of the nation in spite of \$900 million on make-work programmes. They never will! The UNDP report observed that the education system was not producing people who can get jobs and, as a result, the quality of our social fabric will deteriorate further. When will they learn that throwing money at problems do not solve those problems? We have to deal with the process by which we manage, but this glorified shopping list contained in the budget presentation has neither vision nor process. What therefore are we to expect? The poor will surely get poorer and all the adverse consequences of poverty will be with us as long as this Government is in power.

I now turn to the energy sector, the management of which is critical to creating a sustainable economic future. The impact of institutions has emerged as a major aspect of the debate of whether natural resources are a blessing or a curse. In an extensive World Bank study on natural resources in Latin America, it was found that the key to success is to complement natural resources wealth with strong institutions, human capital and knowledge. Research has also shown that in countries that are oil dependent, the emergence of democratic institutions are often hindered.

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It is important that we fully comprehend these realities in the current context of an economy that is heavily dependent upon the oil and gas industry. In the light of this, it is important that we fashion sound policies for the energy sector to ensure that we make the best use of our energy resources and particularly natural gas. Not surprisingly, from the policy perspectives, the Government has failed to come up with a single policy document to guide the energy sector. What passes for policy in the energy sector is actually a patchwork of reports and decisions from committees or task forces like the Natural Gas Export Task Force or the Vision 2020 Committee. It would seem that the only energy policy they have is to sell as much gas as possible in the shortest time possible.

Mr. Speaker, where is the natural gas master plan? Where is the energy sector policy? In the 2003/2004 budget presentation, the Minister of Finance promised to reform the oil and gas taxation regime. The current regime is outdated and has, over the past two years virtually crippled the operators onshore and in the Gulf of Paria. The sad reality is that while the Minister of Finance mouths the virtues of local content in the energy sector, 99 per cent of the lease operators who await this relief from Government are nationals of Trinidad and Tobago. On a critical note, in the last budget, the Minister of Finance promised to deliver a new oil and gas taxation regime by January 01, 2004. It is now October 2004, and we are no closer to having that new regime in place. As a result, this country is losing billions of dollars in revenue that it ought to be collecting from upstream oil and gas companies. As a consequence, no supplemental petroleum tax is received on natural gas produced. By the time he would have closed the fiscal door, the multinational horse would have bolted the stable.

In a few days from now, the American people will vote for a President. Regardless of who wins that election, one can be assured that the US Government would pursue a policy to reduce its dependency on Middle Eastern oil. In such a context, Trinidad and Tobago's role as the largest exporter of LNG to the United States is critical and strategic. In the first quarter of this year, the 10-week strike at ALNG threatened to cripple the energy sector. The genesis of that strike was a promise made by the political leader of the PNM to the people of Point Fortin, prior to the last election, that he would introduce a sectoral minimum wage for the energy sector. This may well explain why the Minister of Finance dismissed the workers' action as a "wildcat" strike.

In response—I might add, in typical PNM style, reminiscent of the 1970s—the army, police and coastguard were deployed to Point Fortin, supposedly to brutalize the workers. The true cost of that strike to the nation might never be

known. It is estimated that the loss in production time on Trains 1, 2 and 3 and the shutdown of construction on Train 4, cost the country US \$2 million per day; not surprisingly, the energy sector contracted by 2.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2004. The Minister of Finance now holds the dubious distinction of renegeing on the most expensive political promise in the country's history.

This budget has spoken of transparency. There has been much talk in the budget about transparency and at the same time they are talking about the activities of Government in the energy sector, which continue to be shrouded in mystery. It is as though they believe that they can fool the population and conduct energy business as they did during the first oil boom. The Government's *modus operandi* is to engage the country in billion-dollar deals and then come to the Parliament as an afterthought. Parliament only learns of billions of dollars of plans to construct smelter plants and the re-gasification terminals from the newspapers. I feel sorry for the Minister of Energy and Energy Based Industries. He is a nice fellow, obviously content to hold on to the trappings of office, with no power. It would have been nice if he were allowed to do his job and not be undermined by cabalistic energy advisers who see him as a mere rubber stamp, to be excluded from privileged trips abroad on Repsol's private jet. Mr. Ken Julien please take note.

The Government, earlier this year, announced plans to establish an aluminium smelter in the country. We are told that the smelter in question will be owned by ALCOA, with the Government holding 40 per cent equity interest. What the Minister of Finance has not told us is the pricing arrangement for the natural gas to be supplied to ALCOA. Is it that ALCOA is going to get this gas free of charge or at a price lower than market value? If so, who decides that, somebody called Lenny Saith, Prakash Saith or Ken Julien?

The Opposition has also taken note in this context of the transfer of business development from the portfolio of the National Gas Company under the chairmanship of Keith Awong to the National Energy Corporation, the Chief Executive Officer of which is Prakash Saith, brother of Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith. Like most of the Government's actions in the energy sector, the rationale for this move remains a mystery. The answer may lie in the composition of the board and management of the National Energy Corporation. Is it that the NGC is being penalized for its success, or is it that the Government believes that it can have more control and influence over the NEC? The NEC, which is headed by the brother of the Minister of Public Administration and Information, would now be responsible for future energy projects such as the proposed aluminium smelter

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and the two hot briquette iron plants. Mr. Speaker, what this means is that the NGC is now just a wholesaler of gas.

I now turn for a little while to Petrotrin. I would not be long. While NGC is being penalized for its success, the Minister of Finance continues to reward incompetence that passes for leadership at Petrotrin. In its annual report for the financial year 2002/2003, the State oil company, which can no longer be referred to as “Petrosingh” is reported to have made a paltry profit of less than \$2 million. What has happened to the recent investigation that was launched into the project awarded to the Cudjoe Construction Company? That is another report that should be made public but remains a well-guarded secret because friends and families of the PNM were awarded contracts for which they did not qualify and the investigation severely criticized the contract process as well as the contractor. In addition, the report was also severe in its criticism of the chairman of the company. How does the Prime Minister expect us to buy into its claim that the Government is interested in transparency, when at every turn it covers up for its friends and families?

12.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC is concerned that there are no rules governing the Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSF). The objectives of this fund are unclear; there is no accountability to Parliament; and the strategy for utilizing the fund is still evolving. The citizens of this country painfully recall that during the first oil boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the then PNM government set up several development funds—road funds, development funds and so forth, and at the end of the boom, the funds could not be found. The funds were all gone because the Government was able to withdraw from the funds without coming to Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, an Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) report on taxes on the energy sector states:

“The detailed design of the RSF is still the subject of internal Government discussion and, as such, there is no known official position on the major objective of the fund—whether it should be a mechanism for the inter-generational smoothing or for placing fiscal planning on a predicable base.”

According to Vision 2020, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago wants to reduce public debt with the windfall revenues that are not earmarked to the RSF. This looks a balanced position, given the relatively high debt of the country and the need to smooth volatile fuel revenues. The problem is that the windfall is calculated, taking as a reference price for crude oil, projected in the budget, which may be set at high levels.

In fact, during 2002, with an average price of oil of \$34.2 per barrel, about 10 per cent higher than the average of the last decade, no contributions were made to the RSF.

Mr. Speaker, therein lies the problem. The Government is addicted to conspicuous spending. Unless there is accountability for funds in the RSF, this Government would spend it all out before you could say, Patrick Manning. This must not be allowed to happen.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has criticized the design of the RSF and their most important arguments are:

- (1) Deposits into the RSF occur when fuel revenues exceed budget revenues, which are based on a discretionary reference price. In this context, two-thirds of the windfall revenues should be earmarked to the RSF and the other one-third, in principle, is to reduce the public debt. Withdrawals are also rigid. Withdrawals are authorized by the Ministry of Finance, and they are not subject to parliamentary approval.
- (2) The RSF does not guarantee a counter-cyclical policy.
- (3) There is no explicit prohibition to the use of RSF balance as collateral in loan operations.
- (4) Reports are done on an annual basis with no inter-year reporting. They are not made publicly available and auditing is commanded to the Auditor General and not to independent auditors.

Mr. Speaker, this is a frightening situation. Effectively, the Government has taken charge of the RSF as though it is its private property, or the private property of the PNM. This explains why the Prime Minister could turn around and run around the Caribbean playing Santa.

Members would have noticed the recent spectacle, stupendous, in terms of its lack of accountability, when the Minister of Finance told this honourable House that he did not know how much funds had been allocated to the RSF.

Under the UNC, this number was reported to Cabinet at every weekly meeting. How could the Minister give this Parliament such a ridiculous response? This is another example of how this Government continuously undermines our democracy by refusing to be accountable to the people.

The IADB report suggested that the design of the RSF may be improved as follows:

- (1) A reasonable medium-term target is to save all fuel revenues into the RSF and invest these funds abroad, and make a reverse transfer to finance a

non-fuel deficit equivalent to the real return on the value of the fuel wealth. By doing so, the Government would spread wealth to future generations and would avoid the impact of the volatility of fuel prices in the economy and in government revenues.

- (2) In the next decade or so, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago may attempt to use part of the fuel wealth to accomplish two goals. One is to reduce gross public debt to about 30 per cent of GDP and two, to try to foster growth.
- (3) If the Government of Trinidad and Tobago decides to allocate to the current generation a larger proportion of the fuel wealth by running a higher non-fuel deficit, the RSF will only have a countercyclical role. In these circumstances it would be advisable to:
 - (a) Ask an independent group of experts to study the behaviour of the international price of crude and natural gas, to determine the long-term price of both products and to update the study regularly.
 - (b) Establish the RSF legal framework that two-thirds of the extra revenues that are obtained compared to the target price should be deposited in the RSF with no exceptions.
 - (c) Establish that the RSF may only be used when actual prices are below the target prices and the Parliament approves the appropriation from the fund.
 - (d) Stop withdrawals from the RSF when fuel revenues return to their normal level.
- (4) A clear mandate of how the RSF can be invested should be established by taking into account that if the RSF is only used as a countercyclical fund its resources should be invested in shorter-term and safer assets.
- (5) If the RSF is only a countercyclical fund there has to be a limit on how much has to be deposited in it.
- (6) The administration of the RSF should be made public every quarter and members of civil society may be advisers to the board that administers the fund, enhancing the accountability in the process.
- (7) It has to be forbidden to use the RSF as collateral in any loan operation of the government or the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, I pointed out earlier that this is our last chance to put in place strategies that would ensure sustained prosperity of the country. The management of the RSF is a critical component of these strategies. For now, it is being run as the private property of the PNM. This must not be allowed to continue. I warn the Government that there is no right way to do the wrong thing. The RSF is the property of the people. It must be invested wisely and the citizens must be accounted to, for its use.

Mr. Speaker, Helen Keller said: “Worse than being blind is to see and have no vision.” If this is true, the PNM is worse than blind. That is why in the beginning, I described the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance as being myopic, astigmatic and strabismal.

This is a Government that refuses to learn. It persists in making the same mistakes. It is as though the PNM has no experience in government. But that is not entirely unexpected. Aldous Huxley said: “Experience is not what happens to a man, it is what he does with what happens to him”.

When the PNM lost Government in 1987, the country had recently emerged from the second oil boom and had gone into a period of precipitous decline. When they lost again in 1995, it was mainly because crime had reached unprecedented heights. Today, crime is again at unprecedented heights, and the new oil boom is being managed in a way that is sure to lead us back to the crisis of the 1980s. That is why I say that the PNM has no experience in government; they have learnt nothing from what has happened to them.

And now, Mr. Speaker, the nation was presented with this glorified shopping list and told it was a budget. This confused wish list will only overheat the economy. It will not produce a sustainable platform for growth with development. The make-believe unemployment figures, which I hope one of the Ministers would justify, will only last in the short term; soon, we would not be able to maintain these so-called social programmes.

Mr. Speaker, this Government’s ignorance of what a budget is and how budgeting fits into the process of strategic planning is an embarrassment to all self-respecting citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. This may be the way to run a village parlour, but it certainly is not the way to run a nation. In business, the conventional wisdom is, if you fail to plan, then you plan to fail. I am afraid that the latter is what this nation now faces. While all of this is not encouraging, Mr. Speaker, I conclude by taking solace in the words of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: “The lowest ebb is the turn of the tide...” This is the PNM’s lowest ebb and the tide is bound to turn for this my beloved country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch and we will resume at 2.15 p.m.

12.58 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, I begin by extending my warmest congratulations to the Minister of Finance and his staff for having put together a very comprehensive budget presentation. I couch my congratulations in the fact that we have not taken the advice we had been offered in 1996 when the then Minister of Finance presented a budget and told us that budgets should be based on brevity. If my memory serves me right that budget was about half an hour or 45 minutes and we were told then that a budget should simply be: state the income; state the expenditure and sit.

The Minister of Finance and his staff gave the country quite an extensive discourse, not just on the numbers involved in the budgeting process, but on some of the issues that surround the considerations that go into the numbers. Persons who require information and who want to deal with the facts of our circumstances would have benefited from the discourse, long as it might have been. Interestingly enough, you cannot please everybody, because we did hear some persons saying that there were no details. I shudder to think if the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance had tried to give us some details, we would still be on the budget statement right now.

As one Member of the Cabinet responsible for a small part of the overall governmental responsibility, the portfolio of housing, I take this opportunity to indicate what we are doing in the housing sector. Before I do that, I would be failing in my duty if I did not pay some cognizance to the speaker who went before, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, who made some comments on the budget, in-between his reading of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) report.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition when he quoted somebody—one of the obscure quotations that he made. He said words to the effect that the messenger had to have some credibility, if the messenger was to be believed. I think there is merit in that statement, because if that is true then a lot of what the Leader of the Opposition tried to put across as the message today, would not be believed by anybody. When I sat here and got a lecture on the PNM undermining our democracy and heard statements that the budget, somehow, is a threat to our democracy and all the flowery language that went with that, clearly, the person who wrote that speech was unaware of the history of our country and the history of the government that was led by the Member for Couva North.

If one is talking about undermining our democracy, I remind my colleagues that it was not the PNM that went to the polls, got people rejected at the polls and brought them into the Cabinet as ministers of government, to vote against people who were elected to the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] The concept of “when you lose, you win” was given to this country by the Member for Couva North, who put a handful of defeated persons, not just one by accident, hot off the polls, having offered themselves and been told “no”. They were put into the Cabinet to run the affairs of this country.

If that was not enough, Mr. Speaker, where you sit in that august Chair, two who were defeated at the polls, were put to sit there to adjudicate on this Parliament and I, as Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, was put out of Parliament by one of them. [*Desk thumping*] For two months the people of Diego Martin West had no voice in this Parliament, because a defeated candidate sat in that Chair and called for a motion to put me out of the House, because I spoke about corruption in the airport. And I have to sit here today and listen to my friend from Couva North lecture me about undermining democracy and messenger and message?

As if that was not enough, cast your mind back to the treatment of the Presidency of this Republic at the hands of the UNC government in 2000 and 2001. Cast your mind back to the Chief Justice and the attacks launched on him by an Attorney General of the UNC, where the Chief Justice was brought into opprobrium and odium, having to defend himself publicly, because he was attacked by the government of the UNC. If that was not undermining our democracy, then I do not know what is. The Member for San Fernando East, the Minister of Finance, brings a budget of \$27 billion and puts aside \$1.3 billion in a savings account and he is undermining our democracy! My friend from Couva North, your hat is by your tail. You have it upside down.

He talked about undermining our democracy. The very first Cabinet of the UNC, having brought a budget to this Parliament, kept us in this House for 24 hours, nonstop debate, because they did not want anybody to hear what the Opposition had to say. We had to speak continuously until the next morning. When we were through with all our speakers, then they entered the so-called debate, because they did not want the public to know what was to be said about their offerings to the country. Then he comes here today and keeps me here for three hours telling me about undermining the country’s democracy.

I was going to bring a rag with me this morning; I forgot to bring it, because I knew I would have been required to deal with crocodile tears. I knew he could not

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resist coming here today, as Leader of the Opposition, to cry crocodile tears for the people of Caroni (1975) Limited, who he claims have been disadvantaged in the sugar industry—crocodile tears requiring a very large rag to wipe. For me it is a very galling incident, because I was the Minister of Agriculture of this country in 1992. I put a lot of effort and government time into coming up with a programme for treating with the sugar industry in 1992. We had consensus as to how to save the sugar industry.

My friend from Couva North signed that consensus and in it was a very prickly issue of a longstanding backpay for sugar workers, \$150 million, which we agreed to pay by January 1993. By September 1992, he was marching up and down the country demanding that the backpay be paid in September, even though he signed the document that said it was due by January 2003—sorry, 1993. Of course, six years of controlling the government in this country, he knows everything that was done wrong by the PNM government and he sends all kinds of coded messages to the East Indian community, invoking all kinds of sinister plots and talking about our diversity being a tragic liability, because he wants to see, out of that diversity, mayhem and bloodshed. According to him, the PNM's action in treating with the sugar industry will cause that. But for six years he did absolutely nothing and allowed the sugar industry to come to a point where it had to be constricted, the way it is now.

When we started with that document, at the time, Caroni (1975) Limited had 9,441 workers. One of the things we agreed upon was that we would allow the numbers to be reduced by attrition of a few hundred per year, going down to a target of 6,000 people. I was shocked when I came back into government to meet Caroni (1975) Limited with 10,000 workers; a complete reversal of the position. The lands that should have been properly and orderly taken out of sugar and used in an orderly way, as we are doing now, were turned over to squatting. That is how they would have dealt with it. Today, crocodile tears about Caroni workers and coming to the Parliament talking about who is Putna and who is not Putna; trying to cast aspersions on the people in the context, to send a message that the actions of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago are, somehow, racially motivated. The PNM rejects that out of hand! [*Desk thumping*]

He spent the whole morning talking about the IADB. He read liberally from the IADB report. As a former governor of the IADB for Trinidad and Tobago, all I can say to you, Mr. Speaker, is that the worst descriptions of any action in Trinidad and Tobago, coming from the Inter-American Development Bank, related to the period 1996 to 2001. I say no more on that.

He called names, implying by innuendo—“Prakash Saith, the brother of Sen. Dr. Saith, is in some position doing something that requires investigation.” Prakash Saith was the same brother of Sen. Dr. Saith all the time; he was in the same position all the time under the UNC. But he implied that we made some appointment of Dr. Saith’s brother to do something wrong in the country; innuendo again.

I heard him call my name in some foolishness, about some newspaper from Tobago that said something about me. One jailbird in Tobago owns a newspaper; another jailbird put a story in there and another jailbird came to the Parliament and repeated it, and I am supposed to respond to that. [*Laughter*] I will just dismiss that for what it is worth.

Remember the La Brea Industrial Company? LABIDCO was something to be disparaged. He came into government, met a programme in place to bring industrialization to Southwest Trinidad, disparaged it, stopped it and threw it out. Today he comes here and tells us that we have not done enough in downstreaming. Apparently, when he was Prime Minister, the downstreaming that is taking place now, was taking place in Couva North or Tobago. Today, at the said LABIDCO site, we have already built two platforms, under this Government, platforms which otherwise would have been built in Houston and towed to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We do not need his advice on these matters; we just leave that for what it is worth: You got the opportunity to talk and you talked.

What else is there that I can respond to? After three hours, there is nothing to respond to from the Leader of the Opposition, so I go into the portfolio of housing to indicate what this Government has been doing in the context of improving Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Because of the requirement to be very precise with the numbers I am going to refer to, I seek your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, to refer to my copious notes.

This PNM Government has made it quite clear to the country and the world that our objective is to improve the quality of life and standard of living of all our people, within a particular time frame. Our commitment to making Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by the year 2020 is there for all to see and we stand by that commitment. It is our objective; it is our work programme. In that commitment, the Government identified the areas of education, health, housing and social delivery, as the four areas which require our attention in that order. Commensurately, all along, the national security, of course, required to deal with the problems of today.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, at the Ministry of Housing and Settlement, we are called upon to treat with the deficiencies in our country insofar as housing availability is

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concerned. And if we do our work in solving that problem with the resources available to us, and as I am confident my colleagues in the other areas are doing their work, solving problems in their respective areas, ultimately the whole will be uplifted and improved.

When we were in Opposition, we committed ourselves to having 100,000 houses built in the period of a decade. Where does the number 100,000 come from? People ask me and I ask myself as well, and the basis of that 100,000 is from a study that was done in 1993 by a company called PADCO. Of course, in 1993 you know who were in office.

The experts looking at the situation then and at the requirements for the future determined that 115,000 units were required, but later on in 2000 another assessment was done which indicated that we really required about 9,800 houses per year to treat with the shortage in the country.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think that any Member in this House would disagree that there is a shortage of houses in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, it has been so for a long time, especially in Trinidad where the demand for housing far outstrips the supply, bringing us to a place where today, even the well-earned middle class cannot find a decent home to buy because the market has gone beyond them, and in the lower middle income you cannot find a place to rent. There is a significant shortage especially in the urban areas and the East-West Corridor in particular.

We, in 2000 took note of another specialist study done by Dr. Angel which indicated that the real shortage is about 98,000 units which means that a programme of building about 6,000 or 7,000 houses per year to 2010 and subsequently building 3,000 to 4,000 per year after that would deal with our problem.

We went to the Central Statistical Office (CSO) figures because fortunately we had a census in 2000 which gave us very up-to-date data which we put in the context of the existing population, the existing housing stock, the population growth rate, family size and the condition of housing insofar as replacement requirements and so on. We took that on board and looked at what we had done before and came up with a work programme for the National Housing Construction Programme.

When one looks back at what happened in the period 1995 to 2001, we see that the housing programme in the nation consisted of 4,500 lots, 2,700 of those persons who accessed financing that was available and, of course, there were 321 houses built in the public sector programme in that six-year period for a total of 3,021 units.

In six years, as a continuation of a programme of low-housing construction in the public sector in Trinidad and Tobago, we had 3,021 units being made available.

Mr. Speaker, we realize that there is a problem to be solved and at that rate we will never solve it. So under the present arrangement of this programme which is well on the way, in the period 2003 to 2004, one fiscal year, we built and delivered 3,283 units. [*Desk thumping*] So clearly, there is a big difference with respect to the approach to housing, preparation of lots and *laissez faire*. In six years there were 3,021 as against 3,283 in one year.

In case you ask where they were: In the in-fill lots programme, we did 986 houses. These were vacant lots that existed in built developments which we went in and built on. In the joint venture programme in that period, the National Housing Authority (NHA) built 2,171, UDeCott is doing 98, and SWMCO is doing 28 for a total of 3,283.

For the programme 2004/2005, we propose to build 8,045 units. [*Desk thumping*] Much of this is well under way as I will outline. We propose to build 712 units in the in-fill programme that existed and were not built on.

In the joint venture programme with the NHA and the private sector, we propose to do 6,336 units, UDeCott will do 947 and SWMCO will do 50 for a total of 8,045 units for the work programme of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the private sector partners in the fiscal year 2004/2005.

For the in-fill programme, which are the individual lots in existing developments, you will see those works going on in Edinburgh 500; Dyett Estate, Cunupia; Couva North Phase 2; Malabar Phase 3; Malabar Phase 4; Union Hall; Graham Trace; Strikers Village, Point Fortin; Harmony Hall; Plaisance, Mayaro; Charlieville; Boy's Lane, D'Abadie; Valencia; Rio Claro; Debe; Santa Cruz; Bon Air West; Bien Venue and Fyzabad.

In the joint venture programme, our programme involves building, starting with the programme of a major community of 1,680 units in La Horquetta South. That is a completely new community where land is available. In Cleaver Woods, 360; Goya Road, 200; Corner Karamath Street and Caura Road, 100; Bates Trace, Santa Margarita, 148; Barataria Phase 2, 48; Carlsen Field, 250; Edinburgh South A, 700; Edinburgh South B, 700; Corinth A, 250; Corinth B, 275; Corinth C, 275; Harmony Hall, 160; Retrench, 300; Wellington Road, Debe, 360; KP Lands Valencia, 80; Mount Hope, 100. Those are to be done with the NHA in the joint venture partnership.

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Under UDeCott we will be doing a number of apartments ranging from 18 in La Romain to 83 in Mayaro; Victory Gardens, Arima 37; Castara 85; Blenheim 119; Roxborough 77; Tunapuna 20; El Dorado 34; Oropune 250.

I gave you that in detail to put the lie to what is being said, that we are house-padding and building slums. Mr. Speaker, take note, that virtually all the locations I have mentioned are houses being built on lands which were available for housing construction which lay idle until the PNM Government came into office.

Many of them with approvals and infrastructure in place were lying idle. In the case of Buen Intento, Princes Town, the sewer treatment plant was there with trees growing in it while moneys were being taken to Liechtenstein and “Steinleich” and no houses were built. This PNM Government is building houses there and housing people. That is our crime. [*Desk thumping*]

In saying that we are building ghettos; we are building ghettos on infrastructure which was lying there when the government chose not to build houses. The difference in policy is that the PNM believes that there is a role for the Government in the housing construction programme which is not new. That was the PNM’s policy since 1956.

From Charlotteville to Bon Accord, from Diego Martin, Carenage to San Fernando to Point Fortin, to Arima, to Barataria, the PNM’s policy all the time is that the Government has a role to play in housing construction. [*Desk thumping*] As the experts have told us that we are short of 100,000 houses, and if you look for a house to buy or rent in this country, you do not need me to convince you that there is a shortage. We are dealing with it by making available a programme to the country which results not in promises, but in actual construction of units which people are going to move into either by way of ownership or rental.

Mr. Speaker, in 2003/2004 the NHA was authorized to borrow \$450 million to get this programme off and running, but the Government believes that there is a major role for the private sector in this major housing programme. Last year December we met with our bankers and told them that the Government’s commitment to low-and middle-income housing cannot be only the Government’s responsibility.

We pointed out to the banks that they have a role to play and we asked them to tell us what role they would like to play based on our advice to them. Having formed a consortium of the four major banks of Trinidad and Tobago: First Citizens Bank, Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, Republic Bank and the Bank of Nova Scotia, they made available to us, under arrangements which I would not

detail at this time because time does not permit. These banks made a revolving facility of \$1.2 billion available to us; available for the next two years for the housing programme which can be renewed on the request of the NHA.

Over and above that, another \$500 million has been earmarked by the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance (TTFM) for mortgage take out and a further \$700 million made available by the local banking consortium to support the mortgage programme.

Mr. Speaker, that means that the Government does not have to fund this programme in its totality, and if you look at the allocation for the Ministry of Housing and Settlement, you will see it has an increased allocation of \$300 million which was an increase over last year, half of which is for the Ministry of Housing and the other half goes to the NHA.

That provides the executing agencies with the various mobilization moneys and the bulk of the cost of the construction is being picked up in this consortium funding, and because we are encouraging home ownership, employed persons would be buying these houses and paying a mortgage and the programme will roll on indefinitely.

So for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, we have our local banking community committing and making a major contribution to a programme solving a problem which has been with us for quite some time.

We in the PNM understand that many of the social problems—

[*Cell phone rings*]

Mr. Speaker: The sound seems to be coming from that bag. Take it off. Please continue, Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, the housing programme has a number of benefits for the country, not just housing people in acceptable conditions because Vision 2020 says we want to become a developed country by the year 2020. What this *means* is that we cannot attain that status if our people are not properly housed. There is no way one can claim to be a developed country, a small island nation of this size and be short of 100,000 units.

Mr. Speaker, all over Trinidad and Tobago, in Diego Martin, Chaguanas, Laventille and San Fernando, there are families with small children living in horrendous conditions and the housing construction programme is providing them with hope and opportunity to enter quality, adequate housing at affordable conditions.
[*Desk thumping*]

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I need not explain to you the social ills associated with poor housing conditions and most of them can be addressed by simply improving the housing conditions and the community upgrades that go with it. That is what the national housing programme is aiming to do.

