

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, October 15, 2004*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

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

[FOURTH DAY]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Winston Dookeran (*St. Augustine*): Mr. Speaker, for the last three days we have been debating all aspects of the Appropriation Bill, 2005. Today I want to look at this Bill in the context of whether or not it spells out the right economic strategy for Trinidad and Tobago, to the extent to which we are perhaps missing the boat in charting a course for the future of our nation.

When there are challenging times, there is one set of challenges. Or rather when there are good times, there is one set of challenges; when there are bad times, there is another set of challenges. What is important for us is to determine what is the appropriate set of challenges in our times, whether they are good or bad times.

The commentators on this Bill have raised two fundamental issues: one is the issue of whether this Bill and the provisions in the budget statement of 2005 would, in fact, start the process of real transformation of the economy. The second issue that has emerged is whether or not we are managing the society in a manner that is appropriate for our times.

After three years in office, this Government would have had ample time, not only to put its act together, but to be able to answer, in an affirmative manner, those two questions for the nation. Has it done so?

When we look at the 2005 budget statement we must, first of all, establish what is the current situation in our country. True, there are increases in revenue and inflow of capital to an extent unprecedented within recent times and we must not lose this opportunity. We must not lose this opportunity to increase our incomes

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and to develop sustainable employment. We must not lose the opportunity to frontally attack poverty and income disparities. We must not lose this opportunity to really improve in the quality of lives of all our citizens.

Those who have commented on this Bill, both in the House and outside the House, have raised a number of challenges; what I would refer to as the transformation challenge; the management of revenue challenge; the capacity in the public sector; the growth of investment in the non-oil sector and the participation of the society in the energy sector.

Conceptually, those are our fundamental problems that ought to be tackled in the budget proposals before us. But the cardinal planning error of these measures is that they have increased, further, the demand in the country without providing adequate income-generating capacity for the nation. That is, fundamentally, what I would like to argue in my contribution today.

There are fuel demands without generating the necessary supply. What are the sources of demand? Almost 75 to 80 per cent of our expenditure generates additional demand. There is additional demand in the proposals aimed at increasing the health sector level of service, in education, in transportation; there is increased demand in food; there is increased demand resulting from the fact that there is new energy expenditure in the oil sector.

What the country has is a substantial increase in demand, but what is the supply? The supply, as far as the Bill is concerned, comes from two main sources: the energy projects and we wonder about the real feasibility of some of those projects. The Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), which, even if we were to take its official figures, is about 8 per cent of the gross expenditure of the country.

There are, therefore, major sources of deficiency of supply in our country: the non-oil sector, food production, fishing, coconut, tourism, transportation and the information sector. What will these measures do to increase the supply? I want to contend that this Bill has missed the boat. It has not been able to create the necessary supply in this country that is necessary now to initiate that process of transformation. What we have instead is a set of expenditure patterns that are generating more demand, setting up the situation for a big fall to take place in years to come.

We have not been able to create the supply side of the economy in order to generate income that would put us in a situation where we can meet that demand, locally. When the world cycle turns and energy prices fall, in relative terms, we

would then be able to see the folly of the foundations that we are setting today. This is why I believe that this is the most fundamental error of this Bill before us.

According to a release by BP Trinidad and Tobago in the *Trinidad Guardian* some time ago, they stated that:

“We have noticed a general trend in increased cost, certainly, in our business because the other side of the barrel, being up, is the dark side of inflation. Global inflation in the oil business is running at two times the CPI somewhere in the order of 6 to 7 per cent.”

Mr. Speaker, indications already of a world trend that is going to affect us, locally, in terms of inflation.

The question, therefore: Are we generating income-generating capacity in this country? Are the fiscal measures that we have put into place able to do that? Are we relying, as we continue to rely, on the energy-induced investment?

In the mid '80s our Economic Policy Framework made very significant departure from that regime; the regime of increasing expenditure, increasing demand and leaving supply unaffected. We began to reform the entire framework for economic policy in this country. Is it now that we are reversing that reform process to take it back to the policies of the 1970s, where we had set up an expenditure pattern that in the 1980s could not be supported, when the world cycle changed and we went into a major depression? The most important thing that needs to be done is to acknowledge the fact that true development cannot be imported.

The assumption of the fiscal measures that have been enunciated in the budget before us, does not acknowledge that fact. It still recognizes the predominant role of the energy sector. It is time that we confidently take charge of our economics and our society. We did that in the 1990s to some extent with little resources. Now, fortunately, the Government has substantial resources. In fact, it is because of the reform programme that was initiated in the late 80s and continued during the 1990s that the Prime Minister could have got up and say to this Parliament, and I quote:

“Trinidad and Tobago recorded its 10th consecutive year of economic growth in 2003 and we are well on our way to another year of strong growth in 2004, despite changes in Government during that time.”

10.15 a.m.

It is the credibility of that reform programme that allows us to be able to make such a boast. What are we doing now with our resources? Are we to go back to

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the days when everyone would become clients of the State? Are we going back to build a society where everyone is dependent on the fortunes of the State or, are we going to build a society in which each individual will have the capacity to ensure his own security and lasting security? I contend, that underlying the budget proposals is the view that we are building a society where everyone is a client of the State; where our fortunes are like seesaws, rising and falling depending on the state of the Government's Treasury. Is the Government simply satisfied to take credit for the good performance of the energy sector and settle our pockets with little palliatives which they claim are going to tackle fundamentally the issues of poverty, and the issues of income disparity? These budget proposals do little to tackle those problems.

The future risks are high. That is why today we must put the transformation of the economy, the conversion of an energy-based economy into a service-oriented economy as our foremost economic goal. The foundations ought to be set particularly in this budget at the time of high prices, to ensure that we set the foundations for a service-oriented economy in Trinidad and Tobago; because what is good is that the gas wealth could finance this transformation, so we are in a very fortunate position.

According to a recent study that was published by the Inter-American Development Bank:

“The greatest challenge, therefore, is to protect current and future energy-related revenues from being spent inefficiently, as occurred in the previous oil booms. In the past, large increases in energy-related revenues were used to increase spending as if new revenues were permanent. When conditions worsened, however, large and painful fiscal adjustments followed, with negative effects on the poor.”

It is in this context that I said the budget misses the real challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago. Evidence of this is seen by looking at some of the figures.

The International Monetary Fund, in its July 2004, Report on the Trinidad and Tobago Economy said, and I quote:

Excluding oil and gas revenues the budget deficit increased from 7.4 per cent of GDP to 8.1 per cent of GDP.

Yesterday, the hon. Member for Diego Martin East talked about VAT increases. This is what the IMF report said. VAT receipts declined from 4.5 per cent of GDP to 3.4 per cent of GDP. So while we are talking and taking credit for all these surpluses, when we exclude oil and gas, we are running fundamentally a

deficit budget. And this has been confirmed by the IDB. There was no mention of this in the context of the budget figures.

The deficit on the local economy has been increasing. In the 1990s it used to be about 4 per cent. Now it has gone to 8 per cent. So while you have increased revenues, you have decreasing deficits—it is true that we need to reduce the deficit, but it has been increasing, not decreasing. I wonder whether this Government knows how this economy works.

Lloyd Best, in an article in which he aptly said, “empty budgets make the most noise”, sums up the situation as follows, and I quote:

“Huge offshore investments and the resulting increase in production, reinforced by buoyant exported prices, amount to a golden age, to a time of great abundance and to an age of plenty where domestic production, national income and government revenues are concerned. Both the fiscal and foreign exchange constraints have been summarily relaxed. How do we intervene to make the most of this good fortune?”

I have tried to explain the enormity of the challenge of good times. The size of the quantum leap that we must make in economic transformation, I have tried to explain. The extent to which we must set the foundations so that we do not go back and reverse the reform process and build a society based on clients of the State, I have tried to explain. What are the fiscal measures of this budget? What is the Government’s response to that problem? I will list it.

Relief to recipients of pensions and public assistance;

Measures to address the rise in prices;

Expand the SHARE programme to 20,000 per month;

Increase the minimum wage to \$9 per hour;

Remove the Business Levy from small businesses;

Increase personal allowance by \$5,000 on a sliding scale;

Introduce a grant to a maximum of \$400 to retired public servants;

Increase duty allowance for in-bond shopping to \$3,000;

Housekeeping matters on tax administration;

Further study of the energy tax system;

Correct an error in a tax system and allow sport allowance to petroleum companies.

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That is their response; a minuscule response to a major challenge. The challenge to set the foundation for this country for all times, this is the response of the Government.

It took the Prime Minister a mere seven minutes in an almost three-hour presentation to enunciate this response which is an indication of the size and adequacy of the response of this Government to a major challenge.

Other measures referred to in the budget are statements of intent. Many which have been repeated in previous budgets. The Budget Statement itself says when we calculate the tax foregone by some of these measures which I have outlined, it amounts to \$299 million; an insignificant figure in the context of the \$29 billion expenditure. The budget expenditure does not tell us what the economy wide effect of these measures will be. The ripple effects may not all be positive as we have seen in the public debate that has emerged on the issue of the fortunes of the poultry industry. Just today I saw the Poultry Association claiming that they will be subject to unfair dumping of chicken parts in Trinidad and Tobago which is a phenomenon of the world poultry industry. Is the Government aware of how the economy works and the reality of these things? Or are they myopic in looking at this country as if it is the world unto itself?

Mr. Speaker, we are indeed happy for the winners but, I am very worried that these winnings will be short-lived and the measures will not be effective. We cannot claim that we are fundamentally tackling the problems of social disparity. It is true with these measures there are other measures in the budget, some of which are aimed at tackling that problem but in terms of the fiscal response in a time of plenty there is little to boast about. In fact, we must ask the question: Is the Government prompted more for the search for political public relations space or, is it really concerned about expanding our economic and social space? The evidence of the past and the heightened public relations campaign of this Government will suggest that their main concern is to increase their political public relations space in this country rather than to deal with the problems of developing sustained income generating capacity for this nation.

Mr. Speaker, I am not alone in this view. Ernst & Young, in their report and commentary on the 2004/2005 budget had this to say:

While there are commendable objectives for long-term survival, it is obvious unless the social development of the country is addressed in a meaningful and sustainable way, the vision for First World status will not be achieved regardless of favourable economic factors.

Professional, independent opinions supporting the view that there is indeed little to shout about in this budget. What worries me most is that they are losing

the opportunity to build that foundation for future generations, and what also worries me is that we are reversing the reform process that was so carefully and articulately put into place in the 1980s and continued in the 1990s, little by little, knowing the pitfalls that would arise as a result of that reversal. It is true we need to reform the reform process but we do not need to reverse the reform process.

Mr. Speaker, on each budget document, we saw little notes, “Vision 2020, ensuring our future survival.” At first I thought they were statements about Vision 2020 before I began to read them. We know that over 600 unsuspecting citizens have been engaged in various committees dealing with Vision 2020. After nearly two years of talk there is yet to be seen a document laid in the Parliament on this issue. What is worse—and the Member for St. Joseph talked about “disconnect” in his contribution. There is a clear “disconnect” between the budget proposals and the Vision 2020 Policy Framework.

10.30 a.m.

There is no doubt that the preparation of the budget exercise is separate and apart from the Vision 2020 exercise and, therefore, we do not see the evidence of the thinking of some of the reports that have emerged in that deliberation in the budget proposals. The whole issue therefore of the credibility of the economic policy formulation process is at stake. This matter is further compounded when we see a repeat of a number of measures in last year's budget.

When I listened to the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro yesterday, on the measures for increasing the transportation infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago, he said the same things he said one year ago. That is why the budget proposals are so disjointed and scattered and, as commentators said, do not fit into an overall perspective. There is really no serious economic planning taking place in the country. There is a lot of talk and a lot of PR, but little economic planning.

I ask myself: What has the Ministry of Planning and Development been doing for the last three years when they fundamentally do not diagnose the real challenges of this country? There have been two Ministers of Planning and Development. Vision 2020 is now being used as an excuse to set distant time frames and not to account for things that should be done today.

Let me say a word about what happens in an expanding economy. Everyone knows that there is a limit to which capacity will increase merely by increasing expenditure. New finance will not in itself install new capacity. This is especially so if the new expenditure generates more demand and leaves the supply unattended. Every first-year student in economics knows that. What is important is

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that such an expenditure policy will be frittered away in imports, inflation and bottlenecks. Is that not what we are facing today—imports, inflation and bottlenecks? The true culprit in dealing with the issue of real price rise in this country is not to create new scapegoats, but to deal with public policy on the matter.

The expenditure policy generates the tendency for increasing imports. We see that thinking in the budget proposals, when they talk about increasing the in-bond allowances. When they talk about increasing the demands for education, health care and transportation without increasing supply, they are increasing bottlenecks. When they develop an expenditure policy of this nature that is what they generate. So the true reason we have rising prices is failed public policy. We do not understand how expenditure policy generates inflation. That is why I want to know what the Minister of Planning and Development has been doing.

It was easy to predict that there were transportation bottlenecks. It ought not take him three years. Today, that is a major concern. There is a lack of anticipation. The whole society has to bear the cost of constant traffic jams and congestion on a daily basis. It is unforgivable that our public authorities have not addressed that. The interchange is coming three years later. Those plans were already laid. This is one of the things. They justify their action by trying to claim that the previous government also was inactive.

In today's world in Trinidad and Tobago, the Government cannot justify its incompetence on the basis of the claim of the last government's incompetence. The UNC is a scapegoat. The business sector is a scapegoat. What about public policy and public planning?

Mr. Speaker, PricewaterhouseCoopers, in their document on the budget memorandum, had this to say.

“What was absent were the specific measures to be taken to bring about the development/expansion of those sectors on which our future well-being, post oil and natural gas, will be based.”

The gap between promises and delivery is becoming wider and wider as each budget presentation takes place. No wonder this country—and there is reason for justification—has such a high dose of skepticism for this budget. As far as the country is concerned, they have already written off this budget as not influencing life in any positive way.

There are some people who will see the immediate gains of the public relations campaign, but the way the economy works in the not-too-distant future that will no longer be a gain. In fact, one commentator headlined his article, “Do our budgets matter?” I have said enough about the economic strategy.

I want to come back to some issues of macro management. Before I do so, let me say a word about telecommunications. It is good to see the work of the task force, which was set up by the last government, come to pass. A competitive telecommunication sector is good for the society and I hope that there will not be a reversal of policy in this regard. In Trinidad and Tobago, the cost of doing business is too high, especially the communication cost, and concrete steps must be taken to reduce the cost urgently.

Ernst & Young, in their report said, and I quote:

“It is hoped that the government will move to accelerate the liberalization program of this sector as Trinidad and Tobago is lagging behind many of its Caribbean neighbours in the whole process of telecommunication reform.”

This is an independent, professional opinion on this issue.

“We had hoped that in anticipation of the opening of the sector, there would have been intense discussion between TSTT and the Government and, given that TSTT is 51 per cent owned by the government, that should not be a problem.”

It is a clear advantage over our Caribbean countries which we see frittering away by our reluctance to deal with that issue in spite of the fact that a report was laid way back in 1999 on that issue, to which the Government has access.

What has been the response to this budget? Fast forward ICT planning. That is what the Prime Minister talks about. Catch phrases, but no substantial strategies behind those phrases.

Then we talk about inflation. Mr. Speaker, you will recall that some time ago the Prime Minister announced that he was setting a target of 7 per cent on the inflation rate in Trinidad and Tobago. In this Parliament, I argued that he was wrongly advised and that he should instead set an inflation target of 4 per cent. Today, I must applaud the Prime Minister for seeing the wisdom of my earlier statement and for changing the inflation target to 4 per cent; but he must go further.

The Governor of the Central Bank should realize that merely tightening monetary conditions is a weak response to inflation control. The change in the regime towards inflation targeting for monitoring exchange rate management is now worthy of consideration. This requires more Central Bank independence and I can only hope that the Governor is up to that task.

It is clear that the Central Bank is becoming another government department, which does not augur well for the independent construction of monetary policy.

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Mr. Speaker, much has been said about the exchange rate and the Prime Minister himself in a statement made this remark:

We shall therefore maintain the appropriate domestic macro-economic environment, including a competitive exchange rate.

I wondered what was the significance of that statement, so I looked at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) report on the issue, dated July 29, 2004, to see their comments. This is what they said. This is the most recent report. [Interruption] The concluding statement to the report does not change. That is a mundane point.

“The mission notes that while the substantial real effective appreciation through early 2002 has been partly reversed, the real effective exchange rate remains some 12% above the 1997 level. This, together with persistent high unemployment and the decline in non-energy exports in 2003 raised concerns about the competitiveness and the appropriateness of the exchange rate.”

The IMF is saying this.

“The mission welcomes CBTT’s indication that its exchange rate policy is flexible and, in particular, in the event of changes in the supply/demand relationships in the market, it would be willing to allow the exchange rate to move in order to safeguard the reserves position.”

This is what the IMF is saying. Put that in the context of what the Prime Minister said when he said that he wants to maintain an appropriate macro-economic environment, including competitive exchange rate.

The monetary policy report of the Central Bank said this—and it is important to note:

“In 2003, the foreign exchange market continued to experience periodic tightness due mainly to asset purchases and foreign investments by domestic companies as well as capital issues by non-residents on the local bond market. Some capital flight—”

[Interruption] I will come to that in a minute. That is the attitude. There is money, so we do not have to deal with the problems. I am suggesting how we should deal with the problems of foreign exchange.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Valley: You are talking “stupidness”.

Mr. W. Dookeran: “So capital flight as a result of socio-political uncertainties may have also contributed to the pressures in the foreign exchange market.”

I am quoting from the *Central Bank Report*. If that is “stupidness”, Mr. Speaker, let it be known.

The *Review of the Economy 2004* that was laid in this Parliament last week had this to say:

“In early 2004, conditions remained tight in the foreign exchange market, prompting interventions by the Central Bank. For the period January—July 2004, the Central Bank sold \$240 million to the market, compared with \$275 million in the first seven months of 2003. For the whole of 2003, near to \$500 million was sold to the market.”

The question is—in light of the Prime Minister's comment, and in light of the IMF comment—is this Government committed to flexibility in the exchange rate, if so what is the limit of intervention? The Minister of Finance's comments, coupled with the IMF remarks, could imply that exchange rate movements are in the offing. Otherwise, there is no real credibility in the Minister's statement. Was it really meant to satisfy the International Monetary Fund, or is it a real policy position of the Government? I hope we will get a response to that.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Valley: Are you giving way? He asked for a response, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. W. Dookeran: I asked for a response when you reply.

Mr. Valley: I can give you one. I can give a one sentence response. Do you not want a one sentence response?

Mr. W. Dookeran: I have some further information before you respond.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about foreign reserves on one hand being high and competitiveness falling. Just two days ago, the competitiveness report by the world economic forum was released. For the last three years we have been seeing a gradual decrease in the competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago, according to the world economic report. Once again, in the 2004 figure, we see a further

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decline in competitiveness, from a ranking of 49 to 51, in the last year. A few years ago it was ranked at 38. The lower the rank, the better the competitiveness.

It went further, it suggested areas in which there is competitive advantage and areas in which there is competitive disadvantage. One area in which there is a competitive advantage is in country credit rating. Another area is in judicial independence. The third area is in foreign direct investment and technology transfer. Under the competitive disadvantage there are areas that identify where the interest rates spread; wastefulness of Government's spending; organized crime; favouritism in decisions of government officials; tertiary enrolment, which the Minister spoke about; Internet access and prevalence of foreign technology licensing. What we have is a situation where we have increasing resolves, remarks about the uncompetitive exchange rate and a trend showing that it is going to become more competitive. Therefore, the question is—I am not advocating the devaluation, but I am suggesting that the indications are that if the Prime Minister's statement is to be meaningful, that is the only way, I can interpret his comment that he would look at the competitiveness of the rate. Other than that, he is just simply putting it to satisfy the International Monetary Fund without, of course, agreeing to do it, which raises the issue of the credibility of this statement.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke earlier on about expanding the supply side of the economy. We talked about increasing the service sector and the manufacturing sector. An economic bulletin supplement that was done in November 2003 stated that the Government may want to review these incentives to ascertain whether the incentives are accessed first of all, or whether they are targeted to the sectors which need to be promoted to achieve its developmental goals. How does the Government respond? The Government responded by saying:

“...not to review the incentives to make them more appropriate...”

This is the Prime Minister:

“I indicated that there are considerable leakages in the tax system due to weaknesses in the tax administration and the absence of simplicity in the tax system. We recognize therefore, the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the tax system on the issue of reform of the non-energy tax regime.”

Here it is, the Prime Minister is responding by looking at the efficiency of the tax system. That is fine. What is being recommended is that the entire system needs to be overhauled. That is why I said the response of the budget is minuscule to the problems we are facing, in almost every area that we look at. It is insignificant, based on other studies that have been done on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, there is a reference for intergenerational equity in the budget statement. Intergenerational equity is separate and apart from the issue of revenue stabilization. We cannot use the same rules by which you can inject and withdraw funds from the Revenue Stabilization Fund into intergenerational equity. This is a point also raised by the IMF in their report. They talked about the need to have intergenerational equity funds. I am wondering whether these things were added, in order to respond to the IMF report. This is what the IMF said:

“We therefore see a role for a more comprehensive fund and/or additional mechanisms to support a policy or maintaining budget surpluses in the coming years, as outlined above.”

Mr. Speaker, a key issue that we must face, in the context of Trinidad and Tobago, is not only the resources that are in surplus on the revenue account, but the resources that are in surplus on the foreign exchange account. That has been missing. How do we deal with the foreign exchange account in which there are substantial resources? At one time, this country had over \$7 billion of foreign reserves; in the 1970s. By the time we came to the mid- 80s all that had dissipated because we took the myopic view that since there are foreign reserves we need to remove that constraint. We can use it to support the foreign exchange. We can use it to open up the import sector. We can use it to generate more demand in the country. We took that myopic view in the 1970s and we ended up with the \$7 billion coming to almost zero. In the 1980s, it was in the order of hundreds, rather than billions.

I am suggesting that we consider ways and means to preserve the foreign exchange reserves. One way to do that is to establish a separate heritage fund in order to make it happen. I think they have missed completely the resource base of the country. It is Orthodox thinking to think about revenue surpluses alone. There is now foreign exchange surpluses in the country and that also must be preserved in a prudent manner; not an open system.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say a few words about Caroni (1975) Limited. On this issue, many tears have been shed as 10,000 workers were left with little hope. The Government's handling of this matter has missed opportunities for development. In July 2003, the University of the West Indies produced a comprehensive public service document entitled *The Caroni Transformation Process*. I raised this in Parliament recently, when the Minister claimed he was not aware. I was very surprised that he was not aware of a document that was done, dealing with a critical contemporary public issue when we are looking at creating development opportunities at Caroni (1975) Limited; missed opportunities. They have created

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an Estate Management Company. What they should be doing is creating a development authority. In that study that was done by independent officials, they talked about a botanical plan, a model educational plan, a model village plan, a buffalo reconstruction plan, a construction plan, a food park plan and a sugar diversification plan in ethanol. I am therefore proposing that these opportunities for development be implemented through the establishment of a Caroni Development Authority, with a similar mandate as the Chaguaramas Development Authority.

There is the view that Caroni (1975) Limited was not strategic. I understand that they recently downgraded the Sugar Manufacturing Company to a C grade status, in terms of strategic importance. There is no doubt that there is a blatant disregard for the hope and aspirations of thousands of citizens who have toiled and laboured for this country in times of great need. What more strategy could there have been but to develop a development plan to create the opportunity? It also fits in with the argument I made earlier about creating supply in the country. Rather than trying to fritter away the resources we have in small palliatives, we should create the supply side of the country, whether it is in transportation, food production, health care or education. Some work is being done in education.

On the issue of the energy tax regime, the Government has created a cloud of uncertainty. The Minister stated that he will review and negotiate all existing production-sharing contracts and review the tax liability of the oil companies over the last six years.

11.00 a.m.

I am asking the question: Is the Minister signalling to this House that he expects some mischief on the part of oil companies? I find that statement perplexing. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers Budget Statement, they made a comment on that issue. The reason that I am raising supporting documents is to show that there is professional support for what I am saying here. *Independent Professional Support 2005 Budget Memorandum* talks about the Government's announcement to redo the tax audit. This is what they said:

This is a potentially dangerous precedent, in so far as the Board of Inland Revenue is a statutory body that should and must act independently of any political interference.

Furthermore it is an unwritten policy of the Board that the tax returns of these companies are, in fact, audited on an annual basis to ensure that they are fully compliant with the tax laws currently enforced.

Mr. Speaker, are we entering the phase as pointed out by this comment of a statutory body not acting independently of any political interference? I raise this matter, notwithstanding the need to review the tax policy, but to review it in the context, not on the basis of rising prices, because that would be a foolhardy attempt. I want to advise the Government that it should be wary of that.

On the basis of rationalizing the tax structure consistent with world standards and creating opportunities for would-be petroleum operations in south Trinidad—I know the Member for Couva South would, in fact, be speaking at great length on the energy tax system.

I want to make a proposal, because if we are talking about fundamental steps in building the transformation for Trinidad and Tobago for the future, we should go further. We should try to negotiate with British Petroleum to ensure that their shares could be traded on the local market in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is the kind of participation that I am looking at; that is the kind of economic independence that I am searching for; but not to develop a budget proposal that skims the surfaces and creates public relations images and does not deal with the fundamental problems of transforming Trinidad and Tobago, where there is adequate participation on the part of the citizens in the energy sector. This is not only with respect to BP, but also with respect to other energy companies. In this respect, there is need to widen and deepen the capital market. I see no reference in the budget statement to any specific measure aimed at dealing with that issue.

A recent commentator dealing with this matter talked about the lack of sufficient product diversification in the local and regional markets to ensure a constant and steady outflow of funds to the metropolis. She said that these funds could instead be used to develop the Caribbean region.

Mr. Speaker, in times of plenty, we could mask the fundamental problems that we are facing. In the glow of the money that is flowing in this country fooling this population into a false sense of security when this is the opportunity to be able to build the foundation for all generations to come; not to create clients of the State but to create independent citizens of this land.

I have a number of recommendations, some of which I have alluded to, but I would like to place them on the record. In the first place, if this Government is serious—and this is what the budget should have been. If we were on that side, these are the issues that we would have been dealing with.

Develop a supply side production plan for the non-oil sector; set up an interest-free fund for small business in Trinidad and Tobago similar to the one that was

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established for Caricom; sell shares of BP and other energy companies to the public—

Mr. Valley: How are we going to do that?

Mr. W. Dookeran: The Government could do that by way of negotiation and working it out. [*Desk thumping*] That is the impotence that these fellows are working with. [*Laughter*] If this is something that is going to benefit our country, then they should hold the necessary negotiations.

When I was the Governor of the Central Bank, I began negotiations as to whether that idea was feasible at all.

Mr. Ramnath: You held negotiations with BWIA.

Mr. W. Dookeran: Pension surplus: I did not raise that matter in my substantial contribution, but one way to deal with protecting the retirement income of the people is not so much to try and deal with it in the way the Government has outlined it. There are pension surpluses in the country, and a policy is needed to work on that matter. Calculate retirement income on 100 per cent of the salary, rather than 66 per cent. This is working within the system to increase pensions' incomes.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister should make a clear statement on the exchange rate and not to leave it hanging, as he has done in his budget speech, so we would know exactly where we stand.

A Caroni development authority should be set up, along the lines that I have outlined in order to capture the development of opportunities in Caroni and bring to bear a new supply in the country. I would speak about that matter in my closing comments.

Implement and open fair statement of access to publicly funded social goods in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is an important issue for the credibility of any government; and they must be able to stand the test of having an open, fair system for access to publicly funded social goods in the country.

Negotiate a business expansion loan to grant facilities to promote exports internally for the non-oil sector.

Confirm the principle of the independence of the Central Bank, so that we could be assured of independent monetary policy.

Establish a separate heritage fund, possible with the use of foreign exchange reserves in the country. That would be the agenda items, not the list of items that I

have alluded to earlier—the list of items that is tinkering with the system that is playing politics with it; that is creating political public relations space, but not transforming the economy in the process.

At the beginning of my contribution, I spoke about two challenges: transforming our economy and the model management of a society. Mr. Speaker, on the second issue, let me say a few words. This is perhaps the most vexing problem that we are facing as a nation. A society is defined by the citizens who possess the common notion of their identity, and a common loyalty to shared ideals. We need a new sense of civic identity.

In this regard, I welcome the initiative of the group of eminent persons and organizations on the Principles of Fairness. These principles, although enshrined in our constitution, must be reaffirmed as the basis of our being, but we must go further. We must build institutions; formulate the right policies to achieve these goals of a civic identity; develop a political culture that raises a number of issues of what is required to make it all a true reality. This is the opportunity of our time. Fortunately, we do not have to deal with the problem of reviving the economy which we had to deal with some years ago. We are fortunate to be blessed with a platform that gives us the freedom now to deal with the management of our society. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, let these tasks not be beyond the expectations of the current government. They talked about good governance. Promoting the jargon of the multilateral financial institutions and the issues of transparency, accountability and governance is not good enough. They are about the jargon of the multilateral institutions.

We must live these issues on a daily basis. In this regard, we could only learn by doing. Here, talk is cheap. Equity to access in publicly provided goods and services—whether in housing, social services or employment—is the best test of transparency, accountability and governance. [*Desk thumping*] Could you set those standards and work toward them so that the society could develop a sense of civic identity; shared values and common purposes? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, at this time in a country's history, we should not be burdened with a budget that cannot pass the test of good planning. I say that without fear or contradiction. I would be able to debate the Minister in the Ministry of Finance in any public forum on the issue of planning in a budget debate. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Valley: Accepted, tonight or anytime. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Valley: I do not care. I am accepting on behalf of any one of the Ministers.

Mr. W. Dookeran: A budget that is based on full economic analysis; not a partial assessment of our deep economic challenges. The gap between rhetoric and realities is high, but the issues of the day remain unattended, with the focus more on immediate applause.

Nice sounding phrases cannot be a substitute for well-designed instruments. Mr. Speaker, the budget statement is not a public relations exercise. A budget is much more than that. There must be a declaration of confidence that we could govern ourselves by adopting current economic strategies; provide a real fiscal package and announced programmes that would effectively lift the poor out of the poverty trap.

Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that from what I have seen, this budget has missed this opportunity to take this country into this secure and confident future. The country knows it; the population senses it; and the society feels it. It is now time for a new direction. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. First of all, I would like to start my contribution by congratulating the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance on an excellent budget statement that has focused this country's attention on sustainability—including economic, social and environmental sustainability—in an effort to achieve high levels of human development. In that regard, there is clear dictate that we must include and ensure sustainable high levels of education; efficient and effective health services; affordable houses; and a vibrant and safe environment for all.

11.15 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, before I actually go into my budget contribution, I would like to deal with some of the issues raised by the Member for St. Augustine, in circumstances where the Member was the Minister of Planning and Development between the period 1986 to 1991. The records of this Parliament will show that the Member admitted to this House that for five years he sat in the Ministry of Planning and Development and achieved nothing. [*Desk thumping*] That information came from the mouth of the Member, yet he stood here today and talked to us about impotence. If ever there was a minister of planning and development who was impotent, by his own admission, it was the Member for St. Augustine. He said that he achieved nothing in five years.

Mr. Ramnath: Watch that sexy language. [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: I am hoping that you are not going to admit your impotence too. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Ramnath: I am worried that you might have to test it. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think that is enough of that; can we carry on, please. [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, thank you for saving the Member for Couva South. [*Laughter*]

When it comes to performance there was a statement made by those on the other side: Performance beats “ol’ talk” any time. We agree with that. I want to capture the last two years of the Member for St. Augustine’s performance, as it relates to the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). As you are aware, the PSIP only became a part of the budget in 1990, one of the years that the Member for St. Augustine was the Minister of Planning and Development. As a consequence of that, we have two years of his record of performance.

In 1990 the PSIP’s allocation was \$1.1667 billion; the actual expenditure was \$598.2 million. That is clear mathematics: a 60 per cent performance. [*Interruption*] I was really giving him one extra per cent, but to be accurate, that was a 59 per cent performance. In 1991, the PSIP allocation was \$1,418,000,069; the actual expenditure was \$800 million, a 56 per cent performance. There was declining performance as the years passed; impotence that he admitted.

On the contrary, when the PNM administration came to governance, our performance continued to increase from 68 per cent, to 84 per cent, to 93 per cent in the year 1995 when we demitted office. The performance for the year 2003/2004 was 93 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] So when those on the other side say that there has not been performance by this Government, we on this side can boast that our performance for the year 2003/2004 was 93 per cent.

Let me make the further point, that the initial allocation was \$1.6 billion. We came to this Parliament and asked for a revised allocation of \$1.8 billion. If we had stuck with \$1.6 billion, we would have performed over 100 per cent of the original allocation of the PSIP. So, Mr. Speaker, do not let them stand there and talk to us about performance, because we know what performance is.

Mr. Partap: What do you have to show for it?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The question has been asked: What do we have to show? We have performed in the education portfolio. We have performed in the

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housing portfolio. We have performed in the health portfolio. We have performed in the social services portfolio. [*Desk thumping*] In every single portfolio, this Government has performed for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

In those circumstances we can understand the desperation that exists on the other side. We can understand that in circumstances where we have an over \$27 billion budget, that for almost 75 minutes the Member for Caroni East could find nothing to say about it, but to pillory the Member for Diego Martin West; nothing about the budget. [*Crosstalk*]

Let me make the point that last year's budget saw a similar situation, with regard to the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro; they tried the same thing. The Member for Caroni East and other Members talked about a Member building a house in Moka. What is the problem on that side with people on this side doing buildings or doing what they see as something to advance themselves? It is very difficult to understand.

Mr. Partap: You must buy your own material!

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: It is very difficult to understand the information that is coming forward in spurious circumstances.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: In circumstances where they have documentary evidence, they should speak outside the Parliament. Do not use the cover of Parliament to bring spurious allegations. [*Desk thumping*] If you have documents, take them outside the Parliament. We are waiting to see which one of them will go outside the Parliament and make those allegations.

Mr. Ramnath: "Ol' talk."

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: I want to return to some of the issues that were raised by the Member for St. Augustine. He indicated that this Government must not lose the opportunity to frontally attack poverty and deal with equitable distribution of services to the poor. First of all, let me indicate that there was a figure stated, in terms of the level of poverty. If I am not mistaken, the Member for Oropouche quoted that figure as 25 per cent. It is unfortunate that the Member did not indicate that the 25 per cent figure he quoted was a figure stated in a report that dealt with 1997 figures.

Mr. Speaker, that report is dated; it is nearly 10 years old. The information is nearly 10 years old. Another report will be done that will give the actual figure.

Over a period of time, particularly under this administration, a concerted effort is being made to alleviate poverty. We are of the view, without actual data, that the numbers have been decreasing, because a concerted effort has been made to alleviate poverty.

Whereas the Member for St. Augustine said that we should not deal with immediate palliatives, like the increase for pensioners, increase of the disability grant and other fiscal measures that have been put in place in this budget, we are of an opposite view. We are of the view that if people are suffering, at a point in time, and the economy can take care of those people, at that particular point in time, then an effort must be made to take care of them immediately. As a consequence of that, we put those immediate measures in place. Those are not temporary measures, but measures that will be sustained over a period of time. We have also put measures in place that will alleviate poverty over time. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Dookeran: I thank the Member for giving way. I want to clarify the point I made. I do not think the Member understood what I was trying to argue. It is not that we do not support the current small measures. I just said that they were too small, in the context of what was happening in this country.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine said that we must not lose the opportunity to frontally attack poverty and ensure equity. In my estimation, the Member then condemned the measures that were put in place. The effort must be made to deal with immediate problems.

