

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Tuesday, October 19, 2004*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

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

[SIXTH DAY]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Miss Gillian Lucky (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Mr. Speaker, thanks very much. This morning, while going through the newspapers in order to ensure that my contribution this morning was as current as possible, I was confronted while taking notes of all the persons who are deemed to have been executed, all the crime statistics that now make it clear that we have a crisis of great proportion on our hands when it comes to crime, and I was confronted as I said with what I can only describe as a most obscene, crude ridiculous, worrying advertisement, printed boldly in one of our newspapers. And I am not talking about the picture that takes up most of the advertisement of the hon. Member for San Fernando East, but the fact that we have to have an advertisement printed on page 27 of today's edition of the *Newsday*, with the heading "Bringing The Budget to you' A people's celebration".

Mr. Speaker, what are we celebrating in this country? The fact that oil prices have increased and there is rampant squandermania under this administration? Is that what we are celebrating? Are we celebrating the fact that we have a junior Minister of National Security who could do nothing more yesterday, than criticize the contribution made by the Leader of the Opposition? When, obviously, he wanted to vent his frustration but he cannot, against his own leader, the Member for San Fernando East, a concept of course, we lawyers know is called transferred malice. He cannot criticize the Member for San Fernando East so he transfers the malice now to the Member for Couva North. That is how they fight crime.

What are we to celebrate in this country? The fact that our economy only looks as though it is doing so well, but if you were to look microscopically,

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clinically, and analytically, and you had recognized but for high oil price we would literally all be under the poverty line in Trinidad and Tobago? What does this Government want us to celebrate? The fact that the nation's resources are being squandered by this administration and not everybody is enjoying the benefit? Is that what we are supposed to celebrate? When I read this I thought if on this—and I say if on this side, we used to operate with a tit for tat approach, then we, too, should have some kind of meeting called “bringing the budget to you and nations funeral” because that is what is really taking place.

So there are Members on the other side celebrating that which ought not to be celebrated, they are therefore living in some other world and if they follow recent movies, maybe they are the “Matrix” or “Matrix Reloaded” and what is happening is what is the plight of persons, which is, our reality becomes those on the other side, their fantasy and what they do at this celebration is that they are inviting the entire population to come and celebrate and we can enjoy tassa, parang, chutney, and a tasty cook-up. Hopefully, none of the Members on the other side are cooking and a live broadcast on Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT) and 95.5, Citadel.

This is an insult for numerous reasons and I will state them: You go to the people to celebrate and after you present a budget with billions of dollars, fooling them, hoodwinking them, spreading propaganda, again gimmickry galore under this administration and you make them feel they have reason to celebrate when, in fact, they have reason to be very cautious that we do not find ourselves in the situation we found ourselves in the late 1970s and early 1980s when persons like myself, did not understand what happened to this day—to this day we do not understand what happened to this oil money we used to hear about. But we are told, come and celebrate.

The second reason I find this offensive is that you have not gone to the people before you present your budget. You do not make them a live part of any of the policies and principles you intend to enunciate and then tell everybody come let us celebrate. This is worse than what is called rum and roti politics.

The Member for Barataria/San Juan in his contribution yesterday made the point that what this Government would be doing when we read yesterday the chairman of the PNM party, the hon. Member for Ortoire/Mayaro said they were going to the people, the grass roots to find out from them what they want in the budget—this would be based after the budget debate is closed, they are going to ask people what they want. In other words, what the Member for Barataria/San Juan was saying yesterday is that this is a means of going to all of those, not everybody in our population, but to those persons who are supporters of the PNM,

and saying, “Listen guys, we have done it again.” Oil prices are high and squandermania is rampant. Let us celebrate. When we have this kind of boldfaced and unashamed advertising of something that we have nothing to be proud of, it worries me. It really, really worries me. Where are we going in this country?

Mr. Speaker, yesterday I took out my notepad, very religiously—and I use the word “religiously” whenever I go to talk about the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant’s contributions—to write the points that he was raising because he is the junior Minister in the Ministry of National Security. This hon. Member always boasts about the facts that he wants to fight crime, and he knows the problems, and he was a policeman, and he was an attorney; and if that is the best that the Member for Laventille East/Morvant can come up with, we have much to worry about when it comes to national security in this country.

When the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant said that he is not going to point fingers at anybody, and when he was in Opposition, he never pointed fingers at the UNC and blamed them for crime, he is right. It is not simply that he never pointed a finger and blamed the UNC administration for crime, the truth is he could not point a finger and blame the UNC for crime because crime was reducing.

In other words, you stand up and tell the population that they should not blame us because we did not blame them. The UNC administration had results and statistics and empirical evidence to show that it was working to ensure that we had a safe environment. I would hasten to add that that UNC administration had not completed all its work. Fighting crime is a work in progress.

Mr. Speaker, what worries me is the fact that there is an advertisement for a celebration and all contributions from the budget are not yet completed. So it goes to show that those on the other side do not listen to any single thing we have to say. They have the schedule; they have a time frame and anything the Opposition says is going to fall on deaf ears.

Mr. Speaker, throughout my contribution this morning, I intend to use independent persons to prove beyond a reasonable doubt, based on the assessment of these independent persons, most of whom I do not know, to show that there are people in this society who are prepared to put the politics aside and to tell the Government they are doing nonsense, to wake up and smell the coffee and start acting in the national interest. Thank God, we have people like that still.

When I heard the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant talking about what the Member for Caroni East had raised, and he sought to dismiss it by saying it was a scandal without foundation, I said to myself, how could those on the other side be so quick to assess this situation if they do not have all the facts before them.

When I heard the Member use the word “foundation”, what immediately came to mind was a vision of all those trucks moving bags of cement, nails, sharp sand—so when he says it is a scandal without foundation what is he trying to say? It is a scandal, perhaps, he knows how much more material was moved and we just do not have the documentary evidence.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to another point. I have always said that one must err on the side of caution and not be quick to jump and point fingers at persons. What I found amazing; I really found this amazing: that two Members on the opposite side were able to dismiss the very outrageous situation that the Member for Caroni East was able to ventilate thankfully, in the Parliament where it is supposed to be ventilated, and there were two Members on the opposite side dismissing the incident by saying that was nothing. It is only circumstantial evidence.

Mr. Speaker, people in this country have been committed for murder and found guilty based on circumstantial evidence.

When a judge is directing a jury on the law and all that the prosecution has been able to put before the jury are circumstantial facts, the judge tells the jury the words to the effect, that circumstantial evidence is powerful evidence. So it showed me that on the other side there are Members who are just prepared to parrot things that they just do not know. Saying, yes, yes, you could dismiss it, it is circumstantial evidence. That is the level of ignorance they prefer to live in rather than to try to, perhaps, use the advice “when in doubt, shut you mouth”; but no, when they are ignorant they feel they could say what they want. And another Member said, all the Member for Caroni East produced was documentary evidence.

Mr. Speaker, documentary evidence is deemed to be also very powerful evidence. Notice to date, and I have made sure before my contribution, I have checked in all the public places and records that I can, that carried the story, the incident and the facts as related by the Member for Caroni East. To this date, no one has said that the documents as presented in this Parliament by the Member for Caroni East are documents which are fraudulent or forged and I put that on record now. They have never said it.

10.15 a.m.

They were quick to bawl, “Thief! Thief!” and it made me wonder if that is in their mind; if that is what they are doing. It is said that when you quickly say “Thief! Thief!” it really means that is what you may be doing and that is what you jump quickly to say. When we talk about fairness, principles of fairness and fair play, equity and justice, under this administration, we will never be able to uphold the principles of integrity expected of persons who hold high office.

When the Member for Laventille East/Morvant was speaking, he was gloating about the fact that, for the second time, he wanted to repeat that there would be a radar system introduced in this country. I want to put on record again that when the Member for Laventille East/Morvant said he wanted to say it twice, he was right, but he did not have to say it twice. The budget presentation for the year 2003/2004 spoke about the installation of a radar system; and in the budget presentation for the year 2004/2005, we are again hearing about the same radar system that was supposed to be up and running; and we are hearing that it is going to be up and running.

At the end of this contribution, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that we will realize and deal with it frontally, that when it comes to national security, there has been a mere photocopy of all the unfulfilled promises made in the budget presentation of 2003/2004.

As I come to the end of dealing with the contribution made by the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, there were times when I went outside the Parliament and did not hear what he had to say. I know that in his contributions he loves to quote scripture and I sat here when he used the biblical story of the Garden of Eden. I said to myself, perhaps instead of mouthing all these quotations and stories from the Bible, maybe to really drive the point home, I should find a suitable quotation that would let that Member truly recognize what is going on. I will say, in fairness to him, that he respects the Bible. He may not use the verses appropriately, but he respects that Holy Book. I want to remind that Member, although he is not here—I know that the Member for Tobago East will go running quickly to tell him, so that he can run to some radio station tomorrow, perhaps Radio 90.5, sometime between 6.45 and 8 o'clock to answer.

This quotation is taken from Prov. 29:16.

“When evil people are in power, crime increases,

But the righteous will live to see the downfall of such people.”

Thank God Trinidad and Tobago still has righteous people.

Another contribution that caused me great concern was the contribution made by the Member for Arouca South, who, for some reason, is not here this morning. This puts me in such an awful position because I am a person who always feels passionately and strongly about the accuracy of what I am saying. I feel that when I make these criticisms of the contributions, I would like the makers to be present. *[Interruption]* I am always prepared to give way.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Chaguanas, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is on her legs and she is the only person entitled to speak in this Parliament at this time.

Miss G. Lucky: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am sorry that the Member for Arouca South is not here but, again, I am sure that there will be someone who will quickly run and tell her what I am saying. The Members on that side outnumber us, so I am sure that they will deal with it.

First of all, let me say to those on the other side that when the Member for Arouca South was speaking—perhaps the truth did drop from her lips on this limited point—she spoke about the Government making a quantum leap with this budget.

Let me put on record that “quantum” means miniscule and very small. [*Member for Arouca South takes her seat*] There is the Member for Arouca South. She should not use the word “quantum” unless what she was really saying, which is the truth, is that with this budget, the Government is making the country take a quantum leap, which is a very small leap. If that is how the Member sees it, so be it because that is what many independent observers are saying about this budget.

It is said that one must not use a hammer to kill a fly. I would like to say one must not send a fly to lift a hammer. I hasten to add, before anybody quotes any Standing Order, that I am not calling the Member for Arouca South an animal or likening her to any animal of any species. I am saying if, because of her portfolio, she is supposed to answer the giant, comprehensive contribution of the Member for St. Augustine, she had better prepare herself. She should not stand and try to answer someone whose integrity and credibility in this country remains so well intact, by using an analogy which to her may make sense, but to every other person who has some quantum intelligence does not.

I will go to the analogy immediately. The Member for Arouca South said—I cannot quote it verbatim, but her analogy was: Why must her Government be blamed because oil and gas prices were high? That is a reality. We agree with that. Secondly, she said that the Member for St. Augustine was saying that if we take away the oil and gas revenue, we are left with a deficit budget. That is what the Member for St. Augustine said.

The Member for Arouca South went on to say—in her conclusion—that, take for example, if you have a home—and she used a personal example—she said hypothetically if her husband and herself have a salary and her daughter, who is unemployed, does not have a salary; obviously, if you take away the husband's salary and her salary, when you pool everything together, what will be left is nothing.

Does the Member for Arouca South not understand that that was what the Member for St. Augustine was saying? Take away oil and gas revenue and see what you have left because the day will come when the oil price will fall and you will have to depend on other industries. If you keep fooling yourself into believing you are doing well because of the high price of oil, which you cannot control and which may fall, and fall drastically without notice, make sure you have something else on which to depend. I found the point so clear. I will make it clearer for the Member for Arouca South by using her analogy.

If her daughter is unemployed and has not gotten a CEPEP work or contract, and as a result she has no money and her father and mother continue to spoil her and do not tell her to go out and work, and keep encouraging her to depend on their salaries—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for giving way. Just as a matter of clarity, my daughter is at university studying law. She does not need a CEPEP job. She is not employed. She is supported by her parents. She came in the top 100 of the students who did the Common Entrance examination, and she is doing very, very well at university. Thank you very much.

Miss G. Lucky: Mr. Speaker, that is not the point. That is why I made it clear that when you do not go to a personal level—and I was not going there. I am happy her daughter is doing so well. I hope one day she will become a great lawyer, which no doubt she will become, because she has probably gotten the genetic and mental capacity of her father and she will come and advise the PNM correctly. I hope so, but that is not my point.

Let us not call it her daughter. The Member for Arouca South should have done what a wise lawyer would do, and that is to use a hypothetical case. She chose to personalize her example, which is typical PNM style—to personalize to make a point to get emotional points. However, when you jam them back with their analogy to show them why it was so inappropriate, they cannot take the jamming. They can never take the jamming.

I am saying—and now let me lift the standard of debate—not resorting to the use of her child and herself as the Member should have done and say that if parents have a child who, for whatever reason, is unemployed—it might be age; it might be incapacity at the time—what good parents have to do is to make sure the child is given the nourishment and the direction and everything else to put him or her in a position that one day that child could take care of himself or herself.

Under this PNM administration, with such a great dependency syndrome on oil and gas, history proved, when oil prices went to an all-time low, that the PNM

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government had squandered the money and that is why we had the great recession in the country that we had. What we are very worried about is that we are headed back down that road. All we are trying to do is to prevent it.

There is another very interesting observation that I made. I am sure that all of us on this side noticed it. When any Member on the other side stood to make his or her respective contribution, they all began with great accolades to the Member for San Fernando East. [*Interruption*] Nothing is wrong with that if it is deserving and sincere.

When, for example, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has to stand and read words that cannot fit on a Hallmark card because it is so long and he has to read from a prepared text, I get very worried. It means that he is not speaking from his heart. He is not even speaking from his mind. He is speaking from a prepared text as though he is saying, "Please, please hold back that commission of enquiry into the health sector because I know I will look bad, real bad." That is how it makes me feel. If we are here to do the nation's business, let us really do the nation's business.

When I heard the Member for Laventille West making her contribution, she too praised her great leader and was saying all the projects that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs was involved in. I would be honest and say, yes, I was involved in a programme Caribbean Tarang and I, too, went to the ministry to access some of the support needed for the programme. I would be first to admit that the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and the junior Minister, the Member for Laventille West, were very supportive. If I have to give Jack his or her jacket, I will give it; but based on this budget, I have no jackets to give. This budget does not deserve the kind of great commendation coming from the mouths of those on the other side who have clearly not studied the document but prefer to make sure that they say to their great leader, "Oh, thank you for what you have given my ministry, please do not have me removed and please, if I need more money, I want to be able to come back to you." Is that what the budget debate has become in this country?

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, when the Member for Arouca South was speaking, she was saying all the things that she felt that we in the Opposition were not supporting by not supporting the budget. She itemized some of the projects and programmes. I want to tell the Members on the other side and those who are listening dispassionately, independently and in a discerning fashion, what the Opposition does not support in this budget is the lack of transparency and accountability in

the distribution of the State resources. That is what we do not support. What we are recognizing, amongst other things, is that this budget is really a platform to launch unchecked and unmonitored expenditure and squandering of State resources. Enough said, point made.

I am very mindful of what you indicated to us yesterday about the use of newspaper articles and reading them. I want to make it clear, as I have said before, that I intend to rely on newspaper articles, not reading them, as was pointed out to us, *in toto*, but really to highlight those critical comments made by independent persons, in order to support the arguments. In other words, there are those who do not understand and I choose to ignore them. In the *Sunday Guardian* of October 17, 2004, on page 5 it is stated:

“Pantin proposes ‘rentier’ economy
...move away from gas and oil”

In this particular article, written by Michelle Loubon

“Economist Dr. Dennis Pantin said T&T should not place all its dependence on oil and natural gas, but look toward diversifying the economy.”

The rest of the article, which I commend to those on the other side because they have not read it, just substantiates the position and buttresses the concern raised by Members on this side, that we are going back to the syndrome of depending too much on oil and gas and we are doing nothing more. [*Interruption*]

I do not have to tell Barbados. I lived in Barbados for two years. It amazed me that while, under the PNM regime, rates for telephone calls were so expensive, under Bartel, they did not have to pay a cent for local calls in Barbados. That used to amaze me. I used to feel sorry for Barbados when I thought all they have is the tourist industry. I then recognized that their currency was so much more than ours in terms of value. I then recognized that maybe they had a much better administration than the PNM administration we have had to endure. We should never be in the position we are in today, never, ever.

Mr. Speaker, last year when the budget was presented by the Member for San Fernando East, much of his contribution and focus dealt with national security. In the presentation for 2003/2004, it was the first time this country heard about a promotion, appointment and creation of a special unit called the Special Anti-Crime Unit. We were told last year, with the use of big, brave words and gun talk, that the administration was waging war against criminals and there were so many programmes, policies and promises that were made. So much so, that Ernst &

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Young Tax Advisory Services, in their publication, *Focus on Trinidad & Tobago Budget 2004*—I am speaking about last year’s budget—had this to say when they came to discuss national security:

“The crime levels in Trinidad and Tobago have soared to unprecedented levels within recent times, and this has impacted negatively on investor confidence. Any initiative must be supported by necessary framework and effective enforcement measures, and must be implemented within the shortest possible time frame. Focus on training of law enforcement personnel must be sustained and working conditions improved.”

Ernst & Young recognized, from last year, that if any of the proposals enunciated by the Member for San Fernando East were to work, there had to be proper implementation.

What does the article on page 5 of the *Sunday Guardian* of September 26, 2004 have to say in assessing the performance or nonperformance of that Ministry?

“Budget deliveries for 2004

Promises fulfilled & broken”

What is interesting is that for the Ministries of Health and National Security, there is the greatest number of broken promises. This is what was said about the performance in that Ministry over the last year.

“Despite putting a new Minister in National Security—Martin Joseph—in the past year, the crime rate continues to spiral to frightening heights—the murder toll to date stands at nearly 190 this year,...”

It was 190 on September 26. Today, October 19, 2004, it is 215.

“kidnapping and robberies continued and so bad was the situation that two months ago, a strong call for a state of emergency to combat crime was at the height of public debate.

The special crime fighting unit was established but its operations remained unknown and dubious. The police computerisation system is still to take effect, community policing has stopped, and prison reform, as promised failed to take place, prompting the Chief Justice Sat Sharma to make this the main focus of his speech two weeks ago at the opening ceremony of the law term. As for the new legislation, the Government also completely failed to get Opposition support on the controversial Police Reform Bills earlier this year, despite a costly advertising campaign to beg for public support.”

In other words, what was recognized by persons who are assessing the performance of this Government is that when it comes to performance, this Government is a dismal failure. That is the reality that we have to face in the country. Unless we are able to find some mechanism to force this Government to perform and really provide national security in this country, we are really going to be in major problems.

Mr. Speaker, about two months ago, I was very moved and inspired by some words that I saw boldly displayed on the walls of a Government building in the US. The words said: “The true administration of justice is the firmest pillar of good governance”. What hurts me, Mr. Speaker, is that for a statement that is so true and talks about philosophy that is so attainable, we here in Trinidad and Tobago, under a PNM regime, as it operates now, we will never be able to see the fulfilment of the true administration of justice. Therefore, we will never be able to get, under the PNM, good governance. Let me state from the outset that when I speak about the true administration of justice, I am not speaking about judicial officers and personnel, nor the extended Judiciary: the magistrates and those who operate in the Magistracy.

What I speak of, is the fact that in this country, there is no adherence by this Government to the tenets and principles of fairness and proper administration and justice.

When one looks at the state of our Magistrates’ Courts falling like dominos and the promises made in the budget 2003/2004, in which it was stated that Magistrates’ Courts were going to be built, I am very worried. When I read the promises made in the budget statement 2005, in that very minute section dealing with the Magistrates’ Courts that are going to be built, there is no mention of the Magistrates’ Court in San Fernando. Everybody would be able to bear testimony to the fact that San Fernando courts—deemed and said to be the industrial capital of Trinidad and Tobago, with statistics showing that after Port of Spain Magistrates’ Courts—have the most cases coming before the various magistrates sitting in their jurisdictions. One would have expected that the San Fernando Magistrates’ Courts would have gotten some kind of prominence in this budget presentation. Nowhere is there mention of the San Fernando Magistrates’ Courts.

The Member for Princes Town, who because of his court schedule is not here this morning, was one of the persons leading that charge and march with other lawyers asking that the San Fernando Magistrates’ Courts be given attention because lawyers were reaching to the stage that they were not able to function in the courts. Personnel had gone on strike, not because they wanted to, but because

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they cannot operate in conditions in which they get the stench coming from the holding cells below. Sometimes you are just walking on the roadway and hear the prisoners in their outbursts. You actually get the odour and the stench. The mere fact that people have to remain in those cells—remember these are persons who have not been found guilty; they are presumed innocent. These are the conditions in San Fernando.

I remember that the former Attorney General, Mrs. Morean-Phillips, when she was confronted with what was clearly a justifiable stance taken by the lawyers and personnel in San Fernando—that they were going to take action because of the non-functioning of the Government in terms of making proper provision for the courts—made a promise that there would be work started on that site in San Fernando. To date, nothing has been done.

Once again, just three weeks ago, there was an article in which some of the representatives of the Assembly of Southern Lawyers made the point that the Government is not getting the message. How can we have in this country the true administration of justice when those in power do not recognize that the buildings that are meant for officers to preside and make decisions about right, wrong and issues of law, are literally crumbling? How are we to have the true administration of justice? What excuse is this Government going to give for its non-performance, with respect to the refurbishment of the Magistrate's Courts, except to say that the former Attorney General, under whose watch, papers went missing? I am coming to those papers that went missing; documentary evidence that would have exonerated the UNC with respect to the Biche High School. Papers have gone missing.