As a mover of the economy, I can report to you today that the housing programme I have mentioned for 2003/2004 and which is continuing has provided in that sector alone direct employment for 10,511 persons. [*Desk thumping*]

2.45 p.m.

I would tell you something. Our accelerated housing programme employs a range of medium and small contractors as well as the large contractors. The Government, in last year's budget—and back to our manifesto—committed itself to making space for the small contractor, to allow 10 per cent of Government contracting to go to small contractors, and nowhere is that promise being kept more than the housing sector where we are deliberately directing 10 per cent of our housing programme to small contractors in this business. [*Desk thumping*]

Today we have 74 small contractors involved in the programme, largely in the in-fill programme, where the sites are scattered and they are building; some doing two; some doing 10; some doing five; some doing 20, and we are providing encouragement and support for our small contractors.

Over and above that, we are using the HYPE Programme, helping young people to find employment. We have taken young people off the streets, put them on construction sites under supervision and in one location in Kelly Village in Caroni, we have given them the contract and they have delivered. They have built 50 houses under the HYPE Programme. [*Desk thumping*] And they are now on standby to be put on another site because the programme worked so well that we would multiply it across the country.

The MuST Programme, which is the Multi-sector Skills Training Programme, we are taking that on board as well, providing training in the construction programme of the Ministry of Housing. We have five sites earmarked for the MuST Programme. We are going to put some of them on the Goya Road, Bates Trace project at Ramgoolie Trace, at Carlsen Field, Tarouba and Point Fortin. These are experiments that are working and we are taking young people from idleness into productive work. You should go on site and see this, Mr. Speaker.

You should see the expression of self-esteem on the faces of these young people when they say to you, “We built those houses.” One year ago they were building nothing, probably lying by the wayside plotting to do wrong. Now they

are saying to you, “We built those houses.” These were fifty houses built under supervision of high quality and with a high level of acceptability. Of course, we got a number of lots in Union Hall, Harmony Hall, Boy’s Lane, where we are going to put some of our training programmes as well.

The National Housing Authority itself, over time, has degenerated into an organization which requires a certain amount of attention and the Cabinet has already approved the actions that would be required to bring about a modernization of the National Housing Authority under, what we call, the Housing Development Corporation. Very soon we would be coming to the Parliament to incorporate the Housing Development Corporation which would be a new, modernized agency to deal with the present outlook in the public sector housing as we see it from here on in.

Over the years, poor manpower planning, attrition and worst practice had been a bugbear at the NHA. Just to give you one example of how the thinking was: We have the NHA as landlord for thousands of units around the country, but the requirement is that the NHA passes its revenues to central government. So you have NHA collecting rent, collecting mortgage money, required to pass those moneys to the Minister of Finance, but you have thousands of units out there requiring a coat of paint, a window to be fixed; some kind of maintenance. Properties require maintenance. The landlord must be free to maintain as and when required and not having to wait on the Minister of Finance who may or may not allocate some small amount each year, and so on.

Modern management systems would not accept that. At the moment, legislation with respect to the creation of the Housing Development Corporation is before the LRC. As soon as the budget debate is over, it would come out of LRC; it would come to the Cabinet and then to the Parliament and I trust that I would have the support of Members of this House to create a new, modern organization to treat with the new public sector housing programme which exists in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We also know that there is a certain amount of tiredness which attends some of the workers at the NHA and in order to treat with that, Cabinet has approved the offering of a VSEP. We are talking to the relevant unions and very soon we would be in a position to offer that VSEP commensurate with the coming into being of the Housing Development Corporation. So we would modernize and reorganize that situation.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to give you an idea of the persons with whom we are dealing. One of the things that we observe—and I would take it from the contribution of the Member for Couva North who, today, in his series of inaccuracies and

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outright misstatements, told the House and the nation that the NHA is not treating with poor people and 90 per cent of what we are doing is for people above \$4,000. I do not know where he got those figures from, but permit me to put on record that what the Leader of the Opposition said with respect to the housing programme and its profile is completely erroneous.

As of September, 2004, the NHA has in its database just over 50,000 applicants who responded to the number of advertisements that we put in the newspapers asking the national community to indicate an interest in NHAs housing programme. Those persons, and others who were there before, amount to this 50,000. It is not a very accurate figure because we are discovering that some people are trying to beat the system by applying twice—husband applying, wife applying, mother applies, son applies. So the figure requires some refining. But even if two-thirds of it is good—80 per cent is good—it is still a large number. But the database, even after we have cleaned it up, we are looking at just over 50,000 persons.

Of the 50,130 applicants on the database as of September 30, 41.3 per cent are persons who earn less than \$3,000 a month. In fact, if we look at persons who earn less than \$4,000 a month, we would be looking at 58 per cent. Fifty-eight per cent of the 50,000 applicants are persons who earn less than \$4,000 a month. I think the Member for Couva North knows that and that is why he came here today and deliberately sought to mislead the country by saying that the NHA's programme is catering for persons who are above \$4,000 a month. Mischievous as usual!

Mr. Speaker, 58.4 per cent earn less than \$4,000 a month. That is our clientele. The figure for those who earn more than \$4,000 a month and less than \$6,000 is 23 per cent. For those who earn over \$6,000 a month, it is 18 per cent. Six thousand dollars a month sounds like a lot of money. But who are they? They are two teachers—husband and wife—two well-paid technicians; one soldier and a nurse. They would earn \$6,000. They are in the upper echelons.

So what if the NHA builds houses for persons who are earning \$6,000, for soldiers, teachers, nurses, and so on? How can that be something to disparage? But that is only 18 per cent of the database. We have said time and time again that the PNM's housing policy is catering for no single group. It is a comprehensive programme that takes care of the needs from the top to the bottom of the pyramid.
[*Desk thumping*]

Because the bulk of our clientele earn less than \$4,000 a month, it follows that the bulk of what we are doing would be catering for those persons under \$4,000. That is why the Cabinet, cognizant of this data, cognizant of people's ability to pay—because affordability is the key to the programme—if we build houses that

people cannot afford, well, then we have got a problem. We are guided by the affordability. We know what our people are earning. The board of the NHA, the Ministry of Housing and the Cabinet know that we have to cater for those persons at that level and that is why in June 2004, the Cabinet took a decision as to what the houses would cost and what they would sell for and what they would rent for. We have a Cabinet approval governing that programme and let me give you an example.

Bearing in mind that mid-range public servants, one or two can be earning between \$4,000 and \$6,000, listen to the prices in the housing programme: In Pleasantville, a three-bedroom unit would sell for \$126,000. It would rent for \$470 and the mortgage on that would be \$718. A three-bedroom unit would sell for \$149,000; it would rent for \$560 and the mortgage, if you are going to own it, is \$849.

Another type of unit in Pleasantville selling for \$190,000, would rent for \$710 a month and would have a mortgage of \$1,000. A different style, a different finish, same three-bedroom duplex, would sell for less—\$165,000; would rent for \$620 and the mortgage would be \$940.

In Rio Claro, a two-bedroom unit would sell for \$125,000; \$470 in rent; mortgage to own, \$700. In Mount Hope, a three-bedroom town house would sell for \$199,000; to rent, \$750; and \$1,130 for mortgage if you want to own it. In Barataria, a two bedroom unit would sell for \$151,000; would rent for \$570; if you are going to own it, the mortgage is \$862. A three-bedroom unit in Barataria would sell for \$182,000; would rent for \$690 and the mortgage would be \$1,041.

I defy anybody anywhere in this country to find any like this anywhere in the private sector, anywhere near these prices. These are bargain prices. [*Desk thumping*] The people who are fortunate enough to be allocated units at these prices are getting bargain prices because the efficiency of the Government housing policy is giving them a benefit that they cannot get, to rent or to own, anywhere else in the country. And while I hear bleatings from the other side, I am quite prepared to accept whatever comments they would make, for having provided housing of this type at this cost—because what they provided was zilch!—I would like to ask my colleagues on the other side to reserve their comments, not for me and my friends on this side, but tell that to the people who come every week and every month, anxious to get their keys for their new NHA houses to start a family, which they had no chance of getting under the previous administration. [*Desk thumping*]

We have gone further. The Cabinet has approved that insofar as housing units are allocated to persons who are physically challenged, that the mortgage prices

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that I have outlined here would be reduced by a further 25 per cent for persons who are physically challenged. [*Desk thumping*] I would give you an example of what that means: In Almond Drive, a unit which normally would sell for \$105,000, we have reduced that by 25 per cent. It would now sell for \$78,000 to a person who is physically challenged. That person, to own the unit, would pay \$500 a month. Where else can you get a better deal than that in this country? We are doing this, cognizant of the fact that the Government, as trustee of the people's wealth, can do no worse than provide them with a decent place to live at a decent, affordable price. That is PNM policy. [*Desk thumping*]

In El Dorado Heights, a unit that would sell for \$150,000, Cabinet approved a 25 per cent reduction for any person who is physically challenged and is allocated a unit. That unit would go for \$112,000. To own it, that person would pay \$641 in a 30-year mortgage or \$766 in a 20-year mortgage. The choice is theirs.

3.00 p.m.

We go further. We realize that many persons are now anxious to have houses, especially when we see that of the 50,000 applicants on the database that I mentioned, 34 per cent of them are women. Many of them are heads of households. Cabinet has decided that insofar as persons are desirous of owning those houses, but cannot afford them at this time, to put in place the Rent To Own Programme. This means that a person who is allocated a unit and can demonstrate that he or she is employed, but the earnings are not sufficient to purchase at this time, we give the person a licence to occupy and pay a rental. In five years that person would have the option—when we hope that that person's circumstances and ability to pay would have improved—to come back to NHA and indicate a willingness to own that unit. The Government has put mechanisms in place to allow 60 per cent of what was paid as rent to be converted as a downpayment on a mortgage. That is PNM's policy. [*Desk thumping*]

So far the programme has concentrated largely on the areas where land was immediately available.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, up to this point in the programme which is year 3, we have focused largely on using lands that were immediately available,

by virtue of having some attention at an earlier time through infrastructure approvals. We have not turned to the urban problems except for a project in Beverly Hills and one in San Fernando. Between them we are doing 240 units. In fiscal 2004—2005, we are going to embark on treating with the issues in urban areas. By 2005, we expect to treat with a number of issues, not the least of which is the whole problem of the capital city, Port of Spain and depopulation.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you are aware that sometime in the not too distant past, the population of Port of Spain was 95,000 persons. With the changes in the society and economics, the population of Port of Spain has dropped to about 45,000 persons. The city of Port of Spain is dying from the standpoint of the occupancy and its service as a city. The planning to be done now is to revitalize Port of Spain. The building of the Brian Lara Promenade gives us an idea as to what Port of Spain can become if we focus on the problems of the cities.

At the Ministry of Housing we are focusing on the whole question of improving residential conditions in Port of Spain because the city has all the available services. We have roads, power and water. We need to make better use of the land that is available in Port of Spain, San Fernando and to a lesser extent, Point Fortin, Chaguanas and Arima. We are aiming to actively treat with some housing issues on the periphery of these cities. In our suburban programme for 2005, we have construction earmarked for Ramdial Mahabir Lands; Alexis Street, Morvant; Dorata Street, Laventille; River Estate, Diego Martin; Paradise Heights, Morvant and Albion Court Development.

In San Fernando, there are Ciper Street, Leotaud Street, Chadee Street, Pleasantville Circular Street, Flamingo Crescent, Naparima/Mayaro Road and Commissioning Street. In central Trinidad, Edinburgh 500. These are some of the sites where some medium-sized projects would take place.

When I got into the Ministry of Housing, I discovered that many years ago, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, cognizant of the need to revitalize Port of Spain embarked on the acquisition of property in East Port of Spain, in what should have been a major slum clearance programme. For some reason which I have not yet identified, that programme came to a halt. The lands had been acquired many years ago and the slum clearance activities did not proceed. We expect to begin that activity in 2005. This means that those areas which have been acquired by government; they are still occupied by persons and the sites are grossly under-utilized and would properly be classified as slums, we would make arrangements and work with the communities in small blocks to temporarily relocate those persons into decanting centres which are constructed for a particular

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purpose. We would do the slum clearance exercise to make it available for fresh, new and modern construction; proper adequate acreage and build on those sites where we would adequately house more people. We would relocate those persons to those sites and have a better condition in East Port of Spain. We have identified some blocks in the area of Basilon Street, St. Paul Street, Besson Street and other areas in East Port of Spain. Very soon we would talk to the people in those communities and on a phased basis proceed to begin the reconstruction of East Port of Spain in a way that would benefit all.

Cabinet has approved the construction of a decanting centre on the old Nestle site at Picton Street and at the moment work is proceeding apace. We are finalizing the approvals for that. In fiscal 2005, we expect to build about 50 units on that site that would allow us to relocate people out of their current circumstances for this programme to proceed. We have engaged the services of an architectural firm to assist us in the planning of this exercise.

One reason we are able to take this project on board now is that the country's finances are very good and, more importantly, we have passed a significant portion of the housing financing to the private sector, through the banks and therefore, the Government can adequately fund the movement of the Slum Clearance Programme that lies ahead.

With respect to squatter regularization, during the last fiscal year, we finalized 855 lots in this programme. It yielded the following:

Lots	Location
20	Rice Mill, Arouca
110	La Paille, Caroni
210	Gasparillo
65	Point Fortin
450	Valencia

In 2005, we expect to accelerate this programme for regularization of 2,150 lots in the following areas: Picton Road, Sangre Grande; Jacob Hill, Wallerfield; Pine Settlement, Sangre Grande; Race Course Lands, Arima; River Estate, Diego Martin; Ackbarali Trace, Arima; Samaroo Village, Arima; John Boodoo Road, Brazil Village; Milton Village, Couva; Macaulay Road Squattersville; Bon Air North, Arouca and some sites in Port of Spain.

We would be working on those sites in fiscal 2005. It does not mean that actual construction would take place on all those sites during that fiscal year.

Much work, like surveys and planning have to go on the drawing board before a contract is awarded for the physical works. Some of these sites would see physical work during 2005, but all of them would see planning work and consultancies towards regularization to the tune of over 2,000 lots.

In the Port of Spain area we are targeting 1,200 lots in these areas: Mc Cale, Belmont; Debe, Long Circular; Soogrin Trace, Laventille; Dundonald Hill; Upper Leon Street, Laventille; Picton Quarry, Laventille and Waterhole, Cocorite. These are the sites that NHA would be focusing on under the Squatter Regularization Programme.

With respect to temporary squatter location, this issue excited a number of persons during the last fiscal year. We are making; we have made and we would make more provisions in four areas to treat with squatter relocation in the Temporary Location Programme. In Valencia as well as Dookiesingh Trace, St. Augustine; River Estate, Diego Martin and Tarouba, South we would treat with the issue of moving squatters from where they are to another site, to improve their circumstances, as well as to advance the national programme.

Mr. Speaker, there is one particular project I must tell you about. I do not know if you are aware that Diego Martin is the only part in Trinidad and Tobago where there is a significant population without a modern sporting facility. From Roxborough to Point Fortin, Chaguanas to Mayaro, there is some semblance of a sporting facility. Diego Martin with thousands of young persons, east, west and central and not a single proper sporting facility. This matter had the attention of the Cabinet. The problem is that the land that was earmarked for the Diego Martin sporting facility at the northern end of Diego Martin Main Road, especially during a particular time, had become overrun by squatters. We have investigated the matter and found that 72 families are occupying the recreation ground in Diego Martin. The situation is as bad as this. Merry Boys can become national champion in the cricket fraternity, but probably has the worst ground in the world. We would change that. Cabinet has approved the following action. The Ministry of Housing has been instructed by Cabinet to find appropriate location and take steps to relocate those persons who are occupying the site of the Diego Martin recreation ground. In fiscal 2005, as part of the work programme for the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, Cabinet has approved the construction of a modern sporting complex to serve the young people of Diego Martin and environs. [*Desk thumping*]

The staff of NHA is currently engaged in looking for appropriate sites for the relocation of the 72 families who currently occupy the land that has been designated recreation ground in Diego Martin. I want to draw to your attention,

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Mr. Speaker, that the law governing regularization of squatters in this country specifically says that persons who occupy lands required for a public purpose cannot expect regularization. There are two conditions under which regularization ought not to be enjoyed. One is if the site is required for a public purpose, or if the area is environmentally sensitive. In this case, there can be no greater public purpose than the creation of a modern sporting complex in the Diego Martin Valley. During 1991 to 2001, would you believe that the same UNC government that brought the law to Parliament, that said that it is not to be countenanced that persons should occupy lands required for public purpose, proceeded to give letters of comfort to persons who occupied the Diego Martin recreation ground? The current Cabinet is saying that is wrong and it has to be rectified. We would relocate those persons and free up the land for the creation of a well-required facility of a modern sporting complex.

We said the Housing Programme was comprehensive. The bulk of our clientele is people in the lower-to middle-income groups. We have not turned our backs on the 18 per cent of persons who are earning \$6,000 to \$9,000 a month. One of our projects is in Arima. We are specifically building in Arima, a project called—a river runs through it.

3.15 p.m.

We are building a middle-class neighbourhood there because the land was expensive; it is approved for housing; we did not want to use that expensive land for low-cost housing. As there is a demand for middle-income housing, we are building a middle-housing unit on that side. We can justify that.

In the case of persons who own their homes, especially pensioners, who find themselves in the current economy not having any surplus income to do the relevant maintenance, the Cabinet understands that they, too, are part of the housing needs and, therefore, we have the housing grant. We have put that housing grant out. We got \$10 million last year and we have spent virtually all of it. As I am speaking to you now, Mr. Speaker, the last figure I have is that 980 persons have accessed that grant, using up the allocation for 2004. The allocation is extended, I hope, Mr. Minister of Finance. In Tobago, there are 156 persons and in Trinidad, 824 persons. The programme is expected to continue into 2005 and we will screen persons and give them assistance; the requirement being that they must be nationals of Trinidad and Tobago; they must be earning less than \$2,000 a month, from whatever source, and they must either own the home or have proper and sound authorization to live in the home. We screen all applicants and make the grant available.

We also have, in our programme, the improvement in the quality of the units that belong to the older phase. As a result, we have spent some significant sums, putting in new elevators in the nine-storey buildings in St. Joseph Road, Almond Drive, Morvant, Mango Rose and Piccadilly Street, because we had the interesting situation where, while we are hearing all the heartbeats and all the talk about what we should do and should not do, when we put the elevators in the nine-storey building in Morvant, some elderly persons, who had not gone downstairs for eight years were able to go downstairs. While they were trapped upstairs, the money from the Treasury was going to the Cayman Islands, Miami, Timbuktu—*[Interruption]* The Bahamas, too? They have money there, too?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: \$1 million on elevators. *[Interruption]* No, the one in Tobago is mine. Mr. Speaker, we have spent some moneys putting in elevators in those buildings because a nine-storey building has to have an elevator or life in that building is hell on earth.

Mr. Speaker, we are bringing that kind of relief and taking responsibility. The new approach in the NHA is that the NHA is a service-oriented organization. We are the country's state landlord, and we have a responsibility to our tenants and clients, and the NHA is doing that.

Mr. Speaker, NHA's core business is to provide housing units of whatever type and to keep them maintained and to provide the opportunity for persons to own or to access housing, in whatever form, and therefore the core business of managing sewer treatment plants does not properly sit with the NHA. The Cabinet has, therefore, taken the decision that the NHA would refurbish and hand over to WASA all sewer treatment plants associated with NHA projects. That programme is currently on the way. We have done repairs and upgrades at Maloney, Couva, Buen Intento, Malabar, Bon Accord, Buccoo and Bon Air. As we do the upgrades we are going to hand them over to the Water and Sewerage Authority, which is the competent authority under law to operate and manage sewer treatment plants.

Work has commenced on sewer treatment plants in Carlsen Field, Caroni, Tarouba and a lift station in Pleasantville. We are hoping that by the end of this month or thereabouts, we can hand over all of these units to WASA. By the year 2005 we would not have on NHA's responsibility file, the question of sewer treatment plants so we could focus on our core business.

With respect to community development in the housing programme, we set out to foster community development by providing in the communities some

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commercial sites and, therefore, we are building multi-purpose complexes in the major housing estates in Trinidad and Tobago. We have started with Maloney, La Horquetta and Pleasantville. The one at Maloney is almost complete. La Horquetta is on the way; we have some problems there but we will sort them out and very soon we will embark on the one at Pleasantville. In 2005, we will add a few more to that.

The intention being, Mr. Speaker, that these multi-storey complexes will provide community facilities like small daycare centres, gyms, food kiosks, retail outlets, some small office space, probably a small supermarket or two, repair shops, small neighbourhood hardware stores and so on. All that would be inside the communities like Maloney or La Horquetta, creating small business and providing service to the people of the area.

During the last fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, we made tremendous strides with respect to modernizing the NHA's database and the whole operation of the Ministry of Housing. We have installed, in our information technology programme, something called the House Application Fulfilment System (HAFS). This programme tracks the homeowner's application; it assists in the selection of applicants for housing and it facilitates the analysis of the whole programme.

We recently launched a website where a lot of information is available on the housing programme, as I have outlined them. Mr. Speaker, you can—if you have access to a computer and if you use the NHA-provided sites—even apply for an NHA house online. That is what we have today, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] You can apply for an NHA house online and we have made available to the public, staff and kiosk and, the whole system is integrated. We are taking advantage of the benefits of Information Technology (IT).

The Ministry is prepared to tap into the Government's Iris Programme, as soon as it becomes available. Currently, our IT allows us to network across the ministry. The intention is that the Ministry of Housing and the NHA would have the same network so we could access each other's data and, therefore, operate more efficiently as managers of the housing programme.

We expect that in the not too distant future that all our mortgage data and our rental data would be on the computer database and then we will begin to finalize, once and for all, this problem of: who is in an NHA house. We want to be able to tell you, at the touch of a button, what your mortgage condition is; what your rent condition is. We want to be able to track the estate that falls under the NHA.

Mr. Speaker, I must admit, one of the problems that the National Housing Authority has is that over time a culture had developed, where persons accessed

houses or apartments and they are known to the NHA; such a person may die and leave a family in the unit and none of those persons are known to the NHA, yet they occupy the unit. That is not good management of the State's assets. We are currently engaged in a programme to identify the occupiers of each unit to ensure that the NHA is a proper landlord, treating well with its assets, whether from rent or mortgage.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch on the issue of how we have done with respect to this question of rental collection. In 2001/2002, and even before that, it was well known that the collection of rents and mortgages was not going very well. In fact, many persons took the position that because the NHA was not aggressive in collecting its rent or mortgage that they did not have to pay it. That is a fact; I do not have to hide that. Many persons having to pay small sums of money—by not paying the small sums when they were due—accumulated substantial debts to the NHA and today the NHA is being confronted with significant arrears, and we are confronting that situation by asking those persons to pay those arrears, over time, as we make the database current.

In 2002, the NHA collected \$58 million in its revenue stream from its various clients. We have aggressively pursued this issue of ensuring that persons who are fortunate enough to benefit from public housing should discharge their responsibility by paying the sums that they are contracted to pay, be it rent or mortgage. Today, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce we have seen an 18 per cent increase in NHA collection over the last fiscal year, amounting to about \$9 million more than the year before. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, if you bear in mind that most persons in the NHA programme are paying hundreds of dollars for their units, a \$9 million increase is a significant effort, and I congratulate the NHA and staff on that. [*Desk thumping*]

The population must understand that it is not feasible or even required for Government to undertake to house everybody. The Government is not undertaking to have everyone access a house from the State's programme. What the Government is undertaking is to ensure that in Trinidad and Tobago housing is available so that any person who wants a house should be able to access one to the extent of his or her affordability. So the State's role is in providing a significant portion of the required housing, knowing full well that the private sector will continue to provide housing, because housing is a profit centre for many persons.

Last Wednesday I had the opportunity to turn the sod for a Nipdec programme in D'Abadie, where Nipdec, catering to the upper-income group, is building about

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200 units in a modern gated community. There are other persons in the private sector who are building a few hundred here and a few hundred there. At the end of the day those 98,000 units that we are hoping to eliminate from the backlog would be eliminated.

We have every confidence that given the rate at which we are attacking the problem that we would not have to wait until 2020 to say that the housing shortage in Trinidad and Tobago has been comprehensively licked once and for all. We expect that if we build in the next three to five years, 7,000, 8,000 or 9,000 houses per year, and after that we reduce the number to about 3,000 to 5,000 per year, the housing problem would disappear by about 2015.

Mr. Speaker, every new house that is built and occupied means that a vacancy has been created where that family came from. A family who currently lives in a unit; moving into a new unit, leaves a space for somebody else who might not have had that access. So as we make one new house available, we are taking the pressure off persons looking for rentals or purchases because people have moved up in the system. So long before the final house is built in this programme, significant relief will come to those persons who are looking in the public or the private sector for housing.

As we do that, Mr. Speaker, we would create some permanent employment, which we did not have before. You can imagine with each hundred or thousand houses built in the country—those houses require maintenance at one time or another—so a significant number of persons would be engaged in—definitely over a period of time—providing support for that housing stock. As we build up the housing stock, we are building up the asset base of the individuals who would own them. We are building up the skill base of those persons who are learning trades in the programme right now and, therefore, at the end of the day, Trinidad and Tobago will be a far better place, having built 100,000 houses to house persons who require to be housed in the national community. [*Desk thumping*]

This housing shortage is a problem in the country. This problem is being attacked by the Government and is being solved by the Government. This is only one of the ambitions of the Government and it is only one of our targets for Vision 2020. We are saying that as we identify the problems and we focus on them and we use solutions available to us, and we eliminate the problem, Vision 2020 is not a pie in the sky; it is not to be disparaged; it is something that is attainable as it is being attained in the housing sector today. We can demonstrate that we are well on the way to becoming a developed country if we stay with this housing programme because we would soon be able to demonstrate that the

people of Trinidad and Tobago are housed in conditions worthy of the label of a developed country. This is what the programme is all about.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues in the various ministries who interact with us; the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Public Utilities, which is responsible for the planning process at EMA, WASA, T&TEC.

The Ministry of Local Government where the local government bodies are required to play their part and the Ministry of Works and Transport where the planning process requires the involvement of the Ministry of Works and Transport with respect to access routes and so on. The Ministry of National Security; the fire department is involved in our approval process and, of course, the Town and Country Planning Department which comes into being and is doing more than that. It is actually assisting us in our planning process as we plan new sites.

3.30 p.m.

I said earlier on that to this point, we had used many of the sites that were available before. From here on in, we would be required to use more new and greenfield sites. There are two issues that arise here. Firstly, cost, because having to use new sites, we have to put in infrastructure which did not exist before. Some of the older sites had infrastructure that was built at an earlier time. Now we are going on some new sites and the cost of infrastructure will have to be absorbed in some way. As I said before, the PNM Government understands the role of a house in the creation of a family and the role of families in the creation of a society and, therefore, as trustees of the people's money, if the Government absorbs some or most or all of the infrastructure costs and let persons pay for the construction cost, then we would be building a country, sharing the burden and at the end of the day, we can all be proud of what we can accomplish in Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerald Yetming (*St. Joseph*): Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West started by saying that he wanted to respond to the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition and said the Leader of the Opposition, after three hours, in fact, said nothing. The hon. Member for Diego Martin West took 15 minutes of his time to say exactly that.

The question of housing will be dealt with comprehensively by one of our Members and I would only say three things. Firstly, I wish the Government and the Minister of Housing well, because contrary to their opinion, we want to see, I want to see, everybody in Trinidad and Tobago housed.

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I would advise that the Minister of Housing should not be directing his concerns about the lack of housing to the poor to the Opposition. He should be directing his explanations to his own supporters who have been publicly airing their very, very deep concerns and are upset with the Member for Diego Martin West on the lack of attention, in their view, to housing for the poor. I will only ask that they stop putting housing on prime agricultural lands and in the allocation of housing that they be fair and transparent.

