

*Leave of Absence*

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Member for Port of Spain North, Minister John Rahael, and the hon. Member for Couva South, Mr. Kelvin Ramnath, both of whom have asked for leave of absence. The leave that the Members have requested is granted.

**PETITION**

**Freedom House**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jarette Narine):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the petition on behalf of the Freedom House of the corner of Railway and Eastern Main Roads, Arouca. This religious organization has been in that location for the past 20 and more years. It was the closure of a cinema called “Diana Cinema” at the time that the Freedom House had started operations at that location. I know for a fact, for I have been visiting with them on a number of occasions where they had celebrations for Divali, Eid-ul-Fitr, and all the other celebrations that we keep in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Freedom House has an outstanding record in the community and they have an active feeding programme for the community in Five Rivers and the vicinity of Arouca. They also have a counselling programme, that they go to family homes when there are problems and they are trying their best actively in the community raising funds and getting support from other communities throughout Trinidad. The congregation is very large and they also have social programmes for the underprivileged.

It is my pleasure to move this petition. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I now ask that the Clerk be permitted to read the petition and that the promoters be allowed to proceed.

*Petition read.*

*Question put and agreed to, That the promoters be allowed to proceed.*

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Fifth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990 and the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act Chapter 25:50 for the purposes of Local Government Elections. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Hedwige Bereaux)*]
2. The non-consolidated financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the year ended December 31, 2004. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]

*To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*

3. Draft Vision 2020 National Strategic Plan. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
4. The Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Draft Order, 2006. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
5. The Securities Industry (Amendment) By-Laws, 2006. [*Hon. K. Valley*]
6. The annual audited financial statements of the National Commission for Self-Help Limited for the year ended September 30, 2004. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

*To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Minister of Planning and Development is about to make her statement. Before the Minister makes her statement, let me officially welcome her back to the Sitting.

**Draft Vision 2020 National Strategic Plan**

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the welcome, and may I apologize for being a little tardy.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago I am pleased to lay before this honourable House today the Vision 2020 Draft National Strategic Plan, in both electronic and hard copy versions, which was prepared by the Multi-sectoral Group (MSG), also referred to as the Vision 2020 Planning Committee, and presented to the hon. Prime Minister on May 31, 2005.

There are certain truisms which have stood the test of time and which remain valid for developing and developed Third World and First World countries. In fact, there is one truism which has been considered by many great minds over the

course of history to be critical in explaining the dynamics of development, and this is: "Without a vision a people perish".

This administration is fully committed not only to the survival of our people, but to ensuring that by the year 2020 every member of our society, and indeed every creed and race, will enjoy a quality of life comparable with the best standards of developed countries. This administration certainly does not consider this to be "pie in the sky". Given the ingenuity and creativity of our people and our favourable endowment of resources with which we are blessed we are confident of the realization of this vision. Moreover, our achievements in the past whereby this country of approximately 1.3 million people has been able to achieve world class excellence in many spheres of life should help us to unshackle our mind from the mentality that we are forever destined to be underdeveloped or perpetually developing and never classed as developed or First World.

Our past successes on the world stage should engender confidence in ourselves and in our ability to hold our own as a nation among nations.

We recognize that we are not yet Vision 2020 compliant in many areas, but with determination and commitment, we shall soon move in that direction. In the words of Black Stalin and the late Ras Shorty I, "We can make it if we try...", "My house is strong and no one can push it down".

The Vision 2020 Draft National Strategic Plan has two parts:

- Part one outlines the aspiration of the people of Trinidad and Tobago within the context of specific priorities; and
- Part two provides frameworks for action and represents a fusion of the contents of the subcommittees' reports, the information gleaned from the public participatory sessions, as well as external expert reviews.

The draft plan is supported by the reports of the 28 sub committees formed by the multisectoral group.

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to advise hon. Members that to date four subcommittees have not yet finalized their reports, namely: health, labour and social security, administration of justice, and pre-primary, primary and secondary education.

Mr. Speaker, Vision 2020 was first articulated by the People's National Movement (PNM) in 2000 when the party outlined a new course for the sustainable

*Draft Vision 2020 Strategic Plan*  
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

development of Trinidad and Tobago that would guarantee tangible improvements in the quality of life of the entire population. The PNM assumed office on December 24, 2001 and initiated the planning process to bring this vision to reality.

As the first step, the Cabinet, in June 2002, appointed a 25-member multisectoral (MSG) group to develop a national strategic plan to achieve developed country status by the year 2020. The MSG, with a strong private sector orientation, comprised:

Mr. Arthur Lok Jack, Chairman	Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon
Mr. David O'Brien	Mr. Trevor Alleyne
Ms. Pat Bishop	Dr. Terrence Farrell
Dr. Rolph Balgobin	Mr. Robert Riley
Mr. Trevor Boopsingh	Mr. Calder Hart
Dr. Inyang Ebong-Harstrup	Ms. Denise Noel De Bique
Dr. Steve Medford	Mr. William Robinson
Mr. Clarry Benn	Mr. David Abdulah
Mrs. Nan Ramgoolam	Prof. Clement Sankat
Dr. Anselm London	Dr. Brian Harry
Mr. Neville Blake	Mrs. Victoria Mendez-Charles
Mrs. Sonia Noel	Mrs. Margaret Farray

Dr. Karl Theodore and Dr. Susan Craig were initially appointed to the MSG but were unable to participate because of pressing commitments and were excused.

Mr. Speaker, before outlining the contents of the draft plan, I want to take the opportunity to apprise hon. Members of the process that resulted in the documents that have been laid in this House today. I also want this honourable House to note that the process was developed, managed and led by the MSG and no attempt was made by the Government to influence the process or the contents of the draft plan and its supporting documents. The Government through the Ministries of Planning and Development and Social Development served as the technical secretariat to facilitate the process.

The process of developing the draft plan was guided by the following principles:

1. Integration and sustainability—all dimensions of the development paradigm were incorporated;
2. Human need focus—the focus was on the human dimension and all factors that affect the quality of life of the society;
3. Inclusion and participation—in order to promote popular ownership of the draft plan, widespread participation was encouraged; and
4. Flexibility and responsiveness—a multi-tiered planning horizon was utilized.

On the basis of these principles, the strategy for developing the draft plan involved the following:

- (a) a sectoral focus through the establishment of 28 subcommittees of the MSG in key areas/sectors of national importance;
- (b) the forging of effective development partnerships;

In effect, the establishment of the 28 subcommittees expanded the planning process to include approximately 600 additional persons drawn from the government agencies, business, non-governmental organizations, locally based international organizations, community groups and civil society.

These persons and organizations were selected by the MSG based on their knowledge, experience and keen interest and enthusiasm in being part of the process; and

- (c) the implementation of an intensive communications campaign and a programme of widespread consultation and dialogue.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important that the hon. Members get a clear understanding of the efforts of the MSG to embrace the national community in the Vision 2020 Planning Process in a spirit of inclusiveness, sharing and true participation.

The process of public participation was launched in Trinidad in July 2003 and in Tobago in August of the same year. In order to achieve national ownership, a wide cross section of individuals including His Excellency the President, the hon. Prime Minister and Members of Parliament in their constituencies, Chief

*Draft Vision 2020 Strategic Plan*  
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

Secretary and Members of the Tobago House of Assembly, students and representatives of private sector organizations, civil society and international organizations participated in these events.

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to thank those persons who showed such a keen interest in making the draft plan a reality. In this regard, on behalf of the Government, I wish to thank the Members of the UNC, in particular, the political leader and the Member for St. Joseph for their interest and participation in several Vision 2020 events and discussions.

The ensuing process of public participation involved consultations and dialogues with key stakeholders, including ministries and public sector agencies, citizens living in different regions and communities, and special interest groups.

In total, 84 sessions were convened, in addition to the hundreds of meetings of the subcommittees which were themselves stakeholder participatory exercises. Through this process, people from all walks of life participated and were given the opportunity to articulate their vision for the future; critically reflect on the present realities; identify issues that need to be addressed; and outline strategies and activities that need to be undertaken to realize their vision.

Especially heartening was the interest shown by youth. On behalf of the Government, I want to thank the youth arms of both the People's National Movement and the United National Congress for their keen participation in the session on October 09, 2004. The youth councils in both Tobago and Trinidad must also be commended for supporting the process every step of the way.

The Government sees this public participation as an ongoing process, which augurs well for the future of our country, indicating that we can put aside our differences and supersede them to ensure the country's good. As we move to finalize the draft plan and as implementation progresses, this process must become stronger and more widespread. It must become more iterative and the input and feedback must be to and from all segments of the population.

Media Campaign: Complementing the public participatory exercises was the Vision 2020 Media Campaign, which comprised:

- Eight "live" talk shows, simulcast on radio stations and supported by daily print advertorials;
- advertising using all forms of the media; and

- outreach sessions to sensitize ministries and public sector agencies, schools and private sector organizations on Vision 2020 and progress made.

The Draft Plan: The draft plan articulates five development priorities to guide us towards the year 2020:

1. Developing innovative people;
2. Nurturing a caring society;
3. Governing effectively;
4. Enabling competitive businesses; and.
5. Investing in sound infrastructure and the environment.

In terms of the developing innovative people, the strategic thrust is towards:

- creating a competitive, knowledge-driven and entrepreneurial workforce;
- developing a learning society and especially a culture of lifelong learning;
- creating a seamless, world class, self-renewing education system;
- investing in teacher education and training;
- forging a national innovation system; and.
- increasing public and private sector participation in research, development and innovation activities.

In order to nurture a caring society, the Draft Plan outlines strategies geared at:

- fostering vibrant communities and growing social and human capital;
- supporting youth development;
- promoting full employment in positive work environments;
- providing income and social protection for citizens;
- ensuring adequate housing for all; and
- improving health care thus enabling a culture of wellness and positive lifestyles.

In terms of promoting competitive businesses, the thrust is towards:

- producing world class products and services;  
nurturing resourceful citizens;
- fostering a macro-economic and national business environment that facilitates competitiveness; and
- providing excellent investment opportunities and financial services for both local and international clientele.

In the area of effective Government, the draft plan focuses on:

- developing world class public institutions;
- ensuring public safety and security for all citizens;
- promoting opportunities for cooperation among internal stakeholders particularly the public and private sectors and on a regional and international basis; and
- developing a strong and effective judicial system.

The strategic thrust towards developing sound infrastructure and environment involves:

- developing safe and efficient transport infrastructure;
- investing in drainage systems that meet development patterns and ecological requirements and mitigate flooding hazards;
- developing quality public services;
- restructuring the operations of public utilities to ensure efficiency, transparency and competition; and
- promoting development that is supportive of environmental sustainability.

The draft plan recognizes that a major strategy would entail changing existing mindsets and culture. A crucial element of the draft plan is the focus on measuring performance. At the core of the performance measurement mechanism are draft scorecards, at three levels, to monitor development progress and effectiveness. Consequently, the draft plan contains:

- national scorecards;



- development priority scorecards; and
- sector scorecards.

The indicators in the draft scorecards were taken from both global and local sources. The global indicators are important in benchmarking the country with other developing and developed countries such as Malaysia, Costa Rica, Singapore and Ireland.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago expects that as development takes place, the scorecards and indicators would have to be refined and the targets would have to be revised. In support of the new thrust towards performance measurement, the draft plan also outlines new institutional arrangements for implementation, monitoring and ongoing review. It recommended the establishment of an advisory council and a programme management office. I am pleased to say that Cabinet has already accepted these recommendations.

