

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, June 02, 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 following Members requesting leave of absence from sittings of the House: Dr. Roodal Moonilal, the hon. Member for Oropouche; Dr. Hamza Rafeeq, the hon. Member for Caroni Central, for the period May 28 to June 03, 2006 and Mr. Gerald Yetming, the hon. Member for St. Joseph, from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the hon. Members seek is granted.

ACT OF IMPROPRIETY**(PREMATURE PUBLICITY OF HOUSE MATTERS)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, within recent times I have noticed that Members are giving premature publicity to various matters connected with the business of the House. Whilst this may not necessarily be a breach of privilege or contempt of the House, it is certainly an act of impropriety.

Members are also cautioned that utterances which are absolutely privileged when made within a parliamentary proceeding may not be so privileged when repeated in another context, such as a television or radio interview or at a public meeting or in their constituency office.

Members are further advised that circulation of a document purported to be a petition to Parliament before its presentation to the House may be treated as a breach of privilege of the House.

PETITION**Trinity Cross
(Change of)**

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Standing in the name of the Hon. Member for Siparia, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, I humbly wish to present this petition on her behalf.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to present this petition on behalf of Mr. Satnaryan Maharaj, Secretary General of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha Incorporated of

Petition

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Trinidad and Tobago, Eastern Main Road, St. Augustine and Mr. Inshan Ishmael, President of the Islamic Relief Centre of Trinidad and Tobago, Bamboo Village, Valsayn. I shall now ask that the Clerk be permitted to read the petition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Petition read.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual administrative report of the Siparia Regional Corporation for the period October 2004 to September 2005. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]
2. Administrative report of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for the period October 01, 2004 to September 30, 2005. [*Hon. K. Valley*]

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(Presentation)

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the Third Report (2005/2006) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for supplementation and variation of the 2006 appropriation.

TRINITY CROSS

(ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEE TO CHANGE NAME)

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to make the following statement to this honourable House and the nation.

Throughout human history, the management of diversity has always been a great challenge for government and society. Racial and religious differences have been at the root of many of the most horrendous conflicts of human civilization. This did not happen only in the distant past. It transpired with some of its worst consequences as recently as during the century just ended. And it could happen again.

Ethnic conflicts continue to simmer today in various global flashpoints; and some thinkers increasingly proffer the view that a clash of civilizations is at the heart of the new wave of international terrorism that we are now experiencing. It is clear that notwithstanding tremendous material, scientific and intellectual progress, human society has not completely eliminated those prejudices that stem from differences in culture, colour, race, religion and place of origin.

Since Independence, almost 50 years ago, Trinidad and Tobago has continued to be a shining example to the world, of unity in diversity. This is to the eternal credit of our people whose innate rationality and deep commitment to harmony have been of foundational importance in the building and sustenance of our nation. It has been paramount in resisting all attempts to create fissures in the society. Consequently, divisive demagoguery of all kinds has so far failed in this country. The people have not been as combustible as some would have liked.

We are therefore able to eventually make the right decision when difficult choices arise as a consequence of our plurality. We have one such choice now before us. Do we keep the Trinity Cross as the nation's highest award or do we not?

As you know, Mr. Speaker, this is not a sudden development. For some time, arguments have emanated passionately on this issue, from various vocal and influential sides of our multi-religious spectrum. It is most noteworthy, however, that on a matter which can generate much emotionalism, never have we reached the point where there arose any cause for alarm.

This is a tribute to our country. We are a nation of great cultural and religious diversity. Our Constitution affirms our belief in God as the creator of all and as a guiding principle for the conduct of national affairs. Religious beliefs and practices are a most integral part of the lives of the vast majority of our citizens.

We have, with justification, been described as a very religious people. In fact, it is part of the folklore that because citizens of one religion or the other are in fervent prayer at different times of the year, ours is a nation in constant worship of God and thus able to sustain the grace of the Almighty through thick and thin for the benefit of all our people. Our good fortune has even produced the saying that "God is a Trini".

This, Mr. Speaker, is not being frivolous. The point I am making is that passions run high in this country where the matters of prayer, religion, worship and moral values are concerned. In the final analysis, the issue is not limited to the appropriateness of the Trinity Cross as our nation's highest award. It goes deeper than that. Among other issues, it points to the role that religion should or should not have in the conduct of our national life. Large questions, hon. Members; large questions. Managing diversity is no ordinary matter.

You can see therefore, Mr. Speaker, that as a result of our social and cultural milieu, there is, understandably, considerable difficulty in arriving at decisions or embarking on action that could offend the religious or cultural sensibilities of any group, however large or small, in our plural society.

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This is the challenge that any government faces. The history consequently shows that the country's political directorate previously examined the issue of the Trinity Cross and with clearly good intentions. During the administration of those opposite, for example, a committee was established, headed by a former Chief Justice, to make recommendations on the way forward. The committee completed its assignment, but no further action was taken.

This is not a criticism, Mr. Speaker; not meant to be, at all. We, who are also engaged in the political management of diversity, recognize that whatever decision is taken in such a situation could cause disenchantment on one side or the other. You run the risk of inflaming passions. You need to tread sensitively, carefully, almost tentatively. Religious beliefs are very close to the heart. No government wants to alienate any section of the population, however large or small, through any decision it takes on a matter like this. It is not in the national interest. Our observers and analysts should therefore not be too short-sighted in their armchair assault on perceived political delay.

However, Mr. Speaker, we must state that, as we on this side first observed the unfolding of the drama and then became directly involved in it, one fact always remained supreme and unassailable in our minds; and it is this: Trinidad and Tobago is a secular democracy. [*Desk thumping*] Trinidad and Tobago is a secular democracy.

But, Mr. Speaker, as our Constitution declares, ours is a society founded on the recognition of a supreme being. This country therefore accepts the existence of Almighty God. It is well known that there are several religious interpretations of this very concept of the one God. It must therefore follow that a religious interpretation of the concept of Almighty God cannot be the basis on which the society advances. This would be too divisive and could lead eventually to the fragmentation of the society and even anarchy. Yet, at the same time, the Constitution guarantees that each individual is free to pursue the religious interpretation of his or her choice.

We must ensure that we do not endanger the future of this diverse society nor replicate the traumas of unmanaged plurality that have been experienced elsewhere. This beautiful, harmonious Trinidad and Tobago would then be no more. I am sure that no right-thinking citizen of this country would want that eventuality.

The Government has a responsibility to ensure that no such dire prospect is ever on the national horizon. And so I must point to the other unassailable fact by which this country is governed. This is the rule of law. That is the other fact, the

rule of law, Mr. Speaker. This is the foundation of the order and organization through which we continue to build this country. Without it there would be utter chaos; our freedoms would vanish, including our cherished freedom of worship; and we would be faced with the most devastating consequences to our stability and security from which it would be most difficult, if not impossible, to recover.

No one, including the Government, is above the law. This administration must therefore adhere to the rule of law. One of our main responsibilities is to set the example. The court has now ruled that the continued existence of the Trinity Cross as the nation's highest award is, indirectly, discriminatory against non-Christians. My administration therefore has an obligation to comply with this ruling and remove this anomaly from our national life. [*Desk thumping*] We shall do it. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we must not lose this excellent opportunity to examine any other similar situation which has been allowed to persist to the discomfort of any section of the national family.

I therefore wish to announce that the Cabinet has agreed to establish a committee to review all aspects of the nation's highest award and also to examine such other national symbols and observances which may be considered discriminatory and to make appropriate recommendations to the Government.

The committee would be chaired by Prof. Bridget Brereton of the University of the West Indies, and its membership will comprise, Ms. Gillian Bishop, designer; university professor emeritus, Dr. Selwyn Ryan; lawyer and businessman, Mr. Devanand Ramlal; business leader, Mr. Gregory Aboud; Dr. Rolph Balgobin, Head of the Arthur Lok Jack Institute of Business; Mr. Anselm Richards, Head of Policy Research and Development Institute of the Tobago House of Assembly and Ms. Sandra Marchack, Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister and Head of the Civil Service who would be secretary and also a member of the committee.

In undertaking its assignment, the committee is expected to take into account the work of any other committee on related matters. The committee will report its findings on the matter of the Trinity Cross by the middle of July this year; and on its larger mandate by the end of September 2006. Mr. Speaker, the Government is determined to conduct the exercise of national awards this year on the basis of new and more acceptable arrangements.

Mr. Speaker, we have reached a defining moment in the history of our country. I am convinced we are on the way to the greater enlightenment and refinement of our civilization. We are opening the national mind even further and putting to the test the understanding of our history and our much vaunted appreciation

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of variety. In the final analysis it will lead us to a better understanding of life and improve our capacity to benefit from the dynamic diversity of Trinidad and Tobago. Let us therefore go forward on this course of strengthening national harmony.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May God bless our nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: I want to ask if the Member would consider putting a Muslim representative. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, no. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: There is no Muslim representative on that committee [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Proceed please. [*Crosstalk*] Hon. Members, I am not going to tolerate any misbehaviour in this House as of today, [*Interruption*] and at all times. Please, Madam Clerk, continue. [*Crosstalk*] Order!

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF
APPROPRIATION) (2006) BILL**

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2006 [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made, That the next stage of this Bill be taken at a later stage in the proceedings. [*Hon. C. Enill*]

Question put and agreed to.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Adoption)**

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move, the following Motion in my name:

Be it Resolved that the Third Report (2005/2006) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the supplementation and variation of the 2006 appropriation be adopted.

The Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Wednesday, May 31, 2006 and agreed to two proposals with respect to the 2006 appropriation.

The first proposal was for the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$3,941,310,143 to fund urgent and critical recurrent and capital expenditure to September 30, 2006.

The second proposal was for the variation of the appropriation for fiscal year 2006 in the sum of \$67,375,000. The total increase in the heads of expenditure being proposed is \$4,008,685,143 and the total decrease of \$67,375,000. This represents a net increase of \$3,941,310,143 which is currently being sought by way of the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, the details of these proposed changes were circulated to all Members of the Finance Committee and discussed at its meeting on Wednesday, May 31, 2006; where clarification was sought with respect to some of the proposed changes to the appropriation for the fiscal year 2006. In instances where responses were not readily available to the committee, written responses have since been circulated to all Members.

In March 2005, by circular dated March 22, 2005, the process of the budget cycle began, and in our system this cycle is made up of a presentation in September or October and a refinement or a review during the midterm. On completion of this exercise—this one we are engaged in—the discussions on the requirement for our next budget 2006/2007 will commence. This review today reflects the requirement that is contained in the Central Tenders Board Act and consistent with our responsibility under the Exchequer and Audit Act which requires that before projects are considered for approval, or expenditure committed, funds must have been approved by the Parliament. This does not mean that the moneys would actually be spent as we have seen in the results of the last year. Last year we closed the year with a surplus of \$2.1 billion; that is actual versus allocation, and then allocated some \$2.593 billion to the Interim Stabilization Fund and also \$500 million for the infrastructure development. These were the results of last year, Mr. Speaker, and I thought it important that we remind the Parliament of that because that is not what was actually allocated.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I now wish, on behalf of the Government, to explain in some detail, those proposals for which increases in excess of \$250 million are being sought.

Under Head 18—Ministry of Finance, an allocation of approximately \$2,262,367,269 is being requested. The use to which these resources will be allocated is as follows:

\$750 million for infrastructure works;

\$600 million for savings;

\$283 million for T&TEC; and

\$630 million for BWIA.

Let us deal with the Infrastructure Development Fund. An appropriation in the sum of \$750 million is being recommended for transfer to the Infrastructure Development Fund account, to continue much needed infrastructure development works. The Infrastructure Development Fund or the IDF, as it was called, was established by Legal Notice No. 347, dated December 29, 1997 under section 43(2) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap 69:01. Its purpose is to finance, wholly or partially, certain capital projects under the Government's Capital Investment Programme.

In the 2006 Budget, requests from ministries for projects approximated some \$13 billion, and the Government funded an amount of \$2.3 billion, which was transferred to the fund. Mr. Speaker, due to the increase in the rate of implementation of some projects, there will be a requirement for additional funds which is being supported by the Government.

With respect to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund, based on the recent computations of oil revenues projected by the Budget Division for the 2006 fiscal year, the surplus oil revenue over that previously estimated based on a US \$35 per barrel oil price is approximately \$2,694 billion.

In accordance with our commitment to the principles of saving for a rainy day by transferring 60 per cent of the surplus oil revenue into the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund, a sum of \$1,616,470.179 will be required to be transferred to the fund—that is to keep that 60 per cent obligation.

However, because of this Government's strong commitment to the fund, we propose to transfer \$2,462,810,771 into the fund in fiscal 2006. This amount represents just over 91 per cent of surplus oil revenues for fiscal 2006. In the 2006 estimates, we intended to transfer \$1.8 billion, however, as our position has improved so too has our allocation to this fund. As a consequence, a supplementary appropriation in the sum of \$600 million is being sought in order to facilitate the transfer to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund.

Mr. Speaker, based on our system of reporting, this amount of savings is classified as expenditure because it was appropriated. I need to make that point because so often we hear of Government spending, and within that allocation there is normally the amalgamation of savings as part of that issue. This, incidentally, will bring the balance in the fund at the end of this fiscal year to \$7,947.5 billion, close to \$8 billion.

A sum of \$282,367,269 is being recommended to assist T&TEC in servicing its 2005/2006 debt obligations in relation to two bonds and one loan. These are a \$220 million Fincor bond, negotiated in 1991; a \$500 million RBTT bond negotiated in 2001 and a \$431 million NGC medium term loan. In addition, supplementary funding in the amount of \$630 million is required to meet equity injection in the recapitalization of BWIA.

Under Head 40—Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, under the Petroleum and Subsidy Act, Chap. 62:02, a petroleum product subsidy is payable to marketing companies. This subsidy arises when the price that the marketing companies pay to purchase these products is more than the price at the pumps.

The citizens of our country enjoy a price for petroleum products calculated on a price of oil that does not reflect the cost of purchasing product for petrol and, therefore, the Government is liable for the difference. At the review, we calculated an increase of \$630,147,000 as required for the National Petroleum Marketing Company to meet a shortfall in subsidy payments to Petrotrin. This shortfall occurred because, among other things, the oil price assumptions used in the estimation of subsidy payments was substantially lower than actual prices for the first half of the year, as well as that projected for the rest of the fiscal year.

Under Head 39—Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, an additional sum of \$308,064,000 is required. Of this sum, \$292,400,000 is required to assist the Water and Sewerage Authority to meet operating deficit, inclusive of loan obligations, and to support its Water Sector Improvement Programme. A further sum of \$15,664,000 is required to support projects under the development programme, the principal of which is \$6 million to undertake priority pipeline projects, and another \$6 million for the drilling and equipping of new wells.

Under Head 43—Ministry of Works and Transport, an increase of \$321,696,474 is being recommended. These funds are intended to continue Government's programmes to deal with our transportation challenges; our inter-island transport system; our country's competitiveness; critical drainage works to alleviate flooding, and payments to contractors.

The details are as follows:

- \$30 million to meet the cost of Phase III of the Mass Transit System Study which forms part of the overall national transportation study;
- \$86.1 million to charter the cargo vessel MV *Malta Express* for the inter-island route from International Shipping Partners of Miami and to dry-dock the *Panorama*;

- \$12.3 million to contribute towards the Civil Aviation Authority Pension Plan;
- \$24.1 million to assist the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago to acquire two gantry cranes for which tenders have been invited and to meet the cost of the engagement of a management operator for the Port of Port of Spain;
- \$15.9 million to expand the National Transportation Study to include the implementation of a rail system;
- \$10.4 million to fast-track critical drainage works before the wet season commences; and
- \$39.2 million to meet payments to the contractor and the supervisory consultant on the Diego Martin Highway Extension; payments to contractors and supervisory consultant on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway Improvement Works; and payments for utility relocations, as well as payments to the consultants for feasibility studies and designs for new trunk roads.

I would now like to address the two major heads of expenditure for which the allocations that were proposed will not be utilized during this period. There are two; the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Attorney General.