Mr. Speaker, before I begin on the budget itself, I want to make the general observation that there is a great disconnect between what the Government says and what is fact. There is a disconnect between what they say and what they do. There is a disconnect between what they say and when they do it; and there is a great disconnect between the problems and challenges that we face and the solutions and prescriptions that they prescribe. That disconnect brings into question the credibility and the competence or the incompetence of the Government. How much closer are we after three years to this Vision 2020? After three years in office I would say, and I think the population would agree, that few things have changed. In fact, in many areas things have gotten worse and that is after \$60 billion of expenditure. It is as if time had stood still for three years in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, in the *Guardian* of Thursday, August 26, 2004 in an article by the Chamber of Commerce and I quote:

“Almost all areas of national life for which Government is responsible are in some measure of disarray: national security, health, education, infrastructure, and social services.”

Time has stood still. Poverty is still reported at 30 per cent of the population. Unemployment. When we left office in 2001, I believe it was 10.5 per cent. The UNC brought it down from about 18.7 per cent in 1995 to 10.5 per cent at the end of 2001.

The *Review of the Economy 2004* produced by the Government, released last week with the budget, on page 15 said that:

“... the first half of the fiscal year 2003/2004, unemployment rate... went down from 10.8 per cent to 10.2 per cent...”

That is in the *Review of the Economy* produced by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It went on to say that:

“The primary employment generating sectors were Community, Social and Personal Services.”

Translate that to mean CEPEP.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I just want to correct him. It says the first half of fiscal 2003/2004 which means October 01 to March 31.

Mr. G. Yetming: What is the difference? Let me repeat it. *The Review of the Economy 2004* reported on page 15 that:

“the first fiscal half of 2003/2004, the unemployment rate ...was 10.2 per cent down from 10.8 per cent ...and that the primary employment generating sectors were Community, Social and Personal services.”

In the IMF, Article 1V, Consultation Report dated July 29, 2004, not yet official and public, they are reporting unemployment for the first half of 2004 at above 10 per cent. So that for the past three years between 2001 and 2004, nothing has changed. In fact, in the Prime Minister’s Budget Speech he made reference to unemployment, explaining the 7.8 per cent. He said that between the first quarter and the second quarter, 22,000 new jobs were created; 4,600 in construction which could be believable because of the actions of the National Housing Authority in construction and what have you, 4,200 in banking, insurance and real estate.

I want to know if in Trinidad and Tobago, with four banks and no more than a handful of large insurance companies, where would we have created 4,200 jobs in banking, insurance and real estate between the end of the first quarter and the second quarter of 2004. Three thousand, six hundred in manufacturing. Where have we created 3,600 jobs in that three-month period and then 3,400 in energy? I would leave it there. That is why I talk about the “disconnect” between what is said and what is fact and when the Member for Oropouche speaks on labour, he would further lend to the point we are making, that the 7.8 per cent is a hoax. [Desk thumping] Time has stood still!

Crime: The Prime Minister in his last Budget Statement still speaks of the unprecedented level of criminal activities plaguing the country, in spite of the fact that he reports that the special crime unit, under Brigadier Joseph, is fully operational. Nothing has changed.

The Chamber of Commerce in the *Guardian* of August 26, 2004 said this issue of crime is a devastating one to the entire country. It is also one which is reaching proportions which seriously affect not only personal life, but economic stability, threatening economic stability, and that BP has to pay a hardship allowance for its people coming from abroad to work in Trinidad and Tobago. In this paradise, in this land blessed by God, with everything to offer, BP has to attract people from abroad by paying them a hardship allowance.

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Under Infrastructure: In the 2004 budget it spoke of the National Transportation Study which will begin this month. The Budget Statement of 2004 delivered in October of 2003, the exact language used in the budget was that a National Transportation Study will begin this month. That is what it says. In 2003, in the last budget, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance said that they have just awarded a contract to have undertaken a national transportation study. So that one year before, it said it will begin this month and now we are being told, “We have just awarded a contract and it will take 18 months.” I am talking about the disconnect between what is said today and what is said tomorrow; the disconnect between what is said and what is done. And in the meantime, while we are awaiting this study which will take 18 months, whatever decisions will flow from that study, we are in for gridlock on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago for the next couple of years, and in the meantime, no interchange. We were told in the last budget that the interchange will be accelerated this year. You were in office for three years, why did you not accelerate it last year, the year before? You do not care about the fact that thousands of people are wasting hours on the highway. You come three years later, and are now talking about “we would accelerate it this year”. Time stood still in Trinidad and Tobago for the past three years.

Flooding ever more after three years! No improvement!

Tobago. The air and sea bridge. There has been temporary relief over the past couple months with respect to the air bridge because you wet-leased three aircraft. We do not know the cost of wet-leasing these three aircraft with all these foreigners flying them and serving, and what have you. No mention was made in this budget on what is your immediate plan, not even medium-term, long-term plan.

Mr. Speaker, everything that I say here did not only come from the Budget Statement but it is also coming from the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2005—2007*. In fact, when they are responding and they are seeking to justify their actions and seeking to say that there are policy positions that they have adopted, let them quote from the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2005—2007* to support their arguments. I do not want them going home and coming up with all kinds of airy-fairy things and presenting it to this Parliament and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago as policies to support the budget when they do not exist. Do not perpetuate the disconnect.

What about the sea bridge? The Prime Minister announced after they have talked about some fast-ferry for the two years and I quote:

“In a matter of weeks, the first phase in the long-term improvement will begin.”

There has been a lot of adverse publicity on this sea bridge for the *Panorama*, the *Beauport* going on dry dock and when it is not going on dry dock.

3.45 p.m.

But he said, in a matter of weeks, there would be something happening. He chose not to say what it would be. We look in the *Social and Economic Policy Framework* document and we read that they recently agreed to the acquisition of two conventional roll-on roll-off boats and a cargo vessel—no information, no particulars, no cost, nothing to report to Parliament.

There are no new schools. After three years, the Biche High School is still closed. There are no new pre-schools and no improvement in health delivery.

In 2004, the Minister of Finance spoke about accelerating their review of the National Health Insurance Scheme with a view to early implementation. In 2005, he said absolutely nothing. We do not know whether they are not pursuing a National Health Insurance Plan or whether they are proceeding to free health care for everybody in this country. If they are going to do that, they should say it and tell us whether that course of action is sustainable. In general, there has been no improvement over the last three years in the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago after \$60 billion. It is as if time stood still.

I want to deal with the budget as presented. It is interesting and appropriate that from the first page—and this budget is also based on this—there were three main pillars of economic strategy. Everything in the budget is based on the three main pillars of their economic strategy.

The first pillar has to do with the energy sector, which shall continue to be the main engine of growth and development in Trinidad and Tobago. Nobody can argue with that. It speaks of maximizing returns from that sector by increasing participation in the value chain. I can only say that when they decide to proceed with investments in that value chain, I would expect that they would come to Parliament to present their plans on this participation, whether it is in shipping, in the regasification plants or whatever. I want there to be full transparency. You know the word “transparency” is one they use frequently in this budget, but it is not reflected in their action. I ask, in respect of their increasing participation in the value chain, that they be extremely transparent with us.

In terms of maximizing the returns from this energy sector, which is the main engine of growth and development, they spoke of an increasing revenue take from that sector through a new energy tax regime. I will deal with that later. They also talk about attracting foreign investment in exploration to increase reserves and our

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energy person will deal with that because I think our energy person would show that for the past three years there has been no increase in the reserves available to us.

The second pillar of this economic strategy—and I will quote from the budget statement—is “to diversify the economy to reduce dependence on the energy sector and to achieve self-sustaining growth”. In this budget, compared to the other budgets of this administration, for the first time, the words “diversify the economy” appear. The reason for it, to quote from the budget, is “the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance acknowledges that oil and gas are non-renewable assets”.

If I could use a reaction from our colleague, Sen. Robin Montano, and friend of the Member for San Fernando East, he would say, “Really! Oil and gas are renewable assets?” Any time we have raised, in this Parliament, the urgent need to have a plan of action to diversify the economy, we get arguments in the Parliament and outside of the Parliament that would suggest that the thinking on that side, from the Prime Minister, is that oil and gas in this country would last forever. He kept talking about this complex geology and what BP hive system tells him. For the first time this year, in the three main pillars of their economic policy, he talks of diversifying the economy.

I quote from the *Business Express* of Wednesday, October 06, 2004, which is attributed to the Member for Diego Martin Central. It says that Trade Minister Ken Valley has said that the time had come for Government to look seriously at diversification of the economy by creating more opportunities in the non-energy sector. This is the Member for Diego Martin Central saying that the time has come. The time came 20 years ago! He is now acknowledging it. I assume because he has realized that the time has come, it is now reflected in this budget.

In the budget of 2001, presented on September 14, 2001, the Minister of Finance at the time, announced that, as a critical economic development plan for the country, there was to be a clearly defined strategy to diversify the economy, and he announced five planks for the diversification. They have gone a step further and named six. We have no argument with that. We agree that it is critically important, not only because of oil and gas being depleting assets and non-renewable, but we need to create jobs. We have been saying that and everybody knows that the energy sector, while very capital intensive, creates few jobs. They have now realized, three years after they assumed office, that they need to do it.

His first plank is traditional manufacturing. This is what they said in the budget of 2003. In 2003, they announced that they would implement a trade assistance programme geared towards enhancing private sector competitiveness. In 2004,

they were discussing the elements of a trade assistance programme with TTMA. One year later, in 2005, they are talking about beginning to implement a trade sector support programme. Whether that trade sector support programme is the same as the trade assistance programme, I do not know.

I would say that if you look at the *Social and Economic Policy Framework* document, page 25 [*Interruption*]—I want you to read it when you get up to respond, and explain it. It says that the Government would continue implementation of the institutional programme, strengthening, not only the human resource capacity in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, but also formulating policy.

Nothing they say here will encourage the entrepreneur or the manufacturer out there to use this plank to grow. Nothing! In fact, they talk about strengthening the ministry, but what about TIDCO? In 2003, in the budget, it said that all their actions would be supplemented by appropriate business facilitation measures through a reformed TIDCO. Less than two years later, TIDCO is about to die because they are going to create a Tourism Development Agency and they are moving all the trade development into the ministry.

Where is the planning? One year they say that there would be a reformed TIDCO, and one year later, they kill it. How could we move ahead in this country like that? Then, while they are talking about that, they set up a Caricom trade facilitation fund at \$100 million and none for the local manufacturer. [*Interruption*] If they have it, they should announce it in the Parliament; but it is not in the budget document and it is not in their *Social and Economic Policy Framework* document.

The point is that while manufacturing has been identified as a key driver and a job creator, no new measures have been announced to attract and encourage investment in the manufacturing sector in Trinidad and Tobago. If they have identified six areas, whether it be yachting, printing and packaging, food and beverage and the film industry as areas within manufacturing for development, what precise measures are they planning to introduce to really make it attractive for the film producer in Hollywood, or from wherever, to come to Trinidad, or for the local entrepreneur to invest in food and beverage and so on? They have announced nothing new.

It is not good enough to say that manufacturing will be the major plank and not say anything to support it. There is a serious disconnect. While they talk about manufacturing being a major plank for the diversification of the economy, they intend to remove part of the surcharge on chicken parts with a threat to remove all. They prefer, on the one hand, to talk about developing the manufacturing

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sector as a major plank for diversification, but they are prepared, on the other hand, to kill an entire poultry industry.

Why not sit with the manufacturers and determine what subsidies, maybe, they could benefit from to keep that industry alive and to keep the cost of chicken down? Why not remove the monopoly on feed coming into the country from the National Flour Mills? They did not do that, neither did they treat with rice and flour, but they are prepared to shut down an entire poultry industry.

4.00 p.m.

Why, when the Government was negotiating the trade deal with Costa Rica, pasta was removed from the list? Pasta, which the UNC government, under Mervyn Assam, protected from the imports coming out of Costa Rica—which nearly killed the industry here in the negotiation of that agreement with Costa Rica; it is going to happen once more—will come into Trinidad and Tobago and kill the pasta manufacturing industry here and 100 persons will be out of jobs. Where is the consistency? There is a total disconnect between the Government's plan to diversify and these kinds of actions.

Agriculture has been on the decline for the past two years; a matter of fact. In 2003, the budget statement spoke of greater use of technology, particularly in the sugar industry. I want the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, when he gets up, to tell us where that greater use of technology is. They spoke of a higher level of mechanization, cultivation and automation in manufacturing. They spoke of a greater reliance on agro-processing as we stimulate agriculture production. Where is the greater reliance on agro-processing? I want the Government to tell us. The Government said that it will concentrate on mini-technologies in agro-processing. Show us where you have concentrated on mini-technologies for agro-processing in 2003.

In 2004, the Government spoke of high priority to mechanization of the sector. The statement said that the Government will immediately introduce new and appropriate technologies, improve infrastructure and generate a wave of new investment in the sector. I want the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to tell us where they generate this wave.

Mr. Singh: Get something and wave.

Mr. G. Yetming: The Government talked about reforming the fiscal regime for agriculture in 2004. I want them to show us where. They say that Caroni will play a pivotal role in facilitating the new thrust. Show us where. It continues. They talk about providing greater support for farmers and gave a man a cheque

for \$30 or \$40 for two and four acres of crops lost through flooding. Greater support to farmers.

In 2005, when I tried to find out what is in the budget statement and what is in the *Social and Economic Policy Framework* document for agriculture, nothing new is said, the same language over and over, translating into absolutely nothing. That is why I talk about the disconnect.

Tourism is another plank for diversification. I should admit that manufacturing, agriculture and tourism were announced in the budget of September 2001 as major planks for diversification. We do not have a disagreement with that. In 2003, for tourism, the document said that it was critical to the success of the tourism drive that the Tourism Development Act, 2000, be reviewed. We will concede that the amendments to the Tourism Development Act, 2000 were laid on the Table one week ago. I have not examined the details of the amendments to understand whether the provisions in those amendments will do anything for tourism. One hopes that it will. We will allow that to take its course. In 2005, they use the language of accelerating efforts to market Trinidad and Tobago internationally. The Government said that it proposes to attract major brands for investment. To be generous, we will wait to see and we will wait to debate the amendment to the Tourism Development Act, 2000.

The interesting thing for tourism is culture, arts and entertainment. When I saw tourism I said fine. I tried to find out what is in it to spur and develop that sector. I went to look for culture, arts and entertainment, to see what the Government intends to do there too, hopefully to support this new thrust into tourism. Mr. Speaker, in this budget statement, there is absolutely nothing said about culture, arts and entertainment. In the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2005—2007*, there is absolutely nothing said about culture, arts and entertainment. What is wrong with it? Culture, arts and entertainment is more than providing subsidies to failed calypso tents and failed soca monarch competitions. It is more than that, and you do not address it! In the 2003 budget, under the heading “culture, arts and entertainment” it said that the Government was developing a national strategic plan for culture.

In 2004, the language used was: “they will develop”. The year before they were developing. In 2004, it was reduced to: “We will develop a strategic plan for the development of culture and the creative arts.” In 2005, nothing was said. In 2003, the Government spoke about an academy for the performing arts on the Princes Building grounds. It was repeated in 2004 and now we are hearing nothing about the Performing Arts Centre.

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Mr. Speaker, this is really disingenuous. In continuing to talk about these planks for diversification, there is a heading called “New Areas of Focus”. I am quoting:

“Mr. Speaker, a country cannot progress or secure its future, without constantly seeking to chart new directions. This Budget reflects that creative drive of this administration,...”

What are these new areas of focus to reflect this new creative drive of this administration? The first one is the Wallerfield Industrial Park. What is creative about that? What is new about it? We announced that as one of the five planks for the diversification in 2001. The Government cannot come for the 2005 budget and talk about the creative genius of this administration, technology industry and the Wallerfield Industrial Park as a new focus and a new plank for diversification. This is the disconnect between what is said, and what is reality.

The second creative genius idea is that the financial sector will be the other area of focus. Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is now the financial capital of the region. Trinidad and Tobago’s banks are now exploring beyond the Caribbean region and getting into Santo Domingo and Costa Rica. The idea of Trinidad and Tobago being the Pan-Caribbean centre for the region is not too far off. I would say one thing; they will do it without the Government. This process was started by the private sector banks since 1995. I was a part of it. The Member for Diego Martin Central knows that. Without the help of the Government, they built it over the past nine or ten years. The reason they are out there—what is required is the further improvement of the regulatory framework. The White Paper that they produced recently is clearly the step in the right direction, however late it might be. The reform of the financial sector started way back before 2000. The Member for Diego Martin Central said 1993. He left in 1995 and came back in 2001 and it still has not been done. That is why I talk about the disconnect between what the Government says and when it is done.

Mr. Valley: You all did nothing!

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. G. Yetming: Mr. Speaker, this great new idea and creative genius administration with the financial sector will happen. Just leave the banks alone.

While I am on that topic, I want to talk about FCB. Leave the bank alone! Our reputation and position as the financial centre of the region will come to absolutely zero. In fact, this whole economy, with all the oil and gas, could be seriously affected if they continue to interfere with First Citizens Bank. This economy could be brought to its knees. The Government had a man of the stature

of Ken Gordon, whom they invited to be chairman of the bank. He had to write to the junior Minister to complain to her about the tone of her correspondence. This is a junior Minister, who now reach, so to speak. This man of Caribbean repute, leading a major financial institution that the Government invited to lead, had to write the Minister to complain about the tone of her correspondence and that the Minister should be writing with some civility. Imagine that!

He went further than that. He had complained, in writing, not just to the Prime Minister, but to the very Minister, about what that micromanagement of that bank would do. He talked about undermining confidence and destroying the excellent prospects of that bank in its thrust outside of Trinidad and Tobago. He warned her that what she was doing threatened to do significant damage to the bank. We did not put him there, so why are you ignoring him? To me, it is a very, very serious charge when a person of the repute of Ken Gordon would level a charge of micromanagement and interference, to the point where he is telling you that you are undermining the confidence in the institution and that you are threatening to do damage. If the confidence is undermined in FCB and there is a repeat of what transpired with NCB, we are in deep trouble in this country.

Instead, the Minister of Finance when he got the complaint from Mr. Gordon—the first time around when she interfered with respect to the bonus payment to staff—intervened. Fortunately, the ministerial team handling public sector negotiations overruled her decision; a decision formerly taken by the Member for Diego Martin Central.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we do not know what other areas of micromanagement took place. It was not only Mr. Ken Gordon who came out and complained, but another director came out and complained about that matter. If that micromanagement and interference in the bank is allowed to continue; today it would be on simple matters and tomorrow—within one year the Minister did those things, could you imagine if the Minister is there two or three years down the road? The Minister would be telling them who to grant loans to, and whose loans to write off. That is not such a farfetched idea. We know about it; it has happened before. If you do not want to have a collapse—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. G. Yetming: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Members for extending my time. I want to close on this First Citizens Bank (FCB) matter by urging—before I make that point, I just want to say that the Government has said absolutely nothing in this budget, except for some administrative statements on the whole question of the state sector and what it intends to do with that sector. The Government's policy is unless a company is of strategic importance, it would be divested.

In previous announcements, we have heard about further divestment in Caroni (1975) Limited—the citrus area, cattle and so forth—and in this budget, absolutely no reference was made with respect to that state sector, and any further divestment. I want to urge the Government that before we have junior Ministers interfering with FCB, to the point where it could put this country's economy at risk, the Government should take an early position in divesting the FCB.

Presently, the Government is, in fact, subsidizing the FCB. The FCB is holding about \$1.5 billion of paper from Taurus which is backed by the Government. On that paper, the Government pays through Taurus, interest of 4½ per cent below prime, with a floor rate of 11½ per cent. So, if 4½ per cent is below prime, is below 11½ per cent, the Government is paying 11½ per cent. Eleven and a half per cent is twice what the Government is presently paying on its paper in the marketplace. Therefore, for this \$1.5 billion of Taurus paper, FCB is benefiting to the tune of about \$100 million. The Government could sell FCB and close down Taurus because all the liabilities of Taurus could be raised from that, and we could reduce our debt stock to below the 50 per cent that we are looking for, so that we would not have to continue to subsidize Taurus. I am not too sure that every year the growth in FCB is offsetting the subsidy that the Government is paying through these Taurus people.

Mr. Speaker, while we are on that state enterprise sector, I just want to touch very quickly on the Port. In 2005, the *Social and Economic Policy Framework* talked about restructuring the Port into several strategic business units and the Government would look at finding a preferred investor. I am only going to suggest that the work on the Port is moving too slowly. After three years, today, we are worse off with that Port. The reason I want to spend a few minutes on this matter is that the Port is contributing, in some way, to the increase in the cost of living in this country. If we do not clean up our act on the Port, not only our local importers—with the price of goods coming into the country—but our local manufacturers are going to be severely affected; not just only getting their raw materials in, but also the cost of the raw materials coming in, and the time frame within which it would take to get to them. There would be no more just-in-time

ordering for them, which is one of the mechanisms or strategies manufacturers use to reduce their cost, but their exports are also going to be affected.

While the Member for Diego Martin Central would be setting up committees to deal with the extent to which the Port of Port of Spain and Trinidad and Tobago could become a major transshipment port—whilst his committee would be looking at that matter—we would be losing transshipment business by the day. This year, it took the Government five months to appoint a new board.

How could a company of such strategic importance run properly without a board for five months? There are problems at executive management; there are problems with high overtime; there are problems with the port facilities—space limitation, congestion and the works. I would not spend any time on that matter.

The fact that we have lost transshipment business, there is less service coming into Trinidad and Tobago. We are paying higher freight rates and the poor people in Trinidad and Tobago are now paying for that. I would hate that we would reach the point where our manufacturers would have to close down or cut back on their operations, because they cannot get raw materials because the Port is at a standstill.

Mr. Speaker, diversification is extremely critical. I was extremely pleased to have seen in the Budget Statement where the Government has actually identified divestment as the second pillar of its economic strategy. I am very happy to see that. I want to urge the Government that all the sectors which were identified—we support all the pillars that the Government has announced. I would just like to see some meat on to this matter that the Government has outlined there. I did not see it in the budget statement and I did not see it in the *Social and Economic Policy Framework*.

I want to move now to taxation. After we have strengthened the energy sector and the non-energy sector through the diversification process, the challenge is to collect the taxes. If we are not efficient in collecting the taxes, whatever we do in those areas—we could bring in all the energy companies from abroad that we want to produce all the LNG and so forth—if the Government does not collect the taxes right, the Government would not be able to do the things it has to do to take this country forward.

In last year's budget statement, the Minister of Finance had this to say in support of the tax reform measures. He said that there was no doubt that there was a considerable amount of leakage in the tax system, and that the Government was not collecting its fair share of revenues. That was the exact quotation from the Minister of Finance, and the Minister was absolutely correct.

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The reform of the tax sector started way back with the UNC government. The reform of taxation at the Inland Revenue Department started a long time ago. I would leave it like that. [*Laughter*] In 2003, the Minister of Finance said that a proposal for the establishment of a Revenue Authority was before Cabinet. That Revenue Authority was to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness with respect to the collection of taxes. We have no argument with that matter. But, in 2003, the proposal was before Cabinet.

In 2004, the budget says that the Government is in the process of identifying an implementation team for the establishment of the long overdue Revenue Authority. So, in the first year, 2003, this matter was before Cabinet; in 2004 they were looking to identify persons to establish this Revenue Authority; and in 2005 the Government has said nothing about this matter. Is this Revenue Authority not on the cards? Was the idea dismissed? I think because of the critical nature of the function of that authority, something ought to be said. I would expect that someone would get up later and talk about this matter. I am only pointing out—on the basis of us being in Opposition and representing the interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago—that I could only go by what the Government tells me.

In 2003, the budget said that work was nearing completion for the implementation of a new fiscal regime for gas, as well as adjusting the fiscal regime for oil, to reflect the new realities. At the time, it was indicated that the last time that the oil and gas taxation regime was reviewed was in 1992. All of us accepted the fact that the oil and gas taxation regime needed to be reviewed.

In fact, in the UNC's administration, we had the International Monetary Fund (IMF) coming down and working with our technical persons to try to come up with a new oil and gas regime. In 2003, the Minister of Finance acknowledged in his budget statement that the work was nearing completion.

In 2004, the Minister of Finance said that it was imperative that the country gets its fair share of economic rent from these non-renewable resources. The Minister spoke of a reputable international firm of consultants being engaged in May 2003. That international firm of consultants submitted an interim report. So, up to the time the Minister delivered his budget statement in October 2003, an interim report had already been submitted to the Government by this international firm of consultants which was engaged since May of 2003. The Minister went on to say that a final report was expected in four weeks. He then went on to make the bold announcement—which took the industry by surprise—that a new regime for the oil and gas sector would take effect from January 01, 2004.

We acknowledged the fact that a new regime needed a lot of time for study, and the Government needed to talk to the players. We do not have a problem with that. To me, it was irresponsible for the Minister of Finance to have announced—prior to receiving his final report which he said was expected in four weeks—to the national population—including the same energy companies that we are concerned about—that a new regime would take place from January 01. We are now being told that the discussions are proceeding, and it is not likely that any final new regime would take place for another six months.

I just want to point to the fact that there is a disconnection between what is being said today and what would be said tomorrow, and what is said today and what would be done tomorrow. While I am on the subject of oil taxation, I want to express a concern with respect to a statement made by the Minister of Finance that a review of the tax liability of oil companies—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea and we would be resuming at 5.10 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. G. Yetming: Mr. Speaker, I was on the point of revenue collection and taxation reform, following on the policy announced by the Government on the three pillars it was going to use to develop the economy. I spoke about the Revenue Authority and the fact that in the 2005 budget nothing has been said about the Revenue Authority, after having spoken about it in the two budgets they presented previously. I spoke about the review of the oil and gas taxation regime. I think we have said enough about that.

I was on the point of a statement made in the budget that a review of the tax liability of oil companies, over the past six years, was to be done, as provided for in the current tax laws. I was simply going to make the point that if this is currently provided for in the tax laws, why mention it in the budget statement at all? There must have been something behind making that statement in the budget speech. It sounded to me as a threat to the oil companies; that is how it came across to me; as if we suspect them of doing something, because there was no connect, in my view, between that and any review or reform of the oil and gas taxation regime. I wondered whether the Government was using the Board of Inland Revenue to do its dirty work.

I remember the junior Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Sen. Sahadeo, making a statement some time ago, when she was questioned on the taxation

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being paid by oil companies or with respect to the Revenue Stabilization Fund. She said that the foreign oil companies have their own agendas. I thought that was not a very appropriate statement to make, in the circumstances. Followed with this statement in the budget, you really have to wonder.

Continuing on the subject of revenue collection, in 2004 the Government said in its budget statement that value added tax to GDP was declining since 1998 and that the system was encouraging evasion and fraud. The Minister of Finance went on to say that a committee had been established to undertake a comprehensive review of the VAT regime, with a view to streamlining the system and improving its revenue performances. In fact, following on that announcement, I have urged that in doing the comprehensive review, consideration should be given to reducing the rate of VAT and not damaging the integrity of the VAT system and in exchange for leaving the personal rate of tax the way it is, because if you reduce the rate of VAT, all the people in the country would benefit, including the poorest of the poor.

In the 2005 budget, nothing has been said about the comprehensive review of VAT. Is it dead? Has the review been done? What is the outcome of that review? Bearing in mind that revenue collection is such a critical element of the system, so to speak, one would expect that if you undertake a comprehensive review of VAT, you would report to us. So one would expect that in responding to our contribution to this debate, we would be told something on this VAT issue not said in the budget statement or in the Social and Economic Policy Framework document.