Additionally, the IMF the IADB and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) have all said that in order to deal with poverty, it is not only about providing day-to-day resources for people. It is also ensuring that they can lift their standard of living. In an effort to do that, we have developed a series of programmes across the board.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, in the education portfolio we have moved—and this is particularly in the science, technology and tertiary education portfolio—to ensure that persons who would not normally be in the academic stream are now being taken up in terms of vocational training, skills training.

We are moving them from a situation where they would not normally find employment, and consequently deemed at a certain level of poverty, to moving their skills and ability to a different level and allowing them to move to that next level so that they are no longer considered the poor.

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That is the process that this Government is using. It is using a process that is treating human development holistically. It is development along educational lines, development in terms of improving the social infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago and development in terms of the public infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we are not, as was said by the Member for Couva North, myopic. Our intention is to take this country forward and as we do so and make that quantum leap to the next level to move us to developed country status, we will do everything that is necessary to ensure that all persons participate actively in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the Member for St. Augustine talked about the competitiveness index for Trinidad and Tobago and he was very careful in quoting from that document on competitiveness, a document that deals with global competitiveness, *A Global Competitiveness Report*. What the Member for St. Augustine, and indeed the Member for Couva North failed to indicate when they both talked about that entire competitiveness index was that one of the indices was corruption and crime. I think they stated crime, organized crime, corruption and so on, but one thing they failed to quote—and I think very conveniently or maybe they just forgot—was what the document actually said about Trinidad and Tobago’s competitiveness index.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote from the document from which they quoted but neglected to indicate certain other information. It says in the *Global Competitiveness Index*:

“Trinidad’s position on the index—33rd out of 102 countries—is noteworthy relative to its Latin American neighbours but far from the benchmark countries. The main factor determining Trinidad and Tobago’s 2002 ranking was the highly publicized corruption cases of three major Government-funded projects.”

It also says:

“The cases cited by the Regional Corruption Report for Central America and the Caribbean (Transparency International, 2002) are: the InnCogen power plant, the desalination plant and the airport expansion project. ...the US \$1.6 bn Piarco Airport expansion project which was investigated only after the former government’s collapse...”

These events were cited as one of the major causes of the former government’s collapse and consequently, the rating that was given to Trinidad and Tobago according to the *Global Competitiveness Report*.

Mr. Speaker, they quoted selectively. [*Interruption*] Yes, the bacchanal works, so it was interesting when the Member for Couva South made the comment across the floor that we are eliminating Rowley and we will continue to do the same with others. They are eliminating Rowley so that Valley could be the next one. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, they quoted selectively, and as the Member for Oropouche said, the bacchanal works and apparently that is what they are here to do. Not to debate the budget, but to create bacchanal and mischief in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. But the truth will always win out and that is why in these three corruption cases, the event was cited as one of the major causes for the defeat of the last Government.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine also said that the Bill which is for debate before the House missed the boat because it cannot initiate transformation. I take this opportunity to debunk what that Member has said. [*Interruption*] The Member for Couva South would know that in a debate one has to deal with the issues that are raised at the time and then go into one's own contribution. That is debate.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine said that this Bill has missed the boat and it cannot initiate transformation. On the contrary, I take this opportunity to quote from the *Article 4 IMF Consultation Report*. The Member for St. Augustine quoted from a July report, I will quote from the October report which is the final one of the IMF which will be published next week. It says in relation particularly to the non-financial public sector:

“The overall balance of the consolidated nonfinancial public sector (NFPS), improved sharply in FY 2002/03, although deficits remained in some entities. The NFPS shifted from a deficit of about 4 percent of GDP... to a surplus of 2 percent of GDP...The turnaround reflected the marked improvement in the finances of the state-owned energy companies due to strong product prices and, in the case of gas, increased output. While most of the energy-related companies, and the telecommunication company, had operating surpluses, a number of enterprises continued to record deficits—”

However, the intention is clear that the turnaround is obvious.

Mr. Speaker, this is the October 2004 IMF Article 4 Consultation Report. The article also said:

“The performance of non-energy sectors was mixed: while there was a strong expansion in manufacturing, construction, and financial services, the agricultural

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sector declined by some 14 percent. ... To some extent, this reflected an increase in the labor participation rate; job growth continued at a reasonable pace.”

Mr. Speaker, whereas the Member for St. Augustine would have us believe that we are not on the right path, the IMF is saying that the path being taken by this administration is the right one to lead us to the necessary turnaround. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we on this side will opt to take the advice that is given in the October report of the IMF, not the July report which the Member for St. Augustine so conveniently quoted today.

In addition to that particular situation where the IMF has seen that in manufacturing, construction, and the financial areas that there is a turnaround, one of the things that the Member for St. Augustine said that certainly baffled me was that when we exclude oil and gas we are running a deficit budget.

Mr. Speaker, I am not an economist, I am an attorney-at-law by training, but I am someone who perhaps budgets by common sense. I am not an economist, I am a woman and I have to budget for my home and it is only common sense that if you excluded the major economic driver of this economy there must be a deficit. [*Desk thumping*]

It would be the same if I stood in my house and took out my salary and my husband's and put my daughter's salary—who does not work—then we would have a deficit budget. So I cannot understand how an economist, who was the Governor of the Central Bank, can stand here and tell us if you exclude oil and gas you will have a deficit budget. Of course, there would be a deficit because it is the major driver of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, we on this side have said that we recognize that oil and gas, the energy industry is the major driver of this economy and we thank God for it. [*Desk thumping*] We thank God for oil and gas and we have also said that as long as it is there we will use it for the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have also said we will use it to transform this economy, and the IMF has said that the turnaround has started and we are not going to say that we are sorry there is oil and gas. We are glad that the prices are high, and once it is available, we will use it, manage it prudently and use it effectively for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, when the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East presented the budget statement, he indicated quite frontally that there were three pillars on which the economic strategy was predicated. This is the first pillar:

“It is directed towards maximising returns from the energy sector, through increasing our participation in the value chain and raising the Government's tax-take in a manner that is consistent with promoting a high level of investment in the sector.”

The second pillar—and I am quoting:

“...to diversify the economy to reduce dependence on the energy sector and to achieve self-sustaining growth. Our diversification strategy focuses on six main sectors:

- the traditional manufacturing sector”

which the IMF says is making a turnaround

- “a new technologically based industrial sector

that is the manufacturing sector, which the IMF says is making a turnaround—

- “tourism
- financial services”

which the IMF says is making a turnaround—

- “agriculture”

which the IMF says we must focus on—

- “the small business sector.”

That is the second pillar:

“The third pillar of the Government's economic strategy is ensuring that the benefits of economic growth and development are shared by all sections of the population. [*Desk thumping*] This implies that growth must be accompanied by the creation of full-employment involving permanent jobs and a high quality of health, education and general welfare.”

Our budget has said that our main priorities are health, education, housing and social services. We are certain, as we move forward, using the energy sector, that we will achieve the vision of making Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by the year 2020.

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Let me come to the issue of Caroni (1975) Limited. I would like to indicate that the Member for St. Augustine seems to forget that it was the “Dookeran Plan” that was the first plan that suggested that Caroni be closed down.

Hon. Members: No! It was the second one.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Well, okay, it was the second one that said Caroni (1975) Limited must be closed down. I just want to remind the Member for St. Augustine that it was on several platforms that those on the other side, because of his plan when he was in government, we found out the word—I think it is a Hindi word—“neemakaram”.

Mr. Ramnath: Correct pronunciation.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: I just want to remind the Member for St. Augustine that it was during the time when he proposed a shutdown plan for Caroni (1975) Limited that we learnt the word, “neemakaram”, because those on the other side, and in particular the Member for Couva North, affixed that name to the then Minister of Planning and Development. So it is very interesting that he is now talking to us about the Caroni (1975) Limited situation. I also want to remind him that for almost five years the Caroni workers wanted their arrears of \$150 million paid and it was only when we on this side came into Government and the tripartite agreement was signed, that \$150 million in arrears was paid to the Caroni workers who were suffering because of the prospective “Dookeran Plan” to shut down Caroni (1975) Limited. We paid them the \$150 million that was owing. No matter what they say on the other side, facts are stubborn things and the truth will remain the truth.

I think I have said more than enough on some of the issues raised by the Member for St. Augustine. I would like to focus my attention on the implementation that we so proudly boast of on this side. I make the point, again, that the objective of the implementation is to move this country to First World status. I would like to make the further point that the Public Sector Investment Programme is, in fact, one of the key instruments which the Government uses to ensure that goods and services are provided to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; to ensure that the goals that the Government has set itself are achieved through the Public Sector Investment Programme, a programme which ensures that there is a mechanism for achieving the vision, the goals and aspirations of the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member for St. Augustine indicated that the PSIP was in no way linked to the achievement of Vision 2020. I find this statement particularly strange from a

Member who has had a somewhat intimate knowledge of the Vision 2020 process and is fully aware of some of the issues that have been suggested to the Government and have been translated into action by this Government.

One of the issues is ensuring that the level of tertiary education moves from what is now approximately 8 per cent to upwards of 15 per cent. One of the things that was said by that particular core group of the Vision 2020 process, was that attention should be paid to not only improving the level of tertiary education but improving the standard of tertiary education. As a consequence of this, two actions have been taken in that particular direction. One is ensuring that there is proper accreditation of tertiary institutions. There is a proliferation of tertiary institutions throughout the country, but the issue that has occupied the minds of those who want to move this country forward is whether or not the programmes that are offered are properly accredited and, secondly, whether or not they are reaching the persons they need to reach to ensure that we move to the next level. In an effort to ensure that this is, in fact, happening, an Accreditation Council has been established. This is one of the issues that has been raised by the Vision 2020 subcommittee.

In addition to that, another issue has been increasing the number of university places. In relation to that, two things have been done: The establishment of the University of Trinidad and Tobago and, secondly, ensuring that the actual building—the actual space—of the University of the West Indies is increased. These were two things that were suggested by the Vision 2020 subcommittee and this Government has ensured that we have moved in that direction.

As I talk about education, I can move to preschool to primary to secondary education. One of the issues that has been raised is ensuring that there is, what is called, a seamless education system, to ensure that at all levels, each level relates to the next. A committee is working on that seamless education system and we already have had situations where we are seeing that transformation. Another issue has been, not only providing universal secondary education of a certain quantity, but providing universal secondary education of a certain quality.

We had the unfortunate situation where, yes, there was universal secondary education, but the quality was suspect. In fact the IDB reported that they were concerned in terms of the Secondary Education Modernization Programme, in that the previous administration was not implementing the programme as it was structured to be implemented. The quality issues were not being taken into account. As a consequence of that, there was even the threat that the IDB would pull out its funding of the programme because it was not being implemented

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properly. It was this Government that had to talk to the IDB, cajoled the IDB to assure them that there has been a change in administration and consequently there would be a change in how the programme is structured and implemented.

As a consequence of that, the programme has been kept, but what has been the major difference is that now the quality issues are being taken into consideration. As a consequence of that, the issues of curriculum development, teacher training, ensuring that the standards that are necessary to ensure that our children achieve international acclaim, are being put into the school system.

This is not a *vaille-que-vaille* education system like the one that had been put in place by the previous administration. Every step of the way the attention to quality at all levels—and when I say, at all levels, I include the pre-school—is paramount with this administration.

12.00 noon

There is attention to the professional development of teachers and the extension to the computerization of schools. There is increased security for schools. This is all in keeping with the current need for the IDB's programme.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you Mr. Speaker and hon. Members.

The Vision 2020 sub committees have also indicated that in relation to health there must be certain imperatives. The health system must be modernized. You will recall that in 1994, a health sector reform loan was negotiated by the then government. Unfortunately, the implementation rate by the government that came thereafter was very slow. As a consequence of that, the Health Sector Reform Programme had been stymied. We have been able to negotiate an extension of the health sector reform loan and because of that, we are now able to assure that the National Health Insurance Scheme will be put in place within a two-year period. The intention was that the National Health Insurance Scheme would have been put in place already, but because of the tardiness of those on the other side who were in government, that was not to be.

Vision 2020 states that in order to ensure that health services are properly provided, the accent must not only be on the provision of structures, but also on

ensuring primary health care and where necessary, secondary and tertiary health care. By the provision of the allocation to the health sector this administration has ensured that this is taking place. The health services are moving along a path that will take them to the fundamentals that have been stated by the Vision 2020 sub committees.

The sub committees have also indicated that there is an indication that if you want to move a society from Third World status to First World status, apart from ensuring health and education, there must be an assurance that the country can communicate effectively with the outside world. As a consequence of that, a clear path has been developed in terms of moving the telecommunications sector forward and liberating it.

The Member for St. Augustine spoke very briefly on the telecommunication sector. Only now, the telecommunications sector is moving towards a state of being liberalized. We all know that the legislation and the regulations have been passed and the intention is to ensure that the Telecommunications Authority operates in such a way that the liberalization of the telecommunications sector is a reality, by the end of 2005.

We are here as a government to ensure that all sectors move forward and all persons participate in the growth that is coming to Trinidad and Tobago. There is one concern that we on this side must articulate in relation to that growth. That is in particular reference to Tobago. This Government is concerned with the fact that Tobago has lagged behind in terms of the development of Trinidad and Tobago. There is clear evidence that there is need for capacity building in Tobago, to ensure effective implementation of its development programme. To deal frontally with that, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly have recently signed with the Caribbean Development Bank, a technical assistance programme that is focused specifically on ensuring capacity building in Tobago and institutional strengthening of the Tobago House of Assembly.

It must not be said in the next few years that Tobago is lagging behind Trinidad. As we go forward, we have to move both islands forward. Unfortunately, because there has been a consistent lack of total implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) in Tobago, it has been shown that there is a serious capacity problem. In an effort to deal with that problem we have sorted out with the CDB, that institutional capacity strengthening through the technical assistance loan which is already being implemented. In addition to that, through the public sector investment loan we have a special section that deals specifically with Tobago's institutional capacity strengthening through the IDB. At all levels an attempt is being made to ensure that Tobago does not lag behind.

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I want to indicate that the Public Sector Investment Programme in Tobago has had its areas of achievement. Throughout the year, Tobago has worked assiduously at ensuring rehabilitation of drainage systems; reconstruction of roads in Tobago and that the educational plant in Tobago is of a similar standard to that in Trinidad. Not only are new schools being built, but they are also being equipped with state-of-the-art furnishings including complete computerization. In the same way that the seamless education system is being put in place in Trinidad, in Tobago, the pre-school aspect of that system has moved quite far ahead.

In an effort to further enhance the number of places for children in Tobago, there has been a concerted effort to ensure that pre-school buildings are being erected. Primary school places have now increased by 1,365 and the secondary school places by 800 in Tobago. The PSIP in Tobago is structured specifically for Tobago's development. Tourism has taken the front burner in Tobago and infrastructural development is one of the priority areas. The issue of ensuring that transportation between Trinidad and Tobago is sorted out to finality is part of the PSIP of Tobago.

For the first time in the structuring of the Public Sector Investment Programme, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has not only included core government projects, but also those projects which are implemented by statutory authorities and state enterprises. This has not been the norm. What is presented to Parliament in Trinidad is the core PSIP. That is, those development projects which are being done by the ministries and departments of Trinidad and Tobago. This year, we have sought to indicate what state enterprises and statutory authorities are doing, in terms of ensuring that public sector investment is at a particular level. This year the Public Sector Investment Programme for Trinidad and Tobago is \$2.1 billion. That is the highest it has ever been. You will recall that last year's revised PSIP was \$1.8 billion. Apart from that, the supplementary PSIP is over \$7 billion. Last year's was just over \$2 billion.

This represents public sector investments that are being done by statutory authorities and state companies; work that is being done on behalf of the people and Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Enterprises like UDeCOTT, Nipdec, Petrotrin and other state enterprises are now being factored into the entire development programme of Trinidad and Tobago.

Whereas the Member for St. Augustine lamented the fact that there needed to be a greater supply—I think that the words he used were, a larger supply of development initiatives—in Trinidad and Tobago, it is clear that he did not read the PSIP document in its entirety. The document states very clearly that the PSIP is

not limited to the core programme. I repeat, it is the highest ever. It is expanded to that supplementary PSIP which is \$7.4 billion.

I will like to take this opportunity to indicate some of the projects in that supplementary PSIP. They tell a very special story in terms of moving this economy forward. Let me take a minute to indicate some of these projects. In the energy sector, there is the cross-island pipeline from Beach Field to Point Fortin. This pipeline is budgeted to cost \$1 billion.

12.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this pipeline project will be funded partly by the National Gas Company, and partly by a loan. This is a project that began in 2003, and it is a project that will ensure that firms such as British Gas, British Petroleum and the Atlantic LNG expansion project will benefit from a cross-island pipeline. This is something that had been spoken about years ago, but because Trinidad and Tobago did not, at the time, have the capacity to implement such a project it was never done. Now, under this administration, the capacity is there.

We are implementing that project, which is going to make a major change to the distribution of natural gas in Trinidad and Tobago, and would move this country further along the road to achieving developed-country status.

Another area that we must indicate, in terms of the Supplementary Investment Programme, is the area of other energy projects that are in the pipeline. Some years ago, the then government indicated that the La Brea Estate was not suitable for industrial development. Mr. Speaker, to the contrary, the La Brea Estate is to the point where—

Mr. Imbert: It is full.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Very rightly said. It is full. They have to build another estate close by so that the Union Estate is reaching capacity, and LABIDCO is also reaching capacity. [*Interruption*]

I can understand why the Member for Couva South is trying to talk above me. They do not want people to know what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago! [*Desk thumping*] But I will repeat it! The Union Estate is almost full and LABIDCO is ensuring that the rest of La Brea Estate is also reaching capacity.

The entire area of La Brea, which has been seen as one of the most depressed communities in Trinidad and Tobago, is being transformed—[*Desk thumping*]—because of the aluminium smelter and new input relating to local content. It is

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unfortunate that the Member for Couva South—I do not know if he thinks that because I am a woman I do not know what is going on. It could not be.

Mr. Speaker, La Brea is being transformed. The aluminium smelter is coming to La Brea and there is a movement to ensure that through La Brea and the Brighton Port—new industries are being located in La Brea and Brighton Port is playing a significant role in ensuring that new industries are being located. The Kairi Platform, which is an example of that issue of local content that is being talked about in energy circles, is the first example of local content in terms of Trinidad and Tobago at that level. It is the first time that the fabrication of a platform of that size has taken place in Trinidad and Tobago, and it has been done under this administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it has not only ensured that there were hundreds of new jobs created, but also, it has ensured that a new set of skills have come to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And further, it has ensured that there will be a whole new industry generated in Trinidad and Tobago, all in La Brea. I repeat, all in La Brea! In an area that was once considered depressed.

Mr. Speaker, because of this Government's vision to ensure that the energy sector does not remain as simply oil and gas but moves towards other petrochemicals, and moves this economy forward, we will continue to ensure, not only that the skills are developed, but that several companies come to Trinidad and Tobago. So that there is the UAN Plant being established and the Melamine Plant being established. Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, and on, but the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries will explain these issues even more fully.

I would also like to indicate that through the Supplementary Public Sector Investment Programme, Government has moved swiftly on a new construction initiative. Not only is the NHA, Ministry of Housing, Land Settlement Agency building houses and ensuring housing for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but the Urban Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (UDeCOTT) has also moved in that direction, supplementing the housing programmes.

We have also said that there must be an improvement in government buildings. As a consequence of that and through UDeCOTT, the Government campus is being created at Richmond Street. There is the entire revenue authority that is being created at Ajax Street; UDeCOTT is transforming Port of Spain.

We are not fearful of any charge that says we have not planned with vision. We are clear in our minds that it is only with vision that we have planned, and that it is only with vision that we will ensure the transformation of Trinidad and Tobago.

As a further consequence of that, San Fernando is also being transformed. The studies are being put in place to see the effects of reclamation for the San Fernando area from Godineau to Guaracara. There is also the Chancery Lane Government Complex and the San Fernando General Hospital that are being put in place. In all areas where there is need for development and transformation, this Government has focussed on those areas and they are moving forward successfully.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to say that when we on this side talk about Vision 2020, we know that it aggravates those on the other side, because they are well aware that we are moving on that path without stopping. We are not stopping because we know it is only through that process that the people of Trinidad and Tobago can achieve their highest quality of life; a standard of living as exists in developed countries; an improved standard in health; increased opportunities in education; improvements in infrastructure and improvements in our social support systems ensuring a sustainable environment.

Mr. Speaker, Vision 2020 is about the quality of life; it is about the human condition; it is about our economy; it is about our country, and it is about ensuring our future sustainable development.

I would like to indicate that when we talk about Vision 2020 we on this side are not, as those on the other side have said, of the view that this cannot be achieved. We are firm in our view that the people of Trinidad and Tobago want to see this vision achieved. We have gone on a process of public consultation into communities, villages and regions. We have seen the interest that has been peaked in the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We are firm in our view that this particular budget is just another plank in ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago will become a developed country. We are not going to be distracted in any way, by any of the diversions that those on the other side put before us. We are of the view that with this Government the movement is positive and it is forward.

The establishment of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, that is Vision 2020. When you ensure that tertiary education would be free for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that is Vision 2020. When the IMF can say that there is a turnaround in manufacturing, construction and in the financial sector; that is Vision 2020.

Mr. Speaker, when we on this side can say without fear of contradiction that the implementation rate of the Public Sector Investment Programme has moved to unprecedented levels; that is Vision 2020. Mr. Speaker, by ensuring that with each

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day we move closer to the people of Trinidad and Tobago attaining the highest standards in education, health and housing, we will, and we shall achieve Vision 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this budget. I am sure that those on the other side are quite certain that they will also see the achievement of Vision 2020.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon, Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch and will be resumed at 1.30 p.m.

12.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed:*

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*): Thank you very much. Much has been said so far on many different issues but, I want to repeat what my colleagues have said and that is, there has been widespread dismissal of the budget proposals by the community at large. It is a statement that is predicated on what Vision 2020 would look like, and to some extent, how the Government thinks that it is going to get there.

When I listened to the hon. Member, my friend from Arouca South, I had serious misgivings about our ability of preparedness to achieve developed country status not only by 2020, but I have difficulty in accepting that it will occur by the end of the century.

Developed country status starts with a change of mindset. It has to do with fundamentally changing systems; it has to do with a commitment, first of all, by the Government to create equality in the society to ensure that all citizens feel comfortable and that there would be no discrimination based on race, gender and all other important factors. While they are talking about developed country status, they continue to practise the worst forms of discrimination in this society; while they talk about developed country status they ignore the fact that we have an irrelevant Constitution; they ignore the fact that a Constitution that was written to satisfy certain needs at the time of Independence will not work towards achieving developed country status. They are not interested in any fundamental changes. They are interested in holding on to the resources, the revenue from the natural resources and a few populace projects.

I will talk a bit about the state of the energy sector later on in my contribution. But, it is interesting to note that the Member for Arouca South not only misrepresented what the Member for St. Augustine said, but that misrepresentation was based on

ignorance of the issue. The Member for St. Augustine spent a considerable amount of time looking at the relative contributions of the different sectors of the society to our national wealth. What he was saying if I may paraphrase, is that without oil and gas as fortunate as we are today to have it, we would become like Haiti if we continue on this present path. It is important, therefore, that we highlight the deficit in the absence of oil and gas, that is, to assume that we did not have it, and work towards developing the other sectors. I am quite sure that my friend from Arouca South would have been, perhaps, the better choice for Attorney General than for her to be placed in this position of Minister of Planning and Development. She certainly seems to be out of depth in terms of what is required.

When she talked about the competitive ratings given by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that was based on the widespread publicity given to allegations of corruption in InnCogen, the desalination plant and the Piarco Airport, I say to her and her colleagues that that is the price one pays when leaders of a country engage in the lowest form of politicking in order to achieve power. Up to today, I have heard nothing about investigations into the desalination or the InnCogen Power Plant. Three years have gone and they continue to spread wild rumours; they continue to send their police honchos here and abroad to carry out their dirty political work. There is a section of the police service that is in conspiracy with the politicians even after three years of being in power and that section is doing the dirty work of politicians. You are not going to get anywhere; no one is going to believe you if people feel that there is a continuing campaign to hold on to power at any cost.

The Piarco Airport Project is something we hear a lot about. They made sure that there was television coverage so that the public could see witnesses being vilified by a man who was a former Chief Justice. They had no concern for the well earned reputation of many of these people and when the television could not function on a particular day, they shut down the enquiry because what was important was television coverage and not gathering facts.

Mr. Speaker, I would have loved to be on television today. Channel four should have been here, and I would have been able to ensure that my constituents of Couva South had an opportunity to listen to what I had to say. I cannot depend on the cheer leaders called the media in this country to report on anything I have to say. I cannot depend on a biased media, a media that earns its income from full-colour, double-page advertisements from the PNM highlighting when they build a house or cut some grass. They are cheer leaders making a living out of Government activities. And as the head of this Parliament in this country, I hope that you can

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do something about it. We must telegraph to the public what is being said here. We should not depend on some businessman to publish what we say, but they do not want that either. And if we are moving on a path to developed country status, then information has to be readily available to all the citizens of this country with respect to what their Members of Parliament say in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. And it has nothing to do with me.

Whether I speak in front of a television or not, it does not really matter with respect to the confidence the people in Couva South have in me. That does not matter. We have reached very low ebb and it is not that people come here to misbehave. We set the wrong examples as an institution and that is, we stifle free speech. People on the outside have to pick up a newspaper to read two lines when someone has spoken for 1 hour and 15 minutes. That is why debates are reduced to pedestrian levels. That is why the Member for Arouca South was babbling and rambling. Not only that, but she was not here when people were speaking. She has no idea of her responsibilities under her portfolio. She took the time of this Parliament to start a cover-up with respect to an investigation that the Prime Minister got up and said was going to take place. If she wants to talk about it she has opened the way for everybody to talk about it.

We want an independent investigation. But they are the ones when they were in Opposition, spent all their time, particularly the Member for Diego Martin West, in calling people thieves. He had no respect—and when I looked at him this morning, I said, “Look how our Rottweiler has become a potter and a whimpering pot-hound.” I said to myself, if I have to build a house I will not hire a contractor who hired a subcontractor 100 times bigger than the contractor. I know if I had gone to the Couva Hospital when the United National Congress was building that edifice and I had taken up blocks and cement, they would have arrested me for what is called thieving. Let us not cover up. In civilized democracies that Minister would have resigned. In civilized democracies people have resigned for far less.

If we are going to accept the principles of Westminster as the operating foundation of our parliamentary system, you resign and you do not go and say that I paid for material that came from a government site. The government site is not a hardware! Are they selling bricks, cement, sand and aggregate as a hardware? The sad part of it all is we must leave it to the independent investigator and the Minister should not seek to further put him in an ineluctable position, but she has a habit, she attacked the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. Nobody in this honourable House referred to him building any house or whether he went to buy tiles of a particular quality. He is entitled to build a house in Moka. If people are

unhappy that he has abandoned his constituency and gone to Moka, they will deal with him. In any event, he is the Member for Mayaro for the time being. That is a seat the UNC is sure so take in the next election. [*Desk thumping*] And my friend knows that. But the Member for Arouca South wanted, in a subliminal way, to attack him. It is part of their internal warfare that is taking place in that party—I seem to be upsetting my good friend. She looks rather elegant and charming today, having lost a lot of weight. She looks beautiful. Mr. Speaker, let me just say that we are not going to get involved in personalities here. We have much to say.

I noticed that the Member for Diego Martin East has conveniently absented himself after making a long contribution about tertiary education and then he was preceded by a Senator, a rather pompous, self-opinionated, arrogant fellow. And then following the Minister of Science, technology and Tertiary Education, the Member for Arouca South, sought as part of her portfolio—they do not know what their portfolio happens to be. They are always interfering in everybody else's portfolio. She took away the entire speech of my friend from Arouca North who has to talk about agriculture. She began to talk about local content and the construction of the Kairi Platform in La Brea. She has never ever been to the La Brea Industrial Company (LABIDCO) site. She does not know anything about the harbour in Brighton. I used to work there. [*Interruption*] I am still there. I work for a living; not like you all.

1.45 p.m.

The Member for Diego Martin East went on at length to talk about these numbers. Primary education is at its lowest ebb in the country. We still have one-room schoolhouses. We still have nasty toilets. We subject our 5- to 11-year-old children to primitive conditions and they are talking about 2020 as though it is two years from now. The distaste for education moves on to secondary schools where bad conditions are exacerbated. Thank God for the wisdom and foresight of the UNC that we constructed so many modern schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

When we move from primary to secondary education and we carry all that baggage, it is no wonder today, in our secondary school system, there are so many problems. They have to create an environment where children would love education; where teachers would love to teach. [*Interruption*] They are to train them. We hear glib remarks about training so many teachers, so mediocre mass secondary education is transferred to mediocre mass tertiary education. They are not concerned about quality education; they are concerned about numbers.

We were severely attacked when we said that all should proceed from elementary schools to secondary schools; when we were talking about giving an

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opportunity to children, when, at age 11, we were leaving 10,000 children behind every year, and we introduced free secondary education for all. They said we were not ready for it. They are the ones who come today in the Parliament and talk about the need to expand the numbers; and, as one person said, the University of Trinidad and Tobago was formed when they change “I” to “U”—from ITT to UTT.

They have done nothing at that school. Prof. Julien was the chairman of the board of TTIT. That was an experiment that produced great results. It was the coming together of industry and government to satisfy the needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We did not do like them. We had a board that understood the challenges and the opportunities facing the industry. That Minister who went on record as describing the school in Coryal as a school for “douen” and parrots, also had some very disparaging remarks about the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology at Brechin Castle.

He is a very uncharitable man because he sees himself in a certain class in this country to which you and I do not belong. It is one of those colonial hang-ups and hangovers. Today he is saying that ITT has state-of-the-art, cutting-edge equipment. Today he is saying they have some good programmes. Today he is saying that they are forming an alliance with Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. We have that alliance. He is saying that they are forming associations with reputable schools like the University of Texas at Austin. We had an alliance with the University of Houston. We had bachelor programmes as well.

I am happy to hear that there is going to be expansion. We are not in government. If we were in government, that would be a foregone conclusion. We started it and they must have seen the wisdom in it and continued it. But, you know, Mr. Speaker, the failure rate is very high, so much so that the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology is very concerned about continuing to support that programme. So they have started a one-year pre-diploma programme called transition studies. The CXC entrants are having great difficulty in meeting the requirements. That has to do with curriculum development.

We gave an opportunity to our people to advance. They, because they are in power—it does not matter how they get there; whether they stole the election or somebody gave it to them—have a duty to ensure that they prepare the students to go into that school and do well.

Mr. Speaker, do you wonder why we have so many problems? Sprangalang will tell you. They do not even teach Civics in school. Children do not know to say “morning”, “evening”, “thank you” and “please”. They do not even look to the left and

look to the right before they cross the road. They say, “Bounce me, if you want.” Their solution to the children’s problem is to put out traffic lights 24 hours a day, instead of having lights that can come on at a certain time like in America. Everybody knows, and the police know, that if you exceed the speed limit, you will be in big trouble.

What about the West Indian Constitution? Do you wonder why nobody knows anything about your Constitution? The British had a course called British Constitution, which led to many people going to study law as a result of having done a subject like that. They were excited about it. We do not even have in our CXC curriculum a study of the West Indian Constitution—and they say we must vote for the Caribbean Court of Justice and do this and that and the average man does not have a clue of what they are talking.

Institutions that are archaic cannot subserve their move forward to their 2020 vision, so they are starting off on the wrong footing. Their philosophy is freeness and the Member for La Brea stood up and said he is proud of that. People in this country get up and say they must have a food hamper for breakfast, lunch and dinner today; then they must have free education, free school books, free everything. They must get a free job in CEPEP afterwards and a free house after that, and they are peddling that nonsense. When we talk about it, they say we are against the people.

Certainly, we must have programmes to look after the less fortunate and the dispossessed. But when you create a society based on freeness, then you do like George Chambers said, “You cannot live in a PNM house and vote for the Opposition.” I say to you that you are going nowhere fast. You should heed the advice of the Member for St. Augustine. You must put yourself in a situation, Member for Arouca South, where if you had no oil and gas where would this country be. That is what they should be looking at.

Would they be able to give to Junior Joseph, some fly-by-night contractor from Point Fortin, who has an intimate affair with the PNM, who gets contracts to build houses in Pleasantville and before the houses are constructed, he gets a contract to build houses in Corinth and before that is finished gets a contract to build government high-rises?

The Government should conduct an investigation into all of these contracts, not only into the Scarborough Hospital. What is happening in Tarouba? The same NH, “Nothing happening” they used to call him in Guyana. The contract in Tarouba went from \$17 million to \$35 million. I had a document sent to me by a

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very important person in government circles—the police. Do you know what was the reason given? They had to build retaining walls. The reason we did not enter upon those lands was that a geological study informed us that the land was not fit for housing—it was moving. It was one of the projects listed under the UNC. They were hurry to build houses. They call them infill lots development.

I am sure, Mr. Speaker—I do not want to drag you into the debate—when you pass along that beautiful extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway, thanks to the UNC, and you turn right on to that link road that passes by Union Hall and you see quality housing, it is comparable to any housing development in any part of the world where people were given service lots and assistance to build their homes as they would like to or as they could afford. When you look at Tarouba, it is a set of hog pens. It is a disgrace.

I am sure that if you live in San Fernando, and you realize that this is what the town has come to, you would be ashamed. NH is prefabricating everything, including the increases. If we are to pursue a vision, let us build a strong foundation. Let us get rid of all these handouts.

Dr. Morgan Job, writing in a newspaper, made a very important point. He said we should start looking for an export market for the grass that the CEPEP people cut, because if we were investing that kind of money— *[Interruption]* He has a PhD from a prestigious university and he has his PhD in agricultural economics in case he needs to find out. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath: I will forgive him on this occasion, but if he repeats himself I will have to deal with him.

It is important. They cannot spend \$700 million in unproductive activity. They must find productive activity to engage our people. Mr. Speaker, do you know what is their productive activity? MuST—Multi-Sector Skills Training. These are people who are articulated to Junior Joseph. The Member for San Fernando West knows the intimacy of which I speak. When they are finished, they get a job with the Government. They are trained by the Government and the party and they get a job with the Government—and then this Member for Diego Martin East will say, “We have trained so many people”. Let them go into the marketplace and compete like everybody else and then we will measure the success of these programmes.

I am simply saying that there are many things we have to do to build the foundation upon which we are going to move forward. This mass mediocrity in tertiary education is not going to take us anywhere. I hear my friend, the Member

for Arouca talking about local content. Does she know how long Damus has been building oil tanks in Trinidad and Tobago? Do they know how long they have been building vessels in Trinidad and Tobago? The BHP platform, which was supposed to be built in Chaguanas, was moved to LABIDCO only because of political pressure. They did not want to build a platform in LABIDCO, but in order to justify the corruption that took place on the LABIDCO Estate, and the fact that the DPP had ordered that the police conduct a thorough investigation, they wanted to exonerate themselves; they wanted to show that there was something wrong with the whole exercise of investigating LABIDCO.

2.00 p.m.

LABIDCO is not a success story. LABIDCO is the place where the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries publicly stated that no geological studies were conducted before they embarked on that project.

Mr. Williams: I wonder if the Member would give way. Mr. Speaker, through you, the platform that was constructed by BHP and its partners, including the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, was slated to be constructed in Louisiana, along with a sister platform. Because of the arrangements and discussions we were able to conclude, we caused that platform to be built here so that it could contribute to the GNP of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I will give way to you because as my line Minister, you know I am a respectable person. Since they would not allow you to reply to me, I understand your difficulty.