Since the draft plan was presented to the honourable Prime Minister on May 31, 2005, Cabinet has agreed that a number of steps should be taken leading to the finalization of the draft plan. These include the establishment of the following:

- A Joint Select Committee of Parliament to review the draft plan and the subcommittee reports;
- A Vision 2020 advisory council in the Office of the Prime Minister to independently monitor progress and advise on further development and review of the plan;
- A Vision 2020 programme management office in the Ministry of Planning and Development to coordinate implementation;
- Vision 2020 liaison offices in each ministry to coordinate implementation at the Ministry and sector level; and
- Systems of coordination among all ministries and public sector agencies and these new entities.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I take this opportunity to publicly thank the Chairman and Members of the MSG, all the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the subcommittees, the over 600 persons who participated in the Vision 2020 planning exercise and the multilateral development agencies who actively supported the process. I especially thank all the persons throughout Trinidad and Tobago who participated in the public participatory process.

*Draft Vision 2020 Strategic Plan*  
[HON. C. ROBINSON-REGIS]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I assure this honourable House and the national community that this Government is committed to realizing this vision by the year 2020. This Government is committed to the task of improving the quality of life of all the people—in all areas of this country and in all aspects of human life.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**2.00 p.m.**

**VALIDATION OF THE FIFTH REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION (LOCAL GOVERNMENT) BILL**

Bill to validate the Fifth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission under the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Act, Chap. 25:50 for the purpose of Local Government Elections [*The Minister of Local Government*]; read the first time.

**SUPREME COURT OF JUDICATURE (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Supreme Court of Judicature Act, Chap. 4:01 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

**CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM) CUBA TRADE AND ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION BILL**

**Senate Amendments**

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

*Be it resolved* that the Senate Amendments to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Cuba Trade and Economic Co-operation Bill, 2005 listed as Appendix I on the Supplemental Order Paper be now considered.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 2.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

In the definition of “Agreement” delete the words “2000 and” appearing after the words “5<sup>th</sup> July” in line 5 and substitute the words “2000 as amended by”.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 4.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

- (A) In paragraph (a), delete the word “and” appearing after the word “Agreement” in line 3 and substitute the word “as”.
- (B) In paragraph (b), delete the word “and” appearing after the word “Agreement” in line 3 and substitute the word “as”.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Schedule.*

*Senate amendment read as follows:*

- (A) Insert the words “Appendix IA” at the top right hand corner of page 102.
- (B) Insert the words “Appendix IB” at the top right hand corner of page 103.
- (C) Insert the words “Appendix IIA” at the top right hand corner of page 106.
- (D) Insert the words “Appendix IIB” at the top right hand corner of page 108.
- (E) Insert the words “Appendix III” at the top right hand corner of page 110.
- (F) Insert the words “Appendix IV” at the top right hand corner of page 111.
- (G) Insert the words “Appendix V” at the top right hand corner of page 112.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House of Representatives doth agree with the Senate in the said amendment.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

**STUDENTS' REVOLVING LOAN FUND (AMDT.) BILL**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to amend the Students' Revolving Loan Fund Act to provide for the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry with responsibility for Tertiary Education, to replace the Chief Personnel Officer as Chairman of the Board of Management of the Students' Revolving Loan Fund, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I would like in my presentation to place this amendment in the context of Government's policy and programmes in the tertiary education sector, and, more particularly, in respect of our policy approach towards making tertiary education more accessible to our nation's citizens.

Essentially, I am going to briefly describe where we have come from, where we are and where we are going in respect of tertiary education policy.

The Students' Revolving Loan Fund was established in 1973 by Act, Chap. 39:05, to provide loans to students who were eligible and desirous of pursuing tertiary education programmes; however, it was limited, at the time, in that it excluded the disciplines of law and the humanities. It was also limited in that it only offered loans to students pursuing programmes at the Bachelor's level. In fact, the only postgraduate programmes that were considered were the Certificate in Public Administration and the Advanced Diploma in Human Resource Management.

The fact that many areas were excluded meant that the Students' Revolving Loan remained irrelevant or inaccessible to a number of students hoping to pursue tertiary education programme. That situation was made worse by the fact that referees were required, but that was not the entire issue in that the referees, too, had to meet certain qualification criteria, in terms of their own income and assets, et cetera. What that meant, was that low income students had great difficulty in finding or sourcing referees who would endorse their respective applications.

For these reasons, we have found the Students' Revolving Loan Fund over the years to be inadequate; in addition, to set up, such that the Minister, who held responsibility, was the Minister with responsibility for the Personnel Department, as stated in the Act. And consequently, it provided for the Chief Personnel Officer to chair the board that would manage the fund.

That was a long time ago and a lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. We have evolved and we have come a long way since then; throughout the '60s and '70s we saw, and continue to see, even today, an expansion, generally, of the primary and secondary schools education systems, which really meant that we have more places at primary and secondary schools and, as a consequence of that, we have more students graduating from secondary schools eligible and desirous of obtaining a tertiary education.

We also have today, a wider range of programmes. We have some degree programmes that did not exist back in 1973, which exist now. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, even as recently as 1988—1989, to do a law degree you had to go to Cave Hill. What we have now, is a number of private tertiary institutions that are offering law degree programmes under the Students' Revolving Loan Fund; they would be ineligible to access assistance.

In addition to that, as our economy expands and as we develop as a society, the hon. Minister of Planning and Development has stated in her presentation that we are moving towards developed country status. One very important ingredient in our ability to achieve developed country status is the availability of expertise in the country to operate our systems at the standards that might be consistent with and required for us to be considered a developed country.

What I mean is, that in order for our health system to be considered on par with international best practice; to be considered on par with the highest standards in the world, we must have the expertise required to operate the system. We must have all the doctors that we need—not only quantity but quality—we must have all the nurses, all the scrub techs, all the radiographers and all the pharmacists, et cetera.

For our education system to work at the international standard, or standards associated with developed countries, we need to have our lecturers, our teachers and our schools managers, et cetera, well-trained—quantity and quality. For any system to work consistent with international best practices we need to have the expertise available; what that means, is that we have to invest in training.

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

I would like to put it in context of what applies in some of the countries that are indeed recognized as developed countries. In the United Kingdom where the national population or the population of that kingdom is just over 55 million people; they have a large population pool, a large human resource pool potential, and they also have—I described it the last time I was here—as a mature education system, and the hon. Member for Oropouche questioned me and said what did I mean. The meaning of a mature system is that they have been operating a system for centuries and they have had many opportunities to review their system and to adjust what might be out of order. They have had a lot of experience with their system; so they have had opportunities to repair, review, analyse and reconstruct, et cetera.

With a large population pool; a mature education system, they also have less of a problem when it comes to brain drain; when it comes to emigration. What that essentially means, they keep most of their graduates. A large majority of the people who are trained within the British system stay and work within the United Kingdom. That has to do with the strength of their currency; a number of things that the economists and financial experts can speak more fluently about.

Mr. Speaker, even with all those advantages the United Kingdom still finds itself having to import more than half of its nurses and it finds itself still having to import teachers. In fact, in September, 2005 when the school term opened they found themselves short of approximately 600 math teachers, and that I say to you, consider what they have in their favour; a large population pool, a mature education system, minimal brain drain and still they find themselves having to import expertise to run their education and health care systems at the standard that would satisfy them and satisfy their population; at the standard we like to call developed country standard.

A similar story in the United States, over 270 million; large population pool from which they could take and train, they have a system different to that which applies in the United Kingdom, but all the same, they, too, have been operating that for many years. Lots of opportunities to improve it along the way [*Interruption*] and they, too, do not experience the brain drain problem we may experience, and yet, they find themselves having to import IT specialists from India, China, Singapore and from other countries in the world. They come here and recruit teachers from our country to work in their inner city schools.

I am putting our situation in that context; we have a very small population—1.3 million people—so the population pool to start with is very small. We have an education system that we have, essentially, borrowed from the United Kingdom,

but we have been trying to apply it to our situation. We have been independent for only a few years, and in that context the system is not as mature as it will be, and as it is becoming. We are now looking at our system and attempting to do our own reviews to determine the suitability of our own education system to our population, our demographics, our economic situation, our sociological situation.

We are examining our education system in that context and growing and improving it. So we would have a less mature education system; a small population pool; a brain drain problem which exists. We understand that, again, that has to do with persons finding better opportunities or finding other opportunities outside. What that means to us, is that we cannot afford to allow any human potential to go to waste. [*Desk thumping*] Essentially, we have a responsibility to ensure that all the talents of our country are developed in such a way that we are able to meet the expertise requirement in order that we may be able to run our systems consistent with the standards associated with developed countries. So, in that context we find ourselves having to ensure that all of our students who are eligible and desirous of obtaining a tertiary education are in fact able to access that education.

Even, as I have said that, I want to go back a bit to look at how—and to do that let me just add this by the way—we are constantly expanding capacity; in all of our public institutions we have been expanding capacity. In fact, over the last few years we have seen the capacity of the student enrolment at the University of the West Indies move from approximately 8,000—9,000 to just around 13,000. We have done that in creative ways by introducing evening university, et cetera. We are growing COSTAATT, again, to expand capacity and we are creating new institutions—which we would talk about in the near future—to create opportunities for persons to pursue technical training.

One institution I must talk about in terms of expansion of capacity; the institution that would give us the quantum leap that we need is the University of Trinidad and Tobago. We expect that when our main campus at Wallerfield is finished in 2008; we expect to increase our capacity there by about 5,000. In addition, we have brought the private tertiary institutions into the fold and we are funding students as they access tertiary education opportunities at these private tertiary institutions. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, we have been constantly investing in expanding capacity and to allow our students who are interested and eligible to pursue tertiary education are able to access the opportunities; we have been on that growth path. But if I may

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

Friday, February 10, 2006

go back a bit and put the Students' Revolving Loan in context; that is in context of our general policy of expansion and improvement in accessibility. In 1988 something happened in this country which was a departure from our traditional approach to education; in that, this Government had held the view and continues to hold the view that education is not a privilege but education is a right.

Having said that, even before 1988 tertiary education did not carry a tuition cost; in 1988 a cess payment was introduced and students were required for the first year that they contribute to their tuition. Over the years, that payment—I remember when it was introduced in 1988, to do a Degree in the Faculty of Arts and General Studies you needed around \$2,400 for the first year; \$2,800 for the second and third years; those were the costs associated with it. I think, Social Sciences might have been about \$3,200—\$3,600. Over the years that cost has increased. In 2001 the Dollar-for-Dollar programme was introduced and that provided some relief—albeit very limited—it provided assistance of half the payment at some institutions, [*Interruption*] public institutions, yes. And to answer the hon. Member for Caroni East, I am aware that the private institutions were, in fact, begging to be able to participate in dollar for dollar. My understanding is, it was not considered at that time.