Just as an aside, Mr. Speaker, I remember when I delivered the 2001 budget and I announced that I was removing VAT on saltfish, the Members on the other side, including the Member for San Fernando East, who was then Leader of the Opposition, made big fun of it; now it is mauby, with a reduction of the CET on split peas. You are reducing the cost of dhal and mauby; politically correct. [*Laughter*]

On this question of tax reform, in 2005, not having said anything about the VAT review, we are now being told about a non-energy tax reform committee having been established in the Ministry of Finance to develop a plan of action aimed at modernizing and improving the efficiency of the tax regime. All of that we applaud. I only mentioned it so that, in the context of the lack of announcement on the whole question of tax reform, it appears to be fairly disjointed, in my respectful view. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: Just before you close, could you please restate the reference to this comprehensive review of the VAT system. Where did you get that?

Mr. G. Yetming: In the 2004 budget statement, the exact quote was:

“A committee has been established to undertake a comprehensive review of the VAT regime with a view to streamlining the system and improving its revenue performance.”

The third pillar for the economic strategy of the Government is ensuring that the benefits of economic growth and development are shared by all sections of the population. The question is: How are we spending our wealth from the energy sector, the non-energy sector, the diversification and an efficient tax collection for the sustainable benefit of all our people? When we begin to examine, whether it be security, education, health care or infrastructure, as I mentioned in the earlier part of my contribution, we have not improved over the past three years. I am not too sure we can claim to be producing quality citizens through our education system; and how long is it going to take the Government to do that?

In the budget, in line with this pillar, the Minister of Finance said:

“This year's budget will contain specific measures to improve the welfare of the poor, the aged, the less fortunate, and the retired, those at the lowest rung of the income ladder.”

Absolutely commendable; absolutely correct, but the prescriptions are not all correct; there is a disconnect. The other concern that we have is: Are all these prescriptions sustainable in the medium term? My next question is: If you are going to announce specific measures to improve on all these areas, why did you not announce specific measures in all the other areas when we talked about the diversification of the economy, which is what I have argued is lacking in this budget presentation?

Mr. Speaker, when there is a lot of money, whether in your private life or in government, anybody could spend it; it is easy to spend when you have a lot of money. When you have a little money, you have to make hard choices. Today, we have a lot of money. What is not happening is that we are not applying wisdom and prudence in how that money, that windfall that we are experiencing, is to be spent. After \$2.7 billion in social expenditure, what percentage of this will really reach the people for whom this money is intended? How much of this \$2.7 billion is going to be wasted through corrupt practices?

When we hear who gets the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) contracts and who controls gangs in the Unemployment Relief Programmes and so on, how much of this money will reach? If we are spending \$2.7 billion in the social, let us suppose of that amount

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\$1 billion is in poverty alleviation and those kinds of programmes, why do we still have people in this country suffering? Clearly, all of this \$1 billion is not reaching down to meet the objective, that it should reach everyone, those at the lowest rung.

I shall read from the presentation of the Minister of Finance' in the budget debate of last year, October 15, 2003. I shall quote from three different parts of his presentation. He said:

“We also propose to examine a system that would target our social benefits to the people for whom they are really intended.”

He acknowledged that it was not reaching all the people for whom they are intended and they intend to examine the system. He went on to say:

“Having increased expenditure at the social level, the problem is that the hotspots in this country are, by and large, in the East-West Corridor, therefore, if you were to allocate resources to the hotspots, as in investment to social stability, you run the risk of being accused of racism.”

My concern, at the time, with those hot spots was: Who are you rewarding when you allocate all the moneys you are allocating to these hotspots? Are you allowing the moneys in the social spending to reach all the people who deserve it?

Mr. Speaker, he went on to say:

“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.”

This is an acknowledgment.

“But we have moved so fast trying to intervene so rapidly, particularly in the areas which are hotspots, that, on occasion, when such an allegation is levelled at us, it is not entirely without foundation, but our objectives and reasons are what they are said to be, our intentions are honourable.”

I was looking forward in this budget to be told what is the result of this review and the amount of time you were supposed to spend trying to make the programmes more accessible.

5.25 p.m.

In the budget statement, I read some vague statements about decentralization. What you did not do, in my respectful view, is that as a follow up to that, recognizing

that charges at times, real or perceived, of racism arise out of that weakness, so important that one would have expected in this year's budget, you would have clearly defined—having studied this for the past year—what specific steps are being taken to correct them.

All we heard in your budget statement was about a manual on social programmes and services which is now available. This manual on social services is something which we have raised on this side. It in fact started here since 2001 in our utterances and the point was being made then that we have these Cable TV programmes coming to us on three newspapers every week, why can we not have a manual on social programmes coming to us every quarter so all can know what these programmes are and to whom they should go if they want to access them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to close by saying that the benefits of our economic growth and development are neither being experienced nor shared by all sections of the population and, in that respect, the Government is failing us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a brief intervention in this debate to discuss the issue of rising prices generally, and specifically, the escalating cost of food and this Government's response to the situation.

Mr. Speaker, the rate of inflation in the year 2003 was 3.8 per cent; to August, 2004 the overall rate was 3.3 per cent. Fairly reasonable yardsticks by international measures but, unfortunately, there is a situation that has been developing not recently, but some time ago, in the food sector where the escalation in the cost of food has reached levels beyond the tolerance of most salaries.

The price of food in 2003 escalated by some 13.8 per cent and in the 12 months to August, 2004 by 10.5 per cent. Against that, allow me to read from a note that was prepared by the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, *A Note on Inflation in Trinidad and Tobago*.

This note was prepared in response to a conference that I had called among a number of stakeholders in August of this year and essentially it dealt with the supply chain. It dealt with the shippers association. We had representatives from the Port Authority, Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association (TTMA), the Supermarkets Association, the Chamber of Commerce, labour unions, the Board of Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise Department and we also had from the financial sector, the Central Bank being represented.

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This was the paper they had prepared to present to the conference and with your leave I would like to read a small part of it. It says:

“A core mandate of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago is that of internal and external prices stability. Price stability is defined in qualitative terms as the lowest rate of inflation which would have virtually no effect on economic behaviour. Price stability is achieved primarily through the conduct of monetary policy.”

It goes on to say.

Inflation is defined as a persistent rise in general price level. Over the last five years, inflation rate has averaged below 5 per cent. Trinidad and Tobago has the lowest inflation rate among Caricom countries which have a floating exchange regime.

Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname posted inflation rates at 5.1, 16.8 and 14 per cent respectively for 2003. The most volatile part of the RPI has been food.

Core inflation has averaged less than 2 per cent over the last five years.”

And therefore, they conclude that Trinidad and Tobago can be considered a relatively low inflation economy.

They talked about the factors impinging upon price stability and the title of the paragraph is “Exchange Rate Dynamics”.

“An examination of exchange rates between Trinidad and Tobago and its major trading partners for the 12 months to June 2004, illustrated that although the TT dollar had remained stable as against the US, the loss of value of the US against other major currencies has impacted on the cost of imported selected items originating from outside of the United States, especially food.

A significant proportion of the inputs into the production of goods and services is imported, and as such inflation is driven by cost push rather than demand pull factors.

As a result, a substantial proportion of the inflation experienced is imported and to some extent is beyond the control of local authorities.

The exchange rate between January 2003 and June 2004 has depreciated in this way against the British pound, 13.2 per cent, the Canadian dollar, 13.6 per cent, the euro, 14.2 per cent, the Australian dollar, 17.2 per cent, Ireland 11.7 per cent, New Zealand 17 per cent, Netherlands 11.7 per cent, and Japan 12.3 per cent.”

This is against the US dollar and effectively against our dollar. So that everything we import from these regions had been affected directly by the exchange rate.

Mr. Speaker, against that background, I would like to put the context of what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago in the context of what is happening worldwide.

The Earth Policy Institute in an article of April this year indicated that worldwide grain stocks are at the lowest level for 30 years, and the last time this occurred in 1972—1974, the price of wheat and rice doubled on the international market.

Further, in each of the last four years, international global consumption of grain has exceeded the production and, therefore, the world has been drawing down on the stocks of grain for the past four consecutive years.

By April of this year, wheat was up 38 per cent, corn 36 per cent, rice 39 per cent and soy bean 100 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, in China, grain is up 30 per cent, vegetable oil 26 per cent, meat 15 per cent and eggs 19 per cent.

In the United States, the American Farm Bureau as a market basket survey which monitors the US retail prices of some 16 basic food items in 32 states indicated that the rise in their market basket in the past year is 10.5 per cent.

Eggs are 29 per cent in the United States, vegetable oil 23 per cent, ground beef 18 per cent, whole fryers 18 per cent, pork chops 10 per cent.

In Russia, bread shortages in February this year became so acute that the government had to levy an export tax on wheat of 35 euros per tonne.

In the late 1980s Saudi Arabia decided that it should be self-sufficient in wheat and launched a very ambitious plan to extract water from the underground aquifers and it worked.

In 1980, the production of wheat in Saudi Arabia was 300,000 tonnes, by 1994 it had risen to 5,000,000 tonnes, but the aquifer could not sustain the production of water. By 2003, the production of wheat in Saudi Arabia had fallen back to 2.3 million tonnes.

In China, within the last couple of years due to expanding desert and the depletion of underground aquifers, no less than 24,000 villages that were involved in the production of grain have either had to move away or close down the production of grain entirely.

The result is that the production of grain in China had fallen between 1997 and 2003 by 30 per cent from 133 million tonnes to 86 million tones.

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Mr. Speaker, China, being one of the largest economies in the world, has had no choice but to import to make up for the shortfall. This year, China will import between 30 million and 50 million tonnes of grain.

What does that mean? Let us look at the Chinese economy and the purchasing power of China. In the past eight months alone China has experienced a trade surplus with the United States to the tune of \$124 billion—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please! Hon. Members, so far we have had very commendable behaviour by all. Let us continue in that trend.

Hon. Minister, please continue.

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: As I was saying, the Chinese have experienced a trade surplus this year of US \$124 billion with the United States alone.

The result is that the purchasing power of China today equals that of the super power of the United States. In the past 10 years, China has moved from an economy that formerly exported oil to a net oil importer.

We have seen rapid escalations in the price of oil, steel and shipping and this year, China's growth rate, according to CNN this morning, is expected to exceed 9 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, so what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago is that between 1995 and 2001, the price of food rose by 88 per cent. The food import bill between 1995 and 2003 went from \$1.3 billion to \$1.9 billion, an increase of 46 per cent.

The result is, the more we import—and we are talking food here—the more we are vulnerable to the ravages of cost escalations over which we have no control. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, what did we do? This Government identified the groups that were the most vulnerable; and let me give you some more information. We have a population of approximately 1.29 million, our labour force is approximately 598,000, and we have employed approximately 537,000 persons.

5.40 p.m.

Of the 537,000 persons who are employed, 312,000 earn less than \$3,000 a month. That is 58 per cent of the total employment. One hundred and ninety-four thousand, almost 200,000, earn less than \$2,000 a month, and we have about 64,000 pensioners earning about \$1,000 a month. The Government employs approximately 83,000 persons. Of those, 11,000 earn less than \$3,000 a month.

The result is that in the private sector you have more than 68 per cent of those employed earning less than \$3,000 a month. This Government is very familiar with the secretaries, the sales clerks and the messengers who earn \$3,000 a month or less and are trying to feed their families on that. Wages is very much a function of education and productivity, and productivity today is a function of the level of investment in technology and education. [*Desk thumping*] It is largely for the private sector to step up and to face the challenge to invest in new technologies that would make workers more productive and more effective at their jobs. Only in that way can we afford to raise salaries significantly. Anything else is purely inflationary.

But it is not as simple as all that. In the manufacturing sector we have approximately 55,000 persons employed. Of the 55,000, less than 2 per cent, including the owners, managers and the directors—less than 2 per cent; only 2,000—have any form of tertiary education. Therefore, the challenge is out and the Government has responded with tertiary education. Let me just put it again for you so that you understand the most vulnerable group and the position that they are in.

The Ministry of Housing is presently holding 23,000 applications from workers who are earning less than \$3,000 a month, and that is the target group that this Government is going to satisfy. [*Desk thumping*] The average house costs approximately \$150,000 at 6 per cent. The cost of the mortgage, plus the rates and taxes and insurances, is approximately \$1,100 a month. You earn \$3,000 a month; you spend \$1,100 a month on your mortgage, what is left? How has this Government responded? I am going to put it into perspective for you.

I had asked my ministry to prepare a food basket of items for a low income family and a middle income family. They did both. The first list for the low income family had 35 items on it and it totalled \$512 a month. This was for a family of four. For the middle income family, the total was \$1,390 and it had 49 items on it. When you consider what families have to try to do on \$3,000 a month, you begin to understand just how sensitive the problem is. And bear in mind that after coming through the period of 1995 to 2001, any stretching of their salaries that they may have been able to make, had been eroded by the price increases in food, of 88 per cent during that period, and they are left with nothing to stretch with.

So what have we done? In this budget, the Government has proposed to remove the CET on milk, split peas, red beans and cheese. There is no alternative to milk, especially for children. Therefore, this Government, in recognizing that, has decided that it would approach the Caricom secretariat with a view to removing the CET on milk. In terms of flour and rice, there is a bit more difficult problem. With flour, there are two flour mills that are coming on stream this year

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in competition with National Flour Mills and we hope that competition would drive the prices downwards, and if they do not, then we would do something about it.

In terms of rice, that is a little more tricky. There are three major producers of rice in the region: Belize, Suriname and Guyana, and they would object strongly to the removal of CET. That nut would be far more difficult, and it therefore becomes beholden on our farmers to produce more at a lower cost.

Mr. Ramnath: But you close down Caroni (1975) Limited. What stupidity you talking?

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: I am going to come to that in a minute.

This Government cares about the little man. [*Desk thumping*] In January 2002, the average price of chicken was \$3.24 a pound. When I came into the ministry, by January of this year it was \$4.28 a pound. In September of this year it had fallen back to \$4.04 a pound. While it had fallen from January, it is an overall increase of 24 per cent from January 2002. That is too great an increase for the people to bear.

Not only that, we began to hear little stories. We began to get some information coming back that there was going to be a manipulation in the supply of chicken that would eventually drive the price upwards to \$5.00 and beyond by the end of this year.

Not only that, one of the major tools that we could use to deal with the price of chicken is the Fair Trading Bill which has not yet been laid here. One of the problems with the Fair Trading Bill is that it requires in its present form, a constitutional majority. This Bill would give the Government and the people—more than anything else, it would give the people—the power to deal with cartel arrangements and unfair pricing. But the Opposition has signalled its intention that it will not support any legislation that requires a constitutional majority and, therefore, we decided to intervene directly.

Mr. Singh: Would the Member give way?

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: I am not giving way, not today.

Mr. Singh: The Opposition supported the OSHA Bill which required a constitutional majority!

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: Therefore, we decided to intervene directly—

Mr. Singh: Nonsense! [*Crosstalk*]

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

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: Mr. Speaker, the Government took a decision to intervene directly in the marketplace to create what it felt would be a more competitive environment. While I say that, let me assure you that this Government is pro-business and we have no intention of destroying the poultry industry in Trinidad and Tobago, but we will ensure the people, like the producers of chicken, do the very best that they can do, in our opinion, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

We are an island economy, a developing country. We have a fragile economy. We are vulnerable to external shocks, but we can either decide that we are victims or that we are masters of our own destiny. Therefore, we can either take a decision to continue to import food or we can make an effort to ensure our own food security. Caroni has 76,603 acres of arable land and up until last year, was growing a product that depended on the largesse of the developed world. I am very proud to say that this Government has liberated and emancipated the sugar worker from their political masters. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me just show you this, Mr. Speaker. Of the 76,000 acres, 1,402 acres will be allocated to industry. That is 1.8 per cent. One thousand, three hundred and eighteen acres will be allocated to housing—1.7 per cent. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I am seeing the expression on the face of the Hansard reporter and she is begging for help and you all are crosstalking. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: The sugar workers have been liberated from their ancestors a long time ago! [*Inaudible*] You are brutalizing sugar workers—do not come here and talk nonsense about liberating from political masters!

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva South, I am bringing to the attention of the House your conduct and if you continue in that vein, I would have no alternative. As I am on my feet, let me warn all hon. Members, check your Standing Orders about disorderly conduct. I refer all Members to Standing Order 43(3) and I intend to enforce it in this budget debate.

Mr. Ramnath: He cannot insult me. He could insult you, not me.

Dr. Rowley: Danny, you are brilliant. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Montano: Mr. Speaker, 68,614 acres have been allocated for the production of food. Let me say that again: 68,614 acres have been allocated for the production of food. As night follows day, we will be the food basket of the Caribbean. We will feed not only ourselves but the region.

5.55 p.m.

Those on that side see this change and measure as a threat. We see them as opportunities. Food is a business and it is a big business! It is a business that will never go away and it will get bigger and bigger as populations increase. There is business in the growing, processing, distribution, storage, refrigeration, shipping and transport of food. That is what the decision on Caroni was about. It was about the production of food and food security.

Further measures to relieve the escalating cost of living to lower income and vulnerable groups as have already been announced, are the increase of \$150 in the pension and grants; in personal allowances for taxation so that persons earning less than \$2,500 a month would benefit by approximately another \$150 a month and an increase in the minimum wage to \$9 per hour, which effectively gives them approximately another \$150 per month.

There are other measures that have come into play since we have been in government that have sought to address this same issue. In our minds, this issue did not arise yesterday, last month or this year. We are now experiencing and enjoying one of the lowest interest rate regimes that the country has ever seen. Consumer loans for the purchase of appliances, motor cars and especially for the acquisition of homes are lower than they have ever been. [*Desk thumping*] Furthermore, last year, we reduced the level of income tax by 5 per cent.

What did we do and how are we going to ensure that our citizens can deal with the ravages not just of inflation, but of globalization? I spoke about education and its importance. When we came to office in January 2002, the enrolment at the University of the West Indies was a scant 8,000 students. By a policy decision alone, I am happy to say that the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education informed me yesterday or the day before, that the enrolment this year is in excess of 13,000. We built no new structures. It was a policy decision alone. What we are talking about is the people who have the opportunity for this form of education would not be dependent on anybody but themselves for their future.

We have started the University of Trinidad and Tobago and increased the enrolment at John S. Donaldson and San Fernando Technical Institutes. One of the programmes that I am very proud to be associated with as a minister is the Helping You Prepare for Employment (HYPE) Programme. I have met so many young graduates of the programme that told me that before they were drafted in the programme they had no hope, no education and nothing to look forward to. In

this fiscal year that has just ended, HYPE had 1,430 beneficiaries. The graduates of HYPE are building houses in Carlsen Field on their own. They are forming their businesses and are self-employed. That is a success story. That is what we have created. That is what growth and development are about.

In addition, there are the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP), Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) and Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE). Their Dollar for Dollar Programme was selective and applied only to State institutions. We expanded it to private institutions. I am happy to be associated with this Government. Other programmes to help those who are underprivileged and vulnerable to deal with the situation are On-the-Job Training Programme (OJT), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the National Entrepreneurship Development Company (NEDCO), an incubator for small businesses and Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP). We have the School Nutrition Programme that fed 128,000 beneficiaries, last year. Today, the unemployment rate is 7.8 per cent. Most households have significantly more than one income earner and are better able to deal with the ravages of inflation. We are not trying to justify it. We are just trying to say that we have done many things to assist families and households to deal with inflation.

Today, there is hope for a better future. I know a young lady, a hairdresser in Mayaro. She has four children and she got a house. She is no longer paying rent and she knows that her family is now secure because she has equity and value for the first time in her property. This Government is not about making handouts. It is about giving a helping hand up. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you very much.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche*): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to contribute in this budget debate. I want to begin by indicating to colleagues on the other side that if at any time during my contribution, they wish to interrupt me on a point of information or clarification, please do so. I would give way. I want to tell particularly the more sensible colleagues on the other side that normally interrupt me, that when we are in positions of leadership and the national community is looking on, we need to conduct ourselves properly. When the Minister was on his feet and the hon. Member for Caroni East wished to ask a question on a point of clarification or information, I do not think that that approach was useful. It sends the wrong message to the national community. I will not be a part of it.

Mr. Manning: Talk to Ramnath.

Dr. R. Moonilal: If you wish at any time to interrupt on a point of clarification or information, I would certainly give way. I do not believe in that pompous and narcissistic approach to the conduct in public life.

Mr. Manning: I am very pleased that the hon. Member for Oropouche is talking about the standards of this Parliament. May I suggest with the greatest respect, that he has a contribution to make to the development of the Member for Couva South who in flagrant violation of the Standing Orders has been disrespectful to the Speaker. It is difficult for me to sit here and hear this kind of thing.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Let me repeat myself. If you wish to interrupt me during my contribution on a point of information or clarification, I would allow you to do that. If you wish to make any other point about colleagues on either side of the House, please do so in your time.

I want to address a couple of issues introduced by the Minister a few minutes ago, before getting into the contents of my contribution which will address three or four items. I am humbled and almost intimidated to speak on this side of the House after the contributions of the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North and the Member for St. Joseph. I do not know if Members on the other side fully appreciate the contribution of the Member for Couva North who gave this morning, a professorial dissertation on governance. For my colleague for Tobago East who is pursuing post graduate work at the university, no doubt the colleague would understand that the Member for Couva North spoke about the challenges facing political administrations in plural democratic developing countries and the leadership required in a country like Trinidad and Tobago. Of course, he spoke about political organizations and management. I consider that to be a seminal presentation made by the Member for Couva North. The Member for Diego Martin Central who has claims for scholarship would appreciate the point made about the difference between compliance and trust in bureaucratic organizations. That point was made this morning by the Member for Couva North. Some people do not care; some people do not understand and there are few on that side that do not care to understand. I would ask them to consider carefully and maybe, read the text of the Member for Couva North.

The Member for Couva North opened the batting on this side of the House and the Member for St. Joseph came to brass tacks and slaughtered that budget; went face to face with it and exposed the reality of the disconnect between what is said and what is done; between facts, fiction and promise. I was tempted to tell the Opposition Chief Whip to close the debate immediately. After you heard the Members for Couva North and St. Joseph you are intimidated to speak again.

A few minutes ago, the hon. Minister was in pain in a short time to discuss the issue of food prices and could not resist the temptation or fixation, the exclusive obsession with blaming the UNC. It is an obsession that you blame the UNC. God forbid they are really in office for a longer time. They would blame the UNC. From 1995 to 2001, everything went wrong according to their perspective. Hon. colleagues on this side will challenge the analysis and information of the Minister.

We heard from the Member for St. Joseph that BP in Trinidad is now offering a hardship allowance to expats coming to Trinidad to work and how badly that reflected. I suggest that maybe ordinary citizens of Trinidad and Tobago also apply for a hardship allowance to live under the PNM.

6.10 p.m.

I think we should go that way and give every citizen an allowance to survive—a survival allowance. But there is no need to suggest that because I think there are measures in the budget, last year and this year, that really, if you look at it carefully, are hardship allowances. When you tell business persons to put in security in their business and you will pay them for that, that is really a hardship allowance. That is telling them to install electronic equipment for security and the Government will give you a tax rebate. As I said, that is a hardship allowance.

I want to say at the beginning that this budget is an opposition's dream. We get no comfort at all in the Government's incompetence. We get no pleasure in their ineptitude. We feel no privilege to report on their lack of performance. In the end, we believe that it would redound to the benefit of the country because they should demit office, based on their poor performance and track record.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is an opposition's dream. Before we assembled for this day, the national community had already attacked the Government at all quarters on this budget and we did not kick off the debate in the House. Normally, Mr. Speaker, as you would know, over the years the Government would have enjoyed 48 hours of goodwill from the national community as persons interpret some of the values, whether it was the tax concession or the price of mauby and brown sugar and so on. As they interpret that, there would be 48 hours of goodwill and when serious analysis is done then they would shred the budget.

But on this occasion, before we kicked off, they were already in trouble with this budget. Those of us who were not spared that presentation on the last evening, which, I think lasted three hours—some of us listened attentively—we noticed colleagues were comforted to leave and idle in the corridor when the Minister of Finance was on his feet, but some of us listened. Mr. Speaker, one

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thing came to one's mind, and it is a point made by the Member for St. Joseph, that there is a gap with this administration. There is a gap the size of the Grand Canyon in Arizona State, which is 18 miles wide. There is a gap like that between what the PNM says and what it does. That is the gap that exists.

Our friend from St. Joseph said that it is a disconnect, but the gap exists and the national community is waking up to that reality. I have said earlier, on another occasion, that we are really dealing with a government that includes a lot of tricksters.

When I was doing research for this contribution, I thought that it was only in my narrow confines of employment, industrial relations, social programmes and so on, in this area, that the PNM Government did not deliver and made promises that they did not live up to. But lo and behold the Member for Joseph, coming from another perspective, gave us examples of situations where the Government introduced ideas and promises and never lived up; never implemented; never delivered.

Mr. Speaker, last week before the Prime Minister stood at the dispatch box— What was on the news last week? We learnt that the Piarco runway moved from \$21 million to \$35 million. Imagine the pilots complained of potholes on the runway. In that same week the kitchen at the San Fernando General Hospital was closed. Can you believe that and have you read of any such occurrence? Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) indicated not to go to the hospital because you could get sick. This is a hospital; a kitchen!

Mr. Speaker, in the same week, for the first time in 10 years, those of us coming from San Fernando witnessed and experienced flooding on the Solomon Hochoy Highway. The last time we saw that was in 1993/1994. That flooding came again, Mr. Speaker, ten years after, during this administration; 1993/1994, 2004: What do they have in common? The PNM Administration! Mr. Speaker, that was the week we reflected on and having spent \$60 billion later we have to report that the kitchen in the hospital has been closed, a “jooking” board runway at Piarco, and flooding on the highway; \$60 billion later. The pharmacists are on strike; the Government cannot settle their problems. No pharmaceuticals for the elderly and so on, and we boast about \$100 million Caricom, manufacture and relief and so on.

The Prime Minister and hon. Minister of Finance presented his budget statement. What were the comments in the press? When you look at the newspapers over the weekend, in particular, and there are certain headlines that strike you— [Interruption] For example, and I can read them since you asked. “South Chamber Slams Shaky Budget; No Closer to 2020 Dream;” “Not Enough for Homeless”

said Anthony Salloum; “Couva Chamber wants Budget Report Card”. A *Guardian* editorial said: “No Thought for Arts in PM’s Big Budget”—that incidentally was on October 11. Ernst & Young said: “Measures do not target social sector”. Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce said: “Key issues not addressed”. Economist, Kelvin Sargeant, sees: “Danger of Creating Dependency Syndrome of the 1970s.” David Abdullah—no friend of the UNC—“Budget Short of Vision”. Our friend, Lloyd Best, while chewing said and I quote here so I mean no disrespect: “Patrick Manning cannot be Minister of Finance in any country in any part of the world”. Business group said: “Budget Short of Solid Long Term Objectives”. Employers Consultative Association (ECA) asked: “Where are the details? Budget did not deal with specifics.” “Economists bash budget. Short of vision. Creates dependency culture. Ignores middleclass. Lacks in-depth analysis of social issues”.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC did not begin as yet. I want to say it takes a rare degree of ineptitude to deliver a budget for close to three hours and then stand accused of lacking details and substance. It is rare that you could speak for three hours and deliver a budget and people accuse you of lacking details and substance.