The preferred place to construct the platform, which was supposed to be constructed in Louisiana, was in Chaguaramas, not in LABIDCO. That is the point I am making. Mr. Speaker, no one is against local content. Why would anybody be against local content? I do not know why the Government feels every time it comes up with an idea, or copies someone's idea, it feels that nobody wants to share it. The Government has the experience of failure; a very high failure rate. They are trying to justify the excess of \$100 million that the police are supposed to investigate on order from the Director of Public Prosecutions. The police do not listen to the DPP, when it comes to investigating the PNM.

The police went to Carlos John's house yesterday, because the police are part of the conspiracy with the PNM. They have no creditability. They are looking for someone who owns an apartment. That is what they are concerned with. Every time they are on a political low, they look for a scapegoat. When the police in a country begin to behave in that way, you are not going to 2090. We would never have a developed country, as long as you people are in power.

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I am looking at the *Newsday* of Thursday, October 14, 2004. This is not my favourite paper. I would tell you how far we have reached in our thrust to become a developed country. ANR Robinson, I think we all know him—

“ANR Robinson, former president and prime minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, created quite a stir at the President's Committee for National Self Discovery symposium in Tobago Tuesday night, when he declared that the legitimate aspirations of Tobago cannot be achieved within the context of the unitary state.”

They have not been able to convince the man who stole the Government and gave to them, after the UNC had a majority of votes; an equal number of votes. We were the incumbent government.

“He claimed his experience in the so-called unitary state has not been a happy one.

Robinson, who was also the inaugural chairman of the then Tobago House of Assembly (THA) in 1980, stopped just short of calling for the island's independence and secession from Trinidad. He said though that time will prove it was a ‘fallacy’ to say that Tobago was too small to become an independent state. Robinson, a former Tobago East MP,...

I want you to listen very carefully, for those of you who do not read the *Newsday*.

“also said if Tobago became independent it would be larger than Trinidad by virtue of the inclusion of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which would place the marine resources now belonging to the nation, exclusively in the hands of Tobago.”

This is the former president and prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, whose virtues they extol to the high heavens about being a great statesman, when it was convenient. They attacked him in the worst way, when he was a junior partner in a coalition government with the UNC.

If you read *Hansard*, I am doing some research about what Mr. Valley, Dr. Rowley and Mr. Imbert said about him. *[Interruption]* That was then.

Mr. Imbert: What did you say about him?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I still say it. What I said about Robinson, I shall never retract. I will give you a copy of what I said. Mr. Speaker, developed country status is not something shared by a former president and prime minister. *[Interruption]* They are talking about secession. Do you understand what this MBA course is doing to many people? No offence meant my dear Member.

Mr. B. Panday: Maybe Imbert is the lecturer.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He would not reduce himself to that level. I use the local newspapers. Let me quote from the *Newsday* of Thursday, October 14, 2004.

“Surging World oil prices are giving authoritarian governments in the Middle East extra options for dealing with discontent and demands for reform.

‘The oil price rise has made all the dictators in the region stronger,’ said Mai Yamani, a Saudi researcher at London’s Royal Institute of International Affairs.

This year’s roughly 40 per cent of oil price rise has brought relief for unpopular governments from Tehran to Algiers.”

I think they forgot to put in Trinidad and Tobago. Do you understand what is happening when you depend solely on income from oil and gas; when you do not develop the other sectors? The Government has abandoned agriculture out of spite and racism. The Government has abandoned Caroni (1975) Limited out of racism and political victimization.

I quote again from the *Newsday*.

Mr. B. Panday: Why are you reading that newspaper?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Because the *Newsday* is the official arm and voice of the PNM. I am quoting from their newspaper. This is an assessment of a review of a book called *Strategic Pragmatism* by Edgar H Schein. This review was done by Kevin Baldeosingh

“Making sense of the Singapore model

Among local politicians and businessmen, it is fashionable to talk about the ‘Singaporean model’ as the one Trinidad and Tobago should adopt in order to become a developed nation. This is because Singapore, like Trinidad and Tobago, is an island-nation which 30 years ago had a per capita GDP of US \$500.

Now, unlike Trinidad, it has a per capita GDP of US \$15,000.

But Schien’s book shows that anyone who recommends Singapore as an appropriate model for Trinidad is talking from sheer ignorance.

...the success of Singapore rests on its core political and business leaders being men of impeccable integrity. ‘Compared to other countries, Singapore was easier to work with because there was no graft, no under-the-table payoffs,’”

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No building of houses for Ministers and stealing of bricks and cement. Those are my additions.

“His book is, in fact, essentially a study of how non-economic factors shaped the economic success of Singapore.”

It goes on to talk about how leadership was the main ingredient in preparing the country for developed country status. It continues:

“Again, the contrast with Trinidad’s union leaders, who run no businesses and are ignorant of economics, is marked. Another significant difference between us and Singapore is revealed in a quote from one former EDB chairman, speaking about Singapore being an island-nation. He said, ‘We have to have humility about how to do things and we have to learn from others. We have a very small island mentality and we can only survive if we are a little Holland, Belgium, Sweden or Denmark, or a significant part of a larger whole, like Switzerland or Austria. We cannot afford xenophobia and we are very multi-racial.’”

The model of which he speaks is one that is not based on anything else, but a transformation of humans and attitudes. You cannot achieve any status with your arrogance. You first of all have to become humble. It continues:

“He describes the EDB ‘climate’ as one of energy, enthusiasm, positive attitude, willingness to tackle problems, speed of response, and thoroughness of preparation.”

I raised this because here is a country that did so remarkably well. They dealt with the political and social issues. They were not being arrogant. They were not saying—whenever other people say we do not agree with your model and mode of development—you are not to be counted. They are not saying that we must just have numbers going to school and producing a bunch of failures. They are saying that we must have quality education.

I heard the Member for Diego Martin East speak about how fulfilled he was, having been demoted from the Ministry of Health; what fulfilment he enjoyed. They are actually so colonized by the Member for San Fernando East, that they actually accept their humiliation and grovelling as part of the culture. He said: “I am so fulfilled being demoted.” He was literally crying when the failed Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources replaced him. In the very near future, he will be the failed Minister of Health and he too will be fulfilled.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, all the plans announced—I hear my friend, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, I have a lot of respect for him as a fellow

professional. I had the opportunity to appoint him when I was a minister to a board. He served well. He was beyond me. He stayed on.

Mr. Manning: Well beyond you.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Many of the more progressive people I appointed did resign when I resigned. I heard my friend, after the disclosures by my colleague from Caroni East, the devastation that took place yesterday. I saw him in a state of trepidation, having to deliver his speech on his works programme. All I could hear is a list of projects that they are going to do. The Government is going to build highways from Blanchisseuse to Matura; across the valleys of Santa Cruz, Maraval and Diego Martin into Chaguaramas; through the Nariva Swamp to Manzanilla; and one to Mayaro. They have just discovered how to use Caroni roads to build ring roads when we had set the example years ago, and a very successful experiment. *[Interruption]* The UNC, of which I had the honour to be a founding member. Just in case the Member does not know, I am the third longest serving Member in the current Parliament. I am senior to you. They are the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and me. I am serving my 19th year. Anyway, I would not get involved in that discussion. You are wasting my time.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro was delighted, if not, excited, about announcing how he paved a road which was paved and allowed to decay under their administration. That is the road from Craignish to Ste. Madeline. That road was widely used. They paved the trace that went up to the Palmyra junction. When I was working in Barrackpore, I used that road all the time, during the dark hours of the night. Mr. Speaker, do you know something? There is a pothole 100 yards, north of the cement factory, for two and a half years and they cannot fix that road. *[Laughter]* There is a pothole, 100 yards north of the Claxton Bay intersection on the Southern Main Road, and they cannot fix it. The rural roads are rotting. I want him the Minister to know that all those IDB projects in Guaracara/Tabaquite, Gran Couva Main Road and the Cedar Hill Road were all developed under the UNC administration.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Couva South 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. K. Ramnath: I did not realize that I had used up so much time. I think we should extend Members' speaking time. You know, I heard the Member talking about paving the Bagasse Plant Road. I spoke to the Minister about that road. You cannot drive on that road anymore; you cannot go to the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology (TTIT) along that road anymore. The bridge that links the Point Lisas link road to the town centre in Couva has been closed off to traffic. So all the traffic must proceed from the highway, right down to the Southern Main Road and then into the town of Couva. They do not know that!

I told the Minister that if he wants to achieve developed country status, he must implement management systems. Where is the highway authority? The Government gets people who want to work within established management systems. If you do not know where a pothole is, you would not be able to fix it, although you are now acquiring pothole fixing machines. Your ministry is very inefficient! You are not getting the right information. People are not working! They are not getting the plight of the people to where it would be attended to.

All the grass along the Caroni (1975) Limited cane fields, which have been abandoned, are now four and five feet high. The Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) is accountable to whom? They should be accountable to you! You have the responsibility for maintaining the roads under the Ministry of Works and Transport and all the edges of the road, but CEPEP is not accountable to you; they are not accountable to the Local Government Authority and under the law, they have the responsibility for providing a good sanitation service and environmental services.

Mr. Speaker, they report to Prime Minister's boy, Mr. Ray Brathwaite, a failed Petrotrin employee, who did not have any work to do there. He was picked up and taken to Moruga to all kinds of Baptists, bush bath and rose functions and so forth. He is the champion of propaganda. That is the person to whom they are accountable. There is some rude fellow called Rudolph Williams—according to my honourable friend from Nariva, a man of great distinction and a man of the cloth—who had the audacity to attack him when he accused these contractors of making a killing out of these programmes. They are not accountable to the Minister. I want the Gran Couva Main Road to be cleared and cutlashed. I want that. My good friend Ross from Claxton Bay knows me, and he would condescend to do a little work, but he is not accountable to me.

Mr. Speaker, they cannot even fix the business that they are put into—that is to manage the landfills in Trinidad. The Beetham landfill is always smoking; the Claxton Bay landfill—the Member for Tabaquite could attest to that—is in a

deplorable condition. It creates a serious health hazard to the people who are living down there. But Ray Brathwaite, who is being paid to carry out political activity and propaganda, is now building houses. They have built 50 houses. They cannot fix the dump; they have no idea how to deal with solid waste management. The Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL) is building houses. I can guarantee you who will get the houses.

So, when my friend, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro stands and talks about what he is going to do—listen, build the highway before I die on my way to Mayaro, because I love Mayaro like you; of course, for different reasons. I like to go and swim there and so forth. The Member should fix the roads, and do something to alleviate the problems that people are experiencing on a daily basis. Do not wait until you move the traffic lights in El Socorro, Valsayn, St. Augustine and so on before you build the flyover. People who are coming from Mount Hope and Port of Spain and from the east would head to south in an uninterrupted manner to go to San Fernando. At least, that would alleviate some of the problems.

Mr. Speaker, look at all the ramps on the Solomon Hochoy Highway. I think the Minister should take some time off and do some field visits. I would take you around. The Minister should go and check the condition of the ramp at Pointe-a-Pierre—the access to the Caribbean Refining Centre—a company of which I am proud to lead in the area of health, safety and management. [*Interruption*] If he had remained in Petrotrin, we would have disappeared from the face of the earth. His record has been dismal. [*Laughter*] He has some records from 1905, but I have some records when the Prime Minister was working there.

I represent a place called Basta Hall. There is only one way in and the same way out. The roads have disappeared. I also represent a place called Indian Trail; I represent Dow Village. Do you know that these people are so wicked, they went into the Couva National Housing Authority and paved every single street, including the one in front of my house, and they did not have the decency to inform the regional corporation? They would not go into the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee in Dow Village and pave a single street. The streets of California are rotted. The Phoenix Park Road now has trenches. I am happy that they paved that area. I do not have a difficulty with that.

The Government wants developed country status when it openly discriminates. They discriminate for all kinds of reasons, as they have done with Caroni (1975) Limited. Up to today, there is no plan for Caroni (1975) Limited—whether it is Trojan horse or whatever it is. As the horse enters, they could have brought the plan with them. Agriculture has now been reduced to two acres a person.

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Over the weekend, I passed through Caparo and Todd's Road, and one could see the thousands of acres of citrus that have been abandoned. These are people who are talking about agricultural development, a plan upon which this developed country would rest. There are thousands of acres of citrus plantation abandoned. The buffalypso have disappeared. *[Interruption]* These are the same persons who stood up and said that all Caroni (1975) Limited lands belong to all the people.

They felt that Mr. Panday wanted all the land for Indians. Under the UNC, Panday did not take any land and give it to any Indians. He could have done that, but he wanted to have a diversified industry with business units, looking after agriculture, sugarcane, rum, citrus and so forth. But they wanted the land; it belongs to all the people. The regiment does not belong to all the people—95 per cent of one race; the police does not belong to all the people; and the civil service does not belong to all the people.

How long are you going to continue to tell people that Indians do not want to join the Army? Do you really believe that Indians would understand that? Do you really believe that Indians do not go in their thousands to join the police service? From the moment a certain level of officers in the police see Indians, they would wipe them out. They are out of the list! How are we going to get to developed country status when you do not respect people as people? *[Desk thumping]* They are like hypocrites talking of the inputs to this big plan, to create developed country status. You must do this with humility; you must take the political decision to implement systems that would subserve, granting that status.

With the few minutes that I have left, let me just say a few words with respect to the energy. Mr. Speaker, you would notice that they had nothing to say with respect to energy. The oil production in this country had been steadily declining. *[Interruption]* That is why they put you in charge of BWIA; the biggest wasting asset in the history of the world. *[Laughter]*

Our oil production was an average of 229,000 barrels in 1978. At that time, BP was producing in the order of 100,000 barrels per day. Today it is 125,000 barrels. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, for the edification of the hon. Minister, wasting assets does not mean to say that you have wasted them. *[Laughter]* It means that when you remove them, they are not replaced unless you find other reserves elsewhere. Now I understand why there are two junior ministers who are senior to him. *[Laughter]* I think the Member is trying to deny me my time.

So, BHP Billiton is supposed to come on stream. We had a date named and a time. Over the next couple of years, we should see about 80,000 barrels of oil coming out of BHP Billiton.

The first estimate of BHP field, the Angostura Field, was 300 million barrels of reserves. According to BHP sources, subsequent drilling has been disappointing. Reserves are now in the order of 100 million barrels. They have downgraded their reserves. Further drilling may further reduce this figure. The point is that the impact on oil production is significantly less than was originally thought. Oil production from the Angostura Field would not adequately deal with the issue of declining oil production, although it would help for the time being.

Listen to what the Member for St. Augustine said. The Member said to do a comparative study with respect to the contribution of the non-oil sector and the oil sector, and you would realize that if it were not for high oil prices, we would not hear all of these boasts taking place—all the roads and buildings that they are going to build, and 60 per cent of graduates coming out from secondary schools would be going on to tertiary education and so forth. This is as a result of the income from the oil industry.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to see 100 per cent of high school graduates go on to tertiary education, but the reality is that you have a declining oil and gas industry.

They have done precious little, especially my friend, the Member for Port of Spain South, since he became Minister. I sympathize with him. I do not hear him saying anything about the industry. He has lost his permanent secretary, who was an oil man. The job has been taken over by Prof. Julien. You know the old Shell team: Maxwell Richards, Julien, Malcolm Jones, Lawford Duprey, Barry Barnes and Peter Wong; just think about what I am saying. They all come from a certain era and background; they are now running the industry. They have taken away the portfolio from the National Gas Company (NGC) and put it into the National Energy Corporation (NEC). Prof. Julien is in charge of that. Prof. Julien is in charge of the industrial estate. Prof. Julien is in charge of Wallerfield. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: Are you aware that the National Energy Corporation is a subsidiary of the National Gas Company?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, under this Government, a subsidiary could be more powerful than its parent company. *[Desk thumping]* In fact it should be the other way around: the NGC should have been a subsidiary of the NEC. The NEC has a larger role to play, in terms of forecasting, intelligence, planning and so on and NGC should remain a pipeline operator.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has failed to address declining oil production through negligence and incompetence. There is nothing in the

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budget with respect to a strategy and plan of action to address this issue; and I will tell you why. I have repeatedly said that we can bring up the level of production on land, if we have the will to do it. I think I have a good enough reason. When we started the lease operatorship programme, that is, giving out some idle wells which were not even producing because of high overheads, wells producing three to 10 barrels a day, production started to grow. My friend, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro knows what I am talking about; he was part of a company that was heavily involved in that kind of business. But they do not know the difference between a well producing five barrels and 100 barrels, as far as their lust for money and taxes go, so they have taxed them out of business. The South Chamber, having gotten rid of the PNM people in that Chamber, now has the nerve to speak out.

When the Member for San Fernando West was involved in the Chamber, before she became a politician, she advocated the removal of this punitive tax on very small producers. It is called the supplemental petroleum tax; it kicks in after prices reach a certain level. You have to encourage people to invest; that is what entrepreneurial effort is about, not cutting grass by the side of the road. These are the people who converted Venture Production which my friend, who was the General Manager, was able to start with nothing. They walked in here to take over some old, antiquated, antediluvian wells that were drilled in the early 1900s and took their production up to about 6,000 barrels per day.

Mr. Speaker, they have squeezed most of these companies out of business. For three years the industry has been waiting on the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries for an invitation to bid on the undeveloped acreage of Petrotrin's unleased lands. You have a Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who has done nothing for three years. The Minister started off by directing his technocrats that a full 3-D seismic coverage over the entire acreage would be a requirement. A 3-D seismic in Trinidad and Tobago is among the most expensive in the world, if not the most expensive, and the Minister's requirement was impractical.

Do you know what he is saying? If you want to bid on this thing, you have to do a 3-D seismic of the entire southern basin. Nobody is going to do that. Although companies might be interested in doing seismic over part of the area, no company would be interested in full coverage. The technocrats at the ministry advised the Minister accordingly, but the Minister persisted with this requirement. Someone in high office was trying to generate a major project for a company in which he had a beneficial interest.

Mr. Singh: That is the word Rowley used.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Because of the impracticality of the Minister's directive, the technocrats were not motivated to move the project forward. A lot of time went by with nothing being done for three years. Eventually, the Minister changed his position and decided that the acreage would be divided into blocks and bids would be invited for each block with a requirement for a certain amount of seismic. They waited for three years. They came up with this big plan which backfired and produced nothing.

When the UNC was in power, listen to some of the initiatives we took: We allowed Petrotrin to drive land and near shore exploration. It resulted in several successive initiatives. When Exxon left, unsuccessfully having drilled up in the southern basin, the UNC understood that the prospectivity of three onshore and near onshore acreages would not attract the majors and we took a deliberate strategy to divide the onshore/near shore acreages into blocks and invited them into joint venture participation with Petrotrin—of the small to medium-sized foreign and local companies. Mr. Speaker, until then, foreign companies were mainly majors. The tradition was a paradigm shift from traditional thinking.

The action of the UNC resulted as follows: The first discovery on land in 40 years was made on the central block. In 2000 the exploration well, Carapal Ridge I, drilled by a small American independent called Vintage Petroleum Limited, tested with a potential of 50 million cubic feet of gas and 1,500 barrels of condensate per day. The last discovery on land before that was the Navet field in 1960. Petrotrin has 35 per cent of this discovery, without having to expend funds during the risky exploration phase. That was the vision of the UNC. [*Interruption*] You did that. [*Crosstalk*] He was, in fact, listening to the wisdom of the UNC.

Mr. B. Panday: Now he is totally spoiled.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Carapal well now produces in the Petrotrin system; the gas goes to the refinery and reduces Petrotrin's dependence on purchased gas. Several small to medium-sized foreign companies came and have invested significant sums in Trinidad. Talisman of Canada is going to be drilling on the east coast, near the Biche High School. There is also Venture of the United Kingdom, headed by my friend from Ortoire/Mayaro in his previous incarnation, Captiva of the USA, Corbeta of Canada and Vintage of USA.

Why did they not follow the pattern we had set, which was working? The Minister came into office, abandoned that pattern and said that he would go for the macro plan, as they called it, and then nothing takes place in three years. I want to warn the Prime Minister. I know he is an eternal optimist, as far as gas

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reserves are concerned. The proven reserves we have in Trinidad today could just about support the existing industries; and be careful, if Mr. Robinson moves for independence or secession of Tobago, you could lose most of that as well. There are no proven gas reserves available, at present, for the various plants identified by the Prime Minister in his budget: You have to be careful about committing the country on reserves yet to be found. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for Couva South for giving way. I am sure when the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries speaks he will deal comprehensively with the contribution the Member is now making. Perhaps I should just advise the Member for Couva South, and for the benefit of other Members, that the success of the exploration effort for natural gas is so great that the companies now feel more comfortable operating on a lower reserves-to-production ratio. If the Member has had the opportunity to be exposed to that piece of technology which BP has, called the “hive”, as I have been, then he would understand what really lies before us.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You understand what I mean by being “very optimistic”. Many of us have a lot of optimism about a lot of things.

Mr. Singh: Can you bank on optimism?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I do not know if people would see that as bankable reserves. We cannot continue to commit the country on reserves yet to be found. In fact, recent drilling for gas off the East Coast has been less than favourable. The last two wells drilled by Enron were failures. Recent exploration over the huge deep water blocks resulted in several dry holes. British Gas may be just shy of meeting its current commitments. In the North Coast marine area, British Gas drilled some very unsuccessful wells and they were just able to meet their commitments for half a train for Atlantic LNG, so they might, themselves, have overestimated the reserves. They recently purchased a central block on land, in an effort to meet its current commitment.

If ever we can develop any tool that could say, with great certainty, that we have those reserves, all of us would be extremely happy. But as a geologist, perhaps, like me you were trained a long time ago and since you did not practise the profession, you may have difficulty in understanding what is happening today. I just want to warn you: This blind optimism of banking on gas that you have not found is something we have to be careful about. There are serious liability issues associated with making commitments on behalf of the country by the National Gas Company.

When you come here and fool the people of La Brea, particularly the Member for La Brea, by telling them that La Brea is going to have an aluminium smelter and all these projects—I would love to have the aluminium smelter plant in La Brea and all those projects—but I am suggesting to you, Mr. Prime Minister, that it is better for you to find the gas, before you commit it. Not even the aluminium smelter people will take you seriously. Apart from the environmental problems associated with aluminium smelting, this is just another effort, on the part of the Government, to make the people feel, with all these mega projects, that Trinidad and Tobago is on this forward path.

In the meantime, they want to be left with the income and earnings from the energy industry, left with the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and the National Housing Authority (NHA) houses and, as far as they are concerned, the rest of the population could go to Toronto and live. If you want to have developed country status by 2020, you better start being optimistic, not about reserves, but about the platform upon which you must build in order to go forward.

If you want Vision 2020 to be accomplished, you have to have constitutional reform. You have to make sure that citizens buy into these programmes.

Nobody in the central region will believe a word you say, after you have committed the greatest atrocity, worse than the colonial masters, ever perpetrated on the people of this country, by the premature closure of the sugar industry and the brutalization of the people of the sugar industry. That was a most brutal act, committed by a brutal man; one who has no history of commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; one who is only interested in his own welfare and the welfare of his tribe; one of your Ministers who presided over the destruction of Caroni (1975) Limited; who threatened the Industrial Court, that if it ruled in favour of the union, he would impose retrenchment on the workers. We are not going to go anywhere as a country.

2.45 p.m.

No amount of tertiary education is going to take you forward unless you are honest with the people and the people can believe that they truly belong here.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have utilized my time so let me say that I do not think that this debate is going to add any value to the wider community. The people do not even have an opportunity to listen to their Members of Parliament. They prefer to give Bernard and his “Kangaroo Court” the television coverage to those of us who are elected and who must report to our people to have an opportunity to do so via the media.

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I say we must follow that aspect of the model that Singapore uses and that is: Do it with the humility first, and get rid of the arrogance.

Thank you.

The Minister of Health (Hon. John Rahael): Mr. Speaker, I stand here proud to be the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and the Minister of Health to contribute to this budget debate the theme: "Ensuring Our Future Survival".

Let me first congratulate the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for a presentation and a budget that is really and truly one that encompasses the benefits for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. May I also congratulate and compliment all those who have gone before me and contributed to this budget debate.

Mr. Speaker, the reform of the health sector is one of the imperatives of our national development and a key success indicator of our progress toward developed nation status.

Today I want to inform this honourable House that despite some of the negative reports that still plague the public health sector, we have begun the turnaround in our health care delivery service.

Let me say that as Minister with responsibility for health, I would be the first to admit that there are limitations in the public health system that have to be addressed urgently. In fact, I am aware that there are many things that need to be fixed and put right before our citizens can be satisfied. Let me also acknowledge the contributions of my predecessors in office in the on going task of improving the health sector.

Mr. Speaker, since this Government was returned to office, the pace of modernization of the public health sector has been accelerated. What we have achieved in the past two years in the health sector with respect to the Health Sector Reform (HSR) is more than what the other side did from 1997 to 2001. It is important that we understand that the future is promising and we all can expect a more improved public health service in the next two to three years.

Many commentators have made heavy weather of the expenditure of health as a percentage of GDP, but the increasing allocation for health speaks for itself. In 1997, health allocation as a percentage of GDP was 1.8 per cent; in 1998, it was 1.4 per cent; in 1999/2000, 1.6 per cent; in 2000/2001, 1.8 per cent; in 2002/2003, there was an increase from 1.8 per cent to 2 per cent; in 2003/2004, the funding for the health sector increased to 2.3 per cent, and in 2004/2005, a further increase

to 2.5 per cent. So it gives lie to the notion that we have not allocated the resources that are required for the health sector.

In fact, I am advised by the Minister of Finance that should we be able to implement the programmes that we have put forward and additional resources are required, it would be forthcoming. So the question of funding does not arise.

Mr. Speaker, let me now talk a little about primary health care. We understand that prevention is very important when it comes to health and primary health care is the most important thing with respect to promotion and promoting health care.

With respect to our health centres, in the past year we have refurbished and reconstructed quite a number of health centres and I would like to place on record the many health centres that were commissioned during the course of the year.

Mr. Speaker, I will now list 14 health centres that were opened and commissioned during the past year.

Hon. Member: Who built them?

Hon. J. Rahael: It is the PNM that built them. They are:

- The Grand Riviere Health Centre
- Matelot Health Centre
- Manzanilla Health Centre
- Brother's Road Health Centre
- Biche Health Centre
- Rio Claro Health Centre
- La Horquetta Health Centre
- Maloney Health Centre
- Arouca Health Centre
- Tunapuna Health Centre
- Tacarigua Health Centre
- Castara Outreach Centre in Tobago
- Delaford Health Centre; and
- Canaan Health Centre

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Mr. Speaker, 14 health centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago were commissioned and opened this year. I also wish to inform you and hon. Members that La Brea and Gasparillo Health Centres will soon be added to this list as both are nearing completion.

Construction has also begun on the Williamsville Health Centre and will soon begin on the Gran Couva Outreach Centre, the Talparo Outreach Centre and Las Lomas Outreach Centre.

As we work towards the refurbishment and construction of all primary health care facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, I will also like to inform hon. Members that tenders would be out by the end of November for the construction of the San Juan/Barataria, Carenage, Ste. Madeleine, La Romain and Debe Health Centres. Construction will begin in the first quarter of 2005.

Tenders for the Oxford Street and St. Joseph Enhanced Health Centres and the Petit Valley Health Centre are closed and are now being evaluated. Construction will also begin in the first quarter of 2005.

Mr. Speaker, 2005 and beyond will see an accelerated implementation of programmes that have never been seen before in the health centres. A contract to start construction works on the Guayaguayare Health Centre was also awarded at a cost of \$2.3 million and construction will begin at the end of December.

The designs and commencement of the construction of district health facilities in St. James, Diego Martin and Chaguanas at a projected expenditure of \$25 million for fiscal year 2004/2005 will also get off the ground.

Additionally, renovations to the Mayaro District Health Facility are expected during the year 2005. We were also able to equip 24 health centres including the Princes Town District Health Facility. I must inform you that all these health centres are now outfitted with modern fitness equipment.

Mr. Speaker, as part of our programme for primary health care, we are ensuring that the community will be involved at these health centres to the extent that we are able to outfit them with exercising equipment so persons from within the community will have a place to go at no cost to them. There will be an instructor present at the health centre so members of the community will be able to exercise.

One of the biggest problems we have in Trinidad and Tobago today—and as a matter of fact worldwide—is obesity. That in itself is responsible for many chronic illnesses and diseases. We are attempting to strengthen and build capacity in our

wellness centres at the health centre level. This means we are willing to use our health facilities to educate the population on how to manage their weight, not only with exercise but good nutrition, to better manage diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and as I said, obesity.

Mr. Speaker, we have evidence to show that these programmes also encourage family members of chronic disease patients to exercise and eat nutritiously so as to prevent chronic diseases even where there is a family history of that particular disease.

In this coming year, as I indicated, we are going to be focusing on primary health care as the pillar for the health service. While we are doing that, we must put proper infrastructure in place, as well as in our major hospitals.

With respect to the hospitals, during the next year, the upgrade of the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex will be advanced so that in due course, the true potential of this institution will be realized.

Already we are able to open a new free adult surgical ward. This was another positive step in our programme to make health care generally and the facilities at Mount Hope in particular, more acceptable to all our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. This service will be complemented by the establishment of a new Intensive Care Unit (ICU) ward so that the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex will surely be the beacon for health care facility that it was intended to be.

Mr. Speaker, designs for the following works at the complex are already underway: renovations to the kitchen, roof repairs and replacement, fire detection replacement, security system, the overhaul of the building management system, the upgrade of the power supply, the replacement of the air-conditioned chillers, improving the water supply, refurbishing waste water treatment and a new telecommunication system, all of which will be accelerated during this fiscal year.

3.00 p.m.

We would also be relocating the maternity hospital during the new fiscal year. This would now be a modern facility and will be commissioned in 2005.

With respect to the San Fernando General Hospital, I would like to inform hon. Members that phase one of the upgrade for that hospital was completed. This phase includes:

- General and day-surgery wards
- Trauma and orthopaedics department

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- General surgery
- Medical gases system
- The installation of three new elevators
- Installation of new telephone system
- Additional generator and chiller
- This includes a new surgical and orthopaedic suite comprising 105 beds
- Upgrade of mechanical and engineering services is ongoing. This wing will be formally opened before the end of this year.

I am informed that phase two will begin early in the new year, and I am advised that it will be completed within 18 months thereafter. This involves the long overdue 10-bed intensive care unit; the upgrade of the medical records department; the pharmacy department; mortuary and laboratory upgrades as well; same-day surgery theatres. We will also be making improvements to the pathology department, the blood bank and upgrading the accident and emergency for burns and trauma.

Currently, the consultants who are assisting in the development of the necessary procedures and protocols to fully operationalize these departments are working with our local team to ensure that there is transfer of knowledge and sustainability.

Dr. Rafeeq: I want to thank the Member very much for giving way. I do not know if I missed it as he was going so fast. The Minister mentioned the ICU and other services and so. Did he also mention the burns unit?

Hon. J. Rahael: This is phase two, the outfitting of the trauma and burns unit. I am told that when that is completed it will really be a state-of-the-art trauma and burns unit. As a matter of fact, it will be the best in the Caribbean. That is what the consultants have indicated to us.

As we turn to the Port of Spain General Hospital, I admit that there have been some delays in the start of the infrastructure. This is due to tendering problems. When the award was tendered and the contractor was given the award, because of the increase in prices worldwide, he did not take up the award, so we have to go through the process again. But we will do so with haste.

Some of the infrastructure work to be done includes the upgrade of the central sterilization and supply department; the relocation of out-patient department; the creation of day surgery theatres; upgrade of the dialysis unit; the maternity ward and establishment of IC step-down unit. We also expect to commission the new incinerator during this fiscal year, after many delays.

Of great significance and what I consider quite an accomplishment, is that for the first time in 10 years, we have at the Port of Spain General Hospital, four functioning operating theatres and we are working on having a fifth theatre operational before the end of this year. Never in the history of this 100-year old hospital have we had five functioning operating theatres. [*Desk thumping*] You will appreciate that this will, no doubt, reduce the backlog of surgeries within the region.

As mentioned by the hon. Prime Minister, the designs for the Point Fortin Hospital are completed and the commencement for this new hospital is expected during the fiscal year, 2005. The people of Point Fortin, Cedros, Icacos and environs, have been very patient. I wish to assure them that their wait is coming to an end.

The upgrade of the Sangre Grande Hospital and the new enhanced health centre is also expected to commence during the year. The Arima Hospital is not going to be left out, as additional services will be introduced in the coming year.

The new Scarborough Hospital is under construction. The pace of construction will be accelerated. The consultants are already on the ground advising the Tobago House of Assembly and the Ministry of Health on the operationalizing of the new hospital. A governance and management structure for the new hospital has been developed and we have now completed the identification and specification of the equipment and furniture for the new Scarborough Hospital. This will be a modern, fully-equipped facility to deal with the needs of the people of Tobago and its visitors. You will appreciate that the new Scarborough Hospital is a hospital that is being built for the first time in over 50 years.

We continue to ensure that all our hospitals are upgraded so that the infrastructure that is required for our health providers to operate in, is being attended to. After all the infrastructural work is done and while it is being done, we are equipping the hospitals. For the first time in the public health institutions we now possess critical pieces of equipment which will seek to bring about a level of relief to our citizens who have had to pay an arm-and-a-leg for these types of services in private institutions. All our regional health authorities, including Tobago, can now boast of having a mammography machine. As you know, breast cancer accounts for a significant number of deaths in our country and with early detection this form of cancer can be treated successfully.

The role of diagnostic imaging in a modern-day health care delivery is pivotal. In this regard, we are able to replace obsolete and, in some cases, non-functioning equipment at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. We have been able to replace those non-functioning machines with state-of-the-art, cutting edge, first-

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world technology. [*Desk thumping*] The Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex can now boast of new X-ray machines, a mobile C-Arm machine; a digital fluoroscopic system, a multi-slice CT scanner.

Mr. Speaker, I must tell you, this multi-slice CT scanner is the only one of its kind in the entire Caribbean. This is the 16-slice CT scanner. Within seconds the scans can provide images of the highest fidelity and detail any part of the body in three dimensions. This permits a higher degree of accuracy and has helped to facilitate diagnosis and treatment of several diseases that would have been otherwise undetected. I had the opportunity to see this machine in operation. It is really cutting-edge technology. When you are being scanned, the information is live to the radiologist. A diabetic patient with circulation problems can be promptly diagnosed and treated expeditiously by angioplasty and stenting. This will also reduce the number of amputations by as much as 50 per cent. The financial savings of such procedures are obvious, since surgery and post-operative care can be significantly reduced. The three new digital fluoroscopic units at Mount Hope would add to the diagnosis and management of such patients.

We all know the value that our Government has placed on its cardiac programmes. Coronary by-pass surgery for blocked arteries, one of the major killers in our society, is also being addressed. We are in the process of purchasing state-of-the-art catheter laboratories for performing cardiac and non-cardiac procedures. This means that cardiac surgery will now be performed on a daily basis at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex—on a daily basis. [*Desk thumping*] This will be a major achievement and breakthrough when we have the new catheter laboratories installed.

Mr. Speaker, heart failure is one of the leading, if not the leading, cause of death in Trinidad and Tobago. While we are waiting for the new catheter laboratories to be operational, we have introduced a programme for the indigent to be able to access open-heart surgery. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this caring Government, is providing 10 open-heart surgeries every month free of charge to indigent citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] For the past year we have done 120 open-heart surgeries, and I am proud to say all have been very successful. [*Desk thumping*] So we are moving in the direction of ensuring that all our citizens, regardless of their station in life, will be able to have access to tertiary health care. [*Desk thumping*]

During one of my many visits also to that institution I was utterly dismayed at the state of facilities in the department of nuclear medicine. Nuclear medicine uses radioactive material and is pivotal in the early detection of coronary artery

disease, cancer, kidney disease and a variety of other conditions. In its functional state, I am told that this department used to be one of our unique assets in health care delivery in Trinidad and Tobago, because it existed only in Trinidad and Tobago.