**Mr. Singh:** I want to thank the hon. Minister for giving way, and I did this on a previous occasion. The architecture that was laid out; you engaged the public sector institutions first; you established the accreditation council so as to ensure the quality and the integrity of the offerings from the private sector institutions. From my recollection it was meant to be triggered by February—March. From the Easter semester the private sector institutions with the accreditation commission regulating that aspect; not that they were not part of the plan. The critical issue was getting the accreditation commission in place; which under your predecessors in office took about two years when it should have taken a few months.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** If I may quote the hon. Member for Couva North: “coulda, woulda, shoulda”. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Valley:** Without even a footnote.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** The dollar for dollar provided very limited assistance. It provided assistance for students in the first year—and if I may point out—it spoke about the accreditation council, but the students who were able to access dollar for dollar were the students who were coming in the first year of the public tertiary institutions. There were no accreditation council issues with the students in the second and third year, yet the students in the second and third year were not able to access dollar for dollar.



If it were, as the hon. Member for Caroni East has said, then I am sure that they would have made it available to all the students in the public tertiary institutions. *[Interruption]* *[Crosstalk]* If the airport had cost \$500 million they would have done it too.

**Mr. Singh:** You want to utilize \$800 million to build a stadium.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** Yes. But we are doing that and this! *[Laughter]* That is the problem. It is not one at the expense of the other. *[Crosstalk]*

**Mr. Valley:** It is a jigsaw puzzle, we are putting in two pieces at the same time.

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** The introduction of dollar for dollar did—as I said—provide some relief. In fact, if I may look at the numbers, the Government received in 2001, 3,965 applications and the amount of money that was spent on dollar for dollar in 2001 was \$23,311,225.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to compare that with the following figure which is the number of applications that we processed for GATE in 2004; 3,965 for dollar for dollar; GATE 2—

**Mr. Singh:** How much for dollar for dollar in 2003?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** We were in Government in 2003.

**Mr. Singh:** It does not matter, it is a growth process. How much for 2003?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** But, the growth started with us. *[Crosstalk]* We expanded dollar for dollar. We included the private tertiary institutions in dollar for dollar.

**Mr. Singh:** When?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** We did it!

**Mr. Singh:** When?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** After you left office. *[Laughter]* Right after you left office. *[Crosstalk]* I am comparing the two programmes; dollar for dollar, 2001. *[Interruption]* The Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses, 2004 *[Interruption]* 24,117 applications—

**Mr. Singh:** I would deal with that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order! [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:**—24,117 citizens of this country were able to access tertiary education opportunities made available under the GATE programme, as delivered to the population by this Government. [*Desk thumping*] And in order to achieve that, [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, we spent, not \$23 million but \$126,211,800 on the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, we have since, on our growth path, improved not only the accessibility in terms of the number of students, but we have also been expanding the programme, such that students pursuing a more diverse range of tertiary education programmes are able to access the assistance from Government. In fact, consistent with the growth and improvement this year—as the country would know—we have, in the last budget, announced the revision of the GATE programme to provide for free tertiary education. And I would like to use this opportunity to outline to the national community, through you, what we have been able to do, and what we are in fact doing at this present point in time. [*Interruption*]

Free tuition would be available to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago pursuing undergraduate programmes at local and regional public tertiary institutions. We have moved at all public institutions, which would include the University of the West Indies, the University of Trinidad and Tobago, COSTAATT, Metal Industries Company; all the public institutions, even the public institutions at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica, and at Cave Hill, et cetera. Students pursuing undergraduate programmes there will be able to access free tuition. The Government of this country would pay for our citizens to access free tuition at these institutions.

The benefit of free tuition at the undergraduate level would also be extended to citizens at approved local private tertiary institutions. What this means, is that we have a number of private tertiary institutions which are offering programmes that have been approved and that are approved. We propose to ensure that any citizen of Trinidad who is accessing an opportunity there would be able to also, at the same time, access the assistance from Government. We are requiring these private institutions to sign the memorandum of agreement with us, and there is good reason for that.

In a few cases we found under GATE that some of the institutions were inclined to increase their fees, let me say, arbitrarily. What we are trying to do with the memorandum of agreement is to ensure that there is some agreement

between the institutions and the Government, so that we can ensure that a reasonable fee is being charged. We have discussed with the institutions already the contents of the memorandum of agreement. They have all agreed, in principle, and we have made some minor language changes to the draft that we discussed with them and we are proceeding. Almost all of the institutions should have the memorandum signed, perhaps, by early next week, so we would be in a good position to—All the students from the institutions who would have signed the memorandum of understanding would be in a position to access this free tuition.

We have a situation where students are being the recipients of scholarships to pursue programme 'A' in medicine at the St. George's University. What took place there, I think, were 20 opportunities—St. George's University in Grenada approached the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and said that they would pay half the tuition fees of the students—partial scholarship is what it is called—and we volunteered to pay the other half at the students' end; they would be the beneficiary of a full scholarship, in the sense that they would not be required to pay any tuition. Now, remember that St. George's University is a university located in Grenada, but it is really an international university and in the interest of ensuring that we are able to produce more doctors to service our country; we have been participating in the programme. And what we have agreed to do, in respect of the St. George's University, is to offer a maximum of 25 additional scholarships to students pursuing programmes there. But each scholarship we would pay 50 per cent of the tuition.

### **2.30 p.m.**

So exactly, what we are paying for the first 20, we would continue to pay for the second 20. Mr. Speaker, what we recognized was that there were students there paying the entire fee and we are moving towards providing some assistance to those students who are pursuing their degree in medicine at St. George's University by providing them with a scholarship to the tune of 50 per cent of their tuition fees.

We have also moved to extend the benefit of the GATE programme to the postgraduate level. We would not provide free tuition at the postgraduate level. In fact, we are providing GATE assistance to the tune of 50 per cent for students pursuing postgraduate programmes at public tertiary institutions. The postgraduate student is slightly different from the undergraduate student. The postgraduate would have had a degree already and would be in a better position to assist himself; the undergraduate student is the one who is just out of secondary

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

school, would have had no opportunity to work, and no opportunity to earn anything. The undergraduate student is the place where we have decided we must make the majority of our investment in terms of assistance, in order to develop the human resources that we need and the expertise that we need.

The students pursuing accredited postgraduate programmes in approved local private institutions, we would provide 50 per cent at the public institutions. What that means? If you attend the University of the West Indies and you are doing a degree programme for \$25,000, we would pay \$12,500; it is a straight case of 50 per cent at the postgraduate level. If you are at a private tertiary institution, we have set a cap to provide 50 per cent to a maximum of \$10,000. If your programme is \$20,000, we would pay \$10,000; if your programme is \$16,000, we would pay \$8,000; if your programme is \$25,000, we would pay \$10,000 because we have capped it at \$10,000.

Mr. Speaker, postgraduate programme—understand the difference in terms of the status of the student as it were. All that we have asked—there is something called the public allied institutions, which means institutions like the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business and we continue to treat them as a public institution until such time as we are able to review our relationship with them. We are in discussions with them now, as to how best to move forward in terms of providing assistance to the students at that institution.

The Government has been, and continues to be, very lenient in terms of what we expect in return from our students. In fact, one of the leaders of one of our public institutions has said to me, that the students are getting away with murder. What he means is that the deal is so good that they really have very little to repay. What we are asking for in return, is that students work in Trinidad for a period of time, commensurate with the value or the amount of money that we would have spent on their tuition. If the cost is up to \$50,000 that we would have spent on tuition, all told over the first, second and third year, they would be required to work in Trinidad—when I say work in Trinidad, not necessarily for the Government; they can work for British Petroleum (BP), Petrotrin, Standard Distributors, they can work for anyone in Trinidad, including the Government, and that would be acceptable to us. But they must work for a period of one year, if we would have spent \$50,000 or less on their tuition.

This is very generous, because most students would fall in this category, they would only be required to work for one year. If we have spent between \$50,000 and \$100,000, the period of service—if I can call it that—would be two years.

They are required to work in Trinidad for two years; from \$100,000 to \$150,000, three years. If the Government would have spent between \$150,000 to \$200,000, they would be required to work in Trinidad for four years; over \$200,000, they would be required to work in Trinidad for five years.

**Hon. Member:** Both public and private?

**Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:** Either public or private sector. They can even work for you and we would be quite happy with that. We would accept that as having fulfilled the requirement.

Mr. Speaker, the free tuition at the undergraduate level in combination with the GATE programme we are doing at postgraduate level, would see all our citizens pursuing any kind of education in Trinidad and Tobago in our institutions, being able to access tuition assistance—on the one hand, free tuition at the undergraduate level and a significant contribution at the postgraduate level. At the end of the day, we expect to spend on this programme during the course of this year, approximately \$350 million and we expect that approximately between 26,000 and 27,000 students, nationals of this country, would be able to access a tertiary education on account of the policies pursued by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Over and above that—[*Interruption*] well, you could join him—we have announced the introduction of a loan programme to be called the Higher Education Loan Programme—very, very creative. We understand that even when tuition fees are paid, students have expenses over and above the cost of tuition. Some students come from very difficult and demanding socio-economic situations and, as such, they may not be able to meet their non-tuition expenses. They may find themselves enrolled; fees paid, but unable to pursue their education simply because they cannot meet their transport expenses; their accommodation expenses; their expenses for books or other expenses that might be related to their pursuit of their tertiary education programme.

Mr. Speaker, we have recognized that, and again consistent with our policy of expanding access and making education available to all, who are eligible, we have created the Higher Education Loan Programme. This programme will be available to students who are pursuing programmes at approved local and regional public tertiary level institutions; students at approved local public allied tertiary institutions—that is the same Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business that I

spoke about—and students at approved local private institutions. Even if you are attending a private institution you can access the Higher Education Loan Programme.

Students at approved tertiary institutions within the Caricom with special arrangements and made with the Government of the individual institution, that issue in particular reference to the St. George's College in Grenada; students who are there can access the Higher Education Loan Programme. It is available to part-time and full-time students and to students if they are employed or if they are unemployed. Sometimes students may be employed—postgraduate students, et cetera may be employed and even undergraduates are sometimes part-time employed—but they still may not be able to meet all their requirements.

All of these categories of students would be eligible to access the Higher Education Loan Programme and the loans are designed to cover part or all of the following tertiary education expenses. Wherever applicable, it will cover tuition fees where that might exist. It will cover accommodation expenses; airfare, if you have to travel to any of the other islands; other relevant transportation costs: ground transport; sea transport, if you are coming from Tobago, whatever the case might be; personal maintenance cost and living expenses. It will cover books and related materials; special equipment cost, including computers, et cetera. We will also provide group insurance coverage and any other expenses that might be related to the pursuit of tertiary education.

These are the kinds of reasons that students would be bringing forward in order to be eligible to access the loan and it would be awarded, whenever you present yourself, you would have to identify the programme that you are pursuing. If you are pursuing a Certificate, Diploma, Associate Degree, Bachelor's Degree, Postgraduate Diploma, any other professional qualifications, ACCA, CIMA, Masters Degree, Doctoral Degree, et cetera, because it is intended for tertiary education, we have identified these programmes as the programmes, the pursuit of which would make you eligible to access the loan programme.

Note, how we propose this programme to function. We are in discussion—when it was announced a few weeks ago, we indicated that we are trying to get it to operational by mid-February. How we propose that this programme would work is that right now we are in discussion with the commercial banks. The commercial banks would use their funding. We would provide a 100 per cent guarantee of the loans, so the students would not necessarily have to walk with any collateral as the case might be. We would provide the guarantee on the loan.

We would pay 100 per cent of the interest while the student is at school; so for the duration of the period of study, the students would experience a full moratorium on interest.