Mr. Speaker, we get no pleasure in this, none at all. This Government, since coming into power, has presided over a crime wave, an unemployment boom; they have presided over rising prices for food, higher prices for transport and so on. To respond to all of that, they have introduced a host of social programmes, developmental programmes and so on. I think different speakers on the other side were hinting on it but they did not, as I had done, tabulate it. Mr. Speaker, I suggest to you that this Government is an acronym Government; they just come up with things. I want to give you a list and maybe you could add if I forget anything. They have introduced MEL, IMAT, MYPART, MILAT, HELP, SAFE, SPINE, STEP, TEAM, MuST, CARE and SHARE, OJT, CEPEP, URP, CCC, CDAP, NEDCO, GATE, YAP, GAPP, RAP, YTEPP, YDAP and they have done that with a lot of HYPE. But, Mr. Speaker, the only one we believe is “Promises Never Materialize, PNM”. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, they have continued their historical and pathological fixation with 10-day work programmes. They have introduced the hoax of Vision 2020. Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, you know it is when they introduced Vision 2020 they then went to consult to decide what exactly is Vision 2020. It is quite interesting. Normally, you have consultation and you mobilize all the ideas and the people, and when you have come up with a plan then you announce the plan to go forward. They announced the plan and then went to round-up the people to discuss it. That is PNM governance.

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I would like to focus on three issues in my contribution. One issue relates to employment. I will then move on to an issue that is certainly linked to employment, which is poverty. The Government has premised a major part of its entire development thrust on poverty alleviation. I want to explore that area. And, finally, an area which must be connected to both job creation and poverty, that is public sector reform. If you are going, indeed, to create a developed-country nation, you need public sector reform.

On the last occasion when the Prime Minister stood in this House and announced with fanfare and I think the Prime Minister repeated for value, the Prime Minister announced in his budget statement, I want to quote the budget statement directly because I do not want to stand accused of misquoting the Prime Minister on any matter. I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, the latest data provided by the Central Statistical Office put the unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2004 at 7.8 per cent, this is the lowest rate since the PNM came into power in 1956.”

There is a highlight on that so I suspect that meant he repeated that.

“I must note that this is about the same rate quoted by the IMF based on the standard ILO definition. The CSO report estimates that 22,000 jobs were created between the first and second quarters of 2004. Of these, 4,600 were in construction; 4,200 in banking, insurance, real estate and business services; 3,600 in manufacturing and 3,400 in the energy sector.”

The Member for St. Joseph asked the relevant question: Between one quarter to another you created 4,200 jobs in banking, insurance and business? Something about that sounds unbelievable. Well actually it is believable because if you understand how these figures are arrived at—Mr. Speaker, let me say that based upon the research, I am surprised that the unemployment figure is not closer to 3 per cent, not 7.8 per cent, given how these figures are arrived at.

Mr. Speaker, as someone who has spent the last 16 years of my life in the area of employment, studying employment issues, researching and teaching as well—I took more than a passing interest in that revelation. I was privileged to receive as well, I think it is the unpublished report of the Labour Force Bulletin, second Quarter 2004 from the Central Statistical Office. This is data that the Prime Minister relied on. I just want to go behind this data to make a few points to you and this honourable House to suggest to you that we are really being carried down another lane of deception and hypocrisy as it relates to unemployment. Let us go behind the figures. I want to tell the Prime Minister first that he is correct, of

course, between the first quarter and second quarter of 2004. Total labour force increased marginally but persons with jobs increased by 22,000 people.

6.25 p.m.

Interestingly, the analysis suggests that one of the main reasons for this is the increase in female participation, meaning the number of women who came into the labour force. Of the 22,000, 14,000 are female or 63 per cent. If you understand how the women labour force increased, that will tell you how the figure went down. In a further analysis, you will notice that in construction, for example, the labour force increased by 4,600 but for women that increased in construction by 2,000. In the wholesale, retail trade, restaurants and hotels, the female labour force increased to 6,000, so that is 8,000 already. If you add finance, insurance and real estate, you would get another 2,000—10,000.

Mr. Speaker, the areas where female participation increased from one quarter to another were: construction, wholesale/retail trade, restaurants—and that includes all these fast food, quick-shops, vending, persons who pull a vending cart on the road and, of course, community, social and personal services. We could go further to ask where these jobs came from. Interestingly—and this is a nice one—the majority of these jobs came in the service sector and what we call clerical workers. So for female, out of the 14,000 as many as 5,400 were clerical workers.

When we break this down and we go forward with this, in terms of own-account worker, that is, one person who may have just started a business by himself or herself, and so forth, the female labour force increased just in this quarter by 5,700. Non-governmental increase was also significant; another 6,000.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to look at the educational level of this new legend of people who are employed. You may not believe it but of the 14,000 new jobs created, 12,000 were persons with five O'level subjects or less and a big lot, as many as 4,000, with primary education up to Standard Four. So the majority of those persons getting jobs have five O'level subjects or less and a majority of 3,100 with primary education, less than Standard Four. Incidentally, there was no substantial increase in the number of university graduates getting jobs and so forth. This data tell us a story. What the PNM Government has been doing—and it is now reflected in data—they have been churning out young persons primarily in several make-work public schemes, short-term, temporary, apprentice-type schemes, throwing them into the labour market and then the CSO catches them. So the persons you are dealing with, particularly clerical workers, invariably are On-the-Job Training workers. So they will be captured as clerical workers, and they

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could be captured anywhere because they could be in manufacturing, government and non-government as we know. It is very instructive. I will leave that and come back to it in a moment. Remember I said their age group was young people with less than five subjects, a primary education, clerical workers, service, and community and so on.

When the UNC had the honour to lead this country it had drafted its own job creation plan. We took it to the different sectoral groups in the national society to get their opinion and to proceed with a massive job creation programme.

Mr. Speaker, we did an analysis of that and the analysis told us that if we want to reduce unemployment to single digits, we would have to embark upon a massive job-creation exercise outside the public sector. We knew, as the Member for Couva North said this morning, that real job creation; permanent, sustainable, well-paid jobs would come from the private sector, not the public sector, particularly sustainable employment. We went about a job-creating programme. We did what is called a tran-line analysis, an analysis based on all the factors, that you punch in data based on everything as it is, your natural progression. We came up with a certain scenario. I want to make a few points on this.

You would recall that the UNC administration moved the unemployment figure from almost 18 per cent in 1995 when it demitted office to below 10.5 per cent or thereabout.

While we were in Government we decided how we would have reduced unemployment in this country to create sustainable jobs?

The Prime Minister likes to talk about full employment. In fact, he mentioned that is also a fixation of his.

Mr. Speaker, full employment is defined as the point at which aggregate demand could not further increase employment and output, a technical definition. But employment studies usually adopt 3 to 4 per cent as the benchmark for defining full employment. [*Interruption*] We would stretch it and say five in Trinidad is full employment. The UNC's task at the time was how do we arrive there given that we were planning in 1999, 2000 and so on?

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege at that time to work with the very distinguished Member for Nariva and the very distinguished Member for St. Joseph, as the Minister of Finance. [*Interruption*] I was housed at the office of the very distinguished Minister.

The trendline analysis told us that to get to 4 per cent in 2005, we needed to create between 2001 and 2005—believe it or not, in 2001, it was 11.2 per cent

unemployment. To reach to 4 per cent by 2005, we needed to create 130,000 new jobs. But we had created over 75,000 new jobs before in that six-year period so we had to work doubly hard to ensure that we got the 130,000 new jobs.

Mr. Speaker, I did a complete analysis of this and broke down every single year, if we wanted to create jobs in an expanding labour market, because the labour market does not remain static. More persons are coming in all the time so you have to plan this with more people coming in and out. So what is the rate of entry and exit? What is the population growth you may also want to factor? When you look at that you can then tell yourself how many jobs you need to create per year. Basically, I could tell you that we needed to create in 2002, 19,000; in 2003, 25,000; in 2004, 32,000 and in 2005, we need to create 41,000 jobs. And we knew, had we done that, we would get our full employment by 2005.

So, Mr. speaker, having the benefit of this type of analysis, of course, I was bowled over when the Prime Minister announced that by 2004 they had arrived at 7.8. I told myself that I would be among the first to queue up to congratulate the Government, but when we interviewed the Central Statistical Office (CSO) we discovered from the CSO as well on their data, that these figures were inflated, regulated and boosted by 2000 Geriatric/Adolescent Partnership (GAP) workers; 400 Civilian Conservative Corps (CCC) workers; 400 Helping You Prepare for Employment (HYPE) workers; 2,000 OJT; 10,000 URP; 2,000 Youth Training and Education Programme (YTEPP); 5,000 CEPEP; 1,000 Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA); a conservative estimate of 21,000 employees on make-work public programmes.

Mr. Speaker, if you factor this into the analysis now and do another type of calculation, the official real unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago today, is 11.2 per cent. That is the conclusion. It is the 11.2 per cent today of the unemployment rate. I have made conservative estimates. What this suggests to those of us who did the calculations is that this is really a pacemaker unemployment rate which is there to artificially boost and regulate the unemployment figure. It is a pacemaker for unemployment. You are boosting and artificially regulating the unemployment figure.

Mr. Speaker, in the next quarter they can declare unemployment at 5 per cent. It is easy. All you do is get the Minister to pump more and more of those OJTs in and it will come down. It is not a problem but if you are serious about job creation, sustainable, well-paid jobs particularly off the private sector and so on, you cannot introduce 25 make-work programmes and dump these temporary workers onto your unemployment figure and then boast about the 7.8 per cent.

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The lowest unemployment rate; we have our doubts. Highest murder rate; we are sure. That one we are sure about. Lowest unemployment rate; we are not sure at all about that.

Mr. Speaker, they are free to consult the CSO.

Mr. Bereaux: I just want to find out when you did those calculations—if my memory serves me correctly, at least you had Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and another similar set of programmes going on at the time. Did you do the other side of the calculations that you are asking us to do now, meaning excluding those or you do not consider them?

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am not sure I understand thoroughly. You can include and exclude and come up with figures. If you include you will come to 7.8 per cent and if you exclude the make-work programmes you will arrive at 11.2 per cent.

Mr. Bereaux: You included yours?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. I did the both. We came up with both sets of figures based on a conservative estimate and based as well on the report from the CSO that URP workers fall under construction; CEPEP, under Community, Social and Personal Services, OJT falls in any industry they are placed, government or private. Believe it or not the Civilian Conservation Corps falls into Community, Social and Personal Services. We factored all of that in.

We are saying nothing is wrong. You can reach unemployment of 3 per cent if you just create more Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), URP and OJT and CCC; but the point is if you want a strategy for long-term development of this country's labour market and a quality labour force you have to abandon that short-term approach to employment creation.

On this matter I also want to add one other fact into that pot because I think they are interested in that. When you balance this figure with the NIS, the national insurance data tells us—and they have data for June to July 2003/2004. So for 2003/2004, NIS is reporting that they have registered only 2,062 new employers and they have registered in one year only 30,627 workers. So they have registered for the entire year 30,000 but in one quarter and another quarter they jumped by 22,000. That tells a story as well. The people who are working on these programmes like URP, CEPEP, will not be registered as first-time NIS contributors. So it tells you how the labour market is plateauing off with that type of make-work programme.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is not our intention to make a mockery out of the data and the presentation but, to point out for the benefit of the national community

that a hoax is a hoax and you cannot now convince this population that you are doing so well with the unemployment figure, while it is being artificially boosted.

If this Government is serious about employment generation as the UNC was, certainly they would have to give much more emphasis to certain sectors. Certainly, the non-oil sector: manufacturing, telecommunication, the servicing sector including tourism and so forth, and help the manufacturing sector to create jobs by themselves. For example, when we were on our round of consultations with the manufacturing sector we met before the budget, and we had a very nice discussion. The businessmen were saying instead of spending so much millions on CEPEP and URP, why can you not help us so that we can train our workforce to expand our business production and reinvest and create more jobs at the workplace rather than bringing persons from outside the workplace. The businessmen were asking for that type of support.

6.40 p.m.

They think that might be valuable to create the type of jobs necessary, but what is happening on the labour market is that there are many young people who go on to On-the-Job Training and that disqualifies them from continuing because when they get their six months that is it. They then come back into the dump heap of the labour market. They are qualified, they have their education and so on, but there is no place to go because businesses are not absorbing workers.

The truth is that the private sector is not creating jobs. If there are jobs in manufacturing, construction, you can bet that is public sector investment. Make no mistake about it, there is a role in public sector investment for employment. *[Interruption]* The State has to play a role, but the State has to facilitate the creation of better paid permanent and sustainable jobs. That is also the role of the State; not just the ten-day dependency syndrome. This is the point that the former chairman of the First Citizens Bank, Mr. Ken Gordon, was making when he said:

“Malaise is largely the result of make-work programmes, which were politically driven, but not carefully thought out and had the effect of institutionalizing handouts, making them virtually a way of life for unemployed youth, many of whom become rudderless, dependent and unemployable. Tragically many degenerated into crime.”

This is the cause of it.

Linked to job creation is the issue of small business development. We knew for the last two decades that one way to create jobs was through small business. Create small- to medium-size enterprises and there should be jobs created. Given

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technology, the reorganization of production and so on, large enterprises will not create jobs. The ten-day, make-work syndrome is not what we want either.

I ask the Member for San Fernando East—he is without doubt the longest serving Member; I am the least of the apostles; I am really a new Member in this House—after serving in public life for one generation, what is his legacy? When he demits office, as he will, what will we remember most of the Manning Administration? I say that with respect. Without looking at the book, what would we remember?

Does he know what many of us would remember? We would remember that he introduced the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), that he spoke a lot about a pipeline up the islands, that the Parliament at that time became the office of the Prime Minister. We would remember that our friends in the business community told us at that time that they felt safe when they were on a plane at Piarco and the door was locked and they were about to take off. They said that the most pleasant words were the words the pilot said: “Please fasten your seatbelts, have your trays in an upright position.” They said they felt safe that they were leaving. That is what we will remember.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for Oropouche for giving way. I remind my friend that my term of office has not yet come to an end, so please do not talk too soon.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I take the opportunity to ask the Prime Minister to reflect, in his quiet moments, on the legacy. Is it a legacy that when he goes abroad, he meets citizens of the country he governs and they are happy they are not in our country? Imagine the paradox! He goes as the head of government of a country and people are happy they are not there. Is that a legacy?

We have to remember, particularly leaders who have served, and one in particular here, who has had the opportunity to serve, not on one occasion, but on two occasions—however he may have come into office. We have a big debate on that score. We disagree, but the legacy is important. I am not seeing any rosy legacy of this administration and this particular leader.

I was on the issue of small business. We have argued for the last two or three years that one of the biggest pillars of deception imposed on this country is something called the National Entrepreneurship Development Company (NEDCO). We have said, as well, that we want to see the list of people who got loans from NEDCO. We want to get a tracer study to see how many have been successful and how many “buss” and close down, because we believe—and I am convinced—

that the NEDCO and CEPEP programmes were used during the two periods to win votes and give away money for political campaigning. Be that at it may, the development of small- and medium-sized business is an important pillar of employment generation.

Mr. Speaker: 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 very much, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. When we ask the question as to the recipients of NEDCO loans, they went in haste and passed an Exemption Order under the Freedom of Information Act. Imagine we introduced legislation for disclosure of information and they busily brought an Order and shut that down, so that they cannot give out the names of people who receive NEDCO loans. And it is free money! They cannot tell us who got taxpayers' money. This is Trinidad and Tobago. I have in my hand the name of everybody who owes NEDCO money. If I had more than 30 minutes, I would read all the names. I am looking to see if there is a "Hinds" here. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please hon. Members, the Member is making his contribution. He has been going very well and the House has been paying him respect. Continue to pay him that respect, please!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, let me assure Members on the other side and let me assure you that I am not going to call anybody's name from this document. I will not be in that. If they would like to see the list, as soon as I am finished speaking, I would make a copy available. What was the line this morning from the Member for Couva North about protesting too much?

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the persons who are delinquent in their payments and they have zero total assets, in one region of NEDCO alone, the figure is \$2.7 million. How many regions do they have? Five, I think.

These are the people to whom they give loans and who cannot pay and will not pay back this money. This is taxpayers' money gone. I understand that people who would benefit from this programme may not have experience in business and may not have a capacity. I am sure that there will be people who will run afoul and will have problems, but not at this level and not with the secrecy, deception and politicization of this programme. This alone should cause them to hang their heads in shame.

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Look at the delinquent list in NEDCO. I do not want to call these names. I will give the Member for Caroni East. He will call them. NEDCO is today a fiasco. In Tobago, as well, there are delinquent loans. It is bacchanal and controversy. In Point Fortin, a matter is before the Industrial Court now with a gentleman who was fired by NEDCO. When you see the data, Mr. Speaker, and you see how people got loans in the build-up to the 2002 election, it is a shame. This is public money.

There are people, Mr. Speaker—and I am sure not you—who believe that we should not know the names of persons who receive moneys from the public purse. There is a fundamental pillar of democracy which is the accountability to the people, and the Parliament is the people. These are elementary teachings and learnings on constitutional law.

My friend, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, knows a lot about this. He will tell you that this is an amalgam of the people. A population of 1.3 million persons does not meet every day in Harris Promenade and Woodford Square. They send us to Parliament to conduct their business. We are their representatives. So when they have to account to the public, they must account to the Parliament. That is a cornerstone of our democracy.

When they come here and say that we cannot know the names of people who got public money at NEDCO or at the Central Bank, or anybody who got a house with public money, that is a travesty of the very cornerstone of our democracy. That undermines our democracy and I do not think any Member in this House will sit idly by while the democracy of this country is being undermined by the monotonous frequency with which they withhold information.

They withhold information at every turn and we cannot allow that because that touches a democratic nerve. Once they start along that line, when do they stop? We cannot know the names of NEDCO recipients and housing recipients. Why not pension recipients? Why not farmers? Farmers got \$25, \$41 and \$51. I am sure others got thousands. We should know the names of the farmers who got public money. Maybe they should bring an order and stop us from finding that out. They are touching a nerve of our system of democratic government, which is their accountability to Parliament.

The last issue I want to deal with concerns their poverty alleviation programme. First, I want to highlight that it is seemingly a paradoxical situation. First, they create jobs. They are creating jobs, but poverty is going up. One would expect that as they create jobs, poverty would go down because if they are creating jobs,

implicit in that is that people are not poor any more, they are working. How do they account for the situation where unemployment goes down but poverty goes up? That suggests that it is distribution, a problem of equity and a problem of administration.

On this poverty alienation programme, this Government has churned out numerous programmes on poverty alleviation as I indicated before. I want to tell the Government, as I have told them before, that several of these problems are commendable. Wherever they got the idea, it certainly could not be Balisier House.

6.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, some of these programmes are good ideas I admit, but when you look at their implementation record, what they have delivered and what they have promised and delivered, there is a disconnect. The first observation under the Social Sector Investment Programme—you would be surprised to know that the Prime Minister's Office has something called the Social Services Delivery Division. Of all the social programmes, 14 per cent are located at the Office of the Prime Minister. The Office of the Prime Minister spent 72 per cent of the money. They have 14 per cent of the programme, but spent 72 per cent of the money. They have a budget of \$1 billion. The Prime Minister who is the Minister of Finance and Minister of Tobago Affairs has \$1 billion to deal with social service delivery. The gentleman is busy, no doubt.

Pages 12 and 13 of the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2005* indicates the implementation rate. The Government has failed to reach its targets in 50 per cent of the programmes which it has introduced. The Government has failed to reach its targets in five out of 10 programmes. The programmes in which they have reached their targets are programmes that are of lesser significance, in terms of money and numbers. Happily, the sports school programme exceeded its target. That is the hardworking Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. The Community Development Scholarship Programme exceeded but they have failed with OJT, HYPE, Youth Development Apprenticeship Scheme and several other areas.

With respect to the SHARE Programme and the hamper delivery, the Government premised its poverty alleviation programme on the increase of \$50 on a hamper. The Government's delivery rate is poor. Last year the Government fell \$26,000 short of a target to deliver hampers to the poor. When the Government boasts about this, we have to take cognizance of the gap between what they say they would do and what they do.

Another area of interest to me—let me state for the record, my other colleagues will deal with this—is the unemployment relief budget, which has

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increased between 2003—2004 by 128 per cent, from \$125 million to \$330 million. For good measure, the CEPEP budget increased from \$80 million in 2003 to \$225 million in 2004. And people want to know where the money has gone! People bold to ask “where the money gone”? You have \$700 million in CEPEP and URP. I am surprised the Government has not run unemployment down to 1 per cent with that type of money.

There are two programmes which I would like to comment on. They are called the Military-Led Academic Training Programme (MILAT) and the Military-Led Youth Programme for Apprenticeship and Re-orientation Training (MYPART). [*Interruption*] But not for my children. Last year, during our debate, the Prime Minister pointed out in his budget statement that his Government will move to introduce three new programmes, including these two, MILAT and MYPART. These programmes are military-led programmes, targeting young people. The other programme is the National Youth Service Programme, under the Ministry of National Security. Last year the Prime Minister announced that the Government would implement this in the next year. Mr. Speaker, as you know by now, I often give way to the Prime Minister, at his convenience. When he interrupted me last year, not this year—I have my statement from the 2003 debate—he said, I quote:

“Thank you very much for giving way. I want to tell my friend that the three programmes to which reference has just been made and the three programmes to be introduced this year are MILAT, the National Youth Service Programme and MYPART.”

He explained the programme. He interrupted me last year to say this is what he would be introducing this year. Lo and behold we get the Social Sector Investment Programme. When we look at MILAT and MYPART, proposed implementation September 2004. They are still not on stream, but with fanfare announced last year. I am sure, I can almost predict the question from my friend from Laventille East/Morvant that with his intervention at that Ministry and his dynamic leadership, those three programmes will be on the way soon.

Mr. Hinds: Thank you very kindly for giving way. Let me assure my friend that the Prime Minister's pronouncements had been a given effect over the last year and we have been called upon on the basis of response from some of the persons we interfaced with on these important programmes to refine an element or two. I assure you—in fact it was launched recently in Trinidad and Tobago—Member for Oropouche, that the suggestions in the document you just read will come very good for the benefit of the young people of the nation.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to hear that. Because I actually received the news that those programmes were not yet being implemented, with pleasure. I think there is a need to rethink those programmes. I want to ask a question to my friend, the Member who I wish would not use this opportunity to respond. In his contribution he will. Why does anybody feel that the Trinidad and Tobago military is prepared to teach, to do training, to do academic developmental work? Who convinced us that the military can do that? Where did that come from?

Two days ago in the newspapers, there was a headline: "Soldiers thief clothes to sell in Grenada". I think they found one guilty. That was a headline. I am sure the Minister would take it up with the relevant newspaper. I want to tell the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, my friend and the Government, that in the 1970s and early 1980s Forbes Lyndon Burnham did that in Guyana; that militarization of the youth that were indisciplined. When you drive through Georgetown today, all who benefited from that programme do not have a skill, a job, a future or any opportunities. They are not prepared for the global village. They are not prepared for work. I would like to be convinced when the Member for Laventille East/Morvant speaks. I would like the Member to convince me that there is in the military in Trinidad and Tobago, appropriate personnel with expertise to teach and be role models. Teaching young people is not having them march in time; it is developing values, developing academic programmes, computer science and IT. I would hope that they will speak to us about that.

While I am on this topic, I would hope that the Member for Laventille East/Morvant will use his new-formed office to conduct a financial audit of the Civilian Conservation Corps, which has not been audited in three years. Moneys earmarked for the CCC have gone into the Anti-Crime Unit of the great Brigadier Peter Joseph. The sum of \$10 million earmarked for the CCC, went to fix some furniture and rooms for the Anti-Crime Unit. They are renting cars there as well. The Minister needs to watch that. They are renting cars for peoples' wives. I would hope the Member for Laventille East/Morvant would investigate the financial transactions at the CCC, apart from looking at whether they can teach training, education and help young people. I am not so far convinced that they can do that with those military programmes.

In the SHARE Programme, as I told you before, it was \$26,000 less than they catered for. We have read in the newspapers, over the past year or so of fraud involving cheques at the On-the-Job Training Programme. A prominent businessman by the name of Jeremie Matouk said in the newspaper of July 2004, that State dollars were used to buy guns and drugs. He made a revelation. This man is not a

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friend of the UNC as I know. I never saw him before at the Reinzi Complex. He said that vast sums of money pumped into the State's social programmes are actually being used to fund criminal activities. I wonder if they asked him to bring his evidence for them to investigate? *[Interruption]* He was a speech writer, so he would have firsthand information if that is the case. Mr. Jeremie Matouk said that moneys for social problems went for crime and drugs. I told you before about the cheques from the On-the-Job Training Programme. The fraud squad was called in. A prominent PNM supporter was hauled before the courts.

Here is another one: "Corruption hampering poor people's share". I am reading from the *Sunday Guardian* of July 25, 2004. The SHARE Programme is infested with corruption, says a high-ranking official of the SHARE Programme. A regional coordinator of the SHARE Programme said it is infested with corruption. She said a family of five collected hampers from a variety of distribution sites. They said that certain people connected to the PNM have been collecting hampers for themselves and their immediate families in violation of the policy guidelines of the SHARE Programme. That is the corruption with the SHARE Programme. That is probably what SHARE means. There is corruption in the On-the-Job Training Programme. We do not have to talk too much about URP and CEPEP. I think that corruption is well known.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot alleviate poverty in the context of rampant corruption and inequality with the distribution in social programmes. At a recent seminar held in Port of Spain, organized by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), we have been hearing a lot about them today, in a paper entitled "*Poverty Reduction on Social Development*" by Kairi Consultants Limited, I believe that paper was presented by Prof. Ralph Henry. He outlined the challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago as they relate to poverty reduction and social development. He said clearly, that such challenge is to upgrade the institutional capacity to deliver to the poor: reorientation of service delivery. Mr. Speaker, they suggested that they harmonize the business of poverty alleviation.

Today I want to issue a call to this Government, why not take all the social programmes and put them under one umbrella and one Minister with a Ministry dedicated to poverty alleviation, rather than have it in eight different ministries: the Ministries of National Security, Social Development and Gender Affairs and Office of the Prime Minister? The Government should have them in one and coordinate its efforts. If the Government does that, do you know what will happen? They can get catch. Take that idea away from their notebook.

Mr. Speaker, it is very instructive. The Member for St. Joseph made the point. With this Government one hand does not know what the other hand is doing and both hands are “thieving”. I had a meeting recently with the South West Regional Health Authority in San Fernando, the hierarchy of that organization. I went to the meeting most polite and disciplined. I told the chairman and others including their doctors that there is a programme that the Ministry of Social Development and Gender Affairs is running under the Government. If a pensioner receives his pension and is suffering from a chronic disease and needs medication and expensive pharmaceuticals and it is coming out of his \$1,000 pension, there is a programme run by the Government to assist pensioners so that they get extra emergency funding for pharmaceuticals. [*Interruption*] You can pound the table. Applaud that. That is a good idea.

7.10 p.m

Do you know what is the next side of that matter? When I put that matter to the South West Regional Health Authority they said, “Oh, where that programme came from?” They did not know about that programme. Two years ago, that programme was put in place. The doctors in the hospital and the Chairman of the Board of the South West Regional Health Authority did not know anything about that programme. I pulled out a pink form that I got from the Ministry and I showed it to them. The hospital did not know that there was a social delivery programme to assist persons.

Mr. Hinds: Are you blaming the Minister for that?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the health care professionals did not know about a social delivery programme dealing with health care. Mr. Speaker, do you know why that is a tragedy? In order to avail yourself of that benefit, you must get a letter from a doctor in the hospital. How could a doctor give a person a letter to get the relief when the doctor does not know that the relief has been in existence for the past 24 months? That is governance for you! You could jump high, you could jump low, or you could jump out the window; that is a fact. The hospital did not know that there was a social delivery programme to assist pensioners who need extra emergency help to buy pharmaceuticals. You could ask the Chairman in South! I do not have to spin that in any particular way. That is the fact! That is because of the lack of co-ordination; the lack of harmony of the Government’s social delivery programmes.