When evidence is in the UNC's favour, papers go missing and that is not a problem. When there are papers and photocopies presented in the Parliament, to show some kind of impropriety, one person on the outside jumps up and says the papers were stolen. What is really happening in this country? Is it that the political divide is so great now that we cannot determine right from wrong? The former Attorney General, who obviously did a wrong, had to tell this nation that pertinent papers had gone missing when there should have been a clear paper chain. You must know if you gave somebody a job to do, they would have handed you, your secretary or your permanent secretary the papers. You must be able to do the paper trail. In instances of easy paper trails, this Government somehow miraculously and mysteriously is never able to get the evidence. That former Attorney General, instead of being demoted, chastised and made to apologize for her ridiculous term in office—for want of a better, maybe that is the best word—is promoted and given a wonderful chance to become an Ambassador in London.

What it goes to show under this regime is the more nonsensical your outburst, the worse your performance, the greater the reward. That can never be the true administration of justice.

Mr. Speaker, again I make the point that it amazes me that in instances in which we should be able to get evidence easily, we are never able to get it. Coming to mind right away is the incident with the Bajan fishermen. With that incident, there was a magistrate, a clerk, the police prosecutor, Morrison and an attorney in Tobago who was alleged to have given a statement to the press, indicating what he heard.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, what clearer evidence would have been available to get evidence to find out, once and for all, who made the telephone call, so that persons whose names are being called could say, "You see, it was not me." Instead, everybody goes silent and the country is expected to accept ridiculous statements from various Ministers saying that we should be happy; because what happened in that case, the end result was that our relations with Barbados are better. Is this Government saying that the end will also justify the means? If the end is not a noble one, then it really makes you question the means that this Government is using to achieve its own selfish ends and needs. That is worrying.

Once again, we question the true administration of justice, which is the firmest pillar of good governance. In this country, it is clear that we do not have good governance.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many police stations falling down. When the new Minister of National Security was appointed—that is Minister Martin Joseph—the first thing that the Minister boasted about was the fact that he was arranging an aerial view, to assess the police stations in the northeast and northern divisions. One police station that was going to be looked at in the northern division was Maracas.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Miss. G. Lucky: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, for extending my time. Mr. Speaker, that Minister of

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National Security, who is clearly worse than his predecessor— the former Minister, Howard Chin Lee—went to the savannah and was going into a helicopter. Apparently, the helicopter broke down, so the entire tour was cancelled.

Whereas that new Minister, the substantive Minister of National Security, Mr. Martin Joseph, would have wanted to appreciate visibly what was happening at the police station, the point is, if the helicopter broke down the Minister could have taken a car, a maxi, a taxi or drive in his own car, but an entire tour was postponed. That is the thinking. If one method does not work, do not try another method, just cancel it entirely. This Minister of National Security, Minister Joseph, has to be living in some other land.

In a *Guardian* newspaper article dated October 09, 2004 headlined: “Joseph promises value for money” it says:

““We have to make sure and spend the money in a way that we get value for money.””

Okay, he is right. He went on to say:

““Value for money is going to translate itself in our ability to continue to treat successfully with crime and criminal activity, so that the country could continue to enjoy a degree of safety and quality of life.””

In Minister Joseph’s mind, he was saying that presently we are getting value for money; that the Government will continue to treat successfully with the issue of crime; and the country would continue to enjoy a safe environment. Mr. Speaker, Minister Joseph has to be living in some other land—Wonderland or even Disney Land. He could not be living in Trinidad and Tobago! If you ask a person in this country, who is prepared to be independent in mind and thought, that person will tell you that presently in Trinidad and Tobago, we are not feeling safe.

The statistics are suggesting it. I was amazed when I read an article dated October 15, 2004 where a senior police officer, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Dennis Graham, is confident that the police are slowly winning the fight against crime. I thank those persons who were able to provide me with these statistics. They are two hardworking officers, who called the Modus Operandi and Records Bureau for these statistics.

Mr. Speaker, just to put on record, the present statistics are as follows: The murder rate as at October 19, 2004 was 215. This figure may be higher than that. According to one officer on the telephone this morning, he said that they have reports, but they cannot assess the credibility of those reports, so, the figure could be more than 215, but 215 is on record right now.

For the year 2003, the murder rate was 229. Based on a calculation that I have done, using a very simple formula of taking the figure 215 and dividing that number by the number of days passed so far, and then multiplying it by 366—because we are in a leap year—if my calculations are correct, we are going to hit 270 murders, if we continue going the way that we are going. Last year, the figure was 229, and the projection is 270.

With respect to kidnapping, as at September 30, 2004 that figure was 132. If we continue going the way that we are going at the end of the year, that figure could reach 177.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, if the Member will give way. I just wanted to ask her: how come she has information with respect to murders as at October 19, 2004, and she does not have the figures for kidnapping as at October 19, 2004?

Miss G. Lucky: That is the very question that I asked. What they have pointed out is that with respect to every other serious offence but, for murder, the statistics are only available as at the end of the month. With respect to homicide and murder they are able to collate those figures.

When there is a killing in the country, compared to the other crimes, it is given a certain level of prominence and, comparatively speaking, it is not as frequent as the other crimes like rape and armed robbery.

Mr. Valley: Will you please provide us with some additional information with respect to the number of kidnappings as at the end of September, 2003?

Miss G. Lucky: I have said it already. I know the Member for Diego Martin Central is not going to try to take my time. The Member knows that I have not reached my pet subject as yet, and that will be all the documentary evidence that was ventilated in the Parliament, and the fact that we have people on the outside giving ridiculous utterances. We have to get to that matter. So, let me move speedily along. I do have the statistics and I am prepared to give them to you.

With respect to rape, there were 235 as at the end of September, 2004. Last year, the total was 278. The projection for 2004 is 314.

With respect to armed robbery, last year, the figure as at September, 2003 was 3,480. The projected number of armed robberies for the end of 2004 will be 4,649, compared with the total for last year of 4,590. Because I do not intend to use statistics to promote a particular point, what I would say with respect to kidnapping is that the figure was 132 at the end of September. Last year, the total was 235. The projection for kidnapping is going to be less than the total number

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for 2003. The projection is 177. So, in terms of murder, rape and armed robbery, the projections are much higher.

I did ask some police officers who were willing not to go on record, to give me the information as to why—given the increase in such serious crimes—the projected kidnapping is not going to be as high as last year. The point they made is that they were getting many reports in which families are saying, “Listen, we have paid ransoms. We were told not to make reports; we were told not to record that we were told that there would be the kidnapping of a family member, unless money is paid; and we were told that if we report it to the police, we would be killed.” With that information, the police cannot convert it to a report.

In this country, what is happening now is that there are many criminals who are saying to families that they have deemed to have a lot of money—sometimes these families do not have a lot of money. They are saying to their targets. “Listen, we are going to commit this crime, if you do not give us this sum of money.” That is what we have to be very worried about. [*Laughter*]

The Member for Diego Martin Central laughs. I am not here to make any kind of outrageous statement; that is the reality. I am not surprised at the reaction we got from the other side. I do not think that the other side recognizes how unfortunate and embarrassing that to date, Vijay Persad, a 10-year-old boy, cannot be found. Yes, I know visits were made by the Minister of Education. All that I am saying is that in this country, we cannot find a 10-year-old boy who has gone missing. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Be careful of what you are saying.

Miss G. Lucky: I am talking about Vijay Persad and I could only go on with the reports that I have. All I could say then is that if Vijay Persad has been found, well then I think that should be in the public domain. Let the facts be told.

Mr. Speaker, let me make it clear that these kinds of statements like “be very careful” and “you better watch out” and so forth, I am going with the information, and that is all that we could go on here with respect to information on Vijay. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I rise merely to suggest to the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre that to go purely on the basis of information in the media, is to take a course of action that she knows will not do justice to the issue that she is discussing. The Member knows that. She is a lawyer and she is operating in front of the courts. I say no more on the matter.

Miss G. Lucky: Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I do not need to be reminded about my duty by anyone including—with the greatest of respect—the Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East. All I can say is that the *Guardian* newspaper has been carrying on its front page, the number of days that Vijay Persad has been missing. To date, he remains missing. If the Prime Minister is sitting as the head of this National Security Council and he has information about that matter, he should let the public know that everything is okay, so that the people could stop worrying. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this is the nonsense that is going on in the country. For public security and safety reasons, certain information could never be disseminated in the public domain. We always have to sit back and hope that we are not being misled. Let this Government start understanding that what proves that it is winning the war against criminals are statistics which show that crime is decreasing, and right now the statistics are showing that crime is on the rise, and we have to go with the statistics. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I have already dealt with that matter. I have been very clear with respect to the statistics. Crime is always going to be a sore point for the other side. They have failed miserably in providing national security. That is why, in the Prime Minister's budget presentation of 2003/2004, so many pages could have been spent on promises, but when you look at his budget presentation, in the fiscal year 2004/2005, the Member for San Fernando East—it is almost as if it has just been thrown in—only photocopies of promises made in the last fiscal year. In the photocopy, imagine a police station that we were promised—because of time, I think I just have about 20 minutes remaining.

I just want to give one example of many examples. In the fiscal year 2003/2004, the country was promised that there would be certain police stations built in this country. One police station that the country was promised was a police station in Manzanilla. It was very important to build a police station in Manzanilla or, at least, to refurbish the one that is now closed. There was cocaine washed ashore. When there is cocaine being washed ashore, it means that someone recognizes that the border patrol that ought to be there is not there. Criminals look around and work out where is their best spot to carry about their criminal activity, in terms of getting away with it. One would have thought that we would have had mobile units on that coast, but we do not have them. The Government recognizes how badly they are looking. So people feel that they could interrupt a speech to stand up and say something that clearly is irrelevant.

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Mr. Speaker, we were promised a police station in Manzanilla. When I look at page 26 of the budget presentation for this year, I am not seeing any mention of Manzanilla police station. So, imagine where you had a very alarming incident with cocaine being washed ashore and villagers beating up villagers because they were taking the stashes from police officers, who allegedly were cashing in, now there is no mention of the Manzanilla Police Station.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, did Manzanilla fall out of all the police stations to be built? What is the Prime Minister going to say about that? That is one of many examples. With all the boast about police stations, the country must understand what has been stated. What has been stated? “Designs for the construction of police stations at Gasparillo, Belmont, Mayaro” and so on; designs; so we are not talking about construction. The Member for Oropouche would remember that the police officers operating in his constituency literally had to leave the premises of the police station, because it was dangerous.

Work has only started on the designs for stations at Oropouche, Brasso, Maracas Bay and Maracas Street, St. Joseph, and the list goes on. Imagine that this Government is quite satisfied that, for areas which need police stations, it can continue going on the way it is, making promises about construction, when the designs, in some instances, have not even begun to be drawn. That is PNM performance. That is why we cannot say that we have proper national security in this country.

Understand succinctly, Mr. Speaker, why we have national security problems; I will say it quite openly:

1. We have a Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, who is in denial. When confronted with statistics, he prefers to say that he is the repository of knowledge that we do not have. So in this country we are worried about people whom we may not need to be worried about.
2. We have a Minister of National Security who is wholly incompetent with respect to fighting crime.

We have a Government that has chosen to embrace criminals rather than to distance itself—when the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, with the greatest respect, could stand and smile, he was probably embarrassed, and say that he had to give a Priority Bus Route pass to a certain person who led an attempted coup in 1990.

The *Hansard* can bear me out; the explanation he gave was because it came under the rubric of religious persons. Understand something: Any and every person

in this country has to abide by the law. If any person, a man of the cloth or not, breaks the law, he has to feel the penalty. If the courts were not able to impose a sanction, for reasons of technicality, then the Government should have sent a message, loud and clear, “You have applied for a bus route pass, but we are not giving it to you, because we have not forgotten what you put this country through in 1990.” That is the message you should have sent. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro is my suggestion to be the next Minister of National Security. In fairness to him, four or five days ago I told him about a problem in my constituency. I told him how horrible it was at Mahogany Avenue in the tunnel area in Gasparillo, and the Member told me that he would do something about it. He got on his cell phone right there and then. I do not think that he expected me to stand next to him, waiting to see the number he dialed, but I did. A crew did go there—the councillors in the area were also putting pressure—and the matter is now being dealt with.

When we work as a team; when we have, at least, one Member who is prepared to listen, he will get the accolades. The constituents will get what they need, that is, proper access out of their homes without having to swim, use a boat or go into water that is two feet high. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, it will be remiss of me if I did not deal with an issue that has raised a lot of public debate and, certainly, raised eyebrows in this House. It was when the Member for Caroni East comprehensively, chronologically and competently presented documents that raised an issue of whether there was any impropriety.

Mr. Speaker, once again I seek your leave and indulgence to quote an article, not in its entirety, written by Suzanne Mills on page 10 of the *Newsday* of October 17, 2004. The headline is:

“The harder they come”

I want to commend that all persons read this article because, very often, when we on this side suggest that there might have been some kind of wrongdoing, whether illegal, immoral, unethical or just plain stupid, the fact is, here is an independent person who has given her take on it.

One of the first points she makes is:

“Development on his Tobago Mason hall project began, by Rowley’s own admission, in 2003. But when in 2003? Did work commence when Rowley was Minister of Planning and Development? If so, then it would not be obscene to suggest that Rowley granted permission to himself for his Mason Hall project.”

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It is just a matter of raising the issue No. 1.

Another issue:

“After hearing Ganga Singh’s statement Thursday, I realised that even if not a single grain of sand had been transported from the Tobago hospital site to Rowley’s development, he was conducting his private and public affairs in a manner which had opened the door to Ganga’s accusation. The same contractor working on the Scarborough hospital was working on Rowley’s private development and renting from the Minister? Ganga Singh was correct; there was definitely an ‘appearance of impropriety’.”

Bearing in mind that there are so many people who quote from Shakespeare, in the very play, Julius Caesar, persons were advised that we should all be like Caesar’s wife, Calpurnia, above suspicion.

Mr. Speaker, I should say that I am enumerating, but there is so much more in this article that I think the record really should get it. The article continued:

“As for Rowley’s successor and defender Camille Robinson-Regis, she should have said nothing at all on the matter. Challenging the UNC, as she did, to make the charges outside the House is an old Government trick. When in power, the UNC used to throw down the same glove to the PNM when the Opposition PNM was alleging corruption in the Piarco, InnCogen, and the Desal projects, PNM members never made their accusations outside the House.

That’s what Parliament is for. Its privilege allows things to come to light that might otherwise remain hidden.”

Mr. Speaker, this is my final point. The article continued:

“I end by noting that as far as I know Dr. Keith Rowley has not broken a single law. However, his simultaneous involvement with contractors NH International in both a private and public capacity is a definite conflict of interest and his involvement in any land development completely untenable. Not because an action is legal, does it mean that it is ethical.

Rowley must practise now what he so loved to preach.” [*Desk thumping*]

If nothing else is said on the matter, that is all that I think of, really. At the very least, the Member for Diego Martin West should have understood that sometimes what you can get away with when you are not a Member of Parliament or a Minister, you are not able to just do so openly, flagrantly and boldly and expect to get away with it. This was a very simple point written by someone who

could not be said to be doing the work of the UNC. This is her opinion. No writer is going to undermine his or her integrity, by doing the work for others. This is her view. There will be those who agree and those who disagree.

What concerns me is the fact that we had the Member for San Fernando East standing so piously and telling the nation something, in a situation, with the greatest respect, where he had no choice. He was in a Catch 22: if he did not stand, he would be chastised and by saying that there will be an investigation, at least, he would have been able to score political points for doing the right thing. But when you stand and say that you will do the right thing, that is just the beginning; it is not the end. Mr. Speaker, when you look at what transpired, you will recognize that was merely a statement meant to pacify what was, clearly, a volatile situation taking place with that degree of exposure and embarrassment.

The Member for San Fernando East has not kept his promise. I will say what I mean by that. As a Prime Minister, he seems to be preaching today about all who should know more and better because they practise law in a court room. As Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, of all people, should know that justice must not only be done, but manifestly be seen to be done. He is one of the oldest persons in the House. I am one of the youngest, if not the youngest, in this House right now. He should be setting the example, being the Member for San Fernando East.

These are the kinds of stories now coming out in the newspapers:”

“Prime Minister satisfied with Rowley’s explanation”

Mr. Speaker, I am mindful about what you told us about reading entire articles. The gist of this article that appeared in the *Guardian* of October 17, 2004, was that, apparently, the Prime Minister had been shown documents to support Rowley’s position and he was satisfied with the situation. That was what a source said. Well then, what prevented the Prime Minister, who was given an opportunity, by those of us on this side, from coming to the Parliament the next day, when this was brought to his attention, and saying to us that this was being carried about in the newspapers and it was not true, that he had not made a determination on the facts. But this is not being said.

It is rather unfortunate, but we all know when something is carried about any one of us, that we deem to be so wrong, we should stand and make it right. We would have given way. We would have adopted any motion to allow him to clarify it, but it was not done. What I find offensive is that the Attorney General is to decide on this matter. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Would the Member give way?

Miss G. Lucky: Just because you are looking so sorry and as though you really want me to. Limited time, please.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I beg that you will give her injury time on my behalf. [*Mr. Speaker nods*] Since I will like to assist you in all you have raised, I wonder if you will assist me by specifically outlining exactly what I am accused of, so that I will be able to respond; not now, but I propose to respond. I will like to know the specific items of which I am accused.

Miss G. Lucky: To answer the question, Member for Diego Martin West, if I could find, let me pass across to you a copy of that article written by Susan Mills, because it deals with it.

Dr. Rowley: I have it.

Miss G. Lucky: You need to understand it. After the session, I do have to run back to the court, but I will give you how much ever time you need, once it does not go above 30 minutes. I will explain it to you. Let us not do it in a public forum, because I do not want to cause you further embarrassment. Take my advice on it; I speak to you as an attorney. [*Desk thumping*]

I am not going to limit my outrage to the Member for Diego Martin West. Perhaps, at the end of the day, it would be shown that it was naivety or some act of stupidity that got him into this position.

Dr. Rowley: What about innocence?

Miss G. Lucky: Innocence of the law is no excuse. You see, Member for Diego Martin West, when in doubt “shut yuh mouth”; do not say anything more; as a lawyer I advise you. I am willing to help you behind the Chair. I want to continue before the Member gets himself in more trouble. I want to offer him protection.

We were told that the Attorney General was appointed to investigate the matter. The Attorney General never ceases to amaze me. Again, I make the point: the true administration of justice is the firmest pillar of good governance. I had a picture but, unfortunately, unlike the Member for Caroni East, I did not have it in colour. However, there was a picture carried in the front page of one of the newspapers, in which the Attorney General was in a huddle with the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Crosstalk*]

Let me make it clear: I am not saying that they were discussing what form the investigation should take but, bearing in mind what occurred, people have to be

cautious. When you raise the level of suspicion in this country—which this Government has been able to do, because of the manner in which it operates: in a clandestine fashion, behind closed doors, with a lack of transparency and accountability—such a picture paints more than a thousand words can say. That is why the Member has to be more than cautious. The Attorney General is the one who is going to make the determination. When he was asked whether he had discussed it, he said no.

I am not into whether it was discussed or not. I wish Members on the other side, who understand it, will explain it to the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: So I cannot talk to the Attorney General now?

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Miss G. Lucky: The Member has to be cautious, especially since the Attorney General does not make regular visits to the Lower House.

11.15 a.m.

Then there was an article which said that Tobagonians are angry over the Rowley affair. A man, who I really think ought not just to escape any kind of comment, is Mr. Emile Elias. He has confused everybody in the country, including me. In the *Express* of October 15, 2004, there was a headline:

“Elias: I don’t have to divert what I own”

What is worse is what he says at the end of the article. It says:

“He has denied Opposition’s claims of \$20 million cost overrun in the Scarborough project. ‘The word cost overrun has no meaning here,’ he said, declaring that ‘it is the increased scope of works’ which pushed up the cost of the project. As the contractor on the project, Elias said he was ‘obliged’ to do the additional work ordered by the design engineer.”

In other words, here you have Mr. Elias giving an explanation saying that it was not a cost overrun even though more money was spent, and that the issue of cost overrun does not arise.

Mr. Speaker, when you have an anti-corruption bureau in a country which, based on a *Gazette* publication, comes under the Ministry of the Attorney General; and when you have a special anti-crime unit which, based on the budget presentation of last year is within the control of the Prime Minister of the country, how can we expect that there will ever be a free, fair and independent administration?

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I have an envelope here—I know I am in my last few seconds and I am winding up—maybe it will be called “White envelope No. 7” because Mr. Singh had brown envelopes, I have white. I do not know if it is symbolic of purity and innocence.

It contains letters written by Mr. Ganga Singh to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) dealing with issues concerning WASA in which, basically, Mr. Singh was asking for the DPP to look into what clearly were contentious matters.

Mr. Speaker, I end by making this simple point: The DPP of the country is also constrained because he does not have investigative powers. So unless and until we recognize that those with investigative powers must be deemed truly independent by not having to respond or account to the Prime Minister who is political, or an Attorney General who is appointed through political means and wears a “Balisier tie”, then and only then upon that recognition will we have a true and fair administration of justice.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have given leave to the Prime Minister to make a statement at this point in time.

**COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY
(APPOINTMENT OF)**

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, October 14, 2004, during the contribution of the Member for Caroni East in this debate, certain allegations of corruption were levelled against a Member of the Cabinet.

At that time, I gave an undertaking to this honourable House that the allegations would be investigated thoroughly and in a manner both in which the integrity of the investigative process will be preserved, and fair. I also promised that the report will be laid in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, following consultations with the Attorney General, I have decided to advise Her Excellency the Acting President today to appoint a one-man Commission of Enquiry headed by retired Judge, Madam Justice Anestine Sealey, now principal of the Sir Hugh Wooding Law School, to investigate the matter.