In fact, one of the problems with the University's Student Guarantee Loan Fund, was that the student was required to pay interest even while he or she was at school. So while you were in your classroom, interest was being accrued, and you found yourself having borrowed "X" thousand dollars; by the end of your degree programme, you graduated, and you have "X" plus interest thousand dollars to pay. As a result of that, students were faced, in some cases, with some large sums of money and still are faced with large sums of money that they have now to repay.

What we are trying to do is to make the burden of the students as light as possible, so for the entire period that you are at school pursuing your degree programme, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago would cover the cost of the interest. When you have graduated you would be faced only with the requirement of having to repay the exact amount you would have borrowed. That is a major step forward.

Mr. Speaker, even after you have graduated, we have decided that we would go even further and subsidize the interest that you would have to pay. We would pay 4 per cent of whatever interest that you are required to pay—the first 4 percentile points. So if the market rate or the prevailing rate at the time is 9 per cent, we would pay the first 4 and you would be required to pay 5 per cent of the interest charge on the amount of money you would have borrowed. Again, all of this is leading to a governing philosophy where this Government is constantly working very hard to make education opportunities available to all of our nationals; all of our citizens; growing our population; improving our human resource base, simply because there are two underlying philosophical positions, both related: Education is a right, not a privilege and no student, no citizen must be denied an education because of inability to pay. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, to facilitate all of this that we are talking about, we have created a funding and grants unit in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. That funding and grants unit would be responsible for administrating the GATE programme with the free tertiary education component and the Higher Education Loan Programme. That is the engine room where all these operations would be taking place. That brings me back to where we are in terms of the amendment that we are here today to make.

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

The Students' Revolving Loan has to be brought across to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and in order to achieve that, the amendment here today—in that context that I have placed it—is to provide for the Minister with responsibility for tertiary education, to take responsibility for the Students Revolving Loan Fund and to provide in addition, for the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education to operate as the Chairman of the Board of Managers of the Students' Revolving Loan Fund. Once that is brought together, we will be in a position then to harmonize all the legislation and we will come back to the Parliament in a short time with a comprehensive piece of legislation to govern the administration of all this great work that the Government is doing for the citizens of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in respect of the provision of opportunities for tertiary education.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. G. Singh (Caroni East):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a short contribution on this matter before us, the Students' Revolving Loan Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2006. As the hon. Minister in his presentation indicated, it is a functional designation of the appropriate location from the Ministry of Education into the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, and where there is now the Permanent Secretary replacing the Chief Personnel Officer as the Chairman of the Board.

Mr. Speaker, clearly, in the context of the oil and gas windfall that is currently taking place in Trinidad and Tobago, that you have this kind of financial focus on the funding for tertiary education, that is laudable. The goal of 20 per cent is a laudable and desirable objective, and I am certain with the kind of funding being provided, we may exceed those goals. But we must recall that that administration in its incarnation in the period 1991 to 1995, left the University of the West Indies with a bill of \$300 million owing by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago when it demitted office, because they simply were not paying the fees owed to the University of the West Indies based on the arrangement with the University of the West Indies.

When our administration for 1995 to 2000 came into being, we had to meet that debt due to the University of the West Indies and we did so within a period when oil reached \$9 per barrel. Today, oil being \$64 a barrel and the kind of oil



and gas windfall, we can understand that when we brought into being the dollar for dollar programme, and we implemented it in September 2001—

**Mr. Valley:** It was a gimmick.

**Mr. G. Singh:**—that was the first year of the dollar for dollar programme. It was not an election gimmick, because dollar for dollar—

**Mr. Valley:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. G. Singh:** September 2001 was not an election year.

**Mr. Valley:** 2001 was when we had an election.

**Mr. G. Singh:** No, 2001 was not an election year. [*Crosstalk*] Well, when we implemented it.

**Mr. Imbert:** It was not yet?

**Mr. G. Singh:** [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, the election was held in 2000; we implemented dollar for dollar in 2001 but 2001 was not an election year, it was the fulfilment of an election promise. [*Interruption*] So that you had the implementation of that programme, having regard to the government coffers at that time, in which 50 per cent of all tuition fees in the first phase at all public sector institutions were to be paid by the government in order to assist the persons who are admitted to the various public sector institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the second phase of the programme was meant for the private sector, and as I indicated earlier when the Minister gave way, there was need for an accreditation in order to establish the regulatory framework and the integrity of the offering from the private sector. We appointed a team headed by Dr. Anna Mahase—

**Dr. Rowley:** Boy, do not talk nonsense!

**Mr. G. Singh:** Dr. Anna Mahase; honorary Doctorate from the University of the West Indies—[*Member steups*] You may suck your tongue as much as you like, that is the reality. That committee reported to the previous Minister of Higher Education. [*Interruption*] You know, the PNM has a history of abusing women.

**Mr. Sharma:** Of course.

**Mr. G. Singh:** A history of abusing women and they continue today again. Nevertheless, the Anna Mahase Committee reported to then Minister with responsibility for higher education, Sen. the Hon. Danny Montano; yet that

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[MR SINGH]

Friday, February 10, 2006

accreditation committee report did not evolve into an accreditation council until perhaps two years after the fact. In the meantime, there was no movement to bring the private sector institutions into what was still then, the dollar for dollar fold, because GATE came into being in 2004.

The PNM became the administration on December 24, 2002 in an Act of “anointment” by the then President ANR Robinson, on the basis of “moral and spiritual values”. So it took two years for the PNM to move into the realm, whereby they were able to bring the accredited private sector institutions into the realm of what they call GATE, which was dollar for dollar. Therefore, when the hon. Minister comes to this House and says, “When GATE was implemented in 2004, you had this exponential growth”, what is the reality? In 2001, you had first year students, in all the public sector institutions: Cipriani Labour College, the Hospitality Institute, all of COSTAATT, the University of the West Indies; all those public sector institutions, year one; in 2003, it would have been year two, by 2004, the three-year cycle would have included. But you see, with that kind of misleading of the House he comes here to say that there is a gap, a big gap, between dollar for dollar and GATE. This reminds me of the book, *How to lie with statistics*.

When the hon. Minister spoke, he said, “There is need for the availability of expertise to operate this country in the context of having a First World society, for us to function as a First World society.” One of the things we did when we went into the administration in 1995, under the then Minister of Education, hon. Dr. Adesh Nanan—who will speak at length on this Bill subsequently—was to move the number of scholarships in the country: open, additional and further additional based on merit. So the number of scholarships moved from 35 to 70 to 200 to 300. I think the consequential movement is some 400 scholarships altogether; I may stand to be corrected by the hon. Minister.

In addition to those 300 to 400 scholarships now, based on merit, the Government provides, through linkages with the various foreign governments and other institutions, some 300 scholarships on an annual basis run by the scholarship division. It is clear having regard to the number of open scholarships based on merit, scholarships through the A’ level system, based on merit through CAPE, this current administration has not provided the supporting infrastructure in order to facilitate the quick disbursement to these students.

Mr. Speaker, it has been brought to my attention that currently, students who are on government's scholarships based on the CAPE and A’ level system, that they got none of their monthly stipend from September 2005 to January of this

year. None! So this is a Government, awash with money, talking about the whole social sector and the need to facilitate the poor people in the environment; but you have persons who have won scholarships, who have worked hard in the system, but they did not get their monthly stipend from September last year to the end of January this year. Now, you have to understand student life is a life, that is penurious for the majority. How can they survive in an environment for the first semester when you do not provide them with that funding? There is need for us to address that and ensure that whereas you talk at the macro level the details are not being provided to facilitate, and it is a real individual struggle for a lot of them.

To date, six months after, book grants for the scholarship winners are not yet in place, leading to frustration by the young students. Mr. Speaker, we do so in a context where you want—the Minister indicated that the best and the brightest should serve this country. So what is the use of a scholarship if you are not getting your monthly stipend? Of what use is this scholarship if you cannot access your book grant? What is the problem? It is a question of bureaucratic delay?

**3.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I am further advised that it is a bureaucratic nightmare, as a scholarship winner, to access your funding. You have three ministries that deal with it. You have the Ministry of Public Administration and Information. If you are a foreign student or if you have an open scholarship, you then have to liaise with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. You also have the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. Students are being pushed around from pillar to post and they are in a foreign country and they are being given the bureaucratic dance. I suggest that in order to deal with this insensitivity at the level of the bureaucracy, there is need for a one-stop shop to clear this issue.

You cannot have scholarship winners entering the bureaucratic nightmare they are facing; so let us put that in place. When you have something like 700 scholarships in place, you cannot have that kind of thing, because of the individual nightmare, the trouble and they will get lost when they have to deal continuously with that. I suggest that we have a one-stop shop for scholarship winners in this country. You have to facilitate your people, because in that way you will be sending a message to them that their scholarship, which is based on meritocracy, is important. [*Crosstalk*] I take it that you are accepting my suggestion.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, yes.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Mr. Speaker, part of the problem is that with the late payment in fees, if you were to write the examination, particularly in the University of the West Indies, you are not graded until the fees are paid.

**Mr. Valley:** Your grade is not released.

**Mr. G. Singh:** They cannot access their grades until the fees are paid. You are in charge of the administration; why are you putting this undue pressure on your young student population, after they have worked so hard to win a scholarship?

**Mr. Valley:** Talk to your partner Bhoel! Talk to your neighbour. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. G. Singh:** In the context of what is happening today in this country, in the context of a background where there is a kind of anarchy prevailing, one must bring to mind erudition, as pointed out in today's newspaper by Justice Volney. I do not know whether he was a scholarship winner, but when I read what he had to say in the newspaper under the headline:

"Volney's volleys"

I think it is recommended reading for all parliamentarians. I would read parts of his contribution in today's newspaper, an article written by Jada Loutoo:

"Our judiciary, which is the last bastion against decadence is not spared for it is precariously undermanned, underfunded, underpaid and under attack,' Volney said as he welcomed...Justice Larry Lalla to the bench.

'Make no error about it, the day of the honourable, of honour and of principle in the ways of man, is well into decline,' he said."

**Hon. Member:** Well, he should know. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. G. Singh:** The article continues:

"Make no error about it, the day of the honourable, of honour and of principle in the ways of man is well into decline."

**Mr. Valley:** He should know. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. G. Singh:** The article continued:

"But,"

Volney continued, in speaking to the new judge,

"Every word you utter becomes a story. Choose them wisely. Every decision you will make will be microscopically analyzed by armchair critics in their

numbers. Fear not the pen of the uninformed...and idle rhetoric of the ignorant whose exhortations may be likened to the events leading to the crucifixion...'

He also told Lalla to 'rise above the displeasure in the unbridled use of the resources of the State to abuse the processes of the court in order to intimidate the judiciary and its judges.

Learn that independence on the bench is not found in the strictures of the Constitution but in the fiber of the judge's conviction to render the true justice irrespective of the consequences. [*Crosstalk*] Learn the listening way even of those with hopeless causes and nefarious agendas.

The adulation of your work will be found in the manner of its dispensation and when vilified and derided for espousing the correct and proper, take consolation in the lives of the Baptist, John, the Christ, the Lord Krishna, the prophet Muhammed and Martin Luther King.

As a new judge, it is your challenge to take up the baton, bear the burden of office, and like your worn brethren...the principle and honour of the law without fear or favour, ill will or malice,' Volney said to Lalla, who will be presiding in the criminal courts." [*Desk thumping*]

I want to recommend this as required reading for all parliamentarians.