In the case of the Ministry of Health, the principal reasons for the allocation not being utilized were:

- (i) the allocations provided under the Human Resource Strategy to facilitate the planned transfer of public service staff to the Regional Health Authorities would not be fully utilized because the exercise is not expected to be completed in the 2006 fiscal year; and
- (ii) funds were allocated for some district health facilities, both under the Consolidated Fund and the Infrastructure Development Fund and as a result of correcting this particular issue, there is \$25 million that is available.

With respect to the Ministry of the Attorney General, the savings materialized as a result of the timely completion by the Arbitral Tribunal on the matter relating to the delimitation of the maritime boundary/fishing dispute between Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados.

The Parliament should note that \$371.6 million of the supplemental resources provided for in this Bill are earmarked for the Public Sector Investment Programme

(PSIP). This need emanated from a mid-year review of the PSIP that was undertaken by the Ministry of Planning and Development, in collaboration with other ministries and departments.

I wish to assure this honourable House that the supplementary funding proposed will not impair Government's fiscal position. The fiscal package presented at the time of the delivery of the 2006 Budget in September 2005, forecasted a surplus of \$9.8 million. When the supplementary resources proposed in this Bill are taken into consideration, along with the estimated increases in government revenue, an improved fiscal surplus of \$102 million is projected.

These proposals are consistent with our approach to containing expenditure within an expenditure planning price and saving the surplus revenue for price shocks and future savings.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to briefly address a few of the issues related to the performance of the economy. Insofar as the domestic economy is concerned, the Trinidad and Tobago economy continues to register strong economic growth. Real gross domestic product (GDP) expanded by 7.0 per cent in 2005, as a result of strong growth in the energy sector and moderate expansion in the non-energy sector. The energy sector output expanded by 10.9 per cent, reflecting not only soaring energy prices, but also increased production. The non-energy sector grew by 4.0 per cent reflecting strong growth in construction, 8.1 per cent, and manufacturing, 8.6 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that we identify the state of the economy as we talk about additional expenditure, and as we talk about an expansion of the economic pie. While that was happening, on one hand, the unemployment rate fell to 8.0 per cent in 2005 from 8.4 per cent in 2004. So that we can be aware of these matters, Mr. Speaker, the largest employment gains were recorded in construction, 11,100 jobs; community, social and personal services, 3,200 jobs and in the distribution sector, 2,300 jobs. The manufacturing and agricultural sectors lost 3,200 and 1,000 jobs respectively; that is the other side.

The other issue that I want to briefly mention is the question of our short-term economic prospects. The two challenges that are facing this Government today are inflation, on the one hand—and in his report on monetary policy, the Governor of the Central Bank made a number of observations, including the containment of wage increases in line with productivity gains; the intensification of efforts by the Central Bank to reduce excess liquidity and contain bank credit; the continuation of a tight monetary policy stance and a moderation in government spending.

Mr. Speaker, all these matters have been looked at, discussed, and a strategy developed, because you see, Mr. Speaker, the Government has established certain parameters for expenditure, for revenue, foreign exchange and for inflation, and we have trigger points at which once these indicators tell us that we need to respond and to reflect, we so do.

The Bill before us today is simply to have corrections based on a midyear review and it allows us to continue the work that we have started. During the course of our discussion today, all the other matters that will come up, we would respond to. On that note, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, there are some who are saying that this Government needs to be congratulated for a very major accomplishment. We will recall last year when the 2005/2006 Budget was presented, many of this country's top economists expressed the view that it would be impossible for this Government to spend the \$34 billion-plus that had been budgeted. Mr. Speaker, today the fact that Government now comes back for \$4 billion more to add to that \$34 billion is an indication that they have spent the \$34 billion in eight months. What does this mean? It means that Government has been spending at the rate of \$4,250 million per month. It means that Government has been spending \$141.6 million per day. It means that Government has been spending \$5.9 million per hour, and now with the largest budget ever, the Government wants more money for expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister referred to the Constitution. It is true our Constitution affirms our faith in the supremacy of God, but it also affirms the dignity of the human person; of equal and inalienable rights. It also affirms our commitment to respect for the principles of social justice in the belief that the operation of the economic system should result in the material resources of the community being so distributed to subserve the common good; that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all; that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate inhumane conditions and that there should be an opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition, merit and ability, as well as integrity.

With that as a foundation, when we look at what is the role of Government, it is clear that one of the core functions of the Government would be to ensure that the public purse; the resources of the State—the Treasury in this case—must be used to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, both present and for

future generations. If we look at this as an underlying principle, it must therefore be a critical consideration that in charting expenditure, this be undertaken by Government that is—in a term that is often used by Government—“good governance”. Good governance, Mr. Speaker, is like a buzzword in development literature; it describes the process of decision-making, the process by which decisions are implemented or not implemented; public institutions, the manner in which they conduct public affairs, in which they manage public resources and guarantee human rights. Good governance also accomplishes this in a manner essentially free of abuse, corruption and with due regard for the rule of law. Mr. Speaker, good governance really defines the ideal which a society strives to achieve.

To ensure that there is sustainable human development, action must be taken to work towards this ideal. Major donors, the International Monetary Fund and others, have been increasingly basing this as a condition for their aid packages. So if we are to look at good governance, we are looking at eight characteristics. Firstly, there must be participation; there must be adherence to the rule of law; there must be transparency; there must be responsiveness; it must be consensus-oriented; there must be equity and inclusiveness; there must be effectiveness and efficiency as well as accountability.

These characteristics would ensure that corruption is minimized, and the views of the minorities are taken into account; that the voices of the most vulnerable in the society—the ordinary man, woman and child—are taken into account. So when we look at expenditure, these are the principles that would guide the manner in which policy making is done and for the kind of expenditure that should take place. The first question then, which is a very obvious question, is: What has the Government done with the moneys that have been allocated so far in this fiscal year’s budget; the \$34 billion, which are on-book budgeted expenditure? Apart from those dollars, there are the off-book expenses, so we are talking about a budget of \$34 billion plus all off-book expenditure as well. What has happened, Mr. Speaker? What has become of that money?

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the state of Trinidad and Tobago, whilst the Government might boast that GDP has increased and will continue to increase because of the buoyancy of the natural gas and petroleum with the energy sector, we would see that the other sectors of the economy have serious problems. Agriculture, for example, has been totally sidelined and it has been decreasing rapidly; its contribution to GDP keeps decreasing, whilst at the same time we are dependent on food coming from outside countries and our food prices are

increasing. It is all good and well to boast about the rate of GDP growth, but is that reaching down to the ordinary man? Is that enuring for the benefit of the ordinary man in Trinidad and Tobago? My answer to that is, no; there is no way the physical and monetary policy in this country is being managed in a way that would reach the ordinary man, woman and child in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I have asked the question: What can we show for \$34 billion, in fact, that would be \$110.6 billion from since this Government came into office, on-book expenditure? What has this Government to show? If we look at our roads and the infrastructure in this country, they have not built any new roads or highways. If we look at the schools; they have been turnkeys, as we have said, for schools that were not built by them.

When we look at health care; what have they done to improve the delivery of health care? It is interesting that the hon. Minister mentioned that in fact you are decreasing—taking away from—the health ministry. It means that you will not spend those moneys while our health care facilities in this country remain in a very parlous state. Are there new hospitals or health centres? Mr. Speaker, you may know that at present there are 80 babies at the Mount Hope Hospital who need heart surgery urgently. Their only hope of survival is to have barbecues, raffles and donations coming from persons. The Minister talks about opening wards, but my understanding is that these wards that he is opening, the roofs were there and all he has done is to put a few beds in those rooms and he says we have new wards.

Mr. Speaker, I think the most glaring failure on the part of the Government is really in the area of national security. Thirty four billion dollars later, what has been done to make this population feel safer and more secure? We have million-dollar eyes in the sky; these are unmanned. We have million-dollar blimps; these are not working. What a waste of money we had on those blimps. I remember when the Member for Princes Town—in the committee stage on Wednesday when we were dealing with the report from the Finance Committee and the proposals for increased expenditure—asked the question, repeatedly, whether the blimps were in need of repairs; whether the blimps had been down for any period of time, and the response to that question was no, that the blimps did not need repairs. Mr. Speaker, that was on Wednesday, and Thursday morning we heard that the two blimps are on the ground.

Mr. Manning: Please, please. My understanding is that the blimps were down for certification; it was not repairs.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The blimps are down on the ground and are therefore of no use to the people of Trinidad and Tobago after millions of dollars have been spent.

Mr. Hinds: The UNC too. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: With respect to police stations, every year when the budget is presented a list of police stations is read off that they are going to be built. Moneys are allocated for these stations to be built but today in St. Joseph, which is a hot crime spot, nothing is happening with that station and officers have been operating out of Tunapuna. The Mayaro police are functioning out of a post office because there is no police station. Mayaro, incidentally, was budgeted for in the 2003, 2004, and in the 2006 budgets but up to today there is no police station in Mayaro.

Maracas, which is a very popular tourist destination, again, no police station. That station closed recently because of its dilapidated condition. Again, that was one of the stations earmarked in the budgeted amounts to be constructed.

Manzanilla has no police station, that is another one that has been targeted in previous budgets for construction. Basta Police Station is another one that has been in the budget since 2003, several years, up to today not even a picket has been planted on the site. All of this, Mr. Speaker, in spite of the fact that year after year we go through this budget exercise and these police stations we are told over and over we are going to construct them, but up to today those police stations have not been constructed.

Mr. Speaker, drugs is a major problem. The Government speaks all the time about drug-related crimes and on the whole east coast there is not a single police station from Rio Claro to Sangre Grande; that is my information. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, when marijuana and cocaine washed ashore in crocus bags on the Manzanilla/Mayaro stretch, but there is no police station. Brasso, which is a route out of Biche, where a considerable amount of locally produced marijuana is grown is also wide open; no police station. In those districts that do have police stations, many are in dilapidated condition, but even more important, there is a shortage of manpower resources in them.

Police officers are still complaining that they do not have vehicles to respond to distress calls. Farmers in Carlsen Field say that they are not wasting their time to call the police when thieves steal their crops because the police never come. The lack of patrols in Carlsen Field has made it a slaughter ground, I am told, for

bandits who are more frequently posing as taxi drivers, kidnapping passengers, taking them into Carlsen Field and robbing them. Several persons have been killed, murdered recently in this area, but again no resources.

Two weeks ago an airline employee was abducted from Freeport Junction, robbed and assaulted. A TTMA board member was gunned down near a bank in San Juan by bandits. The murder toll is rising so rapidly, it is hard to keep an accurate count. So in the area of national security what has that \$34 billion done thus far, except to show a rapid increase in the rate of crime?

CEPEP and URP have licked up the local labour market. Local businesses cannot find people to work because of the attractive wages offered by CEPEP to do tasks that really do not have any sustainable benefit for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. There is wasteful spending on the part of this Government. Labour shortage has also caused production costs to increase, and so with that labour cost increase, productivity and production is stymied and the result is that retail prices will go up to compensate to meet overheads.

I recall that the theme of the 2005/2006 Budget was “Addressing Basic Needs”. Today, eight to nine months into the fiscal year, can this population say that basic needs are addressed, or have even been addressed in any small measure by spending this \$34 billion in the last eight to nine months? If you walk out on the streets persons would tell you the answer is “no”.

Mr. Speaker, if we cannot point to things that we could say, this has been done; that has been done as projects for expenditure for the \$34 billion projects, we would then have to think that there is, in fact, a leakage of state funding; that it is the construction projects sucking up all the moneys and money is being leaked in some way. I am saying that the results of \$34 billion in expenditure do not match with what we can visibly see, and this can only mean that there must have been massive pilfering and stealing taking place out of the State coffers. It may be that we would need to have a forensic inspection of the State accounts to see where that \$34 billion has gone because the man-in-the-street cannot see where \$34 billion has been spent.

2.30 p.m.

So, today, here we are, \$34 billion. We cannot see any real benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Government has come by way of supplementary appropriation for an additional \$4 billion.

Since coming into office this Government has established the unsavoury practice of coming to the Parliament repeatedly for increases to the budgeted amounts for the fiscal year.

In the year 2003, Mr. Speaker, the Government came in July, September and in January 2004, on three occasions, to increase the budget with supplementary allocations. In 2004, the Government came in June and September. In 2005, June and September and this year, we are only in the month of June so this \$4 billion is not the last increase that we may see given the pattern and the practice of this Government.

And what does that mean? What is wrong with that? It makes a mockery of the whole budgetary ceremonial debate that takes place at the beginning of the year. When you are coming for such a large increase, it means that you did not plan in the first place. You were totally out of sync. It would mean one of two things: that your planning in doing the estimates was totally wrong if you are coming back for \$4 billion which is just under 10 per cent of your budgeted amount, and you are coming for more. You will come for more in September before the fiscal year is done. And I am saying that the debate of the annual budget is an exercise in futility. If you come once, twice, three times to get more moneys appropriated for your squandermania and expenditure that when you come at the beginning of the year your estimates are so totally out of sync, what happens? Something is happening with the money. It is either, as I have said, it is being pilfered out, it is being sucked out into other areas and you still need the money to do the projects that you said you would do and have not done or, it may well be that these moneys are now being asked for to work as a slush fund for the People's National Movement. Ninety-one per cent of this increase is in recurrent expenditure and, therefore, to pay contractors, consultancies and so forth. This is, in our view, a slush fund for the PNM, \$4 billion.

We have seen a continuous increase in the supplemental appropriations by this Government. We saw in the year 2003, a 13 per cent increase; in the year 2004, an 18 per cent increase; in the year 2005, a 23 per cent increase and to date, we are looking at about 13 per cent, but there will be another and more as I said, given the trend that Government will come for increased appropriations.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that under the United National Congress the total supplementary appropriation for the past four years made by this Government is \$13.3 billion. That is more than the budgeted expenditure for the entire country in 1999 under the UNC government—just the increases that this Government has taken, one entire year. In total this Government would have spent

\$110 billion in five years. In the five years of the first term of the UNC government only \$54 billion was spent. This Government has spent in the last two fiscal years \$60 billion—in two years, when the UNC spent less than that in an entire five-year term. And what do we have to show for it? We have the schools throughout this country. We have police stations, health centres to show for it. We have the water project that brought water to a lot of the communities in the South. In fact, there has been a reversal with respect to water. The communities in Debe and in the South are under tremendous pressure because there is no water in the taps for three to four weeks. After the water project by the hon. Member for Caroni East, there was water flowing in taps in those areas. I do not know what has happened. If we now have the water transferred into other areas, I cannot say, but something has gone seriously wrong, when billions of dollars later, when we were getting water in taps in the South, you can go now and those taps have had no water for weeks. That cannot be right in a country that boasts of \$34 billion, that boasts of GDP growth of is it, of 7.whatever per cent. You are boasting of more growth, and yet people are suffering for basic amenities, basic facilities. You boast of the growth in the economy, you talk about your foreign direct income coming in and yet there are people in this country who are receiving \$1,000 old age pension. How are they going to live on that? Disability grants of \$600, \$700. Why not increase these? When the inflation is licking up the poor persons in this country you are not providing them with an adequate income that would allow them to overcome the difficulties and the traumas they are facing based on that inflationary rate.

This Government has spent in two years \$60 billion, and the UNC had spent only \$54 billion in a whole five-year term and yet the people in this country are suffering in the health care system; people are afraid for their lives, in the street, in the schools, in the homes; the violence in the schools. So we have a lot of money on paper and the ordinary man is not benefiting.