There is a Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister in charge of social delivery. There is actually a Minister. Many of us have written to the Minister

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more than 10 times for assistance and we would not get the benefit of a reply. How could there be a Minister of Social Development and Gender Affairs who does not respond to letters? By definition, we are writing with respect to emergencies. If a person's house was destroyed by fire, one would write for some assistance because that is an emergency. The Government should put the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro as the Minister of Social Development and Gender Affairs. That Member responds to letters. Another Minister who responds to letters—he is not here—but he is in the other place. The Minister of Social Development and Gender Affairs cannot ignore a letter because, by definition, there is an emergency. This is their governance; this is their practice.

Recently, the European Union published a document dealing with poverty alleviation and food security. They are linking food security to poverty alleviation, and not a 10-day make-work programme. They are saying that you cannot alleviate poverty on any sustainable basis, if you do not have a policy for food security. That is Europe; that is not the poorest of the poor. They are moving with haste to introduce participatory rural programmes; to introduce sectoral policies dealing with agriculture; rural infrastructure; health; education; service provisions; and the upgrading of the implementation capacity of social programmes.

Mr. Speaker, I raised this matter with respect to food security to really touch on an emotional point. This Government closed down the sugar industry. They claimed that they were spending too much money in that industry. The Government had no problem spending \$700 million on the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP). They cut grass and they do not even give the grass to the animals so that they could eat it! If you cut grass and give it to animals then that is a productive activity. Does anyone know what is the price for a tonne of grass? They are exporting CEPEP workers and grass. I do not want to say that they are exporting grass, but I know they were in some cocaine business with the diplomatic pouch.

Mr. Speaker, this Government closed down the sugar industry because it was too expensive. That was taking too much of its precious taxpayers' money. Today, given the escalation in food prices, they are removing VAT on sugar. The Government could not assist its local cane farming sector and cane producing industry, but they are assisting someone else's industry. The Government could drop the price of sugar to assist foreigners who are cutting cane and making sugar, but it could not do that for its own people. That is the lesson. That is the vicious lesson. My other colleagues would also talk about food security and so forth. I say this in the context of my own constituency.

The Member for Diego Martin West and the Minister of Housing made an interesting point earlier. The only thing that I thought was interesting is when the Member said that the Government was building houses in the city because the infrastructure is already there. I thought that was quite instructive. They would overpopulate and overcrowd a city and let it lead to pollution and environmental degradation, because electricity and water are already there. That is the Government's approach.

The approach with respect to fighting poverty deals with rural industrial development. In fact, there should be a minister of rural industrialization to develop industries in rural areas; to assist with access roads for the agricultural communities; and to do drainage work and so forth. Mr. Speaker, there would be no decrease in poverty levels because the Government's approach is ill-founded.

I also want to call on this Government to harmonize its delivery by establishing an umbrella ministry or agency to deal with poverty alleviation. In closing, I want to tell the Government that it must implement monitoring performance assessment institutions to monitor its social delivery programmes. Just saying that 5,000 persons would get a hamper does not mean anything; and telling us that there are 5,000 OJT trainees would mean nothing to us, if there is no tracer study to see how many OJT trainees actually went on to permanent employment. Changing names would not help—whether it is the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) or East Moorings; and pulling down a sign and putting up another sign would not help with the Government's development programmes. What would help the Government's development programmes are meaningful changes like monitoring and implementation, and the managing of its own performance.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much, and I look forward to hearing some of the responses. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Roger Boynes): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to address this honourable House on this occasion, the budget debate of 2005. Allow me to join my fellow colleagues in congratulating the Minister of Finance, the hon. Prime Minister, for delivering an excellent budget to the nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is now left to each and every one of us on this side—all the Ministers—to implement the terms and conditions that were laid out in the budget, as we take this country to developed country status, year by year and budget by budget. [*Desk thumping*] Allow me to also congratulate the Minister of

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Housing and the Minister of Legal Affairs on their tremendous contributions made in this House. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, I sat here and listened to my colleague, the Member for Oropouche. I heard the Member say that the Member for Couva North's speech was so visionary. The Member even indicated that the Member understood the challenges of a democratic country, since the Member made references to political organizations and management. The Member could manage; he is a statesman.

Do you recall the statements and attacks made by that same Member when he was on this side? Do you recall when the Member said that you must do them before they do you? Do Members recall that? Do Members recall the statement about teachers being criminals? Do Members recall that? I am appalled to hear what the Member referred to, and the impression that he gave with respect to that Member. Is that the same person? That is why we would continue to be here, and they would continue to be across there.

I listened to every one of them so far, but they are not saying much. How could they respond to an increase in old age pension? How could they respond to that? How could they respond to an increase in the minimum wage? They cannot respond to that. They cannot respond to the removal of value added tax (VAT) on several items. They cannot respond to that. They cannot respond to the fact that there are measures for petroleum companies—the 150 per cent tax rebate which would be applied toward sports and culture. They cannot respond to that?

Mr. Speaker, the implementation as it relates to the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) was over 90 per cent. In the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs that was about 97 per cent. Every Minister on this side performed! [*Desk thumping*] I listened to the Member when he read articles from the different Chambers of Commerce.

I read an article in the newspaper about the Sangre Grande Chamber of Commerce saying that Sangre Grande was left out from the budget. Interestingly enough, in the same article, the President of the Sangre Grande Chamber of Commerce said that he knows that we are going to get the upgrade of the Sangre Grande hospital which is about \$85 million. That is provided for in the budget. The highway would be going up to Manzanilla. That is provided for. We are going to get the road from Matelot to Blanchisseuse. There are \$30.5 million to be spent on the pine settlement. The Manzanilla Beach Resort is going to be upgraded. Money was provided in the budget for that. The University of Trinidad and Tobago and the Technology Park would be established right in Valencia. I am

amazed! [*Desk thumping*] The road from Toco to Sangre Grande is going to be paved and that work has started.

The Minister of Works and Transport would tell you that if you take a drive up there you would see tremendous work being done with respect to the paving of that road. Work is currently being done to treat with landslips and so forth in the area. There is a lot of work taking place in the country. Where are the Members? Trinidad is on fire! [*Desk thumping*] A lot of work is taking place!

The Member spoke about unemployment and so forth, but the fact of the matter is that the Central Statistical Office has stated that the unemployment rate has dropped to 7.8 per cent. The Member came here and agreed with that fact. That is a fact! I wish to thank the Member for agreeing and confirming that unemployment is, in fact, 7.8 per cent. The Member tried to make all sorts of analyses, saying that it is because of the OJT and Unemployment Relief Programme (URP), et cetera. The fact of the matter is that unemployment has dropped to 7.8 per cent.

At the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, we have had several OJT trainees and they have worked very well. They have been trained. Interestingly enough, after the six-month period, all the OJT trainees who have worked in my office have received employment. The OJT programme is a very important programme for young people to come in and to get experience of a working environment. Is the Member saying that these trainees should not be given that opportunity? Is that what the hon. Member is saying?

7.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side will continue to work very hard and ensure that we continue to lower the unemployment rate; that is a fact. I know that is hurting them.

The Member also spoke about all these programmes. I was so pleased to see the number of programmes that he had, in fact, listed. The Minister of Social Development and Gender Affairs went on a tour recently to an international conference. When he listed to that body the number of social programmes we had, they were all amazed. They said they needed to pattern after Trinidad and Tobago. I am glad the Member took the opportunity to read all the programmes out, so Trinidad and Tobago would, no doubt, appreciate and understand that we care about the people of this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

I heard him talk about the Military Led Academic Training (MILAT) Programme, the Military Led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship Re-orientation Training Programme (MYPART) and the national youth service programmes. For the Member's sake, let me give him all assurance that the Ministry of Sport and

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Youth Affairs has been working with the Ministry of National Security and stakeholders to make sure that we cross our “t”s and dot our “i”s. We are mindful of the concerns that the Member has raised and that is why a task force has been set up to treat with issues as they relate to making sure that there is proper training, academics and life skills training. All these components are fitted into these three programmes. Trinidad and Tobago, from this year, will be pleased and blessed with these three programmes. It is a fact.

I always hear some of them speak about discrimination. It is not a question of discrimination, because some of the Members on that side have been working for their constituents. My friend, the Member for Oropouche, writes to me. The Member for Chaguanas continues to lobby for his constituents. The Member for Nariva also writes to me and asks for things and we assist him. The Member for Couva South has asked us to use some of the Caroni lands to establish a sporting complex; we discussed that. [*Crosstalk*] But he must be careful what he asks for, he may get it. There are plans on the drawing board to even treat with some of the requests from the Member for Couva South. A number of them on that side ask and work with us and we get things done.

Some of them do not do a single thing; we on this side would not get a single letter from them. They then sit there and complain and cry about discrimination, “dat time is lazy dey lazy”. They are not servicing their constituents and that is a fact. Their constituents must demand of them. They must go into their office and see what they have done. Who have they written to? Why can they not work with the Self-help Commission, the embassies or call or write every minister? Service your constituents; that is the function of a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what I told somebody at one time? Someone came to me and said, “Minister, I asked you to help me and you did; when you were a Member of Parliament, I also asked you to help me and you did so.” A Member of Parliament can do so much. We on this side respect every single Member of Parliament because, as the Member for Oropouche said, we represent the people. The whole of Trinidad and Tobago is sitting right here, right now and we on this side respect that. We ask you to stop your talk about discrimination and let us work together to build this nation. You have your role to play as the Opposition and we have our role to play as the Government, but, at the end of the day, we are all Members of Parliament to serve the people.

Mr. Speaker, we heard in the 2005 budget presentation of the sound economic health of our esteemed nation this past year. That was no easy feat, as it took place amidst a national policy agenda that placed social development issues at the

centre of its objectives. Indeed, fiscal 2004 presented some serious challenges to the social fabric of beautiful Trinidad and Tobago. It was through a deepening of our commitment to improve the lives of our citizens that we have been able to champion this cause with a level of satisfaction.

In my role, as Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, and in the midst of an ever-changing and dynamic social environment, I, too, was challenged to respond with dispatch to the existing and emerging demands of our national stakeholders, within the constraints of the available resources. We at the ministry had a relatively good year, as we rose to the challenges before us to deliver our service products to an increasingly enlightened population. Although fulfilling this year has been fraught with many challenges, not the least of which was the ministry's ability to create the level of impact necessary to bring about meaningful development and change in Trinidad and Tobago, permit me to document and to mention our achievements in sport and youth development and chart the course for further advancement in the coming year and fulfil the dream of every boy, girl, the old and the young and that is: To take this nation to developed status, within the shortest possible time.

In the youth department, the year in review was charged with the vibrancy and vitality of our young people seeking to position themselves in the social fabric of our nation and carving niches for themselves in the quest for self-identity. It was a year of excitement and challenges, as we continued our collaborative efforts towards attaining the goal of policy formulation through which we will be guided in our pursuit for development of the youth.

We worked assiduously with our key stakeholder interests to complete the redrafting and obtain ratification by the Cabinet of the first ever National Youth Policy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I remember when the Cabinet approved that National Youth Policy, I called Lennox Marcelle. He told me that when he was younger and attended the University of the West Indies, he and his friends would dream of a day when Trinidad and Tobago would have a national youth policy. He worked assiduously on it over the years. We made changes; we had consultation; it was a tremendous achievement. We took it to the Social Sector Committee where the Prime Minister, through his guidance, was able to make key intervention. The youth councils, both from Trinidad and Tobago, had to applaud the fact that the Prime Minister was able to guide us in a direction that made so much sense and logic, and we were all able to go back and do some extra consultation and then bring a document that was approved by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago.

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When Lennox Marcelle got the news, he cried: Finally Trinidad and Tobago has a national youth policy. According to my friend from Oropouche, when we ask ourselves: How will the Prime Minister, the hon. Member for San Fernando East, be remembered? This is one of the things he will be remembered for: making sure that the country got a national youth policy. [*Desk thumping*]

The approval of this document heralds the formulation of a comprehensive policy approach to address the developmental needs and aspirations of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. This policy document speaks to the ever-changing needs of our youth and serves as a guide to their present and future development. It provides the mechanism into which productive citizens, of whom we can be proud, can be developed. For too long our young people have been without a policy document to guide their development and facilitate the meaningful contribution of this group in our population. The milestone has finally been achieved.

This policy documents a framework for the development of our youth and presents opportunities, not only for employment, but also for skills training as well, thus creating employable young persons. It speaks to the creation of a crime and violence unit geared to combat this terrible scourge that we have to and will deal with. It also speaks to the provision of financial and technical assistance to youth-serving organizations, whose tireless service to their clients has proven to be an invaluable contribution.

Mr. Speaker, at the base of everything else of the policy is to work with our youth non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and our youth stakeholders like the Scouts, Girl Guides, the Trinidad Youth Council and the Tobago Youth Council. Over decades we have seen the subvention of the Scouts and Girl Guides and all our youth stakeholders being at pittance. The Scouts used to get about \$15,000 a year for their sustainability. The Girl Guides used to get about \$10,000. It took the PNM Government to understand the importance of utilizing its youth NGOs to get the work done throughout the length and breadth of this country. We do not want to reinvent the wheel. If the Scouts and Girl Guides are doing a fantastic job throughout the length and breadth of this country, what do we do? We work with them; we empower them; we strengthen them and give them the tools and resources to get these programmes throughout this country. That is why we have taken the subvention of the Scouts from \$15,000 to \$126,000. [*Desk thumping*] We have taken the Girls Guides from \$10,000 a year for their subvention to \$84,000.

My friend from Oropouche was asking about the list of organizations and people who got money and why we were withholding and that sort of thing. That refers to confidential information, as it relates to banking information. There is an

aspect of confidentiality and privacy that we must appreciate. As it relates to the Trinidad Youth Council, we have increased its subvention to \$100,000. We have increased the Tobago Youth Council to \$60,000. We have increased all our youth NGOs' subventions. When I get to sport, if time permits, I will read out all the names of the NGOs and our national sport organizations that have benefited this year from the Government's list of subventions. I could give you the amount of money right now.

7.40 p.m.

So far for this year they got \$12,377,088.39. We have a system where we fund them so that they can do development programmes throughout the length and breadth of this country both from the sport and also the youth side. The Member for Chaguanas knows that.

The youth policy envisions empowered young people who are able to make informed choices in order to lead meaningful, enjoyable lives and contribute to the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the national youth policy is also a company, and what was also approved by Cabinet, was a strategic implementation plan consisting of 15 courses of action for implementation over a period of three years.

This means that the policy is not expected to be a shelf document, but one that will follow a planned implementation path that will lead to the restructuring of the youth service delivery system and the provision of greater economic and administrative support to youth organizations.

I daresay Mr. Speaker, we have been meeting with all the youth's stakeholders and have been going through our strategic development plan with them and mapping out a plan of action.

We guarantee to this nation that 2005 will be the year that the youths in this country come alive through a strategic plan that has been approved by this Cabinet and has been accepted by all the youth NGOs. All of them are so excited because they are the ones working to make sure that we get this programme delivered in the best interest of our nation and its youths.

As we pursue the policy implementation process, the ministry is currently gathering information on youth organizations to facilitate the creation of a database which speaks to addressing the needs of youths.

This database is designed to capture data on the types of youth organizations that exist, demographics of youth organizations and the communities they serve,

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and programmes and projects implemented by these organizations. We do not want to be duplicating. We want to make sure we coordinate the entire exercise in the country.

This database of information will be a decentralization tool through which we plan, organize and distribute resources and render support services to meet the needs of all young persons in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, this approach will bring an end to the fragmentation in the supply of services to our youths and points to the Government's commitment to support and improve the lives of all our young people by providing alternative ways of life and instilling positive social, family and moral values to the young people of our nation.

In this regard, Cabinet has approved \$36 million to be spent over a three-year period towards the implementation of 15 courses of action set out in a strategic implementation plan of the National Youth Policy.

These are identification and coordinating of existing programmes for youths. We want to make sure that we appreciate all the programmes for youths. All the training programmes that my friend from Oropouche listed a short while ago, we want to make sure that we can coordinate all these programmes and have them placed in all our youth facilities. So wherefore our youths go, they would be exposed to all the Government programmes.

Some people in Cedros or Toco may not be in a position to understand or to even be exposed to some of the programmes. We are bringing these programmes to the doorstep of the youths.

Greater economic and administrative support for youth-serving organizations. We are going to support with more resources our youth-service organizations in Trinidad and Tobago; that is why we have all on board working together as one unit, as one team.

We are focusing on a restructured youth service delivery system. We want to ensure that we have a system that speaks to the youth organizations, so the ministry is developing in conjunction with our youth stakeholder a proper delivery system.

Just as we have established a sport company to execute the sporting programmes in communities, it is the same manner in which we would have a restructured youth delivery system to execute all the programmes throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Block Leadership Initiative for the New Generation (BLING), that is the name of this project. That speaks to going to all the areas of Trinidad and Tobago where the youths are gathered. We are going inside there with all our programmes. We are going to use football, cricket, basketball, our IT programmes to educate and capture them. We are going to get them involved and when we put them in our youth facilities, we are going to train them. BLING, that is the one my friend from Oropouche missed. [*Desk thumping*]

Interestingly enough, the Trinidad Youth Council and the Tobago Youth Council came up with that one. So the youths are on target.

The creation of a Youth Empowerment Unit, the creation of a Youth Leadership Development Institute, the creation of a Youth Development Fund, institutional strengthening of the National Youth Council and that is what we are doing.

If I may mention that through the initiative of the Government, we realized that we need to establish a National Youth Council. So we got together with all our youth stakeholders and started a series of seminars that would lead up to the establishment of a National Youth Council.

Mr. Speaker, the J.B. Fernandes Trust Fund administered by the Rockefeller Foundation had been convinced that this is important for our country so much so that they have given US \$100,000 for a period of two years towards the establishment of a National Youth Council, and the Government has matched that dollar for dollar. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the development of a Youth Employment and Employability Policy, the expansion of employment agencies, the reengineering and expansion of the national apprenticeship and service programmes, the development of youth centres and other youth serving facilities and life skills and pre-education programmes; these are the ones that came up in consultation with our youth stakeholders.

This year the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs will focus on the institutional strengthening of youth structures and the provision of greater economic technical and administrative support for youth serving organizations.

The Government also intends to implement the project BLING where community youths will be mobilized to establish teams to participate in games, competitions such as small goal football, street basketball, cricket and netball.

During these activities as I mention, youth workers, social workers and other service delivery professionals will conduct individual and group assessment exercise and would work with these young people in counselling them in terms of

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life skill training, and expose them to IT training in our youth facilities. Tomorrow we are launching the programme “No time for crime in Laventille.”

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with the goal of developed nation status, it is necessary that the young people of Trinidad and Tobago be included in the decision-making process as they have valuable contributions to make in the present and future progression of our country.

Again, through our extensive, collaborative process of developing the youth policy, it was determined that an accepted means of giving young people a voice is through the creation of the National Youth Policy.

Mr. Speaker, Government's approach, as I said earlier, is to work with all our youth NGOs and CBOs to ensure that we deliver all these programmes throughout the length and breadth of this country. The scouts got \$126,000 from \$15,000; and I was wrong when I said that the Girl Guides subvention was increased from \$10,000; it was \$3,000 and from \$3,000, it was increased to \$84,000. [*Desk thumping*]

The National Scouting Association is in the process of constructing their headquarters in San Fernando and this year, we have given them \$50,000, and we are going to forward to them over \$600,000 for the finalization of their administrative centre.

The Girl Guides were given \$100,000 about a month ago and in this new fiscal year, they will receive approximately \$200,000 towards their training centre.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of enhancing the capital stock for youth development, the ministry utilized its 2004 development programme budget of approximately \$4.1 million to maintain and conduct refurbishment works to its existing infrastructure of three residential and seven non-residential youth facilities.

It also focused on the implementation of projects to assist youths in managing their health issues such as HIV/AIDS, instilling social life skills and technical trade skills, and presenting solutions and alternatives to socially delinquent behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to place on record one of the key initiatives of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The ministry's youth/health caravan has rolled into over 15 communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago to promote the message of safe, sexual, reproductive health and other health-related issues through the use of drama, entertainment, workshops and focus groups. And I know my friend, the Member for Chaguanas, will know about this youth health programme.

These caravans have attracted the participation of hundreds of not only young people, but their parents and elder community residents as well. In fact, attendance at these caravans has averaged around 200 with the highest of 400 recorded in the St. George West district.

Mr. Speaker, every time a caravan rolls into a community, the residents respond in great numbers. The youth caravan demonstrates that there are many positive youths in our country, and to be able to attract so many of them to a daytime activity in which the main event is not loud, popular music, the sale of alcohol, or the performance of a well-known dub artiste, is a testament to the impact of this programme in the fight against this annoying scourge plaguing our beloved nation.

As we look ahead to the year 2005, we expect to accelerate the implementation process by seeking to establish those institutions identified in our policy documents that would strengthen the delivery arm of our youth services, expand opportunities for youth development through relevant target specific training, and deepen the process of establishing the electronic information base on youth leagues in communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago which will serve as a key variable in championing our efforts towards improving the situation of youth.

We also intend to continue networking with other ministries/organizations in their youth development efforts. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is partnering with the Ministry of National Security in the implementation of three youth programmes, the Military Led Academic Training Programme (MILAT), the Military Led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship Re-orientation Training Programme (MYPART) and the National Youth Service Programme.

7.55 p.m.

Indeed, under MYPART, the Military Led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship Re-orientation Training Programme, young persons would acquire technical skills while training at our youth facilities in a programme managed by the Defence Force. Additionally, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs supports the other programmes of the Government, including:

- On-the-Job-Training Programme (OJT)
- Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA)
- Multi Sector Skills Training Programme (MUST),

which, I daresay, has impacted this country tremendously. There are young people throughout the length and breadth of this country who are getting an opportunity to learn a trade, and this is a fact. I continue:

- Helping You Prepare for Employment (HYPE).

My friend, the Member for Oropouche mentioned that programme. I daresay contractors throughout the length and breadth of this country are lining up outside the HYPE offices, waiting to get in touch with these tutors so that as soon as these young people graduate, they can take them in, because of the construction taking place throughout our country. And that is a fact. It goes on:

- Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP).

For the past 15 years, over 150,000 persons were trained under the YTEPP.

We would always continue to create an enabling environment by putting the necessary structures and programmes in place to facilitate the future development of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

As this Government continues to chart a course towards the attainment of developed nation status and in recognition of the fact that, notwithstanding the price of oil today, our resources are always finite, it is imperative that no subgroup of our society be left behind. Vision 2020 is our vision for all of Trinidad and Tobago and our youth, a great percentage of whom we can be extremely proud—our youth are our greatest asset and we will not let them down. That is our promise and our commitment to the sustained development of our youth.

I turn my attention to the area of sport. Fiscal 2004 was indeed a roller-coaster year for sport in Trinidad and Tobago. It was characterized by many celebrity events as well as some disappointments; from Brian Lara's golden 400 runs, not-out, and his championing of the West Indies cricket team towards major victory in winning the ICC mini World Cup event, to George Bovell's magnificent performance at the Olympics in capturing bronze in the 200m individual medley, and to the withdrawal of Olympic medal hopeful, Darrel Brown, from his pet event, the 100m dash at the recently concluded Olympic games.

But our country has a lot to look forward to as we received the award of the Brown Package for the World Cup Cricket matches in 2007, and despite our reduced programme funding this year, we were still able to keep sport alive at the community level through the use of sporting facilities and deeper collaboration and cooperation with sport structures, such as clubs, leagues and national sporting organizations, all of which play a significant role in the delivery process.

Permit me to elaborate on some of our significant interventions to advance the development of sport in the past year:

- The provision of over \$5.1 million to our high performance athletes to assist in their daily preparation, nutritional, transportation and training regimen for Olympics 2004.
- The provision of millions of dollars in support of the national Football Development Programme. This programme is designed to standardize the local development of football in Trinidad and Tobago.
- Trinidad and Tobago was the 100th country to become a signatory to the Copenhagen Declaration on Anti-doping in Sport.
- Extensive preparations leading to the award of six First Round World Cup events/matches in which we will host Team India in the International Cricket Council's World Cup event in 2007. We do expect to get some warm-up matches as well.
- The employment of four additional Cuban coaches to assist in the development of training in track and field and the introduction of baseball/softball in the School Coaching Programme, which, as the Member for Oropouche indicated, was a success.
- The hosting of seminars/workshops to enlighten our sport stakeholders and advance the implementation of the revised National Sport Policy.
- The establishment of the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago.

When the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas came to this honourable House and he brought a Motion on the Adjournment and he indicated that we needed to give some support to communities, to the clubs, the leagues, the minor leagues and that sort of thing, what he said did not fall on deaf ears, you know, because we, on this side, listen. On that basis, the hon. Prime Minister was able to spearhead the establishment of a Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago to execute these same programmes throughout the length and breadth of this country; in every community. I continue:

- Assistance to over 50 National Sporting Organizations (NSOs).

This was to the tune of over \$12 million. If I may digress to just call out a few of the names of some of these bodies that we assisted:

- Darts Association, over \$27,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Tennis Association, \$27,000;
- National Amateur Athletic Association, \$195,000;

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- Trinidad and Tobago Pro League, \$3 million;
- Women's Cricket, \$241,000;

This Government cares. It gives moneys to organizations so that they could do the developmental work for the sporting clubs and minor leagues and for the sportsmen and women in Trinidad and Tobago. I continue:

- Trinidad and Tobago Hockey Board, \$173,661.50;
- Trinidad and Tobago Badminton Association, \$45,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee, \$500,000;
- Table Tennis, \$75,000;
- Drafts and Checkers Association, \$40,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Special Olympics, \$37,000, together with \$126,000 from the Sport and Culture Fund.

That was made possible because of the hon. Prime Minister's intervention. I continue:

- Trinidad and Tobago Rugby Football Association, \$60,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Gymnastics Association, \$60,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board, \$70,000;
- Taekwando Association, \$50,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Netball Association, \$200,000;
- Karate, \$20,000;
- Volleyball, \$120,000;
- Stern John Skills and Award Programme, Football, \$140,000.
- Elite Athletes Programme, \$5.1 million;
- Clico Marathon, \$20,000;
- Southern Games, \$30,000.

That is one page. I have three pages:

- President Award \$60,000;
- Scouts, \$126,000;

- Girl Guides, \$84,000;
- National Basketball Federation, \$52,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Boxing Association, \$224,000;
- The Semi-League, \$250,000;
- Amateur Swimming, \$30,000;
- Secondary School Cricket League, \$53,000;
- Trinidad Youth Council, \$100,000;
- Tobago Youth Council, \$60,000.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Boynes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You see, we have to take our time and let the population know all the work that this Government has been doing. I continue:

- Body Building Federation, \$46,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Golf Association, \$40,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Chess Association, \$40,000;
- Cycling Federation, \$20,000;
- Surfing Association, \$20,000,
- Tag B, Triathlon, \$20,000
- Powerboat Association, \$10,000;
- Bridge Association, \$10,000;
- Windball Cricket, \$10,000;
- Trap and Skeet Association, \$20,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Sailing Association, \$20,000;
- Trinidad and Tobago Game Fishing Association, \$15,000;

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- Trinidad and Tobago Judo Association, \$10,000;
- The Rifle Association, \$10,000;
- Squash Association, \$20,000;
- Pigeon Racing Association, \$14,500.

That is to tell you, all in all, over \$12.3 million were spent for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Additionally, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has implemented the following programmes in communities:

- District Sporting Programme
- Sports/Youth Festival
- Community Coaching Programme
- School Coaching Programme
- Sport Training Enhancement Programme (STEP)
- Motivational and Inspirational Programme in schools and Youth Training Centre.