**Hon. Member:** Why?

**Mr. G. Singh:** Because it espouses the desirable objects of principles.

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Mr. G. Singh:** It espouses the desirable object of what in this society is required: independence of thought; principle base [*Desk thumping*] and the judge is saying that no amount of money, no amount of State pressure will bend me, because I have the moral fibre to stand up against the State. [*Desk thumping*]

When we train our young people, our children, in the universities and institutions of higher education, we train them to occupy positions in the Judiciary; we train them to occupy positions in the Parliament of this country; we train them to occupy and run our society in our aftermath and this is what we require in every arena, that people do their national duty, consistent with certain principles, certain ethics, certain values and certain morality. When I saw in today's newspaper what the Prime Minister said in the headline of a column in the first page:

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[MR. SINGH]

Friday, February 10, 2006

"Beware of the power of the drug lords"

I quote:

“‘The thriving illegal trade in drugs and arms in the region has now raised the level of violent crime to unprecedented levels in the Caricom,’ Chairman Patrick Manning said yesterday. ‘This could eventually threaten the regional societies,’ Manning added, ‘since it was not farfetched to conceive that the insidious influence of drug lords could spread to the highest levels of political security and legal systems. If that happens, all of Caricom is in real trouble.’”

I repeat:

"...insidious influence of drug lords could spread to the highest levels of political security and legal systems."

I say to Prime Minister Manning, based on the request of the Opposition leader, based on the request of the hon. Member for St. Augustine, the political leader of the UNC, appoint a commission of enquiry into the allegations made by Vernon Paul; otherwise, you would be just mouthing off words. Walk the talk. There must be an alignment between what as Prime Minister you say and what as Prime Minister you do. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Narine:** The devil!

**Mr. G. Singh:** It is in this context, when we speak of the role of young people in our society, what kind of support infrastructure, hon. Minister, are you putting in place to continue the process for those who win the 400-plus scholarships on an annual basis? I recall that I had begun the process, when I had the honour of leading the human development sector, of tracing those scholarship winners to find out where they were; what contribution they were making to society; whether they were contributing to the country's development beyond the three-year or five-year period and what they were doing. Why do we not bring them together in, perhaps, an annual meeting of the best. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. G. Singh:** An annual meeting of the best and the brightest; let us put that in place. Let us bring the best and the brightest together in a common gathering, because these are the students who won on the basis of merit. [*Desk thumping*] It was not a scholarship given because you were a party member. It was not a scholarship given because of nepotism. They won on the basis of merit and by virtue of their hard work, discipline and character they can best exemplify what is best in Trinidad and Tobago.

Every year we read in the newspapers and we take pride in the achievements of our students: No. 1 in physics; No. 2 in French; No. 4, No. 5; amongst the best and brightest in the Commonwealth world based on the A' level Cambridge Examinations. Where do they go? Where do they find themselves? How can we best utilize their talents? What role would they be playing as they seek to find this elusive goal of Vision 2020? [*Crosstalk*]

We are suggesting that we put them together; perhaps, the class of 1990. It might be a starting point, because you know that the hon. Minister might bring his relative, Bilaal Abdullah. I understand Mr. Abdullah is a genius. I do not know whether he won an island scholarship, but in terms of software programming he is a genius. I understand that the police are looking for him but, currently, you cannot find him so, perhaps, in your contribution you may give the police the information where to find your relative.

**Hon. Abdul-Hamid:** My relative? [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. G. Singh:** We must start, at some point, the process of building our society.

**Mr. Imbert:** "He look like Bilaal?" [*Laughter*]

**Mr. G. Singh:** You must understand what is taking place in our society; contemplate young people and read what they have to say. Presentation College, Chaguanas won the President's medal for three years straight. You should go and see the paucity of facilities. The laboratory in that school is, perhaps, dated to the 1970s, but yet in the science category they won back-to-back for three years straight. This is a tremendous achievement; perhaps, it is necessary to provide some kind of incentive for schools like that. You should have a financial grant provided to the secondary schools that produce the President's medal winner on an annual basis; you create the incentive and the whole school identifies with it, so that it leads to improvement of the facilities for the next generation. [*Desk thumping*] You have the money. You should do something with the money; something that will provide for better infrastructure; that would provide an investment; that will anchor excellence. So within the school system, you anchor that excellence; the Government has the money. It is short on ideas. The hon. Member for St. Augustine says it all the time. They have the power, but they lack the knowledge, but we are giving them the benefit of some measure.

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[MR. SINGH]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

Mr. Speaker, when you understand this kind of environment, education becomes the avenue for social mobility. Crime is the principal issue in this country and education represents part of the solution to the problem of crime in this country. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, when you invest in that arena, as we are doing at various levels, as the continuum continues since 1995 with the UNC administration, investment at the supply side and now there is movement into the quality side, all is part of the continuum. We must now have an appreciation of where the society is headed.

Several decades ago, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi wrote a statement in which he warned against the seven social sins: one, education without character. I think that it is a fundamental flaw, an error, made by several administrations, not to incorporate culture into the educational environment. By that I do not mean having a Carnival jam or Divali programme alone. I am saying a critical component as part of the development of the education process is culture. [*Crosstalk*] I do not mean what you are doing.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** We have that.

**Mr. G. Singh:** When you look at the best schools in this country, culture in the environment is incorporated into their learning process success. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. G. Singh:** Education without character; we must build the character in which people have an understanding of the plural nature of our society, of the multireligious nature of our society.

**Mr. Hinds:** Plural initiatives!

**Mr. G. Singh:** "Yuh know de people in Laventille doh want to hear you; so you stay quiet for a little while." The people in your constituency do not want to hear nothing about you.

**Mr. Hinds:** You know nothing of Laventille. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Khan:** They do not want you. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. G. Singh:** Another principle enunciated by Gandhi was science without humanity. As you are in charge of science and technology, where is the report done by Mr. Clem Sankat on science and technology in Trinidad and Tobago. What measures are we taking to cure the deficit in science and technology starting from the primary school level? Where is the Government policy position on science and technology? Are we going to wait for the articulation of that in Vision



2020. I was pleased to receive the report of the Vision 2020 Committee, coming to the end of their term. I intend to make a contribution on that, the Minister having read her statement today. What are you doing?

We are behind; we are laggard in that area. We are behind the rest of the world. Therefore, when we reach 2020, where would we be in science and technology? The Clem Sankat report is something like five years old. When I left there was a draft science and technology policy, so it is, at least, four years old. Where are we with that? We must be able to deal with that in that context.

When you find that kind of approach being taken, as evil stalks this land with the kind of murders taking place, education remains a part of the panacea, a part of the cure. When I saw what went on with magistrate Lucina Cardinenas-Ragoonanan in the upscale area of Palmiste in San Fernando and when the embodiment of the law is treated in that manner, I understand the evil taking place in society. It brings to mind a third principle of Gandhi, that is, politics without principle.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Tell them that.

**Mr. G. Singh:** One of the seven social sins of Gandhi is politics without principle. It is only politics without principle that can have the Prime Minister saying, "Be careful of the insidious influence of drug lords"; and have certain members of his party participating in the planting of that at the homes of two Members of Parliament, but unwilling to have a commission of enquiry; that is politics without principle. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Rowley:** Politics has its own morality!

**Mr. G. Singh:** Politics may have its own morality for you.

**Hon. Member:** For you! [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. G. Singh:** For you, not for me. There must be politics of principle, otherwise you will have a disconnect in your society and a nonalignment. There would be a disconnect between what you say and what you do. [*Desk thumping*] If you cannot align what you say with what you do, then there is an abandonment of the politics of principle.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Pointe-a-Pierre knows that by heart.

**Dr. Rowley:** Which part of the party do you belong to?

**Mr. G. Singh:** We need a framework for our young people to understand; an ethical framework; a values-based framework; a framework for their community

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[MR. SINGH]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

and for your country. If you do not have that, well then you are not heading in a direction that will bring everybody. Mr. Speaker, if you do not have a common bedrock of shared principles and values, then you can say with ease that you will sleep with the devil. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** "Oh goood!"

**Mr. G. Singh:** Then you can say that you will sleep with the devil.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mr. G. Singh:** Slumber with the devil gives rise to a fruit that can be poison to the nation. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, it is clear to me.

**Mr. Hinds:** Good shot!

**Hon. Member:** "Oh goood!"

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Caroni East you are "neemakharam"!

**Mr. G. Singh:** When you understand that if you sleep with the devil in order to win an election, you will release the evil that is now stalking the land. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] You will release the evil, because you will recall, Mr. Speaker, that in December 2001 when there was the done deal, there was, in a sense, a sleeping with the devil. [*Desk thumping*] Now, under this PNM administration, you have evil stalking the land, so you have the number of murders being what it is today.

**Dr. Rowley:** Leave the PNM out of that! [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, please; perhaps you all are misunderstanding the Member. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Imbert:** We understand him.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, let the Member make his contribution in silence. He expects silence; I want to hear him too.

**Hon. Member:** We want to hear him, too!

**Mr. G. Singh:** What is required, and the Vernon Paul issue demonstrates it, is that we must keep away the criminal element from the political processes of the country. We have to engage the society and have a national conversation on the basis virtues of ethics, truth and honesty—

**Mr. Valley:** And the devil!

**Mr. G. Singh:**—morality, character, respect, discipline, divinity and non-criminality. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, I must get the *Hansard* record of the contribution of the Member for Caroni East in order to make sure that I really heard what I heard.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** You must; it is history.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I took some notes, so let me see if I could repeat: "Sleeping with the devil is like a fruit that will poison the nation." Did I get that right, Mr. Speaker? "If you sleep with the devil, you will release the evil that stalks the land."

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Talk about the Bill first.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Why he must talk about the Bill first? He is responding; it is a debate.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** This is a very, very curious debate. As the Member for Caroni East was "explatiating", I saw the Member for Couva North sinking deeper and deeper into his chair. [*Laughter*] As the Member for Caroni East carried on about sleeping with the devil to win an election, I saw the political leader of the UNC banging the table.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, yes.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** The Chairman of the UNC was sinking, looking grimmer and grimmer and grimmer. [*Crosstalk*] It is clear that these are interesting times. [*Crosstalk*] It is clear that the Members opposite are living in interesting times. You know the old Chinese proverb, "May you live in interesting times", it is clear that they are living in interesting times. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** Call elections and see!

**Hon. C. Imbert:** My goodness! Member for Caroni East, I wish you well in your endeavours. I wish you luck. I have never seen such a vicious, frontal and brutal attack on a political leader of a party in full public glare. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] I have never seen such a thing. I wish you luck, Member for Caroni East.

**Hon. Member:** He was right.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I agree with you, but I wish you luck. Let me go back to some of the issues raised by the Member for Caroni East.

**Mr. Hinds:** Member for Chaguanas, could you do better than that?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I do not think the Member for Chaguanas could do better than that. [*Laughter*] Let me go into some of the issues raised. [*Crosstalk*] I could almost forgive the Member for Caroni East for all the nonsense he spoke prior to that.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** Come to the Bill. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I could almost forgive the Member for the nonsense he spoke prior to those gems that he dropped on us just now, but I need to correct the record. The Member complained bitterly that the University of the West Indies was indebted to the tune of some \$300 million, but that was 10 years ago. Even if it was so, I am not sure that is correct, but that was 10 years ago.