It is interesting to note that for the period 2003—2006, total supplemental variations, \$13.3 billion; almost half of those increases have gone to the account of the Ministry of Finance, 50 per cent of the increases, and it is the same again, Office of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance especially. In the year 2002, the actual expenditure was \$1.4 billion; in 2004 that climbed to \$2.4 billion. In 2004 it climbed to \$3.1 billion. In the 2005 Revised Estimates, \$5.5 billion and in 2006 it is \$8 billion. From \$1.4 billion which was the last UNC budget in 2002, the Ministry of Finance has climbed to \$8 billion. We really have to ask: What is happening in this Ministry of Finance? Where is this money going? We cannot see the benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So the quantum of the increase, the quantum of the expenditure is cause for concern but this is not all. I think the greatest cause for concern in the economy if you are looking at economies, is what is happening with inflation. This Government is creating a monster of destruction in this country. This measure of this \$4 billion tied with the T&TEC rate hike, the squandermania of this Government, its inability to manage the economy, has led to headline inflation in Trinidad and Tobago. The Government is not able to deal effectively with its monetary and fiscal policy and so they are flinging this country down, in my view, into an increasing inflationary abyss that will bring us all down. Government has been warned time and time again that they need to be more moderate in spending but Government continues with reckless expenditure.

The Governor of the Central Bank himself, last month stated that the inflation rate is high and it is getting higher and like all other economists, he has indicated that a major contributor of the problem is Government's spending. Government was warned about this excessive spending. It is time that this Government hold up, stop, because it is taking this economy to such heights with the inflation that it will collapse. In the last monetary report in April, the Governor of the Central Bank said and I quote:

“A major factor underpinning the rising inflationary pressures has been the increase in government spending and its impact on the non-energy fiscal deficit...the evolution of the central government finances in the first six months of fiscal year 2005/2006 suggests that the non-energy fiscal deficit has continued to increase sharply. The monetization of energy receipts to finance this growing deficit is a major source of liquidity injection and of inflationary pressures. (Monetary Policy Report April 2006 Pg. 5)”.

In that report also the Central Bank warns:

“A moderation in Government spending is a prerequisite for effective inflation control.”

Mr. Speaker, the Government was warned last year when the IMF came in and again, at that time the Government had come for, I think, a \$3 billion supplementary increase at the time the IMF mission was visiting in August of last year. The IMF warned that Trinidad and Tobago's rainy days savings were in danger of being completely depleted by 2020 if high levels of public spending by the Patrick Manning regime continued. The IMF mission warned that Trinidad and Tobago would not be able to fall back on its energy sector revenues for a bail out since oil reserves were limited and the gas reserves under current extraction rates would run out.

Mr. Speaker, those are depleting resources. This economy is concentrating in gas and oil and both are depleting resources so that the rapid monetization that this Government is doing in terms of getting money so that they can continue with their squandermania, places the future of this country and of our children in serious danger. The report continues:

“If Government continued with this spending spree, it might have to dip into the country’s savings to finance Budget deficits in the next few years, the IMF noted in its concluding statement of its 2005 Article IV Consultation.”

The level of public expenditures embodied in the amended fiscal year 2004/2005 budget appear to be unsustainable over the long term, given the necessarily limited level of oil resources, the IMF said.

Preliminary calculations carried out by the mission suggest that if the level of public spending envisaged in the amended budget is maintained over the medium term, the Government may need to start drawing on its savings in just seven years to finance budget deficits, with the savings fully depleted by 2020 and deficits rising sharply soon thereafter due to the exhaustion of gas reserves.

So even as the trend indicators warned of future price increases particularly in the cost of construction materials, in the cost of food, in the cost of every single item in this country, even as the warnings are coming that Government’s expenditure is creating this inflationary pressure; the Government does not pay any heed to those warnings. It is as if the Government is hell-bent on spending every cent it can within the next two years that they have in office.

Mr. Speaker, food prices; they increase on average of about 10.3 per cent per annum. Under this Government increases have now reached 22.6 per cent increases in food prices. The rate of increase in food prices it is reported in Trinidad and Tobago, is higher than the rest of the Caribbean. Why is this so? Two suggestions put forward are: Firstly, that the food prices are increasing because of declining food production in the agriculture sector. Secondly, by the presence of an oligopolistic distribution regime, that is to say, there are very few sellers where they control the distribution of food and, therefore, they keep the prices up so that the ordinary man has to pay. It is like a cartel in a sense where you have these very few sellers distributing food in Trinidad and Tobago. These are issues that Government needs to pay attention to, at the agriculture sector. I mentioned it before. We are talking about food prices and clearly, agriculture is one avenue for reducing food prices if it is we can produce some of our food here.

In the 2006 budget, \$602 million had been budgeted to be spent on recurrent expenditure. Now in the supplementary appropriation, \$3 million is being asked for but this is for computerizing records and to pay off a loan. I know when we were in the committee stage several Members on this side asked that consideration be given to giving more money to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in order that we can boost food production in this country in terms of access roads, subsidies to farmers, and incentives to farmers. I repeat that call publicly, that more money should be put into agriculture so that we could deal with the high cost of food in this country, that we could widen and deepen this sector of the economy.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture, as I said, is on the decline. It is the only industry which has been suffering from negative growth in the past three years consistently. What has happened with Caroni (1975) Limited? There was a promise that lands would be given and persons would be able to plant but the conditions under which these—and, therefore, agriculture would be able to compete more to the GDP. Unfortunately, that has not materialized. I do not know what has happened with respect to those grand plans. The condition under which persons were being given those lands was also really humiliating and did not make for producing or for developing the agriculture sector as had been boasted. This is one sector that seriously needs to have some kind of boost and we ask Government to consider giving more moneys to the agricultural sector.

So it is not just an increase in food prices. Construction and land costs have also increased by as much as 40 per cent from 2003 to the present time and it would increase further in 2006. Obviously, that has to do in part with the huge construction projects of this Government. We are being told that T&TEC would also be coming with a rate hike and this is going to put further inflationary pressure—published today. This will have a spin off in all prices as virtually every business has electricity as an input cost. That input cost will then be multiplied at every stage of production so that you will get a resultant hike in prices to the final consumer. As a result, it is not only food prices that would increase but every other item. In this regard, you are going to get increases for goods and services, increases in food, transport, health; in every area of life you are going to get increases that would be a multiplied effect from the increase in the T&TEC rate hike.

Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the Government use some of the windfall that they have to stem the rising prices. I suggest that they give consideration to a subsidy on electricity, either directly on the production price on electricity or to the price

of the natural gas used in the production. And this is very important. They put out a big thing that they want to suggest and they are going to give a grant or they are going to pay a lower rate for persons of low income. That is nonsense, Mr. Speaker. It is sop that is being offered; it is a PR gimmick!

What is happening, first of all, is the kilowatt qualification for persons to qualify. You are talking about a man living in a one-room shack with one light bulb. Those are the persons. The majority of the citizens, working population of this country will not benefit from that. I am talking about working people who are still unable to pay their bills. I am not speaking of Ministers who have given themselves a three time rate increase, price increase and salary increase. I am not talking about those persons. I am talking about the ordinary average man in this country. That sop that is being offered is, in fact, a humiliation of the poor. The procedure for application is really a further humiliation of the poor. I make the call that a subsidy be given on electricity either directly to the production price or to the price of the natural gas used in the production.

Mr. Speaker, I make this call in the midst of allegations that the price of natural gas in the aluminium smelter project is subsidized by the Government. If you want to subsidize the aluminium smelter project then subsidize the electricity here, the production price here so that the Trinidad and Tobago citizenry can benefit from the windfall that we are now enjoying. A subsidy to this smelter project will benefit only a few who can afford to pay the price in the first place. These are people with money, these smelter people. They have money. They could pay the rate hikes. They do not have to worry with electricity rate hikes. I ask Government to come openly and transparently and tell us whether it is true that they are going to subsidize the smelter plants and if they are, to what extent that subsidy will be. The *Newsday* of June 02, 2006, reports:

“GOVERNMENT’S attempt to finance the aluminium smelters, the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) and some other projects through the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) Investment Programme has been turned down by the Regulated Industries Commission (RIC).

During a media briefing at the RIC office yesterday, the chairman of the RIC, Mr. Denis Pantin said T&TEC had proposed an investment programme of \$3.29 billion over five years (2006—2011), but the RIC had allowed \$800 million.”

What does this mean? Come clear and tell us of the \$3.9 billion, how much of that was to finance the aluminium smelters. The RIC said further that this is based on investor fee market principles that is, these projects should be the responsibility of

the Government and not of T&TEC. This in particular relates to the aluminium smelters and the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Pantin said the RIC determined these projects may be legitimate but Government would have to find that money off T&TEC's budget. More detail on this proposal is required. Parliament is being asked to fund T&TEC debt servicing and the Government in turn was trying to get T&TEC to use their investment programme allocations to fund and finance the smelters, so we need some explanation as to what is going on with respect to those smelters and what is the deal the Government has made with them.

Mr. Speaker, recurrent expenditure. As I indicated, 91 per cent of the increase is for recurrent expenditure. There is a vast amount of millions of dollars in this increase that has to do with funding for the payment of consultants and for various ministries. We ask the question and again, at this point I should say that this Government treats this Parliament with contempt and disrespect. We were given this supplementary proposal—it was circulated to Members on Tuesday which was a public holiday. We were invited to come here at 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, so that we were seriously handicapped in our facilities to do research. Nonetheless, we came here and as the nation's loyal Opposition, we asked numerous questions and the responses in that Committee stage with due respect to portfolio Ministers, they could not explain to the Committee why and what the increases were. I think the Member for Arouca South and the Member for Arima were among the few Ministers who could answer what all these moneys were being allocated for. We were then told—the Member for Diego Martin West for example, did not know what was the answer; and housing which I will come to in a while. The housing ministry is asking for tremendous increase but the Member for Diego Martin West could not answer the questions as to the details with respect to why they needed all these extra vast millions of dollars for that Ministry. And, therefore, I do not know who is preparing these documents.

I always remember from my time serving as a minister in the Government that it was the Minister and the Ministry who prepared the estimates and the details of what was needed for that ministry to perform. And having prepared that and approved it the Minister has responsibility for overseeing the Ministry. The permanent secretary is the accounting officer, it is true, but it is the Minister who is ultimately responsible and after the Minister it is the Government, the Prime Minister and Cabinet. So the Minister prepares in consultation with the officials in the Ministry; they send the details of the estimates that they would like to see to the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Finance then cuts it down or adds or takes away as the case may be, and of course, the Ministry of Finance, depending on

who is the latest “blue-eyed boy or girl”—there are certain ministries that would get far more increases than other ministries, I mean some ministries would not get anything.

I was so disappointed that the Member for Toco/Manzanilla, as the Minister of Sport, when Trinidad and Tobago is participating in the World Cup, FIFA, has been so slighted. He is certainly not one of the favourites; he has not been able to go to the World Cup football match to represent Trinidad and Tobago. But I do understand the former Minister of Sport, the Member for Chaguanas, will, in fact, be in Germany with the Trinidad and Tobago Football team.

Therefore, when the Minister of Finance cuts and adds and so forth, based on instructions from their “boss”, then what happens is that then goes to Cabinet and, of course, the “boss” is still the head of Cabinet, it is approved because that was his document in the first place, and after it is approved it is brought here. It is so surprising that when we were in the Committee stage not a single question with respect to details—apart from the Member for Arouca South and the Member for Arima, no one else could answer any of the questions. The Member for Diego Martin Central when we asked about BWIA, he could answer us. [*Interruption*] You were asked about BWIA. [*Crosstalk*] Okay. Is that why half of your ministry has gone away so it is not under you? Be careful you might end up with none.

Mr. Speaker, Ministers could not answer. I was talking about the disrespect and the contempt for the Parliament. I have talked about our getting this document which is about 54 pages long containing proposals for increasing the budget to \$4 million, given Tuesday to come on Wednesday, and Wednesday when we asked the questions they could not answer them. We come on Friday and we get another 54-page document as we arrive in the Parliament. [*Crosstalk*] So these are the answers to the questions presented as we arrived in the Parliament, so we certainly have no time to examine these answers so that we can contribute in a more meaningful way to this debate. I think this is totally unacceptable behaviour on the part of the Government especially when it is coming to get \$4 million more. It is an exercise in deception; it is an exercise where you are seeking to fool the population out there, you want \$4 million but no one must come and ask anything about it and the answers that you give cannot be examined in a meaningful manner so that we can point out—I am saying we are the nation’s loyal Opposition. It is our duty to show and to point out where things are going wrong when we are talking about the patrimony of this country, when we are talking about the Treasury of this country, the public purse.

Mr. Speaker, I was talking about the recurrent expenditure and the questions we were asking and I went back to show those are some of the questions we had asked. Who are these consultants? What were the criteria to hire contractors? Was one of open transparent bidding? Was the contract or consultancy given to the highest or lowest bidder, or which bidder? None of these questions are being answered. We ask again: Why have you come to ask for more money? What was estimated in the first place? What have you spent? Whilst we have 54 pages of answers, Mr. Speaker, the answers are still not complete. I had respectfully asked a question with respect to the Ministry of Housing. I had asked to give us a breakdown of all the numerous projects in the Ministry of Housing that increases were being sought for and I believe this is Head 36, the Ministry of Housing. Almost every project in that Ministry has gone into cost overruns, Mr. Speaker. And I had asked the question in the Committee stage: Tell me firstly, what was the estimated expenditure, what was the actual expenditure? Tell us what was the process of hiring the persons who worked on those projects, bidding, not bidding, was there openness, was there transparency and so forth. They have provided only the estimated and the revised provisions, no indication whatsoever in the answers as to the process by which these persons were contracted to carry out these projects.

And that is why these accusations have to be made. Are these projects then being manned by PNM “boys” and “girls”; as we say; jobs for the boys, jobs for the girls in addition to the 91 per cent of recurrent expenditure? At the end of that recurrent expenditure you cannot point to anything. There was nothing tangible that you could point to. Recurrent expenditure is for salaries and wages and goods and services; you cannot point to us a single school or police station to say it was spent on that and, therefore, it will be so easy for this Government to do what it has always done, for the PNM to do what they have always done, to use those moneys as a slush fund in this country to fund PNM activities. And it is interesting that this is coming just a few days before the PNM’s “Family Day” this weekend. And it is the same mentality, squandermania.

I want to get back to the issue of housing. You are now asking for \$37 million more in the Ministry of Housing. For the development programme in the Ministry of Housing, \$104 million was provided. You are now asking for \$141 million as a revised provision, so an addition of \$37.5 million, page 29 of the warrant. Under this is the sub item “Housing and Settlement”.

Mr. Speaker, you will see for every one of these projects, they have come for an increase and that increase represents a cost overrun because you would see what was estimated. The project number Edinburgh 500, \$500,000 was the estimate.

This Government is now asking for \$750,000, an increase of \$250,000. Orange Field Housing Development, there was no provision and they have now included it. The Tarouba Central Housing Development, an increase of approximately \$800,000 plus. Again, that is a cost overrun. Cedar Hill Housing, estimate of \$2 million, they are now asking for \$1.4 million more—cost overrun.

La Horquetta Housing Estate: \$2.5 million was the estimated amount; they are now asking for \$3.8 million more—cost overrun. Pleasantville Multipurpose Complex: \$4 million was allocated; they are now asking for an increase of \$3 million—cost overrun. On every one of these projects, they have overrun the estimated cost. Maloney Multipurpose Complex: the estimated expenditure was \$500,000; they are now asking for \$1 million more—cost overrun. Bonaire Multipurpose Complex, \$1 million was estimated. They are now asking for \$1 million more—cost overrun. Couva Multipurpose Complex: \$1 million was allocated. They are now asking for \$1 million more—cost overrun. In Couva North, under the settlements programme, they were given \$1 million; that is what they were going to spend. They have now come back and are asking for \$6.9 million—overrun. La Fortune Housing Settlement, \$1.8 million estimated. They come eight months later wanting \$1.6 million more—cost overrun. The Squatter Regularization Programme: \$30 million was their estimate to deal with this programme. They are coming eight months later wanting \$15.2 million more.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, on every one of these projects in the Ministry of Housing, the Government has overshot the estimated cost. Therefore, in my view, it must be that the moneys are being improperly applied; it must be that the moneys are being leaked elsewhere so that the projects cannot be completed with the amount of moneys. Even if they need more because there are some variations that they did not take into account, we are talking about \$4 billion more. In some of the ministries, the increase requested is very high.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am hearing faint voices saying a plus or minus 10 per cent increase. That may be the average, but when

you go into specific ministries—*[Interruption]* No, no, no. There are certain programmes and I am selecting those. I am very concerned with the Ministry of Housing. Here you are coming for an increase of \$37.5 million, clearly that is not a 10 per cent plus or minus increase. That is at least 30 per cent increase.