The terms of reference of the Commission shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. To enquire into the allegation of the removal of materials, equipment and resources from the site of the Scarborough General Hospital to the

site of a private construction project called Landate at Mason Hall, Tobago in which the Minister has an interest, with particular reference to:

- (i) whether the materials, equipment and resources were in fact removed in the circumstances as alleged;
 - (ii) if these resources were in fact removed as alleged, whether there was any impropriety on the part of the Minister or his agents; and
2. to make such observations and recommendations arising out of its deliberations as the Commission may deem appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner will be asked to conclude her deliberations in the shortest possible time.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, as we enter this last day of the budget debate for fiscal 2005, one cannot help but note that if we were to discount the political rhetoric, there is general support and endorsement for the initiative outlined in the budget by the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister.

Honestly, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for presenting a budget that has been able to gain such consensus whether within this House or outside. Most people would consider the budget statement more akin to what we knew as a throne speech rather than the traditional budget statement.

When we, for example, consider the contributions on the other side, we see those who avoided the issue completely, such as the Member for Couva North preferring instead to meander and go back to all previous hurts and so on.

We had the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre a while ago, who, other than dealing a bit with the crime issue, dealt with extraneous matters to the whole budget.

Mr. Speaker, I think we would be the first to admit that crime is perhaps one of the most serious issues with which this Government has to deal at present. As a fact, we note that even if they are small, there have been some gains lately, and as Asst. Commissioner Graham made the point, that slowly the police seems to be winning back that war, I continue to be extremely hopeful.

There are some issues raised by the Member that I think we need to correct. While the Member complained that she did not see any reference to the Manzanilla

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Police Station in the budget statement, I want to assure her that it is included in the estimates for this year. It is there as Project No. 054 under Head 22, the Ministry of National Security. The Minister, of course, just could not include everything in the budget statement.

Secondly, the Member had me rushing for a dictionary when we were informed that the word “quantum” means little, the smallest quantity, and I wondered all this time when I used the term “quantum leap” I was really speaking stupidity, so I had to get the dictionary.

For the benefit of the Member and those whom she may have led astray I want them to know that the word “quantum”, in addition to meaning the smallest quantity of some physical property that a system can possess according to the quantum theory, also means—I am making sure, that is why I said, in addition. There are three meanings given. The word “quantum” also means “of or designating a major breakthrough or sudden advance as in quantum leap”. Members would recall that is the point the Member was making. So when one uses that term, clearly what one is referring to is that movement from one stage to another.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, generally there has been agreement with the projects identified in the budget. While there might have been some differences in the approach, there is agreement at this time that public policy ought to concentrate on building capacity in the non-energy sector if we want economic sustainability. That is what I want to direct my contribution to this morning.

Members spoke about building capacity to diversify the economy, building capacity to build competitiveness, and to provide the required institutional and physical infrastructure as we prepare for global competitiveness. Moreover, there seems to be general agreement also that equity must underpin public policy if Vision 2020 is to be achieved.

Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on these issues because I want you to know first of all, that the Government agrees that those are the critical issues that we have been dealing with and we will continue to deal with them for the rest of this period to 2007.

I want to digress and make the point again that when one looks at the Government’s manifesto of 2002, one sees clearly that we stated what we planned to do in this period. We stated clearly that there were six issues with which we were concerned over this five-year period and the first was social equity. So when equity becomes the mantra of the Opposition—it was not so during the period 1995—2001 you know but, suddenly, equity is now taking pride of place in whatever, and we agree that as a society, we cannot go forward unless we take everybody along.

Mr. Speaker, I want Members to know that with respect to the social services, the Minister of Social Development has just completed a review of the social programmes and the manner in which they can be accessed, *A Guide to Social Programmes and Services in Trinidad and Tobago* which outlines the various social programmes and how any of them can be accessed.

This is to be printed and made available to the general public, to all Members of Parliament and it ought to be on every Member of Parliament's desk because if we are talking about equity, we must know that we have the responsibility.

I congratulate the Member for Oropouche. The Member for St. Ann's East made the point that the Member offered his constituency office so that the people at NEDCO can come and speak to the people of Oropouche. That is what we ought to be doing in our constituency office. We cannot sit back and say there is discrimination; we have to get the programme and make it available to our constituents.

11.30 a.m.

I want to make the point that equity is the number one principle of this Government in this period and wherever one sees that there is this lack of equity, bring it to the attention of the Government. The Government continues in the manifesto—the second principle—to talk about human development. Why are we doing this? Somebody made the point that there is a disconnect—the Member for St. Joseph and the Member for St. Augustine also—between Vision 2020 and what the Government is doing in the budget. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What is the reality? The reality is that the Government visioned a developed society by 2020. The Government has committees working. These committees are going to take some time. They believe—suddenly—the same way, just before the election, they ran and paved roads—instant roads—with all types of potholes and so on, they believe that is how planning is done.

We are aware that the Vision 2020 committee will take some time, so that when we were looking at this period, the first five years in that 2020 plan, we determined what was critical and we decided to fix that—the institutional underpinning, as it were: human resource development, health, wellness and well-being. And while we are doing that, we wanted to house our population properly. So that there is education, health—a healthy population, well housed. We know that we had to take care of those at the margin so that issue number five is poverty eradication, and there is also the issue of security.

There are six issues and that is what one would see taking pride of place in every budget brought by this Government in this five-year period. When one goes

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to the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), one would note, for example, that the allocation to the areas I have mentioned: education, health, housing, human resource development, public order and safety, that accounts for 61.5 per cent of the Public Sector Investment Programme for the year, because that is what is important for us, putting that infrastructure in place.

While the committee is doing its work—and my colleague, the Minister of Planning and Development, has stated already, some of the work is being fed into the planning, into the budget for this year. That point was made, and one would find that as we go along, more of their work will inform our annual budget. At this time, we are guided, in the main, by our manifesto for the period 2002—2007, providing the critical infrastructure.

One can view even further. While, for example, in 2002, the social infrastructure, education, health, housing and so on, accounted for 47 per cent of the PSIP, in 2004 it is 52 per cent. While in 2002, public order and safety accounted for 3.3 per cent of the PSIP, in 2004 it is 5.6 per cent, and for fiscal 2005 it is 8 per cent concentration, moving from 3.3 per cent to 8 per cent in 2005—the concentration. As I said, crime and criminal activity is the bugbear of the Government—we recognize that—and we plan to deal with it.

In 2005, the social infrastructure: education, health, housing and so on, has gone to 53.5 per cent and that is from 47 per cent in 2002 and 52 per cent in 2004. So that it is clear that we are on track and when people speak as though we know not of what we do, they are simply very far from the truth.

I come now to the issue of diversification. The Member for Couva South sees the issue in terms of using our oil and gas revenues to ensure that future generations continue to improve their standard of living and quality of life. He advocates targeting of new knowledge-based industries as an avenue of diversification. The Member for St. Augustine saw the conversion of an energy-based economy into a service economy as our foremost economic goal. Is that not what we are doing? Is that not what we are attempting to do? The Member for St. Joseph was even more emphatic. “Mr. Speaker, diversification is extremely critical.” He has just gotten up and realized that. That is what we have been doing. He was extremely pleased to have seen in the budget statement that the Government has actually identified divestment as the second pillar of its economic strategy, but wanted some meat on the matter.

Let me provide some. He says that he has not gotten meat either in the budget statement or in the Social and Economic Planning Framework. Let me take him, first of all, to page 10 of the budget statement. We start with “Manufacturing”,

because when we speak about diversification—first of all, I think on page one, we spoke about the second pillar and we outlined about six areas that we would concentrate on with respect to the diversification effort:

- “The traditional manufacturing sector
- a new technologically based industrial sector
- tourism
- financial services
- agriculture, and
- the small-business sector.”

The budget statement continues, at page 10, to deal with what we plan to do with manufacturing. We intend to build on this and position Trinidad and Tobago as the major manufacturing and commercial centre in Latin America and the Caribbean—the point that we have been making all along, that we see, as a fact, that the positioning of Trinidad and Tobago as a manufacturing centre, as a trans-shipment centre, as a financial centre in this part of the world, and that in the short to medium term, our goal is to integrate the economy of Trinidad and Tobago within the Latin American economy. For that, there are certain specific strategies that we are pursuing.

Only two weeks ago the Cabinet approved the bilingual initiative that we have been pushing, positioning Spanish as our first foreign language. Because we cannot be efficient intermediaries as we expect to be, between the English-speaking North and the Spanish-speaking South and Central, unless we can speak the language. The goal is to ensure that within a period of 10 years, Port of Spain at least, will be bilingual. [*Interruption*] No, it is a jigsaw. You are putting both pieces in at the same time. That is what you do.

There are other critical initiatives to make this happen. When we came in, we had to revamp the EXIMBANK because we said if we are going into these new markets, we need that financing institution to be able to take the credit of our manufacturers that are going to the market. There was the emphasis on market access. The Costa Rica agreement which was closed earlier this year, simply part of the running space that we are providing to our manufacturers in keeping with our vision; in keeping with our objective of integrating into Latin America. So that we now have trade agreements with Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica—

Dr. Moonilal: I thank the Member very much for giving way. The point I am making is not just a frivolous point, in that what happens is that when you try to introduce Spanish as your second major language, you find that the students who would do English well, will also do Spanish well, and the students who may be in a majority who may not be able to speak English, will never learn Spanish, and that would be inconsistent with your Government's goal of equity.

Hon. K. Valley: That is why I say it has to be a jigsaw, because you made the point that those who do English well will also do Spanish well. The converse is also true, that people are gifted. If you are gifted in languages, you are gifted in languages, and that is why it is a jigsaw. You put both pieces in at the same time; it is not sequential.

So I am making the point that had the Member done his work and looked at the budget statement, he would have seen the plan of the Government as outlined with respect, for example, to the small business sector. Again, on page 11, tourism, and agriculture on page 12, and it continues.

Moreover, had he gone to the Social and Economic Policy Framework, he would have been given the picture over the medium term, because starting on page 25, the opening sentence says:

“In furtherance of Government’s objectives of diversification and growth of the economy, the transformation, development and expansion of the Non-petroleum Sector will remain in focus over the medium-term with continuing emphasis on the Manufacturing, Services and Agricultural Sectors.”

Then on the same page it talks about:

“The objective is to position Trinidad and Tobago as the manufacturing centre and commercial, trans-shipment and financial hub of the Caribbean and gateway to Latin America.”

It goes on to speak about the EXIMBANK and investment in services; it speaks about the IT area, financial services and all of that. So that I am at a loss to find out what further meat the Member wanted.

I can also provide Members with information from Tidco with respect to what is happening in the non-energy sector over the period 2002 to present. With respect to the manufacturing sector, there was a total number of 18 new projects over the period for a proposed capital investment of some \$175.8 million, and with proposed employment of some 393 persons. Some of the bigger projects were the processing, milling of rice and flour which, of course, is now on stream;

the manufacture of amino resins for \$17.4 million, and so on. In addition, of course, as you know, the Tourism and Industrial Development Corporation looks at tourism projects also, and for the same period, October 2002 to September 2004, there was a total proposed capital investment of \$453.8 million with proposed employment of 604 persons and the number of projects, some 46.

So there has been continuing efforts at the diversification of the economy. You would know, for example, that while they talk about a science park at Wallerfield, the Government has, in fact, started the implementation of that project and have gone further by putting the University of Trinidad and Tobago as a centrepiece of that project, because we believe that a university that is geared to the science and engineering field in an industrial area that is so geared, would provide a high level of synergy.

11.45 a.m.

The Property and Industrial Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago (PIDCOTT) which is now renamed Evolving TecNologies Enterprises Development Limited (ETeCK) is in charge of that project. I can report that things are going quite well so far. To give some insight, that industrial park will encompass four zones of activity. There will be a mixed business industrial zone focusing on technology and software development and incubation facilities. There will be a manufacturing zone concentrating on light manufacturing and downstream manufacturing from the energy sector. There will be the knowledge-based zone which will house the University of Trinidad and Tobago together with online distance learning capabilities and a commercial and service zone.

To date, the following tasks have been accomplished. The land has been transferred. There has been the issue of certificate of clearance for the Wallerfield Industrial Park Development. There is the master plan for the park; the architectural designs commission for signature buildings. Stakeholders' meetings have been held including relocation arrangements. There were some farmers and ETeCK has to deal with all those matters. ETeCK is going well.

Earlier this year you will recall that I came to the House and presented the White Paper on Financial Sector Reform which is another critical part of our diversification effort. As the budget stated we have earmarked financial services as an area for diversification.

There was some talk with respect to the energy sector looking at the services element and building the local capacity to deal with the service content in the energy sector. My colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries,

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mentioned that a committee has been established to look at the local content and moving in an incremental manner to have more of the work done in Trinidad and Tobago for that sector. We want our people to provide more services to the energy sector.

We are on our way with respect to the diversification of the economy. When I hear people speak about diversification, I remember that in the 1970s and 1980s, we were then called an oil economy and before that it was oil and sugar. No longer are they calling us an oil and sugar economy. In the 1980s we were an oil economy. We were going downstream for more natural gas, until lately, we have been producing more natural gas. No longer are we an oil economy; we are now an energy economy. Even though over the 20-year period we made that move from an oil economy to an energy economy, there are persons who continue to say that there has been no diversification in the economy. Even though they are now telling us that we are too dependent on oil and gas, they were not telling us that in the 1980s. They were saying that we were too dependent on oil.

There has been diversification of this economy over time. If one were to look at the statistics and view the contribution of oil to the economy, one will see that over time it is somewhere around 24 per cent. This means that because it is the main sector it is the driver of the economy. As it increases, so will the rest of the economy. It is not something that we need to complain about that oil is major in the economy. That is what we have. We have to say, "Thank God". What is important is how we use it.

At this time we are saying that we will use the surplus revenues from the energy sector to develop other sectors. We all agreed on that. We have no complaints with respect to that. They said that we must diversify, become competitive and build institutions. That is what we are doing.

I move on to the second issue of competitiveness. The Member for Couva South had much to say on that. We came in and knew that we had work to do. In 2002, we went to the IADB and negotiated a \$5 million loan to build capacity. As part of that assignment the Trinidad and Tobago office of the IADB commissioned this report.

First of all, I would read the cover of the report. It says, "*Building The Competitive Advantages of T&T Draft Document*".

"The following draft papers may not be quoted or used for any purpose without the written consent of the Inter-American Development Bank. If you need clarification or assistance in this matter please contact..."

This is Parliament so we take liberties.

Page 10 of the report says:

“OTF Group has been contracted to perform a competitiveness assessment of Trinidad and Tobago. It is our mandate to assess the quality of local firms and the potential of clusters for sustained economic growth.”

They are being asked to look at our firms and give us an appraisal of the competitiveness of our firms and the potential for clusters.

“This work must include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the local platform in enabling local firms to compete in an increasingly global economy. However, we approach this not just in the context of having a solid platform; it is about the existence of competitive firms and clusters. A strong enabling environment is a crucial input, but the only true barometer of competitiveness is the advantages of firms themselves. Real firms, selling real products, to sophisticated customers, for a premium. On that scale, Trinidad’s strategy is lacking.

It is our goal to identify specific areas of opportunity in which the Inter-American Development Bank’s various funding and technical support vehicles can be applied most effectively to further enhance the competitiveness of the country. Of course, a document such as this one must necessarily be the beginning of a consultative process. Once again, while our hypotheses are strong, experience demands that the directions we highlight be thoroughly tested locally before any program of aid is delivered.”

The purpose of this document is to assist the Government in developing or designing its Trade Assistance Programme that the Member has complained about that has now gotten off the ground.

There is the US \$5 million loan from the IADB for a number of different programmes, one of which is the Trade Assistance Programme. This study—with 10 recommendations, most of which we have started to work on—will inform us about what else we have to do.

Let me give Members an insight. Let us look at the first recommendation. “This is the last chance for Trinidad and Tobago to invest in its future prosperity”. That is what informs our diversification thrust. I made the point earlier that this budget is a building block to 2020 in accordance with the manifesto position of the party, providing the infrastructure knowing that as a fact, we have to move or use surplus funds from the energy sector to the non energy sector to build capacity.

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I have spoken about the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) allocation, pointing out the importance of the critical areas we have identified. We look at the second recommendation that Trinidad and Tobago needs to go micro. In the budget statement the Minister of Finance made the point that we have identified seven areas such as food and beverage; printing and packaging; merchant marine; film; music and entertainment; fish and fish processing and yachting services where we are going micro. We feel that we have fixed the macro economics in spite of what the Member for St. Augustine says. Now we need to do the sector analysis. That is confirmed. We started doing that before they reported on July 13, 2004. We are looking at the different industrial groups.

We have a private sector/public sector committee. We have seven different committees appointed by the business committee chaired by the hon. Prime Minister. Most of them have already reported. Their recommendations will inform the work of the Ministry of Trade and Industry in terms of providing support at that micro level.

In addition to that, this year, at the ministry we employed four university graduates who were going into the master's programme. We told them that we needed them to do some research work for us. We have trade agreements with the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Venezuela. We looked at El Salvador; we do not have trade agreements with them as yet. El Salvador has indicated an interest in opting into the agreement. We assigned each of those students in one of those countries and told them to take the information; analyze what they import and tell us what else we can sell to them. That is market-based and market focused, giving us information given what we have. What can we sell more of? That pilot project went extremely well.

One of them said that in the Dominican Republic there is an opportunity to go downstream in ceramic in Trinidad. While we are importing the plate to make the tile, we need to talk with the manufacturer to sell not only to the Dominican Republic but also to other countries around. The person who studied Columbia, said that we have an opportunity for rum in Columbia. In Venezuela, the person looking at that said that we have an opportunity for spices. We will do more of that work because we believe that it can assist us in attracting inward investment. In this fiscal year, the BDC will look at some of that work to determine the products which are not now being produced in Trinidad and Tobago, but which are demanded by countries with which we have favourable trade agreements.

12.00 noon

Mr. Speaker, we are convinced that is the way to go because when we look at the competitive reports coming out, the Member for St. Augustine, when he spoke, made the point that Trinidad and Tobago declined by two points from 49 to 51 in the competitive ranking. When he said that, I said that is really a bikini statistic.

Mr. Speaker, what it reveals is interesting, but what it conceals is vital. As a fact, when you look at the report you would see—*[Interruption]* That is what I said: What he conceals is vital. Mr. Speaker, when you look at the report on the *Guardian* “Business Today” dated, October 17, 2004, the point is made that all that really happened was that there were three new countries in the sample. While the 2003 survey had merely 101 countries, three new countries were surveyed in 2004. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Cyprus. Those three new countries were all ranked ahead of Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago maintained its classification of 4.1. In effect, therefore, if these same 104 countries were examined last year, one would have seen that Trinidad and Tobago had gained a point.

The article makes two important points: One, it says:

“T&T ranks 4th in macro economic environment index in the Americas behind the USA, Canada and Chile...”

Mr. Speaker, when we heard the Member for St. Augustine say that we were blowing it; that we make everybody a client of the State and so on, at that point, I could have mentioned to the Member that, really, you do not know what you are talking about. This macroeconomic environment is strong but I will come back to that.

Mr. Speaker, we are 4th behind the USA, Canada, and Chile, and we are second in Latin America, behind only Chile, with respect to the macroeconomic environment. It says:

“On the positive side, the quality of macroeconomic management, the sophistication of company operations and strategy as related to regional sales, reliance on professional management and production process sophistication and the aspects of the quality of the national business environment featured prominently.”

Mr. Speaker, the negatives, crime and inefficient bureaucracy, were ranked as the two most problematic factors for doing business for Trinidad and Tobago. I guarantee this House, Mr. Speaker, that next year there would be an improvement

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in the ranking. As I already said, with respect to crime there has been improvement and I feel certain that given the current management, this is going to continue. With respect to the bureaucracy I know that we, at the Ministry of Trade and Industry, are doing our part.

The Member for St. Joseph made the point in the negative, when he spoke about disconnection. The point the Member made was that all of those things were fine but there was a disconnect between what you say and what you do. Mr. Speaker, it points to the issue of the need to build capacity in the institutions and in the physical infrastructure. We are saying that our manifesto's position, for example, with respect to infrastructure, or the road, for that matter, is that no two points in Trinidad and Tobago ought to be more than two and a half hours away. When the Minister of Works and Transport spoke, he mentioned all the programmes that were put in place for that advance, as it were.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Chief Whip and hon. Members for the extension.

Mr. Speaker, I was making the point that the Minister of Works and Transport and his people seem to be ready for that assault on the flooding problems, the road problems and so on, with which we have been plagued. We are attacking the problems with respect to the institutions.

Mr. Speaker, my manufacturers, with whom I work quite closely, made the point that we need some support with respect to institutions. Why did they, first of all, make the point again about diversification? I quote:

“Our focus and attention must be the growth, strengthening and sustainable development of the non-oil manufacturing sector. The revenue we get from oil and gas, must be used for economic diversification in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and services. We must recognize that whilst the finite and diminishing resources of oil and gas provide the nation's main revenue; the other sectors are needed to provide sustainable employment, social stability and to reduce our dependency on and vulnerability to a single industry.

The need to foster investment and entrepreneurship, while simultaneously encouraging export trade is pivotal to the development of the manufacturing sector. We recommend that through sector analysis and cluster development,..."

They are telling us what to do and I like that, and that is exactly what we are doing.

"further downstream and forward integration of the oil and gas industry should be pursued."

Mr. Speaker, it goes on to say in the main recommendation:

"...is to free our business environment from all impediments to investment and growth.

Institutional strengthening of Regulatory Bodies & Information

While all of our regulatory bodies need reform, and increased resources, we in particular seek the enhancement of the Customs & Excise Division, the Trinidad & Tobago Bureau of Standards, Plant Quarantine, Food and Drug Division and the Port of Port of Spain."