During the last four years, I have seen the cash surplus. Member for Caroni East, you are obviously not aware of the cash surplus for the University of the West Indies that the money they have on short-term and long-term fixed deposits is now in excess of \$350 million. I do not think you know this. The university has been building up a surplus over the last four years or so; it has grown from \$200 million to \$300 million. In fact, I recall at one time the surplus was in excess of \$400 million. One of the last notes I saw coming from the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education indicated that the current surplus is \$375 million. So I really do not see the relevance of some issue 10 years ago, when this PNM administration has demonstrated its support to the University of the West Indies and has given it far more money than it required.

It is something we need to start discussing with the university. This is just the St. Augustine campus. I am not talking about the surplus in all three campuses; I am simply talking about the St. Augustine campus having cash reserves in excess of \$300 million. It is something that the Government has to talk with the university about; what they are doing with this money; why they are not earning a proper return on this money; why they are not investing it properly and why certain departments are underfunded; departments that come to the Government all the time for additional funding to run their programmes and their research projects.

We keep telling these departments, "Look, the university has over \$300 million in the bank; you need to start talking to the administration; you need to start engaging in proper dialogue with them to find out what they are doing with this money and why are individual departments coming to the Government one by one and asking for a \$5 million here and a \$10 million there." I hope that deals

with the whole issue of the financial status of the University of the West Indies. The university is in very good financial shape.

The Member for Caroni East had the audacity to say—and I could forgive him for his brilliance at the end of his contribution, but we need to correct the record—that the Dollar-for-Dollar programme was not implemented in an election year. That programme was an election gimmick. It was launched in the constituency of Diego Martin West, in Victoria Gardens, at the beginning of the 2001 election campaign. I think that the hon. Member for Couva North was the feature speaker at that public meeting in Victoria Gardens in 2001. The Minister of “log jams” apparently passed him a note and the then Prime Minister announced, on a “vaps”, the Dollar-for-Dollar programme, in the heat of the 2001 election campaign. I needed to correct the record.

That was why it was not properly organized. That was why it was deficient. That was why it only referred to first year students; when you already had second and third year students in the university. It was not comprehensive; it did not extend to all the institutions in the country; it did not address the question of private tertiary level institutions and many other aspects. That is why this PNM administration decided to replace the Dollar for Dollar programme with the GATE programme, because there were so many things wrong with it. It was an innovation, nobody is disputing that. It did provide a measure of financial support for students in the university that was not there before. All of that is a fact, but nobody in their right mind could compare the reach of the Dollar for Dollar programme, its extent, the GATE programme and now the programme of free tertiary education. There is absolutely no comparison; none whatsoever.

You can even look at the figures. The Member complained that a proper comparison was not made between the figures in the Dollar for Dollar programme and the GATE programme. I asked the Minister, while the Member for Caroni East was speaking, to give me the 2003 figures. [*Interruption*] I asked him while the Member was speaking; the early part. [*Laughter*] At the end part, I was caught up in the moment, but in the early part of the contribution of the Member for Caroni East, I asked for the figures. These are the figures, for those of you who are interested.

There were 10,000 persons on the Dollar for Dollar Programme in the 2003—2004 academic year. In the 2004/2005 academic year, there were 24,000 persons on the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) programme; so there was more than a 100 per cent increase in the number of persons accessing

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

Government support for tertiary education, in one year. Those are the year on year figures; so there is no comparison in terms of numbers.

In terms of the reach of the GATE programme and now the free tertiary education programme, the last time I checked with the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, there were approximately 25 private tertiary level institutions approved for GATE funding initially, and now free tertiary level, including a fledgling institution operated by the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, which demonstrates that this is a caring Government and that we do not discriminate against anyone, no matter which side of the political divide he or she falls.

I understand that it is a good school. You can talk to me later about the free advertisement. [*Laughter*]

The fact of the matter is that there are now approximately 25, and there may be more, private tertiary level institutions which are approved for funding under the Government's GATE and free tertiary education programme. I heard the Member for Caroni East making some uncomplimentary remarks about Sen. D. Montano, but he did quite a lot of foundation work in that Ministry. When I came afterwards, I was easily able to implement some of the programmes, such as the Accreditation Council, because Sen. D. Montano had done a lot of the work before that. This demonstrates that this PNM administration operates as a team. That is the big difference between us and them; the big difference between the PNM side and the UNC side; we operate as a team. [*Desk thumping*] It is a team effort on this side.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** You could have fooled me.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So when I went into the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, I found that the accreditation report was virtually complete. This had been done under the stewardship of the Minister before me, Sen. D. Montano. I was then able to flesh that out and create the Accreditation Council. The concept of the GATE programme was already being developed by the Minister before me; I was able to implement that; now the new Minister has moved on to the much wider provision of free tertiary education. So it is a continuous stream of evolution, because of the team approach of the PNM administration to everything and the Government policy already enunciated in several manifestos, over a period of time.

The PNM's approach to higher education, in particular, and the approaches of other administrations, is chalk and cheese. We could go back 50 years when Dr.

Eric Williams decided that there would be free university education; that was an innovation that created a revolution in higher education in this country. No longer was university education something reserved for the privileged few, the wealthy and so on; it became available to the ordinary man in the street. All you had to do was to achieve the required performance, in terms of matriculation requirements and you were able to go to University of the West Indies.

I always remember when I attended the University of the West Indies in the mid 1970s; all I paid was caution money. [*Desk thumping*] I think it was \$120; that was all I paid in the Faculty of Engineering, \$120 in caution money. I did not pay fees; and so it was across the board in all the faculties. That was a direct result of the policy and vision of our first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, himself a university man, himself a lecturer at Howard University and a graduate of Oxford, who recognized how important education was; not just primary and secondary. He recognized how important education was to its full extent, all the way through tertiary and beyond into post-doctoral studies.

It was another administration that came in 1986, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR)—they had economic problems; nobody is saying no; they were facing some challenges—but they are the ones who introduced the cess. Prior to that, university education was free. It was another government coming in, not a PNM administration, that introduced the concept of fees.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Dookeran advised them.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Whoever it was, but it was the NAR administration in the 1986 to 1991 period that introduced the students' cess programme and caused the introduction of fees. I am very proud to be part of a PNM administration that has turned the entire thing full circle. [*Desk thumping*] We are right back to where we were in the 1970s.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** You are right; we have gone backwards. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** It is no longer that university education is the preserve of the privileged few. Now anybody can enter university, whether he is from Caratal, Mundo Nuevo, Carenage, Lambeau, Esmeralda Road in Cunupia, wherever he is from, once the person performs, once he gets his grade, once he did well at CXC and A' levels. Now students are not even required to do A' Levels anymore for the University of Trinidad and Tobago. That is another innovation which allows persons to enter, if they have good Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) passes. It allows the two plus two approach, where you do the associate degree in the first

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

two years and then if you do well enough, you go on to do the second two years and you get your bachelor's degree. All free; all courtesy the policy initiatives of this PNM Government that I am proud to be a member of! That is the fundamental difference between us and them.

I am sorry if the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is embarrassed. Where in a million years would you have a free education programme, where a Member of the Opposition can run a school of higher education and be accredited by the Government; in which other country would you ever see that? [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** A free democratic country.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** You cannot call one other country in the world where a government can introduce a programme of free higher education and then accredit a school run by a sitting Member of Parliament in the Opposition.

**Mr. Ramsaran:** The United Kingdom.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** You just talking; go and get the facts for me. [*Crosstalk*]

It is necessary to reinforce this point, because in our education programme, one of the issues that cannot arise is the concept of discrimination. Anybody who wants to allege that there is discrimination in the higher education initiative of this PNM administration, has got to be stark, raving mad. You can say it if you wish, but there will be no justification in it.

I was just teasing the Member for Arouca South a while ago. I was saying to her that I was not too comfortable when she spoke about what was happening with the Vision 2020 programme; when she was giving a status report. I told her that I was not too happy that she was complimenting the UNC; of course, I was teasing her; I was not serious.

The point is that in order to achieve Vision 2020 status, we need everybody on board; all hands on deck for something as serious as education and development of this country to achieve our vision of developed country status in all its facets, not just infrastructure. Some people seem to think that there is an obsession with infrastructure; that is not so. When one looks at the Vision 2020 programme, we are talking about the complete person and a developed nation in all its facets; not just in terms of the physical, but in terms of the intellectual, emotional and so on. This is a whole vision of a developed country.

The fact is, when you look at the innovations that the PNM administration has put in place over the last four years or so, we have moved the whole question of access to education up to a new realm. It is definitely a quantum leap. No other



government, except the Government of Dr. Eric Williams, has introduced the kind of innovations that we have.

The matter before the Parliament today is purely an administrative, procedural matter. We are simply replacing the Chief Personnel Officer as the authority, as the Chairman of the board of the Student Revolving Loan Fund, with the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry responsible for tertiary education. The whole point is that we actually have a Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. It shows you the importance that this Government places on skills training and higher education, the fact that we have fashioned and created a ministry that is devoted solely to higher education, vocational training, post-secondary training and so on.

The budget of that Ministry is in excess of \$1 billion; the last time I checked. It also shows the kind of resources that this Government is putting into higher education; the kind of resources we are putting into skills training and so on. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, the sky would be the limit. I sit on a committee that looks at the construction sector and just today Minister Abdul-Hamid's Ministry did a presentation on some programmes they are planning for the construction sector, in terms of introducing a new programme of upgrading semi-skilled workers up to skill level; creating large numbers of tradesmen; creating journeymen and so on.

The concept of expanding Government support into the vocational training sector was raised. It is something I am sure you are going to see in due course, but the whole point is that we have already revolutionized higher education in this country. We have created a second university. We have refurbished and rehabilitated the technical institutes, something that the former administration, under the Member for Caroni East had allowed to almost disappear, if one looked at their enrolment.

When we came into office in 2002, the enrolment in the John Donaldson Technical Institute was almost down to about 300 or 400. Prior to that, in 1998, 1997 and so on, the enrolment at John S. Donaldson Technical Institute was almost 2000. Because of neglect, the lack of focus, and their just talking rather than doing and because they had a deliberate intention to downgrade the technical institutes in Port of Spain and San Fernando; they were not even location sensitive. They downgraded San Fernando Technical and John S. Donaldson and they dropped their enrolment to well below 1,000. The last time I checked, the enrolment in those two institutions was in the thousands. I think it is over 2,000 or

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[HON. C. IMBERT]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

3,000 now. The Government spent over \$30 million upgrading laboratories at both those technical institutions, bringing them into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The sky is the limit, in terms of the Government's emphasis and focus on higher education.

Although we are doing a minor administrative change today, it is part of a much greater plan. There are some things that have to be done to allow the programmes to continue, to allow them to function while the Minister is getting ready to introduce the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP) that he spoke about, which will come in this year, 2006. It is the other part of the Government's support for higher education. You have the actual financial support, where tuition is paid for by the Government, so students at the undergraduate level will no longer have to pay for tuition. Now you have the other part, where the Government has recognized that tuition is not the only thing that students require; they require assistance with accommodation, books, travel expenses, living expenses and so on.

This is what the Higher Education Loan Programme is all about. This is the much bigger picture. I am confident that you will hear a lot about this in 2006 from the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. More and more people would understand the vast difference between the education programme of the former administration and the holistic and visionary education programme of this PNM administration.