This nuclear medicine department did not exist in any of our Caribbean countries. It existed at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. This department was once active with patients, as I said, not only for Trinidadians and Tobagonians, but for other citizens of the Caribbean. Through the neglect of the past administration, it has now become defunct. My ministry understands the value of keeping abreast with cutting-edge technology.

The tools that we have provided for our health care professionals must reflect our vision and perception for health. Our Government is determined to stop at nothing short of the best for the citizens of our country. To this end, our Government is shortly to purchase two nuclear gamma cameras for the nuclear medicine department at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, to revitalize this once vibrant unit. [*Desk thumping*] I may let you know that former Prime Ministers and Presidents of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago had made use of that when it was functioning. This department will be indispensable in the early screening, diagnosis and treatment of many of our cancer patients, and it is situated just a stone's throw away from the proposed new Oncology Centre at Mount Hope.

3.15 p.m.

Another major piece of equipment is being installed as we speak at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. I am referring to the 1.5 Telsa MRI unit. This unit with its super conductive magnet would be able within seconds to produce accurately, a diagnosis of the brain, spinal cord and other areas of the body. These services can now be accessed by our citizens who are in need, at no cost. These pieces of equipment are for the benefit of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. No discrimination! No UNC, NAR, PNM or Tapia. It does not matter. The health of our citizens is our responsibility.

In addition to all this we recognize the need to implement modern information technology. In our Health Care Delivery Programme, we are shortly to purchase necessary equipment that would make it possible through the Internet, for X-ray images and other scans done at remote institutions throughout the country, including Tobago, to be interpreted with a report becoming available in a matter of minutes. Telehealth in the making. You would be able to transmit an image from Tobago, Point Fortin, Chaguanas, wherever you are, through the Internet to the radiology department at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, have it read and transmitted back to you in a matter of minutes. That is where we are

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going. In other words, if Mohammed cannot go to the mountain, we will carry the mountain to Mohammed.

The hospitals in Port of Spain and San Fernando are benefiting from the following pieces of critical equipment that we have provided over the past years. They are the mobile X-ray unit and mobile C-Arm system. For the benefit of those who do not know, a mobile C-Arm system is a piece of equipment that when surgery is being done, the surgeon would be able to see on the screen exactly what is happening as he is doing it. We are now providing our hospitals with cutting edge technology. There is also a digital fluoroscopic system; a new general X-ray system.

Of course, not to mention mammography machines. Every health institution, the hospitals in Sangre Grande, San Fernando, Port of Spain, Tobago and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex have mammography machines. We recognize that breast cancer is the leading cause of death in women. All our health institutions, for the first time, never before in our history did we have mammography machines at the hospitals in Port of Spain, San Fernando, Sangre Grande or Tunapuna. That is now provided.

Having recognized that we have all these pieces of equipment and presently, people can only access these pieces of equipment during the week, we are now looking to ensure that these pieces of equipment would be manned on weekends. Six months ago there was no question of extending the hours into the weekends because they were not there. Today, we have all these pieces of equipment at all our institutions. All these pieces of equipment were procured at the cost of \$56 million. Most of them have been commissioned. If there is none that has been commissioned, we will press ahead to have all equipment up and fully in use.

It is not too difficult to see the determination and commitment of this Government in providing the necessary tools and equipment for our health care professionals, that would bring us closer to our vision of good health for all.

The Member of Parliament for Couva North indicated that the Government spends huge amounts of money without significant thought. Clearly, that is not applicable here or elsewhere. With \$56 million we were able to provide all those pieces of equipment in our major institutions. Let me also make it clear, as I have said before, and I would repeat it in this Chamber today. The Government will provide the necessary tools for the people to do their jobs. It is not only those heavy and modern cutting edge equipment we have provided.

In order to ensure that our newborn babies are given the best care possible, we made every effort to acquire the necessary equipment as recommended by the

medical profession for the neonatal ward at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital. The sum of over \$3 million worth of equipment has been procured and is in use. Some of the pieces of equipment include 12 incubators; 15 cots; ventilators; infusion pumps; cardio monitors, oxygen hoods and a cardio vascular ultrasound system for the pediatric wards. I am pleased to state that the wards continue to be sanitized and measures are in place to ensure that babies and mothers receive an improved standard of care which they rightly deserve. Similar neonatal equipment is being procured for the San Fernando and Port of Spain General Hospitals. We are providing the infrastructure; we are outfitting and providing the tools and equipment for our public health institutions. More is being done.

I go to some of our other medical projects such as the National Oncology Centre. In the budget speech on October 08, 2004, the hon. Prime Minister indicated that the theme for the coming fiscal year is “Ensuring Our Future Survival”. This relates to the country’s continued economic and social development. He rightly identified health as one element of the third pillar of the Government’s economic strategy. It is undisputed that health, education and gainfully employed citizens constitute a country’s greatest asset. The Ministry of Health is committed to providing the best quality care to the population. We must therefore comprehensively address the leading cause of illness and death.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in this country. As part of our Health Sector Reform Programme, the Government has entered a contract with the Government of Canada to develop a national cancer service consistent with our 2020 vision. The project is scheduled to take 30 months and would deliver a state-of-the-art walk in oncology centre, integrated into the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. This approach will allow us to address two interrelated issues; the provision of quality care to our population and the realizing of quality cancer care to the population and the realizing of the potential of the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, to deliver needy care at the secondary and tertiary levels to the population.

This project will deliver all the elements of a comprehensive care service. These include health promotion, prevention, screening, early diagnosis and treatment, support and palliative care. The prevention element covers proven means such as screening for cervical cancer; addressing the tobacco epidemic—for some of my colleagues who continue to smoke—promoting healthy eating habits and regular exercise. It also includes the provision of easily understood information on cancer. There are risk factors and personal action that should be taken.

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The early detection and diagnosis component of the service will include screening for breast cancer and investigation for prostate and other cancers. Treatment will encompass radiation therapy; chemotherapy and surgery delivered in suitable locations. Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex will provide in-patient beds and surgery will be done at several hospitals both at the RHAs and the private sector. The programme will also address patients' needs for support of different kinds such as emotional, psychological, social and spiritual in different settings, both at home and in the community.

While we are doing all this, we are ensuring that several nurses and radiation therapists are being trained abroad and a training schedule covering the next five years has already been developed. Implementation has started. Persons will be trained in all the treatment and care modalities such as radiation; medical and surgical oncology; radiation; oncology nursing and for the support services, visual laboratory, pathology, pharmacy and radiology departments.

In addition, several of our citizens and cancer professionals in various parts of the world have demonstrated their desire to support the development of the National Oncology Programme. We see them as another set of important partners in our efforts to deliver oncology service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Human tissue transplant is another medical programme. An area of grave concern to a growing number of our citizens has to do with kidney transplant. The Tissue Transplant Act and its regulations which are now being approved seek to address these concerns. Initially, we will focus on kidney and corneal transplants. The Act provides for donations of tissues before and after death and mandates that tissue removal be conducted on the basis of informed consent.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it prohibits the trading of tissue and it sets out penalties for actions committed in contravention of its stated objectives. Prior to the Act, only kidneys of living relatives were permitted. The law now allows for other donors, thus enabling persons with end-stage renal failure to have transplants from non-relative donors. Therefore, persons who wish to donate their organs, if they should die in an accident, could do so now.

This facility is, of course, complemented by the establishment of a new dialysis treatment centre in north and south Trinidad and forms part of a whole management of this chronic disease.

These two treatment centres will include full assessment of renal function of the patient; continuous maintenance of the patient; provision of all required

medical supplies; creation and continuous maintenance of the vascular access, provision of all the required drugs; monthly laboratory tests for renal scan, blood count and bacteria culture; annual chest X-rays and an ECG; and any other tests prescribed by the consultant nephrologist and qualified medical staff of each centre.

Mr. Speaker, each centre will be staffed with a consultant nephrologist and medical staff, trained in the treatment of patients with end-stage renal disease. Each centre will be staffed with supporting staff including a dietitian and a social worker to support the patient in his treatment programme.

We are trying to cover all these chronic illnesses and ensuring that we put in place, first a primary prevention method—because these end-stage renal failures, and these other chronic diseases and illnesses, when they reach at the end stage it becomes very expensive to treat.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Rahael: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank the hon. Member for Caroni Central, and former Minister of Health for the extension of my time.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, secondary and tertiary health care is extremely costly but we have to deal and treat with it while we are educating our population so that they would be responsible and will be able, with the knowledge, to take better care of themselves.

Mr. Speaker, HIV/AIDS is another area to which the Ministry is paying much attention. The Ministry of Health has launched its own five-year national strategic plan. The plan focuses primarily on prevention, treatment, care and support. As you are aware, persons requiring treatment for HIV/AIDS have been able to access free treatment since 2002. Free treatment to HIV/AIDS patients.

In Trinidad and Tobago, there are over 2,000 persons receiving care and 1,000 benefiting from anti-retroviral therapy. If our strategies to deal with this virus work, if our current rate of infection is controlled, it is expected that, at least, 6,000 will receive treatment.

Another programme we have implemented in order to assist in controlling the spread of AIDS and other STIs is a special abstinence programme launched jointly

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by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, which involves some dedicated, concerned citizens. The programme promotes sexual abstinence among primary and secondary school students.

Over the vacation period, close to 1,000 students and teachers were trained on how to create abstinence clubs. These clubs would support teens that choose abstinence as a method for avoiding sexually transmitted infections.

Abstinence is much more than avoiding AIDS. It is also about empowering our young citizens to take control of their bodies; to control their feelings, emotions and physical pleasure. It is all about teaching our young people to become disciplined and responsible adults.

Young people all over the world are vulnerable to social, physical and psychological abuse. They face problems of suicide, teenage pregnancy and substance abuse.

Mr. Speaker, records of visits to our public health institutions show that for the year 2003, 2,664 visits were made by girls between the ages of 10 and 19 years old. I repeat: 2,664 visits were made by girls between the ages of 10 and 19 years old. The report of an 11-year-old and her 25-year-old lover committing suicide is still fresh on my mind, and even the 12-year-old who delivered a baby in Arima, which was reported in a newspaper recently.

Risky behaviour impacts negatively on the development of young people. Alcohol abuse can lead to unprotected sex, which can lead to unplanned pregnancy, or STIs, all of which can leave future adults emotionally scarred for life.

The benefits of our abstinence programme include high performance and achievements at school, healthier lifestyle choices, avoidance of social problems, resulting from risky behaviours, and reduction of unwanted babies or abortions.

I congratulate those boys and girls who have chosen abstinence. To those who are already sexually active, it is not too late to change and choose abstinence now and defer sexual activities until you are more mature and better able to deal with the consequences of your actions.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to mental health. Because of the very destructive nature of mental health disorders, we are paying special attention to addressing this problem. The trauma of depression alone can develop into serious social problems including an upsurge in violence, crime and suicide.

Our immediate goal is to equip our healthcare workers with tools to recognize and treat persons with mental disorders. Our partnership with Dalhousie University

has begun and will continue to lay the groundwork for transfer of knowledge and resources to local professionals who will guide the plan of treating mental illnesses, using a community-based holistic approach.

As I have said earlier, following up on this initiative, we propose to reestablish the Psychiatric Ward at the Port of Spain General Hospital. This would be done in the coming fiscal year.

One of the major problems at public health institutions is the long wait of citizens to access surgery. The waiting list is extremely long. Persons have to wait years before they could get their surgery done. In an effort to reduce and to eliminate the waiting list, the Ministry has embarked on a number of initiatives.

We have entered into a contract with the Ophthalmology Society of Trinidad and Tobago to perform cataract surgeries on all persons on our waiting lists. It is expected that there are, at least, 2,600 to 3,000 persons that are, in fact, on waiting lists. We have to date performed over 1,800 cataract surgeries through this programme. [*Desk thumping*] All, of course, at no cost to persons suffering or who have been waiting for cataract surgeries.

Initially, the programme was anticipated to take 18 months to complete. I am happy to say that we will be able to do it in less than nine months. I am confident that by the end of December 2004, all persons on the waiting lists, at all public health institutions in Trinidad and Tobago waiting for cataract surgeries will have their surgeries done. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of persons are on the waiting lists for hernia surgeries. We have been able to make a serious dent on that waiting list. Again, I want to assure persons whose names are on the waiting lists, at all our public institutions, that by the end of the first quarter of 2005, your surgery would have been done. We are going to eliminate the waiting lists for hernia surgeries. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, not only that, fibroid. There is a new technology with respect to fibroid: the embolization, non-invasive surgery. With this new technique there will be no need for a surgeon. All that is required is just an insertion the size of the tip of a pencil, which will starve the fibroid for oxygen and cause it to shrink and disappear.

Mr. Speaker, I know that if we can, we will ensure that all women who require that type of surgery, it will be done that way. We do not have a full-time doctor presently in Trinidad and Tobago who can perform that type of surgery. We are now trying to bring someone who will be resident in Trinidad and Tobago. Right now there is a doctor who comes from UK, once a week, to conduct these

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procedures. Over 30 women who have been on that waiting list for fibroid have had the surgery done. [*Desk thumping*]

I am confident that our attack on that waiting list for persons who have been waiting for years for all type of surgeries will be eliminated in this coming fiscal year. [*Desk thumping*] Yes, that is a commitment, Mr. Speaker, by the end of 2005 you will not have to wait more than one month in order to have your surgery done.

3.45 p.m.

Training. This Government has been able to increase the number of persons being trained in the medical profession, in some cases almost double. In 2000, within the Ministry of Health and COSTAATT, 251 nurses were trained. In the year 2004, 512 persons are now studying nursing. Not only general nursing, but intensive care nursing, trauma and emergency care, operating theatre nursing, neonatal nursing, district nursing, home nursing and enrolled nursing assistants and the list goes on and on. We are providing training throughout the profession in the medical fraternity and so we would ensure that we continue to provide the training that is necessary.

Mr. Speaker, I want to come to what I believe to be one of the best programmes ever introduced in the health sector and that is, the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP). This programme started in 2003. The first phase treated just four chronic diseases: diabetes, hypertension, glaucoma and some cardiac diseases. During the past 18 months we have taken that programme, with that limited number of medication for those diseases—and at the time that it was introduced, it was for persons over the age of 65. We moved it from the age of 65 to age 60. We also included persons under the age of 18. We then included all persons who were on the disability and public assistance programme. As we continue to expand the programme, we continue to add more and more medication for different types of chronic illnesses. We have the vision that is required in order to provide quality healthcare for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, we have on this programme persons who are suffering, not only from cardiac disease, or diabetes but, enlarged prostate, glaucoma, hypertension, arthritis, asthma. All the chronic illnesses are now listed on that CDAP prescription form.

Mr. Speaker, from November 01, 2004, just a couple of days away, all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are suffering from any of those illnesses will be able to access medication for chronic illnesses at no cost. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is amazing, it is unbelievable how people could think that programme is not a programme that is for the benefit of all the people of Trinidad

and Tobago. How can someone say that programme is not one of the best things that has ever happened in the health sector? There is this idea about certain persons who may have an interest in certain pharmacies. I do not know whether a past minister or a present minister has any interest in any pharmacy. What difference does that make? But I want to make it clear, this present Minister of Health has no interest in any pharmacies in any part of Trinidad and Tobago. What difference does it make whether a past minister or present minister has shares in a chain of pharmacies or any pharmacy? When you get that CDAP prescription form, whether it is from a private doctor, or whether it is from our health institutions, you have the choice. The choice is yours. You do not have to obtain your prescription at our public health pharmacies. You can go to over 200 pharmacies throughout Trinidad and Tobago. You will choose which pharmacy you wish to go to have that prescription filled. Where is the corruption? Where is the problem? It is really difficult. *[Interruption]* Who is protesting? About what?

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about free medication, we are talking about free access to tertiary health care, we are talking about free access to primary health care, we are talking about equipping our public hospitals with state-of-the-art equipment, we are making Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex accessible to all referrals in Trinidad and Tobago. Any public health institution now can refer a patient to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, not only Arima and Chaguanas. We are opening up the health sector. We have a vision; we know where we want to go. We want to be able to make available to every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago the best quality health care at any institution in Trinidad and Tobago.

What we are in fact doing is preparing for our National Health Insurance Plan. That is what we are doing. In case persons on the other side or outside are not aware of what our objective is, if one notices how we are moving, we are moving towards this National Insurance Plan. This plan will provide for every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago regardless of one's income level, regardless of one's station in life, the objective is that with a card you will be able to access health care at any health institution in Trinidad and Tobago. You will be able to access your medication at any pharmacy in Trinidad and Tobago. That is our vision; that is our objective. We hope to do it in the next two to three years, but we are committed to having it done. This is something that has been on the cards since 1955. Since 1955 the question about a health insurance plan was being talked about. I tell you today, that it will be done. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I know I have limited time, but in addition, this Government has decided that all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are equal when it comes to

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health. In order to achieve what we need to achieve, we need to put a task force with a strong secretariat, in order to implement the National Health Insurance Plan. The steering committee will be comprised of persons throughout the health sector. All stakeholders would be invited to join this steering committee.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to invite the former Minister of Health from Caroni Central, to be on that committee because there is no politics. In health there is no race; in health there is no discrimination.

In conclusion, my ministry is fully cognizant that it faces many challenges in its quest to promote wellness and to ensure the availability of quality health care for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago irrespective of their station in life.

The horror stories we hear and read in the newspapers tell us very pointedly that it cannot be business as usual in the private and public health service. So while we improve the working conditions and the environment, and improve the compensation packages for health care personnel, outfit our institutions with state-of-the-art equipment and expose our staff to modern technology, we are going to demand maximum returns on our investments as we increase our capacity to solve the many problems that still beset the health sector today. We are dedicated to the task of improving the health of our country and bringing hope to those in our society less able to afford the high cost of medical treatment.

Our goal as was so eloquently stated by the hon. Prime Minister, is to create a health service that will, indeed, set new standards of health care in the region so that all citizens of this country can enjoy long, healthy and fulfilling lives.

I have touched on some of the major initiatives that we are working on or are about to bring on stream to continue the turnaround of our health service. Underlying these initiatives is the philosophy that the health of our nation is the true wealth of our nation. I assure you that we have the political will and the financial resources now to focus fully on the work ahead. I have accepted this challenge without reservations because I am consumed with the passion to succeed and to do the best I can to make positive changes.

I must express my deepest appreciation to our Prime Minister, the hon. Patrick Manning for allowing me the opportunity to serve our country in this capacity. I also salute the men and women for their dedicated services to the health service.

Mr. Speaker, working in the Ministry of Health as a Minister of Health has truly been challenging but at the same time, a very rewarding and fulfilling experience for me. The challenges which I have encountered during this period of service have provided a block upon which change has taken place and will

continue to take place. Mr. Speaker, what a caterpillar calls the end of his life or world, the master calls the butterfly. So said Richard Boach. It is through the challenges of life that one grows, learns tolerance and discipline and discovers new and interesting ways to help, support and encourage those who seek alleviation from their suffering and pain.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I say “fulfilling and rewarding” because real joy comes, not from ease or riches or from the praise of men, but from doing something worthwhile for your fellowmen. What greater joy can fill one’s heart than the knowledge that someone’s burden has been made lighter and the hope of a better quality of life has been given to another?

It is a sacred and humbling experience to hear the cries and needs of so many of our fellow citizens whose health and well-being we have the obligation to secure and safeguard. We must do all in our power to care for each person with respect and passion. The life of each person is sacred and unique. We owe this quality of life to each other and to our fellow citizens.

Mr. Speaker, we are committed, determined and devoted in our pursuit of quality health care for all our citizens, for our citizens deserve no less than the best.

I thank you.

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I join this debate to make a contribution, particularly on some aspects of the health sector. The contribution, which the Minister of Health has just completed, is typical of the attitude of this Government towards the running of this country. It clearly demonstrates a lack of appreciation of the reality in Trinidad and Tobago. After listening to the Minister of Health, we are left to wonder whether he is living in the same country we are.

The Minister has sought to paint a rosy picture of the health sector, which, if true, would make liars of the media, which has been publishing and airing horror story after horror story in the health sector. It would make liars of the doctors, nurses and pharmacists, who have been highlighting deficiencies in the health sector on a regular basis. Most of all, it would make liars of the thousands of patients who complain on a daily basis about the chronic shortages, the overcrowding and the inhumane conditions on the wards and the long waiting times they have to endure for pharmaceuticals and surgical operations.

Mr. Speaker, if you had the opportunity, as many citizens in this country have had, to look at the documentary on the San Fernando General Hospital, which was

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televised on TTT a few nights ago, you yourself would have been appalled by the horror stories you see there, even though I know you would not seek attention there. You would have seen the roaches, rats and other vermin. You would have seen the broken down beds with and without mattresses. You would have seen patients on the corridors of the wards and on benches and you would have seen the deplorable condition of the toilets and washrooms that are used by the patients. To crown it all, Mr. Speaker, you would have seen, perhaps for the first time in living memory, the closing of the kitchen at the San Fernando General Hospital because of unsanitary conditions—infestations of flies, rats and cockroaches. How does that compare with what the Minister has told us here this afternoon?

That is not all. I am not going to read newspaper articles here today because that will take my entire time and more. However, there is one article, which details the experience of a young woman in her encounter with the health sector that I need to put on record. This can be the experience of any number of persons attending the public health sector today. It is taken from an article in the *Trinidad Guardian*, dated September 01, 2004, and written by one Carol Matroo.

“There seems to be a never-ending tale of problems for North West Regional Health Authority, this time, at the Port-of-Spain General Hospital...

The latest problem plaguing POSGH is a shortage of beds.

At 1 am on Monday a patient was admitted to Ward 33 after complaining of stomach pains.

The patient, who did not want to be named, said that after she was warded, there was a mix-up with her medical papers and she had to wait for over an hour sitting on a chair.

She suffers from a condition that stems from polycystic ovarian syndrome, which causes extreme pain in the pelvic area.

‘They gave me the impression that I would be placed on a bed, but that wasn’t so,’ she said.

The patient said she was told by a nurse on duty that this was the system at work and ‘if you have to get sick in the hospital, get sick in the morning.’

‘As soon as morning clear, I checked myself out of the hospital and I went home,’ the patient said.

‘You want to tell me I had to sit there for that length of time in all that pain? Nah!

'If I have to dead, let me dead in my bed. They like they just don't care.'

The patient said that she discharged herself and went to Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex in Mt. Hope, hoping to get treatment.

However, she said she was again referred to PoSGH.

She was eventually placed on Ward 53 yesterday, where she was placed on a makeshift bed of four chairs.

The patient is sharing the space with several other women who also have to sleep on makeshift beds.

Stroke patient...also had to lie on a bench, using a dirty meal tray under her head for support.

Her garbled cries for help were ignored by the lone nurse.

Another patient...who was fortunate to be assigned a bed, complained about the unsanitary conditions.

She said when she took a bath, her skin itched from the water and the place was generally 'nasty'.

When contacted yesterday, Rahael said he could not respond without knowing all the facts.

'I am not aware of this situation at all and I cannot respond...'

NWRHA chairman Hugh Eastman also denied being aware of these issues."

Mr. Speaker, what is the use of fluoroscopic machines, CAT scan, telehealth, C-Arm machine, MRI—all of these things—if they cannot provide a bed for a patient? What is the use of all this technology if they cannot provide a bed for a patient?

The Minister boasted about all the equipment he has procured for the health sector at a cost of \$55 million. Do you know why he was able to do this, Mr. Speaker? He was able to do that because when we came into office in 1995, we had to provide basic equipment like blood pressure apparatus and apparatus to test blood sugar. There was nothing like that in the hospital at that time. Now it is well served with that type of equipment. We provided equipment to the tune of \$200 million during our tenure. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister is talking about \$55 million, but he can do that today because he does not have to provide the basic equipment that was missing during our time. I am saying that the 2005 budget does not address the concerns that I have raised.

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I am very happy for those who will benefit from the provisions in the budget. However, for hundreds of thousands of patients who seek care in the public health sector on a daily basis, there is very little relief to come and very little to look forward to.

I will go through in detail each of the promises made in the budget statement and all of the major heads of expenditure to demonstrate that the budget, certainly as far as the health sector is concerned, lacks credibility and does very little to improve the health sector. It is just a rehash of all the unfulfilled promises, with a few more added and more money to spend.

Let us go through the promises in the budget statement. I am doing so because I do not want the population to get carried away with the rhetoric from the budget statement and believe that because more money has been allocated things will get better for them. There will really be no meaningful change in the health sector. I will go through, line by line, the statements made by the Prime Minister in the budget statement.

The first item the Prime Minister mentions—and it was mentioned by the Minister of Health—is the commissioning of the intensive care unit, the burns unit and the theatres at the new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital. At present, there is an intensive care unit at the San Fernando General Hospital. It is a small unit with four beds. That unit is having difficulty in functioning properly because of the shortage of intensive care nurses.

Intensive care is just what it says—intensive care—and one intensive care bed requires at least four nurses on a daily basis. That is, three that will provide coverage for an eight-hour period, and one will have a day off. If they cannot provide that level of care in an Intensive Care Unit, then they are not doing what an Intensive Care Unit is supposed to do. Patients in an ICU require constant monitoring and if you do not do that, then that ICU is of little value to the patient.

At present there are ICU beds at the Mount Hope Hospital, which are not being utilized because of a shortage of staff. There are intensive care unit beds for the Port of Spain General Hospital, which are not being utilized because of a shortage of intensive care nurses. What is the point in commissioning a new intensive care unit when you already have beds and they cannot be commissioned because of a shortage of staff?

In addition, Mr. Speaker, an ICU requires highly specialized and expensive equipment to function effectively. I have not seen any allocation in the estimates for equipment for an ICU unit or for a burns unit. If that has to be commissioned during this fiscal year, then those pieces of equipment should have been ordered already.

As far as a burns unit is concerned, that also requires highly trained staff and specialized equipment. I am saying that they do not have the staff and they do not have the equipment for that kind of unit at this time. If it is the intention of the Ministry and the Regional Health Authority to take the nurses who are at present in the small Intensive Care Unit and deploy them to this unit that, I think, would be very unfortunate.

Until they have sorted out these issues of training and equipment, because they already have Intensive Care Units in the system that are not being used, instead of commissioning a burns units, why do they not make an arrangement with a burns unit abroad, stabilize their patients in Trinidad and send them abroad for proper treatment? This is what is being done at this time. Why not do that rather than rush and commission a burns unit?

You know, Mr. Speaker, a burns unit requires a lot of support services. It requires, not only a proper Intensive Care Unit, but it also requires a proper laboratory. I am sure all here would have seen a few days ago, again on television, the staff at the laboratory of the San Fernando General Hospital threatening industrial action because they work in a building that is over 100 years old. That building was condemned over 25 years ago and when we were in office, we had put our work programme in place. Before the burns unit came the laboratory. We must have our priorities right where health care is concerned. What is the purpose of having a burns unit where you will be seeing two or three patients a month, sometimes less, and the laboratory which is really one of the live wires of the institution does not get any attention?

Let me say a few words on the Scarborough Hospital. The Prime Minister in this budget statement has mentioned this and the Minister of Health has mentioned it again.

In the *Draft Estimates of Expenditure for 2004*, that is last year, \$30 million was allocated towards the construction of the Scarborough Hospital. However, in the revised estimate, \$39 million was allocated for the construction of the Scarborough Hospital.

In the revised estimates that money has been totally removed, so there is now in the 2005 budget, for the Scarborough Hospital, an allocation of zero. No money has been allocated for the construction of the Scarborough Hospital in the 2005 budget. Remember that the construction of the hospital started in March 2003. The actual expenditure, according to the document that has been given to us by the Government, is zero.

4.15 p.m.

The Government has spent no money in 2003 and 2004, according to the estimates, but the project is continuing and there is a cost overrun. Something

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fishy is going on here. If this project is being funded off budget, the Government must tell us that it is being funded off budget and they must also tell us what the cost is, at this point in time. As far as I know, this project is not being funded off budget. It is not supposed to be funded off budget because this is part of the Health Sector Reform Programme. It is supposed to be in the estimates. We do not know how much money has been expended so far in 2003 and 2004. There is no accountability whatsoever, so we cannot question how much money has been spent, because we do not know.

The ex-Minister is saying that the THA—I am talking about the estimates from the THA. That is what I am quoting from. Mr. Speaker, the construction of the Scarborough Hospital is turning out to be one of the biggest scandals since the days of the Hall of Justice, Mount Hope and the Twin Towers. The quality of work in that hospital is going to be poor. The cost overrun is going to be massive. I am asking the Minister to tell this Parliament and the country—if he wants, I can give way—what was the contracted price for the hospital. I also want him to tell this House how much money has been spent so far. I also want him to tell this House how much money has been spent and what works have been done so far. In addition to that—that is not all I am calling for—I will like him to have, in the light of all the allegations that were made, a forensic audit on that hospital at this point in time, to determine the amount of money that has been spent and the quality of work on the hospital so far.

When we were in government, we did everything that was required, according to procedure, to get that hospital started. We did the feasibility study which would have determined the size of the hospital and the range of services. Through international tender, we did the designs as well, that is with full consultations with all the stakeholders in Tobago. We went out for tender for the construction and the tender for the contract was about to be awarded when we went out of office. It took this Government one and one-half years to start that project. The quality of work is extremely poor. The cost overrun is going to be very high. We estimate and are predicting that hospital would cost at least three times the budgeted price.

Let me comment on the oncology centre. This was raised as the next issue in the Prime Minister's budget. In last year's budget presentation, the Prime Minister mentioned that construction was expected to begin in the fiscal year. Of course, no construction has taken place during that fiscal year. The Government has already spent \$21 million on that project. We have not had anything on that project as yet. Construction has not started, but \$21 million have already been expended on that project. This project is another major scandal.

When we were in office, we awarded a contract, through the international tendering IDB approved process, to a firm from Canada to conduct a feasibility study for the National Oncology Centre. That study would have given us information on the site and size of the centre, the equipment and machinery that were required and the staff that was needed to run the centre. That firm was supposed to produce its report in 2002. Since this is such a highly specialized area, we secured the services of two highly respected specialists, one in Miami and one in Houston, Texas from one of the leading cancer treatment centres in the world, to review the report upon its receipt. We demitted office in 2001. We did not have the opportunity to do that. The report was handed to the Government in 2002. Against all the rules of transparency and accountability, this Government contracted the same firm that conducted the feasibility study to construct the National Oncology Centre, without any tendering. It is highly irregular for a firm which has conducted a feasibility study to be given the contract to construct the centre.

Secondly, and more importantly, the fact that it was awarded without tendering is inexcusable. Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what the IDB has to say about this and why are they so silent on this matter.

Mr. Rahael: I would like to indicate that the contract was negotiated between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Canadian Government. It is something between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Canada.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: That contract was given to the same firm that did the feasibility study. It has been given that contract without any tendering.

Mr. Speaker, to add insult to injury, to insult the intelligence of the population of Trinidad and Tobago, a paid advertisement appeared in the three newspapers for approximately three days. When I saw it I was interested. I said that they were now going out to tender for the National Oncology Centre. I read the advertisement. Do you know what this was for? This was an invitation to bid. The North West Regional Health Authority is the one entering into the contract. The invitation indicated:

- “6. Contractors are required to submit their bids in sealed envelopes...
7. Proposals will be evaluated according to the Evaluation Criteria...
8. The Bids must include details as outlined...and required by the evaluation criteria.
9. Contractors are invited to attend a pre-bid conference and site visit at the site,...

10. Please note that (i) the costs of preparing the bids are not reimbursable...”

Do you know what this tender was out for? It was for a site office for the National Oncology Centre. The persons got the contract for \$133 million to construct the National Oncology Centre and there was no tender. Now, the Government is putting out a big tender and contractors were invited to a pre-bid conference to provide a site office. They are insulting the intelligence of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I therefore, would like the Minister, at some point in time, to tell us who is paying for the site office, how much is being paid, whether it is coming out of the \$133 million, or if the North West Regional Health Authority or the Ministry of Health is funding this.

I would also like him to tell us, at some point in time, what did the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago get for the \$21 million. In the estimates, \$7 million have been budgeted for the construction of the centre, I would like to know what can the people of Trinidad and Tobago expect to get for that \$7 million.

Mr. Speaker, the next issue I would like to deal with is the CDAP Programme. That programme, as the Minister mentioned, makes medications for chronic illnesses free of charge at the private pharmacies, to patients who qualify. I commented on this before and I want to say again, that is a good programme. The programme is now being expanded to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That is a laudable initiative.

Mr. Speaker, let me quote from the budget statement, something that the Prime Minister said in relation to that. I am quoting from the budget statement:

“Mr. Speaker, the expansion in the scope and eligibility of the CDAP Programme by removing the age restrictions now means that over 500,000 of our citizens would benefit at a cost of \$50 million.”

At a cost of \$50 million for 500,000 means \$100 in drugs per year. That would translate into one or two vials of insulin for a diabetic for the year. While it is a good programme, \$50 million certainly would not make any dent, as far as the people who are suffering from chronic illnesses are concerned. There is going to be chaos, confusion and disappointment if the drugs were to run short when patients go to the pharmacy to fill a prescription with three or four items and can only access one or two. These are chronic illnesses where persons are required to take their medication on a regular or daily basis. It is not a one-off treatment, they must take medication everyday and most times for life. There would be a lot of disappointment, chaos and confusion if they go with a prescription to the private pharmacy and can only access one or two medications, because moneys have run out.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. The allocation is \$50 million but, of course, a commitment has been made to all Ministers and Ministries that in the event they require additional money for approved projects, then the money would be available.

May I also say that at the end of six months, there is a mid-year review. Ministries have also been given flexibility to utilize moneys as between programmes within the same ministries and we would rectify that at the mid-year review. In other words, I am giving the assurance to the hon. Member and the national community that money will be available for the CDAP Programme.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, if there were proper planning they would have realized that means \$100 per person. The Prime Minister said he can always come back for funding and that they can move funds around. You can go through every budget for the past 40 years or 50 years—I do not know how long they have been doing budgets—you will see when there is a budget for drugs, that budget has never been increased. If it is anything, that budget has always been decreased. This is why, nearing the end of the year, there is such a shortage at the nation's hospitals.

When Nipdec gets the budgetary allocations for medication at the different hospitals, in consultation with the Regional Health Authorities they decide how much each RHA would get and the pharmaceuticals are disbursed on that basis. Once that allocation runs out, there is no more for that RHA and the same thing goes for the CDAP Programme. I am happy if the Prime Minister can give the assurance to the national community that the money would not run out. I do not know why more money was not allocated in the first place. With the experience he has had with the CDAP Programme for the last year, that alone would have told him that this money is insufficient.

Before I go on to my next point, do you want to take the tea break?

Mr. Speaker: You have until 4.30 p.m.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: I will just deal with one issue. I hope you will allow me the time to deal with this. This does not concern this year's budget, but there is a carryover. This 2003 budget has fallen apart, as you have seen. In that budget, the Prime Minister said that the Government would remove customs duty and VAT from medication. A couple of days later, we got a Legal Notice. This Legal Notice says that medicines excluding those set out under the headings appearing in the Schedule will from now not attract any VAT or any customs duty. That is all medicines except those that are mentioned in the Schedule. This Legal Notice was

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taken out in 2002, during the budget, again in 2003 and in June of this year, it was renewed to take effect from 2004—2008. The drugs will not attract VAT or duties, except those that are on the Schedule.