Mr. Speaker, I believe you never get fired from on top, you get fired from below. It is the people who depend on you are the ones you have to satisfy, and they gave me my marching orders. Mr. Speaker, about three months ago at the Ministry of Trade and Industry we appointed a committee to look at the problems at the Port. We want to establish Trinidad and Tobago as the transshipment hub and if there are issues there preventing that, we need to correct them. That committee has reported, I have been in consultation with my colleague at the Ministry of Works and Transport and shortly we would be approaching the Cabinet with certain recommendations.

With respect to the Bureau of Standards, Members would know that we passed the Metrology Bill earlier this year and the infrastructure is being put in place so that legislation can be proclaimed.

One would note, again, that in the development programme there has been an appropriate allocation to the Bureau of Standards so that it can continue its upgrading process to satisfy the requirements of our manufacturing sector.

Mr. Speaker, let me deal with some other issues raised in the debate. I go first to the Member for St. Augustine. His thesis was that we are increasing demand in the budget without a corresponding increase in supply. Mr. Speaker, my friend is supposed to be a well-trained economist and I am, generally, surprised when I hear him making statements which cannot be backed up by the facts.

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The Member, first of all—I do not know whether it was a Freudian slip—said that the budget was some \$29 billion. My colleague asked him whether they were bringing back \$2 billion from wherever they had it. Mr. Speaker, the budget is, in fact—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, that \$27.9 million must be discounted for certain things. First of all, there is the capital expenditure. In addition, there is the debt service. There is the planned appropriation to the Revenue Stabilization Fund. I want to deal with that in a while.

Mr. Speaker, the recurrent expenditure adjusted for this period is some \$20.2 billion as against \$18.2 billion for the last fiscal period; in other words, an increase of some 11 per cent. Now, when we look at the period—the last year in office for the UNC, October, 1999 to September, 2000—in other words, fiscal 2000 as against fiscal 2001, the recurrent expenditure increased by 15 per cent. We did not hear the Governor of the Central Bank, as he then was, arguing that they were going to mash up the economy; that they were making all of us clients of the State or any such foolery. We did not hear that, Mr. Speaker, why are we hearing it now?

When he spoke about the lack of increase in supply, again, the analysis was deficient. If the Member were to look at the Public Sector Investment Programme, he ought to have noted that in addition to the \$2.1 billion, the Central Government, as it were, was investing by way of the Public Sector Investment Programme, the public sector had a programme of some \$7.4 billion. It is shown on page 151 of the Public Sector Investment Programme, moving from \$2.7 billion in 2004.

12.15 p.m.

At page 151 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme* it shows moving from \$2.7 billion in 2004. So that there is the increase in supply that spending of some \$7.4 billion of that Public Sector Investment Programme.

They spoke of unemployment. When the International Monetary Fund Report—and I am not speaking simply about the concluding remarks—I am speaking about the IMF report dated October 04. This report went before the board this week where on page 6 it says quite clearly—I think they were still dealing with first quarter—as a footnote:

The unemployment rate used in this report corresponds to an extended definition based on a relaxed seeking work criteria deemed to be the appropriate one for Trinidad and Tobago's labour market. Under the standard ILO definition the unemployment rate would stand at 7 1/2 per cent.

That is the IMF. That is the not the Government. I want to repeat that: Under the standard ILO definition—in other words, internationally recognized—the unemployment rate would stand at 7 1/2 per cent. That is the reality and then, of course, there is this issue of the exchange rate, a most reckless statement made by a former Minister of Finance having my friend from St. Augustine hedging because he knows that he is talking nonsense but does not want to say that. He said, “Well I do not know, I want the Minister of Finance to explain it”. He talked about \$500 million to support the exchange rate. Nonsense!

Mr. Speaker, at the Ministry of Finance we have been arguing with the Central Bank and the Central Bank has now agreed to manage our foreign reserves at 6 1/2 months of cover. We argued that our reserves belong to the market. Simply, in Trinidad and Tobago, we have a system—that because of oil and gas, the Government is the main earner of foreign exchange and central banks like to hoard the thing, so you have months of import cover; eight months, 10 months and so on. That money, the excess reserve, must be in the market and that is what has been happening. As we say, we want to develop the financial market here; we have to make that foreign exchange available because that foreign exchange loaned to other countries and so on, would in time provide cash inflows in the form of loan interests and capital repayments, and that is what it is. So that the \$500 million was not put to support the exchange rate; it was put because it was excess foreign reserves. And we will continue managing the foreign reserves at about 6 1/2 months of import cover.

The Member would know that by doing that, the excess liquidity in the system is thereby reduced. As you put United States dollars into the economy, you take out Trinidad and Tobago dollars thereby reducing the inflation core, as it were, reducing money supply and affecting the inflation positively; and that is what you want to do.

Mr. Speaker, like him, we are conscious of the need to avoid overheating the economy. We know what happened, especially in the 1970s and this is why as we go forward we would do that with prudence. When the International Monetary Fund speaks about moving under flexible exchange rate, we say listen, if you allow that to happen, what is really going to occur is an appreciation of the exchange rate. If one were to leave the exchange rate to its own device, there would be an appreciation of the TT dollar, vis-à-vis the US dollar and that is why one speaks about maintaining competitiveness of the exchange rate, because if it appreciates, obviously, then your TT manufacturer is less competitive.

Mr. Speaker, I turn next to the Revenue Stabilization Fund (RSF). First of all, let me make the point that in our manifesto of 2002, we said clearly that we agree

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with the concept of the RSF; we never agreed with the way they were doing it because they were making a projection based on current oil prices. For example, if they felt that oil prices this year would be \$28 then they would budget on \$28 and if it so happens in the year that oil prices were higher than \$28, then they would put the excess in the Revenue Stabilization Fund. That made no sense, because to the extent their projections were correct, nothing would go into the Revenue Stabilization Fund even though oil prices would be high.

Mr. Speaker, it is easy to see if, for example, we were using that system and say fine, the projection is \$50 and, therefore, we would budget on \$50. So what have you? Nothing would go into the Revenue Stabilization Fund even though the oil prices are quite high. So after much discussion we said we want to look at what is the long term oil price and you would see in the budget—I think it was extremely creative to come up with the concept of planning your expenditure on a \$25 oil price, planning your revenues on what you expect the average oil price would be, and making an appropriation for the difference in Revenue Stabilization Fund, budgeting.

So you are planning to put some \$1,329 million into the Revenue Stabilization Fund and that is what it is. Having done that, you are now hearing a change in their argument. No longer are they arguing that they have to set up a revenue stabilization fund. Now they want to know the rules of the fund. We told them clearly we are coming with the rules before the end of the year. They had it all the time, they never had rules, now they are worrying about rules, and my friend from St. Augustine, said no, we do not want the fund, we want more than fund, we want an intergenerational fund. So I asked him very simply, why could we not just have the one fund, it is the rules. Say this amount would be for stabilization, that amount would be for intergenerational transfers, but you do not need more than one fund. Then he told me very interestingly. “You are only thinking about the fiscal revenues. But no, you have to think about the foreign exchange”. He said put some of the foreign exchange in a fund. I do not know how one is going to do that.

The Government appropriates out of revenues. Foreign exchange is derived from what you do here on the fisc, but you cannot tell the Central Bank to take a set of money and put it into a fund. I do not know what he was talking about. Member, do you know what the Member was talking about? I do not know why he is not here. I do not know what he was talking about, and he confuses me.

Mr. Speaker, what I like about him, he stands up and says we want to make everybody the clients of the State. It sounds very nice and everybody says, “clap,

clap, Dookeran, he is bright". He talks a set of stupidity most of the time and should be told.

Mr. Speaker, we now go back to a situation where the Member said everyone is a client of the State or we are going to be self-reliant. Everybody is going to be self-reliant. At the same time the Member said \$200 million, that is all the fiscal measures cost, and that is peanuts. I do not agree. Because what you attempted to do was simply to take care of persons at the margin. In other words, if we did not have to deal with the high food prices this year, we could have come with the budget without fiscal measures. It does not mean that every year you have to come with the budget with fiscal measures. The fiscal measures are there in the budget simply to deal with food prices, and we attempted to do that in a number of ways. In one case, we said, listen, your food basket is affected by 'x' dollars and that the calculation suggested about \$100. We say all right we would give you \$150 more in the case of the old-age pensioner or the person on public assistance and so forth. In the case of the lower income taxpayer, we said we would give you an additional tax deduction of \$5,000 with marginal rate relief or threshold provisions for persons earning between \$30,000 and \$35,000. We were simply taking care of the people at the margin, in our efforts—as you know one of our core principles is poverty eradication—to take care of those persons at the margin. Then some persons argued that the middle class got nothing.

Mr. Speaker, what is the fact? This is our third budget since we came and in earlier budgets we dealt with the middle class. It is this Government that provided a special deduction for persons who bought a new home, an extra \$10,000 in addition to their \$18,000 deduction; they can claim an additional \$10,000 as a new homeowner for five years.

Mr. Speaker, it is this Government that provided a reduction in the marginal tax rate from 33 to 30 per cent from 28 to 25 per cent. We reinstated the credit unions' deduction, and so on. We felt that we had dealt with the middle class; that this year did not warrant any further action in that regard and that we were dealing simply with persons at the margin such as public service pensioners. We thought we should do something and we did that by giving them an increase.

Mr. Speaker, of course, you would note the longer you were retired, the higher the amount because, of course, we took into consideration the fall in the value of money over time. That is what it is quite simply. So we provided for persons at the margin in this budget, but the general tone was to concentrate on the key areas of education, health, housing, national security; and that is what it is.

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Just a word on this issue of spending, what I think the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre said providing largesse as it were or the concept of clients of the State.

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want Members to remember that—and they all know it—it does not matter whether it was the NAR government in 1986 to 1991 or the UNC 1995 to 2001, neither of those governments got rid of the URP programme because there is the recognition that, in an economy, you have to take care of those persons who cannot compete.

We believe that the training elements in all those programmes would be accentuated. We say that over time the allocation to those social programmes would be reduced because, as housing construction takes off and there is an increased demand for persons there, there would be a lower amount needed for those programmes. We will build sustainability as we expand the economy by doing different things. This first five-year period, Mr. Speaker, must be a period of providing the infrastructure, of building capacity in the non-energy sector, of diversifying the economy, of building competitiveness; the importance of the IDB report, the importance of that \$5 million we got from the IADB to restructure. It is important that we restructure the Ministry, but we would also be looking at other agencies to provide support to our manufacturing sector.

I commend once more the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. When we listen to their comments, all have said that it is an excellent budget to take Trinidad and Tobago on its way to Vision 2020. This budget is the building block. Next year we will come again to provide another pillar as we move in that direction.

I thank you.

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

12.33 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before the hon. Member for Siparia makes her contribution this afternoon, may I point out that she has requested and has been granted permission on this occasion to use her laptop computer as an aide memoire during her contribution. I wish to advise all Members that the use of

laptop computers or other electronic devices will henceforth cease until such time as the matter is considered by the Standing Orders Committee and a report to and a decision is taken by this honourable House as to the use thereof.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you then for the privilege of allowing me to use it.

I join this debate on the Appropriation Bill 2005, with the privilege of closing the debate on behalf of the Members on the UNC Benches. I wish to record that I take up the baton in this marathon that has been well run by my UNC colleagues in a most successful manner, secure that in this budget debate the UNC has scored a resounding victory.

They have done so by exposing the deception, the incompetence and the corruption that has been found on the other side of the House. I also congratulate all who participated in the debate because they did so in the interest of the well-being of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I congratulate those on the other side who have that interest; all the Members on this side and, of course, your good self, Mr. Speaker, who, for this debate I must say, followed the maxim of all good Speakers, which is: Let the Opposition have its say, because at the end of the day the Government will have its way. We thank you for the flow of the debate in this House for the past days.

We have heard all the comments on the budget both inside and outside the House and perhaps at this juncture, as we on this side close, it would be useful to do a very brief summary of the issues that have been raised. It began last Friday with the budget statement of the hon. Minister of Finance.

Like his budget statement prior to this one, he came promising the moon and the stars and gave the indication that at this time he would be able to deliver manna from heaven to Trinidad and Tobago. We see, Mr. Speaker, that his destiny will not permit that, because the promises that have been made in the last two budget statements have not been kept, have not been delivered and have not been met. So the issues raised on this side concentrated in that direction to show those shortcomings and to show the broken promises.

My colleagues spoke of the disconnect, the deception, the chasm between what is said and what actually happens; between what is done and what is said. In this budget debate, we were able to experience, from the statement, many issues, which would redound to our benefit. There were matters we welcomed. I talked

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about the strategy to go for a very high percentage of tertiary education, but again my concern is that disconnect between the desired objective and the steps to get there. While there are elements in the budget that we support, it is our duty to point out the difficulties and the concerns we have.

One of the best budget responses I have ever heard in my time in this House came from the hon. Member for Couva North, Leader of the Opposition. I think what he really did was say that the budget sounded like so much “robber talk”. He even mentioned that it seemed to be carnival time again—all these huge promises—and the issue not being that of all this money, but that of leadership and governance. From that tone set by the Leader of the Opposition we went to the Member for Diego Martin West—and I will return to that Member in a while.

The former Minister of Finance, Mr. Gerald Yetming, crunched the numbers for us in the pillars in this budget and raised serious questions about the credibility of the numbers that were being used for the platform for this budget and the new fiscal year. The end of it was that he tore those numbers and the budget to shreds.

I cannot, for the life of me, understand why the Government Benches asked Sen. Danny Montano to speak in this House. There are so many elected Members sitting here. He brought with him, with due respect to this House, not only discourtesy, but nothing else. I see the Member for Arima has not spoken—my good friend, the enthusiastic, bright Minister—yet Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano was the second speaker after the debate kicked off. I could not, for the life of me, understand why.

I understood after hearing Sen. The Hon. Danny Montano that he was really responding to the Member for St. Joseph by describing for us all the developments that were taking place in China. We all know that the Member for St. Joseph is Chinese. There was nothing else that was of any value to us in that debate and he dealt with issues of such far-reaching consequences to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of bread and butter issues.

He came to this House—and I really want to express our disgust when he gave the feeble reason why Government did absolutely nothing to listen to the cries of the people with respect to the high prices of rice and flour, basic staples. He told us that they were building two flour mills and when they were on stream, the price would go down and they would see about it then if it does not go down. Why do they not do something, now? The people have been crying out. They have a \$28 billion budget and they say they cannot deal with the common external tariff (CET) on both rice and flour because the Caricom people will be vex. It is quite all right

for the “Trini” people to be vex and starve, but they do not want the Caricom people to be vex, so they do not want to remove the CET on that. They do not try to assist in any way with the price of rice and flour, the basics in this country. That is nonsense.

On the other hand, they took the common external tariff off other items. They took it off dhal and other items, but the basics, rice and flour, that every “Trini” has, roti and rice, we cannot have it. They are not taking any steps to deal with those high prices and they admitted themselves that those prices were very high.

I do not see why Minister Montano came to this House. He was very discourteous when asked to give way, telling me that he was not giving way. I ask you, Leader of Government Business, please teach him some manners when he comes to this House. He was most disrespectful. [*Interruption*] That is why both of them have fun up there in the other place.

The Member for Oropouche, Dr. Moonilal, put him in his place loud and clear in a contribution that was really insightful and well researched. Then came the very vibrant and dynamic Member for Toco/Manzanilla. I know that the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs means well. Any time he speaks, you can hear the enthusiasm and the will to go. He was completely emasculated. He is running a Ministry in which the percentage of the budget is so small. The Member for Chaguanas made that point. The budget is almost non-existent for that small Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs—such an important Ministry. On top of that, what is really happening is that the person who is running his Ministry, the one thing that is of any value, the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago, he is emasculated there, too.

That person who runs that and therefore runs the main thrust of the ministry, that person is a clone of the Ministry of Finance. It is the same thing with respect to the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Port of Spain South. Each of them is a clone of the Minister of Finance, running the ministries. In the case of tertiary education, there is Mr. Julien, University of Trinidad and Tobago his biggest, greatest joy. We come to Port of Spain South, a bright man, really, really bright, hearing his contribution and knowing he wants to do well for the country, but they cannot. They are all emasculated.

1.40 p.m.

The Member for Laventille East/Morvant has been totally emasculated. It is amazing to see how a man who was such a roaring tiger and a lion quietly puts his tail between his legs and how quiet he has become.

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I particularly enjoyed the contribution of the Member for Tobago East. I think it was a very serious contribution in this debate. It is one that is well needed at this time in this country.

Mr. Partap, the Member for Nariva, made an impassion on behalf of the children of Biche. I would like to repeat that cry. It is over three years now—*[Interruption]* Do not worry, I will make mine. It is over three years now and that school has not collapsed or fallen down. Do to the children of Biche as you would do for your own. Help those children in Biche, Mr. Prime Minister. That school can be opened. The school has not collapsed. No one has died. Is it for spite, malice and vindictiveness that the school still remains unopened? That is a state-of-the-art school. Please look into that. Help those children in Biche.

Mr. Speaker, I think in this entire debate a very historic something has happened. As far as I can recall from the debates I have been in and ones I have read of, it is the first time in a budget debate that a commission of enquiry has been announced. That is an historical event.

When the budget is remembered, it would not be remembered for all the grand plans and promises that were made, it would be remembered for the exposure of impropriety on the part of a senior Government Minister. That is what would be remembered at the end of the debate. The Prime Minister, in response to calls that came from this side of the House, indicated that he would be setting up a commission of enquiry to look into the matter raised by the Member for Caroni East, Mr. Ganga Singh.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the statement that the Prime Minister made, we had great hope that when the allegations were raised by the Member for Caroni East that these matters would have been dealt with expeditiously and with all propriety. I would like to repeat what the Prime Minister said in his budget statement on page 44. It states:

“Integrity in Public Life

We shall do more. We have implemented the new law pertaining to integrity in public life; a law, which is consistent with international best practice. We have gone a bit further, however, and strengthened the mechanisms for detection and investigation of all acts of malfeasance conducted by public officials. We intend to take all measures necessary to prevent the illicit enrichment of individuals at the expense of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In other words Mr. Speaker, we shall deal clinically and comprehensively with corruption.”

These new laws dealing with integrity in public life—let us take a bow for the UNC on this side of the House—were passed by the UNC in this House strengthening integrity legislation in this country.

What is particularly relevant, in terms of the allegations that came from the Member for Caroni East and the matters that are being raised in this House with respect to the private development projects of the Member for Diego Martin West is the Code of Conduct set out in the Integrity in Public Life Act, which is very relevant. I now read section 23:

- “23. This Part applies to a person in public life and to all persons exercising public functions.
24. (1) A person to whom this Part applies shall ensure that he performs his functions and administers the public resources for which he is responsible in an effective and efficient manner and shall—
- (a) be fair and impartial in exercising his public duty;
 - (b) afford no undue preferential treatment to any group or individual;
 - (c) arrange his private interests whether pecuniary or otherwise in such a manner as to maintain public confidence and trust in his integrity;”

I repeat:

- “(c) arrange his private interests whether pecuniary or otherwise in such a manner as to maintain public confidence and trust in his integrity;”

I ask the hon. Prime Minister, having regard to section 24(c), whether he is satisfied with the arrangement of the private interests of the Member for Diego Martin West, that it is in such a manner as to maintain public confidence and trust in his integrity? I ask the hon. Prime Minister if he is satisfied—that the conduct of the hon. Member, as a public officer, a person holding high public office in this land, a person in his Cabinet—with his conduct with respect to his private interests. Is that he is so satisfied, is he then giving licence and saying that it is quite all right for his other Ministers to act in a like manner? Is it all right for the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, as the Minister of Health, to have dealings with the dispensation or selling of drugs in the health system? Will that be all right?

The rumours are—just as these rumours were before the Member for Caroni East brought the evidence before this Parliament—that a chain of pharmacies are coming and the Member has dealings with these. If you are holding public office,

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private interests cannot be part of it. Section 24(c) gives us that clearly. The Code of Conduct continues:

- “(2) A person to whom this Part applies shall not—
- (a) use his office for the improper advancement of his own or his family’s personal or financial interests or the interest of any person;”

I am asking the hon. Prime Minister, is he satisfied—when the Member for Diego Martin West held the position of Minister of Planning and was involved in a private land development project—that there was no conflict of interest? Is he satisfied that he did not use his office for improper advancements of his own or his family’s personal financial interest or assets? Is he satisfied? I ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he is satisfied that the Member for Diego Martin West held and is holding the portfolio of the Minister of Housing? Here are dealings, clearly documented as evidence, that a Minister of Housing is having engagements and involvements with a person who is a major contractor in the housing sector.

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

Mr. Speaker: What point of order?

Mr. Valley: Standing Order 36(10). I submit, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, the Member is questioning the conduct of a Member of the House. It seems to me that it falls under Standing Order 36(10). The matter has been referred to a commission of enquiry.

Mr. Speaker: No, I rule you out of order.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, a commission of enquiry has been announced. What is expected is that the commission will be allowed to do its work without Members of the Parliament seeking to cast aspersions on the individuals involved.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I am not casting aspersions, I am asking questions.

Mr. Manning: Let the commission do its work. You “cyah” wait? The implication is clear.

Mr. Speaker: I disagree with you. Please continue. Perhaps you would want to press on.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not questioning your ruling, but I would like to make the point that any A’level law student knows that a commission of enquiry does not pre-empt what can be done under the Integrity in Public Life Act with respect to the functions of the Integrity Commission

and the functions of a commission of enquiry. If it is that there is a commission of enquiry into a matter, that does not pre-empt the police from going and doing their duty and it does not pre-empt the Integrity Commission from doing its duty. I thank you for your ruling which was totally correct.