There are certain ministries, and Housing is one of them, where Government is pushing full steam ahead ready to build houses *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I have no problem with the building of houses but why do they have to go over \$37 million above their estimated cost? Tell us why! That is all I am asking you to do.

Mr. Valley: Efficiency.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: This is total inefficiency. You are inefficient and incompetent and that is why, for these projects, you have to come for additional funding. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, they can shout how much they want, it does not change the picture. The truth offends.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the hon. Leader of the Opposition is making her contribution and I would like to hear it also. I am sure you would like to hear it also. Let us listen to her. You will all have your 75 minutes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, there is another area of tremendous concern to us in terms of squandermania on the part of the Government with respect to this Infrastructure Development Fund. You will recall that moneys had been allocated for the Infrastructure Development Fund. Government is now asking for \$750 million more to go into this Fund.

There is nothing wrong with seeking to improve the infrastructure, but it was very frightening to us on Wednesday in the committee meeting when we asked for a breakdown of the Infrastructure Development Fund and we asked what the \$750 million was for, we were told it was for future expenditure. We asked for the details of the future expenditure and we were told they could not give it and that when it happened they would give it. In fact, we will be doing it after the fact. We are being asked here to approve moneys for the Infrastructure Development Fund, the purpose for which we do not know. It is like buying cat in bag. We do not know what the projects are, where they will be, how much each would cost, which ministries will be involved. We asked the questions repeatedly and we said that it was totally absurd to ask Members of Parliament to support \$750 million into the Infrastructure Development Fund without being told the purpose.

Yes, we are told it is for construction, but we were not told at any point, despite our questions, what were the specific projects. So one day we will wake up and we will be building another stadium for hundreds of millions of dollars in Tarouba. These projects are announced ad hoc: no planning, no parliamentary approval—an abuse of the Parliament in my view. This is an even further abuse because we are told that they cannot tell us what the \$750 million is for.

Again we say that this is part of their slush fund. How can you ask people to approve money in such large sums when you cannot give an account as to the purpose? When Parliament approves funding, it has to be used for specific purposes. If it has to be used differently, then you have to go through procedures for viring it or transferring it out of a particular project and ministry. This Government has failed to provide us with any details about that infrastructure fund. I find that very frightening for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

We come back to the area of national security. We have seen the millions of dollars that are being spent on advertising by various ministries—a PR gimmick on the part of the Government to fool the population that something is being achieved—but we must remember that each time this PR is engaged in, there is a price tag that the ordinary citizen, as a taxpayer, has to pay for the advertisement and PR gimmicks of the Government.

In the Finance Committee, increases were being sought for the National Strategic Development Framework, Vision 2020, under Head 21. I had asked for a breakdown of the items. We were told that these were the activities for the National Strategic Development Framework, Vision 2020, for which moneys are being sought:

Holding consultations and meetings, discussions with ministries and so on	\$300,000
Engaging media consultants for promotional Activities	\$2.5 million
Contracting consultants re, foresighting, again PR	\$2.4 million
Providing transport in Trinidad and Tobago car and taxi services	\$40,000
Renting audiovisual services for meetings and seminars	\$140,000

Printing reports and so on	\$1 million
Hosting conferences	\$200,000
Operationalizing the programme	\$1.3 million
Total	\$7.9 million

This is Vision 2020, a plan which the country really still does not know what it is about. I see this as a total waste of money. *[Interruption]* Why do you not bring it to Parliament and have it debated? *[Interruption]* It is laid; have it debated. Bring it once a month for two hours. Be reasonable. Put it on the Order Paper if you are so convinced that the report is so good. Put it on the Order Paper and let us talk about it.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: If you are convinced it is so bad, you put it on the Order Paper.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Madam, it is Government business. If you give me that authority, I will do it tomorrow morning—if I have that authority to place matters on the Order Paper for hearing. I am asking, through you, Mr. Speaker, to give me the power to place matters on the Order Paper and I will do so.

Mr. Speaker, we are being asked to approve \$9 million in the Ministry of National Security to be spent to pay for overtime due to officers working extended hours because of manpower constraints. This is tied, under that same Head, to the approval of \$3.3 million spent in 2006. This is the reason given, as increasing numbers of police officers are seeking medical attention for heart and cancer-related illnesses. As regiment personnel are increasingly being used in the fight against crime, an increasing number of officers are seeking medical attention for various health problems and injuries. What is the answer to this problem, Mr. Speaker? They are overworking the officers and they then have to seek medical attention and they have to pay overtime, plus the medical bills. It does not make any good human resource management sense.

What is the Ministry's answer to crime in this country? The latest solution is this 555. You remember all the other glory names—Anaconda and so on. What is 555? To call in and give information. People already have that facility in Crime Stoppers. They can call in and they are getting a monetary reward. Why do they think they will want to call their 555? Why do they want to compete with Crime Stoppers? Why do you not support the Crime Stoppers programme? Take the

money and support the Crime Stoppers programme, widen and deepen it. Help that programme, instead of trying to set up a parallel one to compete with it. It just does not make sense.

Cabinet only recently discovered, it seems, that the police service needs to get more and better guns and accessories and so they plan to spend a total of \$14.6 million on these items. Now they are asking for an additional \$41 million. They are asking for this for the retired UK policemen. They are asking for a handwriting parascript system, maintenance works at Camp Cumuto and maintenance and operation of the airship. What is happening to all the money that they already allocated?

The police service is overworked; they are underpaid; they are understaffed; they are housed in collapsing police stations. In spite of the 53 police stations that they have always promised to build, we still have these police stations needing to be built.

Here we are with the Ministry of National Security—they want \$9 million more; they want \$3.3 million for medical bills and to pay the overtime; a total of \$12.3 million in this regard. I want to say that they can bring all the retired cops they can from London. Are they really from Scotland Yard? I do not know. A statement was made that we were bringing Scotland Yard officers. Then we were told we were bringing retired Scotland Yard officers. Now we are being told that they are not Scotland Yard officers at all. What is the truth with respect to those persons? They are included in this \$41 million increase that they want to get. They can bring all of them; it is not going to make a difference.

They really need to increase the number of policemen in the service. They must give the police security of tenure. They must give them a decent working environment. They must give them fairness in promotional prospects. They must give them satisfactory terms and conditions of employment. Then they will have a police service that will operate efficiently.

There are police officers going to the courthouse to seek justice and equity in respect of their own promotions. They can bring all these people, they will not reduce crime unless they can deal with the resources in the police service—the human resource and the equipment resource. They can pump all the money they want into this Ministry; it will not help them with crime. It is like you buy a big expensive Mercedes-Benz. That is what they are doing. They are buying all this equipment—airships and spying equipment—bringing all these people from all over the world; ostentatious expenditure. It is like buying a luxury vehicle, but you fail to put gas in the gas tank.

That is what is happening in the police service. They bring all these things on top the police service, but they fail to give them the basic resources and to provide them with decent terms and conditions of work. The statistics bear it out. While the allocations to the Ministry of National Security continue to increase year after year, they are accompanied by the increase in the crime rate.

Mr. Speaker, I have a graft that will show it to you. [*Holds up chart*] Here we have an increase in the murder rate in this country, accompanied by the increases over the years with respect to the Ministry of National Security. We had, in the year 2001, murders of 151, the budget for the Ministry of National Security being \$1.3 billion. When this Government came into power by the end of 2002, the murder rate had climbed to 169. The budget had climbed to \$1.4 billion. When we got to 2003, the murder rate, from a low of 151, rose to 229. The budget had also gone up to \$1.6 billion. In 2004, the murder rate climbed to 260. The budget went to \$1.9 million. When you got to 2005, the murder rate climbed to 387 and the budget went to \$2.3 billion. In the year 2006, we have had 151 days of the year up to yesterday and at yesterday, there were 164 murders.

The murder rate continues to climb as does the budget of the Ministry of National Security gone, in the revised estimate, to \$2.9 billion. There is a direct relationship between the rise in the crime rate and a rise in the moneys being given to the Ministry of National Security. It is understandable that they would want to give the money to the Ministry of National Security because everybody in this country is terrified because of the crime.

It is also very clear that by pumping more money into that Ministry, they are not getting returns per dollar because the crime rate continues to expand. What is the answer? There must be serious human resource management in the police service. That did not need legislation. That did not need all these police bills we were told were so essential to fight crime. Incidentally, the police package of legislation was passed in this House so long ago. It was held up as a panacea to deal with all the problems in the police service and, up to today, the Government has failed to implement that legislation; has failed to proclaim it.

They spent millions of dollars on a huge PR campaign saying that the UNC was holding back reform of the police service. We finally had discussions with them. We agreed to the legislation. We came to this Parliament, spent hours of manpower time going through the Bills and passing them and, up to today, crime continues to skyrocket. Government has taken no steps to implement the package of police legislation.

I had called, during the debate, for a committee to be set up to implement them because the legislation involved so many areas of administration. I have not heard any more about it. Certainly the Acts have not been proclaimed or implemented. We continue with human resource management problems in the police service which can be dealt with, not simply with legislation, but with human resource management where they give people the respect and dignity that each working person deserves under the standards of the ILO Conventions.

Policemen are working in these police stations and they do not have the resources or the equipment and they are getting “beat up”. You turn around and you cannot find a way, when we depend on our protective services so much. We really need our protective services in this country. We are not giving them the due respect and the dignity they deserve in this land. So I say that you will not solve that problem by pelting money—pelting good money—behind bad into that sector in the manner in which you are doing it.

As I come almost to the end of my contribution, there is another area in the warrant—an area for concern. I talked about housing and the PR exercise, but there are some other areas that we really need to pay a little more attention to. Every year, in the rainy season, there is flooding in rural communities. That is discrimination too. There is discrimination in this country in several ways. There is rural neglect, Mr. Speaker.

Every year, these communities are neglected and not enough funding is put in. [Interruption] Tobago is discriminated against, by the way.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Says who?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: You are not given the funding that you need to carry on your projects. In fact, I am advised that, in Tobago, when we were there recently, that every development project has come to a standstill. [Interruption]

The Member can respond, she does not have to behave like she is in the market. We are not in the market; we are in the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: Please! Hon. Member for Tobago East, you will have your 75 minutes to speak and I am sure nobody will disturb you.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Leader of Government Business will allow the Member to speak so that she will not have to shout across the floor.

I was saying that our advice is that the projects in Tobago have come to a standstill. I do not want to lose focus on the issue of rural neglect. In the rural communities, which are the ones most vulnerable to flooding because they tend to be agricultural communities, every year in the dry season, there is no water in the taps. At the end of it, as we approach the rainy season, works have not been done in these communities because the flooding will come again.

I recall the hon. Prime Minister coming into my constituency. I was not invited on his tour. His officers were taking him into all the dry areas in the constituency of Siparia and I discovered that he was there and went to meet him. I offered to take him—and I did take him—into the areas where after five days the flood waters had not yet gone down. Right there, with all the media present, the Prime Minister publicly promised that what was needed to be done would be done. He had the officers from the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Ministry of Local Government. They all said yes. He told them that he would provide the funding for whatever needed to be done. That was nearly two years ago. We are going into another rainy season and that flooding will continue.

What is there in this increase or what is there in the last budget that has helped these rural communities? When their crops are damaged, they get \$45. A farmer loses his whole crop and he gets \$45. It is an insult. They are saying that we did not change it. I do not wish to go backward. I wish to go forward. We want to go forward and two wrongs will never make a right.

We ran this government at that time on an oil price of US \$9 per barrel; today the oil price is US \$70 per barrel. We can show the performance for those years for projects that we undertook on US \$9. What this Government has spent in two years, we have spent less in an entire five-year period and we have the projects we can show for it. When you say: Why did you not do it? We did what we could have done on the resources we had then. You have a windfall; use that windfall properly.

We are seeing at this time in our history a repetition, and if we do not learn from the mistakes of the past, then we are doomed to repeat those mistakes. We are seeing a similar boom as we witnessed previously. We are getting the windfall in and we are seeing, by this vulgar and obscene expenditure on the part of Government, the squandermania of the money of the ordinary citizens of this country. History is repeating itself. Government has already exceeded the equally reckless expenditure levels of that PNM time, of that boom period. It seems that the more things change, they do not learn from those mistakes.

Today, as the loyal Opposition of this country, it is our duty to caution the Government, as others have warned, that the Prime Minister and the Cabinet is placing this country on the brink of a precipice. The rate of the economy is heating up. If Government does not exercise fiscal restraint, the inflationary pressures will bring this economy down. [*Interruption*]

Yes, I agree, there is growth, but it is not due to anything that is sustainable in this economy. The growth is due to just taking the basic natural resources out of the earth—the gas and the oil. Those, Mr. Speaker, as I have said, are depleting resources. I have repeated time and again. We do not own this land. We inherited this land from ancestors. We stand today as the adults in the society and hold this land in trust for future generations. It is not ours to squander and to give away. It is ours as trustees to protect and save so that future generations can benefit. I am not seeing that happening because those reserves will be depleted given the rapid monetization of the energy resources. Those resources will be depleted in a short space of time. The IMF has warned 2020 and 2025.

We will not support this increase in our budgetary measures—an increase of \$4 billion—because we do not believe that the Government should continue its reckless spending in the manner it is doing without paying attention to the trauma to the economy with respect to inflation and with respect to the ordinary man, woman and child down there. When you go to the grocery to buy fruits or vegetables, you cannot survive. At this point in time, one-third of the population lives under the poverty line. With this inflation, more persons will be pushed below the poverty line.

The most vulnerable groups in the society are not being taken care of, so, in addition, I call on Government to increase the old age pensions, the disability grant and the public assistance grant, in keeping with the windfall revenue that is coming the way of the Government.

With these words, Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, it is a pity that the Member for Siparia did not allow the leader of the other side to lead off. Perhaps we would have been treated to a little more accurate information.

Mr. Ramnath: You will not be around here next time.

Hon. C. Imbert: We do not have FIFA rules over here, you know. Perhaps the Member for Couva South believes that we subscribe to FIFA politics on this side, but we do not, so I will be here. Do not worry! I am not sure about you.

Let me deal with some fundamental issues that were completely missed by the Member for Siparia. This is not surprising because her very background renders her incapable of intelligent discourse. [Mr. Dookeran holds up book] [Laughter]

I want a copy. Send it for me. Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Augustine is trying to distract me. He pulled out some book called *Foul*.

Let me deal with a fundamental point that was completely missed by the Member for Siparia. The matter we are about today is a supplementation and variation of our appropriation and the Bill before the House seeks to supplement and vary the appropriation provided for by the Appropriation Act, 2006. The Member for Siparia completely missed the fundamental point—and I am not surprised—because, as I said, her background does not render her capable of any intelligent discourse.

What the Minister of Finance has told this Parliament is that, based on the current oil prices and prices for other products in the energy sector, there has been an increase of revenue to Trinidad and Tobago. If the Government does not appropriate that additional revenue, then that revenue cannot be used for Trinidad and Tobago. It is a fundamental point that people keep missing.

This \$4 billion that we are seeking to allocate into the various ministries and departments is money earned by this country during this fiscal year.

It is money earned. If we do not appropriate it, it simply goes into our current account in the Central Bank and stays there. We are not pulling this money out of a hat. This is money earned by the oil price of US \$70 and all the factors that have caused an increase in revenue. The income to Trinidad and Tobago has increased by \$4 billion and we are simply appropriating it. That is all we are doing here today.

3.30 p.m.