Mr. Speaker, there are approximately 300—400 drugs on the Schedule. All these are common medications that people use on a daily basis: Aspirin; Panadol; Atenolol, for high blood pressure; Captopril, for high blood pressure; Chlorpropamide, diabetes medication; Chlorpheniramine, allergies medication; Cimetidine, for stomach; Clotrimoxazole; Codine Phosphate; Dimenhydrinate; Diazepam; Frusemide; Glibeenclamide; Gliclazide. All these medications now attract VAT and duties. The announcement and promise that was made by the Prime Minister was that he was going to remove VAT and duties from medications.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting of the House is now suspended for tea and will be resumed at 5.10 p.m.

4.32 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, when we took the break, I was going through the budget statement. As far as the section on the health sector is concerned, I said that I would go through it in detail. I had reached the point where the Prime Minister was talking about district health facilities. He said in the budget statement that the Government would continue the construction of a number of district health facilities and also enhance existing health centres.

The Health Sector Reform Programme, as it was originally conceived, called for the construction of seven district health facilities, and this Government added another district health facility, which is the St. James Health Facility, so there was a total now of eight district health facilities to be built. Last year, the Prime Minister announced in his budget statement that the construction of the St. James Health Facility would commence in that fiscal year. That fiscal year has come and gone and nothing was done with respect to that facility. In this budget statement, the St. James Health Facility was not mentioned. So, that is another broken promise.

You see, when the PNM was in office during the period 1991 to 1995, they constructed one and half district health facilities. The district health facility at Arima was constructed and they brought it under the Health Sector Reform Programme. The district health facility in Arima was the most expensive facility to be constructed at a cost of \$44 million. At that time, the budgeted cost for a district health facility was \$20 million and that included construction and equipment.

The Mayaro District Health Facility had started and it was rushed for the 1995 general election because, at that time, the PNM knew Mayaro was a marginal seat. Because of that, a lot of substandard work was done at that facility and it had to be repaired.

We completed the Mayaro District Health Facility; the Couva District Health Facility, and the Princes Town District Health Facility. We also had the designs done for the other facilities. This Government has been in office for three years now, and they have not commenced the construction of one single district health facility. That is another broken promise.

As a matter of urgency, one would have thought that—since the emphasis is on primary health care and in an effort to ease the pressure on the major hospitals—all the district health facilities would have been constructed.

I now want to deal with the next issue in the budget, which talks about the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital. In the budget statement of 2004, on page 50, the Prime Minister said that construction of the Point Fortin Hospital would have started in the last fiscal year. Again, that is another broken promise.

In addition, I want to read from a Member's contribution in the 2000 budget debate. That Member was sitting on this side at the time—it would appear to be in all sincerity at that time—and he said that the Point Fortin and Tobago hospitals would be designed, constructed, properly staffed and fully operational, as soon as the PNM government took office in the year 2002. He said to the people of Point Fortin and Tobago, to take it from him, it is only a matter of time. That Member is no longer a minister—so it is not only the present Ministers who are making false promises—but that Member happened to be the Member for San Fernando West, at that time, Mr. Barry Sinanan. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Broken promises.

Dr. R. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, during the period 1991 to 1995, when the PNM was in office, they took a decision—and the Member for Arouca mentioned it today—to close the Point Fortin Hospital, and to build a district health facility there instead. They took that decision in the Health Sector Reform Programme. When we came into office, we had to renegotiate with the IDB, to leave that hospital and not downgrade it to a district health facility. The IDB required a feasibility study to be done, which was done through a consultancy firm, which was contracted through open tendering. After the report was handed in, the IDB agreed for us to construct a hospital. We went out for tender for the designs. Up to today, that hospital remains a dream for the people of Point Fortin.

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The Prime Minister also mentioned a primary care systems development. He said that in addition to infrastructural development, they would also implement a primary health care systems development. I do not know if the Prime Minister understood or knew what he was talking about. There is no primary health care systems development in the Ministry of Health. There was a consultancy on health care systems development, and that consultancy had been terminated. The Ministry is still trying to develop that project with the help of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Again, this Government has its policy decisions wrong. Primary health care should be the thrust of the Government. Today, the Minister mentioned that but, again, that is only lip service.

Recently, there was a big function organized in Port of Spain to celebrate 25 years of Alma Arthur to bring primary health care to the fore. At that time, the distinguished Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed, was President of PAHO. Mr. Speaker, this Government would be spending \$80 million on the United Nations doctors who are volunteers. I do not know what is the cost. There are doctors at the primary health care facilities, but there are no nurses. We do not have nurses; we do not have pharmacists at these primary health care facilities.

The Minister talked about exercise equipment. Yes, he is installing something that we have started, but there are no health care education officers. At most of the centres, these pieces of exercise equipment are lying idle. If the Government is serious about primary health care, then talking alone is not enough.

The Prime Minister then went on to say that they would ensure a continuous supply of registered nurses by training approximately 350 nursing students annually. When we demitted office in 2001, we had not only recommenced the training of nurses, which had been discontinued by the previous PNM government, but we started that process. There were over 300 nurses in training, and that figure could be close to 400, if you take the nursing assistants into consideration.

In the 2004 budget, the Prime Minister mentioned a plan to introduce a Bachelor of Nursing Degree Programme at the University of the West Indies.

Mr. Rahael: That is on.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Is this programme going to be on from this year?

Mr. Rahael: Yes.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: The Government said that they would introduce a Nursing Practitioners Programme. That also is another broken promise.

I want to spend some time talking about HIV/AIDS. The Prime Minister talked about controlling the spread of AIDS; treatment for persons living with HIV/AIDS; and the provision of anti-retroviral drugs. In the budget statement of 2002/2003, the Prime Minister said that starting in that fiscal year and continuing for the next five years, the Government would spend \$500 million on all aspects of campaign against HIV/AIDS. He went on to say that the construction of a world class testing facility in Tobago would begin in fiscal year 2003. He also said that there would be a walk-in service which would provide the result of an AIDS test within a very short time.

I asked the then Minister of Health a question in this House with respect to the timetable for the spending of this \$500 million. If we take into consideration, the allocation in this budget statement for HIV/AIDS, less than \$50 million would be spent on HIV/AIDS. The timetable that the Minister mentioned calls for the expenditure of, at least, \$300 million during that period. So, that is another broken promise. Mr. Speaker, what about the world class AIDS testing facility that was supposed to be constructed in Tobago? Again, that is another broken promise.

The Government also boasted of providing anti-retroviral drugs for patients who are suffering from HIV/AIDS. I would have to file another question in this Parliament because up to today, no one could tell us how many HIV persons are being treated with anti-retroviral drugs. We cannot get that information. If the Minister has that information, I would sit so that he could provide that information to this honourable House.

Hon. Member: He has nothing.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: I would have to file another question in this Parliament. Up to today, no one could tell us how many HIV positive persons are being treated with anti-retroviral drugs. At present, we cannot get that information. If the Minister has the information, I would sit and allow him to provide it.

Dr. Khan: Minister, do you have the information?

Dr. H. Rafeeq: I would have to file another question. We know that the cost of anti-retroviral drugs is going down. We had started the process of negotiating for cheaper anti-retroviral drugs. In Trinidad and Tobago, out of the 30,000 persons who are HIV positive, our information is that just over 100 persons are being treated with anti-retroviral drugs. If that figure is wrong, the Minister should say so.

Mr. Speaker, recently, we heard the pharmacists saying that they are short-staffed, overworked and underpaid. There were negotiations going on for a new collective agreement and so forth. More than a year ago, we passed a piece of

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legislation which this Government brought to the Parliament. We supported that legislation and it was passed in this House. A category of staff called “Pharmacist Assistant” was created in that legislation. That category of staff would have been able to assist pharmacists in performing their functions and duties. There is a shortage of pharmacists in Trinidad and Tobago. Over a year ago, that piece of legislation was passed in both Houses of Parliament and, up to today, it has not been implemented. That is why pharmacists are so understaffed. They have no assistants. That is another broken promise.

The next issue that the Prime Minister mentioned was the two renal dialysis treatment centres which would be established to provide treatment for 400 persons. This programme was long overdue. We are fully in support of it. There are three concerns that I have with respect to this programme. First of all, where is the staff going to come from, to dialyse 400 patients? We know that there is a shortage of trained nurses in this country. You would need nurses to dialyse 400 patients on an annual basis, and also to run 100 dialysis machines. Where is the staff going to come from? That is my first concern.

Mr. Speaker, the second concern that I have is that the Government is going to set up two dialysis centres: one in north and the other in south, to dialyse 200 persons. It would be extremely difficult to concentrate staff only to dialyse patients. It would have been better if many more centres could access this facility in order to dialyse 24 patients or so. The 400 patients would then be dialysed in centres that already have existing staff that could do the dialysis.

My third concern is—this is the most important concern that I have—that there are thousands of persons in this country who are suffering from renal failure and who are in need of dialysis. Since this programme is going to be funded by the State—it is going to be paid for by taxpayers’ money—we would like to know: what would be the criteria for selecting persons who would be dialysed? Is this system going to be transparent? Will it be able to stand up to public scrutiny? Will the criteria and the method of selection of candidates be made public?

Mr. Rahael: Yes.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: We would like to be assured that there would be full transparency in the selection process, and that the candidates for dialysis would not only be friends and family of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, remember, when the decision is made as to who would be dialyzed or who would not be dialysed, you would actually be making the decision as to who would live and who would not live. I am saying that the system has to be transparent and it must be able to stand up to public scrutiny.

The Prime Minister went on to say that this dialysis programme would be supplemented by a Renal Transplant Surgery Programme to provide renal surgery at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. I do not know exactly what the Prime Minister meant by this. I suppose he was talking about implementing the Human Tissue Transplant Act. I have spoken ad nauseam with respect to the implementation of that Act, inside and outside of Parliament. We had passed the Human Tissue Transplant Bill since 1999, after it had been languishing for about 25 years in the hands of the PNM. In 2001, when we demitted office, the process of getting the regulations together was already in an advanced stage.

5.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, since that time I have been asking the Minister to bring the regulations to Parliament, let them be proclaimed, do whatever infrastructural work is necessary and let us start the programme. Every time I speak here, the Minister says, "Yes, it is being done," but hundreds of lives have already been lost because of that kind of incompetence. [*Crosstalk*]

You will remember that quite a few of our patients had to go to Pakistan to access renal transplants at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars. You will remember the late, Alyson Nobbee, who went to Pakistan to have his transplant done, surgery that could have been done right here in Trinidad, if we had the regulations and the necessary infrastructure in place.

Then there is another hare-brained scheme: Do not go to Pakistan for surgery, we will send you to Cuba instead. He is going to have discussions to send patients to Cuba. What is needed is to lay the regulations in Parliament, have them proclaimed and do what is necessary, as far as the infrastructure is concerned. We have some eminent doctors here who have already been involved in transplants, like my good friend, the Member for Barataria/San Juan. They have already performed kidney transplants, with great success, but what is necessary is that the regulations must be brought to Parliament. I do not know what is the delay to have them laid in Parliament. The Minister has told us that they have already been agreed to by Cabinet. Bring the regulations to Parliament, put the necessary infrastructure in place and let us start saving lives.

The Prime Minister went on to talk about the charitable cataract programme. [*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank the other Members of the House, in particular, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

I have always said, and I think everybody knows, that cataract is a curable cause of blindness. No one in this country, especially in an age of plenty, should have to go blind because of cataract. The Prime Minister mentioned that they had done 1,600 cases. The Minister mentioned 1,800 cases. I have been told otherwise, but we will accept those figures.

Just about two weeks ago, at a meeting between the Joint Select Committee, Part II, of Parliament, dealing with certain ministries, and the South West Regional Health Authority (SWRHA)—and I am not giving out privileged information here, because that was a public meeting, which was widely reported and well attended—the committee asked the SWRHA staff, “If patients come to clinic today, what appointment would they get for cataract surgery?” We were told, and it is recorded in the *Hansard*, that patients were getting appointments for 2006, for a disease that is a curable cause of blindness.

Again, just about three weeks ago, I had someone come to me to collect money for cataract surgery. I told him that was not necessary, because the Government had embarked on this free surgery programme. He said that he had been to the programme and was not successful in accessing the surgery. Every month there are, at least, 150 new cases added to the waiting list for cataract surgery; that means close to 2,000 cases a year. Do you know how many cases are done in Trinidad and Tobago, on a routine basis for the year, both at the San Fernando and Port of Spain hospitals? Close to 700 cases. So with 2,000 persons coming onto the waiting list every year and only 700 surgeries being done, it means you have a carry over of 1,300 on an annual basis. You do not only have to deal with the backlog; that is not the solution. It is important to deal with that, but it is also important to put programmes in place to deal with the 2,000 cases and not only the 700 cases being done presently.

Mr. Rahael: Thank you for giving way. I could not agree with you more, Member for Caroni Central. The fact is that we are now outfitting a dedicated eye theatre, with all the necessary equipment, at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, which will be operating five days a week, every week of the year.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: I read that in the budget statement, but this is not the first time we are hearing this. You will recall that the previous Minister of Health, when he was bringing in the United Nations volunteer doctors, said that he would be bringing an ophthalmologist—I think it was from Ethiopia—who would be doing

25 cataract surgeries a day at the Mount Hope hospital. Up to today, that person has not arrived and nothing has been done at Mount Hope. I hope what this Minister said was correct.

Do you know what is the most galling thing in all of this, Mr. Speaker, except for the fact that people are going blind? There are many poor people in this country who cannot do better, who cannot access services at the offices of private doctors or nursing homes, hundreds of thousands of people who seek care at the public health institutions. They endure the humiliation, despair, suffering, discomfort and inconvenience to get care there, because they cannot do better, but although they are poor and suffering, they maintain their self-respect and dignity. They do not want charity from this Government. They go to the institution because they feel that they are entitled to get care there, because they are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and they contribute to the economy.

To further humiliate these people, this Government has dubbed this programme “the Charitable Cataract Surgery Programme”, meaning that this is not something you are entitled to, but we will condescend to give you charity and you can have your operation done. That is being totally insensitive to the feelings of poor people and people who seek care at these institutions.

I want to spend some time on an issue that was raised in the budget and it is supposed to be the highlight of the section on the health sector, because it is in bold type. I will read it for you:

“There exists in this country today an inequitable and pernicious system whereby residents of the Mount Hope and surrounding areas receive free medical treatment at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, while other citizens have to pay. We shall put a stop to that. With effect from the First of January 2005, all medical services including the use of the medical facilities offered at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex will be free to all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.”

I am sorry the Prime Minister is not here. He is totally misinformed. It is not true to say that residents of Mount Hope and surrounding areas receive free treatment at the Mount Hope hospital. There are certain services offered free of charge to members of the public and there are certain services offered on a fee-for-service basis.

Mr. Speaker, remember that Mount Hope was opened some time in the early 1980s as an institution, but when we came into office in 1995 most of it had been closed, most of it had never been opened to even offer the services there. We took

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a decision to open Mount Hope on a phased basis. When we went into office there were pieces of equipment that were in boxes, that were bought many years ago, which had become obsolete, even before the boxes were opened. There were many pieces of furniture which could not have been used for the wards. We took the decision to open up Mount Hope.

First of all, we opened the Wendy Fitzwilliam Pediatric Hospital and all the services offered at this hospital were free of charge to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The second thing we did was to open a medical and surgical ward, which we transferred from the Caura Chest Hospital and all persons accessing that facility did so free of charge. Then we opened a medical and surgical ward that was accessed by persons on referral only, persons from the Chaguanas Health Centre and the Arima Health Facility. Persons who accessed these facilities by referral did so on a free basis. Then there was the pediatric cardiac surgery programme, which was available to all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, again on a free basis. Plans were put in place to transfer the orthopedic, ophthalmology and neurology services to Mount Hope from the Port of Spain hospital. Of course, we demitted office at that time.

The services offered on a fee-for-service basis are the following: the priority care facility, which functions as an emergency ward; the cardiac bypass, angiograms, angioplasty and intensive care facilities. Investigative facilities, laboratory, X-ray and CAT scan are all offered on a fee-for-service basis. The Hibiscus Ward, which operates as a private ward, is also offered on a fee-for-service basis. Therefore, it is wrong to say that the residents of Mount Hope and surrounding areas access the services free. There was no need for the Prime Minister to use strong language such as pernicious and so on, to describe what was happening there.

I want to say categorically that we welcome the freeing up of Mount Hope after so many years, especially in these days of plenty, but the population must not be fooled. The Minister of Health did not go into any details, but I would like the Prime Minister, in his winding up, to tell the nation exactly which services will be offered free to the public from January 01, 2005, at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. He has already committed himself, in the budget statement, by saying that all medical services, including the use of the medical facility, will be free to all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, this would mean that all nationals will be able to access free services at the priority care facility. It would mean that all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago will be able to access X-rays, blood investigations, CAT scan, MRI and whatever other investigations are done at Mount Hope, free of charge. It would

also mean that they will be able to get angiograms, angioplasty and cardiac bypass surgery and all dental services free. It would mean that they will be able to access all the facilities at the Hibiscus Ward, free of charge. The Prime Minister said all the services offered at Mount Hope. When the renal transplant programme comes in place, they would also be able to access it, free of charge. Anything less would be mamaguying the population and, once more, remain a broken promise.

I want to inform the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister that there are several serious problems associated with this decision. I am saying up front that I am happy if they can do it. First of all, the issue of staff has to be addressed. We know that there is a shortage of all categories of nursing staff and certain categories of medical staff in this country. That has to be addressed. Recently you would have seen in the newspaper that the Medical Chief of Staff at Mount Hope, Dr. Hillwig, said that it was difficult for them to meet that deadline to offer services free to the public. He probably does not even know the extent of the services that are going to be offered at Mount Hope free to the public.

The other problem is cost. A couple of days ago I read in the newspaper that the Minister said it will cost something like \$20 million to deliver the services free. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if he really said that; if he did, he could deny it, but if he did say that it will cost \$20 million to open up the services at Mount Hope to the population of Trinidad and Tobago, free of charge, he does not know what he is talking about. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Rahael: I said that the revenue we are earning from the EWMSC is a maximum of \$20 million, and that is what we will give up; the rest of it we are already paying for. Our present revenue is a maximum of \$20 million; in some years it is \$17 million.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: I have no problem with that, if that is your income. Are you in a position to say how much it will cost to open up the services free to the public?

Mr. Rahael: Whatever it costs. *[Crosstalk]*

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Whatever it costs? I hope that it goes down in the *Hansard* that the Minister of Health said that whatever it costs to open up Mount Hope, he is going to open up Mount Hope. Let me just repeat it, in case the *Hansard* reporter did not hear: The Minister of Health said whatever it costs.

So you have \$20 million in income that you will be foregoing? That means, at least, you have to put \$20 million to open the services. It will be much more than that, because now you will have persons accessing the services free of charge. *[Crosstalk]* There is no provision in the budget to open up Mount Hope because,

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at a conservative estimate, it is going to cost, at least, \$200 million to do so, maybe more than that. If the Minister says it is no problem, fine.

5.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to find out if that money is going to come from the allocation of the North West Regional Health Authority (NWRHA) because that has been increased by \$95 million and I want to find out if the allocation is going to come from that.

Incidentally, the North West Regional Health Authority is an entity that does not exist at this point in time. That was dissolved by Legal Notice dated August 15, 2004, but in the budgetary allocation moneys are allocated. I do not know how one can allocate money to a non-existent body. Anyway, that is another matter we will discuss in a couple of days when we will be debating that particular issue.

I want to find out whether the allocation to open Mount Hope free to the public, will come from the \$95 million allocated to the North West Regional Health Authority. If that is so, I want to warn all the citizens who seek medical attention at the NWRHA that they are in serious trouble, and I will explain.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that some time late last year there was this scandal in the NWRHA where that authority was owing \$108 million to the Board of Inland Revenue for PAYE and health surcharge and so forth. You will also recall that it was owing over \$20 million to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) and we do not know what they were owing to the other utilities, the National Insurance Board and the pension fund and so on.

We do not know if that liability of \$108 million has been settled to the Board of Inland Revenue, or the \$20 million to T&TEC. If it has not, and you have given them an increase of \$95 million to settle that liability for last year then the NWRHA is starting off the year with a deficit of over \$50 million, and we are not talking about Mount Hope yet.

In addition to that, if they have to pay all their statutory liabilities during this year, that is at least \$100 million that has to be added and they are starting off with a deficit of over \$150 million and then they have to fund Mount Hope. I am saying if you want to open Mount Hope, we have no problem with that but it must be done with proper planning. It cannot be done by getting up one morning and saying we better open Mount Hope and announce it. It cannot be done like that. These things require proper planning for allocations to be made.

As I said, if that is the case, I want to warn the population that even though you have a budget of \$29 billion, things are going to get worse as far as health care in this region is concerned.

The Minister talked about tropical medical research, which was the last statement he made as far as health is concerned. All I want to say about that is that state-of-the-art laboratory facilities that would facilitate research in herbal and tropical medicine are important. Research is always important in medicine, but he said that there will be a laboratory to do this research, and I am saying before he does that, he should attend to the lab at the San Fernando General Hospital.

We saw in the newspapers there are no microscopes, no refrigerator, there is an old building that is falling down, there are cockroaches and staff making threats, deal with those situations first before you set up a new facility to deal with tropical research.

Mr. Speaker, I have taken the time to deal with each of the 18 programmes mentioned in the budget, and I have done so to demonstrate to the national community that with all of these grand announcements, the quality of care in the health sector is hardly likely to get better. One of the reasons for this is that the first statement which the Prime Minister made in the budget presentation dealing with the health sector said, and I quote:

“We intend that by 2006 this country will enjoy a health care system that will set new standards of quality and accessibility.”

Mr. Speaker, to have a healthy nation and to have healthy people there are several determinants of health and the last determinant in that continuum is the provision of health care. There are several things that go before you get a healthy nation and they are not mentioned.

The Minister said he has put exercise equipment, but there are no health education officers and these pieces of equipment are not being used in most of the centres.

The issue of road safety where over 200 persons are being killed on our roads on an annual basis, there is also the issue of smoking. This country ratified the UN Convention, but what does that mean for Trinidad and Tobago? We got the Law Commission to do a White Paper or Green Paper, some kind of paper on tobacco and the process was supposed to move forward where it would have been brought to legislation. So far nothing has been done by this Government on that. The issue of the environment is also a determinant of health and of which little has been said.

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The point I am making is that preventive medicine is extremely important in maintaining good health just as treating diseases. We will never be able to provide the resources to treat all the citizens of this country for all the conditions from which they suffer. Never mind the fact that the Minister and the Prime Minister said that money is no problem, we will never be able to do it because of financial resources and because of that, we have to attack the problem at the other end; the preventive end. That is why primary care, disease prevention and control are so important.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal with two more issues; first of all, the functioning of the Regional Health Authorities. These are the delivery arms of the health sector and if they do not function efficiently, then the health services will not be offered efficiently to members of the public.

Why in this day and age—when the Minister and the Prime Minister say that money is no problem—do we have rats, cockroaches and vermin at the hospital? Why do we have broken down doors and broken toilets in the washrooms of our hospitals? Why do we have a situation where the kitchen at the San Fernando General Hospital has to be closed? Why do we have a situation at the NWRHA where although they cannot pay their phone bill, they spend \$180,000 in social events buying carnival tickets for members of their board?

Mr. Speaker, the solution to this problem does not only rest in the Regional Health Authorities, it rests with the Ministry of Health and the Minister. They are equally to blame because that is what happens when you put people in charge who do not understand health issues.

When Dr. Gopeesingh was the Chairman of the NWRHA, he put together a maintenance team for the physical plant of the hospital and was able to do over 472 infrastructural projects at the Port of Spain, St. James and St. Ann's Hospitals. Time does not permit me to go into all of them, but just let me relate one incident that occurred recently as I am on the Regional Health Authorities.

The Joint Select Committee of Parliament, the one dealing with different ministries had a meeting with the North West Regional Health Authority and several issues were raised including the fact that the NWRHA had sent five senior managers on leave at the same time; they had hired a CEO one day and sent that person on leave the next day; the issue of the \$180,000 for social events, the issue of the \$108 million not being paid to the Board of Inland Revenue were questioned.

Mr. Speaker, can you imagine the audacity of the Chairman of that region, Mr. Hugh Eastman, writing to the Joint Select Committee demanding an apology because of that line of questioning? Can you imagine the rudeness of the gentleman

not wanting to account to a parliamentary committee for his actions? Can you imagine the audacity of that gentleman charged with the responsibility of overseeing the management of over \$300 million of taxpayers' money and does not want to account for it? Are we surprised that the NWRHA and the health sector are in such bad shape? I do not want to say more on that because I do not want to pre-empt any further action that the joint select committee may take.

As far as the Health Sector Reform Programme is concerned, the Ministry of Health is the arm of the health sector that deals with policy formulation and monitoring the operations of the Regional Health Authorities. To do this, the ministry needs to transform itself to satisfy that new mandate.

When we were there, we had, after several confrontations with staff and other stakeholders, established the new structure for the ministry. After we demitted office, nothing has been done and so it is the responsibility of the Minister now, to work post-haste to transform the ministry into that new entity that will monitor the operations of the Regional Health Authorities, so that he will not come and tell us that \$108 million have not been paid to the Board of Inland Revenue and he does not know anything about it.

Finally, there is in the health industry a cartel developing and I would hate to think that it is supported by the Minister of Health. I would hate to think this is done by the Minister of Health in order to cream off funds allocated for major projects. When these people who are involved in the cartel look at the budget and are sometimes aware of major projects and their specifications before they are advertised, they begin their lobby and position themselves to grab these lucrative contracts. Whether it is the \$21 million allocated for renal dialysis, the \$55 million allocated for equipment, or the \$50 million for the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP), they position themselves to grab these contracts even before they are publicly announced.

One must not be fooled into believing that because these contracts go out for tender that there is transparency. There is an evaluation process that takes place after the tenders have been submitted and there are certain names appearing on these evaluation committees with alarming frequency. So when you have the specifications beforehand and your person is sitting on the evaluation committee, what else can you ask for?

Today I will say no more on this issue, we will be dealing with this on another occasion, but I want to say however, that provision of good health care does not include facilitating of one's friends and business associates in accessing lucrative

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contracts to the exclusion of others. It does not include making deals at clubhouses and restaurants and getting a kickback for oneself. Provision of good health care does not involve this.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the Minister of Health that the ministry is too sensitive an area to be run by PR, the same way they do your PR and take your money, the same way they will expose you. I am sure when Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT) did the exposure a few days ago on the San Fernando General Hospital you were surprised, asking why they did that to you. How else would they get you to act in the interest of the people?

As I close, let me say that renal dialysis, C-Arm, fluoroscopy, cardiac surgery, and research in tropical medicine are all important, but when patients have to sleep in the corridors of the hospital and have to battle with cockroaches and rats on the ward; when they have no decent washroom facility; when they sleep on beds with no mattresses, and when there are mattresses there are no sheets; when patients are put through the indignity of having to be cleaned and changed in the full view of the public and when they have to sleep in their urine and faeces for hours without being cleaned; when there are no trolleys and wheelchairs to take them to the wards and they have to wait in the hospital from 9 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the morning and beyond to get a bed, none of the provisions in the budget will alleviate this. These are issues that patients and their relatives have to deal with on a daily basis and to the extent that these are not addressed in this budget, it is a failure.

5.55 p.m.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jarrette Narine): Mr. Speaker, I would like to join with my colleagues in congratulating the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, other Members of Cabinet in the Ministry of Finance, the staff in the Ministry of Finance, for giving us 2004/2005 budget, an excellent budget, as I see it. It caters from the top bracket of our community to the lowest bracket, and if anyone in this country has a problem with the people at the lowest level earning a living because we have money in the energy sector, then I feel that it is unfair to those people who cannot afford to look after themselves. This is a situation in Trinidad and Tobago, that if you are not on the field and you are not into the poor communities, you would not understand the suffering of some of those families.

As a matter of fact, a young man drowned in the pool of the Trinidad Hilton the day before yesterday—my neighbour. He attended the Excel School; a very

poor and humble family. Today they are looking for money for burial. So one could well understand that while we try to lift the standard of living in Trinidad and Tobago, the money that we are gaining from the energy sector and other sectors, must reach those persons at the lowest level.

It is approximately 11 months now that I have been transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I would like to thank the public servants, the daily-paid and everyone in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources who supported me during this period, to be in a position today that I understand that Ministry, totally, and in some cases I am amazed to hear the statements being made here and the support of the Opposition in the agricultural sector even though they paid no attention to the entire sector for the six years that they were in office. Today, when I visit the people in the agricultural sector, they are saying so, but they are always saying, "Well we can't support the PNM."

This is what this Opposition has created in Trinidad and Tobago, because the main focus of the Member for Couva North in this budget debate was race, corruption, wondering if we could deliver—and we have proven that and we are going to continue to do that. We have delivered and we would continue to deliver. As a matter of fact, what the Member did for the three hours was just telling the Member for St. Augustine: "There is no way you could challenge me. I would be there for life. I am able to talk for three hours regardless of what I say. I am going to stay there and nobody shall challenge me."

So what I am saying is that during the debate very little was said about agriculture and I do not know why. Maybe other speakers who would continue this evening and tomorrow will say so. We have received in this budget, \$452,961,232 for Recurrent, and Recurrent also includes Goods and Services, which we have done quite well over the last year. Last year in the revised estimate we received \$51,274,343,000 for the development fund, and one would understand that it is because of development funds one is able to develop the sector.

But in 2001, I think \$26 million for development was given by their government; in 2002, the figure was \$28,357,000. In 2003, there was a slight drop. The actual figure was \$26,681,000. This year we have received an increase—very little but significant—of \$52,170,000 for the 2005 development.

I am pleased, like other Ministers, to say that we have spent in last year's development programme, 98.8 per cent of what was allocated to us. So that when Members on the other side say that we have so much money to spend and we cannot deliver, we have proven beyond any reasonable doubt that we are able to spend actually more than 100 per cent of our allocations for development programmes.

I would like to highlight some of those areas, because when you are in a ministry you must prioritize; you must target certain things, and in order to increase food production in Trinidad and Tobago, you need to target areas like water management where we got \$8 million in this financial year for development; access roads, \$10 million; fisheries, \$4.2 million. I am certain that Moruga will get their facilities in the near future. You had sanitary and phytosanitary and food safety, which is so important, \$1.5 million, and the citrus programme would receive \$1 million; training for YAPA would be about \$10.5 million.

The only matter that came up here concerning agriculture on more than one occasion in this debate was for flood relief. I would like to rest, once and for all, after all the antics by the Member for Oropouche and others, about how much money they received for flood relief—not compensation—that I am going to set that matter to rest today.

The existing protocol for flood damage assessment is done in a particular manner. Even before there are floods, the extension officers need to have records on the farmers in their area—registered farmers, that is—to find out what they are planting in their district at any given time. So you do not wait until a flood happens to get outside there in the field and say, “What you had planted here?” They should have some idea before the flooding. When a flood occurs, within the first three days they have to ascertain from the other agencies and also themselves, what areas in Trinidad were flooded. For instance, if you got a claim from Port of Spain, you would realize that is a false claim. So you have to find out what areas were flooded and where we have agricultural land that people are doing farming on.

Within a three-day period, that is done and then within two weeks officers will visit to ascertain what has happened on your property. In the meantime, the ministry has a system, that they come to the extension offices—and we have eight throughout the counties in Trinidad—and a form is given to them to make a claim, so that when the officer is going out into the field he has that claim with him to ascertain what was claimed and what he actually sees.

We took it a bit further than that this year, in that we interchanged officers. We sent an officer, say, from St. Patrick East to visit St. Patrick West—to double-check—and those from St. Patrick West would go to the East or go into the Victoria area. Because we have had a situation—and I said it before and I would say it again—where false claims are rampant in that ministry. I do not know that happened before. You had in the UNC government, two ministers; one damaged an entire cane crop by saying he was going to do bio-fertilization. I will tell you

something. They did not spray that year and you would remember the disaster that took place in the sugarcane industry that year—the froghopper. Another one, when he was sent, described the ministry as a bhaji, pumpkin and bodi ministry.

So there was no enthusiasm in that ministry and the morale of the workers there was very low. I will tell you what is happening with these false claims. The farmers' badge is a badge that is given to an agriculturist who has land, renting land or who has lease land. That badge is to certify you as a bona fide farmer. When you apply for that badge you have to say how many acres of land you have, and the officer would visit before that badge is given.

We are finding claims from people who have two acres of land and all of a sudden they lose 10 acres of paw paw. Imagine that! That is happening. You have to give your officers liberty to do what they want. I understand during their tenure, Ministers used to tell them: "Hello, that is our people; fix them up." So they did not have that drive to go there and do the right thing, as public officers. I am saying today, this Minister is 100 per cent behind my public officers in the ministry. [*Desk thumping*]

I have a farmer's badge but I am joint owner of a parcel of land with my brother. There are other areas where three and four members of the family who own that very plot, so that there are four persons applying for the same produce on the same plot of land. That is happening. There are instances where officers are carried to different points to see the same parcel of land, but we are dealing with that and we will continue to deal with it. There are persons who are claiming on other persons' land. When I went to distribute cheques at St. Augustine nurseries one young man told me: "I have two acres of land, you know." I am a street man so I asked him: "So how you lose 10 acres of this?" He said, "Well, boy, ah squat in ah area up there and that is where I carry them and show them."

So there are cracks; we are trying to tighten them, but they are still slipping through. These things will happen. I am not saying we have a perfect system, but when I am through with this system, I assure you that it would be tighter and transparency will prevail.

There are also farmers who go into flood-prone areas and plant to get flood relief. You would not believe this. So we need to quarantine some of those areas that we know are prone to flooding and in the rainy season they must not plant, because according to the Act it is the responsibility of the Government and the minister involved in the ministry to pay this flood relief. It is not a right; it is dependent on the sympathy of the Government, seeing that agriculture is a risk, to

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get people to start back; it is not paying them for the crops. But I would come to that in due course.

During this period of flooding at the end of 2003, the ministry paid out approximately \$4.4 million. When we have false claims, obviously it would take a longer period to get payment. That is why, when they asked me after the last flood, I said, "Give me at least six months." Some people did not like it, but that is the reality. Seven hundred and ninety-five farmers benefited from that. A handful of persons went to the Oropouche office, which is not an agricultural office, in the first place. They went to the wrong place. He could not help them at all, and then he turned around and said, I should have invited him. The same farmers said: "Don't invite him, because he is not around; he has done nothing for them; they preferred the former Member who said it was a bhaji, pumpkin and bodi ministry. He was probably better than all the others.

6.10 p.m.

Because he questioned he was fired and he had to leave.

At present we have about 1,200 applicants from the last flood. We are interviewing them and checking. We think that would cost about \$6 million. The last estimate that we had was \$14 million and we paid out \$4.4 million. From the flood damage in North Trinidad we had 406 farmers and in South Trinidad 388 farmers collected cheques.

About four farmers went to the office of the Member for Oropouche and complained bitterly. I am sorry that he is not here.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He is hearing you. He is outside.

Hon. J. Narine: I am certain that he would have had some knowledge to guide his people.

I have the *Valuation of Crops Revised Schedule*. This schedule is 1996. I wonder who was in government and the minister at the time. I cannot read this entire document, but I will attempt to explain certain things to you, Mr. Speaker, and this House. This is the revised document from 1996. There was always a valuation schedule for vegetable and food crops for plants at various stages of maturity.

I will take cabbage. At 25 per cent maturity it says 30 cents for a plant. A cabbage plant at 50 per cent maturity—means that it has just started folding—is 43 cents. At 75 per cent maturity it is 55 cents. At 100 per cent it is 66 cents. We are reviewing this but we cannot pay more than this. This is a UNC document. I

can go on and on. Dasheen is 23 cents at 25 per cent; at 50 per cent, 39 cents; 75 per cent maturity, 56 cents and at total maturity 72 cents per plant. I have heard that during their period they had paid a man for dasheen bush in La Paille. Floods do not affect dasheen. If the plants remain under water for very long, maybe, they might die. With dasheen bush you send the young leaves to the market. He got \$60,000 and the next week he was in Tunapuna selling dasheen from the same field. [*Laughter*] The tricks do not finish. I understand that a former Member of Parliament for Oropouche, pumpkin and bhaji minister went to pay cheques down there and saw a cheque for over \$100,000. He did not pay it and brought it back to the ministry. I compliment him for that because that is something I would do. Let us investigate.