Most important, I am being reminded, that does not prevent us from raising the questions and the Prime Minister dealing with his Minister in a manner that will give trust and confidence in the governance of this country. That is why the questions come. That is our duty here in this House, as elected representatives of the people.

Whilst there may be those who are close to him who will ask him to cover up and hide, I know the hon. Prime Minister, from the statement made in his budget statement, wants to deal with matters of impropriety and corruption. Let us hang it out, open it and bring it to the public light. Let us ask the questions. The Code of Conduct continues:

“(b) engage in any transaction, acquire any position or have any commercial or other interest that is incompatible with his office, function and duty or the discharge thereof;”

Is there any incompatibility with the fact that here is a Minister of Planning who is doing land development which falls within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Planning and thereafter a Minister of Housing who again, in that function, has to deal with a private housing project? I am asking, based on this, is it incompatible?

“(c) use public property or services for activities not related to his official work;”

Clearly, that is the only term of reference that is within the enquiry that is set up by the Prime Minister, whether these materials were removed from a public place to a private place.

“(d)” directly or indirectly use his office for private gain.

(3) No person to whom this Part applies shall be a party to or shall undertake any project or activity involving the use of public funds in disregard of the Financial Orders or other Regulations applicable to such funds.

25. A person to whom this Part applies shall not use the information that is gained in the execution of his office and which is not available to the general public to further or seek to further his private interests.

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26. A person to whom this Part applies shall not use his office to seek to influence a decision made by another person or public body to further his own private interests.”

Section 29 speaks of conflict of interest.

“For the purposes of this Act, a conflict of interest is deemed to arise if a person in public life or any person exercising a public function were to make or participate in the making of a decision in the execution of his office and at the same time knows or ought reasonably to have known, that in the making of the decision, there is an opportunity either directly or indirectly to further his private interests or that of a member of his family or of any other person.”

Is there a conflict of interest in this private land deal that is going on with respect to the Minister of Housing?

This is why an article written by Suzanne Mills in the *Newsday*, is most instructive. I would quote selective parts of it. I do know you read the entire paper and do not like us to quote the whole article because you read all of them. I will select those parts that are most relevant. This is from the *Newsday* of October 17, 2004:

“I have news for Dr. Keith Rowley, for his chief champion, Camille Robinson-Regis and for the PNM. The allegations made Thursday in Parliament by Opposition Chief Whip Ganga Singh—that Government materials were being used on Rowley’s land development site—have long been circulating in the form of rumours, with all the usual hyperbole that gossip-mongering brings. Talk for months has also been that Rowley had become a mega developer, building houses left, right and centre, up and down the land.

I first heard the Ganga ‘corruption’ claim earlier this year and from more than one person. None of these however, could provide any documentary evidence to support as serious and defamatory an accusation as theft of State materials. I told my informants however, that in my view, there was another important problem with Rowley’s involvement in land development: conflict of interest because of his Cabinet portfolios. First, he had been Minister of Planning and Development and now he is Minister of Housing.

Development on his Tobago Mason Hall project began, by Rowley’s own admission, in 2003. But when in 2003? Did work commence when Rowley was Minister of Planning and Development? If so, then it would not be obscene to suggest that Rowley granted permission to himself for his Mason Hall project. If the go-ahead was granted in Camille’s tenure, this, too, looked bad because the public would still believe that office was used to attain this

sanction. (Indeed, this is why no minister should be involved in land development or any private business). Rowley should have withdrawn his name from the project and let his family attend to family matters. He was elected and appointed to see about the public's affairs."

She ends this article by saying:

"I end by noting that as far as I know Dr. Keith Rowley has not broken a single law. However, his simultaneous involvement with contractors NH International in both a private and public capacity is a definite conflict of interest and his involvement in any land development completely untenable. Not because an action is legal, does it mean that it is ethical.

Rowley must practise now what he so loved to preach."

1.55 p.m

Mr. Speaker, again, through you, is the hon. Prime Minister satisfied with the role of this senior Minister in his Cabinet? Is the hon. Prime Minister satisfied that this behaviour has been ethical? Is this the standard by which he would want the rest of his Government to be judged? Is the Member satisfied that other Ministers will not trump and follow suit? Someone said that Dr. Rowley, the Member for Diego Martin West, is corrupt, unethical and stupid or he has been unethical and stupid. It could be any one.

Hon. Member: He is corrupted and stupid.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Take your pick! Is either the Minister is corrupted, unethical or stupid. Take your pick! The question is: Is the Prime Minister concerned with the manner in which these contracts may have been drafted and awarded—contracts that have been awarded, contracts that may be awarded, and contracts that are yet to be awarded by this Minister? This raises a whole issue. This Minister continues to sit as a senior member of the Cabinet dealing with other contracts and mega dollars from this massive billion dollar budget. Is the Prime Minister satisfied that, in the circumstances, this Minister will behave ethical in the context of what has gone before?

I now come to the announcement of the commission of enquiry. Whilst we welcome the Prime Minister's response to our call for a commission of enquiry, we have serious concerns about this enquiry. When I heard what the hon. Minister said, my first response was, that is a cover up. This commission of enquiry, which is a "one-woman" enquiry, is a cover up.

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Mr. Speaker, do you know why I say this is a cover up? In the first place, the terms of reference are far too narrow. I would ask you to reconsider the terms of reference because I know you want to do well; I know that you want to do the right thing. So, I am asking you to reconsider the terms of reference.

Earlier today in this Chamber, the Member told this honourable House that he will be setting up a commission of enquiry with respect to the Landate and Mason Hall sites in which a Minister has an interest, with particular reference to whether materials, equipment and resources were, in fact, removed, in the circumstances as alleged; and if those resources were removed as alleged, and whether there was any impropriety on the part of the Minister or his agents, to make such observations and recommendations, arising out of its deliberations as the commission may deem appropriate.

It is my respectful view—and I am sure this is the view of many other persons—that in the first place, the Prime Minister announced a commission of enquiry and he had his senior Minister sitting there and presiding over all the documents and papers that would be the subject of this enquiry. How can you then say that there will be propriety with respect to this matter?

In other parts of the world, when there are concerns about impropriety and conduct in public affairs, you do not leave the person against whom the allegations are being made, sitting there—and everyone is scurrying around him because he is a sitting Member in the Cabinet.

In this country, even in a state corporation, where allegations of improprieties are being made against a person, that person would be suspended. The person does not sit and continue to hide, cover up or to lose papers. The Member cannot continue to sit here since there is an enquiry. They are telling us that this enquiry is going to be fair without bias and without favour. I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister to also consider that. I know that he means well. I heard him when he made his budget statement. He was very energized and vibrant when he read what he wanted to do with respect to corruption and transparency in governance. I really doubt it that the Member was lying to us. I believed him. I am asking him to consider: how is he going to have a commission of enquiry going on into a matter and the person is sitting there?

I remember when we came into office, allegations were made with respect to MTS persons and they were suspended. I am asking the hon. Prime Minister to please consider that.

Mr. Speaker, I remember a story I read which was written by a former chairman of the British Conservative Party. This story concerned a party that was

campaigning—that is how I know the Member cares about this matter, because he campaigned about it—about transparency, accountability in public affairs and rooting out corruption. And, in a particular, Third World state, the party campaigned and they said that when they get into power, they were going to wipe out corruption and so forth, and bring in accountability and transparency.

When that party won the election, the prime minister told the attorney general—and he had promised the people transparency, accountability and getting rid of corruption and so on—to tell him what he wanted. He said that he will give him anything that he wanted to deal with this issue. The attorney general said: “Look, I do not want very much. Mr. Prime Minister, I just want a gun and a plane ticket to go to Geneva.” The Prime Minister gave him the gun. He went to the Swiss Bank in Geneva. Those are the banks where people put money in when they steal it. So, he went to the Swiss Bank and he went to the first person and said: “Listen, I am the Attorney General of ‘X Land’, and I have promised my prime minister that I am going to deal with corruption. I have come here and I want you to show me the bank accounts of all the people from my country who are banking with your bank.” Of course, this was a junior member of the bank. So, the person said: “Listen, I cannot help you, sorry, you will have to go and talk to the boss man.” He went to the boss man and told him that he was the attorney general of ‘X land’, and he promised his prime minister that he will deal with corruption, and he wanted him to give him the bank accounts of all the people in his country who were in that bank. The gentleman said, “Well, I am sorry, Sir, I cannot do that.” The attorney general told him, “No, that is my job as the attorney general.” And the gentleman said, “no”. He then said, “Well, listen, you see this gun—he pulled the gun out and put it to the man’s head—if you do not tell me the names of those persons from my country who have accounts in your bank, I am going to blow your brains out.” The man in the bank told him, “I am very sorry, Sir, I cannot give you those names.” The attorney general then put the gun down on the desk and he told him, “Well, now we can do business. I want to open a bank account in your bank.” [*Desk thumping*]

That reminds me of what has happened here. Week after week, in this Parliament, the Members for Diego Martin West and Diego Martin East would lambaste everyone on this side. The Member was waiting to get his hands on the money in the Treasury. That is what he was waiting to do. [*Desk thumping*] I remember the Ibis High School in which we placed 500 children, who had no where to go. Every week, the Member will come here and say that I stole the money, and that building was my family building. That building was never mine

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and I had nothing to do with that building, financially or otherwise, but Landate and Lamsden is his and his family building. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Thief!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, I now come back to the terms of reference as set out by the hon. Prime Minister with respect to this commission of enquiry. I am saying that the terms of reference are too narrow. I have read them. They are too narrow because they do not deal with the contracts. The terms of reference must include the various contracts from Warner to NH International to Romain. All those contracts must be involved. The terms of reference must be able to trace the money trail. It does not only deal with how materials were removed, and how they were not moved. This is far more than that. This goes far deeper than that. Those terms of reference need to be widened.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that this announcement of a commission of enquiry is a cover up. I would give a further reason why it is a cover up. After the hon. Prime Minister did the right thing and agreed to have a commission of enquiry, a senior Member of his Government immediately jumped up—the Member for Arouca South—and defended the Member for Diego Martin West before the enquiry takes place.

This is almost like what happened here today when the Member said that he cannot raise questions and he cannot say anything until the commission of enquiry stops. His own Member got up and defended the Member when, as Prime Minister, he said that he would enquire into this matter. The Member had already judged the matter. Is this the Minister of Planning and Development who will have to give the planning permission for that development? Is that the Minister who will have to grant that permission if it is not yet granted?

Again, there was a report in the newspaper—and I would ask the Prime Minister to tell us whether this report was really coming from him. It was reported that the Prime Minister said that he was satisfied with the explanations given by the Member. How could there be an enquiry when a report said that you were satisfied with the report and explanation given by the Member for Diego Martin West? How can that then be a true investigation? Please, answer?

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. I, too, saw the report and I have no knowledge of the genesis, none at all.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Very well. Mr. Speaker, we are saying that there is evidence of a cover up. The third question has to do with the “hush hush”

meetings with the Attorney General and the Member for Diego Martin West. They are colleagues in the same Cabinet.

Is the hon. Attorney General advising the hon. Prime Minister? Did the Member for Diego Martin West nominate the lone commissioner for this enquiry? Did the Member have any hand in this matter based on these “hush hush” conversations? Is the hon. Attorney General, a Member of the Cabinet and his colleague who made this recommendation? Since the allegations came from this side—we called for an independent enquiry—will it not be appropriate if the Prime Minister had consulted with Members on this side of the House in order to arrive at an independent investigator? [*Desk thumping*] How can we sit here and feel comfortable about the independence of this particular commission that he has appointed? How can we be confident of the competence of the commissioner that you have appointed?

Whilst I cast no allegations, I do not impute the integrity of the lone justice commissioner that you have appointed, I have serious concerns as to whether this will not end up like another Biche Commission of Enquiry. Let us remember that this is not the first time that the PNM has chosen this lone justice commissioner to sit on a commission on matters that are highly political and very controversial.

With respect to the Biche Commission of Enquiry—that is why I raised the plea for those children and that school. We still do not know what became of that report. We do not know what became of it. Millions of dollars were spent to pay the commission and other persons sitting there and we do not know what has become of that report.

Mr. B Panday: They have to sanitize it.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: When that commission was going on the report got lost and evidence was also lost in the matter. Will the evidence be lost in this matter with the Member for Diego Martin West as well? [*Desk thumping*]

So, we are saying that we have serious concerns and we are asking the Prime Minister—given his words in his budget statement, like “transparency” and “accountability”—to reconsider his decision. We are saying that decision handed down today is a cover up and it is an attempt to cover up serious impropriety happening within his Government by a senior Member.

We welcome the commission of enquiry. I am saying that this budget, when all is said and done, would be remembered for the exposure of corruption happening on the other side.

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Mr. Speaker, there is a further issue. When we talked about contract and widening the terms of the contract—bills were paid and so on. When there are materials being used in a public project and materials being used in a private project—the public project and an IDB project—it is well recognized that they are exempted from Value added tax (VAT). So, when they siphoned out, from one side to the other, what happens to the VAT? Did they pay VAT on any of the items?

I am calling upon the Board of Inland Revenue Department—this new fancy squad they have—to go in and check the VAT payments with respect to the materials used on that Scarborough Hospital site and in that private project.

2.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I need to ask about the contract to NH International for the Scarborough Hospital. Hon. Prime Minister, I will like you to take note of this, because it is a serious matter involving, not only the contract for the Scarborough Hospital. Was it a valid legal contract? Was a valid contract given? We all know that, in the first place, it may not have been fair, because it was not the lowest bid; he was not the lowest bidder. I am not raising that issue; that is old news to people of this country. The new issue is whether the contract granted to NH for the Scarborough Hospital is legal and valid in this country.

I raise that issue, because I have reliable information, which I have verified, that NH International is a company that has been incorporated in the Cayman Islands. It is not incorporated in Trinidad and Tobago. Do you remember everything you said about the Cayman Islands, and islands and islands? I come back to my story about the Prime Minister and the Attorney General. The corruption must stop. The company was incorporated in the Cayman Islands.

Nothing is wrong with that in the company laws of Trinidad and Tobago. If you have a company incorporated outside the country, as so many others are in England or any part of the world, it is registered in Trinidad and Tobago. American Airlines, for example, is incorporated outside of Trinidad and Tobago, but it is registered in our Ministry of Legal Affairs in the Companies' Registry. So NH International is a company that has been incorporated in the Cayman Islands. I will come back to what all that means and why a Trinidadian, who likes to say he is a Trini, acts and does everything like a Trini, would want his company registered in the Cayman Islands. Maybe we can start with that and come to the second point.

Why would somebody incorporate his company in the Cayman Islands? We all know that they are tax havens. We all know that it is a place to repatriate

moneys out of Trinidad and Tobago and back into the Cayman Islands, to benefit from the tax havens created there. We all know of the secrecy laws with respect to banking there, so that when money comes through improper sources, you cannot trace it. So here is this company, incorporated in the Cayman Islands, that is the first point.

Secondly, according to Rule No. 26 of the Rules of Procurement of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), which deals with procurement for works contracts and the nationality of contractors, a company incorporated in a country that is not a member country of the IADB is not permitted to be eligible for the granting of contracts. Is this contract legal and valid? I am reliably advised that the Cayman Islands is not a member country of the IADB, so under Rule No. 26 for works contract, NH International is not eligible for any IADB contracts.

Hon. Members: Ooh! [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Prime Minister, I tell you this because I need you to check it out. You really need to investigate these contracts, because we are talking about billions of dollars. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The same applies to the School Building Programme, where we are building the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) schools under the IADB programme. If NH is involved in these contracts, are these contracts legal and valid? The same applies to the Health Sector Reform Programme and the National Highways Programme, all of which are being financed by the IADB. This is a matter that needs to be seriously investigated.

Mr. Prime Minister, in case you wish to verify that the company is incorporated in the Cayman Islands, I can give you the address. The registered office is at Uglan House, Post Office Box 309, Georgetown, Grand Cayman. Check it out, Mr. Prime Minister. The question that arises is: Was there collusion between NH officials, Mr. Elias, the local IADB office and the people in the Ministry of Planning and Development, with respect to the Scarborough project? And it is not only this project; I am so advised about one that is very close to my heart, the Siparia Administrative Complex, and also the Customs building, the San Fernando General Hospital upgrade, phase 1 and, of course, the Scarborough Hospital. Check out these contracts and see what is happening. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Prime Minister something serious is going to happen. I know we want the hospitals and the schools, but if NH is not under valid

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legal contracts, any citizen of this country can go to the courts to declare those contracts not valid and any citizen can then take out injunctions to prevent the projects from being continued. I do not think that is what you want. We all want the Scarborough Hospital. We want all those projects to continue for the benefit of the people.

I have dealt with the issues concerning the Member for Diego Martin West, but we are now going into other areas of work of this Government, with respect to all IADB projects. Once these projects are IADB-funded and contracts were given to NH, are the contracts binding and legal? It is something that can be checked out easily. [*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, I am sure the hon. Prime Minister will do the right thing and deal with him in an appropriate manner. Let us look at projects for the people of Trinidad and Tobago—the Scarborough Hospital project. You had engineers, designers, architects and so on, you designed this whole hospital. After all that was done and the works began, how is it that you suddenly realized you needed all this extra work to be done and you changed the scope of works completely? How did you do it in the first place? You are still at the foundation level; you have not even gone off the ground and now you have changed your whole scope of works to bring in another \$20 million. How did that happen? That is why the terms of reference of your commission of enquiry are too narrow; you need to include the entire Scarborough Hospital project; those are public funds.

These are some of the issues that will emerge as the most historic, out of this budget debate, the setting up of a commission of enquiry based on allegations and exposures with respect to corruption taking place in the Government. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Mr. Singh, the Member for Caroni East, got this piece of paper this morning. It said:

“Mr. Singh, I want to tell you, this is just the tip of the iceberg.”

Hon. Prime Minister, you need to go into all the contracts that have been awarded.

One year ago I filed a question in the Parliament. What a shame this Parliament has come to! Up to when the Parliament prorogued, the question was never answered. You will see it written on the question:

“Answer due by 18.12.2003”

I filed the question in November, because you have to give 21 days’ notice. It appeared on the Order Paper; 21 days after it was stated:

“Answer due by 18.12.2003”

When the Parliament was prorogued it lapsed. This is one year later.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what the question was? Let me remind you. I asked the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries a question. That is why I am saying to the hon. Prime Minister that it is not just in one ministry; this is going on in all the ministries. The corruption in this Government is rife from the heart, inside and out. [*Desk thumping*] I filed a question to the Minister of Energy and Energy Resources, because we had information. When we get information, we do not want to make allegations without getting the facts from you, but you refused to give the facts.

Here is the question:

“(a) Would the Minister state:

- (i) the names, job designations and remuneration packages of each person or company hired on contract;
- (ii) the names and job description of each person or company awarded contracts for the supply of goods and services and the cost of each such contract awarded;

at Petrotrin since January 1st, 2002?

- (b) In the case of companies, the names of the directors of each company;
- (c) Whether the jobs/tenders were advertised and if they were, where and when were the advertisements placed;
- (d) In the case of tenders, the bid made by each tenderer;
- (e) What was the procedure and criteria used to hire each person and company and/or used to award contracts for the supply of goods and services?”

This was filed one year ago. Why are you hiding the information? In words made famous by the Member for Diego Martin Central, “They could run, but they

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cannot hide.” [Desk thumping] My information is that there are serious breaches of the tendering procedures going on at Petrotrin and that is why, up to one year later, they refuse to answer that question.

I am calling on the Integrity Commission today to investigate this matter and it must not hide the report. I call, particularly, on the Chairman, who is very reluctant. [Desk thumping] When it came to Mr. Panday’s Members, they publicized everything in the newspapers: front page, back page and centre. Here are these allegations and they are sitting on them. I call upon the Integrity Commission to do its job: go to Petrotrin, pick up the documentation and bring it to the people; the people deserve it. You want to spend \$28 billion; you must spend it with transparency and accountability. [Desk thumping] We are happy if the people can benefit, but when graft and corruption are going on, the people will only suffer. We know that the Member for San Fernando East does not want that to happen at all. I want to remind you of other questions that I have filed in this Parliament, that have remained unanswered. The reason you do not answer them is because you do not want the country to know.

I asked the Minister of Education a question, but:

“Answer due by 31.03.2004”

Of course, this also lapsed and the answer was never given. I asked the same question: What are the schools in which you said you were going to expand construction? Name the schools; tell us the procedure and the criteria used to select the schools; tell us the nature of the construction and tell us the estimated cost of the expansion. When you have done that, tell us whether tenders were invited for the contracts; tell us the bids made by the tenderers and the criteria you used. The Minister never answered the question; that was with respect to the School Expansion Programme.

I asked the Minister of Education to tell us, in addition, about technical upgrades. Every day we read in the newspapers about hundreds of millions of dollars in construction programmes, in fact, \$2 billion in school construction programmes; come and tell us to whom these contracts are going. Tell us for how much they have been given; tell us what the estimated costs are and, at the end of the day, the actual costs.

I will give you an example, Mr. Speaker. When we got the information about the Russell Latapy High School and it was here in black and white, that question was finally answered. The estimated cost was \$8 million; when it was completed it cost \$22 million. That is why I want the Minister to tell us what are the

estimated costs, who is she giving these contracts to and what are the procedures she is using. I asked for the technical upgrades; I asked for the expanded construction; no answers. This Parliament comes like a rubber stamp. We come here week after week to ask questions on behalf of the people and they will not answer the questions. One year later, you will not answer and you come with a next budget for \$28 billion, to spend more, and you have not told us what you did with the money from the last budget; you will not account for it. You will not account to the people.