What bothers me is the intellectual bankruptcy of the Members opposite. Within the \$4 billion of additional income that we are simply putting on the expenditure side, \$2.2 billion is for the Ministry of Finance. When you go into the actual figures, \$600 million is going into the Revenue Stabilization Fund. Is the Member for Siparia saying that she is opposed to putting \$600 million of surplus revenues into the Revenue Stabilization Fund? Is the Member opposed to that? The Member is in agreement with that.

The sum of \$2.2 billion is going to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and \$630 million, out of the \$4 billion, is going to subsidize the price of

gasoline. If we did not subsidize the price of gasoline, the price of gasoline would go through the roof. The price of oil has a direct relationship to the price of the product that is derived from petroleum. I am surprised that the Member for Siparia is not aware that gasoline is a by-product of oil. When the oil price is at US \$70, there is a commensurate increase in the price of gasoline because the refinery—I am amazed that I have to be giving such a simple lesson to the Member for Siparia—at Pointe-a-Pierre has to buy oil at the world price. The oil is then converted into a number of things, including gasoline. The market price of gasoline is way in excess of the price that this Government has decided to charge the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That goes for diesel fuel as well—the price of petroleum fuels in general. We could have taken a decision not to subsidize the price of petroleum fuels and the price will go through the roof and children and parents would simply have to pay double for their taxi fares and taxi drivers, double for their gasoline; then you will see riot and hyperinflation in this country.

I wish the Member for Siparia is temporarily the Leader of the Opposition. The Member for Siparia has a history of holding on for somebody else. I remember in 1966, the Member for Siparia was Attorney General for four months. She was holding an “end”. She did not get a 10- days. With this presentation here today, I am certain that the Member for Siparia will not be Leader of the Opposition for very long. I have just shown you that \$600 million out of this appropriation is going into the Revenue Stabilization Fund, to be preserved for future generation. Another \$600 million is going for subsidy to the price of gasoline which, if we did not do, may cause the price of gasoline to double.

The current subsidy of gasoline in fiscal 2006 is \$1.3 billion. We are taking \$1.3 billion of tax revenues and using it to prop up or lower the price of gasoline. Is the Member opposite saying that we should not do that, we should punish the little people in this country, that we should punish the small man and, therefore, we should not appropriate additional funds to keep the price of gasoline down? Mr. Speaker, this is the kind of arrant nonsense that we have to listen to on this side.

In addition, in the \$2 billion that is to be appropriated for the Ministry of Finance, we have \$630 million to put equity injection into BWIA. Is the Member saying that we should not do that; that we should not put that money into BWIA and that we should not recapitalize BWIA? Should we send home all the pilots? Should we send home all of the flight attendants? Should we send home the 2,000-odd workers in BWIA? Is that what the Member is saying? Should we not put \$630 million into recapitalization of BWIA for urgent maintenance on its

aircraft? Is that what the Member is saying? Is the Member saying that we should not subsidize the price of gas and retrench all the workers in BWIA? Is that what the Member is saying? I have already reached \$2 billion: \$600 million for the Revenue Stabilization Fund, \$630 million for the subsidy of gasoline and \$630 million for BWIA; that is \$1.86 billion. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: I want to thank the Member for giving way.

Hon. C. Imbert: I would always give way to a Member of the Back Bench.

Mr. Singh: With respect to the investment equity injection of \$100 million— as part of the \$250 million agreed equity injection in BWIA, the \$630 million you talked about—is there a clear criterion in the context of the operational plan that you can share with the House?

Hon. C. Imbert: Certainly, as far as I can recall, the Minister—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Your voice dropped.

Hon. C. Imbert: You will hear noise just now. I am answering a Member of your Back Bench. I am talking to somebody who is intelligent. The Minister who currently has responsibility for BWIA had indicated that there was a plan to recapitalize BWIA somewhere in the vicinity between US \$250 million and US \$300 million. This \$100 million forms part of that overall package, which is aimed at making sure that the aircraft are maintained in accordance with the international requirements and paying off debts that have been outstanding for a number of years. This is part of the overall recovery and rescue plan for BWIA.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. Lenny Saith has already articulated what this money is for and in due course, in a very short while, I am certain that comprehensive details will become available about the recovery plan. I have just accounted for almost \$2 billion of the \$4 billion that the Member for Siparia was screaming about; saying squandermania. According to the hon. Member opposite, putting money in the Revenue Stabilization Fund is squandermania, keeping the price of gasoline down is squandermania and keeping BWIA flying in the air is squandermania.

I also heard the Member screaming about T&TEC. Almost \$300 million of the \$2.2 billion that is being appropriated to the Ministry of Finance is for assisting T&TEC in servicing its debt obligations in relation to a number of financing regulations entered into over the years, to meet the cost of deficits and capital expansion. If the Government did not appropriate the \$282 million to assist T&TEC in servicing its debt obligations, then electricity prices would go up. Is the

Member opposite saying that we should not give T&TEC the \$282 million to assist it in its debt service obligations; we should not give that money to T&TEC and, therefore, allow electricity prices to go higher? Is that what the Member is saying? Nothing she said made any sense.

Let us look at the appropriations in the Ministries of Finance and Energy and Energy Industries. Let us look at the Infrastructure Development Fund. I am reminded by my colleague from Diego Martin Central that the initial allocation of \$500 million was made to the Infrastructure Development Fund by a UNC Minister of Finance. Could the Member for Siparia please tell us the list of projects that \$500 million was spent on? I can answer and the Member cannot. They were so arrogant when they were in government; they simply appropriated \$500 million for the Infrastructure Development Fund and refused to tell this Parliament what that money was spent on.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: So you are doing the same thing.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We outlined our projects.

Hon. C. Imbert: When the budget statement was made in this Parliament, more than six months ago in 2005, with the budget statement was a large package of documents on the Medium Term Investment Programme, the PSIP, the Allocation of Resources for the Infrastructure Development Fund and the Estimates of Expenditure. All these capital infrastructure projects were contained in documents given to the Member for Siparia and hon. Members opposite. She did not read them. The \$750 million, which this Government is appropriating to the Infrastructure Development Fund—you do not have to be a primary schoolchild to understand that it is for infrastructure and the list of projects contained in our PSIP and medium term policy document. You do not have to be a rocket scientist. Is the Member saying that we should not appropriate money to the Infrastructure Development Fund for roads? Is the Member saying that we should not appropriate money for the Infrastructure Development Fund to improve our water supply? Is the Member saying that we should not appropriate money to the Infrastructure Development Fund to build agricultural access roads? Is the Member saying that we should not appropriate money to build schools? Is the Member saying we should not appropriate money to build hospitals or police stations? What on earth is the hon. Member saying? The money goes into the Infrastructure Development Fund for infrastructure.

One of the things the Member complained about is that money is not being spent to deal with rural communities. More than \$100 million out of that \$750

million is being allocated to a number of special purpose companies, including the Rural Development Company, the Community Improvement Services Company. These are specifically targeted towards improving the basic infrastructure in rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago. Is the Member saying that we should not appropriate that money for the Infrastructure Development Fund and not improve the road network, not improve the drainage network, not build health centres and police stations and not improve our health care delivery system? Is that what the Member is saying? I am simply astonished at the intellectual bankruptcy on the other side.

The Member also spoke about decisions made by the Regulated Industries Commission. What the Member does not know is because the Member does not read and the Member has no interest whatsoever in understanding how this country is organized. If the Member for Siparia had bothered and spent five minutes to talk to the Member for Caroni East—I know that is no longer happening—the Member would have known that successive governments of Trinidad and Tobago have been supporting T&TEC for years. Where does the Member for Siparia think that the money to deal with T&TEC's deficit comes from? It does not come from the sky; it comes from appropriations. The only reason electricity rates in this country have not increased for several years is that the Government has been subsidizing the infrastructure programme of T&TEC.

The street lighting programme that we are engaged upon at this time, where does the Member think the money is coming from? It is coming out of the appropriations? If the Government did not appropriate funds to install street lights in this country, then T&TEC would have had to raise its rates to charge the citizens of this country for that expenditure. I do not understand. The Member was in government for years. I have no idea what the Member was doing during that six-year period.

Surely, basic things like appropriating funds to deal with the deficit—WASA has been running at a deficit for years and the UNC government, the PNM government and the NAR government have always appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars to bail out WASA and T&TEC to ensure that water rates are kept at a low level and to ensure that electricity rates are kept at a low level. Check any island in the Caribbean: Grenada or St. Lucia, and look at the cost of electricity in those islands, it is chalk and cheese. The rates for electricity in Trinidad and Tobago are the lowest in the Caribbean. The reason we are the lowest is that successive governments have continuously subsidized the deficit that T&TEC incurs on an annual basis, taking the oil dollars from the energy windfall and

using them to keep the cost of basic essential goods and services low. Is the Member saying that we should not do that? Is the Member saying that we should make people of this country pay the full price for electricity? Is that what the Member is saying; pay the full price for water, gas and electricity?

The Regulated Industries Commission has made a determination on what the cost of electricity should be, without Government's subsidy. That is all it is. They have looked at the cost and they have established the rate on the premise that there will be no subsidy. The Government will subsidize. Governments have always done that. The Government is not going to throw the population to the wolves. Do you know what is mind-boggling to me? The Regulated Industries Commission was established by the UNC. Am I not correct, Member for Caroni East? The job of the RIC is to examine the cost of services and to establish rates, based on the cost. They may have cross subsidization. The RIC, in its deliberations, may say: "All right, people at the higher end should subsidize people at the lower end." Even that kind of subsidization cannot deal with the inherent issue that governments always have to subsidize the cost of basic utilities in Trinidad and Tobago to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. All the RIC has done is applied the formula.

The Member for Siparia was in this Parliament when the legislation to establish the RIC was passed. The Member for Siparia was in this Parliament when the framework, the governing rules, guidelines, formula, mathematical equations and the system were established for calculating utilities rates. The Member was right here. The Member for Siparia knows that it is the job of the RIC to establish the rates, based on the actual cost. When the Member comes to this Parliament and says that the Government raised electricity rates, that is an untruth. All the RIC has done is applied the formula. The RIC has come up with rates. The Government now has to respond to the determination of the RIC. The Government may decide that, in terms of redistributing the oil wealth, it would subsidize the cost of electricity. It may give a subsidy to T&TEC and, therefore, the rates calculated by the RIC would not be the applicable rates. That is exactly what is going on with gasoline.

I have to go back to the gasoline example to explain to the Member how absurd her point is. The price of gasoline is established on the world market. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago could simply say the consumer would pay what the price is. There is a formula for determining what the price of gasoline should be. It is based on the cost. The Government could say: "Let them pay the full cost." We have not done that. We have decided that fuel is essential and we

are taking \$1.3 billion of oil revenues and using it to keep the price of gasoline down. In the same way governments always have and governments always will look at the price of water and electricity and make a judgment call on how much of the revenues will be applied to subsidizing the cost of these basic items.

When I have to listen to this foolishness coming from the Member for Siparia, about how the Government raised electricity rates and that this is squandermania, it pains me to see the level of leadership on that side. I am pained. We definitely need a strong opposition in this country and we certainly do not have that.

Let me go to the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment. I am going to illustrate for you the kind of nonsense the Member is uttering in this House. Contained in the \$308 million additional appropriation for the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment is the sum of \$135 million for WASA. This \$135 million will allow WASA to meet its debt service obligations arising out of a number of development projects; some of them were started by the Member for Caroni East and continued by the Member for Arima, and to cover operating deficits up to September 2006. There is also an additional sum of \$157 million to supplement the provision of the Water Sector Modernization Improvement Programme. Together that is almost \$300 million going to WASA to pay for debt servicing, to cover operating deficit and to pay for improving our water supply infrastructure in this country.

The Prime Minister was very careful recently when he told the Member for Siparia that the water supply infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago is old and antiquated. Some of the pipelines in the ground are over 50 years old. We have an aging infrastructure, in terms of water supply in this country and the only way to deal with this aging infrastructure is to replace it. We have to replace these 50-year old pipelines. We have to modernize the water supply and distribution infrastructure in this country. The only way to replace pipelines and to modernize the water supply infrastructure in this country is to spend money. You cannot wave a wand and tomorrow morning a pipe magically appears from nowhere and goes into the ground and the other old pipe comes out and it costs you nothing. It is an absurdity! How on earth does the Member expect—

The Member for Siparia brought a petition to this House for water. She made a lot of noise about various villages in the Siparia constituency that do not have an adequate water supply and demanded that the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment urgently upgrade the water supply infrastructure in the constituency of Siparia.

Contained in this appropriation is \$157 million for the modernization and upgrade of a water supply infrastructure. Is the Member saying that we should not do that? Is the Member now recanting and saying that there is no longer any need to modernize the water supply infrastructure in the constituency of Siparia? If that is what she is saying, we could reduce the appropriation. It is not a problem. We could take out the \$157 million and reduce the appropriation and not replace the pipelines, not put in new pumps, not put in new high lift stations, not put in new valves and not install new pipelines and tanks. If that is what the Member for Siparia wants, we could go through the entire \$4 billion and take out everything that would be allocated for the constituency of Siparia, in order to satisfy the Member's requirement that we reduce the appropriation. We could do that, but because we are the Government of Trinidad and Tobago we are not going to do such a thing. We are the Government for everybody. I am telling the Member here today that the \$308 million for WASA, we are going to appropriate it. We would make sure that WASA has the funds and the wherewithal to replace pipelines, not just in Siparia but in every constituency in Trinidad and Tobago. We are not taking on this nonsensical diatribe that comes across the floor.

The Member complained about priority pipelines in north and south at a cost of \$6 million. Additional funds are required to meet contractual commitments for several projects including those in Woodbrook, Laventille, Wallerfield, Princes Town, Williamsville and San Fernando. Which one of these projects does the Member want us to take out? Should we take out the one in Princes Town? Where is the Member for Princes Town? Look him there. Should we delete the priority pipeline project that is underway in Princes Town? Should we stop paying the contractor? Is that what the Member wants us to do? We also have the rehabilitation of booster pumping stations in Tabaquite. Should we remove that one? This is the juvenile delinquency of the recommendations from the Member opposite. As we go through each one of these things—we are not playing by FIFA rules over here. They listen to too much nonsense from some people.

The other allocation we have here—every single one of them is justified. I heard the Member talking about the Ministry of Housing and complaining bitterly that there were cost overruns because the Ministry of Housing is requesting an additional \$37 million. What arrant nonsense! In the estimates of expenditure that are laid in this Parliament, during a budget debate, are not estimates; they are allocations.

The Member for Siparia was a Minister of Government for six years and would have, during those six years, been aware of the fact that contained in the

line items of the various ministries—I would use the Ministry of Education as an example—that Member would know that it is standard practice when you have a list of projects you would make a notional allocation for these projects. Some projects might have a \$1 million, \$2 million, \$500,000 or \$3 million allocation; it does not matter. The Ministry would have its development programme and it would have a list of projects. On each project, there would be a notional allocation. The reason it is done that way is that during the year, a number of circumstances would arise: you could have contractual difficulties on a project, some projects might accelerate, others would have been done faster than others, there may be inclement weather; all sorts of reasons why a particular project would require more funds than what you have allocated in the beginning of the year. That is why you have variations of appropriations; routine standards practice in this Parliament, for more than 40 years.

When you go through the explanations in the Ministry of Housing, even a child would understand them. Look at squatter regularization, \$15 million. Supplementary funding is required to meet increased cost, continued construction at various sites and commence construction at River Estate, Diego Martin and Port of Spain squatter sites. What would have happened is that at the beginning of the year, the River Estate Regularization Programme, the Port of Spain Regularization Programme or the Pleasantville Regularization Programme, whatever it is, would have received a notional allocation of, say, \$100 million, and during the year the consultants would have produced drawings, and would have gotten approvals from the Town and Country Planning Division and the project would have been fleshed out and it would be ready for execution. Then, the Land Settlement Agency would indicate: We have moved a little faster than we anticipated and we are now ready to implement the project and, therefore, we need a supplemental allocation. These are not cost estimates; this is actual work in progress. The Member for Siparia is very, very well aware of that.