Many of the farmers who did not get the money that they were expecting this year went to their MP's office instead of coming to the ministry. Because of the article in the newspaper that Radica Sookraj wrote the Debe farmers demanded an apology from me. I do not think that I have anything to apologize for. I would not call names because they were in the newspaper. I am certain that the Member of Parliament for Oropouche would understand that when someone gets \$74.13, we have a reason for that. I have the records here. The claim was for 3/4 acres of cucumber and 3/4 acres of paw paw. The finding upon investigation was that .004 acre was planted and they found 15 plants. In the other case they found 9 ochro plants. Because of their schedule the 15 cucumber plants amounted to \$37.05 and the ochro plants were \$37.08. He got \$74.13 and he ran to the Member of Parliament for Oropouche.

I want to put in this one for \$47. This was from a lady who made so much noise on television making PNM look as if we do not care about our farmers. Mr. Speaker, when I am finished today you would know how much this Government has been spending and is spending on farmers in this country. There is no tax system for farmers. For \$47.83, on 1/2 acre of land there were 2,000 plants of ochro, pimento, melongene, sorrel, corn, peas and pumpkin. All that on 1/2 acre of land! Could you imagine that? She is a big agriculturist according to him. They found 12 ochro plants, 15 pimento plants, eight melongene plants, no sorrel, no corn, no peas and no pumpkin. The plants must remain. Sorrel does not wash away. [*Interruption*] You are a doctor. You have to go to Aranguez to talk to those people and they will tell you. When these people do that it makes the Government look bad.

We are not going to let up. The last time I visited flood areas with the Minister of Works and Transport and the Minister of Community Development and

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Gender Affairs, while we were waiting for the Member for Caroni East to join the clique—I used to sing with a Ramayan group there. The Leader of the Opposition knows much about the Ramayan. He came and talked some “kheesaa”. That is stories. That is what he was saying in his budget debate contribution about Kootan from the Ramayan. One “fella” approached me and said, “Boss ah puttin’ in a big claim and we go fix up.” I did not forget him. [*Interruption*] That is the last flood relief that we had.

I think that I have spent sufficient time on that flood problem. I know that concerning the recent flood the officers are double checking and I too will be scrutinizing the list.

Dr. Khan: His name is Rowley.

Hon. J. Narine: I will tell you the name of the person. He opened a rum shop in Cunupia.

Much has been said about training in this budget debate. The Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) is part of the Ministry’s training programme. Apart from training in YAPA that deals with ages 17—25 years, we have limitless training for anyone who wishes to be trained. You need not be an agriculturist or a farmer. Every month we have advertisements in the newspaper for training on a monthly basis. This is the report from the Extension Training and Information Services Division from October 2003 to September 2004. The total number of courses conducted during that period was 313. The total number of participants trained—these are not persons in the 17—25 years age group. These persons come when we advertise. They register in the morning and take the training period. The number is 3,317 persons.

Training venues are Centeno, Point Fortin, County Caroni and Carlsen Field, Cumana, Sangre Grande and Debe/Penal. The areas of training are cocoa and coffee production; citrus and tropical fruits; agro forestry; poultry and rabbit production. Rabbit is making inroads. For your information rabbit is low cholesterol; low in fat and high in protein. The cost of one pound of rabbit is \$15. Some people who did not know, last Christmas if you swung a rabbit, you would have bought it for “gouti”. They ate rabbit and felt that it was “gouti”. Hilton had asked for 500 kilograms of rabbit. [*Interruption*] The Barbados tourism industry has to import rabbit. The people who are concerned about their health know that rabbit meat is the healthiest meat to eat.

The other courses are sheep and goat for meat; compost making; soil conservation; agricultural marketing; agribusiness management; bodi, saeme and vegetable production.

Apart from what the Caroni transition team did, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources trained persons who took VSEP last year from Caroni. A total of 678 persons were trained at Ste. Madeleine and Brechin Castle under our programme. Our training is rigorous. We have much brain power in the ministry. Anyone who has worked in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources will know that. Our officers are well trained.

For YAPA Phase 2, courses were held in Point Fortin, Rio Claro, Penal and Sangre Grande. That is spread all over the country. We trained youths in the community and women's groups. The officers of the ministry went out to the communities in Mayaro, Oropouche, Charlieville and Cumana.

Increasing the involvement of youth in YAPA Phase 1 is orientation and awareness. Lectures are given to them on a regular basis. They have a three-month training period in the first instance. They are attached to farms with vegetable and tree crop production and livestock.

Phase 2 of the programme is for nine months. That is for those who came out from the first phase and are really interested in agriculture, from the farmers' recommendation and that of the officers from the ministry. At present, 100 persons are training and 100 have graduated. They have intensive training in the following areas: farm management and farm records; food and root crop production; nursery production meaning growing seeds in boxes to transfer to the field.

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We also have grow box production and vegetables, rabbit production, poultry production, ornament and ornamental and landscaping, and agro-processing, so that we gave them something to go with. When they are finished with the three-month and nine-month programmes within that year, they are well trained to go into their own production and so on. Mr. Speaker, some of those persons have gone into their own production, but I will come to that later.

Trainees participating in Phase 1: We have had nine cycles in this programme since it started, Mr. Speaker, but they love to come here and talk about discrimination and inequitable distribution. These figures will prove to you that this is across the board and throughout the country. As a matter of fact, some areas are benefiting more than others—in the opposition areas!

In the nine cycles for St. George West, we have trained 463 persons. Agriculture is not attractive to the age group of 17—25, because in our agricultural population the average age is 60. This is why we are encouraging young persons. If our success is 5 per cent of the people that we have trained, we have done well to put

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them into agriculture because the other areas are more attractive to them—the MuST programme and the other programmes, and they pay much more money, too. In St. George East, 343; St. Andrew/St. David, 617 in the nine cycles; Caroni, 542; a total of 1,965 for north Trinidad. In south Trinidad, over the nine-cycle period: Victoria, 575; Nariva/Mayaro, 577; St. Patrick East, 526; St. Patrick West, 526; a total of 2,204 students. In north Trinidad we trained in the nine cycles of the first phase 1,965 young people and 2,204 young people in the south of Trinidad. But, Mr. Speaker, they come here and talk race discrimination and inequitable treatment.

Mr. Speaker, since I have identified some of these areas, I just want to say that we started the programme in Tobago this year. I went to Kendall Farm in Tobago—Tobago was given about a quarter of a million dollars because they started late and they already have persons training at the farms. We are hoping that after Phase 1 we will go to Phase 2.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said in the budget debate that we have to make lands available to these people from the University of the West Indies, ECIAF and YAPA. I am pleased that the Prime Minister made that announcement, because if in the third phase of this programme, after I have trained for a year and I am secured, I can go out into the fields; but if I do not have lands available to me then I would go back to zero. This is what happened some years ago when they did training for bakers in Maloney. Mr. Speaker, to build a bakery is a lot of money. They taught them to bake and after they graduated—my aunt had a bakery at the time—they then realized that the cost to put up an oven was \$350,000. That was the type of training that was done in those days.

They are tracking the YAPA programme. Mr. Speaker, in north Trinidad, 20 trainees have been trained and continue to be employed by farmers to whom they were attached during the training period. Some of the large farms, which took in young trainees, have kept them—sustainable employment. [*Interruption*] Yes, they are paid and they are interested in the job so they will move on.

Six trainees have started grow-box cultivation in their private capacity. Grow-box is something you can do in your backyard and young people must be encouraged to do it. Nine trainees have started rabbit farming. Rabbit farming does not need 10 acres of land; if you have a small area in your backyard you can do rabbit farming and the training is there for you. As I said, nine trainees have started rabbit farming. The three trainees in north Trinidad who are attached to the Sugarcane Feed Centre have enrolled in the centre's six-month employment scheme. The Sugarcane Feed Centre has a programme for six months and they

have enrolled because they would want to go on to do the training for tilapia, cascadura, buffalypso, pigs, cattle rearing, goat and sheep, at the centre.

One trainee, with assistance from his parents, has purchased a farm in Toco—I think the MP for Toco is quite aware of that—and he is doing quite well. Another trainee has applied for a scholarship to do agricultural science at a Venezuelan University.

Mr. Speaker, 56 trainees were employed in agriculture in south Trinidad on a regular or casual basis. Eighty-nine of the trainees have created employment in their own agricultural enterprise with their family holdings. In south Trinidad where people have lands, their children came for training and they have started their own business. Mr. Speaker, you would be surprised at the kind of letters that I have received from those trainees. I have no time today to read most of them but I can tell you they came from a wide cross-section of the community.

With respect to the participation of farmers, we need to have farmers as trainers and during those cycles. When the programme started we had 14 farms in St. George West; 22 in St. George East; 12 in St. Andrew/St. David and 28 in Caroni. Up to the last cycle, which finished some time this month, we maintained 13 in St. George West—we just lost one farmer; 21 in St. George East—we lost one; and 12 in St Andrew/St. David, which is the same; and in Caroni we lost one. We still have 27 farmers that started in the first cycle on board. One farmer left—I did not get information on that, I will be honest about it, I really did not find out.

In south Trinidad the same thing has happened, where we had 12 farmers in St. Patrick West and we still have 12 in St. Patrick East. In Caroni we had 13 farmers and we now have 21, so we have increased in Caroni.

Mr. Speaker, this programme has been a success. The farmers and the students have written and said they thought that agriculture was simple until they got into it with the technology and so on. The way agriculture is done today my grandfather—who did agriculture—would not have survived unless he had done the YAPA training programme.

Mr. Speaker, we have given proper training to persons in agriculture. As a matter of fact, I have letters here that indicate that the training of the young persons was excellent and that they want to continue.

In the new year we will upgrade the programme to accommodate 1,500 trainees. You would have seen in the finance documents that we had targeted 780 students this year and we went to 1,200-plus, so we exceeded our amount by 500-

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plus. But it was not convenient for the Member for Oropouche to say that because that was in agriculture and that was putting a nail in his coffin. He spoke about the youth programmes that my colleague, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has but left out YAPA, which has exceeded its expectation for this year.

We have extended the programme to Tobago and will continue to do that. We propose to introduce organic farming and aquaculture in the next cycle of the programme because we did not have those areas included. We are going to start Phase 3, where the Prime Minister indicated that lands would be available to young people who were doing agriculture. [*Desk thumping*] I would like to thank the Prime Minister for having that vision of the YAPA programme, which includes young people in farming.

Mr. Speaker, it is known to the national community that for the objectives for agriculture to go forward we must:

- Increase our GDP and agricultural production, while we deal with our sustainable and renewable natural resources and the ecosystem;
- Enhance food security;
- Promote sustainable rural development;
- Increase the involvement of youth in agriculture;
- Increase competitiveness in export and domestic markets;
- Promote the development of agro-industries as sources of employment and the sustainable utilization and conservation of ecosystems and species;
- Promote and facilitate private investment in agriculture and develop information systems to service stakeholders in the sector.

We have been saying these things but we also have that area in 2004/2005 that we had to target on increasing agriculture's contribution to the GDP. We had some decline in the sugar industry and that was expected. I will come to that later on in my contribution in the House.

- To increase the competitiveness in export and domestic markets, introducing sustainable management strategies and increasing the involvement in youth in agriculture.

We have done that and we need to develop the other standards: the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) standards, the good agricultural practices, the sustainable and renewable resources in agriculture and so on.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, in his wisdom, called us recently from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to a meeting and we came up with these priorities:

- Water management;
- Land management;

I will come to that because there is a history of persons not getting their leases renewed for years. There is a history of persons who have been applying for 15 years and have not been settled with their leases and so on, but I will come to that later.

- The Fisheries Development Programme;
- Agricultural access roads and bridges;
- Agro-processing.

I can say to you at this time, Mr. Speaker, that the agro-processing industry through NAMDEVCO has commissioned a study. The study is now completed and we have a document with which we can go forward. We have done the work and we are ready to go with the agro-processing industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Other areas that we discussed were large demonstration farms with local collaborators in one instance. If we can encourage private foreign partnerships—not government—and “Other” was unspecified, that can be between the ministry and some other agencies.

Mr. Speaker, many persons felt that agriculture did not progress this year and they only gave that as lip service. You would have realized that since Wednesday we have been debating here and not one person, except for what I have seen in the newspaper—my colleague from Chaguanas had a demonstration in the area where he lives in Warren and it was surprising because the name was Ramsaran Trace. I feel so sorry for those people who have had for so long a representative from Chaguanas

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

6.40 p.m.

Hon. J. Narine: Mr. Speaker, you need not worry. Once those people come to the right place—like the persons who got the \$47 cheque that I just explained, should not have gone to the Member of Parliament's office. They should have gone to the extension office and we would have given them the privilege to look at the record, or come to the Ministry. I am willing to meet anybody at any time. If the people from Ramsaran Trace have to go on television to demonstrate, certainly, we will reconsider that in this year's programme, to fix that agricultural access road.

The achievement of the Ministry this year:

Consultancies were completed and have been financed by the IDB Agricultural Sector Reform Programme.

Agri-business strategy.

Transport of perishable to export market.

Market information system.

Grades and standards, guidelines for agricultural chemicals.

And there is a problem in that area in that anybody who has money will open an agricultural shop. They are selling chemicals and they are not trained in these areas to be able to advise the young person who is into agriculture. While we are training our people about the proper use of chemicals we need to certify these people so that they would know what they are doing.

Recently two persons died because of poisoning and the person who sold them the poison should have had some reason not to sell them because he was a stranger to Sangre Grande. He was from Barataria and ended up buying that poison in Sangre Grande and going a long way off to Toco to use it. The chemicals: pesticides, fertilizers, insecticides. That has to be changed. Agri-business specialist going with the establishment of an industrial development committee for six non-traditional commodities. The final output would be the preparation of an industry development plan for each commodity. We are talking of root crops and so forth. These committees have been working. I met with them on two occasions and they have been working very hard.

Regional trade in marketing. We have developed markets with St. Lucia and Martinique. We have increased the number of certified farms from last year—279 registered certified farms to 301 registered certified farms.

Successful negotiation with the supermarkets.

Mr. Speaker, you will remember sometime last year we had opened a packaging plant at Piarco. That packaging plant is now fully on stream. We have spoken to the supermarkets that are willing to have their agricultural produce washed at the packing house and packaged and delivered straight to them at the supermarket instead of them having to put people to clean vegetables. It will be done by machinery. The Government has provided that and the farmers are now utilizing that area. The activities at the packing house peaked this year at 131 pounds per month, but that is still very small. We would like to double that within the next year. We began the process of Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point Programme (HACCP) certification for the packing house because you need to do that to get export. If those commodities are to leave Trinidad, then the packing house must HACCP certified.

The introduction of the soup menu in the School Nutrition Programme, and this is very interesting. We had discussions with the School Nutrition Programme and we introduced soup at least one day per week. I understand it started off very well and resulted in a demand for 1.5 million pounds of root crops and we can double that for the year. Root crops will play an important role in the nutrition of our young people who are in the primary schools. And this is excellent. They love it. But there is another difficulty, in that the people who are involved in the School Nutrition Programme would like to get a soup pack so that they would not have to do the work. They want it in a package to deliver the next day as lunch.

We went on to complete the feasibility studies for a multipurpose agro-processing facility to process added value to extend the shelf life of a range of fruits and vegetables, root crops, herbs and spices for the local export market.

We began development of the Market Information System to facilitate business planning and decision-making, trading and so forth. The Member for St. Joseph was asking. I have additional information if I have the time today.

We completed the development of grades and standards for 15 of the most widely traded crops. Grades and standards are so important to modern agriculture and export markets and so forth. We provided training for over 5,000 persons in production; value added markets and quality assurance.

Our maintenance of agricultural access roads—and the list is very long. I know I am running out of time but what I can tell you, St. George East and West, Caroni, St. Andrew, Nariva, Mayaro, Victoria, and this is only for maintenance. Out of the recurrent estimates that we got last year, we were able to provide

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172.76 kilometres of refurbished roads at a cost of \$460,584.86 so that we have done much to refurbish our roads.

People have maligned the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP). CEPEP is taking care of our roads in Trinidad and not only main roads, but our local roads and I am very proud anywhere I go in Trinidad to see CEPEP. We must look at that CEPEP-type programme for agricultural access roads and we must have them as entrepreneurs; people from the area who are agriculturists to do that type of programme to keep agricultural access road and drainage open.

Access roads—and these are new roads completed this year: St. George—Pasea Extension was completed and one bridge was constructed. The length of the road was .2 kilometre. Five farmers benefited from a total of two hectares of land. In St. Andrew/St David, Persadee Trace, Plum Mitan, .6 kilometres satisfied 40 farmers and opened up lands for 101 hectares. That is the number of lands that were opened because of building that road. McNair Estate, and I have a story to tell about McNair. We built approximately four kilometres of road and the number of farmers that benefited were 20 and we opened up about 40 hectares of land in that area. I would like to tell you where Mc Nair is.

When I took the vehicle to go to McNair and we turned into Chin Chin Road, Cunupia, I passed the place called “Ship Wreck”. I heard that it belonged to one of my colleagues in this House, but it is a drinking spot, and as we passed “Ship Wreck” I went into a road called David Toby Road and I got in the back there to McNair. I was amazed to see the amount of farming that was going on in there and the people were really interested. They complained to me that they need—and we are going to do the ponding this year—some water ponds, they need equipment to push the water so that they can plant all year round. They were very much pleased with what this PNM Government has done for them, but do you know it is an opposition area, belonging to the Member for Caroni East? And when I asked why nothing was done all the time, they asked if I passed a place called “Ship Wreck”, that is to wreck our lives. They said he did not build a road to help them. He did not build a road when he was in government for six years. He did not even put a load of gravel on those roads for the same agriculture people that have been voting for them from birth to death. They told me that, and they will continue to do it but they are ashamed.

One would realize when the Member for Nariva said that I was on the newspaper opening water; if I open one project in Trinidad for this year, I have done 100 per cent better than the UNC for six years. They did nothing for agriculture,

absolutely nothing apart from McNair in Caroni. We did Connector Road, .8 kilometre, Teeluck Trace—I went to those areas. That is down Charlieville leading into Pierre Road. It is a beautiful area. Ten farmers were provided for and 50 hectares of lands were opened

Debe Trace in Carlsen Field, .9 kilometre were done. Savanada Avenue in Carlsen Field, 1.3 kilometres. Another road in Carlsen Field, 1.1 kilometres. St. Patrick: Chaitoo Trace and that is why the Member for Oropouche is not here. He knows fully well that Chaitoo Trace, for years, they have been begging a UNC Government, “Do something for me please.” We have done it. Chaitoo Trace, ½ kilometre and this year we will continue so that other persons will get access to their lands. Fifty farmers benefited from 25 hectares. And, as we go further in more farmers will be provided with areas. Jagroop Trace in Penal. The Member for Siparia went as far and told the people that was her job. They put that there. Imagine three years ago, but that is the habit of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, you would not doubt that everything that the PNM is doing in Penal, Podai Lagoon, in Jagroop Trace, Radhayram Trace to connect Bunty Trace to Mulchan Trace. Why I know all this is because I went. They have not seen their Member of Parliament for the longest while and he did nothing for them. That is why we won a seat in the last local government election for the first time. That is why in Sangre Grande the Member for Nariva could come and tell me I am opening water in Valencia. It was not that. The Prime Minister said it. It was in Carlsen Field, the heart of the UNC in Depo Road where we opened 168 acres of land and provided water for 35 farmers—three pumps.

Mr. Ramsaran: What have you done for Laventille? You said what you have done in the UNC areas.

Hon. J. Narine: We are talking about agriculture. Ask your former Member of Parliament for San Fernando West what he did to Laventille. That is what we are reaping today. We are reaping that today in Laventille, what that former Member for San Fernando West did.

Victoria, La Fortune, Princes Town, Moruga, Malgretoute—we did five culverts. We did approximately three kilometres of road in that area. Nariva/Mayaro, Pinder Trace in Rio Claro, a Guayaguayare Food Crop Project, .5 kilometre and 1.4 kilometres, a total of 1.9. But we had a grand total. With that \$7 million that we had to spread all over, we did a grand total of 14.5 kilometres of roadway that was newly constructed and served 482 farmers and the hectares for that was 1,127.

6.55 p.m.

On the incomplete roads we have spent a total of \$4.6 million on 9.9 kilometres of agricultural access roads. The benefit of that programme went to 227 farmers on 651 hectares of land.

We go on to routine maintenance. That was another part of the programme. Throughout Trinidad and Tobago, we did 146 kilometres of road. Farmers who benefited were 2,200 and the total hectares were 5,000.

We go on to water management and flood control. Desilting works were done in St. George, in Wallerfield, in Centenary Street in Tunapuna, Tumbasson, Pasea Rice Land Network, Aranguez South, Gran Fond, Maracas Bay, and Macoya. A total of 23.7 kilometres of desilting works was done, which benefited 196 farmers on 410 hectares of land.

We move on to Plum Mitan and it is interesting, like McNair. When I went on to Plum Mitan, there was an area there where we had three pumps on stream that take water from the Nariva Basin in Plum Mitan into the river in the rainy season and pump water back from the main stream into the Plum Mitan area in the dry season. What has happened is that we have three diesel pumps and one standby.

In 1996, the Member for Nariva did not go back after the election and the people are waiting for him. Those pumps broke down and for six years nothing was done. For 18 years those drains were not desilted. Thanks to the Minister of Works and Transport, we have been able to do some. The Ministry did some. We have the four pumps ready to go, but we are building the pump house at this time. He will see me very soon on the newspaper putting water in his area. Something that was non-existent for the longest while in agriculture.

We looked at Plum Mitan and we looked at Caroni, Esmeralda, Calcutta, Chase Village and Felicity. We did desilting for 16 kilometres and that satisfied 410 farmers. I do not have the average on the acreage. We went on to St. Patrick and we did 9.5 kilometres on the Seukeran Channel—I think that was named after the hon. MP's father. That is somewhere in Oropouche. At Nagasser Channel and in Duck Pond 3 kilometers of drainage was done. Duck Pond is where the Trinidad Sluice Gate went in last year. There is salt-water intrusion in that area, so the 3 kilometres were of embankment to stop further the salt-water intrusion into the Oropouche Lagoon. Those 700 hectares of land had to be leached, which means that it was salt-water infected and it has to be washed out, which will take about five years.

I remember the former Member for Oropouche who, as a minister in the UNC government, came here for 20-odd years and begged that something be done on the Oropouche Lagoon and the sluice gate. My leader even called him “Lagoonier”. He “tired” talk about Oropouche. Last year they got their sluice gate. This year we did about 10 smaller ones. We were able to do 10 kilometres of desilting and they are watching now to see where the water is coming up. With the leaching, more lands in that basin will go into agriculture.

They did not care about anybody in agriculture. They just wanted them to vote. They will continue to get their vote, but they have not satisfied anything in agriculture. Their people are very disappointed in them. Some will talk out and some will just hide because they are ashamed. That is a total of 61.2 kilometres of drainage that was done and which benefited 769 farmers, and affected a total of 643 hectares.

We come to water management control. The Member for Nariva saw when I went to turn the pumps on for Depot Road in Longdenville, in the heart of Caroni East. I will tell you what happened. Mr. Speaker, we have irrigated 160 acres of land there and we have a pond that is rechargeable—10 million gallons per year. *[Interruption]* I would say it five times because they did nothing for their people. That is why they are up and down the place looking for you all. One gentleman here, the Member for Couva North, is saying that they are ready for blood. They are ready for him, not for us.

We did a feasibility study for the Royal Engineer Road project in Los Iros, Phase I. We have already given out lands in that area, but we did a total water management/flood control programme on 8,626 hectares, from which 738 farmers benefited.

I have something I want to go through here so that I need to move fast. Broilers increased by 2.25 per cent. Those are the same people who came and talked nonsense about the poultry industry. They had an increase and do you know why they did not go further than that? Because they were price controlling the industry with chicken price so high. We know everything and I am certain that the Prime Minister has taken the right decision to bring chicken prices down. We will go further than that.

I warned the Prime Minister that they are now dumping the hatching eggs to send the price up for Christmas, and we are going to deal with that. It was reported to Caricom that we are not bringing chicken from Didco in Guyana. I sent a team of persons from the Ministry of Health—including one gentleman

who is related to these cartels—to Guyana and he is now saying that he is not signing that report because they do halal chicken.

We have to clear that area. Let them dump the hatching eggs. They were bringing hatching eggs and telling the Minister of Consumer Affairs that they were bringing so many hatching eggs, but they were bringing table eggs together with them. They felt nobody knew. I have people working in that industry for these people and now they are writing the Prime Minister begging him to stop the importation of legs. Am I right or wrong? So what happen; our poor people cannot eat legs?

The production of oranges was increased by 81.45 per cent; grapefruit increased by 187.39 per cent and—here is one for you—paddy production went up by 102.8 per cent. Now this may not be a quantum leap, but we have given the 2,000 acres of land that Caroni has for rice production, to the CRATT and Nariva Farms—people who have equipment and who can handle 1,000 acres of rice. I give you the assurance that this 102 per cent will be doubled next year.

Because the Prime Minister waived the charges for water for that area and got T&TEC to re-install the electricity for the pumps—the Ministry of Finance would take up that cause—the farmers are happy. One of them called me this morning to say that he had started preparing for the next crop of rice and that he was going to plant by next week or week after.

That is a plus for us. Right now we are producing about 10 per cent of our consumption of rice. We want to get back to about 40 per cent. *[Interruption]* Money! This is not a UNC Minister; this is a PNM Minister. When you are talking to me, do not talk money, talk about integrity and honesty.

Copra went down by 24.63 per cent. There is a reason for that. The green coconut industry has gone way out. A coconut costs \$3.00 around the savannah. Nobody will allow a coconut to dry to get copra. That is understood. We are still doing only 3 per cent of small ruminants like goats and sheep. Can you imagine that? We have to import 97 per cent. I assure you that when I come back here to another budget debate to speak about agriculture, we would have increased that because we bought stock from the United States. We have them at the breeding unit. We have been doing artificial insemination throughout Trinidad. There was a virus that took place during the UNC time and now we can give the farmers the breed.

We are also developing a system to do, not only artificial insemination, but also embryos, so while we have a 77 per cent in artificial insemination success—and that is high for the world—we hope to have 100 per cent when we introduce that system. The buffalypso and other animals will be improved and we can sell embryos to other countries that wish to increase their herd production.

In the sugar cane industry, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is responsible for the farmers. I know we have another matter being debated in the Parliament for the vestment of land and I am going to speak at that debate, so I need not detain myself.

Our support to the farmers this year was \$48,534,000 for area scale operations. The farmers operated 30 scales and the sugar industry team had to take up the other 12. Not even the Member for Couva North could have gotten those four unions in the farming industry—TICFA, CPATT, CFATT and the direct delivery people to get together. He could not get it. I tried it and I, too, could not get it. TICFA came saying something; CFATT came saying something else and CPATT something else. At one time, they were saying we were giving all to TICFA because it is Raffique Shah's union and he is close to us. That was not so. They did 30; we did 12.

This is another area where we maintain access roads for the sugar cane industry. Three hundred and forty-five miles of access roads were maintained this year in Caroni and 1,539 miles of dirt road at a cost of \$2.3 million. Cane transport went to \$11.2 million. They were giving these people urea all the time and we keep getting a smaller cane. People have been begging for a mixed fertilizer. This year we ordered 26:0:26, a mixed fertilizer so that by next year we will get a better cane product.

7.10 p.m.

The downstreaming of the sugarcane industry is so important. Angostura has already started making sugarcane brandy out of cane juice. They are also making wines. The farmers are not only selling during crop time, they are selling out of crop because there is another gentleman who brought machinery to start canning cane juice. That is the way to go; not to mislead your people. I appreciate the time that I had. I had much more to talk about but I will on other occasions to do so. I am satisfied that we have had an excellent budget this year. I thank you.

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town*): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to take part in this debate. It is not very difficult, after hearing so much of nothing in such a long space of time. He boasted.

Mr. Manning: Not he, the hon. Member.

Mr. S. Panday: The hon. Member boasted. I wonder if he deserves that. Imagine, 5.2 kilometres of road; 200 yards of road, .5 kilometre of road. When one checks all these minuscule things he mentioned and was expanding, it is against the backdrop of a \$22 billion budget. The Member spoke about what they

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did last year. They did very little things. The Member comes here and has reached the stage of almost misleading the Parliament.

The Member spoke about water management. What have they done with water management, dug two ponds in La Savanne? The Member spoke about developing roads. La Savanne, in the constituency of Ortoire/Mayaro, is the food basket of South. What length of road was done there? Those are the worst roads and that is the food basket in South Trinidad. [*Interruption*] No, I was there last week.

The Member spoke about YAPA and tried to give the impression that there is no discrimination. This is where the lie is. The Member called various areas in Trinidad and said those are the areas in which they created jobs. If the Government wants to talk race, we are saying that you are racial. Look at the way you did things in those areas. Give us the names of the persons. Do you know what the Government did? The Government went to those areas and gave their PNM supporters, but it said that there was distribution. The Government has exacerbated racism and discrimination and murdered the people in those areas when it took their people and allowed the others to suffer. The Government has come to this Parliament to say that it shared equally. No. Their areas got all and they went to our areas and gave their people all. That is the discrimination and dishonesty! The Government is fooling this Parliament. Drama? It is pain to see what they did. I remember when the Government started the YAPA Programme you would hear Ministers saying: "Give meh 10 fellas nah." These are people who were given residual jobs and handouts just to fix the figures for employment.

The Member also spoke about the people in Debe who went to the office of the Member for Oropouche. He gave an analysis as to the reason these persons received such small sums. This Government is a blaming Government. The Government has been in power for three years, and what has been about the Schedule? The hon. Member had 75 minutes and said nothing. What has the PNM done in the three years, assuming that the Schedule was bad? They were taking advantage of the people in agriculture. That militated against the people in agriculture. The PNM has been there for three years and what have they done to that Schedule?

Public servants received ex-gratia payments. Why could the Government not give these people ex-gratia payments? It is different strokes for different folks. The Member boasts, skins his teeth and laughs at those poor people who are the children of the earth. He boasts that he gave them \$20. The Member is trying to set up the people and make them look as though they are crooks, vagabonds and rogues. They are "thiefing" sand, water from the well, everything. The Member pounds his chest and speaks about PNM integrity.

Is it that the PNM's agriculture people go out and check what the farmers have planted? If a farmer said that his crop was damaged, the agriculture people could tell them before, that they knew the amount they had planted and that is what they would be paid for. Why is it that they have to come back to say there were only 15 ochroes or 15 bodi? The Government has come here today in an attempt to humiliate and degraded those persons. The Government is not here to help people. The Member made a contribution for 75 minutes, but he does not understand what agriculture is. He does not understand the scenario in which we stand. He is here merely to try to score points and kick people down.

The Government talked about YAPA. We were told a few of them have gone into rabbit, this and that. How does one assess the success of such a programme in the context of feeding the nation: five "fellas" went there, two "fellas" went there, nine trainees went there, three trainees went there? The Government said it has trained thousands, where have the others gone? What has the Government done for them? What the Government did is just—according to the Member for St. Augustine—made them clients of the State. They were put into the programme. Out of a total of 1,000 only 28 went forward. The Member boasted if five per cent of the people, who have been trained, take up agriculture that is a success.

When he was in local government he was called "Mr. 10 per cent". Now, it seems to me [*Interruption*] Dhanraj did not "thief" the sand in Tobago. Do you know why Ivan did not go to Tobago? "Dey thiefing" wind in Tobago! Member for Laventille East, you are shaking your head. What were you doing? They would "thief" from a grain of sand.

The Government tried to imply that the Member for Caroni East was in some way associated with a bar called "Ship Wreck". That ship did not wreck before it went to Tobago to find out what happened in Tobago. That is the ship he used to go to Tobago. I want to put on the record—the Member for Chaguanas is not here—the bar is owned by Mr. Daniel Sookoo and the Member for Caroni East has nothing to do with that. What is wrong if a man goes in the bar in his district and mixes and limes with the people? You cannot do that!

The Member spoke of pesticides. He does not know the law, as it pertains to pesticides. There is the Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Act. With respect to the Toxics and Pesticides Act, what has the Government done? What has the Minister done to ensure the implementation of the Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Act? Nothing! He does not know about it. He comes to the Parliament today and tries to say that the people were frustrated.

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The Member went on to speak about the chicken prices. He boasted. The PNM is trying to cast aspersions on people who have produced in this country. They are trying to set them up. I am not sorry for those chicken “fellas”. Ask *aajee* from San Fernando West how much money “dey give she” for the campaign. I am not sorry for “dem fellas”. I am sorry for the small farmers involved. Mr. Speaker, on this chicken issue, they are playing politics and are casting aspersions on people who have spent millions of dollars in the chicken industry.

Food is paramount and there is a necessity to protect some of the vital industries which provide the staples. What has happened is that many countries in the West Indies have put tariffs to protect the industries. The PNM has YAPA, MAPA, PAPA and MAMA but they really want to lick up a certain set of people: their own supporters, “fellas” who pushed money in the last election. They are saying take it now. You put the PNM there, take it. Do not give me all these documents about the United States. They put the PNM there. Give them the money! The Member for San Fernando West ate money in the last election. What has happened is that they have put tariffs in every country in the Caribbean.

The tariffs in Jamaica is 260 per cent, Barbados was 180 per cent, Guyana 90 per cent, Belize 80 per cent and Trinidad and Tobago 80 per cent plus VAT. The purpose of that was to try to protect the industries, because the industries—apart from the big “fellas” in the industries who are the PNM’s supporters and friends—employ a large number of people who are poor. These countries tend to protect their people. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Government finished Caroni (1975) Limited and 10,000 persons were sent home. The aim of the Government is to “lick” up the poultry industry by sending home another 10,300 people. There are 10,300 persons employed in the poultry industry. The Government wants to knock them out directly. The ratio of the persons who are dependent on the individuals who work in the poultry industry is one to five. The Government is destroying the lives of 50,000 people in the industry. When we say the “poor” people, we are talking about those in the pluck shop, those on the farms and those providing transportation. Those are the people they are going at.

They try to give the impression that they are trying to protect the consumers. One would have thought that if they want to have a free market, they would encourage production, let the market forces play and get the price down, but they want to deal with it.

7.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, not only the big boys—like the supporters of the PNM—have heavy investments like mills and so forth. Hundreds of contracted farmers have

built sheds. They do not have any part to play with respect to the pricing mechanism. What happens is that the supplier would supply them with 5,000 chickens or 10,000 chickens and the feed for those chickens. They would then work day and night to rear these chickens. When these birds are produced, the suppliers would take the birds and weigh them and then pay them for the birds. They would also market the birds for them. This is a situation where persons who are toiling have a market. It is not like when a person plants bodi—in agriculture everyone produces the same crop at the same time—and then there is a glut in the market and so forth. These persons have a fixed market so they know that when they produce these chickens, they are certain that the chickens would be sold.

Mr. Speaker, about US \$50 million investments have gone down in the chicken industry. If you are dealing with the chicken industry, the way the PNM is dealing with it, all those poor people who are living in the same areas where the sugar workers are living, would be further damaged and there would be social unrest in that section of the community.

We have spoken to the people and they said that they do not get any subsidies. The Government was boasting and saying that these persons could do rice farming and they would get a reduction in water rates and so forth.