I am exceedingly disappointed. I think it is a mark of disrespect that the Minister of Education has not come to this House to account for the \$2 billion that were spent last year and the \$3 billion she is going to spend next year. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] Do not start to bat for her, she can bat for herself. [*Crosstalk*] Do not tell me that she is going to account to the Senate, because I want to point it out to you. In an appropriation's debate, the vote is taken in the House of Representatives; this is the primary place, the vote is taken here. Nobody in the Senate votes on passing a money bill. They just stand there and talk. She should come and account to the people, because I want to ask, "Where de money gone?"

Mr. Speaker, \$2 billion were given in the budget for education last year. I ask any one of you to show me what you did with that \$2 billion; show us. That is why you had a duty to come and account to the people for \$2 billion spent. Do you know why? Not only because it is the people's money, but because this year you got more. This year education has the largest slice of the budgetary pie, \$3 billion, and the Minister has no respect to come and tell the nation what she did with last year's money and what she will be doing with this year's money. Instead, promises made in the education budget, both by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Education, have been broken year after year.

2.25 p.m.

I will give one example because they are too numerous, and I do not have enough time. I have spoken of it already. Budget 2002, the Prime Minister promised that they will build 30 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres (ECCEs).

Budget 2003 promised to build 43 and Budget 2004 the same thing again; not one. I will quote your words for you. This is just one example and there are numerous broken promises; that is why our school system and education sector is in the position it is in today. It is in a state of total collapse.

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On page 30 of the *Budget Statement 2003*, presented on October 21, 2002, the Prime Minister said:

- “We will increase the number of Early Childhood Care and Education Centres (ECCE) in every district;”

The Minister of Education, contributing to that budget debate on October 29, 2003, said over fiscal year 2003, construction and outfitting of 43 ECCEs will take place. How many have been done? Not a single one.

Again on September 05, 2003, in reply to the question in the House, the Minister told us clearly that no ECCE had been built for that year. The Prime Minister in his budget statement 2004, presented in October 2003 at page 45 said:

“...we have developed a plan to achieve universal pre-school education before the end of the decade...we shall build... 200 centres over the next four years...”

Mrs. Manning, on October 13, in supporting, him said that this year, Government plans to build 30 ECCEs using revised modern designs. So 43 in the 2002 budget, 13 in the 2003 budget and so it continues. We are here in fiscal 2004/2005 and again the Prime Minister promises us that they will build the pre-schools, but not a single pre-school was built.

It will go down on record that the PNM, under this Prime Minister, did not build a single secondary school while they were in office, and so you are going to achieve the record in this one of promised pre-school and not a single one is being built.

There are not only broken promises, but let us look at the hoax that is being perpetrated. All the full-page advertisements and so on are just a trick on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

This year you tell us you are going to build 43 pre-schools. On page 17 of the *Budget Statement 2005* says:

“In the New Year we shall construct 43 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres...”

The hon. Minister of Education told this Parliament that whereas the UNC Government—thank God for the UNC—Adesh and I constructed and upgraded over 100 pre-schools in our term of office. The Minister said we are too cheap—she did not use those words you know, but there is implication. The UNC did that with a ceiling cost of \$250,000 for the pre-schools, but they could not do it. It is in black and white in this Parliament’s record. She said we will do it at \$400,000. Lo

and behold thereafter, the Minister announced that it will cost \$700,000 now to build one pre-school. In three years none was built and the price has gone up from \$250,000 to \$700,000. Look at the estimates.

They want to build 43 pre-schools and do you know the amount they have allocated in this budget for that? They have allocated the sum of \$10 million. How many pre-schools you will build with \$10 million? By the time they are finished it will be \$1 million for one school.

The price they gave to build the 43 schools will cost three times the amount of money put into the budget. It reminded me when Dr. Rafeeq was speaking and he said that they were allocating \$50 million to CDAP but it was going to cost three or four times the amount and the hon. Prime Minister said: “You doh worry about that. If them fellas want more I will give them more.” Government by vaps.

We are here debating the budget for the whole week with a set of paper and file and documents working out numbers for them to balance and work and the Prime Minister tells us—You know, it is incredulous! It is unbelievable! He says: “Doh worry, if dey want more money in six month’s time, I will just give them more money.” So \$10 million for a pre-school, you are promising 43; that is why I am saying not a single one will be built.

I want to know why the big promise for deshifting our schools was made every year. Again, we are in agreement. There is consensus. We must get rid of that evil shift system. We began the process when we were in office. It is tragic that in three years only three schools have been deshifted; one a year. If you have 42 more to convert are you going to take 42 years to do them?

What I would like the Minister to answer is when I checked the budget estimate, I saw \$60 million was given for deshifting and conversion exercises last year and out of that \$60 million—of course it was not utilized—\$9 million is being put as the revised amount for 2004.

You deshifted one school in the year 2004. What did you do with \$9 million? Why was \$9 million necessary to deshift one school? I know the school because it is a school in Siparia, and no \$9 million could be spent there. What did you do with \$9 million? Tell this country.

When you tell us you have a \$3 billion plan to deshift the schools in this country, I am seriously frightened about the people’s money. These are some of the issues that concern us in education.

There is just one other matter I would like to raise if time permits. There is a matter that I feel duty-bound to raise because whilst we are in a time of plenty and

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we all want to enjoy ourselves, Government has made sure they have given themselves two salary increases, and up to today they cannot pay the Opposition Members for the year we served in office, but they have taken two or three salary increases. I have lost count. That is all right. You have taken your salary increases and so on, but the money for which I worked in 2002, you have not paid me for that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you if you do not have shares in the Trinidad and Tobago Publishing Company or in CCN, or any of the media houses, I strongly advise you to buy shares now. I will tell you why. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has become the No. 1 advertiser in this country.

Profits will be accruing to the media houses and it is here in black and white in the estimates. I am not lying. Every Member of this House talk about centrefold and centre spread and it is really obscene, the amount of money that is spent on the centre pages. In the estimates, the numbers tell us the amount of money this Government is spending and will be spending on party and publicity. Typical PNM style—spreeing and propaganda.

I believe some Members on that side are going to be very surprised. They will find out who the real boys are, and who are not the boys; who are the real girls and who are not the girls. You are going to be flabbergasted at what has gone on in this budget in terms of the publicity programmes and entertainment and spreeing programmes; the propaganda vote.

Mr. Speaker, I spent a little time crunching the numbers. I started looking at the votes that were given for overseas travel because I have noticed the hon. Minister of Education—who goes to work every single day—seems to be out of the country on quite a few occasions, and so I wanted to find out how much money they had spent on this overseas travel.

When I looked at overseas travel, I was very surprised to see in addition to overseas travel votes, there is a vote called “Official Entertainment Vote”; one called “Hosting Conferences, Seminars and Other Functions”—I do not know what the difference between the two is; if you entertain differently from hosting functions. Then I saw another vote which had never been in the estimates for this country and that is the propaganda vote. It is called “Promotions and Publicity”, a whole vote that has been created for the propaganda of this Government. That is why I say if you do not have shares in the newspapers and TV stations, go and buy shares because you will find out how much money we are talking about now.

Mr. Speaker, when I totalled those votes, I discovered that this Government has allocated unto itself for the coming fiscal year \$125 million to be spent on

spreeing and propaganda. Let the country know it. Add it up, and I challenge anybody to do the research. I sat a whole night with my calculator and I left out some because there were so many, and this number I am giving you is only for the ministries. Do not forget you have a host of other organizations falling under the ministries known as state enterprises such as WASA, MTS, NLCB—do not talk about NLCB. There are the state enterprises and the statutory authorities. So this is a drop in the bucket.

This \$125 million for spreeing and propaganda; that is more money spent on themselves than they spent to deal with the high price of rice and flour in this country. That is \$125 million more that they will spend on themselves rather than deal with the destitute and really poor people of this country.

When you talk about below the poverty line, those people are the ones who are getting the equivalent of US \$1 per day, but there are people in this country who do not even have \$1.00 a day. They are the destitute, and your way of helping these poor people in this country is by giving 5,000 more hampers. It sounds nice, but those hampers are given for only six months of the year, what must they do for the next six months, starve? But \$125 million for fete and propaganda for you, and the hampers are not even costing you \$8 million.

So you are going to help the poor people who cannot buy food and so on, but you put for yourself \$125 million. Whilst all of this is being done, there is a programme in every ministry known as the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and it appeared on the same page with all this bacchanal, propaganda, and publicity vote. When I looked at what they were giving to this EAP, for the year 2004—\$4.2 million, but taking \$125 million to make sure you are eating, drinking, spreeing and being on the newspapers every day.

For the year 2005, you are putting \$7.4 million into that vote, but you know what is really sad about it? With the exception of maybe two or three ministries on that side, other ministries did not spend their EAP vote which was given last year. Check it out, not even your ministry used it up. Very few ministries used that.

While I am on this, let me deal with who are the most outstanding stars in the Government. To whom have the allocations gone? Some of these people are going to be very surprised because while you are getting \$30,000 and \$40,000 for the year, the Minister of Education has been given \$4 million in overseas travel vote for this year.

2.40 p.m.

Let us look at the propaganda vote: The Office of the Prime Minister for 2004, let us tell you how much he spent. He was allocated \$9,000, but he really spent in

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his revised estimate, \$3 million out of his ministry. That is just for one of the votes. You know there are four. For 2005, that \$3 million was not good enough, so what he has done, he has given himself \$4.5 million.

Then you have the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs—bright young people they want to keep down. Whilst the Prime Minister is taking \$4.5 million, and whilst the Minister of Education is taking \$3.9 million, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is allocated \$100,000. [*Crosstalk*] The Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs has surprised me. I thought this was the high priestess of the PNM—only \$100,000, and there are several Ministers there. These are the promotions votes.

When you look at the overseas travel vote—and I would be very happy to give you the details so each of you can check where you fall in the scheme of things which level you are. The travel vote is very interesting. These “fellas ain’t” getting to travel at all. The only place they could travel to, is from Port of Spain to Siparia. I hope they will come to visit my constituency.

Under the UNC government, the Member for Tabaquite would tell you our education travel vote was about \$200,000 or \$300,000. For the overseas travel under the Minister of Education, in 2003 it was \$647,000; in 2004, \$1.4 million; in 2005, \$1.4 million. Minister of Housing, see where you are in the scheme of things: \$94,000 in 2004—

Mr. Valley: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, please. Is that “Minister” or “Ministry”?

Hon. Member: What is the difference? Sit down “nuh”.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: This is the allocation for the ministry under the overseas official vote which is utilized by the Minister.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, once more, could I ask the Member, is it the Minister alone who uses the official overseas vote? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Mr. Valley: I just want to know. Just tell me! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order, please!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Details of Recurrent Expenditure, 2005; I will give you all the page numbers and you can check them. You are in the Ministry of Finance, you should know the answer to that.

Mr. Valley: If you are bringing information, bring proper information! The official overseas vote is for the ministry! [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: You should know the answer to that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, order, please—

Mr. Valley: It is for the ministry! It is for all officials, and you know that!

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. Valley: Do not come here and misrepresent the facts!

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: I will have to get injury time.

Mr. Speaker: Listen, there is a rule that says when the Speaker is on his feet, all Members must sit. I wish all Members will remember that rule. [*Interruption*] Order, please. I am speaking.

Hon. Member, if the Member is not giving way, the proper thing for you to do is to take your seat. Obviously, she was not giving way.

Please continue.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Valley: My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: You see, they do not want me to let the Members know. Minister of Housing, they do not even want me to let you know where you are in the scheme of things with this.

Dr. Rowley: I know exactly where I am.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: It is \$160,000. Millions for them, but \$160,000 for Housing. But never mind, the Member for Diego Martin East got even less than you did—\$150,000. I am asking you to compare these with the millions being allocated in the other ministries. The pattern is the same throughout this.

We have also said on this side that we will support the advertising vote, the propaganda vote. The Member is asking me to give the totals. The propaganda vote: Office of the Prime Minister, \$4.5 million; Ministry of Community Development, \$100,000; Ministry of Local Government, \$239,000. Each of the ministries is listed here with respect to this propaganda vote. [*Interruption*] Gerry, I will give you the total in a minute. The Ministry of Education was allocated \$3.099 million. The total on the propaganda vote where you need to buy your shares now is \$79.414 million. In the previous year it was \$48 million.

Mr. Speaker, I have had a most enjoyable debate. I thank you for the privilege and time that you have given me. As I say, I congratulate all the Members on this

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side and I do want to say, my colleague from St. Augustine always tells us we must get the politics right, and he is totally correct. But I think at the end of the day it is even more important that we get the governance right. The PNM has never got the governance right and they will never get it right.

When all across the land the people are crying out in their pain and suffering and they are asking: “Whom shall we send?” The voices arose and they said: “Send the UNC, because as surely as night follows the day, the sun will rise again.”

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stanford Callender): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I want to start off by complimenting the Minister of Finance for a well-structured, all-conclusive and thought-provoking budget. A budget means several things to several people and, therefore, I am not surprised by some of the comments that are coming from the other side.

I want to say that of the Members on the other side who spoke, there is one particular Member that I have a little respect for, and that is the Member for St. Joseph. In the budget debate of 2001, I remember saying to the Member for St. Joseph—I was on that side—that I believe he is a man with good intentions but finds himself among bad company, because I remember distinctly with the coming into being of the present Tobago House of Assembly administration, it was faced with some serious financial problems brought about by the last administration of the Tobago House of Assembly. The then Minister of Finance, the Member for St. Joseph, intervened, and that laid the groundwork for the performance of this present administration to date.

However, the Member for St. Joseph spoke about the disconnect of the budget and, therefore, in my short intervention I want to take the opportunity to connect Tobago to this budget debate now taking place in this House. To begin to do the connection, I want to refer to the Minister of Finance’s budget statement where he speaks about Tobago. I quote from page 38:

“My Government wishes to congratulate the Tobago House of Assembly for their continuing efforts to develop Tobago; and for the genuine partnership that has been forged between the Central Government to ensure that Tobago, as I have indicated in a previous budget statement, ‘catches up’ with the rest of the country. I am pleased to report that among the principal fruits of this partnership are:

- The record expansion of the Tourism Sector to an expected 100,000 visitor arrivals this calendar year;
- The significant improvements in the operations of the air bridge;
- The commencement of work on the new Scarborough Library;
- The Buccoo Integrated Community Development Project;
- The purchase of the Courland Estate; and
- The settlement, once and for all, of the Pigeon Point issue.

And we are also pleased to announce that in a matter of weeks, the first phase in the long-term improvement of the service on the sea-bridge will begin. The Cabinet looks forward to the imminent submission of the Report of the THA-led Task Force on natural gas and Tobago's future development; and to the Report of the recently established THA Task Force on the Cost of Living in Tobago.

Looking ahead, we are once again encouraged by the proposals emanating from the Tobago House of Assembly for the next fiscal year; and this is why this Budget includes important provisions for:

- Enhanced Human Resource training and Development;
- The Tourism Rolling Plan;
- The Scarborough and Roxborough Police Stations;
- The Tobago Heritage Land Trust;
- The Roxborough, Blenheim, Castara and Adelphi Housing Estates; and
- The L'Anse Fourmi/Charlotteville Road."

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, yesterday I had to leave the House because I was not feeling well so I missed the contribution of my colleague, the Member for Tobago East, but I am certain that she would have done justice in her contribution to this debate. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to take a little time to treat with some of those important projects in the interest of the people of Tobago. The Scarborough Library was destroyed by an earthquake a number of years ago. Under the former THA administration and the former UNC government, nothing was done to rebuild that Scarborough Library. This administration is going to put that wrong right. The efforts to develop that

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now famous L'Anse Fourmi/Charlotteville link road is of major significance in opening up the north-eastern end of Tobago.

The purchase of the Courland Estate, while there are those that might want to have their own views on the issue, for the people of Tobago, particularly those people in the south-western region where most of the communities are hemmed in, this purchase provides an ideal opportunity for village expansion, housing, light industry, recreation, some public buildings, among other things. Most people would not understand that if you have to buy a lot of land, particularly in the south-western region of Tobago today, you might be called upon to pay anything in the vicinity of \$200,000 to \$400,000.

The other major significant development that we look forward to is that Buccoo Community Integrated Programme. Buccoo is famous for a number of things: the boat race, which was started in 1925; it is the home for the now famous Buccoo Sunday School; it is also a point tourists use to get to the famous Buccoo Reef—no man's land. Therefore, the people of Tobago, particularly on the south-western end, are very impressed and support the measure of this Buccoo Integrated Development Programme, because among the facilities will be a new multipurpose community resource centre, integrated with an upgrade boat race facility; a new relocated beach facility; a new fishing facility, meeting the analysis critical control points—HACCP standards—a new fishing landing jetty; a rehabilitated jetty for the reef tour operators; improvements to surface drains, water collection and treatment and roadway and sidewalk.

There is no gainsay that tourism plays a critical part in Tobago's development. Tourism is vital to the people of Tobago who depend in a large measure on it for their sustenance.

Approximately 30 per cent of the working population in Tobago is employed in the industry. It is the second highest employ of labour after the public sector. For the first time in recent history the Government is paying due attention to tourism, as a major instrument in the diversification of the country's economy.

2.55 p.m.

I must pause to indicate that it is in the coming of this administration after the elections of 2002, the Prime Minister established a tourism subsector committee which he chaired and at the time included the then Minister of Tourism, the Member for Tobago East, the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, the Secretary for Tourism in the Tobago House of Assembly and most of the technocrats in the Tobago House of Assembly, in the Ministry of Tourism.

Last year saw the established record of international arrivals. The airport reported 67,420 international arrivals at Crown Point eclipsing the previous highest number of arrivals of 61,000 established in 1999. In 2004, a new record has been broken. There have been over 70,000 international arrivals with two and a half months still to go in the season. It is expected that 100,000 direct international passengers will arrive in Tobago by the end of the current year.

I know that some people have questioned the figures on the ground that some of the passengers coming to Tobago on those international flights are en route to Trinidad. They have failed to understand that whereas there is an average of six international flights arriving in Tobago per day, over 22 such flights arrive at Piarco and each with passengers destined for Tobago. Between 25—35 passengers are booked to travel to Tobago on those international flights. The figure might exceed what we anticipate. As we look to the future in respect of tourism development, three additional international flights are scheduled to begin flying from Europe to Tobago with effect from early November 2004. Condor will increase its frequency from one to two services per week. Lauda Air will inaugurate a once weekly flight from Vienna to Tobago in November 2004. Martinair will begin to fly from Amsterdam to Tobago every Saturday from November 06, 2004. These flights would be flown in B76—300 aircraft. These represent an additional seat capacity of 750 passengers per week.

I make these remarks because it was a conscious effort by this administration and the Tobago House of Assembly to place emphasis on the sector. This Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, led by the Secretary of Tourism must be congratulated for the efforts. Whereas in 2001, there were 49,441 direct international arrivals in Tobago, it is expected that within three years the arrivals will double.

Today, most of the larger properties enjoy occupancy between 60 and 70 per cent. Many of them have begun to benefit from increased rates resulting in higher yield leading to better profitability. There is a major property on the island that reported that at the end of May this year, they had already achieved its total budgeted income for 2004.

As we place emphasis on tourism we cannot ignore the importance of the environment. We cannot ignore that tourism is the mainstay of economic activity where there are over 6,000 jobs. One third of the working force in the country depends on tourism. In order to ensure survival and sustainability one has to ensure that all components which contribute to the industry are up to international standards. The most important contributors to the maintenance of a safe environment,

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the Government, together with the Tobago House of Assembly are about to embark on a project involved in the collection, treatment and disposal of waste water in the south-western region of Tobago. In this area are located most of the major hotels and guest houses; the world famous Buccoo Reef; Nylon Pool and beaches such as Pigeon Point and Store Bay.

The update of a 1994 study is well on the way and should be completed by October 31, 2004. In this regard, a symposium of the serious degradation of the environment around these famous areas, we cannot afford not to see this project completed in the shortest possible time, if we have to sustain the achievements that we would have made in the tourism sector.

I am heartened that energy will begin to play a very significant part in Tobago's development. The Chief Secretary now sits on the Energy Task Force. The Standing Committee is chaired by the Prime Minister. In terms of Tobago's future development it is a very important plan. It is proposed to be a power plant using natural gas. The Cove Estate in Tobago will in large measure begin to change the landscape of Tobago, creating downstream and light industries and begin the diversification process. These are some of the connections that I want to bring to bear. That is why I do not see the total disconnect of the budget.

We can look at the various areas of our development. When the Minister of Health spoke about the strides in the health sector, Tobago has not been left out. We have seen the rehabilitation of several centres in Tobago; the construction of a new health centre in Canaan, Bon Accord and the now famous Scarborough Hospital. I take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Health and the Secretary of Health in the Tobago House of Assembly for their connectivity by allowing for the first time, Tobagonians to have access to dialysis treatment in Scarborough. We look forward to that continuing relationship as we seek to take our nation forward.

In the area of education, I heard the Member for Siparia say that no early childhood centres and schools were built by this administration. In her true UNC style that is one of the areas that disconnected Tobago from Trinidad and Tobago. To make the connection to reconnect Tobago to this whole process I want to place on record that the Buccoo and Castara Government Primary Schools were reconstructed by this administration. Mason Hall Primary Government School; Scarborough Methodist School; Mason Hall Government Secondary School; Goodwood Secondary School; Speyside Secondary School were constructed during the period of this administration. In the area of early childhood centres one was constructed in Roxborough and one in Mount St. George. It is heartening for

us and the people of Tobago as this Government embarks on its quest to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country on or before 2020. Tobago's development is not being forgotten.

When the Minister of Housing spoke about the housing thrust in Trinidad and Tobago, he did include the housing development at Roxborough, Blenheim and Castara. He did not say that housing in Tobago came to a halt after the previous PNM administration did all the housing development. Not a single house was built in Tobago for over 25 years. That is about to change. With those three housing developments, and likely to come on stream very soon, is another housing development on the Adventure Estate, or some people call it Schneider Estate, at Plymouth and part of Courland Estate which has been recently purchased.