When projects require more money, it means that work is taking place. That is what it means. It means we are doing something. If the Member had even bothered to take two minutes to take a look at the PSIP, the actual estimated cost is indicated in there. You may have a housing project which is estimated to cost \$25 million. The PSIP will say the estimated cost of this project is \$25 million and it comprises 100 houses. It is located in Chaguanas, or wherever it is. It would also say that it comprises roads, drains, sewer treatment plant, apartments, town houses, single units, whatever. You have a physical description of the project, the scope of works and the estimated construction cost all in the PSIP document,

which accompanies the budget speech and the other budget documents. In the estimates you may have an allocation of \$1 million. As the project evolves throughout the year, the contract may be awarded, construction may begin and there may be a requirement in fiscal 2006 for \$10 million on that particular project. You would then need a supplementary allocation on the \$1 million of a further \$9 million to take you up to \$10 million, which is the requirement for fiscal 2006. It is child's play. The Member is painfully aware of this. This Member came into this Parliament on numerous occasions and asked for supplementary allocations for her Ministry.

I heard her make noise about how contracts are awarded and what procedures are being used to procure contractors. I was most surprised that one of the questions asked by the Member during Finance Committee was on the number of projects in the Ministry of Works and Transport, all financed by the IADB. The Member is very well aware of the procedures for the National Highways Programme, financed by the IADB, because a number of projects were done under the UNC administration, using the same procedures. The Member knows that under the National Highways Programme, which is financed by the IADB with counterpart funding from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, that the Central Tenders Board is the named agency for the award of contracts. I am really surprised that an experienced Minister, who knows that the IADB procedures are published on their website—have been there since the IADB was in existence—knows that the Central Tenders Board is the agency to award these road construction projects under the IADB programme, will come into this Parliament and insinuate that there is some form of corruption in the process and that they want to know who are the contractors who were awarded the contracts.

The Member does not understand that in making these insinuations and in laying all this innuendo into the system, she is saying that the IADB and the Central Tenders Board are guilty of some form of malfeasance. That is what the Member is saying; the whole thing childish. It is a form of juvenile delinquency; that is what it is.

The Member would be given the information. I would simply write the Central Tenders Board and say that the Member for Siparia has asked for this information, please tell me who are the contractors, what were the bids and what was the winning bid and the name of the contractor and we would provide it for the Member. All this can be provided by way of a question. It is a routine, straightforward and simple issue. The Member wants to come and make noise and “tra la la” in the Parliament about this very routine matter that we are about today.

She is making noise about the Ministry of National Security. She pulled out a graph to show that when expenditure in the Ministry of National Security is increased, crime goes up. What is the recommendation; reduce spending? Would that bring down crime? This is the kind of childishness I have to deal with. The Member has a graph that shows when the expenditure on national security goes up, crime goes up. We must cut expenditure and crime will go down. That is the kind of childishness I have to deal with. We should stop building police stations, stop paying overtime, not pay the medical expenses of police officers, not give them guns, not give them bullets, no bulletproof vests, no shoes, no pants, no gasoline and crime will go down. That is the thesis presented in this Parliament by the Member for Siparia today. What arrant nonsense from the Leader of the Opposition! When you spend money on security, crime goes up. Cut expenditure and crime will go down. If the leader is saying that, what would the followers say?

I am trying to grapple with the absurdities about expenditure, in terms of the Ministry of National Security. The documents indicate that additional funds in the sum of \$142 million are required to pay for expenses in the Ministry of National Security. Policemen must not work overtime now? They must all go home at 4.00 p.m.? Every police officer in Trinidad and Tobago must now go home at 4.00 p.m.? Is that what the Member wants; that police officers must now work from 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.? When you call a police station at 4.05 p.m. there is not a man or woman present. Is that what the Member wants? This is the kind of foolishness I have to listen to. We must not spend money on overtime for police officers. If there is an emergency, or if a riot breaks out in Port of Spain at 4.05 p.m., there would not be a man or woman present, everybody would have gone home because, according to the Leader of the Opposition, police officers must not get overtime. That is what we have to deal with in this Parliament.

Hon. Member: Could you imagine if she becomes Prime Minister?

Hon. C. Imbert: Could you imagine? That would never happen.

The Member for Siparia is also quarrelling about additional expenditure on medical care for police officers. We are bringing a request to this Parliament to appropriate an additional \$3.3 billion to pay for the medical expenses of the members of our protective services; for our hardworking men and women in the police force and defence force at \$1.8 million for the police and \$1.5 million for the regiment. The Member has a problem with that. Sick policemen must not

receive any medical attention. We should not appropriate the money. We should cut the allocation and take it back so that when the police officers suffer from various chronic ailments and they make requests to the Government to assist them by dealing with their medical expenses, we must say no, because the Member for Siparia said no overtime for policemen and no money for medical expenses for policemen.

We have an expenditure of \$2 million for training for the regiment. The army must not be trained? We should take out the \$2 million. We have \$9.8 million for food at institutions because of the increased use of military personnel in the fight against crime: joint army/police patrols and narcotic eradication exercises. We must not have narcotic eradication? We should take that out. We must not have joint army/police patrols; take that out. Do not give them food. Send out the army into the forest in the various weedeater exercises and make them starve. That is what the Member is suggesting.

We have a situation where there are a number of coastguard vessels which are down for repairs. Contained in this appropriation is the sum of \$15 million to commence repairs on the *TTS Cascadura*. Funding is required for propellers, rudders, shafts, rope guard, engines, et cetera. If we were to listen to the Member for Siparia, there would be no engine for the coastguard vessels, no rudders and no propellers; take them out and let them use oars.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think the Member needs extra time to finish with the \$1 billion that is unaccounted for. In such circumstances is it your pleasure to hear the hon. Member for 30 more minutes?

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If we listen to the Member for Siparia, the coastguardsmen will be rowing the *Cascadura* with oars, because we would not appropriate the money to repair the engines and the propeller shaft.

Here we have \$6 million for the purchase of vehicle and equipment for fire services. A special funding is required to make a downpayment on the purchase of a vehicle for the Couva South Fire Station. Are you saying that the Couva South Fire Station should not have a vehicle? Take that out! If we were to listen to the Member for Siparia, there would be no fire tenders, no vehicles for fire stations and no vehicle in particular for the Couva South Fire Station. Take it out.

We have \$3.55 million for the establishment of a unit to coordinate and facilitate the maintenance of the physical infrastructure of police stations. At the present time, the scope of works and preliminary estimates to refurbish—this is going back to the original point I was making—53 police stations have been completed. We now require a unit to manage the refurbishment of these 53 police stations. The Minister of Finance is asking this Parliament to appropriate \$3.5 million to establish a management unit to coordinate the refurbishment of these 53 police stations. What is the Member for Siparia saying; there should be no unit to manage the refurbishment of police stations, leave them, let the roof leak, let the policemen sleep on the floor? Is that what the Member is asking us to do; or that the programme should be mismanaged; one police station doing its own thing and the other doing another thing; everybody using different specification and forms of contract? Is that what the Member is suggesting to us? That flows as a logical consequence from the recommendations of the Member for Siparia.

We have \$20 million for the automation of passports to meet contractual commitments related to the provision of machine-readable passports. Every day you read in the newspapers about persons getting caught with forged Trinidad and Tobago passports. This Government has taken a decision to upgrade the security features in passports, to make them machine-readable, so that we can minimize and eliminate forgery of passports. Do you want this expenditure to come out so that people would continue to forge passports in Trinidad and Tobago like “Buffy”? Is that what the Member wants us to do?

We have \$4 million for the transformation of the police service to enhance the leadership and management capabilities of the police service. A proposal has been submitted by George Mason University of the United States of America for the implementation, from January 2005, of an organization development project for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Is the Member saying we should stop that programme; do not do that? We must not enhance the management and leadership capability of the police service? Is the Member saying to take out that \$4 million?

I am moving on to the Ministry of Legal Affairs. We have agreed, in order to allow the decentralization of services, to allow enhanced service for people particularly in rural communities. The Cabinet has agreed to the employment on contract of 51 district registrars, 16 deputy registrars and 10 registrar clerks, with effect from March 2006 and a sum of \$1.8 million is required to employ these people for fiscal 2006. The 51 registrars will deal with births and deaths and registration of marriages in rural communities. Is the Member saying that the 51

district registrars must not be employed, so that people from Siparia, Tabaquite and Fyzabad will not be allowed to go to a district office and meet and treat with a district registrar and get the services that they require: birth certificates, register marriages and marriage licences? Must we alienate rural communities in this country and rural people must suffer and all come into town? Is that what the Member is saying? That is why I said her speech is juvenile delinquency. The Member did not bother to read the documents and look at what the money is for.

We do not know where that was appropriated from. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources is computerizing its records. It is establishing a connected network for a national agriculture information system, so that farmers will be able to go to district extension offices and get information online in all the rural communities where the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has offices. Is the Member telling us that we must stop the computerization of agricultural offices in rural communities, so that farmers cannot go online? Is the Member saying that farmers are incapable of accessing the Internet and services of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources by computer? Is that what the Member is saying?

In the Ministry of Education, the sum of \$49 million is allocated for teaching and learning strategies for the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP). As far as I can remember, SEMP was started by the other side. Is that not so, Member for Tabaquite? As far as I could recall, you had a hand in that, not her. We are now well on the way, in terms of implementing SEMP. We have to acquire library books, CD ROMs, computer equipment and textbook rental. Are you saying that our children must remain illiterate and not get textbooks or computers? Is that what the Member is saying? Come on, Mr. Speaker, come on!

In the Ministry of Public Administration and Information, the National Library and Information System has been allocated \$3 million. Funding is required to meet the salaries of 105 positions of library assistant. Are we saying that there should be no librarians in our libraries? Is that what the Member is saying; that we must remain hewers of wood and drawers of water; that farmers must be illiterate and children must not have books? Is that what the Member is saying; no books for the children and no computers for the farmers? Is the Member saying that farmers cannot read and write and they must remain like that? Is that what the Member is saying?

With respect to the training of librarians, we are paying money to send 15 librarians on scholarship to the United States of America in fiscal 2006 to further their studies and enhance their capabilities. When you do a budget, it is a snapshot in time; it is your best estimate of expenditure during the year, but things happen. For example, in terms of the award for national scholarships, you may find that when you reach the person who is number 200 on the merit list, there may be three persons there who have the same point or there may even be 10 persons within a narrow band down at the bottom and you may decide, on the grounds of equity and social justice, that instead of awarding 200 scholarships, you award 210 scholarships; but the money has to be appropriated. It was not in the original allocation. Is the Member saying that the actions of a government and the requirements of a country are to be cast in concrete?

Look at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs; the Government has taken a decision to allocate \$45 million to deal with a football World Cup effort. We took a decision to allocate a further \$9 million to send a cultural contingent to Germany. We did not know that we would qualify for the World Cup. When we read the budget in September 2005, of course, we wanted to and hoped to—we all wished that we would qualify for the World Cup—but unless you are a “see-er man” or a medium, you would not have known that you would have expenditure in excess of \$50 million unbudgeted, that has to be appropriated in a supplementary variation of appropriation. Is the Member saying that we should take that away?

Should we take away the \$45 million we wish to appropriate to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs to deal with World Cup expenditure and take away the \$9 million to send the 129 persons to represent this country and to showcase the culture of Trinidad and Tobago? The 129 artistes who are on their way to Germany to represent this country, while our Soca Warriors are playing in Germany, must not go and the bonuses that we have decided we would give the players, the technical team, the management and the coach for the brilliant effort that they have made in qualifying for the World Cup, should we take them back? Is that what the hon. Leader of the Opposition is saying? Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely ridiculous what we have to deal with in this Parliament.

When you go through every single item of expenditure—the Ministry of Works and Transport took a decision to lease a cargo vessel for the inter-island sea ferry system. The *Malta Express*, which will be arriving in a week or so, is costing us \$123 million to charter and operate. It is twice the capacity of the *Lynx* and the *Panorama* put together and is required to sustain Tobago's development.

For years there was an insufficient cargo-carrying capacity on the sea bridge. This PNM Government, in recognition of the fact that Tobago's economy is booming and that there is an expansion of the tourism industry in Tobago—there is road construction and all sorts of things happening; there is an increased demand for transport of construction materials, the transport of goods and people from Trinidad to Tobago—took the decision to lease a dedicated cargo vessel, as opposed to a passenger vessel.

What was happening in the past is that the passenger vessels, which are outfitted to carry people and cars, were being used to carry containers and trucks full of gravel and was simply destroying the efficiency of the passenger vessels. We decided we would get a dedicated cargo vessel. It took us a while. There is a shortage in the world market, in terms of appropriate vessels. We eventually came to a conclusion approximately one month ago, with respect to the *Malta Express*, which we determined was most suited for the inter-island route.

That is the expenditure over a two-year period. In this fiscal year, it might be \$50 million or \$60 million. Is the Member saying that we should cancel the lease for the *Malta Express*? Is the Member saying to do that instead of leasing a dedicated cargo vessel so that Tobagonians can benefit from economies of scale and lower transport cost? Is the Member saying that we should not lease that vessel again?

I would not bother with the Member. I heard so much puerile utterances coming out from the Member. We are now at the beginning of June. We have June, July, August and September; four more months for fiscal 2006. In terms of Arithmetic, I know the Member is not good at Arithmetic, but eight out of twelve is two-thirds. To take it down to the level of the Member for Siparia, two-thirds of fiscal 2006 have elapsed and one-third of fiscal 2006 remains. If the original allocation was \$34 billion, we are now appropriating \$4 billion, 34 plus 4 is 38. One-third of 38 is 12.76. How would \$4 billion satisfy a requirement, if you do simple Mathematics for expenditure of almost \$13 billion between now and the end of the year? How on earth could this administration have spent \$34 billion?
[*Interruption*]

Do the Mathematics, two-thirds of 38. Since the Member cannot do the Mathematics, two-thirds of 38 is 25. We have spent \$25 billion. Those are not the actual figures. I am simply doing it on a straight-line basis because I understand if I do it any other way; if I start to explain to the Member that our oil revenue

comes in quarters and we get income from the oil companies every three months and if I have to go into the whole accounting process that informs the expenditure and income patterns—I would not bother.

Mr. Speaker, it is the kind of nonsense we have to hear that this Government has spent \$34 billion; the whole budget in eight months and has come for four months to last out the rest of the year. That is what I have to deal with.

Mr. Speaker, let me go back to what I was dealing with.

Mr. Speaker: That will have to wait. Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea and I hope all Members refresh themselves adequately. We will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: You have 13 more minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, thank you and I would not use the 13 minutes. For a moment, I thought the Opposition was so “bazodee” that they retreated into some room. [*Laughter*] The simple point is that the \$4,800,685,143 that we are seeking to supplement the appropriation for 2006 did not fall from the sky.

Mr. Speaker, I would close my contribution by making the point that this \$4 billion has resulted from additional revenues. We believe that the purposes that the additional appropriation would be used for are all necessary and useful. We believe it would be money well spent and it would redound to the service of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (Chaguanas): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. When I received the notification to attend the Finance Committee in this House on Wednesday, May 31, 2006, I looked at what we were to consider. Six months ago this Government sought approval for a record breaking budget of \$32 billion, and now six months later, without batting an eyelid, it comes seeking another \$3.9 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I thought the hon. Minister of Finance would have come to this honourable House and updated us on what has been happening in this country over the last six months—how the money was spent and whether the promises that were made in the budget were kept. Of course, he read what was discussed here on Wednesday.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the budget statement which was presented here a few months ago, on page 6 you would see some promises that were made. Maybe we in the Opposition do not listen to the Government's propaganda on the radio, so we may not be updated on what is taking place. Mr. Speaker, I am going to quote the hon. Prime Minister.