Now, what are they doing? Why are tariffs in Belize and Guyana lower than other Caribbean countries? The price is lower in those countries because the farmers have a large farming industry, and they do not have to depend on external supplies. They could produce their own supplies; they have vertical integration. That is why the prices are cheaper in those two countries.

However, it is said that the price of chicken in Trinidad and Tobago is the cheapest in the Caribbean; this is not so because there is a cartel, but the people are competing. For the hon. Member to come here today and say that farmers are dumping hatching eggs in order for the price of chicken to go up, was very unfair. The Member should call the names of those persons so that they would know their position with the Government.

Mr. Speaker, in Belize they grow corn; in Guyana they grow rice; and in Suriname they also grow rice paddy. In Jamaica, the shipping cost is lower. The Government is going to destroy 50,000 persons again. They have just traumatized about 60,000 persons in a particular area in Trinidad and Tobago, and it is going to hit another 50,000 persons. But they do not care! They have money, so they would spend it.

Mr. Speaker, hear the joke about this whole matter. In America, the American Government subsidizes the agricultural industry—they subsidize corn; they

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subsidize soya; and they subsidize the production of broilers. So, under the guise of the consumers, the Government would be subsidizing American farmers. [*Desk thumping*] We have oil; we have money—we have a tidal wave of money coming in, so they do not care. That is why in the 1970s, a former Jamaican President said: the oil flowing through Trinidad and Tobago is like a dose of salt. That is the way we are going.

When the Government wants to talk about First World status and all kind of “gambage” about communication for First World status and so forth, the first thing that we must be able to do is feed ourselves. That is what first world status is about. The most important thing for a man is food. In a budget of \$27 billion, only \$52 million were allocated for agricultural development.

Mr. Speaker, that is not all. What is happening is that in America, the people there are very selective when it comes to chicken. They do not eat the legs; the legs are called the red part of the chicken. They use the breast and wing parts of the chicken. The thigh is called the waste. So, in the United States of America, the cost of a bird is US \$0.76 per pound. When the bird is cut up, the chicken breast is sold for US \$1.99 per pound; the wing is sold for US \$1.07 per pound; and the leg is sold at US \$0.31 per pound.

Mr. Speaker, in America, they do not want the legs, so they would dump it. The value of the expenditure is being made on the chicken breast at a cost US \$1.99 per pound; and the chicken wing at a cost US \$1.07 per pound, so they are dumping chicken legs on the market at the cost of US \$0.31 per pound. That is the position in the United States of America. So, when our tariffs here are dropped, and the importers start to move in, they are going to dump on the local market. When they dump on the local market, our farmers here are going to get unfair competition.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot report America to the World Trade Organization (WTO). America has been the stumbling block in the WTO. The WTO cannot move forward because America subsidizes everything. Do you remember the problem with respect to the airbus and the European Union? They were subsidizing Boeing and the European Union had problems. When America dumps chickens on the local market, that is going to drive all our farmers out of the market. That is what we are afraid of.

Dr. Moonilal: That is what they want to do.

Mr. S. Panday: As a responsible Government, they should be more caring. What they should do is try to find a way to keep the prices down and still keep our

farmers in the business. How does the Government expect our farmers to compete with American farmers? Why can the Government not do the necessary research to find out what is the differential in subsidies between America production and our production in order to see the amount of subsidies the Americans get under their system? We have oil. Why can the Government not subsidize our farmers to the same extent that the American farmers are being subsidized, so that the price of chicken could drop? I thought the Government would have put an intellectual spin to this matter, instead of this pedestrian analysis of the budget. That is unfair competition.

Has the Government done its homework? Has the Government looked at the Caribbean to see what is happening? Look at Barbados! Look at Honduras! Look at Jamaica! I want to inform this wicked and nefarious Government that in the same way it has chased people out of every aspect of agriculture, that is the same way it intends to drive people out of the chicken industry. What is happening is—let me give the Government a warning here today—that because of the investments, it would be difficult to bring back the industry. I do not know if the Government could find officers in the ministry and ask them about what has happened in the Bahamas.

The Bahamas had reduced their subsidies and they wiped out the poultry industry there. Now, they are trying their best to bring back the industry, and no one wants to return to that industry. The sheds that the poor people have built were specially designed sheds with certain heights, wires and floor. This is the kind of investment that one cannot have flexible use of. If chickens are not produced in those pens, you cannot produce goats or pigs, because of the special characteristics of those pens.

Mr. Speaker, the Member spoke about persons in Debe and boasted that he was the man who gave them \$47 for their bodi. We ask the question: has the Government ever considered the risk of these poor people when they go into these enterprises? These persons would rear these chickens from one day old, using electricity during the night to keep them warm; and in the day they would use fans to keep them cool, and sometimes coming down to the last month, these chickens would then die.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what they would have to do? They would then have to clean the pens and sanitize them and so forth; they would then go and buy sawdust and put it back into the pen and then try again. Why did the Member not talk about those persons? Why did the Government did have a heart and think about the number of persons who have suffered like Noo Noo? These are persons who have taken risks, and now the Government is trying to put them out of business.

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When that generation of entrepreneurs is murdered, no amount of Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) could get persons to produce food for us. What would happen is that the importers who would be importing chickens, would not have any risk whatsoever, because they would go through the supermarkets and take up their orders. When the chickens come from America, they would just take them out from the docks and then they would leave—they would full their pockets with money without any risk whatsoever; they would then want to run the farmers out of business to create a demand for themselves. After they have sent the farmers home and run them out of business, the price of chicken would then go up.

These same consumers that the Government is pretending that it is going to help may not be able to eat chicken toe. We are saying that the PNM has no thinking. They have the worst Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—illiterate, pedestrian—

Dr. Moonilal: Those are his best qualities.

Mr. S. Panday: Okay, I would leave that there. I would never say that about the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. I would never say that about that Member. The Member has class and that is because he is probably educated.

7.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, why somebody said that he was like an electric drill—[*Mr. S. Panday makes noises*]—only upsetting people's ears. He is like an electric power saw, saying nothing; a dumb electric power saw that cannot even cut a piece of board. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you do have to use some words that the Hansard reporter would be able to record.

Mr. S. Panday: I apologize, Sir. He is like an electric power saw, making a screeching, annoying and disgusting noise and he is vacuous, empty-headed and blaring like a siren. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Hinds: How could you say that of a Member?

Mr. S. Panday: You should have never put someone like him as the Minister of Agriculture. We need food security. I feel that the Member for St. Ann's East was doing a better job.

You came to the Parliament with a budget of \$27 billion and boasted that you did .2 kilometre of roads. Things you should be ashamed of, you came here to

boast about. But when you do not have it—[*Mr. S. Panday points to head*—you make a fool of yourself in public; I apologize for him.

I am certain that you are upset to hear such a budget response. In his budget speech the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, read and did not understand or he “cyar” read. He said that there was an impending world shortage of food. That was also reported in the *Guardian* of Tuesday 12, October, 2004, where Maharaj predicted a food shortage. “De man would not even read de papers.” [*Crosstalk*] He cannot be described in any better terms.

This article was written just three days ago. One would have thought that if these are the concerns of the population that a progressive minister would have come here today and try to address these issues. Instead, he boasted about how he “likking up dem farmers in Oropouche” and “come by meh if yuh want.” Balliram Maharaj, a supermarket owner said:

“...T&T may be heading for a possible food shortage in the next few years...”

Not far in the future; a possible “shood fortage”—[*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, he talked so much nonsense and coming after him I had to listen; he addled my brain. I tried writing and I could not even get anything to write to answer. I had to sit here for 75 minutes and endure that pain and suffering. [*Crosstalk*]

The article continued:

“because of developments in international markets.

Referring to rapid increases in the prices of meats and dairy products, Maharaj said this was the result of weather conditions, the weakening of the US dollar, and more recently, growing demand for these items from China, India and Russia. “

This is a PNM Government that listens, that cares. They came here today, after saying how they will spend \$27 billion, and did not address this most fundamental issue.

Mr. Maharaj continued in the article:

“Based on the above, I am predicting a possible food shortage of certain basic food items by the year 2006/2007...”

These are people who are in food. It is so serious. This matter is imminent. This is what he said as well:

“...I am hereby appealing to the Government of T&T to return to the agricultural sector and start focusing on food production, which would ensure adequate food supplies in the future.”

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The Minister came here and beat his chest. This is food production, Mr. Speaker. When you talk about food production, you could have how much oil money; you could be how much lawyer “yuh” want; you could be whatever engineer, “yuh” want; you could be whatever profession “yuh” want, if you do not have food, you are going to starve. Food is most fundamental and most important. I would have thought that the Member for San Fernando East would have put this on the front burner, but they feel, “We doh care; we getting a tidal wave of money; we getting oil money and we will buy whatever we want; we will push out the same Caricom neighbours; we will compete with them on the international market; we will starve them if we can, because we have money; who have more corn will feed more fowl,” that is the attitude of the PNM Government. When they boast that the economy is expanding, it is not because of their competence and efficiency, but because of external factors over which they have no control. It seems to me that the way they are going, they might have to drink the oil.

It is not only me who spoke about jobs. I did not make this up. Hazel Brown, a consumer rights person, also spoke about this. [*Crosstalk*] You are not as foolish as the person who just spoke. You will not understand even if I speak. You talk about equality; you talk about sharing.

“Importing chicken and turkey parts may damage the local poultry market...Hazel Brown says.”

She continues:

“Government’s proposal to reduce the surcharge on imported chicken and turkey parts from 86 to 40 per cent, Brown said, “I don’t know how we could substitute something we know nothing about to destroy a local industry.

“This will affect the local market, which employs...”

Do you know who, Mr. Speaker? A lot of single mothers. You are putting a knife in their backs and turning it; these are the poor people whom Hazel Brown spoke about; ladies, single mothers who want to work, who want to have pride in themselves, who want to have dignity in themselves to work for their money, “but dey doh care bout de people.” They have something for those producers; that came out of the mouth of the Member for Arouca North when he said that the producers were going to dump chicken. “We will deal with them,” he said.

In his budget presentation the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, said that the reduction was part of the Government’s strategy to counter rising prices. As I showed you, Mr. Hon. Prime Minister, that is myopic; it is short term. The long-term results will be devastating. He also said that this measure was expected

to reduce the price on specific products, improve the level of competition in the market and, hopefully, lower chicken prices. Hear what they asked, “Yuh want to throw away hatching eggs?” The hon. Member for San Fernando East knows about it; as one speaker said, “Join the dots and draw your conclusion.”

The hon. Member for Arouca North said, “Dey want to dump the hatching eggs to carry the price up and the hon. Prime Minister knows about it.” I am certain he knew about it before he wrote the budget. The Prime Minister said in the budget statement:

“If this measure does not generate an appropriate reduction in poultry prices, the surcharge will be further reduced until the expected benefits to the consumer are realized.”

You are fighting them; you are threatening them. [*Crosstalk*]

This lady, Hazel Brown, should have been the Minister of Agriculture:

“Yesterday, though, Brown said that the move would cause people to lose jobs, endanger the industry as a whole, and put the country at the mercy of exporters.”

You will have to make “work-make” jobs like the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) and Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) for them, but people are losing their genuine jobs. This is the most important part: Apart from those sectoral areas which will be affected, we want to let you hear what “town” saying.

People did not expect to hear all that vacuous vitriol from you in the budget; not at all. [*Crosstalk*] People are concerned; food is important. People want to know that when they get up tomorrow and go to the grocery, they could find food.

“Brown said that she wants to hear what Agriculture Minister Jarrette Narine has to say on the reduction of taxes on imported chicken.”

He did not address it at all; that is why this Government has no credibility. [*Desk thumping*] People outside do not have faith in you. People feel that they are not a part of the \$27 billion you are spending. They feel that they are not beneficiaries and recipients of the national patrimony.

Mr. Speaker, I think I need to add this one:

“Nutrimix, this country’s largest poultry producer, also expressed concern on Friday after the move was announced in the budget.

Vice president of the company Ronnie Mohammed said it was a stab in the back, since the company was being asked to compete with Brazil and the

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United States, which the World Trade Organisation has ruled are receiving heavy subsidies.”

Oh, PNM, how hard can your hearts be for the poor? We know that these people are receiving subsidies, and you are killing your own farmers whom you do not give subsidies. [*Crosstalk*] The PNM is trying to get a solution which causes more problems than there were before.

You know what they did, Mr. Speaker? They get their spin doctors. Instead of analyzing the issue of chicken, they spin it. They use their editor, the Member for Diego Martin West, the Editor of the *Newsday*, to run an article:

“Chicken drop by 55 per cent”

“Dey so hurry to pull a trick on the population”. From 80 to 46 per cent is how much? But they are saying now that it was not reduced by that percentage, but by 55 per cent. They are trying to hoodwink people.

Mr. Manning: It is true.

Mr. S. Panday: It is true? [*Crosstalk*] In the *Express* of October 12, 2004, it said:

“No drop in chicken and flour” [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I suggest to him that he check the prices that prevailed in Hi Lo San Fernando, on Sunday last. He would find a completely different picture from that to which he referred.

Mr. S. Panday: I thank the hon. Minister. I do not shop at Hi Lo. I shop in poor places. [*Laughter*] I shop at places like Food Basket, Persad The Food King and so on. I do not want to say that you are misleading the House or cast any aspersions on you, but if you want to make a statement like that, tell us what was the price per kilogram of chicken at Hi Lo before the budget and the price after the budget.

Mr. Manning: Last week Sunday a pack of chicken parts, legs, that would normally sell for \$34.99, was selling at \$19.99. [*Desk thumping*]

7.55 p.m.

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. P. Manning*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. S. Panday: I thank the Prime Minister and Members of the House.

If he cannot read the papers, at least he could get his friend to help him. I now quote from another article, not two days before the budget—if he cannot read because he is busy, you mean to say he does not have friends who read the newspapers and as Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, tell him what the problems are? Or is it, “tell me your friends and I will tell you who you are”?

On the *Express Business—Agriculture*, of March 31, 2004—this came out since March, long before the budget proposals had been formulated—since March people are complaining. I mean to say, he could not get somebody to read it for him? The Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago held a meeting at the Rudranath Capildeo Learning Resource Centre. Do you know what they were trying to do? The aim was:

“...to encourage farmers and other stakeholders to be a part of the policy making decisions which would affect the sector.”

No Government Minister attended because they said at least if they were not here, we would make representation. Listen to what they were complaining about:

“Losses caused by praedial larceny...”

That is one of the greatest obstacles in the production of agriculture. The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro would tell you, a coconut cannot fall from the tree, “dem fellas gone wid it. They tiefing it; they stealing it.” People are complaining of praedial larceny. One would have thought he would have come today and said, “I have heard the poor people; I have heard the farmers; I have heard the children of the earth complaining about praedial larceny and I would address that issue.” No!

Dr. Moonilal: He did not talk about that. What did he talk about, really?

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, praedial larceny is one of the greatest problems to farming. You plant your eddoes—since we like eddoes and cassava—and you work those eddoes and cassava right down to the end and, say you want to reap them next week, “dem fellas come in the night and rip out all the cassava and eddoes and plant back the tree. When you go and pull the tree, no eddoes, and no cassava.” It happened in Mafeking.

These are the real problems. We would have thought the Minister would have come today and say, “We have called upon the police.” You open 200 acres here; you open half acre there and say, “Look, we have told the police we have registered

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farmers; we have asked them what crops they are producing; we have tried to use that data”—I will teach you how to use data—“to find out when the crops would be about to reap and then contact the praedial larceny squad and have the squad service the area.” No! Since March people are complaining, and if he cannot read, you mean to say he cannot hear, too? I hope that the Minister of National Security would come and say what they are doing.

Further to that, do you know what they have done? When there is a shortage of police vehicles in areas to do general duties, they take away the praedial larceny vehicle and send it on the streets, so there is no sort of support for our farmers. If we want to go forward we have to protect our farmers.

The Agricultural Society is complaining about poor access roads. They came here today and boasted as if .2—.2 is one-fifth of a kilometre—200 yards. Do you understand it? Point two is one-fifth and one-fifth of 1,000 is 200 metres. *[Interruption]* Well, 36 and 39.3. You will argue with me for 3.3?

Mr. Manning: It is .37.

Mr. S. Panday: You really need a better Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, you know. I have respect for you. You could count; you could read; you could write. I have the greatest respect for you. It goes on:

“...the high cost and low availability of water,”

You are digging a dam here and a dam there? What we should do like in La Savanne—that is the area because I go there very often—you should run pipe borne water into the La Savanne, or even in the river. Put pumps to take the water from the river so we could service them. Do you know the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is more *au courant* with agriculture than the Member for Arouca North? He is digging pond and he is going in the river to take the water. That is a good idea.

When we take the water from the river, we should take it in pumps and keep on pumping it all the time and we should do that for them free, and we should not charge them any water rates. *[Interruption]* You want me to take you on again? It states further:

“...land settlement issues,”

Where is the agriculture? When one looks into the Draft Estimates of the Development Programme, one would see that no moneys have been put into the programme for this. As a matter of fact, Caroni, that they said they were going to distribute, not a cent has been placed in the Development Programme for

preparing the lands for the people of Caroni—not a single cent! *[Interruption]* That has nothing to do with you? That is to produce food! So you do not believe that as a Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, all the land that is concerned with food production is important and has some relevance to you? Do you not think so, Mr. Speaker?

Those were the general issues which the Agricultural Society had spoken about. After that, they went on to sectoral issues. It states:

“Moderator Vassel Stewart suggested that the sector organize itself to provide leverage through an association with the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago. He said each sub-sector or industry could form a community association and become affiliated to the Society. These associations, he said, would sit as sub-committees which would work together to develop plans to solve the problems in the sector.”

People want to solve the problems. Mr. Speaker, in the Siparia constituency, they went there and gave Councillor Narine a whole heap of contracts without tendering, to put street lights all about, and you come here to berate the Member for Siparia? We thought you would have listened to these problems and work with the stakeholders in the industry. Do you know why the Government was not involved? It states:

“The Agricultural Society then, could take these strategies and present them to the Ministry of Agriculture as a proposal for rehabilitating the sector.”

These are people on the ground. *[Interruption]* Mr. Prime Minister, do not worry about him heckling me, you know. He and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, they “is the lawyer for the tief”. When you had him in the room there—

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no. You see, he is making a connection. *[Interruption]* No, no, please. He is making a connection. If you do not understand it, I understand it. So, please, do not go there.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, it seems as though you are well read also. He is playing lawyer together with the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and you wanted “Mr. E.” to get trapped—or the two men to get trapped if one was not your friend. Heckle me! Heckle me!

Dr. Moonilal: Whoever you defending, gone to the gallows!

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. S. Panday: Did you not say that the man sued you in Grenada and you glad if he got “lick up”?

Mr. Speaker: Please get on with your contribution.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, you trying to save him!

Mr. Speaker: Address me. You are wasting time, you know. Your time is running out.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, I have not started my speech as yet, you know. Play your politics inside. Do not come here for me. It continues:

“Representatives of both ASTT and CABA agreed—”

Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, God save you. I am not speaking of any launching of any black caucus in the Hilton in November, you know; I am speaking about:

“Representative of both ASTT and CABA agreed his proposal was one which merited further consideration.

Stakeholders, who presented their views on the state of the industry, also had other suggestions to ease their problems.”

The reason the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is listening so attentively, in his constituency, which is covered by 90 per cent forest, there is an industry, which could make us proud. It goes on:

“Patrick Greenidge, who spoke on the poultry aspect of Livestock, Aquaculture/Fisheries and Apiaries subsector, said the industry made great strides in the last 50 years. He said the industry provided about 30 million broilers a year.”

Look at the contribution of the poultry industry—30 million broilers a year! Are you not proud of the productivity of our people, of the discipline of our people? And those are the people we are going to hit in the short term for the consumer? Let us not play politics. We give you the guarantee today that if you stand up for the farmers, we will stand in public and say you did the right thing.

We must look at the long-term security of the country, not the short-term. You know, they really believe I did not go to school. They are not telling me what the proposals are and then you are asking me about supporting it. Tell me what your proposals are; I will consider them and I will tell you if they make sense. They are behaving as though we did not go to school. I continue to read:

“The poultry surveillance unit needed to be revamped, air trading legislation...”

Listen to what they want:

“...air trading legislation should be implemented to protect the industry, feed, hatching egg and pharmaceutical standards needed to be established and

enforced, as well as legislation relating to feeding labelling especially with relation to weight and measures.”

Look at the kind of problems they have. They have problems with ministries, weights and measures. Let us give them the support. If we give them that support because of the greater security, it might give them the option to reduce the price.

8.10 p.m.

He came to a budget debate to talk about eating rabbit for “gouti”. Not because one looks like a rabbit one has to denigrate rabbits like that. Only 1 per cent of the \$25 million in sheep and goat meat was produced locally. They are jumping all over the place. I remember when there was a shortage of goat in Trinidad we used to go to Tobago for goat. We could develop the goat and sheep industry in Tobago. Where there are lands that are not arable you can put sheep to graze. In Trinidad they could develop it. The biggest challenge for goat and sheep farmers is praedial larceny. They also had problems with affordable labour and seasonal demand. I do not see anything wrong with that. Instead of spending \$25 million to subsidize farmers from New Zealand, Australia and Ireland, why can we not help our people and put things in place to produce our food, so that we can get food security?

Although our food import bill is \$2.1 billion, here is a small opening of \$25 million. Let us try to be sufficient in that area, so we can beat our chests. Do not beat your chest and say that you are eating rabbit for “gouti”. You would make a dent in one small sector of the industry.

I thought that as Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, you would have given an overview of the whole agricultural sector.

“Claudius George, another farmer, lamented that the dairy sector was fast becoming extinct because of a myriad of problems including high feed costs, water cost...”

If you drink Svelty or those other brands of milk you would see that they are reconstituted. Farmers who are getting subsidies—they are sending down the powdered milk here and we are adding water, packaging and giving our people.

There was a time when you could have bought fresh milk on the market. Caroni had a dairy area. I do not know if because they were colonials they should have been treated better. We are subjecting our people to reconstituted powdered milk. We have land and good rainfall. Why can we not try to develop the industry? My information is that the industry is almost dead. This is the way the minister should have looked at the ministry.

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They said with Nestle payments taking so long that they have problems. These people are so honest. They are not dishonest as the hon. Member for Arouca (North) tried to make them out. They proposed a maximum rent of \$1,000 per acre, per annum to dairy farmers. They want a reduction in water rates and electricity. They want some incentives. That is all they are asking to produce food for you.

One would have thought that the Minister would have spoken about aquaculture. That is one of the fastest growing industries in certain parts of the world like Malaysia and Thailand. If we develop aquaculture we might be able to produce sufficient protein in cascadura and tilapia. That is a lucrative export market.

Hon. Member: What about “wabine”?

Mr. S. Panday: Yes. Two foot one, too. [*Laughter*]

“Although the aquaculture industry in Trinidad was about 50 years old it was still considered an infant industry according to Suresh Beni of the Sugarcane Feeds Centre. He said the main products of the industry were talipia and cascadura...”

Since you do not have that expense to go out to sea and at sea you could be hijacked, we may be able to produce those fishes for consumption cheaper than sea fish. We have the opportunities, land and water, but we do not have any vision. That is the problem.

“...some of the challenges facing the industry were slow and expensive laboratory services for feed analysis.”

Apparently, they have some kind of feed for them. These are the small things that you could do to produce food. You do not have to be a rocket scientist. They also went on to say that you could contract the fish system to other people; and intercrop ducks and other animals with the fish.

Hear this one for the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro.

“Beekeepers also have their share of problems, which were outlined by Paula Hones. Some were common with other farmers, such as land issues and praedial larceny.”

Hear the special problem of the sector.

“In addition, Hones said because proper trading arrangements were not in place, locally produced honey was not granted access to European markets, even after Trinidad and Tobago won a prestigious prize at the London Honey Show.”

We have an industry waiting to take off. They do not want any subsidy from the Government. They want them to find markets. That is one of the major problems of agriculture.

Mr. Rahael: Do you know what date was that?

Mr. S. Panday: The date of the article is March 31, 2004. [*Interruption*] You as a former minister whose only fame to glory is that you murdered 10,000 people in the sugar belt should have known this. As Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, you sat and did nothing but put pressure on people and plot to kill them. Instead of that, you should have sat down and thought about it. What shamelessness to ask me what year it was! You should have known!

Mr. Rahael: Trinidad and Tobago's honey won the first prize in London at shows in 1998 and 1999, under the UNC and they did absolutely nothing about it.

Mr. S. Panday: And the PNM has been in power for three years. What have you done about it? The PNM must stop the blaming syndrome. You are in government and have the responsibility to do it! That nonsense does not hold water anymore with the people. They came here and complained about it. They killed all the bees in Union Estate.

They boast about the citrus industry and that it increased by 100 per cent, but 100 per cent of 50 is only 100.

“To satisfy local demand, however, the industry has to expand production to 7,500 acres which would yield about five million crates of citrus a year.”

What did they do? In their haste to brutalize sugar workers and drive them down the gutter, they closed down Caroni saying that they were so brilliant that they know that the LOME Convention after 2000, the subsidy might be reduced.

They fooled the people to give the impression that sugar was the only thing about Caroni. Caroni had hundreds of animals in Mora Valley. They introduced the buffalypso. [*Interruption*] “All yuh kill it and eat it already?” In Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Bennet had developed buffalypso from the bison. We were exporting buffalypso to other parts of South America. When the Caroni debate comes we would deal with that. I do not want to spend time on this.

What about the 3,000 acres of citrus in La Gloria? What about Longdenville? They closed the industry saying that the price of sugar on the world market is so low and in the process of closing the sugar industry, they lick up the citrus industry too. If you look at the *Review of the Economy* you will see that the production of these commodities reduced as a result of the closure of Caroni

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(1975) Limited. They want to fool the people and give their friends the satisfaction that they are closing down Caroni not thinking that it was not only sugar. It was a culture, buffalypso, citrus, dairy, rice and rum.

Talking about CEPEP, they make job, I want to let the hon. Prime Minister know that they gave the contracts to whom they wanted to create entrepreneur. It is really a client of the State. They gave them \$150,000 a month; work half the gang and do not work the other half. They make up the books without people's names on them; send them to the office and claim money. They are taking advantage of the poor. I am going to form a CEPEP contract union. Mr. Prime Minister, I know that you do not know about it. The people who are involved are exploiting the system. You want to create entrepreneurs but they should be people on the ground, not those few selected PNMites who are milking the system. Because they say that they are PNM they would break the Treasury. CEPEP is corrupt! [*Interruption*]

Do you know whom? The "big belly fella" lives in New Grant and he works full-time in the Ministry of Works and Transport. "Yuh eh know him?" He retired; he is getting a pension from the Ministry of Works and Transport and you are making him an entrepreneur. "Ah ol' dead piece ah wood dat kyah move any further; retired at 65, yuh making entrepreneur. He whole life he couldn't be entrepreneur, now yuh making him entrepreneur!" It is PNM feeding "de boys". Mr. Prime Minister I am letting you know that this is the way they make the deals.

Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize to you that I did not get the opportunity to start my speech. [*Laughter*]

Thank you.

8.25 p.m.

The Minister in the Ministry of Community Development and Culture (Hon. Eulalie James): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I crave your indulgence to read from my notes.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased for this opportunity to address this honourable House, and to participate in this debate. I wish to join with my colleagues on this side to congratulate the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, for an excellent presentation, which should provide tremendous satisfaction and hope to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

May I also take this opportunity to convey to the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, favourable sentiments on what has been described as an excellent budget by residents of Laventille West, whom I have the honour to represent in this Parliament.

The budget, in true PNM style of Government, sets out in the clearest manner to directly address the social and economic development of the nation. The budget outlines the three pillars of the economic strategy, which lay the basis for medium-term development and prosperity. It states the specific measures to further improve the welfare of the poor, the aged, the less fortunate, and the retired. In addition, it provides measures for education, training and development, in keeping with the theme, "Ensuring Our Future Survival". This budget also demonstrates in a practical manner to residents in communities throughout our Republic that no one should be left behind.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, any imbalance that has been highlighted in this time of plenty, as it relates to the financial revenues of Trinidad and Tobago, has been addressed in a meaningful manner in this budget.

Apart from the social and economic needs, this budget also makes provision for investment programmes that expand the stock of human and physical capital, which have a net effect of empowering people.

The fact that the proven success of these programmes led to increased fiscal allocation and the introduction of additional programmes can only further benefit the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Permit me to report to this honourable House that these programmes have proven to be of immense benefit to the residents of Laventille West. These programmes include:

- The On-The-Job Training (OJT)
- The Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP)
- The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)
- The Helping You Prepare for Employment (HYPE)
- The Export Centres Programme
- The Transformation and Development Centres (TDC)
- The Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA)
- The Women in Harmony and Elderly Care
- The Multi-sector Skills Training Programme (MuST)

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- The Reforestation Programme
- The Unemployment Relief Programme (URP)
- The Non-Traditional Skills Training for Women Programme
- The Adult Education Programme
- The Community Education Programme
- The Patient Care Assistance Programme
- The SHARE Programme

with the distribution of food hampers. Mr. Speaker, Laventille West looks forward to embracing the benefits of the Military-Led Academic Training (MILAT) programme and the Military-Led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship Re-orientation Training (MYPART) Programme.

We also give full support to the Government for implementing measures to address the rise in prices of food items as it relates to chicken, powdered milk, split peas, black-eye peas, cheese, brown sugar, cocoa powder, coffee, mauby and orange juice.

The increase in old age pension, public assistance grants and the pension of public service officers to include ex-gratia payments are all commendable. The programmes of this Government in education to include GATE are welcome, as are the initiatives to further develop the quality of life in this nation in the areas of national security, health, and with the increase in the minimum wage.

As you are aware, the residents of Laventille West not only travel abroad regularly to visit relatives, conduct business, and improve their education, but also travel as cultural ambassadors throughout the world, taking, with pride, the music of the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago from the hills of Laventille to the hallowed halls of prestigious venues that include the Royal Albert Hall in London, Carnegie Hall in New York, the Kennedy Centre in Washington, and were the feature artistes for the ceremonial opening of the Centre for the Arts in San Francisco.

I say this to indicate the welcomed benefit of the increase in exemption from customs duty—Duty Free Allowance—from \$1,200 to \$3,000 for individuals travelling abroad in respect to goods belonging to them, which accompany the passenger and which are acquired abroad or in local in-bond shops for personal use or as souvenirs and gifts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me once again place on record of this honourable House the expression of thanks on behalf of Laventille West to the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this debate was started on Wednesday and I have sat here and listened to the Members on this side give great accounts of their stewardship in their ministries. I am very proud of this Government; it shows that we are working hard. Mr. Speaker, in the Ministry which I have the honour to serve, under a strong and caring leader, Sen. The Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams, we work very hard and we show care for the people. I believe some Members on the opposite side could attest to that.

This budget debate presents an ideal opportunity for me to enlighten Members of the House and the public at large about Government's policies and programmes, which impact on the lives of citizens, through the work of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. The debate allows me the opportunity to report on my constituency, Laventille West.

The ministry comprises three main divisions: the Community Development Division, the Gender Affairs Division and the Division of Culture. The structure of the ministry also includes the Export Centre Company Limited, the Community Development Fund Secretariat, and the National Commission for Self Help and the National Museum.

As a people-oriented and service-driven organization, the ministry has implemented over 25 programmes, which are designed to meet the needs of citizens and communities throughout the country. These programmes include the Best Village Programme, Community Concerts, Community Education, Leadership Training, Heritage Exhibitions, the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme, and the Non-Traditional Skills Programme for Women and the Construction of Community Centres.

Within the constraint of the time allotted to me, I will focus on activities relating to our national heritage, the Best Village Programme and the Gender Affairs Division. Attention will also be given to my constituency.

National Heritage: The preservation of the positive products of endowment of our national heritage is a commitment of my Government. Our forefathers have worked long and hard to develop the rich heritage, and we must ensure that the fruits of their labour are preserved and protected. During the last fiscal year, steps were taken to begin the restoration and upgrade of heritage sites and facilities.

The development of Nelson Island Heritage Site proceeds with the construction of a jetty and the clearing of the site. In the new fiscal year, the focus will be on the

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restoration and rehabilitation of buildings, landscaping, security and activities relating to the commissioning of the site. We hope to work with the people of Carenage to ensure that tourists will be taken safely to the site after it has been developed.

Major refurbishment work has been undertaken at Queen's Hall. A visit to Queen's Hall would provide the evidence of the transformation that has taken place, including the installation of state-of-the-art equipment.

Preliminary work has already begun on the restoration and upgrade of Naipaul House—the House of Mr. Biswas—and the Little Carib Theatre and Naparima Bowl. These projects will be relentlessly pursued in the new fiscal year.

The National Museum is the repository of the memory of our society. It is the storehouse of artefacts and heritage products, which help us to explore the life and time of our ancestors. The National Museum has undergone substantial renovation. During the current year, 12 exhibitions were held at the museum. The exhibitions carried titles such as Indian Temple Art, the Calypso Story, the Many Splendors of Taiwan, the Pan Story, a History of Queen's Royal College and the Pioneers of an Era.

Expansion work at the museum will be undertaken in the new fiscal year. There are also plans for the establishment of a museum in San Fernando and permanent community museums in Laventille, Mayaro and Caroni. Last month a Police Museum located at the refurbished Police Headquarters was launched as a collaborative effort between the police service and the ministry.

Best Village: Mr. Speaker, the Best Village Programme is alive and well. Heritage preservation is not a static process. As a society develops, new heritage projects emerge and have to be integrated into the existing stock. The Best Village Programme is perhaps the most powerful instrument for combining the preservation and development of our heritage. The Best Village Programme mobilizes communities annually to participate in competitive activities, which ensure that our cultural products are not lost with the passage of time. Best Village is much more than dancing and singing, it is also about preserving our cultural heritage through folk stories, the village chat, the traditional folk characters and folk rituals.

8.40 p.m.

Best Village is, above all, about community togetherness, as co-operation among people irrespective of age, race or religion; people who co-operate for the single purpose of preserving and enhancing the identity of their community.

Mr. Speaker, we have noticed that even though some of the groups in Trinidad and Tobago do not take part in the concert-type best village and the theatre-type

programmes and so on—we have instituted some single programmes like tassa, chutney, drumming, dancing and so forth—all of these are single programmes and we have had all types of groups coming in: tassa, chutney and so forth. Last year Williamsville won the best tassa group and represented our country abroad this year.

Through Best Village people of communities such as Barackpore, Laventille and Fyzabad are identifying social problems and developing theatre which diagnose those problems and come with solutions. In other words, Best Village groups take collective action rather than the easy way out of complaining or relying solely on Government. Let us take, for example, the problem of crime. Laventille is stereotyped as a crime-ridden community. The North-west Laventille Cultural Group has examined this stereotype in the theatre production in the current Best Village programme. The group has, therefore, provided the opportunity for the young people of the community to look at themselves as a means of changing their attitude to crime and violence. These are positive actions which need to be promoted by the media. Laventille has many positive achievements.

Miss Best Village 2003 is the representative from North-west Laventille. The best female vocalist and the best folk drummers in the Best Village Competition are also from Laventille. Representatives of the combined culture group are from Laventille and also participated with distinction at a folk festival in Venezuela last month. In addition, groups in Laventille are using their initiatives to meet and discuss solutions to violence in the communities. Officers from my ministry are also working with the leaders and groups in Laventille to reduce the incidence of crime. Our approach is to confront problems face up, and at the same time, develop strategies for ensuring a better quality of life in the future. Participation rose from 38 groups last year to 68 this year. [*Desk thumping*] There was great participation as I indicated before in the single items newly instituted, in dance, drama and so on. About 90-odd groups took part.