Mr. Speaker, I thought it was necessary to debunk some of the foolishness that the Member for Caroni East spoke in this House today, in his vain effort to compare their piecemeal and halfhearted approach to higher education and the PNM's comprehensive, policy-driven and visionary programme for higher education.

Before I take my seat, I cannot help but congratulate the Member for Caroni East—he is not here—for his testicular fortitude; clearly taking a gamble; obviously taking a calculated risk to just jump off of his box like that and drop those “calpets” on the Member for Couva North. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** His last speech. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Rowley:** A new Chief Whip!

**Hon. C. Imbert:** His last speech? [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Member:** His swan song they call that!

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I am told that this was the last speech of the Member for Caroni East in the capacity of Chief Whip. I understand that some other one of his colleagues has been summarily dismissed from the other place. It is a reshuffle or something. They are throwing them overboard. [*Laughter*] I want to congratulate the Member for his courage in taking on the lion from Couva North. [*Laughter*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Stay out of “UNC business”!

**Hon. Member:** He has tamed the lion!

**Hon. C. Imbert:** We shall see whether the Member for Caroni East is a lion tamer or not. [*Crosstalk*]

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rowley:** The Tabaquite tiger!

**Dr. Adesh Nanan** (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a contribution on the Bill before us. In the Minister’s contribution this afternoon, I thought he would have been aware of the University Students Guaranteed Loan Fund; apparently he is not aware. He gave us a history of the Student Revolving Loan Fund; how it originated in 1973, but he made no mention of the University Students Guarantee Loan Fund originating in 1994.

In my research for this particular contribution this afternoon, I went back to a question asked in the House by the Member for Diego Martin West, Dr. Rowley. He asked this question: With reference to the Student Revolving Loan Programme of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, could the Minister provide a list in alphabetical order of all recipients who are in arrears; the dates of each respective loan and the extent of their arrears as at June 01, 1997? When I perused the answer, I saw the name Jeffrey Henderson. The date of the loan was December 15, 1986 and the arrears, as at January 06, 1997—\$7,705.60.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** That is the Director of Public Prosecutions.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Apparently he was one of those who did not pay.

**Hon. Members:** So was Job!

**Dr. A. Nanan:** If you go, Mr. Speaker, you will see high-ranking officials.

**Hon. Member:** What is the point?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** High-ranking officials is the point; Debra Thomas Felix is also here; a loan taken in April 10, 1984; arrears as at June 01, 1997, \$35,221.88. I thought the Minister would have come to the Parliament and told us what was the current situation with the Student Revolving Loan Fund.

**Dr. Rowley:** Is Morgan Job's name still there? [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Partap:** The Landate is there.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in 2001, the Minister of Finance made a statement in this House. In fact, a moratorium was granted to waive all the interest on the principal to that date with the condition that the principal amounts be repaid within the timeframe from that date, that was September 04, 2001 to June 30, 2002. In the University Students Guarantee Loan Fund that the Minister was not aware of, there was an amendment that UWI students would pay 10 per cent of the tuition and be allowed to borrow 40 per cent.

I see the Member for Diego Martin Central looking concerned. [*Laughter*]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** "He worried that you calling Landate." [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. A. Nanan:** At present, with respect to funding for the tertiary education sector, there is the existing University Students Guarantee Loan Fund. If the Minister was aware, he would have known about the report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the University Students Guarantee Loan Fund for the year ended December 31, 2001, which was recently laid in the House.

Mr. Speaker, this fund was established by Act No. 12 of 1994. The purpose of the fund is to facilitate the grant of loans by local commercial banks to students of the University of the West Indies, its Institute of International Relations and the professional law schools for the payment of tuition fees. Beneficiaries under the fund are nationals of Trinidad and Tobago who are either registered or have been accepted by the university to pursue full time certificate, undergraduate diplomas, post-graduate diplomas or professional courses at the university.

There was a scenario actually in 1994 that brought this particular fund into the picture. It was recognized in 1994 that although there was a need at the tertiary education level, the focus would have started at the preprimary level, because there was already universal primary education, as well as, to some extent,

universal secondary education. The focus was actually going to be on the pre-primary sector. We are in an oil windfall and we are fortunate to have that kind of facility, tertiary education being free. But in this environment, this landscape that we have today, in terms of the reality, a student who has access to all these loans and free tertiary education, passing through the system, having tremendous academic qualifications, like Dr. Eddie Koury, and the Minister mentioned the St. George's medical school of my relative, Mark Rattan, a second-year medical student, and being brutally murdered. Dr. Koury's head chopped off; my cousin, Mark Rattan, abducted, beaten, stabbed and left to die. That is the reality we face today.

Mr. Speaker, in this context, how can the PNM solve crime, when we have shocking revelations about top PNM officials in a plot to destabilize the UNC in 2002?

**4.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make reference to Caricom because the Minister said that Caricom member countries' students will receive a certain benefit under the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP).

Mr. Speaker, I wrote to the Secretary General of Caricom and I will put this letter on the *Hansard* record.

"The Secretary General of Caricom

H E Edwin Carrington.

Dear Sir,"

**Mr. Valley:** Date?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** February 06, 2006.

"Dear Sir,

As the International Relations Officer of the national executive of the United National Congress, I have been mandated to bring to the attention of Caricom some shocking revelations by a former associate of the US Drug Enforcement Agency, Vernon Paul, now in protective custody in Venezuela."

**Mr. Valley:** What is the relevance?

**Mr. Speaker:** I really do not see it. Get back to the Bill.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, the relevance here is that Vernon Paul was working with the URP, if he had utilized the facilities the Government was offering, you would see that he would have academic success and would not have been involved in this particular situation. [*Laughter*] So I crave your indulgence to go on, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** No. I think you are still irrelevant. That has nothing to do with the Bill before us. You are too far off.

**Hon. Abdul-Hamid:** It is irrelevant. Dr. Moonilal is “shame”, he is hiding his face.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to belabour the point but I am speaking about Caricom, and in this debate we are dealing with university students of the Caricom and Caricom leaders who are in the country now dealing with crime. In fact, in every area of this country, in Palmiste, university students are being threatened, and on campus; there is a crime situation in this country. [*Desk thumping*] So you cannot deny this particular letter in the *Hansard* because it is not only factual, but it is what is happening in this country and we cannot put that under the carpet anymore. We need to bring it out now, and I plead with you to let me read this letter into the *Hansard* record.

**Mr. Speaker:** If you are writing Dr. Carrington about some educational matter, it is all right, but I get the impression that your letter has to do with something else other than that. Is it that you are assuring the Chair that your letter to Dr. Carrington has to do with education? If it has to do with education, I will certainly allow you to read it, but if it has to do with Vernon Paul and the allegations made by him, then it is out of place here.

**Mr. Valley:** Bring a motion.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Okay, Mr. Speaker, I will bow to your ruling of the denial of the democratic rights of the country, and what we are seeing here strikes at the heart of our democracy.

All this is doing actually—I am not going to read the letter, I am going to say what is in the letter—was asking the Caricom heads to support the independent enquiry with the FBI and with the vacillating Commissioner of Police who only recently put investigators on the particular case. I will move on.

There are university students in Tortuga who are risking life and limb on a daily basis because of a landslide there, and the relevance here is if those students

cannot make it to primary school to get an education, how can they access the loans of that particular ministry, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Good one, good one.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, every day they have to walk on a pipeline to get to school.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** A pipeline?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Yes. They are walking on a pipeline risking life and limb and I gave the Member for Diego Martin East the pictures and he told me I was too late because he had already toured. I met with the residents yesterday and they said they never saw the Minister in the area, they asked me if he came by blimp or by helicopter. [*Laughter*] So I am extending an invitation to the Member for Diego Martin East, the Minister of Works and Transport, to come with me to meet the residents to see that particular area because they will be cut off from the rest of the country shortly because of the severe landslips on every access road.

Mr. Speaker, if those same students cannot access a primary school education, they may become vagrants just like the 800 vagrants whom they plan to place at Piparo and I understand that the wife of the Prime Minister, Hazel Manning, met with the Piparo Village Council and told them do not worry, the 800 vagrants whom we are bringing, we will register them to vote and take the electoral district of San Pedro, Piparo and Tabaquite. That is the plan. When I did my research—

**Mr. Partap:** “All yuh exploiting people.”

**Dr. A. Nanan:** The figures are extremely low, the UNC candidate got 2,317 votes and the PNM candidate got 1,660. So if 800 are put there, one sees that they want to take that seat. That is the plan throughout Trinidad and Tobago, because although there are large numbers in the electoral district, there is a small voter turnout. So I ask the Government to clear the air on that plan in Piparo to have 800 vagrants registered within the next two months to vote there.

**Hon. Member:** “Yuh going off, yuh paranoid.”

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, today is a day of revelation. It is unfortunate I did not get to read the letter into the *Hansard* record, but I will continue.

I go back to Palmiste because students are at risk. University students are being robbed in their homes and we also have under the guise of a Bed and Breakfast house, a glorified brothel in Palmiste and I call upon the Member for San Fernando West to say that is not true.

**Mr. Bereaux:** What is the address?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** At the end of May Street in Palmiste. A Bed and Breakfast sign has been placed at the end of May Street.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Are you planning to go?

**Mr. Imbert:** “What he say, bed and breakfast in Palmiste?”

**Hon. Member:** A disguise.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, a student in New Grant was killed and because of the lack of DNA in legislation, the killer cannot be brought to justice.

**Mr. Imbert:** He gone to DNA now.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Of course, it is a student from New Grant. Do you see the relevance? That student would be deprived of a university education and that is because of a situation here where the Attorney General came to the House and said he is bringing the legislation. Would you believe that the Attorney General came to the House and said this?

The enactment of an efficient workable DNA strategy regime shall be brought into being by a new DNA law. Contrary to popular belief at the present time, DNA evidence is admissible in our local courts. The problem lies in the inability of the authorities to collect what is described as intimate samples.

The legislation which is on the books and was passed in 2000 unfortunately contains certain material deficiencies in this area shall be cured this year.

From 2000 to 2006 and still we have not seen the legislation and this particular brutal murder took place in New Grant. We call upon the Government, it brought the legislative agenda, it must bring the legislation. People are suffering.

In Williamsville—and they may ask my relevance, but I will give it at the end, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Imbert:** Give us at the beginning not the end.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** In Williamsville on Friday last, a taxi driver was kidnapped, he was abducted and taken to San Fernando. He had to draw money out of the ATM machine and then he was beaten and thrown out of the car in Couva. The relevance here is that that taxi driver transports university students on a daily basis. *[Laughter]*



**Mr. Imbert:** “O God, yuh stretching it man.”

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, I also want to deal with the issue of Tobago and I am dealing in the context of the university that is earmarked for Tobago at Buccoo. I have been told that there is a large acreage at Kendal and there is a possibility of an agricultural school. So the Government is looking to put a university at Buccoo, but people are suggesting that Kendal can be operated as an agricultural school and the Ministry of Works and Transport building can be a National Skills Centre.

In the context of the situation in Tobago, I am informed that there is a drug and ammunition trade there. Students are now dropping out of school and going into the drug trade and if that happens, of course, there will be no access to tertiary education and they would not be able to get the benefit of the Students' Revolving Loan or any other facility for tertiary education.

How can they go in a situation where Tobagonians have improved their hotel stock from 2,400 to over 4,000 rooms, so there is a genuine bed and breakfast trade in Tobago and we are having a situation where crime is rampant in the country?