“Mr. Speaker, over the past year, the Government made a number of strategic interventions that we believe, in time, will go a long way to address the current crime wave on a sustainable basis. Some of the more important initiatives are:

- Acquisition of state of the art crime fighting technology. The package includes:
- an aerial surveillance system outfitted with radar and imaging systems;
- a forward-looking infrared camera;
- twenty-four mobile police units;
- sky watch units;
- a 360 degree radar system which will be available in the next few days;
- Four armed helicopters;
- Six fast patrol boats; and
- Three offshore Patrol Vessels.”

Mr. Speaker, when I heard this and when you read it now, you would get the impression that things are okay, and the Government would be assisting us in reducing crime. As I said before, I am not aware if these things were put in place. Six months have gone; the money is finished and you come back to this Parliament and we are not updated as to what is taking place. So when people say that the House is one of deception, we must agree.

Mr. Manning: I would like to advise the Member that everything has been put in place except those items that have a long lay time, that is to say, the boats and the helicopters, but everything else is in place.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for saying that. Maybe he should have opened the debate and brought us up-to-date on how the \$34 billion is being spent. At the end of the year, when we add the actual figures and the allocated figures, the hon. Minister of Finance would come and say that we have a surplus.

Mr. Speaker, I thought this would have been a good opportunity to tell us how the windfall that we have is being used to improve the quality of life of our citizens. They should come and tell us and I would be very thankful for it. Here is where we have to come and let the country know what we are doing. The Government is just coming here and asking for more and more money without accounting to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This is my problem.

Mr. Imbert: What is the score?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Two hundred and fifteen for seven. [*Laughter*] We have to account for what is taking place. If we come to this Parliament and we are not able to account for what we are doing, then people are going to lose confidence in us. I want to tell you that people are losing confidence in us. Parliamentarians are sending messages out there as people who are deceiving the population.

I was listening to a show on radio this morning where it is claimed that money is being thrown after problems and nothing seems to be working, and crime has continued unabated. The social ills continue on a daily basis. Let me just stick to the budget and some of the promises that were made.

Mr. Speaker, at this juncture, let me turn to page 40. I want the Prime Minister and the Government to tell us where we have reached. When you look at the budget statement, as I said before, it could be a real art in deception and public relations. I quote:

“Mr. Speaker, we must ensure that we uplift the status of those who are most vulnerable and marginalized among us; including substance abusers, elderly persons, mentally ill individuals and those who are homeless.”

When you walk through the city of Port of Spain, San Fernando, Chaguanas and elsewhere the vagrant population seems to be exploding. Vagrancy in this country is now accepted as everything else. Maybe all the social ills are accepted now in this country. People are becoming numb to the murders in the country. People are now walking on Frederick Street and jumping over vagrants as if this is accepted now. Maybe the PNM has an art in teaching people to accept these things, so people are no longer complaining about vagrants, crimes and murders. This country is becoming numb and maybe the propaganda of the PNM is working. We have to wake up; we have a responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, hear what the Prime Minister said:

“Our programme in the new fiscal year will include:

- Provision of short term accommodation at the St. Ann’s and Tumpuna Road facilities for the mentally ill;

- Substance abusers who require special attention relocating to rehabilitation centres;
- Establishment of three new facilities—a Social Displacement Centre and a Halfway House in Port of Spain and a Centre for the Aged, in Arima.”

Mr. Speaker, when I sat here—this time I was in Parliament for the budget debate—and listened to these things, I said at least the socially displaced in our country would be given an opportunity to improve themselves? But eight months later, what is happening? Mr. Speaker, \$34 billion is being spent and \$4 billion more is coming on the table. When you go back to what was presented to us you would see all the excuses being made for not housing the homeless.

- “Development of the capacity of NGOs to provide appropriate care and rehabilitation through training programmes and the provision of technical advice and financial resources.
- Establishment of Senior Centres for Older Persons...”

What has happened to that? Has that been left out? Tell us whether the funds were appropriated elsewhere. We want to know.

- “Implementation of a Meals on Wheels Programme...”

I remember talking about this Meals on Wheels Programme. Where is the programme? What is happening? Is the Minister asleep or is the Prime Minister not in charge of his Cabinet?

- “Provision of a Continuum of Health and Support Services for Older Persons;
- Provision of Business and Entrepreneurial Training for Persons with disabilities;
- Training of Personal Assistants for Persons with Disabilities; and
- Establishment of five new centres for the Adolescent Mothers Programme.”

So, when the Minister of Finance comes to this Parliament to get more money to do things that are urgent, in a Parliament that is worth its salt, I would expect the Government to tell us where we are and how they are spending the money. These things were promised in the budget. They should also tell us whether they are capable of doing these things. We want to know! People with disabilities are waiting, and people at the lower end of our society are struggling. People have asked us what is happening in this country, and why they have been neglected.

Pension is \$1,000 per month and recipients of disability grants receive \$720 per month. They are struggling to make ends meet. Here we have people talking about inflation and overheating the economy and yet this Government comes to the Parliament to talk about the expansion of their programmes, and nothing is being done in this country to improve the quality of life for the people at the lower end of the scale.

What is happening to our pensioners? Mr. Speaker, \$1,000 a month sounds like plenty money, but you know it is not plenty at all. None of us could go to a grocery or a supermarket with \$1,000 and try to live for a month. One person would find it difficult. The Regulated Industries Commission (RIC) is only interested in increasing rates. The Member for Siparia said that would also add to the inflation. What are we doing to help persons who are at the bottom of the ladder? Poverty is growing. When we describe poverty it is the disposable income of our people.

This morning I met with a Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) gang. I was driving my car and I stopped. The foreman of that CEPEP gang is Mr. Nagessar, a PNM candidate who lost in the borough corporation election. He got a stroke and he is badly injured. His entire right side has collapsed. He told me that he would not be getting a cent from CEPEP. He is about 63 years old. Nothing for him! His last day work is his last day's pay. He would be going home penniless. He has asked me to talk to someone on that side so that he could get a disability allowance.

Mr. Sharma: "Great is the PNM and it shall prevail."

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Another worker was working on the edge of the highway and a car came across on the shoulder and knocked the man down. This was described graphically by a lady who said that the person is in cast from his head and only his face and pampers are showing, and everything else is in cast. He received injuries to about 95 per cent of his body. He is lying on a bed at the Port of Spain General Hospital. The irony is that there is no sick leave for CEPEP workers. I was told that his family has to fend for themselves; we are saying that we care. Do we really care?

We have been calling on the Government to put things in place to deal with our CEPEP workers. I am not against CEPEP, but the management is another matter. When there are people suffering out there, we have to talk about them. The sum of \$75 a day is paid to CEPEP workers and in some areas the workers would get more. When you calculate the wages earned by a URP or a CEPEP

worker they cannot encourage a good standard of living. Their disposable income cannot suffice in this country. It cannot! The Government is spending \$36 billion, but what are we getting for the more challenged people in our society?

What is happening with the Ministry of Social Development? There are problems in our country. Children are being murdered. We are asking for the Children's Authority Act to be proclaimed which was assented to in 2002. The infrastructure was put in place to address this problem in our country and nothing has happened. As a matter of fact, the Ministry of Social Development has lost money in this Appropriation Bill. Nothing was put in the Bill to deal with this matter.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to children issues, I want to put this on the record again—it was put on the record before, but I just want to repeat that when I was the Minister of Social Development children were the centre of my focus. [*Desk thumping*] I believe that children's rights should be protected. We did not only talk, but we did it. We came to this Parliament and approved the Bill. The Ministry of Social Development worked on the Children's Authority Bill for two years and then we demitted office. We know the reasons we demitted office, but I am not going there now. The fact is that we have to deal with the matter.

Mr. Speaker, let me just read from a document that I prepared when I was Minister of Social Development. I took a package of legislation to legally address the problems that our children were facing, and the Cabinet approved them. When I hear the Minister of Social Development, a person who I believe now understands the importance of that ministry—when people hear about the Ministry of Social Development they feel that it is a little ministry up the road. I heard the Minister talking recently and maybe his heart is in the right place. I do hope that the people's heads on that side are in the right place to support the establishment of what the Minister has been calling for.

Let me read some of the important points with respect to the Children's Authority. The setting up of the Children's Authority would comprise a wide cross-section of the national community as outlined in section 7 of the Children's Authority Act. This authority would exercise powers and under this Act, amongst others, would monitor community residences, foster homes and nurseries. My friend, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, if this Act were in place, these crimes would not have happened. I agree with everything the Member said about crime, because it happened to me.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to my ministry. When I visited and interviewed the CRY Foundation they did not receive a cent from the government under my watch because of the weaknesses in their system. We asked them to put the necessary systems in place and they refused to do so. I do not know what happened, but like someone just gave them the subvention and I think that was wrong. The entire system was weak.

I had a case where a Senator in our government, one of my colleagues, asked for a certain home of hers to be granted subvention, and the report from the ministry was that the home was not fit for children. I did not force the ministry to give money to that home. I believe that if something is not right, whether it is on any side of the political fence, it is not right. She did not receive any subvention.

I remember going on record and saying that I prefer a child to remain in an abusive relationship at home with his or her parents than to be in a public place where that child would be abused. If we do not put systems in place we cannot do that. We came to this Parliament and we did that. It is now 2006 and nothing has happened since. We are wondering why. Is it not important to put \$2 million or \$3 million in this Appropriation Bill to put the Children's Authority Act in place so that we could get it going? Is that too much money? When you see where the money is going it makes you wonder.

The Children's Authority would investigate complaints of the children parents and guardians. As it is today—I do not know if it has changed, but the Minister could tell me—the National Family Services has the responsibility for children and there are only two or three officers to deal with the entire country. That could not work and it should not work! When we see the fallout of our problems in the country and how children are suffering, as leaders, we must be responsible. The matters with Sean Luke, Amy Emily Anamunthodo and many others should not have happened. I am not saying that the Children's Authority Act would have prevented it, but it should not have happened.

I remember when I first talked about the abuse of children reaching my ministry in this Parliament, the Member for Diego Martin East laughed and asked me if I was living somewhere in Mars. We appointed a committee which was headed by Dr. Robert Sabga to investigate homes in this country, and that report is somewhere in the Parliament. It was laid in Parliament. When that committee visited homes they found children were being abused and the managers of these homes tried everything to prevent the committee from going into these buildings. They almost went to court. I went hurriedly to cabinet and appointed an inspector of homes who had the legal authority to visit these homes. These people would

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[MR. RAMSARAN]

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pretend to be social workers and all they are interested in, I dare say some of them, is to see what they could get from the Government and private citizens. We went ahead and looked at the Sabga Report and we implemented some of the recommendations in our legislation.

I went to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and we were told that certain things must be done, for example, we must have our national plan of action so that we would be on par with the United Nations. We hired a high-powered committee from this country with senior public servants to deal with that matter and to ensure that the rights of the child were protected—the right to education; the right to everything. It is there in law now. The Children's Authority Act, 2000 covers that. I would invite the Prime Minister to read that Act and he would see how important it is. The rights of the child are enshrined there.

When things happen in this country and we hear the hodgepodge attempts to deal with the problem—I am concerned and people could blame me for the one year I did not do it, and I would plead guilty. What I did, with the approval of Cabinet, I appointed the Children's Authority in principle. I want to pay tribute to Sen. Dianne Mahabir-Wyatt. I do not know if she refused, but she did not accept an appointment as a Senator to be the chairman of the Children's Authority which would have been a full-time job. She asked me where the staff is. I told her that we cannot wait for the ideal opportunity, so let us start and then we would build and look at the laws. I said that if there were any changes we would do it, but we should not wait for the opportune moment or the best time because it may never happen. She accepted and the rest is history.

We were ejected from the government in 2001 and after that we had the 18/18 situation, and we did not get the opportunity to continue. That is a sin that would follow the people who have caused us to be out of office. Every time a child dies in this country under those circumstances, I feel for that child. I could blame people but that is not my style. The fact of the matter is that we were out of office and maybe this Government wants to do it, but it does not understand how to do it. It could be that the UNC did something and the Government does not want to continue it. I do not know the reason, but I would ask them to read the package of legislation and they would see the good work that was done.

Mr. Speaker, this was a lively debate in both Houses. People made their contributions and changed certain things to facilitate the Members of Parliament. These Bills were passed in both Houses, and I do not see what the problem is now.

With respect to any child who is in the care of a community residence—we protected the children in community residences, foster homes and nurseries and there are penalties for failure to comply with the requisite standards as prescribed under the Children's Community Residences Foster Homes and Nurseries Act and any incidences of mistreatment of children in such places.

It goes on to say that the Children's Authority could issue, revoke and withdraw licences of community residences and nurseries; monitor agencies which address children's issues; investigate complaints or reports of mistreatment of children in their homes; act as an advocate for the rights of the child in Trinidad and Tobago; and continue to do all such things that are necessary or expedient for the proper performance of their duties.

When we look at the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Health certain things were not done. It is amazing that this Minister of Finance could come to this Parliament this afternoon and address the soft issues that are affecting our children, our women and our families. This is not happening. When I come here and talk about these things it is with a sense of emotion that I say these things. I do not know how the Prime Minister feels, but once something happens in my constituency—I am in charge of my constituency—I feel for the people. I would want to know where I went wrong; where the Government went wrong; and how I could help. I would ask myself these questions. We see things happening in this country where children are being raped, abused and murdered.

Mr. Speaker, whilst I am on this point, I said a couple years ago that we have laws in this country, but are we policing them properly. Is the Minister of National Security talking with the Commissioner of Police? The raping of a child who is under 14 years is statutory rape. We have children in this country having children at the age of 14 and before they are 14. Is it not possible for the police who are interested in the social welfare of our country—we have police officers like that—to go to the hospitals and interview these children who are having children? Who is the father of the child's child? If the police could arrest a few of these fathers maybe we could start to address the issue of incest and rape of our minors. This is continuing every day in this country. We have children having children in public institutions and nobody is interested. Nobody wants to stop this problem! When things happen to children I would blame the Government!

With the recent upsurge in crimes against children—Sean Luke and Amy Emily Anamathodo—I thought I would have seen in this Appropriation Bill the establishment of the Children's Authority and moneys being approved for that purpose. [*Desk thumping*] Instead, they have continued with the heating of the

economy and creating inflation. The poor people in our communities continue to remain poor. The challenge remains more and more a challenge.

We talked about AIDS and kidnapping in this country and the truth has never been told—I am not going to call names, because I want to protect the identity of the victim—that most of the young female “kidnapees” in this country have been raped. I know of a recent victim who contracted AIDS and was on the verge of committing suicide, and yet we just sit back. I would not be surprised if someone gets up from the next side and say that there were only five or six kidnappings this year just to deal with the statistics. That is too much. Our people must be protected, but as to how and when, we want to hear it from the Government side.

The Government talked about having the equipment to do the job, and when we asked about the equipment they are not working. Yes, it may be national security matters and you are bound by that and you cannot share things with us, but at least you could give us the results. Tell us what is happening so the country could relax and breathe again.

I do not want to bring the President into this debate, but it was reported in this week’s newspaper on the front page: “Do not flee your country”. People have asked me: what are the reasons the President could give them for not leaving the country? To me, this made a lot of sense because of what is happening. People are questioning everything now. With the so-called disruption in the UNC, people are asking me what is happening. They are saying that the PNM is ruining this country and we are ruining our chances. Some people have described it as two teams playing cricket: one team does want to win and the other team does not want to lose, so both teams are playing for nothing. Do you remember the game of Chi Pet. You are trying to eat each other and who eats less would win? This is what is happening. I am really disappointed to have to come to this Parliament to talk about issues affecting children.

I want to continue with some of the promises that were made in the budget. I want to go now to page 42. My underlying message to the Prime Minister is that eight months have passed, and it would have been democracy at its highest order—not like how Mr. Imbert attacked the Leader of the Opposition. He should have known better.

Mr. Imbert: Is that your leader?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Yes. I must admit that in the committee meeting the Member for Arouca South, the Member for Arima and the Prime Minister did explain certain things. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*] I want the Prime Minister to listen

to me. I have taken my time to do this because I want answers. This is not to criticize the Prime Minister. I know his job is not an easy one.