At this stage I wish to put on record my absolute congratulations to George Bovell for what he has done for this nation. [*Desk thumping*] His humility and his commitment to this country is second to none. I remember George Bovell went to the schools; met with children and the message he gave to them to focus on their education was second to none. When he went to YTC and addressed those young men and told them that they could make a difference; they could change their lives; that the Government wants them to change their lives; that the society is backing them; make a difference, I saw a couple of them cry. I want to put on record my congratulations and thanks to George Bovell for going into the YTC and trying to contribute to changing this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Additionally, we are working with NSOs to strengthen their organizational capacity. For example, the ministry is attempting to solve the problems in motor sports by working with the organizations involved. When we looked at several of the accidents which took place on the roadways which are caused by drag-racing on the road—and several of the Members on the other side would understand what I am talking about because I think some of their families have suffered as a result of this—the Prime Minister immediately indicated to us at the Ministry of

Sport and Youth Affairs that we must find a home for drag-racing. We needed to solve the problem that exists at the Wallerfield area where they normally have their motor sports.

We had a massive meeting with all the stakeholders, because at one point one set was not talking to the other, and that created a problem. So we brought them all together and were able to put a plan and solve the problem in that sport. They have given us the assurance; they said: “Minister, you are talking about sports tourism? We would show you through our combined efforts, and working with your Government we would be in a position to establish motor sports as one of the best in the region and when you see people coming into Trinidad and Tobago you would understand how people love motor sports.” I believed them. So we are going to be working with motor sports and we are going to make a difference and establish Trinidad and Tobago as the hub for motor sports in the region.

Equally, while as a nation we tend to think of the late Vince Lombardi’s quote that in sport, “winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing”, we, at the ministry, tend to subscribe to his other quote that says: “In wanting to win, it is glorious even to fail.” With that parameter before us, we continued to invest in systems that build from the ground up. We know that achievement at the highest level does not come without a sound foundation, lots of talent and continuous effort on the part of our athletes who perform for us on the international stage. That is why our intervention in the sport development process has been twofold, focusing at the community level, through programmes of mass participation and at the national level through high performance sport.

Our national sports policy speaks to these two dimensions of contemporary sport—total participation in sport and high performance sport. These are the bases upon which our policy and programme decisions are made. So, notwithstanding the accomplishments of our sporting stars, of which we are all proud, we remain resolute in the task of strengthening the foundation through our total participation in sport, coaching and training programmes, upon which our future stars will be conditioned for success.

It is on this note that I wish to take this opportunity to extend my heartiest congratulations to our outstanding national athletes who performed incredibly well on the international circuit of their respective sports. They are in alphabetical order:

Mr. Niconner Alexander. He did extremely well.

Mr. Steven Ames. You all, no doubt, would remember he performed extremely well.

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Mr. Ato Boldon

Ms. Cleopatra Borel

Mr. George Bovell III

Mr. Darrel Brown

Mr. Marc Burns

Mr. Brian Lara

Ms. Candice Scott,

to name a few.

8.10 p.m.

There are several others whose achievements have made us proud Trinbagonians in the past year. Their outstanding accomplishments were the results of determination, hard work, discipline, sacrifice, commitment to purpose and maintaining a drug free status. They deserve every accolade for a job well done.

You may agree that sport has been the beacon through which our society transcends all adversity. It is a key factor in the lives of our citizens particularly, our younger citizens whether through active or passive participation. We at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs have sought to make that possible for as many of our citizens, as we traverse the path that would take us to developed nation status by 2020. Indeed, healthy lifestyles reduce social deviance among young people and greater access to non traditional educational opportunities has been the hallmark of our programme offerings. Our sport programmes have offered young people opportunities for self development and self motivation and taught them commitment and dedication to the task ahead.

It is through this grounding that several of our sporting citizens have moved on to attain national, regional and international achievements in their respective sporting endeavours. Even though our achievements at the international level may seem sporadic at times, they are indicative of the well-rounded grooming of our athletes at the early stages of their training. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs operates 17 strategically located sport facilities. These facilities cater to the playing of indoor court games, track and field games, main field matches and aquatic pool sports. Our delivery arm personnel includes coaches; physical education and sport officers who interface with students and other participants to deliver coaching and training programmes at these and other state facilities.

This year we made some decisive interventions in our approach to the improvement of sport development and sport delivery which I wish to share. In the Football Development Programme, Government continued to support the development of football through the provision of financial assistance to the professional and semi professional football league and the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation. This investment is intended to lay the foundation for the development of football from primary schools through the level of community clubs and leagues to the national level.

In cricket, like the rest of the region in Trinidad and Tobago, sport is synonymous with cricket. Our local hero, Mr. Brian Lara based on his latest world class achievement in test cricket earlier this year, has been appointed as an Ambassador of Sport for Trinidad and Tobago. His achievement is fortuitous as it has occurred in the midst of planning activities for the next ICC World Cup Cricket Tournament which would take place in the Caribbean in 2007. It also serves as a fillip to the cricketing world in general and the West Indies in particular. His leadership of the West Indies team to victory in the recent ICC Mini World Cup League Competition was another heart warmer and shows that amidst long hard struggles there can be victory.

Development plans for staging events and matches of the upcoming Cricket World Cup in 2007 are engaging the attention of the governments throughout the region. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has signaled its intention to invest considerable funds to improve the facilities and construct a multi-purpose international sporting complex in South Trinidad. The Union Park site at Marabella has been identified as the location for this project which would form part of the proposed Brian Lara Multi-Purpose Caribbean Sporting Academy.

This academy would be a world class sporting facility and would include playing facilities in the sports of cricket, swimming, cycling, indoor basketball, netball, volleyball, tennis and hockey.

Quite apart from the accolades we pay to our high performance athletes, we at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Government as a whole, as part of the implementation process for the national sport policy have also implemented strategies to facilitate total participation in sport by all citizens. We recognize that participation in physical recreation activities is an important part of the holistic development of the person. We encourage the development of healthy lifestyles through the delivery of programmes and the provision of technical and financial assistance to our sporting stakeholders.

Indeed, I envision that the day would come when all citizens from the cradle to the grave would benefit from the implementation of the policy measures outlined in the 2002 revised National Sport Policy of Trinidad and Tobago. That would ensure their fitness and well being and contribute to the improvement of the quality of their lives.

In advancing the policy implementation process of which a key factor is the establishment of a Sport Commission of Trinidad and Tobago (SCOTT) to manage the sport plant and treat with matters pertaining to the development of sport, the Government has set up an interim body to fast track that process. That body is the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, a limited liability company fully owned by the Government to facilitate the implementation of the National Sport Policy. The sport company would implement suitable programmes for total participation and high performance sports through the implementation of community programmes in 10 sporting disciplines. This includes football, cricket, netball, basketball, track and field, swimming, cycling, hockey, volleyball and boxing, in the first instance. This is designed to reach the masses in every nook and cranny of this country; every citizen, everywhere!

There would be programmes involving training for Special Olympics. This would impact significantly on the various sub groupings of the national community. There would be specific programmes for youths who may have much time on their hands; the elderly; the physically challenged; the housewife; executive; student; office workers; factory workers; high performance athletes. There would be programmes for all and sundry. There would be programmes for Members of Parliament. At times we would be in a position to play each other. I guarantee that on this side we would give them the soundest "lickin" they would get in any sport, any time in Trinidad and Tobago.

The company would also implement specific elite programmes in five sporting disciplines including football, cricket, basketball, netball and athletics, all this towards improving the lives of fellow citizens through physical recreation and sport. May I also point out that about 80 per cent of the 2005 budget of the sport company is directed to programme delivery. We expect from the programmes at the sport company compounded with the programmes of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs that 2005 would be branded as the year of sport in Trinidad and Tobago. You were outside when I mentioned that you had made some intervention that we are looking to treat with.

As a result of this planned programme expansion through the sport company, the ministry would focus its energies on measures of reducing social deviance

through physical recreation activities such as the National Sports Festival Programme with its accompanying community level matches which has been successful in assisting young people in their personal formation and socialization. Some people know it as MILO Fest. It is really a Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs initiative funded by the ministry. There would be Sports Training Enhancement Programme conducted throughout the country in multi disciplines to identify talented individuals within the 8 to 14 age group for further training in sport; preparing talented youths to perform at higher levels of sport. This year we had 1,621 participants. We call that programme STEP. That caters for the age group of 8 to 14 years. Every year we have that.

We have the Sports School Programme that the ministry presently conducts throughout Trinidad and Tobago. It is one in which selected sport achievers from various districts are invited to participate in a non residential programme of activity to further their skills in specialized sporting disciplines. This is also an opportunity to encourage self-development and build self-esteem. We also conduct our community and schools coaching programmes.

Through the work of the sports company combined with the programmes run by the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs, 2005 as I mentioned earlier has been declared by United Nations as the International Year for Physical Education and Sport. I daresay that we at the ministry and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago are taking sports seriously in this country. We would have sporting programmes throughout the length and breadth of this country. We welcome every Member of Parliament to come on board with us; write to us and come and see us. We would work with you so that we can have these sporting programmes in each constituency. At the end of the day, we have to serve the people.

We recognize that at the administrative level there is a paucity of trained sport personnel in Trinidad and Tobago. This has deepened our relationship with the Republic of Cuba under the bilateral agreement with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Three of the first Cuban coaches have completed their contract to coach and train our athletes in boxing and volleyball. They have been replaced by four specialist Cuban coaches who have been brought on board to assist the ministry in its School Coaching Programmes in the sport of baseball, softball and field events such as throwing events as javelin, shot put and discus.

Government continues to invest in its human resource in the field of sports. There are 15 Trinidad and Tobago nationals currently pursuing university degree programmes in Sport and Physical Education in Cuba. The first batch of five students is expected to graduate in 2005, when they will return and add to the

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human resource capacity in sport at the administrative and technical levels. We will be liaising with the University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad and Tobago to develop courses for our citizens wishing to pursue a career in sport. We must see sport as an industry similar to oil and natural gas, so it is therefore necessary to develop home grown experts in the areas of sport tourism, sports management and sports facility management.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has been having discussions with other stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Tourism, hotel and marketing experts on the country's sport tourism thrust by developing a sport tourism package including our world class sport facilities which can be marketed internationally. Additionally, we are working with national sporting organizations in respect of the hosting of international sporting events in this country. The World Optimist Sailing Competition, and the Norcesa Volleyball World Cup Qualifying Tournament would be hosting these events in Trinidad and Tobago in 2005. We would work with them to ensure that these international events are properly marketed. We see the number of people who would come to Trinidad and Tobago as part of our sport tourism thrust.

We are all aware of the consequences of using performance-enhancing drugs to get ahead of the competition. Sometimes we get caught; sometimes we do not and when we do, we are seldom able to deal with the disgrace that accompanies the discovery. The promotion of drug free sports is listed among the tenets of our National Sport Policy. I wish to announce that Trinidad and Tobago was the 100th country to become a signatory to the Copenhagen Declaration on Anti-Doping in Sport in March 2004. This signage commits Government to support the World Anti-Doping Code adopted by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

8.25 p.m.

The Government has also approved the establishment of a local Anti-Doping Commission to administer and enforce the anti-doping rules set out in the code. Legislation to give effect to the setting up of the commission is included in Government's legislative agenda 2005.

Mr. Speaker, as you are no doubt aware, Trinidad and Tobago has been awarded the Brown Package of matches in respect of ICC World Cup, 2007. As a result, Trinidad and Tobago would be hosting six first-round matches events in Group C, including India for the upcoming International Cricket Council Workshop. The Government continues to work with the ICC CWC Inc. 2007 and Caricom to ensure the successful hosting of cricket in the region.

We in Trinidad and Tobago look forward with great excitement to the preparatory developments leading up to the Cricket World Cup events. I dare say, Mr. Speaker, that Cricket World Cup would be launched next year April in Trinidad and Tobago.

May I take this opportunity to elaborate the stunning international achievements of two of our nation's greatest sporting heroes, Messrs. Brian Charles Lara and George Bovell. The Government proposes to honour these men as follows:

The establishment of the Brian Lara Multi-purpose Caribbean Sporting Academy comprising a Multi-purpose Sporting Facility at Union Park, and a Coaching Clinic to train would-be first-class sports persons of Trinidad and Tobago and the region as a whole. A first-class cricket facility is also to be built in Bacolet, Tobago to advance the game of cricket in that island and add to their sport tourism.

The establishment of a Brian Lara Foundation with initial subvention from Government of \$10 million, with contributions invited from the private sector to be utilized to advance cricket in this country.

Significant upgrades to the community sporting facilities at Cantaro, Santa Cruz.

An additional 180 scholarships and bursaries to be granted by the Government to under-privileged youths based on their performance at the CXC/GCE examinations. That was done, Mr. Speaker.

As it relates to Mr. George Bovell:

An Olympic sized swimming pool to be named The George Bovell III Swimming Complex in Port of Spain.

An Olympic sized swimming complex to be built in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in fiscal 2005, the Government intends to invest over \$31 million in capital projects. And be mindful, Mr. Speaker, that we drew down 97 per cent of our PSIP in 2004. This is an increase of \$13 million over the 2004 figure. These funds will be largely used towards:

- The development of a Multi-purpose Sporting Complex at Union Park, Marabella.
- The completion of the Youth/Sport Multi-purpose Facility in Mayaro.
- The refurbishment of the National Hockey Centre.

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- The improvement and refurbishment of our Indoor Sporting Arenas at Pleasantville, Point Fortin, Chaguanas and Tacarigua.
- The construction of six more regional grounds which are situated at Diego Martin, Santa Cruz, Pleasantville, Point Fortin, Toco, and Yoland Pompey Recreational Ground.
- The construction of three Youth/Sport Indoor Facilities situated at Arima, Diego Martin and Sangre Grande.
- The construction of the 50-metre swimming pool.
- Construction of the St. James Youth Facility and upgrade of existing Youth Training Facilities at Los Bajos, Laventille, Malick and Woodbrook.
- The refurbishment of Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres.

Mr. Speaker, be mindful that we drew down 97 per cent of our PSIP in 2004. We also have turf wickets on which we are going to embark. We held a meeting at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and I have indicated to the staff: I said, this is the year that we have to go on the ground. We have to go to every nook and cranny and make sure that we push these projects! We have to make sure that we deliver! We have to get 100 per cent! The people in my ministry are charged! They are energized! They are proud that they have achieved 97 per cent and they want to go higher than that!

Mr. Speaker, in looking ahead, we recognize that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs will face many challenges in the coming year. We will be required to respond to an increasing demand of our stakeholders for enhanced opportunities to improve their quality of life through personal development, vocational skills training and involvement in positive sport and recreational activities.

In 2005, the ministry will continue its strategic initiatives to strengthen the capacity to deliver and advance the process of restructuring its role from programme implementer to policy formulator.

In order to continue on the successes of Brian Lara and George Bovell, Government intends to provide further financial assistance to ensure that the many Laras, Bovells, Ramnarines and Browns, through their respective national sporting organizations, will have the capacity to make the development process and pathway to success. In other words, Mr. Speaker, Government will adopt a broad-based approach to make 2005 a significant year for sport and youth development in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we have at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs a youth policy, a sport policy. We have allocations to implement the programmes for youth throughout the length and breadth of this country with the help of our youth stakeholders. We also have sporting programmes that we conduct at the ministry itself; that we will also conduct through utilizing the sport companies, in every nook and cranny throughout this country.

When you look at the fact also that we have our projects that we have to implement that speak to all over the place; we are trying to touch every constituency in every area. We would be working with every Member of Parliament in this honourable House to make sure that we touch the human resource in terms of sport and, also, that we deliver on the capital projects that we know we can deliver this year.

We ask that everybody join on board as we make Trinidad and Tobago aware that sport, 2005, would be a very significant year. All of us must come on board! Come on board all of you! All Members of Parliament; come on board for the sake of your constituents! Please do!

Mr. Speaker, this is how we operate on this side. We operate this way because we care. Let me also say that our approach at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is quite clear. We are following our youth policy. Our sport policy is in a very structured and organized manner. I dare say when you want to know what the Member for San Fernando East would be remembered for; remember that it is through his initiative that the sport policy was approved. It is through his initiative that the youth policy was, in fact, approved. It is because of his initiative that he continues to push and to help us establish a sport company to deliver to Trinidad and Tobago—all of you all!

Mr. Speaker, and hon. Members, let me just say that as we move on to a developed status, and as other Ministers and Members on this side stand and give an account of their stewardship, one would realize that it is all coming together, budget by budget.

Mr. Speaker, we have a plan. We are not operating by vaps. We have a plan and there is a programme to which we are adhering. In 2005, we are going to make an impact. In 2006, we are going to make an impact! Year after year, budget after budget, we will get there! We will make this nation a developed nation by 2020! We ask you to understand this! You cannot stop it! It will happen! Join on board now for the sake of your constituents! Vision 2020 is a reality! We are empowered; the nation is empowered and we are going to make it happen!

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

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*): Mr. Speaker, it is really good to join this debate at this hour. It is not usual that you hear a Member from the other side giving praise where it is due. I want to thank the hon. Member for Toco/Manzanilla for doing that this evening. That is something that we must applaud.

Mr. Speaker, it is as if time stood still in 2001 to 2004 because everything that was articulated by the hon. Minister was there in the ministry except, of course, BLING. The ministry is in good shape and I would like to remind the Minister of something, maybe he did not understand it. As you know sport being very close to my heart, I was trying to do a pie chart with the sum of money received by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs for all their grandiose plans. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs actually received .0008 per cent of the national budget. When I did a pie chart it was as if I had to take a microscope to really see the amount of money the ministry received.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the hon. Prime Minister that I think the hon. Minister made a passionate plea to be recognized. I say this with all sincerity. When I look at all the programmes, which are called youth programmes, and we have a Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, had I been the Minister, I would have had a problem with that. As he said this evening, Mr. Speaker, youth development is very close to his heart, but yet all the youth programmes are scattered across the sphere as if the Prime Minister has no trust in the Member for Toco/Manzanilla.

I sincerely hope, for the sake of not duplicating efforts, that the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs be empowered to deal with at least—when one looks at the programmes not all should go there—90 per cent of the youth programmes should be under the supervision of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Director of Youth Affairs. I have worked there and it is quite true that most of the members of that ministry are really interested in moving the youth forward.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I am asking the hon. Prime Minister that whenever he is doing these things to—most of these youth programmes are political. I was doing some calculations and you would be surprised to know the cost per person in these programmes. In certain instances it has worked up to as much as \$30,000 to train one person in these programmes. When you do the division you would see what I am talking about—\$20 million divided by \$500—the amount of money that is spent in these programmes. If all this money could have come together in Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs—I am sure if the hon. Minister had this responsibility—and the

Member for Tunapuna could work with him—I am sure the youth in this country would benefit. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have not created that trust for the people out there. The people and, especially the youth, are at risk to respect and to have a government to lead them.

This country is about perpetual handouts and if you examine these programmes they have one intention and that is to keep people in perpetual poverty and then at election time to say: Vote for me. So this evening I must really say that the Minister made a passionate plea. He probably did not do it consciously or maybe he did, but the fact is that his Ministry should be given the responsibility for all these youth programmes that are scattered all across the country.

The 150 per cent rebate, this was introduced on September 14, 2001 by hon. Gerald Yetming, the then minister of finance and up to now it has not yet been put right. I have been asking the question over time and here we come piecemeal again in the 2004/2005 Budget to talk about improving the petroleum sector. I am still not sure that this is being done in the way that it should be done. Businessmen still call me and they are still confused as to whether they would be given a rebate if they spend their moneys in certain sports and in a certain way. I do hope when we come to debate the amendment to the Finance Act that that will be put right once and for all because I still believe they have not yet got it right. I do not think the hon. Minister and Member for Toco/Manzanilla might be responsible as, indeed, the Minister of Finance, so we have to get that right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Minister tried to bring something about the unemployment rate, which he probably did not know too much about. In my humble way I would try to put on the table the *Social and Economic Policy Framework 2005/2007* to see if we could get this unemployment rate right. Let me quote from page 14:

“The unemployment rate rose slightly to 10.5 per cent in 2003 from 10.4 per cent in 2002 due mainly to the voluntary separation of Caroni workers during 2003. Unemployment however has since resumed its declining trend leveling off at 10.2 per cent during the last quarter of 2003 and the first quarter of 2004.”

I know my colleague dealt with that extensively. But the Member for Toco/Manzanilla has a habit of jumping in and out—that is one of his shortcomings—of his seat. Apparently he needs to go further up, I do not know. I continue to quote from page 20:

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“The strengthening of world economic growth over the last year will complement the increased activity within both the Energy and Non-energy Sectors. The rate of inflation is anticipated to remain closely in line with those of our major trading partners, averaging 3 per cent over the medium-term.”

8.40 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, listen to this. I do not know if the Prime Minister read this.

“As a result, unemployment is expected to reach single digits within the same period.”

That is, the period 2005—2007.

All the books that are laid in the Parliament point in a different direction from that 7.8 per cent. Do you know what is going to happen? When the Prime Minister is winding up the debate, he should say that was a mistake as in the last budget debate when he spoke about affirmative action and so forth. He must apologize. I warn the Members opposite to be very careful about that 7.8 per cent. It is just not possible. I quoted from the books laid before us.

As I talk about this book, the hon. Member spoke about three great sporting heroes over the last year, and, I too, have great respect for their abilities and what they have done in their various fields: Stephen Ames, George Bovell and, of course, Brian Lara.

When one looks at the front of this book that is our Vision 2020, it is showing our future survival, and I see sports. I notice some people are playing volleyball or whatever. I thought they would have used the opportunity to put these three heroes on our books before the Parliament so that at least people would understand what we are about. But again, there is no vision in this Government. This is mediocre and when one looks at these pictures, one could just see politics rather than something that one could look forward to. That is why I made the point that if the population does not have the confidence of their leaders we are not going to get out of poverty. There is something I want to put on record.

I know the hon. Member spoke about George Bovell. I would like if he could ask someone to explain to us, at least for public knowledge, why the President kept waiting on August 31, 2004 for George Bovell. I think this was an embarrassment. The Minister was there. He was the most senior person around and yet George Bovell who was being recognized by the State was late for his appointment. Was it the politizing of Mr. Bovell at the airport? I do not know. I

would like the hon. Member to tell us. I believe there are certain protocols in this country that one must observe and this is one of them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister talked about a redrafted national policy. When the UNC left office that new policy was a reality, but it has taken three years to redraft and yet it has not come to the Parliament. I remember the Member for Tunapuna passionately pleading with me: When would you bring that National Youth and Sport Policy to the Parliament? Now three years later, and the Minister himself said both were redrafted and revised. One was redrafted and one was revised yet they have not been brought to the Parliament. This is negligence of the highest order. This is a sure message to his leader.

Coordination of programme. This is the point I was making earlier. You are coordinating a programme, for about 10, 12, 15 youth programmes and yet the hon. Minister is crying out at least to coordinate the programme which is in my mind, rightfully, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and duplication of programme. He mentioned that. And I would like him to straighten that point because my colleague from Oropouche said that when these programmes come under one roof maybe, there would be some sort of integrity but when they are scattered all over the place, there would be duplication and, of course, it is making room for corruption. And I would talk about corruption a little later.

He talked about the youth caravan. I want to say sometimes as a Minister you give birth to a particular programme and that was one of the programmes that I personally thought about and we discussed it. It is something I want to applaud the Minister but he again—kind enough to say, it came from us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about cricket. The hon. Minister himself said help cricket. It is synonymous with sports in the Caribbean. Trinidad and Tobago—and I believe if you want to have sustainable development, if you want to have a development with something that would build a country it is not in handouts. All the HYPE that they are making about these handouts, this is not the way to end poverty. Maybe through sports one can invest in the youths.

For example, I still manage and run a cricket club and it is extremely difficult playing when you are playing in the national league and every other league; the cost of equipment. Now the games are starting at 9.00 a.m. and finishing at 6.00 p.m. You have to provide lunch and tea and you have to beg for some sort of assistance from the business sector.

I believe that the Government—because times have changed. Maybe this was not the situation three years ago but times have changed. If you want to spend

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money, invest in the 16 cricket clubs at the highest level. For example, there is an anomaly here and it is because of the talents of the club or the lack of clubs—again I will bring in the Member for Tunapuna here.

When cricket was cricket in the old days, there were clubs from Port of Spain to Toco. Now the whole north-east zone cannot have 12 teams. There were about 60 teams and now you cannot. It is because of the financial situation more than anything else in the country.

For example, in Chaguanas, in my constituency, we have five clubs out of 16 playing at the national level. If you go a little further south there are about four more, Preysal and what have you. There are about 10 clubs from the central area, a couple from south, a couple from Port of Spain; none from the east, none from south-east or south-west, and the cricket is in a little area. I thought that something should be done—I recommend this to the Minister because I know sometimes he listens, that we could, for example, my club—I would not mind if we could get people from Toco to come and play with us. I know there are talented players in Toco. I have seen them in action but there are no incentives for them to leave where they are. If you want high level sports, you have to go into communities and invest in the young people. With all this HYPE, YAPA, yes they might serve their purpose which I doubt very much, but if you could invest money in sport and not to give the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs less than 1 per cent of the national budget and then try to convince us on this side that, “Come to me, and I will make things right,” it is just not possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, sports is powerful and I would ask the Minister to stand by for 2007. He might not be there, but the fact is with what has happened to Grenada we do not know, and with more hurricane seasons to come, we should not give up preparing ourselves for hosting games. For example, Grenada. The stadium that was built by my friend from Diego Martin East has collapsed, as in many things he has built. If these things could happen again—I am not wishing it but the fact is we should be preparing.

I remember in the 1970s and 1980s, that Trinidad and Tobago hosted four test matches because of the weather. We have to stand by. So I ask the Minister to please continue to at least build another first-class facility and involve the cricket board. Do not leave them out.

They might have some problems with the Government but they need some assistance in building the Balmain Cricket Centre.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister made heavy weather of this subvention given to sporting bodies. I thought that I was reading a different book because yes, certain subventions were made and I want to put something that I found very interesting on record. If you look at appendix 1 there is some very interesting reading. For example, we just had George Bovell winning bronze at the Olympics and what do I see. Last year the Amateur Swimming Association of Trinidad and Tobago—\$93,261.05. This year they got \$30,000, in brackets, and one knows what that means. It has been decreased by \$63,261.

The National Amateur Athletic Association (NAAA) received \$1 million, \$51,000 less than what they received last year. I do not know how this—

Special Olympics. He made heavy weather of that. These are the disabled persons. They received \$100,000 last year and this year they are going to receive \$37,000. He mentioned the \$37,000, misleading us. These Ministers do not read these books. They just read what they get at the ministry. They forgot that we on this side receive the books and we read them.

The Special Olympics had a reduction of \$63,000 and if you look at the disabled in this country, it is as if there is discrimination against them. In their Disability Allowance Grant they have now reached \$800 per month. They still lag behind the old age pensioners. It is these people who have to pay more for medicine. If one asks the Minister of Health he might say there is medicine available but when you ask the people out there, there is no medicine available. It is as if you are discriminating against persons with disabilities. Of course, when it comes to debating that Bill, I would have much more to say on the increase in oldage pension and the disability allowance.

The National Racing Pigeon. The Minister made some noise; they got \$20,000 last year but this year they got zero, just to correct him on that. This is the other one that I thought was very interesting, that the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation—I do not know what they have against the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation. Last year they got \$2 million, this year they got \$181,095.76. A reduction of \$1,818,904,000. This is the year for qualifying for the football tournament. Today, we are facing Mexico and we have qualified for the next round and I am sure the TTFA will need money but here we see a reduction of \$1.8 million.

Weight lifting—\$60,000 last year, zero dollars this year, a reduction of \$60,000. I can go on. This is when you try to mislead the House. I think that the Minister should be very careful how he does that because all the other organizations; table tennis, a reduction by \$12,000; taekwando by \$36,000; Trinidad and Tobago

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Tennis Association by \$32,000; volleyball, a reduction by \$52,000. This is the point I have been making.