I came to the Parliament and read a letter where people who were already booked at Kariwak Hotel cancelled their reservations and refused to go to Tobago, and we have seen that brutal incident with the golfers being attacked in a villa and we are seeing it throughout Tobago where crime is increasing on the island.

The British Advisory has been intensified and by word of mouth, Tobago is being blacklisted internationally. The Association of British Travel Agents has written the Government and asked what it is doing with the crime situation in Tobago. There are two police stations—one at Old Grange, and the other at Scarborough—that are totally rundown, and there is a situation where police are not seen on the island, and you are trying to say that you are securing your visitors.

The students are suffering in Tobago because if the economy collapses in Tobago they would be like vagrants so we are calling on the Government this evening to do something. If one makes a call in Tobago to the E99, it is my information that they get Trinidad. There is a report that a phone call was made to

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

E99 for the Tobago Hilton and the police responded to the Trinidad Hilton. That is how bad it is in terms of the networking on that island.

There are reports that statements of rape victims are taken in corridors with no privacy at all. That is the situation on the island. It is serious and, in fact, I intend to raise that as a matter on the adjournment. The Minister of National Security must recognize under the Constitution that it is the Ministry of National Security that is responsible for security in Tobago, not the Tobago House of Assembly; it has no authority at all. The Chief Secretary in Tobago cannot give the police any instructions in Tobago.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** That is not true.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** I am hearing whispers from the other side. That is how it is. No control. When the United National Congress was in office, it made sure that Tobago was secure. We put the patrols in and helicopter service to go across the island.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** "Nah, stop that!"

**Dr. A. Nanan:** We did all that. We even introduced a mounted branch in Tobago.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** Excuse me?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Apparently the Minister was not aware of it or probably was not even involved with Tobago at that time. All those things were in place. We used the security of the hotels, the cars were given to the police so they would have extra manpower and vehicles in Tobago, that link between the police and the private sector was there. That was in place and everything has fallen down under the PNM. I will not stand here and let Tobago fall because the Minister of Tourism is going all over the place and Tobago is the number one destination. All the resources are there in terms of the ecology of Tobago; the history, and everything will be eroded with that lack of attention by the Government.

The Minister of National Security must make a statement on what he is going to do about the crime situation in Tobago because international attention is going to be focused on Tobago. That recent incident of the British national has been reported and it is by word of mouth they will blacklist the country. So I want to make mention of the economy of Tobago because while we have oil and gas here, they depend on the tourism sector. In fact, that sector pays the most taxes in Tobago as revenue, so if the economy collapses, every student may become a vagrant in Tobago.

**Mr. Bereaux:** That may be your wish.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** I beg to defer. That will never happen because Tobagonians understand how to work for their living—

**Hon. Member:** “Yuh making a speech?”

**Hon. Member:** Get up and talk.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, we are hearing asides from the Member for Tobago East.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, if it were so why did they let the agricultural sector collapse in Tobago? What is the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources doing in Tobago? Absolutely nothing!

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** “Who he talking 'bout?”

**Mr. Speaker:** Perhaps you should talk about education as it relates to the Bill and leave agriculture and tourism out of it. Get back to education, please.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, agriculture goes with the school nutrition programme and if they cannot get food in Tobago, what will happen? It stands to reason that the whole economy will collapse and the economy is what builds everything. So I do not understand how you can rule me out of order for something like that.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** “Yuh out of order, we.”

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, I was dealing with the agricultural sector because of the economy. I hope that the passionate plea that I made for the Tobagonians has not fallen on deaf ears.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** Not that you asked for it.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Because there are a number of programmes that they can put in quite quickly to help the students of Tobago. What are they doing in terms of the tertiary education system in Tobago?

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** You did nothing; you took back all the money. Leave us alone.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** What are they doing? I am hearing all sorts of asides, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** What is your problem? Leave him alone, let him speak.

**Mr. Speaker:** Please hon. Members. There is too much crosstalk. Please ladies.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your protection.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** From the two ladies.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** From the two ladies. Mr. Speaker, I do not know why I step on corns when I speak of Tobago in this Parliament. Every time I speak about Tobago, I aggravate the Members on that side and we hear nothing from them about Tobago and they are representing Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They do not say anything about Tobago and if I speak about Tobago, they are upset.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** You do not aggravate anybody; you did nothing when you were there.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order please!

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, I will go back to the context of what has happened to the education sector.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** Hypocrisy, shut up!

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, I said that the pre-primary sector is the precursor. Under all this rubbish—I do not know if that is an unparliamentary term—the Member for Diego Martin East spoke about a continuous stream of evolution. I do not think he understands what that means because that is total rubbish coming from him.

Evolution is a continuous stream by itself so that is total repetition on his part. He was unprepared and he came to make a few remarks and I am shocked that as a former Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education that he made that hollow contribution. I am also shocked that the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education did not even know what the university students' loan fund was about, but again he probably was not briefed.

Let me inform him in case he did not know that when you are dealing with the tertiary sector you have to start from the pre-school. That is why when the Government said it was going to build pre-schools and set a limit of \$400,000, it did not build a single pre-school in this country. It said the UNC Cabinet agreed

for \$250,000 and that cannot build a pre-school, it must be \$400,000 but it built none and increased the value on the pre-school to \$1 million.

In fact, I think that the Prime Minister has lost focus.

**Mr. Partap:** Long time.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** The money has gone to the Prime Minister's head. For the Prime Minister to snatch the President's ground for his residence he has lost his focus and I would not even bother to explain the relevance of that to you. University students have passed through the botanical gardens and enjoyed the ambience of the area. And, of course, in every budget you see it has budgeted for the pre-primary sector and nothing is happening there.

I heard the Minister speak about having more students accessing secondary education and there will be more students going into the tertiary sector. That is absolute foolishness! There is a situation right now under the PNM where in the secondary education sector, the children are failing the CXC, how are they ever going to get into the tertiary sector? The system right now shows that there are 50 per cent failures.

I do not want to bring out the figures but that is the reality. So when you think you are moving into the secondary and there are more students coming into the tertiary sector free, that is not so. The Minister of Education must understand that she needs to strengthen the secondary sector before she can even access the tertiary sector.

The Minister produced a document which I was asked to read to bring reference to this particular debate and I have not seen anything to make a contribution to this debate in that report. A total set of administrative bureaucracy in that report, only public relations; several documents to say what it has done but the country is going down the precipice quickly.

There is violence in schools and everything is collapsing around us and, of course, the crime situation. Security guards have to be increased in every area and we have to look behind our backs as we enter our homes, university students are being threatened, and I saw on today's newspaper the principal of the University of the West Indies speaking about security measures. Some of my patients who are university students have told me that the situation is so bad on the campus that they are afraid to be there even during the day.

**Mr. Valley:** You have patients? You are taking risk.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Mr. Speaker, before one would have the opportunity to use the library, now they are talking about expanding the education sector by building libraries and stocking them with books and the university students cannot even access those things because they cannot even stay on the campus because of the crime situation in the country.

So there is a situation where soon in this country you will see empty classrooms. Students will leave their tape recorders and tape the lectures because they are afraid to go to the classrooms. That is how bad it is in this country for the university students at the UWI campus and the Minister of National Security must do something. He is responsible for the security of the nation so we must hear from him. How is he securing the campus of the University of the West Indies?

It is the intention to build more campuses and extend the university, but what are you doing to maintain the security of the 24,000 students accessing tertiary education? As you expand you said you are going into private institutions for tertiary education and the security of the nation is under threat in Trinidad and Tobago. We want the Government to deal with the issues.

Mr. Speaker, the Government did nothing for the pre-primary, it built no secondary schools, I understand it is going to build a new Biche High School, and Swaha College is still unfinished. How are those students going to access tertiary education if they cannot use the secondary school system as a platform? [*By order of the Chair, remarks withdrawn*] Sorry, Mr. Speaker, he is a stranger to the truth.

**Mr. Speaker:** You will have to withdraw that and it will be expunged from the record. You cannot accuse the Member of lying.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Even if he is lying, Mr. Speaker?

**Mr. Speaker:** Sorry?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Even if he is lying?

**Mr. Speaker:** You cannot accuse a Member of lying. So I understand you to be withdrawing your statement?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Okay, I withdraw it. He is a stranger to the truth.

**Mr. Speaker:** And we will expunge it.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Every time the Member makes a contribution in this House on John Donaldson Technical Institute he always says that the United National

Congress government deliberately ran down that institute and the San Fernando Technical Institute. Total nonsense! We did nothing like that. When I was Minister of Education, we ensured—and if you check the budget you will see that money was allocated for the upgrade of those technical institutes. Total rubbish! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we went on to expand the programmes. I do not know if the Minister is aware, but we put in a construction programme at the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute giving a diploma in building construction; that is what we did. They probably got rid of that programme too because they do not understand. Everything is being railroaded by the PNM. They are going back to 1970, the Member said so.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** I hope they remember what happened in the 1970s.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** I want PNM to understand that when it came into office in 2001, there was a platform for growth and development there. All it had to do was follow it but no, politics, it does not want to follow the UNC, it wants to put a new plan. That is why we have the Member for Arouca South coming with a big document—Vision 2020—five years later.

Mr. Speaker, when the United National Congress returns to office, it will ensure that whatever is put in place will be continued—because we recognize it is not politics here—for the benefit of the country. The PNM has rejected all our plans, it has spent years reviewing and reviewing in every sector especially the education sector and in the UWI sector. There is a 10-year strategic review for the University of the West Indies, a budget is in place but no, it is reviewing, new programmes under different names like GATE, that is the plan. Disguise, smoke and mirrors right through, public relations gimmick.

Every day I receive a pamphlet from the Minister of Health saying what he is doing and every day the Member for Oropouche talks about a particular lady who almost died in the hospital.

You cannot get medicine. I see they delivered so many thousands of drugs in this country and in my constituency people cannot even get drugs on a daily basis.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** Medicine.

**Dr. A. Nanan:** Medicine on a daily basis. More and more public relations from the Government, but the time has come for it to answer to the population. It

*Students' Loan Fund (Amdt.) Bill*  
[DR. NANAN]

*Friday, February 10, 2006*

must answer. It has had its time and it is over because it cannot fool the electorate anymore. The electorate is wiser now and you will see in the coming months that they will demonstrate to this Government that what it has done in the last four years is viewed as non-performance and it will definitely have to pay.

**Mr. Valley:** Are you finished?

**Dr. A. Nanan:** No, I have much more to say. I have dealt with the pre-school sector, the secondary system and I want to go to the technical and vocational sector because the Member—

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley):** Mr. Speaker, I do not know about you, but we cannot take all of him in one stratum, we will take him little by little.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, February 17, 2006 at 1.30 p.m. when the Member will be allowed to continue.

Let me correct that, Mr. Speaker, he will have to wait for about two weeks because the hon. Minister will be absent next week and, therefore, we would do Bill No. 2 under “Introduction of Bills” as No. 1, and then Bill No. 1 next week.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar:** Which one is that?

**Hon. K. Valley:** The Supreme Court of Judicature first, and the Validation of the Fifth Report of the Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government) Bill second which will give you some time, Member for Siparia, to prepare for the NLCB.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** So these two are for next week?

**Hon. K. Valley:** That is right.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 4.31 p.m.*