In the area of tertiary education Tobago has not been left out. One of our concerns is that the physical place of Tobago would be developed as this administration takes us forward to developed country status. Our major concern is that our young people might not be accessing the training opportunities that are being made available. While the physical place Tobago is being developed, the human capacity will not develop at the same pace. Against this background the Tobago House of Assembly took the time to print and distribute throughout Tobago a training programme and educational opportunity for the young people of Tobago and how it can be accessed. It is our hope that as we prepare to take this country forward with the coming on stream of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, in the Tobago Campus greater opportunities would be made available to the people of Tobago.

This budget to a certain extent makes the point that many people opposed to the PNM in Tobago—most of the opposition parties speak of the Deyalsingh report.

3.10 p.m.

The Deyalsingh Report made reference to a percentage of the budget allocation coming to Tobago's development. Our efforts, over the past years, have demonstrated that this Government does not only treat with a percentage, it deals with Tobago's development. In the light of what is said, a percentage is more so an accounting measure.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

This Government's objective is not solely the arithmetic of the Deyalsingh Report but the holistic development of the people of Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is why you will find a number of programmes and projects within the budget that do not reflect Tobago's allocation. For example, the wet leasing recently of those aircraft to improve the transportation between Trinidad and

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Tobago; the expansion of the Crown Point International Airport; the purchase or leasing of a ferry to improve the sea transportation between Trinidad and Tobago; and a host of other measures, are measures brought to bear by this Government as they impact on the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I am not solely dealing with a 4.5 or 4.6 per cent. To amplify that position, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as Members of this honourable House would be aware, the Ministry of Planning and Development has brought to Parliament a separate Tobago PSIP since the fiscal year, 2003.

The instrument was developed in response to the need to give special emphasis to Tobago as part of its thrust to achieve developed-country status by 2020, while maintaining its status as a green location. As a consequence, it is imperative to transfer the present level of Tobago's social economic performance to the attainment of the standard that has informed and will continue to inform the PSIP in Tobago.

The 2005 PSIP for Tobago is consistent with the broader framework of the vision of Trinidad and Tobago to achieve developed country status. The size of Tobago's PSIP in 2005 is \$205.9 million, almost 10 per cent of the national PSIP. This gives the point I was making in terms of the Deyalsingh Report. Funds have been made available to Tobago to treat with Tobago's development.

The Government has kept its promise to Tobago in 2004. All funds were allocated have been made available in 2004, and I expect the same for 2005. I am confident the same level of cooperation in dealing with the situation on the air bridge would be brought to bear on the sea bridge.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also would like to compliment the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), and in particular the Secretary of Finance, Mr. London, for the study that is now taking place with respect to the cost of living differentials between Trinidad and Tobago. It is important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to make these points to demonstrate the connection and the connectivity; the quality and the relation and its effect, and the quality of life for the people of Tobago.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, this budget, to a certain extent, demonstrates how caring this administration has been and will continue to be to the people of Tobago. When the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister, spoke about settling the Pigeon Point issue, once and for all, those of us who know the history of that situation will understand how important that area is to the people of Tobago, it is not only for recreation but it is environmentally sensitive. Therefore, in the interest, not only

of this present generation but our future generation, we need to protect that environment.

There are also national initiatives in this budget which are benefiting today. One has to mention, as some of the national initiatives benefiting Tobago, issues such as the increase in old age pension; increase in the public assistance; increase in the minimum wage; the juice prices and basic food items; elimination of VAT on basic food items; increase in personal income tax; increase in duty free allowances; free medical care at Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex; again, these are some of the specific initiatives benefiting Tobago directly.

Mr. Speaker, there is a catch budget surplus of \$1 billion for the first time in the history of the people of Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Desk thumping*] There is a borrowing window of \$500 million. There is a 15 per cent increase in resources available to Tobago.

In this budget, too, I must compliment the Minister of Finance for sticking to his word and his commitment to the people of Tobago by making \$15 million available for hurricane relief after Hurricane Ivan. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, there is this link—as one of the MPs in Tobago, together with my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Tobago East, as representatives of the people of Tobago; working in conjunction with the Tobago House of Assembly and from where I sit and operate as Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister in Tobago, the link and relationship between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the people of Tobago and the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), there could be no greater connectivity in this combination.

Mr. Speaker, that is why the people of Tobago will support these measures because it is in our interest. Tobago, for the first time, is poised to take off. I see this budget as another step towards Vision 2020. I see this budget as another step to take the people of Tobago to catch up with the development that is taking place in Trinidad, as together we both move towards developed country status. [*Desk thumping*] It is against that background, Mr. Speaker, that I join this budget debate to bring the connection between this administration, the people of Tobago and the representatives of Tobago.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I again wish to say that we now have a golden opportunity in Trinidad and Tobago in that we now have a government that has demonstrated its caring; a government with a vision that the people of Trinidad and Tobago can only benefit from. I, therefore, again congratulate the Minister of

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Finance and Prime Minister for his vision; a well-structured budget and a thought-provoking budget as we seek to take our nation forward.

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

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning):
Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to begin my response to the debate in this very historic budget presentation by thanking, very sincerely, all Members on both sides of this honourable House, who have contributed to our deliberations and so, in their own way, advanced the cause of development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

This budget, as indeed the other two budgets that I have had the honour of presenting to this honourable House, was set in the context of our vision for Trinidad and Tobago, a vision of acquiring developed country status by the year 2020. It is a vision of a very efficient society. It is a vision of a society in which our environmental circumstances are pleasing to the eye and that are in accordance with international standards. It is a vision of a society in which there is equality and opportunity for all to realize one's potential to the fullest. It is a vision of a society with a road system that facilitates no part of Trinidad being more than two and a half hours away from any other part of the country. It is a society in which our diversity is applauded and acts as a strength that makes Trinidad and Tobago unique in the world.

It is a vision of a society in which there is religious tolerance, where people of different religious persuasions live harmoniously, side by side. It is a vision of a society in which there is no poverty—poverty is eradicated—and the society provides adequately for those who are most in need of the benevolence of the State.

It is a vision of society of high productivity that makes our country very competitive in the international community. It is a society that anticipates a standard of living that is comparable to the standard of living associated with the developed countries of the world.

Ours is a vision in which there is proper health care; health care that is available to all our citizens at affordable prices. It is a vision where education is available to all and, accessible by all, up to and including the tertiary level. It is a vision of a society in which there is full employment. It is a vision of a society of well-clothed, well-housed, well-fed, happy people working assiduously to further develop their own country and to provide the highest standards of living for themselves and their families. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, that is the vision the PNM has for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and that is the vision that the hon. Leader of the Opposition, in his discourse in the budget debate, described as puerile.

I would like to remind honourable Members that we did not arrive at that vision unilaterally. We did that on the basis of the most democratic approach of which this country is capable. We have set up within our own party a team of individuals.

We involved in it all our Members of Parliament; a number of subcommittees looking at different aspects of the thing, and after they had done their work, we pulled it all together and distilled from the collective wisdom of that group of people a draft vision document which we then circulated widely inside and outside of the party.

3.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we sought the views of the widest possible cross section of the national community: business, labour, academia, our communities and so on. We even invited the views of the Opposition at the time and when we got the document we convened a convention of our political party, that is, also having circulated the document to all our party units. We discussed it. There were comments on it, we revised the document, and reconvened a new convention of the party which is the highest body of the People's National Movement and adopted a document that was not the result of two or three persons sitting in a room and writing it up, but it was the result of widespread consultation inside and outside of the party and widespread consultation particularly with members of the national community.

It is a vision of which we are proud and it is a vision, the likeness of this country has never seen before. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, you will understand my own trepidation when the very distinguished Member for Couva North referred to that vision in such disparaging terms, and I ask myself the question, is it that hon. Members opposite have some kind of view, some kind of vision for Trinidad and Tobago that compares with this in any way? Not only is there no vision by them that compares with this but, as far as we know, they have articulated no proper vision for Trinidad and Tobago, preferring as they do, to operate in a vacuum and without the direction that all of us know is absolutely essential to the achievement of any noble and worthy objective by any society. They do not have it and they just do not know how to accept something that is good. We have taken it one step further.

We came into Government in 2001 and effectively we started to function in 2002, and an essential element of the achievement of our vision is the institution

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of a proper strategic plan. We decided that to arrive at a strategic plan, now that we are in Government, we will take a different route. And we would go to the private sector to bring about a proper involvement and symbiosis between the public and private sector, in the developmental process, and we would select one of the major successful captains of industry in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Arthur Lok Jack. We would ask him to coordinate and spearhead an effort designed to mobilize the expertise not just of the public sector, but also the private sector so that there can be a cross-fertilization of ideas and we can utilize whatever ideas the country is capable and we can, as a result of that exercise put together, have a number of strategic plans over the entire range of governmental activities. The fact is that Mr. Lok Jack, who has done extremely well on this matter, has been able to mobilize over 600 persons from the private sector, working together with their counterparts in the public sector in committees looking at finance, committees looking at community development, committees looking at education, health; all without the political intervention of the Government of the day. We sought not to intervene in the matter. We are not intervening at all. Let us see what they come up with.

We recognize as the elected Government of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we must have a political input and at the appropriate time when that exercise is complete, it would be for the Government to then consider the draft document that is before us and to apply its political wisdom to it, which can then be debated in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and be adopted as a national strategic plan for taking our country forward to developed country status by the year 2020—a document on which the Parliament would have adjudicated and in respect of which there would be parliamentary agreement. That is the strategy that we have outlined.

Mr. Speaker, we expect the Draft Strategic Plan to be available to us in the month of December. The exercise is one of Herculean proportions and the team headed by Mr. Lok Jack and the other persons that he had been able to mobilize have been completing the sectoral plans one by one, and have been using those plans as a basis for discussions with the national community and the Government has now agreed with them on their proposal, that the Institute of Business will be contracted to bring all the sectoral plans together in one national strategic plan. We have agreed to that and that is being done and we expect the plan by December 2004. That is the PNM's approach, not *vaille que vaille*, not governments by vaps as the hon. Member for Siparia would like this honourable Parliament and members of the national community to think. But it is an approach that is systematic, methodical and an approach that has been carefully thought out and, above all, an approach that subscribes to the highest principles of democracy that we can practise in Trinidad and Tobago.

And, therefore, in the face of that, one wonders where these allegations of dictatorship have come from. I do not know who talked about it—I think it was the Member for Barataria/San Juan who talked about Castro and Cuba, Chavez and Venezuela and God alone knows who else was passing through his mind—and Maugabe from Zimbabwe, and all of it, clearly the machinations of a most fertile imagination, that is what it is, bearing absolutely no relation. In fact, there is absolutely no basis to it, but instead we can and have demonstrated that our approach is an approach that has been rooted in democracy and it should surprise no one, because the PNM came to office on the basis of democracy. It is enshrined in the fundamental principles of our party. And when citizens of the national community assess the PNM one of the things that they need not worry about, is that a PNM government will go off the democratic rail. There are processes and institutions within our organization that will ensure that no such thing can happen.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, and I ask hon. Members opposite if there are any similar processes and structures in their own organization, to which they can point that would give the national community comfort that the threat to democracy will come neither from us nor from them. If they are to be guided by our experiences so far, it was the hon. Member for Couva North who came off an aircraft and announced that elections would be held in the party. He took it one step further, that for the purpose of this election, Members of Parliament could run for office. No political leader of the PNM has the authority to do that. In fact, election to the party is a decision of the general council and who is eligible for election and who is not, is a matter for an annual convention of the PNM. It is democracy. Therefore, whatever allegations can be paid at the doorsteps of the PNM, with whatever justification, the one allegation in respect of which there is absolutely no justification is an undemocratic inclination. It does not exist here. [*Desk thumping*]

Members of the Cabinet will tell you that the Prime Minister is the Chairman of the Cabinet and the Prime Minister does not take unilateral decisions unless there are circumstances that require it, and when those things are done at the first opportunity, the Prime Minister goes to the Cabinet and ensures that the Cabinet ratifies, or otherwise, the decisions that have been taken. That is how we operate.

Now that many of you on the other side have had Cabinet experience, it would have been really nice if some of you—well, you cannot sit on a PNM Cabinet; you do not qualify—would have had a chance to look into a Cabinet meeting of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, the one thing Members of this Cabinet know is that the Cabinet is the highest Executive authority in the land and we conduct our business in a manner that reflects that. No vomiting in the stateroom as you had in those Cabinets.

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It is necessary for me to go into all of this background so that we would not forget the complexion, the type of Government that Trinidad and Tobago has today. There is no threat to the country's democracy coming from us, none at all.

We conceive of our development in discrete parcels of three five-year plans. We got the plan in 2004. In 2005 we will lay our plans and we will see the country moving to developed country status in three five-year increments; a five-year development plan from 2006—2010; a second five-year plan from 2011—2015, and a third five-year plan from 2016—2025 by which time we would have confirmed our developed country status. It is not to say that we have to wait till 2020 before we can achieve that objective but that what would happen and what is happening even now, contributes every step of the way to the realization of that objective, sector by sector, and we are going to achieve the objectives in some sectors before we achieve it in others. The budget identifies it.

Indeed, it was very heartening to hear a commentator who is not a member of the PNM, who traditionally has been opposed to the PNM, say in a forum on the budget that in respect of two areas, Trinidad and Tobago has already achieved developed country status. The first is inflation which is at 4 per cent maximum, was 3.3 per cent this year and in respect of unemployment which the Central Statistical Office, which is the body authorized to so determine, has indicated that it stands at a level of 7.8 per cent. Even if they want to question the figures, as the Member for Oropouche has done, it is my colleague from Diego Martin Central who, quoting from Article IV, Consultation of the International Monetary Fund, made it clear that the IMF said that in accordance with ILO standards and using the method most applicable to Trinidad and Tobago as it sees it, our unemployment figure is 7 ½ per cent; even lower than we said it was.

Mr. Speaker, in that regard Trinidad and Tobago has already achieved developed country status and our next step is full employment which, for Trinidad and Tobago, is an unemployment figure of 5 per cent or less. But even before the strategic plans are available and even before we can establish our discrete five-year increments of development, there are certain things that are already clear and must be done in our own country. We must improve our road system. We must improve our system of education, we must improve our health care and while we plan for the future and while we keep that lofty objective in view, and work assiduously towards achieving it, we have to provide for our citizens today. So we have to push on the impact of the standard of living on our citizens, the negative impact and so forth, and all of these things we had to do and that is what we will be doing. That is what the last two budgets have done and that is what this budget

today, that is the subject of the debate, is doing for Trinidad and Tobago, the largest budget ever—TT \$27.9 billion.

3.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, a lot has happened in three years. When you listen to the Member for Siparia speak, I think I ought to remind the very distinguished Member that we are now completing our second year of a five-year term. More than that, we came into government and, contrary to what this country have been led to believe, we did not meet the extensive plans that they spoke so elegantly about when they were in government, seeking to suggest to the national community that the plans were there and for them it was just a question of implementing the plans.

We did not, for example, find any designs for the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin. We found no plans for the extension of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway to Wallerfield. We found no plans for linking Blanchisseuse to Matelot in terms of road development. We found no plans for upgrading the secondary school system to take care of a forward-looking curriculum that is designed to bring our education system into developed country status.

When the Member for Siparia talked about where the money was spent in education, let me remind her, because they count it only in terms of how many new schools they built. What the hon. Member did not say and what the country must now know is that when that government took this country to universal secondary education, it did so without any proper curriculum. In other words, it was building bricks and mortar, which will have little impact on the quality of life of our citizens. Indeed, they created more problems than they solved. Even though they were able to point to numbers, it was after they had done it that we began to see the effects of their actions in the school system. Do not believe that the violence that has erupted in schools in the recent past is unrelated to that decision.
[*Desk thumping*]

So today the first thing that we have done is we have settled the issue of the curriculum in our secondary school system and some of the things that emerge as a consequence of that is the need to construct laboratories, the need to construct additional classrooms and the need to construct ancillary facilities that will ensure a proper quality of education and, therefore, a proper quality of life for the beneficiaries of the education system.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say again that when the Member for Siparia talks about the deshifting of schools, the one thing that this Government is determined not to

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do is to deshift schools to be able to say that we deshift. Our plan is to complete the deshifting of 19 schools by the year 2006. We have done one so far. *[Interruption]* It is three we did? Okay, take two more. Three. We have done three. Mr. Speaker, I am telling you that by the end of 2006, there will be no shift schools in this country. We are not doing it so that they can get up and say this and that. We are doing it in accordance with a clearly identified plan designed with specific objectives—targets that we set—which we hope to achieve in a realizable time frame. That is how we plan to do it.

If as a consequence of that we have to advertise in the newspapers, it is because the things that we do we must advertise because people do not know. The things that they do need no advertising. I will come to that in a minute. *[Interruption]* It makes headlines anyway, the things that they do. *[Interruption]* We are coming to all that. How much time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: You have 21 minutes left on your first—

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, let me deal with the integrity issues immediately. I made a statement in this House a few minutes ago, following allegations that have been made on the other side, indicating our determination to establish a commission of enquiry. I had put into the record the following statement:

“The terms of reference of the commission shall include, but not be limited to the following...”

In other words, the commissioner would have had as wide a scope as she considers appropriate in the circumstances. Conveniently, hon. Members opposite chose not to hear that. Even before I sat down they started to discredit it and anything we say they will discredit. “It is the same commissioner who did the Biche School” and it is this and it is that. They said that the terms of reference are not wide enough and that we are trying to cover up and so on. Whomever we put as commissioner they will discredit. Whatever terms of reference we set, they will discredit unless we tell them to investigate Trinidad and Tobago and the kitchen sink. They will not be happy unless that is what emerges.

We make it clear that we are not playing politics with integrity. The effrontery of—I think it was the Member for Siparia again—the proper thing to do was her language—was to consult the Opposition. They forgot that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in 2003, said yes to us and no to them. When the people said no in 1995, we walked. It took the Member for Couva North some time to walk. He eventually did to his credit.

The people said yes to us and no to them and all they are trying to do is to sit on the Opposition Benches and exercise executive authority in this country. Not with a PNM government! Since any commissioner we appoint they will seek to discredit, or any terms of reference that we set, they would seek to discredit, we have decided to do something different. We are going to refer the entire matter to the Integrity Commission. Let me see them discredit it now. They were just boasting about the fact they set it up. Let us now see what they will say.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I am very happy you listened to our concerns. I welcome your statement and I thank you very much for doing that. You have listened—at least today.

Hon. P. Manning: We have put that to bed, Mr. Speaker, but what we have not yet put to bed is what the distinguished member for Couva South raised. Why in God's name would he want to raise LABIDCO again, I do not know? I was in opposition. There were three investigations into LABIDCO. If they had any basis for arresting me, the Member for San Fernando East, they would have done so already. The fact they have not done it is that there is no basis on which it can be properly done.

I want to remind them that I live in South Trinidad and the oil industry is centred on that area. If I go anywhere in South Trinidad, I would more than likely meet someone working in the refinery or in the oilfields, or somebody working with Schlumberger. I would meet somebody and we would sit sometimes and talk. In that context somebody spoke to me over that LABIDCO matter; somebody who was involved in it. They said that the whole thing was contrived to achieve a certain result. The result was that they wanted to move from LABIDCO because they wanted to discredit the government that preceded them. At one stage I thought that was the only reason. I am coming to believe that there is more to it.

Let me tell you the consequences of it. The Member for Siparia was talking about the amount of money we are spending on advertising. Less than one half of one per cent of the budget of Trinidad and Tobago is being spent on advertising; what we are doing is in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, so that they can know.

In LABIDCO, they pull the consultants—Mr. Speaker, you know how consultants operate—and they end up with the statement that the LABIDCO Industrial Estate is not suited for industrial plants. Immediately Farmland Misschem, who are not stupid, saw an opening and told them that their plant was ready for construction, but in light of the fact that LABIDCO Industrial Estate was then being discredited as a proper location for the plant, they wanted to go to Point Lisas.

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Mr. Speaker, from the start Farmland/Misschem wanted to go to Point Lisas and we gave them an incentive to go to La Brea. In other words, they got a break on the gas price. It would have been the first plant on the La Brea Industrial Estate and we gave them an incentive to go there; but they met and initiated on the other side; went to them and told them they wanted to start immediately, to let them go to Point Lisas, and they agreed. Not only did they agree, but they allowed Farmland/Misschem to build at Point Lisas at a gas price not applicable to Point Lisas, but a gas price that was applicable to the La Brea Industrial Estate, which was a special price because of their pioneering circumstances. That was what they did.

What they also forgot was that in some of the other agreements there is something called a “most-favoured-nation clause”; that is to say, if you set a gas price for somebody making a product similar to me, that is lower than mine, immediately I have access to that gas price. Do you know what that resulted in? That resulted in a whole wave of price reductions in Point Lisas; and the National Gas Company was saved from losing a lot of money only because they went to AMOCO and got them to reduce the price at which they sold gas to the National Gas Company. You know how that went, Mr. Speaker. If AMOCO is selling gas at a lower price, then they pay a lower tax liability.

Between the years 1998 and 2003, the tax liability foregone as a result of the decision of those opposite amounted in the six-year-period to TT \$306 million. That was not the end of it. Before the decision, NGC purchased a 24-inch pipe to supply gas to the La Brea Industrial Estate. Now that that pipeline is no longer required, they had to sell it. They were able to salvage some of it to run the pipe from the Point Lisas main estate to the Farmland/Misschem plant, which, incidentally, is a mile and a half off the estate on agricultural lands. They did that! They were able to save some of the money; but in all it cost them an additional US \$18 million because they had to build the pipeline corridor—TT \$113 more.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, as a result of having to reduce the prices on the estate, the National Gas Company lost a further \$225 million.