Junior Best Village, a new programme that was instituted, is based on our concerns for the future and was introduced two years ago. The programme is designed to promote, preserve and develop our cultural heritage through the medium of co-operation. As part of the programme design, children between the ages of five to 16 years are selected to participate in training camps during the August vacation. Emphasis is placed on teaching the history, culture and contribution of each heritage through the development and evolution of the Trinidad and Tobago society. The children learn about food, religion, clothing, songs and dances of the various heritage groups. For example, participants of the camp at St. George East were exposed to the Syrian/Lebanese culture; Tobago, to

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the Amerindian culture; St. Andrew/St. David, to the Chinese culture; Victoria, to the French culture; Caroni to the British culture; St. Patrick East to the Indian culture; Nariva/Mayaro, to the Trinidad and Tobago culture and St. George West, to the Spanish and African cultures.

The Junior Best Village programme has been very successful and it is certainly one of the ways to preserve our heritage. Children who have participated in the training camps will showcase their multicultural skills at a grand extravaganza at the Queen's Park Savannah on October 29, 2004. All are invited to attend.

I now turn to gender affairs. As we seek to build a more harmonious nation, we must take steps to improve our gender relations. A national gender policy will be the major instrument for managing gender relations. A draft policy has been completed and it is being finalized for submission to Cabinet. Other initiatives are to bring in harmony programmes, to equip single mothers between the ages of 26 to 45 years with skills in landscaping, agriculture, and the caring for the elderly. The programme seeks to bring women in harmony with themselves through their caring role and through their connection with the land, which is the source of our sustenance. Four hundred and eighty women were trained in the programme in the period 2003— 2004.

The non-traditional skills for women:

Through this programme unemployed women have been trained to perform male-dominated skills such as carpentry, masonry, plumbing and other construction skills. Besides removing gender barriers in employment, this programme prepares deserving women to participate in the booming construction industry.

In our Ministry, we have a story that we like to tell of some women who came to us for assistance. We worked with those women, helping them in every way we could, and introduced them to all of our programmes. Today those women are well equipped. A couple of months ago they brought a picture to show me of women building a house, and we are truly very proud of all that. [*Desk thumping*] These women, too, have had their office created where they provide several areas of their skills. They provide cleaning and landscaping; they make letterheads and call-cards and several other things. A very ambitious number of women and we are proud to know that we helped them to reach thus far. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the males have not been forgotten. A male support programme has been designed to assist in addressing social and behavioural problems for boys and men. Male support groups have been established and training workshops and seminars for men have been organized. Men from non-governmental organizations

and community groups have also participated in two training of trainer programmes entitled "Defining Masculine Excellence". Additionally, a street theatre programme has been implemented and it is going on right now in various communities where they even go, if it is on the basketball courts, on the street corner, if it is in the rum shops; wherever the men are, we reach them and discuss with them some of their problems. This programme has been implemented throughout the country to allow men to express their views on issues affecting them in the comfort of familiar environment where they gather. In other words, if men are reluctant to participate in social programmes, we are going to meet them to discuss their concerns. We also have a domestic violence area.

My Government is concerned about violence both within the homes and outside the homes as a social oriented organization. My ministry, on behalf of the Government, has been implementing a number of programmes to reduce the incidence of domestic violence. These include a hotline which provides listening, information and referral services to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week and ten drop-in centres throughout the country which offer counselling and referrals to social agencies and safe houses.

A comprehensive gender awareness and sensitization programme has been developed. This programme underlines our effort to improve gender equity and gender equality. To this end, gender training has been conducted with agencies such as the Narcotic Unit of the police service, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Trinidad and Tobago Federation of Women's Institution, Sophia House and several other communities.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight at this point some of the issues in Laventille and to say how much we have achieved under this Government. As the representative of Laventille West, it will be unforgivable if I do not deal with those issues.

I thank the Government, under our Prime Minister, for assisting us in upgrading the amenities. If you see Laventille West now, although all the lights are not in, but if you see it now to how it was before, it is well lit, and noting the problems we have, we are very grateful for that. [*Desk thumping*]

I thank the Minister of Works and Transport for assisting me with some roads, and he is not finished with me yet.

8.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the water situation has also been improved and we say thanks to the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment. We also thank the

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Government for the new technology centre, which is a plus and which I am sure will benefit the young people in the area. All of our community centres are earmarked for refurbishment and two of these are near completion.

The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs has assisted. You see a lot of people come to us from all over the country and we assist them as far we can. We never turn anyone away. Those young people in Laventille came knocking and our Minister, the caring person that she is, assisted them.

We assisted in sporting activities, in the renovation of a preschool and we assisted in continuing community education, through computer literacy. Our Ministry assisted in rebuilding a house that was burnt out, noting the plight of those unfortunate people.

We also assisted in equipping the Morris Marshall Library and I cannot leave out the MRRG Programme, which is very helpful to those people who cannot help themselves, and who need repairs to their houses. I must also say thanks for the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) because they are very helpful to the less fortunate. *[Interruption]*

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

You see, before time they used to ask what the PNM was doing for Laventille, now that we have started to turn things around, they are talking about nothing being given to them. We are not neglecting anybody you know; anybody who asks, we help.

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has work to do for me. He started, and a basketball court and pavilion were completed. He has to upgrade the rest of the grounds, which will be done shortly.

Our renowned former calypso monarch Singing Sandra made an impassionate plea for Laventille to be turned around. This turnaround is gradually taking place at the ground level of the community through the initiatives of the people and social programmes, which Government has been implementing. However, the turnaround will not take place next month, nor next year. Rome was not built in a day, and I am certain, just as Rome emerged as a major city, Laventille will eventually turn around and be restored to the glory of the past.

So, Mr. Speaker, in keeping with the vision, strategy and measures so ably presented by the Prime Minister in his capacity as Minister of Finance, and in keeping with the demonstrated prudent management of the affairs of Trinidad and

Tobago by this PNM Government, I wish to express my pride in being a member of this administration.

In closing, permit me to make the observation that it is the performance of the PNM in government that gives credence and indeed, reiterate the stated and demonstrated approval of the majority of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who have from 1956 to date, voted the People's National Movement into government; not on one occasion, not two, not three, not four, not even five times, not six, not seven, but eight occasions. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, for the benefit of those on the other side, the facts are that no other entity has had any such confidence placed in them by the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago after their solitary term in government; whether elected to office or brokered to office.

I stand here a very proud representative of my constituency, proud to be PNM; proud to be a member of this Government, under my astute leader, my Prime Minister, Mr. Patrick Manning. I know that with all that was said Mr. Speaker, nobody from the other side really replied to the budget, because they have nothing to reply to. You see, the budget is so good that it is causing “commesse” and confusion. That is a good sign. I know that we will conquer and all that we say we will achieve.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and may God bless us all.

Mr. Nizam Baksh (*Naparima*): Mr. Speaker, never in the annals of our history have I seen so much money pass through the coffers of this country with so little corresponding benefits. Only recently, I was reminded in one of our daily newspapers that a former Prime Minister of a Caribbean island, some years ago, said that money was passing through Trinidad like a dose of salts. Those days are back with us.

The Prime Minister, in his budget presentation, has given us the theme “Ensuring Our Future Survival”. In my view the more appropriate theme would have been “Building the family”. I have perused the budget statement and my indelible impression is that this document embodies a range of long-term plans, which, if we judge them against the performance of successive PNM governments, will never become a reality. We are confident that come next year, around the time of the next budget, most of his grandiose plans would either fall by the wayside or be abandoned for want of the will and determination to deliver.

I intend in my contribution to lay emphasis on the building of the family as an important institution because this Government seems to have abandoned the role

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of the family and have stationed itself in that role through an elaborate process of handouts via its expanded social investment programmes.

Mr. Speaker, even though the social investment programmes lack a concise developmental thrust, they continue to expand these programmes and to erode the role of the family. In 2004, the social programmes took a huge chunk of the national budget, which is \$2,649.9 million, approximately 13.2 per cent of the national budget. This year the allocation is more than in 2004, yet these measures do not target the social sector with a proper developmental thrust for self-reliance and sustained growth.

I would like to quote a few lines from an article by an accounting firm, published on October 10, 2004, on page 3 of *The Sunday Guardian*.

“Measures do not target social sector

Accounting firm Ernst & Young has expressed concern that the \$27.9 billion budget presented on Friday in Parliament by Finance Minister, Prime Minister Patrick Manning, did not address the critical issue of social development in T&T...

Unless the social development of the country is addressed in a meaningful and sustainable way, the vision for First World status will not be achieved, regardless of the favourable economic factors.

Citing the PM’s mention of a variety of social programmes like youth training and poverty alleviation through pension and disability increases, the firm stressed that these measures ‘fall short of developing the country’s human resources in a manner to make them independent and build self-esteem’.

On handout programmes aimed, the Government claims, that developing small businesses, like NEDCO and CEPEP, Ernst & Young said, ‘It is also hoped that the plans for business support in terms of the incubation and nurturing of certain industries will be enhanced by the management and entrepreneurial development that facilitates the transformation of the skills acquired into productive enterprise.’”

This is saying that they must take these programmes higher than they are doing right now. Ernst & Young also expressed hope that Government would place adequate attention on critical training in system maintenance for effective implementation.

I would like to read from another newspaper, page 6 of the *Express* of Wednesday, September 22, 2004.

“Gordon hits handout syndrome

It makes people dependent and unemployable.

Gordon said: ‘A team of experts recently undertook the study of one of our depressed urban areas and their instructive diagnosis of the problem was ‘social depression and learnt helplessness’.

He added: ‘That malaise is largely the result of ‘make-work programmes’ which were politically driven, but not carefully thought through and had the effect of institutionalising handouts; making them virtually a way of life for unemployed youths, many of whom became rudderless, dependent and unemployable’.

‘Tragically’, Gordon said, ‘many degenerated into crime’.

He said, ‘People must have hope and this will not come from perpetuating ‘handouts’.’”

So, in a nutshell, Mr. Speaker, this is what the social programmes perpetuate. I want to lay emphasis on implementation, monitoring and evaluation, which I would elaborate on as I proceed to examine the social programme.

Mr. Speaker, the *Social Sector Investment Programme* document has listed 132 social programmes spread over 15 Ministries and the Tobago House of Assembly. Is it necessary for a small country as ours with a population of less than 1.3 million persons to have so many social programmes? With the introduction of so many social programmes, we are creating a welfare state among the developed nations. So for a First World status in 2020, we would be the most developed welfare state.

9.10 p.m.

I am not anticipating where we are heading with the proliferation of social programmes but I am also reading into the Government’s sinister intentions in the introduction of a plethora of social programmes. I have reviewed the various social programmes and realized that a number of social programmes exist only in names. I contacted some of the social agencies and they had indicated to me that they are hearing about some of those programmes for the first time. In a number of instances, neither the Appropriation Bill nor the social sector investment document contained any allocations or targets. Some of these programmes were not assigned to any ministry and funds were allocated to them.

Mr. Speaker, let me look at some aspects of the social programmes. The scope, content and intent of the social programmes are very descriptive, attractive

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and enticing. The descriptive language used to market the social programme could easily influence someone. The social programmes lack developmental content. A review of the *Social Sector Investment Programme, 2005* indicates a range of beneficiaries and in some instances, beneficiaries are segregated into males and females. These indicate the quantum of beneficiaries. These social programmes are evaluated therefore on the basis of the quantum of beneficiaries delivered, or the number of citizens who obtain services. This Government feels contented when the quantum of beneficiaries increases year after year. After all, those statistics enable the Government to bask in glory.

Mr. Speaker, this Government measures performance by its spending.

This particular approach to social programmes will go down well in the areas of permanent disability, for example old age pension, disabled persons and those who are handicapped. What of those who choose poverty? There is a new group of people who are coming into the society—those who can do good, but because of the types of programmes that the Government is introducing, they are now choosing poverty—and whose membership increase from year to year and the Government feels justified to increase the allocation for a greater number of beneficiaries. This could be ascribed to programmes such as the SHARE Programme.

Social programmes, especially those with the training component, are easily evaluated on the basis of the number of beneficiaries. The Government's tools of quantum to evaluate social programmes have resulted in a form of musical chairs. What happens is that one person gets into a programme, after that programme is terminated they move to another programme, spend some time there and then go on to another programme. This is what the Government counts. Once you are there in a particular programme, they take a head count. You go to a second programme and you are counted there as well. You go to a third programme and you are counted there as well. At the end of the day, you are getting figures that are not quite true. We need to find another way of doing surveys to take the count of these people.

The critical element in social programmes is not the total number that benefited or were exposed to the training or remedial education. The critical ingredient is the end result of the training or enhancing initiative. What the recipient did with the loan, grant or newly acquired skills is the developmental component of social programmes, which must be evaluated and used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

The developmental component of social programmes needs very effective benchmarking. This is what is also lacking in all the social programmes. In other

words, clearly defined targets of how many persons who are trained, should be placed in employment. Government is obliged to introduce mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the end results of the recipients of social investment. To what extent those who obtained loans become sustainable and in fact created additional employment or added value to what they received? To what extent or what percentage of those who obtained skills from vocational education been successful in obtaining employment? This type of evaluation would lead to changes in the social programme and eventually a decline in the amount of allocation. In other words, success leads to the sustainable development component, which is lacking in Government's social programmes. The success of a social programme is to obtain information about the end result and to evaluate the training, if it enabled the beneficiaries, to obtain employment. Do not just train citizens and leave them there and they are forgotten afterwards. The Government needs to conduct tracer studies.

The other problem is that the same programmes continue year after year. This is one problem. We find that these programmes are being repeated. Therefore, they are not giving the persons who are trained any particular skills that they could use to gain jobs.

Mr. Speaker, an individual could become more frustrated when he is trained with no available employment opportunities, rather than when he is untrained. It means that training must be tied with employment projections, and systems must be put in place to make that connection.

It is convincingly clear that Government's social sector programmes, in its present form, will only perpetuate intergeneration poverty as the dependency syndrome grows. There are 132 social programmes in 15 ministries. More funding is committed to these programmes and poverty is increasing. This sends a strong message that these programmes are not really successful. Therefore, we have to re-think, re-look and re-programme these programmes, so that there will be an ultimate benefit to these people.

I want to look at two social programmes in particular. I want to look at the youth apprenticeship centres, formerly known as the youth camps and trade centres, which have been merged into MYPART and YTEPP. Youth camps were established on or after December 31, 1964 when there were few government secondary schools and more than 60 per cent of those who qualified could not get a secondary school place. At this time, primary school leavers who did not get a secondary place had limited opportunities for any form of advancement in academic or technical education. Around this time, three technical schools: John

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S. Donaldson Technical Institute, San Fernando Technical Institute and Point Fortin Vocational Centre could only accommodate a handful of technical trainees. The trade centres at Chaguanas, Bazilon Street, Malick and two others in Tobago were established in 1974, when the then oil boom caused a proliferation in the building industry and there was a dire shortage of persons trained in business skills.

Since 1964 and 1974, the entire landscape, that is, opportunities in vocational building skills, have changed drastically. We now have universal secondary education for all our children. In other words, the youth camps and trade centres are no longer required to take the slack generated from a lack of academic or technical school places. We can no longer justify the existence of youth camps and trade centres. Apart from our inability to justify the youth camps and trade centres, the financial support of residential institutions where food, shelter and clothing are provided, can prove to be quite expensive. These institutions are not only duplicating the training of our youths, they have been used as scapegoats to provide lucrative jobs for the boys. It would be interesting to see the cost of food, administration to the managers and camp directors and the cost of foodstuff. We should use these funds to strengthen the TTIT.

YTEPP was established in 1988, with a World Bank loan, to train the backlog of 20,000 youths who graduated from the secondary school system and who acquired very little vocational education, because the secondary school system was not well organized. YTEPP's was given a mandate to complete the training over a period of 10 years, after which the World Bank funding would have ended. Since 1998, it has been funded by the Central Government. The continued retention of YTEPP means that our secondary school system is still badly organized and failing. This is something we need to address. If even graduates continue to be ill-equipped, there are a host of other institutions which can take up the slack. Among those include the continuation classes of the said secondary schools, the National Energy Skills Centres, the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology, adult education programmes of the community development division and vocational courses at the national youth centres, technical institutes and the life long learning centres.

Has there been any tracer studies done to determine the effectiveness of YTEPP and to what extent the graduates have been able to obtain jobs? The only justification for the continued retention of this programme is that it continues to provide jobs for the PNM activists. Recently, certain persons who have been employed with the programme from the inception and who assisted in its viability have had their services discontinued for reasons that they are perceived to be UNC members and known PNM supporters have replaced them.

I would like to read from the Community Development Scholarship Programmes in the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2005*. Page 12 lists one of the programmes as a community development scholarship programme. It is stated that 203 persons actually benefited from these courses. I would like to know whether these scholarships were advertised, what criteria were used, who selected and interviewed those persons, what scholarships were given and in what areas of studies? I would like to know whether this was a programme of reward to PNM activists.

I go to another section of the PSIP. I want to take a look at the community centres, refurbishment and construction programmes. I quote from page 35 of this document:

“The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs continued its construction and rehabilitation programmes at community and civic centres nationwide. The sum of \$9.2 million was spent on the refurbishment of community centres in Cane Farm, Tacarigua, La Romain, Hermitage, Vance River, Point Fortin, Sobo Village, La Brea and Mayo.”

I called the names of nine community centres at a cost of \$9.2 million for refurbishment.

Let us take a look at what the THA did in Tobago.

“The THA’s programme of social and community services aimed at strengthening communities, utilized \$2.0 million for the following activities:

- completion of construction of the Golden Lane Community Centre at a cost of \$1.0 million;
- upgrade of community centres at Mt. St. George, Glamorgan, Patience Hill, Mt. Grace, Signal Hill, Les Coteaux, Goodwood, Speyside, Charlotteville, Lambeau, Castara, Whim and Delaford at \$0.7 million;”

They refurbished 13 community centres in Tobago for \$0.7 million and we used \$9.2 million in Trinidad to refurbish nine community centres, while it took \$1 million to build one in Tobago. I want to know about the disparity. One would think that the cost of material in Tobago would be higher. I do not want to elaborate on it, but it shows that something is not quite correct.

9.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am now going to quote from page 30 of the budget statement which states:

“Sites and Services Programme:

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Under the Sites and Services Programme, the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee is about to award contracts for the completion of infrastructure works on 107 lots, as well as contracts for the design layout and infrastructure works for four (4) sites comprising 811 lots.

In addition, SILWC expects to complete an additional 50 housing units by the end of fiscal 2005.”

These are generalized statements. The hon. Minister of Finance needs to inform this House of the beneficiaries of these housing lots and houses to be developed and constructed by the SILWC. As far as I am aware, I do not think that we have sugar workers in the country. All sugar workers have been forced to take voluntary separation plan and the company was disbanded.

As a matter of fact, I read in the newspaper, a few days ago, where the factory at Brechin Castle was vandalized, as well as properties in other areas. I also read that valuable equipment, accessories and fertilizers were stolen from these buildings. A statement was made to the effect that nothing was wrong if a few million dollars went missing by thieving, because it would have been more expensive to put security to guard the property and equipment. Mr. Speaker, I ask the question: Is this a la carte PNM style?

Several persons have reported to me that PNM friends and supporters have helped themselves to valuable equipment and accessories. I would say more about that matter at another time.

Is the hon. Minister of Finance aware that the SILWC is constrained by law? The Sugar Welfare Special Fund Act is to develop lands for houses and only to provide housing loans to sugar workers and cane farmers? Is the Minister also aware that the former sugar workers are entitled, by law, to source services of the SILWC even when a person ceases to be a sugar worker? It would be rather interesting to see who are the beneficiaries of those housing lots and houses.

Dr. Moonilal: That is a good point.

Mr. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, I now come to a very innovative point that I want to raise here. At present, the country is experiencing a healthy balance of payment, but the resources are not trickling down to persons who are most in need. We are not seeing visible or sustainable results from a range of social programmes which are, in fact, handouts. In fact, poverty is a burning issue.

My recommendation here tonight is for Members of Parliament to be given an annual allocation of \$5 million in the first instance. Some of the funds must be

used to promote and undertake innovative and sustainable projects under a prime minister's award scheme for outstanding, sustainable poverty alleviation programmes. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Lucky: Very good.

Mr. S. Panday: Innovative.

Mr. N. Baksh: There should be checks and balances for that programme. An opportunity will be provided for Members of Parliament to utilize their peculiar situation to develop and generate projects, which are geared towards the delivery of skills and the generation of employment.

Dr. Moonilal: I already have one.

Mr. N. Baksh: I am confident that parliamentarians on both sides would like to be put to the test and contribute positively towards poverty eradication. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to matters in the 2005 budget which address the crime situation. I know that my colleagues will examine those measures to control and curb crime in greater detail. I feel compelled to register my disappointment with the continued emphasis on generalization.

I am now going to read from page 24 of the budget statement which deals with national security. It states:

“Mr. Speaker, we continue the battle to curb the unprecedented level of criminal activity plaguing the country today.

This Government's policy is to ensure the safety and security of all residents and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. To achieve this objective the Ministry of National Security and its various Divisions and Agencies have embarked on a wide-ranging series of initiatives.”

Mr. Speaker, what are those initiatives?

“The Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago, under Brigadier Joseph, is now fully operational and is performing an increasingly important role in the country's fight against crime.

The implementation of cutting-edge technology combined with improved intelligence is being accelerated and allocations to the Ministry of National Security have been increased with special funding being provided to treat with certain crime hot spots.

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In terms of equipment, the Service was provided with, among other things: 16 Computer Systems, 2,050 Bullet Proof Vests, 630 Police Safety Vests, and 100 new vehicles to be deployed to Police Stations in specific crime prone areas.”

Mr. Speaker, this Government has been in power for the last three years, and crime has been the No. 1 problem since then, yet, we are only hearing generalized statements being made and no specifics on how they are going to address crime. The citizens are crying out for specific measures on Government’s initiatives to curb crime in the country. In Trinidad and Tobago, we are classified as No. 1 in crime and murders in the Caribbean. Like myself, to date, over 210 families have suffered from the hands of criminals. Citizens have lost their loved ones and the police do not seem to have the ability to control the spate of crime in the country.

Every week, citizens advised me that the same individuals who were arrested are the ones who murdered my son, Ashmead. To date, it has been five months since this has happened. Citizens have also advised me that the said family continues to terrorize the neighbourhood. They have been doing this for years, and the police are helpless. The police are not equipped with the training and high-tech equipment as the criminals.

Mr. Speaker, I am tempted at times to hold the Government responsible for my son’s death. They are failing to provide the necessary tools and equipment for persons who are required to address the law. Specific leads have been provided and the police service is now talking about cloned phones. This is a problem that they have come up with as they follow the lead in my son’s murder. There must be some technology to break the criminals’ codes. They called my son on several occasions and the phone numbers that were used cannot be decoded to date. How will the list of initiatives that I have read solve the problem? This is a frightening situation. This has happened to me once, and I have the fear that this could repeat itself. No one is safe today. The criminals are being given all the protection. How will it be possible for citizens to place their trust and confidence in this Government if the police are not provided with sophisticated and advanced technology that are needed to fight crime?

The Prime Minister, spoke in veiled language with regard to the safety and security of our citizens. He should tell us what measures have been put in place to deal with crime. The citizens want to feel secure. His plans must not come as a surprise birthday party, or like a thief in the night. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to turn now to the National Insurance Scheme. I have heard some comments made with respect to this scheme. Following my research and contribution to the

debate on the last amendment of the National Insurance Act, citizens from all over Trinidad and Tobago have reported certain anomalies to me with respect to that scheme, and it is affecting their quantum of benefits.

In the Prime Minister's budget statement, the hon. Minister of Finance failed to provide any relief to persons who were adversely affected by the current provisions of the National Insurance Act. All the Prime Minister said on the subject matter was that under pension reform, phase 2, which deals with review and modernization of the National Insurance Scheme, will take place upon completion of the Seventh actuarial review of the NIS and its findings and recommendations thereon.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister's response was very vague. This is the usual approach of this Government to make general statements. No date was given for the completion of this report. How long contributors must wait for their legitimate grievances to be addressed? I shall use a few minutes of my time to address certain critical areas of the NIS operations.

I refer now to Act No. 9 of 2004, Chap. 32:01. In that section, provisions are made in the Act for stepchildren and adopted children, but not for children in legal custody. So, while the court could award provision of custody of children, you would find that those children cannot benefit from NIS. So, this is an anomaly that needs to be addressed.

With respect to retirement pension, on May 03, 1999, the NIS Act stipulated that persons over 60 years old and who are in receipt of a pension, and would have returned to work and had their pension suspended are made to contribute at regular rates accordingly to their income.

On the other hand, Act. No. 9 of 2004 says that persons who qualified for pension after March 01, 2004, could resume employment and retain NIS pension and pay no contribution. That is discrimination. The pensioner who retired on March 01, 2004 and is in receipt of a pension and has resumed employment, that person's pension was suspended. That person was required to pay contribution in accordance with his or her salary. Persons who were qualified for pension on or after May 01, 2004, can resume employment, retain pension and pay no contribution. This is another area that we need to look at. This practice is gross discrimination. This is an anomaly which must be regularized.

Mr. Speaker, the last actuarial report recommended that NIS pension should be on par with old age pension which is \$1,000. If that was the basis on which NIS

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was to be increased, today, old age pension is now \$1,150. Therefore, NIS pension should now move up correspondingly to match old age pension.

The survivor's benefit of a person in receipt of class 1 pension was \$216. Prior to October 01, 2003 that sum was increased to \$268.67. The survivor's benefit of a person in receipt of class 6 pension was \$513.50. Prior to October 01, 2003, that sum was increased to \$636.74. After October 01, 2003, they are both receiving the minimum pension of \$1,000 per month.

9.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the problem arises for the survivor's benefit, because you have two different grades, and it moved up to \$1,000. Since both were receiving \$1,000, upon death, both widows will be expecting the same quantum of survivor's benefit. However, according to Table 3, Part I of Act No. 9 of 2004, the widow whose husband was in class I, \$268.67 per month, will only get \$161.20 per month, while the widow of the pensioner in class 6, \$636.74, will get \$382.07; so there is a disparity. The anticipation of both widows will be the same; therefore, we need to address this as well.

I turn now to medical expenses. Legal Notice 28 says in section 2, which is a new clause included, that regulation 6 of the National Insurance Medical Expenses Regulations is amended by inserting after the word "expenses", the words "and provided that the insured person can show proof that he met those expenses". Let me explain the difficulty here: When the insured is hospitalized and his dependents are required to pay costs, could he prove that he met those expenses, if he is dead or unconscious? We need to remove this aspect of it, so that they could continue to receive that benefit. This clause should be removed; it is most unfair. It is an attempt by the National Insurance Board (NIB) to avoid payment.

Let me look at some administrative matters. There is the post of medical advisor in the NIS. There has been one medical advisor since 1972. He administers sickness, employment injury and invalid benefits. He only works one day per week, on a Wednesday, and if he attends tribunal, which is also on a Wednesday, then that day is lost. So you see what the problem is there; that is why we have a backlog of those cases. They could put the guy to work every day; that is one solution.

The NIS Appeal Tribunal has jurisdiction to deal with appeals relating to benefits only. If there is a dispute in respect of contributions or any matter other than benefits, there is no adjudication body. We need to widen the scope for the tribunal to adjudicate on all NIS matters. The tribunal has no power to subpoena witnesses to appear and give evidence; it is left to appellants to beg and even pay

witnesses to appear and secure their cases. This is another problem. The tribunal should be given the power to subpoena witnesses to appear before it. If a contributor is dissatisfied with the ruling of the tribunal, he can take his case further to the High Court, which is expensive. A tribunal commissioner should be appointed with the status of a High Court judge. This practice currently obtains in Great Britain.

The National Insurance Scheme regulations, Legal Notice 26 of 2004 says that individual claims for benefits must be submitted within three months; failure could result in loss of benefits. On the other hand, the board can take as much as three years before a decision is taken; this practice is most unfair. A penalty should be imposed on the board when payment is not made within a similar period. [*Crosstalk*]

Why is there delay in dealing with the self-employed? How can the question of contributions be addressed? Use the practice of the health surcharge system for self-employed persons, to establish who they are and to have them covered under the NIS system, as established in the case of voluntary contributions. So we have a way to solve the problem of the self-employed.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to social welfare, where we have an increased allowance for the disabled. The grant has now moved up to \$800, but it is so difficult for these people to get that money, because the means test is at a minimum of \$300. So if you have someone getting assistance from a relative or friend of \$200 or \$300 per month, that could debar them from getting the grant, because the means test has a ceiling of \$300 per year. You would appreciate that persons with disabilities have more expenses and are in greater need; this is a form of discrimination to those people. [*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, I thank you and my colleagues as well.

I spoke about the disabled who are receiving this grant, but let me also make a point here for the Caroni pensioners, who are only receiving \$650 per month; we need to address that. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: The minimum is \$1,000.

Mr. N. Baksh: If you say that, I accept that it is so. I got a call this morning to inform me that it was \$650; but I accept what you have said.

I turn my attention, a little, to Caroni (1975) Limited and the sugar industry. This Government has clearly indicated in its 2004/2005 budget that it has no clear-cut policy on agriculture. It has been two years since lands were promised to the sugar workers and they have still not been distributed. In the Caroni (1975) Limited closure and restructuring programme, it was stated that private farmers would supply sugarcane to produce 75,000 to 80,000 tonnes of sugar for local market and export. This year only 610,000 tonnes of cane were bought to produce 42,000 tonnes of sugar. That tc/ts ratio was about 15 tonnes to one tonne of sugar, which is extremely high. This was as a result of the haphazard manner in which fields were allocated for harvesting, so it caused a shortfall in this target.

This year, up to early September, farmers were still collecting chemicals and fertilizers, when the fields should have already been fertilized since April, May or June. Because of this uncertainty, farmers are reluctant to replant or even work their existing crops. Because of Government's attitude towards the sugar industry and cane farmers, it has left a certain amount of uncertainty in the minds of farmers regarding the future of the industry.

Most farmers do not even have a valid contract to supply cane to the Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited and now there is talk of renewing contracts for a period of two years. How on earth can you give a contract for two years, when cane produces ratoons that last from five to 10 years or more? After all the efforts taken to plough lands, produce ratoons and maintain the fields, the Government wants to give a contract for two years. We recommend that the Government give the farmers contracts for a minimum of five years, as was previously done by Caroni (1975) Limited or if the Government knows that it is their intention to do away with sugar cane farming, then it should do the honourable thing and compensate the farmers.

The increase of \$10 per tonne was really an insult to farmers. This pittance had to be passed onto their cane cutters and for expenses in fuel and maintenance of their vehicles. Sugar cane cultivation and production is viable in Jamaica, Belize and Guyana, why not in Trinidad and Tobago? It needs Government support and there is no indication that it is willing to do this.

Mr. Speaker, I heard about many of my colleagues who made requests to Ministers for improvements in their constituencies. I want to raise some issues in that regard as well. As a former public servant, I am aware that very early in the

year estimates are prepared by ministries for inclusion in the budget. With that experience, I took the opportunity to write a couple of Ministers seeking to get some programmes and projects into their budget estimates for 2005. Very often we hear the term “discrimination”; I said that the only way to test this was to identify and take part in it and see whether that was going to work.

In April of this year I wrote to the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs. For each of those ministries, I provided a list of critical projects for the constituency of Naparima. Only two Ministers acknowledged my letter: one is the Minister of Works and Transport and the other was the Minister of Public Utilities. I thank them both.

Arising out of a meeting with the Minister at the Princes Town Regional Corporation, he promised some work would be done there. Some started and he promised that some would start very soon, so we look forward to that, but there are some other critical areas. I suggested utilizing some of the tasker roads; my colleague raised that here as well. There is one tasker road from the Barrackpore Police Station, the cemetery road that links with the tasker road straight across to Iere Village. That is an ideal road for development; it will take you right across. If you observe the pattern of all the roads, this takes you from east to west. That is the only route that takes you from north to south across the entire region. This is a worthwhile project.

9.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the Minister of Works and Transport that there is a critical drainage problem on the northern side of Ciperio Road, Golconda. You know, since the extension of that highway which ended just at the back of the Golconda Community Centre, all the water was brought into that drain known as the stella drain. This has been walled and paved up to the Ciperio Road, but just as you go across on the northern side of that road, there are no box drains there. If you look at the first house on that corner, the walls are cracking. In fact, the owners took me there and showed me even the tiles on the floor are now lifting. If we stay too long we may have to pay costs, so now is the time to do a little of it. I am saying, if you cannot do the entire drain up to the Hindu temple, do that part which would push the thing a little further down. I ask that you consider that very seriously and urgently.

There is another urgent one with regard to the construction of a footpath. Those of you who travel the Manahambre Road just in the vicinity of the Jordan

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Hill Presbyterian School, will recognize that there is pavement on one side of the road and a bit of it on the other side. But the manner in which this pavement is built is like a roller coaster, kind of thing; you keep going up and down. This is something we need to address. If we have to build pavements to accommodate the handicapped, we cannot be going up and down like that. Sometimes you stop suddenly at an edge and there is no pavement. You have to go through somebody's driveway, or something like that.

My point here is, that is a very busy road. You could hardly get across to the other side. Some parents who live within a quarter mile of that school told me they have to hire transport to take their children to and from school, because there is no pavement there. I see they started doing some work just at the La Paille end of it, but at the rate they are going, it is too slow. We need to go a little eastward there. I have other activities on this list but I know that the Minister looked at it and we would talk to him later on it. But those are some of the critical projects.

With regard to drainage, I want to commend the Minister because I got a number of drainage works done: realigning of the Oropouche River and a number of the drains and so on. So I am satisfied. We need to look at the Realize Road and Rochard-Douglas Road, which are common boundaries between the Member of Parliament for Princes Town and myself. I know there is work taking place on the St. Mary's Road but I hope they could come down to the Rochard-Douglas Road, which is very critical. *[Interruption]* Well, if you are looking at that, you would have to look at the Cunjal Road. That is from Realize Road. I could take you around and walk about in that area.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to take the opportunity to publicly commend and thank the Minister of Public Utilities, the Member for Arima. She had requested from us a list of areas where we need street lighting, electricity and water extensions. I must admit that I have started getting some street lights. They are in touch with me—*[Desk thumping]* There are only two Ministers doing that so far, you know. The others have to do it. Both of them are very unassuming and they are delivering. I have a list of the areas here and I hope that it continues. In fact, people are coming to me when they see the street lights going up and saying that they did not get in their area. You see, a good political strategy is that they must come to the Member of Parliament's office now to talk so that they could negotiate for the utilities.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I hope you are telling them it is the PNM who is delivering.

Mr. N. Baksh: I said so; I said the Minister. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, although I have a list of about 10 projects for the Ministry of Local Government, the first one is very critical. The bridge at the Mussrap Trace across the Oropouche River has been removed since 1996 when the watercourse of that river was straightened and realigned and it became much wider than the original river. Since then, this bridge has been down. A pedestrian walk was built across the bridge and that is halfway down the river now as well. So when it floods the children are unable to cross. That is also an agricultural area and people are finding it difficult to take their produce and sugarcane across to the scales, which are very near—the No. 2 and No. 3 scales. They now have to take a very long route with their carts and so on. I am asking that this bridge be built. It is going to be an expensive bridge. I understand the estimate is about \$1 million and I see the allocation for local government under “Bridges” is \$1 million, so we have to talk about this.

Under the Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs, I have asked for a community centre because I see that no community center was constructed last year and none listed for this year as well. I am recommending the St. John’s Village Community Centre. I know the Minister taught in that area before so I hope that she would be amenable to having a community centre there.

I have a number of other things here but I will consider bringing my contribution to a close. I wish to thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Motion made and question proposed, That this House do now adjourn to Monday, October 18, 2004, at 1.30 p.m. [Hon. K. Valley]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.02 p.m.