The Trinidad and Tobago Women's Cricket Board got \$241,000 which is about \$100,000 more than the normal cricket board. I do not know why this was done but it was done. This was misleading the House and I thought I would put the corrected version before you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am still making the plea and I hope Members of the Cabinet on the other side could speak to somebody and say let us spend some more money on sports to build facilities across Trinidad and Tobago because it will be money well spent. I assure you of that.

When the Minister was ending his speech he talked about winning is not everything and what have you. Those are excuses and I do not think this time we can accept excuses. We have to put things in place as we move towards the development of Trinidad and Tobago. I believe that sports are, indeed, one of the vehicles that could and would take Trinidad and Tobago proudly into the future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to touch on poverty eradication. This was debated across Trinidad and Tobago over the last couple of days. It has reached the stage that one might find I am repeating myself. When you listen to all the commentators, it is amazing to see that we all share—before I go there, there is one other area I would like to touch.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

In last year's budget, in sports, a National Sports Institute was established at the University of the West Indies which should place emphasis on the development of high performance sport. One year has elapsed and we have not seen where this has gone.

8.55 p.m.

I want to touch slightly on what is taking place in the social development area. It is now very clear to the population of Trinidad and Tobago that the PNM does not have the capacity or the vision to lead us at this time in our development. Vision 2020, in my opinion, is but an illusion.

Despite continued and unprecedented growth in the economy and a GDP of \$66.263 billion, 2004 figures, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are no better off today than in 2001—this despite spending more than \$50 billion in three years. What this translates to in the populace is that money cannot work if we do not have a vision and the political will to transform Trinidad and Tobago into a quality nation.

Mr. Prime Minister, I could describe your budget presentation as a masterful act of deception—a trick and an attempt to mislead the population. Alas! It did not work. You see, the countrymen are more intelligent than you anticipated.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture, let me remind you of the UNC's vision. Our vision statement reads like this:

To transform Trinidad and Tobago into a knowledge-based society with a globally competitive, technologically-driven diversified economy that will sustain full employment, growing prosperity, equal opportunity, secure life, social cohesion and the highest standard of living for all citizens.

They can borrow it because I have noticed that in this year's budget much of what we left in 2000/2001 has been borrowed. They do not have to tell us they are using it, but they can use it.

When we look at the world today—people are talking about “competitive” and about “globally competitive” and that was our vision way back. Today it is much more in focus than before. We have to be globally competitive. We have to be technology driven. We have to have a diversified economy, as was said today by my colleague, and we must aim for full employment and equal opportunities.

What is their vision? Let me tell you. I remind the hon. Prime Minister of an interview he had, I think, in 1997. It was published and I drew it from the famous website www.google.com. This was Mr. Manning. I quote.

Mr. Manning has shown a determination to be focal in opposition criticizing what he sees as the government's reliance on political patronage.

That was describing the UNC. Listen to this, Mr. Speaker.

He said that the UNC had family and friends running the country.

This was said by Mr. Manning in opposition. Is this the reason— *[Interruption]* Maybe it was for revenge, but I do not know on this side who was friend and who was family. Is this the reason he has chosen a bunch of incompetent, visionless colleagues to govern this country?

It is quite obvious that after three years this Government has collapsed. How then can we explain, with the unprecedented growth in the economy—oil dollars at US \$52 per barrel, high gas prices—yet we cannot provide an affordable life for 1.2 million persons? What pertains is the continued existence of inequity in the midst of plenty.

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Trinidad and Tobago is a small country compared to the cities of New York and Toronto. We have a population of 1.2 million and I feel disgusted from time to time when I hear Ministers on that side talk about urban and rural development. We are a small country.

The Minister of Housing today spoke about building houses all over the country. He read out where the houses are being built. I give him credit, but here is the anomaly. I cannot understand it. He talked about overpopulation in Port of Spain, so they want to move. Some people say it is house-padding and I firmly believe that. So they are moving the people out of Port of Spain because it is overcrowded. The Minister of Works and Transport has left, but I want to say that he is a poor Minister, not in the sense of money—because I understand he is doing quite well—but when you look at the question of traffic in this country, it is a nightmare. From Chaguanas to Port of Spain in the morning takes two hours. If you drive at night, it is about 20 minutes. The Prime Minister's vision is paying off. He said from point to point in this country should take two hours. That has already been achieved. From Port of Spain to Arima takes two hours. From Port of Spain to Tunapuna takes two hours. This has been achieved.

It is important to have these housing areas that are being built all across the country.

Construction activity will continue on the government campus at Richmond Street and Ajax Street. The complex consisting of five buildings will be approximately 1.6 million square feet and will include a 10-storey customs and excise building, a 22-storey Board of Inland Revenue tower; a 22-storey legal and consumer affairs; a 9-storey Ministry of Education building and a 9-storey car park building housing a cooling plant to service the entire complex, including two storeys which will be available for retail shops.

This is for completion by 2007 and expenditure is \$350 million.

Mr. Speaker, if they want to get rid of poverty, they have to develop Trinidad and Tobago. How can they convince me that they are building houses in Caroni, Caratal, Dyett Estate in Chaguanas and other areas, yet all the infrastructure is being built in Port of Spain? All the traffic would head to Port of Spain. The Prime Minister's office, the Parliament—people would be coming into Port of Spain. What would happen to this country? One does not have to be an expert in transport to realize yes, we have traffic, but we should decentralize these buildings in a meaningful way. We had a vision. We still have. We were going to relocate government buildings to St. Joseph. What do we have with this Government?

Is this insecurity? Why can they not propose that the Parliament building be somewhere in Caroni? We have a lot of land just south of the Caroni River. Why do they not consider that and free up Port of Spain?

I read an article by Peter Quentrall-Thomas recently when he said never to bring back the opening of Parliament in Port of Spain because of the traffic jam and massive pile up that took place. When you talk about confidence, you have to give your customers confidence and the customers are the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

We live in a small country—1.2 million persons. We can fit in a village in New York, yet we have urban and rural development. I have a problem with that. It is an art of deception. They talk about developing Trinidad and Tobago. They are cutting highways across the place, opening up the country, but they are putting everything in Port of Spain. Is it lack of confidence? Are they scared of somebody?

Mr. Speaker, just think of Trinidad and Tobago developing as one. Constituencies should not arise. This is another point for constitution reform. If we do away with constituencies—think about it for one moment—I would not be fighting for Chaguanas as the Member has invited me to do. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant would not be fighting. We would be building Trinidad and Tobago. If every Ministry would invest in Trinidad and Tobago, we would build on the best lands. We would build the agricultural sector on land that is best for agriculture, and we would develop the country holistically and make it a place to be proud of.

What do we have now? We have a lack of confidence in governance. Every talk show, including our good friend on Power 102, is bashing the Government. People who have been in the bosom of the Government are bashing the Government. I do not think it is because it is stylish, but it is because they have lost confidence in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

When the hon. Prime Minister comes to this Parliament and talks about transparency, I do not know if he is suddenly finding out what we found out about corruption in the Government of the day. It is strange, after three years in government, to talk about transparency. It is something I find interesting. When we attempt to find out what is happening in this country, the transparency ends.

I want to quote the hon. Prime Minister in this area, because, if he means it, it is a step in the right direction. Questions are being asked and—I know it happened to Members on this side—I believe it is unfair to make people believe

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they were corrupt. As the Prime Minister put it in this year's budget when talking about transparency, I applaud him for that but, at the same time, he should not just pay lip-service but make it happen.

When I am talking about transparency, the first thing I want to talk about is this statement. It is one of the most damaging statements I have heard since I entered politics. On page 13 of the budget—and again this is the confidence of our people in the government of the day. For example, do we have confidence in the Government or is it a con job or an art of deception?

“We will strengthen the current agricultural incentives programme by making it more production-based, and accelerate the distribution of agricultural State lands and Caroni lands to farmers and in particular to graduates of the faculty of Agriculture of the University of the West Indies...”

Is this another deviation from distributing Caroni lands to the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited? Is it that a person who has graduated from YAPA after three or six months—and most of the people go there because of the stipend—and you are going to tell me that—

Mr. Speaker, let us be fair and honest with each other. The people who participated in these programmes, especially the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA), belong to the Government. They are supporters and friends because this is how it operates in the PNM. I want to warn that this will not happen as easily as it is announced here. These people have toiled on the land and brought it to where it is and we must never forget that.

There is something else that is happening in agriculture. People from my constituency have received letters increasing the rents for the year from \$300 to \$3,000 on a 30-year lease. If we do some Maths, it is almost \$100,000 for lands that are not valued that. What to me is sad is that these lands were developed by these people themselves over the last 30 years. It was rice land; it was Caroni Swamp and these people developed these lands with their own sweat, and to pay that money now is very unfair.

9.10 p.m.

Does the Government want to end poverty in the country? Is the Government serious? Today, in time of plenty, when you expect cushions to cope with the spiralling cost of living, what do we have? I want to say it again, we have a visionless government, squandering billions and throwing scraps at the poor. Poverty eradication will never take place using the PNM's approach. Remember the UNC's approach of sustainable development to alleviate poverty?

Let me now quote the *World Bank Report 2004*. This morning, the hon. Leader of the Opposition quoted the IADB as they attested to the UNC's vision. Listen to what the *World Bank Report 2004* has to say:

“Broad improvement in human welfare will not occur unless poor people receive wider access to affordable, better services in health, education, water, sanitation and electricity. Without such improvements in services, freedom from illness and illiteracy are two of the ways poor people can escape.”

Again, this is what the UNC was about. To get rid of poverty is not giving handouts. I was the Minister of Social Development. I could have said that I introduced this programme and that programme. We have to understand, they have to go side by side. We need to deal with the new poor. We need to deal with people who would have fallen into hard times and coax them out of it.

Let us now examine this hapless Government's approach to eradicating poverty. As the master of deception, the hon. Prime Minister, described, this year's budget would contain specific measures to improve the welfare of the poor, the aged, the less fortunate and those retired.

Mr. Speaker, let us listen to some deception. I said it before and I would try to prove what I have said. Turn to page 35 of the budget statement. I would read this again into the record. This is the art of deception. It states:

“Mr. Speaker, the case of Retired Public Officers also needs to be addressed. As at the end of July 2004 there were 27,565 retired public officers. Of these:

- 2,007 are in receipt of a public service pension of \$1,000 per month or less;”

When I heard that I said: ‘Good, the Prime Minister is going to help the persons who are receiving \$1,000’. He said it before.

“- 11,271 receive a public service pension between \$1,001 and \$2,000 per month;

- 10,379 receive a pension between \$2,001 and \$3,000 per month; and

Put another way, 23,657 or 85 percent of retired officers are in receipt of a public service pension of \$3,000 or less per month.”

I sat here and said, “Good. At least we would have some relief for these officers who served our country well.”

Listen to this. When the Prime Minister announced the measures, I was taken aback. That was a con artist at his best.

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Page 47 indicates:

- “● To address the plight of the retired Public Service Officers, we propose to grant an ex-gratia award to retired Officers as follows:

Public Service Officers who retired on or before 31st December 1984 will receive an exgratia payment of \$400 per month;”

He broke it down beautifully under \$2,000 and under \$3,000. Here the con man job.

“Public Service Officers who retired on or before 31st December 1984 will receive an exgratia payment of \$400 per month;”

Mr. Speaker, before December 31, 1984. Those “fellas” old. The Prime Minister did not tell us how many persons would benefit. He talked about the bands. I agree with that. But now to give the payment, the con man at work.

“Public Service Officers who retired on or before 31st December 1984 will receive an exgratia payment of \$400 per month;”

How many persons will benefit from this? Check the number of years from 1984 to 2004. On an average, those persons would be 85 years old. How many pensioners do we have out there? If I wish, I can do like Robin Montano and say: “Yoo hoo, come and line up for your \$400.” That is a con man job. The Prime Minister broke it down before by bands but here he comes to give his payment by age.

It continues:

“Public Service Officers who retired Between 1st January 1985 and 31st December 1994 will receive an ex-gratia payment of \$300 per month;

Public Service Officers who retired Between 1st January 1995 and 31st December 1999 will receive an ex-gratia payment of \$150 per month;”

This is a con man at work. The Prime Minister set up the people. But, according to this person who was receiving \$1,000 pension and retired later will receive \$150 increase; the same as the old age pension. I believe, again, that is the art of deception.

Another example is the question of old age pension. As I said before, we would be debating this in a couple of weeks. Suffice it to say, when we look at the poor, the disabled and the elderly in the society you want to give them something. I have no problem with that. As a matter of fact, persons would be happy with the \$150. Again, I used my calculator. The increase in old age pension, disability

grant and public assistance add up to a grand total of 0.63 per cent of the national budget. The Prime Minister beats his chest as though this is a major achievement. I warned the Member for San Fernando East that he should not beat his chest unless he is interfering with his pacemaker. We cannot continue to beat our chests and jump with these scraps thrown at the poor.

Under the heading “Poverty Alleviation” what do you see? To me, poverty alleviation is getting people out of poverty; providing them with a good life, cheap food stuff and housing. Under this heading, what do we see? I quote:

- “● We propose to expand the SHARE Programme from 15,000 Food Hampers per month to 20,000 per month,”

My colleague from Oropouche said that there was a shortfall in the delivery of 26,000 over the last fiscal year. It continues:

“...as well as increase the value of each hamper from \$200 to \$250 per Hamper.”

Mr. Speaker, this is indeed the problem in Trinidad and Tobago. In a time of plenty, which we are experiencing, we should use this opportunity to make sure that our people receive some sort of sustainable developmental strategy to take them out of poverty. This hamper, Mr. Speaker—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Thank you very much, colleagues. The Social Help And Rehabilitative Efforts (SHARE) Programme was modeled to, as the acronym would say, assist persons to get them out of poverty. The last two letters of the acronym means “rehabilitative efforts”. I would have been happy as, I am sure—many other people in the country would have heard that the \$50 would go to the NGOs who participated in the programme so that they can hire persons to train recipients of SHARE.

The question of SHARE is to keep them there. It was four months under my watch but I understand that it is now six months. That is okay. During the six months persons would receive their hampers. At the end of the six months, it was expected that the NGOs would attempt to train these people to get them out of the

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dependency syndrome. Experience has taught me that it is impossible for these NGOs; they have little or no money because they are specially formed NGOs. They are not the major ones. They would use the opportunity to train these people. I feel the \$50 should have been spent in that way. If that is done, it would at least send a message that we are serious about fighting poverty and we want to get people out of poverty by training them. Mr. Speaker, the \$50 increase on a hamper will encourage more people to line up. I am sure everyone would agree with me, if you visit any area where there is the SHARE Programme, cars can be seen parked.

The first time I saw a SHARE Programme I was on my way to a prayer meeting. I was not too sure of where I was going. I saw many cars parked. I paused where I saw the activity. A friend of mine said: “You come for a SHARE hamper, too?” This is a reality. I asked him what SHARE was about. I kept driving. When I returned, I called my friend. He said: “That is joke. Persons 10 times richer than you come here for SHARE hampers.” This happened in Bamboo Village. When I went to the Ministry, I remembered that incident. I spoke to my NGOs and told them if anyone is caught doing that they would be in trouble. Today, it has reverted to what it was. Mr. Speaker, if you pass by any SHARE distribution site—I could take the Ministers and we could take a drive and see what is happening. There would be cars newer than what Members drive stopping for SHARE hampers. It is as though the people have gone mad in the country. Who would blame them? Handouts? Line up and take. This is the culture that was created by the PNM; handouts and more handouts. This increase, in my mind, will increase poverty in the country, rather than decrease.

Mr. Speaker, I want to continue, with your permission. I want to quote something with respect to poverty alleviation. I quote:

“I have asked myself, how could it be that in a country that has so much, there could be so many living below the poverty line. Why do these areas of poverty persist? I experience no satisfaction, nor am I complacent because of the sometimes-quoted statement: ‘The poor we will have always’”.

Mr. Speaker, I think the Prime Minister, in his budget statement also said: “Poverty will be with us. There would be persons who would never be willing to change.” He also accepted that: “The poor we will have always.” I continue:

“That I will ascribe, at risk of great opposition, to poverty by choice, to a certain extent. Whose choice is quite another matter. But, there follows the next question: ‘Would anyone choose to be poor?’ Answers reside within those questions.

I have my own thoughts on poverty eradication and I say not 'reduction' but 'eradication' which should be the goal of this country. We should not limit ourselves to merely reducing poverty but to commit fully to the responsibility of using all of our resources, natural and human, towards the achievable objective of eradicating poverty from among us. This should be regarded as fiat."

Mr. Speaker, this was the honourable President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, when he addressed the Parliament at the recent opening of Parliament. Did we take a clue? Did the Prime Minister listen to the President? Had the quotation I just read, been followed, we would not have poverty alleviation. We would have had a comprehensive approach to poverty eradication. We do not have to reinvent the wheel.

To eradicate poverty, as declared in the Copenhagen Summit of 1994, at which the then Minister of Social Development, now President of the Senate made a feature address on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago, the Minister lamented the incidence of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago and all the causal factors. Again, as if the world stood still, the Government comes back today, in 2004, 10 years later, and the mistakes are being repeated.

9.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, during the period when I was a minister, we attended these conferences and we accepted recommendations for developing a sustainable country. As a matter of fact, when the UNC led the government during the period 1997 to 1998, we were voted the No. 1 country in the world, as we struggled against poverty. That was not by accident, but because of the models that we have accepted. We were working in collaboration with all the government agencies and non-governmental agencies towards the strategic goal of eradicating poverty.

I want to repeat what was the plan. We had a minister of government on one side and the private sector on the other side. There was a committee for Civil Equity and that committee was led by Sen. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt. The idea was for this committee to go into communities and then the committee would go to the ministerial committee to discuss how we were going to eradicate poverty.

Mr. Speaker, they scoffed at us, but twice we came first in the world. Mr. Speaker, where are we now? We are at No. 8 and dropping. If you read the United Nations report, it would tell you that poverty cannot be solved with handouts.

I want to spend a couple of minutes on the constituency of Chaguanas. The constituency of Chaguanas is in the centre of the country. In my opinion, it is the

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micro of the macro neglect. I want to start with schools, because schools have always been close to my heart.

Mr. Speaker, if you remember, prior to UNC being in power, there were three secondary schools between the Caroni River and San Fernando. These schools are: Holy Faith Convent Couva, Presentation College in Chaguanas and Couva Secondary. Under the watch of the UNC—the population census; the report by the Elections and Boundaries Commission showed that Chaguanas and environs are the most densely populated parts of Trinidad and Tobago. As a matter of fact, the population in Chaguanas is larger than the population in Port of Spain. So, we built schools and we were in the process of building more schools.

I asked the Minister of Education the following question in this House: “Would the Minister of Education indicate why the construction of Monroe Road Hindu School, the ASJA Boys and Girls Colleges in Charlieville, the Vishnu Boys College in Caroni and Saraswati Girls College have not yet started, although these schools were budgeted in the previous year?”

I also asked the Minister to indicate to this House the respective dates when construction was due to commence on these schools and the respective dates of completion of these schools, including the Chaguanas North Primary School.

The Minister went on a journey throughout the world about what they were doing and what we did not do. Toward the end of the Minister’s reply, she then answered the questions.

The Minister said that those schools were under construction. In the fiscal year 2001/2002, these schools received funding of \$2.9 million. The Minister was trying to accuse the UNC of something. Of course, these figures are not correct. I collated all the figures and that figure was just to mislead the House. The Minister mentioned that during the fiscal year 2001/2002, \$900,000 were allocated. In 2002/2003, \$200,000 were provided, but the funds were not adequate so they were transferred to Waterloo Hindu School, which was under construction. She said that funding would be provided to this school during the fiscal year 2003/2004, under the development programme of the Ministry of Education. Mr. Speaker, construction on this school has not yet started.

What is the purpose of answering questions in this House? Can we bring these Ministers to justice? Can these Ministers just come here and tell untruths and mislead the Parliament and the nation? The Minister came to this Parliament and mentioned that funding would be provided for this school in the fiscal year 2003/2004, and not one cent was given to this school. This school is about 50 years old; it is now collapsing. This school gets very good SEA results.

The Minister went on to say that funding would be provided for ASJA Girls College in Charlieville. In 2001/2002, \$1 million was provided. During the fiscal year 2002/2003, \$7.6 million was provided for the construction of these schools, and the starting date was November 07, 2002 and the project completion date was May 2003. Needless to say, we are in October 2004 and nothing has happened. Can we bring this Minister to justice? The Minister said that the construction of phase I was completed and the construction of phase II was 25 per cent completed.

With respect to the ASJA Boys College in Charlieville, again, \$1 million was provided in the fiscal year 2001. In fiscal year 2002/2003, \$7.6 million was provided. The starting date for the ASJA Boys College was November 07, 2002 and the projected completion date was May 2003. Mr. Speaker, we are now in 2004.

With respect to the Vishnu Boys Hindu School, no money was provided in 2001/2002. For the fiscal year 2002/2003, \$8.47 million was provided. The starting date of construction was January 13, 2003 and the completion date was October 2003. We are in October 2004. The Minister said that the construction of phase I was 5 per cent completed.

With respect to the Saraswati Girls College, no money was provided in fiscal year 2001/2002. This was not true. If you check the appropriation, you would see that money was provided. Again, this was just to mislead the Parliament.

During the fiscal year 2002/2003, \$8.4 million was provided. The project starting date was April 2003, and the completion date was March 2004. Mr. Speaker, I want to report to this Parliament that the construction of that building has not yet started. We have Forms I to IV in these schools. Is this how the Government treats with the children of this country? Is this how the people of this country are going to have confidence in the Government that talks about eradicating poverty and taking Trinidad and Tobago to world class status? I said at the beginning of my contribution that Vision 2020 is a nightmare. It cannot happen under this Government. This Government does not know about equity and developing this country in a manner that would benefit the whole of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am sure my colleagues would go into the whole question of voter-padding and so forth. The repairing of roads is another major problem. As I mentioned, when the Minister was absent, that traffic jam in Trinidad and Tobago is something that cannot be solved by the Minister. I am sorry to say that. It is not that the Minister is not willing, but if we do not decentralize our goods and services to different parts of the country, going to Port of Spain would always be a nightmare, whether we get transport rail in 2020 or whatever.

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Recently, I toured my constituency in Chaguanas. I asked the councillors to come up with a list of roads that need paving. According to the hon. Minister—I know he would regret making that statement when he said it was a UNC election frenzy paving, but that happened in 2002. Almost every road in the constituency of Chaguanas needs to be repaired. I could read the names but it does not make sense doing that.

There is a very interesting situation here. In Bejucal Village, there are two roads: Rangoo Trace and Moore Trace. I am sure that you have heard about those roads many times in this Parliament. There were questions to Ministers with respect to those roads, and there were also Matters on the Adjournment raised with respect to these roads. The Member for Arouca North, who was the then Minister of Local Government, came to this Parliament and promised that the roads would be paved.

I want to make the point that when people are wilfully neglected—the Government comes here and says that they are going to build a quality nation and they have a vision for 2020. If the Government cannot get its politics right; if they cannot unite Trinidad and Tobago; and if they cannot give people the confidence that they care about this country then the Government cannot have a vision for 2020. The Government cannot only do things to win an election. The Government must do things to ensure that we have a country which would be developed. That was happening and it was happening quickly.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Rangoo Trace and Moore Trace, these two roads are very small but they are in highly populated areas. These roads were prepared for paving in 2001; election was called, and we know the results. The results did not go the UNC's way, and from then to now, people have been living in those conditions for the last three years. In the dry season there is dust and in the wet season there are potholes and mud. Despite writing the present Minister of Local Government—I wrote a letter to the present Minister of Local Government and asked him to do me the courtesy and reply to that letter and he did just that.

If the Prime Minister is interested I would ask him to tour the constituency with me and he would see the condition of the roads. That is no longer acceptable. I asked the councillors about drains and they said to tell the Parliament that all the drains need cleaning and repairing.

Mr. Speaker, the Government wants to move forward and take this country to developed country status—Vision 2020—but if we do not include all the people, we cannot reach there. People are talking about human resources, but it is more than that. We need to unite the forces in this country.

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Order that we received this evening talked about the reduction of surcharge and so forth. The surcharge rate was reduced from 120 per cent to 86 per cent from October 08, 2004 to October 31, 2004, and as threatened, it would be reduced to 40 per cent from November 01, 2004. The Government has threatened and acted at the same time. The Government said that if the prices were not dropped it was going to further reduce the surcharge. Is this another act of deception? I remember clearly in the budget when the Minister said that if that does not work, he would drop the surcharge to 40 per cent.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: He would take out all.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, the point I want to make is that this is exactly what a government should not do. I believe, in the first place, the reason the surcharge was put there—I am sure it was put there by the PNM. The fact is that it was done for a purpose; maybe that is to encourage local chicken farmers. Someone told me that you prefer foreign chicks. [Laughter] [Interruption] The fact is that you are giving incentives to local farmers; and you are encouraging the local farmers with strict control. When that input is controlled, the output would be cheaper. The entire chicken industry would be destroyed, because when one adds the 40 per cent duty, it turns out to be 126 per cent, and when value added tax (VAT) is added, it would be 141 per cent. The importation of chickens is really an expensive business. Now that you have removed that surcharge, it is going to destroy the local chicken industry.

9.40 p.m.

You are talking about a First World nation; you have got to be able to produce your own food. As we go down the list, the Minister talked about ducks, geese and so on. Everything here is “*gallus domesticus*”, but when you come to the other one, this is what I find interesting: You are removing the common external tariff (CET) on cane and beet sugar. This morning I heard what, to me, was the comedy hour: I heard the Minister of Consumer Affairs justify removing the duty and surcharge on cane sugar and beet sugar, coffee, mauby and orange juice.

Mr. Speaker, we have a Prime Minister who talks about Vision Trinidad and Tobago, Vision 2020. These surcharges and this duty were maintained when Caricom—Caricom must agree. The Minister alluded to it. He said that when we remove the duty and surcharge on certain items Belize and Guyana would be angry, but there was no regard for Trinidad and Tobago. He said that when we remove the CET, they would be angry. Why would we not be angry?

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What about the split peas industry? Mr. Speaker, we do not have a big split peas industry, but we have a couple of people in Trinidad and Tobago who import the raw product, have it split, polished and sold; now those companies would go out of business. You know what is the big reduction? Five cents; so a pound of dhal will now have a five cents reduction. To me, this is another act of deception. I am sure that this would never, ever decrease the cost of living.

As I take a comprehensive look at this budget, I want to repeat: It is an act of deception. It is not a recipe for poverty reduction. It is not a recipe to reduce the cost of living. To me it is another spending spree. I am sure that my colleague from St. Augustine will speak about the economic variables. How could you have a \$29 billion budget and this surplus that you talk about and say that Standards and Poor's would give you BBB plus or whatever? By the Minister's own admission, we have increasing poverty.

Mr. Speaker, this is, again, an art of deception. Poverty is on the increase, by his own volition; unemployment is on the decrease—I cannot understand that, maybe he has to explain that to me; he can show me how that is possible—yet we have a surplus. This surplus is not just money that is brought into the coffers of Trinidad and Tobago. If we have this escalating poverty, why not spend that money in a meaningful manner? Create jobs. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: Panday said do not spend it!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I am not saying to squander it; invest it in meaningful employment and make sure that the people feel it. We had a boom and the country was worse off. We are having another boom now; if we do not manage the money of this country properly, it is going to be wasted as before. For my part, I will not support this budget. I think it is squandering the hard-earned money that our ancestors left for us and we should really leave it for future generations.

Motion made and question proposed, That this House do now adjourn to Thursday, October 14, 2004, at 1.30 p.m. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 9.45 p.m.