3.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, over the six-year period 1998—2003, as a result of the folly of hon. Members opposite, Trinidad and Tobago lost a total of \$645 million and counting. It goes one step further. What we are now finding out—I have to be very careful with what I say now—there is a case to answer in this entire matter. All I would say is that the matter is a subject of forensic investigation. That is what has emerged. Not just that, the other plant on Point Lisas Estate, I would not name it, is also a matter of forensic investigation. InnCogen and Desalcott are

matters of forensic investigation. I know the Member for Caroni East, in his contribution during the debate, had a lot to say. He said after three years, nothing has happened, which means that there is no case to answer. I want to tell you Sir, through you, Mr. Speaker, that one has to await the evening in order to determine how splendid the day has been. The day is not yet done. That is all I would say. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we put in place a number of programmes. We are working towards developed country status. In this budget, we made an analysis of what has transpired over the year under consideration and we were able to come to this Parliament and to report as follows to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that inflation in Trinidad and Tobago is under control at approximately 4 per cent. Incidentally, food prices rose by over 10 per cent in 2004 so we had to do something about that. We did not do it the way they expected us to do it. What they expected? They expected us to control food prices? International agreements no longer allow you to control food prices. Therefore, you have to deal with it in another way. The way we chose to do it was to increase the disposable income of our population, in fact those who are most in need of it. That is how we did it. Do not talk about food prices, we have dealt with that.

In this budget, we have also talked about the unemployment rate of 7.8 per cent. I referred to that already. This year, this country has been able to boast of a trade surplus of US \$1.6 billion. That is Trinidad and Tobago doing trade, which means that we have no balance of payments problem and our exchange rates are not in jeopardy, contrary to the machinations and mouthing of those who set themselves up as financial experts. There is nothing wrong with the exchange rates. We are not threatened in the least.

Our external reserve is \$2.07 billion. The budget surplus last year was \$437.1 million after transferring \$1,263,000,000 to the Revenue Stabilization Fund. Our external debt is down from 16.2 per cent to 13.8 per cent of GDP. These are statistics of which any developing country will be proud. These are statistics that single out Trinidad and Tobago, place us in a category virtually by ourselves, a category that says we are on the road to developed country status. [*Desk thumping*] We are particularly proud of what happened last year; that countries and companies in the region are borrowing from the Trinidad and Tobago market. They borrowed US \$500 million. Do you know what that means? It means that we have already emerged as a financial centre of the region. [*Desk thumping*] That is one of the objectives. We have already emerged as a financial centre of the region. Twice in one year, we have had an upgrading of our credit rating. We set

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ourselves the objective of another upgrading of our credit rating in fiscal 2005. We will see how it works.

In the interim, our people need jobs. We need to industrialize our country. Our strategy in industrialization is manufacturing in Trinidad and Tobago, new products that will lend themselves to further downstream development. You cannot come with an ammonium plant alone, so it is melamine now. You will take the melamine and manufacture construction materials in Trinidad, or if you wish, you could export it to territories in the Caribbean that can now use it for manufacturing purposes and export as their circumstances allow. It is a recognition that the development of Trinidad and Tobago is intimately tied up with the development of our second largest market, outside the US, of mega Caribbean. Both are together. It is not only ammonium and urea; it is urea ammonium nitrate (UAN), which is a fertilizer. It is a new product that lends itself to further development downstream. It is titanium oxide, as the Member for Port of Spain South has so eloquently articulated in this House.

Titanium oxide is a base for paint manufacture. A whole new set of paint industries can go up. Not just here, we can export it to the regions and they could make paints, too. It is aluminium. Aluminium represents a major breakthrough for Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of its industrialization strategy and policy. It means that we can go into downstream industries and, in some instances, in industries that are of strategic importance to developed countries in the world, aircraft parts manufacture, the space programme; we can do it because we have aluminium.

We are going the route of ethylene. As Train 4 comes on and we get a critical mass of ethane, you make ethylene from the four plants. It is a complex. It is not one plant. It is a complex. As you get ethylene you have the basic building block of a petrochemicals industry and therefore of plastics manufacturing. You could go the other route, as we propose to do also. You can go methanol to olefins; in other words, gas to polypropylene. That is what it is, which is petrochemicals, plastics manufacture. There is a whole range of opportunities now descending on Trinidad and Tobago, as a consequence of the industrialization policy that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has put in place. [*Desk thumping*]

It is indeed the dawn of a new day. Already, the first plant for our industrial estate at Wallerfield will be a plant that uses aluminium to manufacture motorcar rims by a new technology. An agreement has already been reached on that. I could go into all the details. There are so many of these plants. I need not go into details. The Member for Port of Spain South did it very well. What is important however, will be the new products that are becoming available on the domestic

market. Therefore, the implications for expansion and job creation are being brought about as a consequence of the policies now being pursued by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, one more point. We are of the view that government exists for one reason only. That reason is to improve the quality of life and standard of living of its citizens; to give its citizens the highest possible standard of living. It is people oriented. When we take a decision to put street lights on a street, it is not for the sake of street lights, it is because when we illuminate a street it is safer and brighter for those who use it, either by way of driving or walking. It is people-oriented.

When we bring new plants to Trinidad and Tobago and when we manufacture new products, it is because it diversifies our industrial base and creates jobs for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to take up. That is why we do these things. Our new policy for siting industrial plants is to site them anywhere on the west coast of Trinidad, between Point Lisas and Icacos, anywhere along the coast. Any plant or any cluster of plants that can stand on their own must be made to do that because we see these things, not so much as economic development, but as roads of social development. [*Desk thumping*]. Ask the Member for La Brea. That is how we see it. The Member for La Brea will tell you that La Brea today is a different place. It is not the economic development, it is the social development. They are now buying drinks for you, is that not so? Longtime he had to buy; now he is the recipient of drinks. That is what it is; roads of social development. Government is about people. That is what it is about. Whatever we do we relate it to people. We create the high-paying jobs.

When we say that we are going to do a gasoline optimization project at the Point Fortin Refinery, four plants, we have broadened our base. You are making your refinery more relevant. You could stay in business and not be squeezed out by the competition and you are creating jobs.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. P. Manning: I am very grateful to you and hon. Members for their kind indulgence. We cannot be unmindful—while we set all our plans for national development—of the conditions under which our people live today. If the people have been saying to us that food prices are affecting them adversely, any caring

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government will do something about it. I think the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan was absolutely correct. When I walked this country in 1996, the message was clear. Whatever you all thought you did so well for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I do not think you thought enough about us. If we had made that mistake before, we are not going to make it twice. Stick “eh” break in our ears. We hear and we understand.

As we approach the Parliament in this budget, we made our calculations and looked at our financial position and we decided that we are going to give \$150 more to old age pensioners, to cushion the effect of the thing. We gave \$150 more to the disabled people who are in need of the benevolence of the State. We gave \$150 more in public assistance. Whereas they could slither as much as they wish and speak in disparity terms as they wish about an expansion of the SHARE programme, it is not increasing it by 5,000 hampers, but the cost of the hamper goes up by \$50. If they were beneficiaries of the hamper they would not be talking the way they are talking today. It is because they are comfortable. Some of them are more comfortable than they should be.

We are caring. We decide to take VAT off certain food items; because mauby is one, the Member for Siparia feels that she must now describe the budget as a “mauby” budget. Yes, the budget is a “mauby” budget. It is something that we accept. The budget is a “mauby” budget. What it means is that it is a budget that looks after the people in our society who specialize in drinking mauby, that is the people who are at the bottom of the economic ladder. [*Desk thumping*] They prefer the champagne budget. That is what they would have preferred, in which case it would have been Ish, Brian or Steve.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Oropouche had much to say about the jobs, of which we are proud. Our unemployment level has fallen to 7.8 per cent. The Member for Oropouche disaggregated the figures and he concluded—I am not saying that he is right or wrong. I am prepared to accept his argument only for the purpose of the discussion, but the figure is there—that 21,000 jobs were created by the Government as a result of the social programmes, and that if it were not for those programmes, the unemployment level would have been 11.2 per cent. That was the Member’s theory.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is proud of that figure. If it were not for our intervention, 21,000 persons would not have been employed today, and these persons would have been available to contribute to the escalation in the levels of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is something to be

proud of. They do not seem to understand that a person who cannot work by day is going to work by night.

One of the reasons why we came into power, on this occasion, was that we were able to convince the people of our social conscience. One of the reasons why I accepted the portfolio of Minister of Finance—contrary to the principle that I, myself, had enunciated before—is because we were determined to bring about a shift in the pattern of expenditure in the country towards the social sector. That is what we have done.

If, today, our social sector expenditure has reached \$2.6 billion; that is something which we are extremely proud of. We know that there are hundreds and thousands of persons in this country who—had it not been for that orientation of the PNM—may not have been able to exist in as comfortable a circumstance, as they can now exist, following the adumbration of this budget.

When the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West comes to this Parliament and says that within one year, there would be no backlog of cataract and hernia operations, this is something which the Government is proud of. This social intervention could only come about by a Government that cares about the people who elected it to hold office. [*Desk thumping*]

They could raise all their disparaging remarks about the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP), but one thing is certain and that is as we move from here to there everyone would now have access to the CDAP programme. They could jump high or jump low; all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are going to benefit from that programme.

CDAP is a programme where we make pharmaceuticals, for certain ailments, available to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. This is one of the more forward-looking programmes that has ever been introduced in any developing country in the world. [*Desk thumping*]

They have asked us: Why do we feel proud on this side? Look at us! Every man here is suffering from pride. [*Laughter*] We are very proud of our achievements.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan talked about the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP).

Dr. Khan: When I say CEPEP, I mean the CEPEP contractors' salaries; not the workers. Can you tell us why are they getting such exorbitant salaries for what they are doing?

Hon. P. Manning: As usual, the Member is trying to obfuscate the thing.

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. P. Manning: Will you allow me to speak or do you want to speak twice?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: You are speaking twice.

Hon. P. Manning: Well, it is my privilege, my lady. I moved the Motion and I am now winding up. Mr. Speaker, they have persons talking about CEPEP in the way as the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP). CEPEP programme is not an unemployment relief programme. That programme is a mechanism to foster the development of new entrepreneurs in the country. More than that, even if initially the programme had some clichés in it, the conception of that programme was that the workers of the company would have shares in the company and, therefore, they would have some kind of stake in the success of the company of which they would all be an integral part. As a result, you would get high levels of productivity.

I went to a CEPEP Family Day and I was absolutely taken aback when I saw the spirit of those people. There were people of all races; people of all classes; people from all walks of life; and mainly young people. I was amazed! It struck me that CEPEP is perhaps one of the best conceived programmes that we ever had in terms of social programmes. [*Desk thumping*]

During this fiscal year, we are going to do more. We are going to introduce a training element within all our programmes of that nature. [*Desk thumping*] At the end of the day, people must be trained to be able to take advantage of the job opportunities that would be created elsewhere. As we create the job opportunities elsewhere, people would be moving from the social programmes into the higher paid permanent jobs. [*Desk thumping*] That is what is going to happen. They are going to move from the social programme to the higher paid permanent jobs and the Government's outlay, in terms of its social intervention, will go down. [*Desk thumping*] The unemployment figures do not tell the whole story.

There is a category of young persons in this country, who are not looking for any job; who are not applying for any job; who are not reading any newspaper and applying for any job; and who feel that they are marginalized—they are out of the system. Mr. Speaker, this Government has taken a decision that it is going to find those persons wherever they are.

Earlier this year, I went on a series of visits in different communities, and I met these persons—La Horquetta, Maloney, Enterprise and Diego Martin. I met them. A fellow said: “You have O’Levels but I have none. I leave school three years ago and I eh work since ah leave school. I am not looking for any job. I do not feel that ah could get any.” There are persons who feel that way.

When we started the Multi-Sector Skills Training (MuST) programme, we made sure that half of the persons who were taken on in MuST came from that category of persons. We went out into the communities to find them and we found them. The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education will tell you that many of them were very pleased to have been on that programme. For the first time, they are seeing a future ahead of them and becoming responsible citizens and moving away from the propensity that some of them had developed towards a life of crime. [*Desk thumping*]

I do not know what hon. Members opposite expect. That is how we intend to do it. [*Interruptions*] The levels of crime are still unacceptable to us. Whatever the Member may wish to say, the interventions that we have made in the recent past, we are satisfied that they are having an effect on the people. Over a period of time, they are going to have more effect and Members opposite would see their opportunity for government just dwindling. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, with all of that, we had to sit and listen to the Member for Couva North for three hours. The distinguished Member for Siparia was loud in her praise for the Member for Couva North. He was completely off the budget. When one reads the contribution of the Member for Couva North, in relation to the budget, one would discover the difference between those who aspire and those who achieve. In other words, as long as he is over there, we will be over here. [*Desk thumping*]

A budget presentation, especially in a country like ours which is developing as rapidly as it is, could never articulate a comprehensive programme of development for any one particular year. What the Minister of Finance was seeking to do was to give a broad outline, and as the Ministers follow, they were going to fill in the blanks and, in fact, flesh out some of the ideas that have been articulated in the budget, so that the national community and the Parliament would benefit. In some instances, some of these matters were not mentioned at all. The fact of the matter is that all of this cannot be done alone by the Minister of Finance.

The Member for Siparia said that she could not understand why the Minister of Legal Affairs came to the Parliament. He came to outline the position with respect to food prices which were a central issue in the budget. The Member cannot understand that. She also said that the Member was from another place and he has all the time up there to talk, but she wanted the Minister of Education to come here. That is a contradiction. The reality is that the Constitution affords a Minister to come to any House to speak on his or her portfolio. It is not for the Opposition to determine which Minister should speak here, but it is for the Government to decide that. [*Desk thumping*]

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If the Government says that the Minister of Legal Affairs and Consumer Affairs must come to this House and explain our position with respect to food prices, then the Minister will do that. If the Government decides that the Minister of Education must come to this House and defend her stewardship in the other place, the Minister would do that. [*Desk thumping*] Whether it is in this place or the other place, our stewardship would be defended in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the country's development cannot be fully articulated in a budget statement. And of necessity, there are many aspects of the budget that are going to be left out. Last year, when we looked at the performance with respect to development programmes—we now have a revised figure for the expenditure with respect to development programmes. Initially, the figure that we gave was \$1,715,000 and the latest figure is now \$1,791,000. What this means is that since the original Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) was \$1.677 billion, we have spent about 106.8 per cent of that original figure, and from the revised figure of \$1.803 billion, we have spent 99.3 per cent in performance. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this did not come by accident. There are a number of things that we did to achieve this. Firstly, we had regular meetings with Ministers and their Permanent Secretaries urging them to act in a certain way.

Secondly, we put a system in place whereby releases were made on a quarterly basis rather than on a monthly basis. Ministries would be able to shift money—as long as money is available—between Heads for approved projects and then we would square it off at the end of the quarter.

Thirdly, we told the Ministries that they could spend money in the month of September which had not been the case. All of that has produced a result that is startling to us.

For the fiscal year 2005, we have identified a development programme of \$2.075 billion. We are confident that not only are we going to spend that money, but it is possible that when we do our mid-year review, we are going to have to return for a supplementary appropriation, because that PSIP is likely to go up.

Mr. Speaker, we have built capacity this year, and to be able to implement our ambitious programme—we know these programmes are ambitious, and we know that there is a major concern about the implementation of these programmes on the outside. We have not only built capacity in the public sector, but we have used state enterprises as an extension to the public sector, to circumvent some of the strictures with which the public sector is afflicted, and which has the effect of

increasing our levels of expenditure and performance and extending our development programmes.

Mr. Speaker, while I cannot talk about all of these programmes, there is one that I think I must mention. There is a company called the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UdeCott). UdeCott has dubbed fiscal year 2005 as: “The year of the Tower Crane”. Do you know what is a tower crane? A tower crane is a construction crane that is used for high-rise building.

Mr. Speaker, on the Government’s campus on Richmond Street, two contracts have already been awarded: one for the 10-storey Customs and Excise Building and the other for a 7-storey parquet building which will hold 1,600 cars. That building is located at the back of the Unit Trust Corporation building.

4.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that they have just awarded the contract—an award will be announced shortly—for the first of two 22-storey towers. One is the Board of Inland Revenue building, and there is an archive associated with it that is six storeys high. For the other tower, which is going to house the Attorney General's office and the Ministry of Legal Affairs, the contract should be awarded by mid-November. In respect of the final building, which is the 10-storey Ministry of Education building, the contract should be awarded by mid-January of next year. A lot of construction; within one month of award, work actually starts on the project.

There is also the complex on the port: the International Waterfront Complex. We have decided to do this by a design/build arrangement. Proposals for that complex will close this month. It is a complex which will have two 22-storey buildings; one will be an international building that will house the United Nations building, the FTAA headquarters, the Association of American States and so on. We are seeking to interest a major State enterprise in the other building, if not, the State will take it up. Design and build—that should close by the end of the month.

What you are seeing is a lot of construction of public sector buildings and this is not an exhaustive list. We will also have a five-star hotel and a conference centre. That facility is expected to begin by April 01, 2005. Look at what is happening: Already construction is taking place on the transfer from Shed 4 to Shed 6 of the Cruise Ship Complex. We are also doing this by a design and build arrangement. Chancery Lane in San Fernando is the site for the San Fernando Complex, which will be three floors of shops, a basement, two floors of stone, three floors of car park and so on. Whatever else is on top of that—eight storeys—we will have; again, a design and build arrangement. That should close by the end of the month.

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Contracts have been awarded for the Financial Complex and the library, those two major ones in Tobago. We are about to take occupancy of the Siparia Administrative Complex and, in respect of Edinburgh 500 in Chaguanas, work is under way; it is almost completed. The site to the north of Trinidad House, where a 17-storey building is contemplated, will have construction commenced in 2005. Salvatori Building which, itself, will be shops, car park and floors, parking structure and an office building on top; work will begin in fiscal year 2005.

What I have alluded to is a very significant development programme of the public sector that is not involved in the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). Whereas the PSIP this year is \$2.075 billion, the development programme of the State enterprises and ancillary agencies outside of that, amounts to some \$7.6 billion. Included in that, is a three-year plan for the Water and Sewerage Authority and a determination to take water to as many communities as possible. The cost of it is, understandably, going to be higher than normal, because these are at the extremities of the system. We are beginning a programme next year of street lighting for every street in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on and on; I choose not to do so. I hope that I have been able to say enough to convince hon. Members that they are dealing with a Government that has a vision. They are dealing with a Government that has a programme of activity and knows what it is doing. I urge hon. Members to pay special attention, to the Government's Green Paper on Local Government Reform, because we intend to reform the local government system that takes into account a view of the future, where local government will be responsible for execution of policy, while the Central Government will be responsible for policy determination. It is up for public comment right now and we urge hon. Members opposite to take note of that.

Mr. Speaker, there you have it. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, by agreement between the Leader of Government Business and the Opposition Chief Whip, we will continue to sit until 4.37 p.m., if the Prime Minister wishes to continue until that time.

Hon. P. Manning: You told me it late, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Local government reform is the system of the future. That is what we are seeking to do in our document that is now up for public comment.

I think this brings the curtain down on what I consider another successful budget debate, which, for whatever reason, however you may wish to view it, was an exercise in democracy. I want to tell my good friends opposite that the

responsibility of the Opposition is not to oppose, as one of them seems to feel. Let me identify the culprit in this case.

Mr. Singh: I said that.

Hon. P. Manning: It is, indeed, the Member for Caroni East. The role of Opposition, Sir, is not to oppose. The Government proposes and the Members of the Opposition are supposed to critically examine and show the other side. [*Crosstalk*] That is what we did; we showed the other side. The fact that you had difficulty in discerning it is really no surprise to me, but that is what we did. [*Crosstalk*] It is to show the other side and hold the Government to account. It is not to oppose.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. P. Manning: It is that view that the role of the Opposition is to oppose, that led them to vote against the police legislation. That is their view! [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. P. Manning: In other words, whether it is good or bad, you opposed it. That is your view! Regrettably that is inconsistent with the determination of our society to achieve developed country status. In developed countries that is not the way it happens. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Singh: Systemic change.

Hon. P. Manning: Bring it back? “Yuh getting it, you know.” It is not to oppose.

I am very fearful when Members say that, because we have school children and other people who look at the profession of politics to decide whether they want to be a part of it or not. When Members say that kind of thing, they come to the conclusion, “This is really not for me.” I want to set the record straight: The role of the Opposition is not to oppose; it is to show the other side. It is hoped that when the other side is shown by hon. Members opposite that, arising out of our deliberations, we can arrive at a consensus that is in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we believe we have achieved by this budget and it is for that reason I commend this budget to hon. Members.

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

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Mr. Speaker: Before the House goes to committee to consider the Estimates, we will now suspend for tea and will return at 5.10 p.m.

4.37 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

**COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES
(APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before the House goes into Finance Committee, I have an announcement to make with respect to the matter at present engaging the attention of the Committee of Privileges. The Member, Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis, has stepped down because of her unavailability occasioned by official Government business. Mr. Hedwige Bereaux has been appointed to replace her on this committee.

**APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)**

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve itself into Finance Committee, and in accordance with Standing Order 64(1), I now ask all strangers to leave the Chamber during the deliberations of the Finance Committee.

Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.

5.13 p.m.: *House resolved itself into Finance Committee.*

7.26 p.m.: *House resumed after Finance Committee.*

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, without amendment; read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, October 29, 2004, at 1.30 p.m.

On that day the House will consider the Provisional Collection of Taxes Order which, as Members know, has a 21 day requirement and that is the 21st day. We have to meet for that matter. Other than that, the House will consider other matters, as per the Order Paper.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.28 p.m.