Mr. Speaker, let me commend the Prime Minister on his statement this evening. I do not normally commend people on the other side, but whoever authored this document, I think this is the way to go in this country. We must really try to give it 100 per cent in order to manage the diversity that is Trinidad and Tobago; if we do not, this country would be destroyed. When we read about the division in this country it could only lead to destruction. When I listened to the Prime Minister this evening I thought whoever did it—if you wrote it, congratulations—I think this is a document that we should keep to see how far we could really live this dream. This is what we need in Trinidad and Tobago. I am sure that if you do not do it we on this side would do it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Valley: Who? Which one? Ramesh!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: As you mentioned the name Ramesh, I heard my good friend from Couva South describing my political leader, Mr. Winston Dookeran, as the leader of a church.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Nothing is wrong with that.

Mrs. Job-Davis: That is a good description.

Dr. Khan: He is talking about the Member for San Fernando East.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: But that description is better than the devil. [*Laughter*] I hope Members understand what I am talking about. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

“In addition, we propose to spend over \$142 million on the upgrading and establishment of community sporting facilities, including swimming pools, ...”

This is not under the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. I think the Prime Minister is mixing up the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. Under this Minister’s watch we have reached the World Cup finals, and the person to lead the Trinidad and Tobago’s delegation to Germany should have been the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. [*Desk thumping*] I would prefer it to be the Prime Minister—

Mr. Manning: When you become the prime minister then do that.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of Britain, would be seeing England playing Trinidad and Tobago. We underrate the power of sport in this country, except the sporting fans. Even if England gives us six goals, that is okay. We do not expect to beat England.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Just imagine that we are going to beat England and you are there in Germany; do you know what message you would be sending to Trinidad and Tobago? The message would be anti-crime and for our young people to develop healthier lifestyles. It is not too late. The Prime Minister could hire a jet and go up there—

Mr. Manning: Do I have a jet?

Mr. M. Ramsaran:—as he did before. [*Laughter*] I know you have hired jets before. You cannot say no.

Mr. Speaker, let me continue with what is under “Community Development”. Maybe it is a mistake; I do not know. Perhaps my friend from Tunapuna could say if he is in charge of this programme.

“In addition, we propose to spend \$142 million on the upgrading and establishment of community sporting facilities, including swimming pools, playfields and jogging tracks to facilitate the participation of families in recreational activities.”

How far have we reached with that? You keep making mistakes. This is under “Community Development”. Do not tell me that you do not know the difference between community development and sport. Maybe I was the Minister of Community Development and Sport, but do not mix up community development and sport. We want you to tell us how the money is being spent. That is what we want to hear. [*Interruption*] Do not react when I am talking.

Mr. Speaker, the Member should come to this Parliament and tell us how the money is being spent. He made certain promises in the budget, so he should tell us where they have reached. This is probably the only Prime Minister of a country who does not understand the importance of World Cup 2006. I am still going to tell him that if he cannot make it let the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs lead the Trinidad and Tobago delegation. Calypsonians cannot talk for us. Suppose something happens there and we have to talk to the government of that country, who is going to talk? Is it Mr. Warner? Let us face it. This is the biggest sporting achievement made by the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and, as Prime Minister, you should respect that. Yes, you gave money to the football team.

One day I would ask the Government to explain how this money was spent. The country is supposed to know this. It should not be in a press conference where the media would carry snippets. You should tell us in this Parliament that

you have given the team \$45 million and how it is going to be spent, and if they win you are going to give them more money. The country would then be aware of what is happening. No secret deals! You must make these things public. This is the country's money; the poor people's money; and Trinidad and Tobago's hard-earned resources. We are only the temporary keepers. We must tell the country what we are doing.

With respect to \$142 million under "Community Development", the Member for Tunapuna could tell me if he is in charge of this fund. The Member is a sportsman and he is the Minister in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. He could tell me if he has that responsibility, and I am going to accept what he says. I believe that this was put in here for public relations. Is the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs going to spend \$142 million in sport? That is sounding jokey.

Under "Sport and Recreation" it says:

"Community sporting facilities including swimming pools, cricket and football fields and multi-purpose courts will be developed in Diego Martin, Pleasantville, Toco, Point Fortin and Santa Cruz. In addition, we will develop several regional recreational grounds: Yoland Pompey, Irwin Park, Eddie Hart and the grounds in Morvant, Sogren Trace in Laventille, Chalieville, Lange Park and Patna Village."

He continues:

"...we intend to spend over \$100 million upgrading and improving community recreation grounds all over Trinidad and Tobago."

That is \$242 million.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to give way to the Member for San Fernando East, if he could tell me what is the position with respect to these projects. Mr. Speaker, \$242 million was allocated to improve sporting facilities. What is happening with these projects? Could you have a meeting to tell us what is happening or is this just a public relations exercise? Is the budget presentation a public relations exercise? What is happening with this \$242 million which was allocated to upgrade recreational grounds, swimming pools and so forth? Where is the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs?

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Works and Transport should be interested in what is on page 59. If the Minister is here he should listen to this.

"Mr. Speaker, the major road infrastructure projects scheduled for fiscal 2006 include..."

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is sad about this budget statement? This was carried live on television and radio. The public gallery was filled with people. Senators and VIPs came and listened to this piece of propaganda. Let me read page 59 of the budget presentation:

- “Extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from Golconda in San Fernando to Debe;”

Mr. Imbert: That project would be starting next month.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I want you to get up and say that.

- “Commencement of a new highway from San Fernando to Princes Town;”

Mr. Imbert: That would start next month.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It continues:

- “Extension of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway from O’Meara Industrial Estate to Wallerfield...”
- Commencement of the Interchange at the intersection of the Churchill/Roosevelt and Uriah Butler Highways;”

Mr. Imbert: That project has started.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It goes on:

- “Commencement of the Western Freeway to Chaguaramas;”

Mr. Imbert: That project would be starting in three months’ time.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: It continues:

- “Commencement of the Mamoral Dam...”

Mr. Imbert: That would start next month.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: This is a promising Government and we have a promising Minister of Works and Transport.

- “Extension of the Diego Martin Highway to Diamond Vale...”

Mr. Imbert: That project is finished. [*Laughter*]

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I know. We have to pay tribute to the Member for Diego Martin East for making sure that his highway was completed first. Good Minister!

- “Commencement of an Overpass and Highway improvements in Cocorite...”

Mr. Imbert: That project would start next month.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: This is what the country wants to hear. The country would be happy to hear that. I am sure that Members opposite and Members in the other place would like to be reminded of the promises made by the Prime Minister in his budget presentation. Sometimes they do not know. I heard the Member for Siparia saying this evening that the Permanent Secretary and the Minister should be in sync. This is what we need in this country. I feel that when we sit in this Parliament and accept mediocre presentations by Ministers, the country is fooled. The country is asking questions. What has the Government done with all the money that has been given to them? Has the Government improved the quality of life of our poor citizens in this country? Has the Government improved the quality of life for the disabled persons and the aged? The answer is, no. This Government is only interested in giving contracts, consultancy and so forth to their friends and families, and the Government is overheating the economy.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a point and I hope that I would bring it across properly. Do you know what is taking place with the labour force in this country? With the infrastructural development taking place in the country, the skilled labourers are being drawn to these developments. Persons who are building their private homes cannot find skilled labourers. These labourers are being hired elsewhere by contractors who are paying handsomely. Other labourers have gone to CEPEP and URP. So we have a situation in the country where the middle class and the lower class segments of our population cannot find people to work for them. Is it that the Government has overstepped its bounds in using up the human resource in the country?

A good government is supposed to be the facilitator in our development, but they are the main driver in our economy. The little I know about economics, I believe that this is not healthy for our country at all. I think the Minister of Finance should look at this matter and slow down some of these government projects. I am not saying do not build, but we have to find a mix. The private sector and the ordinary homeowner who is trying to build a house cannot find skilled labourers like masons, electricians and so forth. You said that we are lacking those skills and that you want to bring people in from elsewhere.

What has happened is that we have pulled everybody into the central government's activities and nothing is being left for others. Maybe the planners of this country should get together and see how they could find a proper ground so that people would be available to work elsewhere. I know that all of us would agree that to find people to work is very difficult. I am not saying that people should not be

properly employed. There should be a mix so that people would be meaningfully employed all over the place.

As I said before, it is unfair to lull our people into accepting CEPEP and URP jobs. If these same persons are trained they would be able to fill the breach so that we would have trained carpenters, masons and so forth. I do not think they would need a lot of training. If you give people a little change they would work for it. If they are getting \$75 a day, they would work for half day and then they would go and idle. We have to get the human resource to work meaningfully for our country. How are we going to do it? I am not saying that it is easy, but we have to get people to continue to help us.

I do not want to rehash the figures because the Minister of Finance did that. When we see in this document that the Minister of Health has given up some \$55 million, I find this to be the most obscene part of this document. For example, the establishment of facilities for the socially displaced; \$2.75 million. Listen to the excuse:

Progress in the establishment of these facilities for the socially displaced is being hampered as residents are protesting the placement of the centres in the areas earmarked for them.

Mr. Speaker, that is what good planning is about. You do not announce that you are going to do something and when you get there you encounter problems. That is what I am talking about. The Minister of Health is not interested in the socially displaced. He is not! I know that Anthony Salloum was the chairman of the Socially Displaced Unit and he left this country in frustration. He came to me a year after the PNM got in office and told me that he was leaving. He said that this Government is not interested in caring for the socially displaced.

Mr. Speaker, funding for the construction of some district health facilities is also provided under the Infrastructure Development Fund, and the excess provision is recommended for transfer to other programmes. This \$25 million was earmarked for the construction of district health facilities, and this money has been recommended for transfer to other programmes.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much and also the Member for San Fernando East. Mr. Speaker, you would be aware of the number of occasions I brought this matter to the attention of the Parliament—the construction of a health facility in Chaguanas. This project was promised. This project was supposed to start in August 2005 and to be completed in August 2006. This matter was raised on the adjournment.

A few weeks ago the Minister got up and said that everything was in place, and that they were going to send out tenders and so forth. Since then to now nothing has happened. I went to Chaguanas and talked to the managers there, and they did not know anything about what the Minister told me. It is as if deception is the order of the day. The Minister is giving up \$25 million which should be used for building district health facilities.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Prime Minister uses his blue lights and so on and he does not know about traffic. If we do not decentralize some of our systems quickly we are going to be in serious trouble. These district health facilities must be set up so that people with serious injuries do not have to travel miles and hours in a motorcar to get attention. That is why these health facilities are so important. It is more important now than before. District health facilities should be set up so that people could be attended to in their districts. If this money were used for that purpose then I would applaud the Government.

Mr. Speaker, we have \$32 million being spent and health facilities are being built across the land, but the Chaguanas Hospital was promised in the 2004 budget. I applauded that more so when the Prime Minister and I had a talk and he admitted to me that Chaguanas is one of the most populated regional corporations in the country. Whether it is a city or a borough, it has now gone over 50,000 citizens as compared to Port of Spain with 30,000 citizens; San Fernando, 33,000; Point Fortin, 16,000; and Arima, 14,000. Chaguanas has gone way in front.

I must applaud the Prime Minister for making the statement that Chaguanas would become a new city. We need hospitals and other infrastructure to go with that, but we have no support from the Minister of Health. Maybe the Minister of Health is only interested in building the Chaguanas Plaza. He is the owner there. There would be seven cinemas there.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to advise the hon. Member for Chaguanas that discussions are under way right now between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and Johns Hopkins University to do a number of things,

including the construction of a replacement for the existing Port of Spain General Hospital and also the construction of a new hospital in central Trinidad, among other things.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I thank the hon. Prime Minister for making that statement. Any infrastructural development would be welcome in Central, and I am happy to hear that. I am not saying that the Opposition Member should be invited to your talks. I am not so bold to say that.

Mr. Manning: Would you like to come?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I would love to. I would like to see Chaguanas come to the fore in our country. I was talking about the plaza. I hate to get into people's private business, but I understand seven new cinemas would be built there. I am against the traffic support for that. There is where the word "planning" comes in my debate. We do things but we do not plan for them. When you try to get on to the Endeavour Flyover—the Member for Diego Martin East claims that he knows that flyover—sometimes you would spend 10 or 15 minutes there, and they are going to build seven cinemas there. I know your colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—here we are developing Chaguanas East. When you are driving south there is a big sign—the new arrival in central landscape now is Chaguanas East. It was Chaguanas before, but because of the political boundary, it is now Chaguanas East. I thank the Prime Minister for making that statement. The people of Chaguanas deserve better quality infrastructure to deal with their problems. We could go on, but I want to put on record once more that if this is going to happen, the Minister should announce that this is going to happen.

Mr. Manning: Again, I thank the hon. Member for Chaguanas for giving way. Last week Tuesday which was Indian Arrival Day, there was a meeting held in the Prime Minister's office among a number of agencies who are involved in planning to discuss a number of things; one of which is the growing population between Couva and Chaguanas, and the need to carefully plan how that development would continue in the future. I think the hon. Member should know that.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: You have offered me to attend your meetings and I would come, despite the fact that people are saying that I have missed meetings at Rienzi. That is not accurate. *[Laughter]* If you invite me to your meetings to discuss the future of Chaguanas, I would be most willing to attend.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have had cause to make many press releases and I just want to read—this is a long one but just to summarize. I ask the question—and the hon.

Prime Minister maybe could answer with the Minister—the \$41 million that has been allocated to the Ministry of National Security and the Crime Unit, how is this money going to be spent? Forty one million dollars is a lot of money to deal with a small unit of the police service; paying the “Yardies”. I do not know if it is Scotland Yard or English Yard, but they are paying the “Yardies” a part of that. I want to know among the four subheads, how will the money be allocated.

Why I ask this question is not just to make political mileage, but I believe again, this country is guessing. I do not know if the Government is guessing so we have to follow suit. When we hear one time it is active Scotland Yard detectives and so on will be coming here, they would be training our young police officers, again, I applaud these things because I believe these are good efforts. But when we come now and hear it is old "fellas"—Eddie Hart might outsprint them—coming to teach our policemen certain things, it is amazing. *[Interruption]* Why we do not keep the old policemen we have here? Why send them home at 55?

Hon. Member: What it is, they coming with brain, Ken?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: They are coming with brain, they could ship it, you know. We have a peculiar country; no policeman from anywhere else could come here and solve our crime immediately. You know what would happen, and Mr. Minister you know this, when they come here they would have to get our people, get our ideas and implement those same ideas. It happens all the time. Why are we remaining Third World? Why do we not train our officers?

Mr. Valley: That is part of the training.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Well tell us. I want answers. Could you explain the training?

Hon. Member: What part of Scotland Yard they are coming from?

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, what you are doing is, you are bringing persons with First World experience to mix with your people. Yes, our people know the local conditions, these people know advanced methods in solving crime and so on, and you expect a transfer of technology. That is what you would expect.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, you know this is very interesting. When we debated the police bills a couple years ago, I remember going on the Internet and going into the Mounties in Canada. When you go there you have a meander—this is only what they offer on the e-mail on their website. So much so, if you consult with them you would get information that you do not want. They show you how the police officers are now becoming computer literate.

For example, you are in your motor car—I am sure Ken when you go to New York and you get charged for speeding, right there they could put your name and they could know who it is; this is what we want. To bring these old people to teach us computer literacy and so on, I think we are reversing the thing. You have to bring young people who understand technology, who understand the information communications—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: This is just a procedural question. Could I just find out if this is a private discussion between you and the Member for Diego Martin Central, seeing that you are calling him Ken?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: No that is when he gets charged in the United States.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I said if he is charged. Thank you very much for your intervention. Mr. Speaker, I apologize, I apologize. You know I was just trying to personalize the thing. I have respect for my senior citizens—I am getting there myself—except a few of course.

I am saying that we have to learn from our young people too. As far as information communication technology is concerned, the younger people are more trained, are more versed. I believe if you want to set up a good police service it must be based around good information systems. If we do not do that we would live in Third World. We could do whatever we want, if this country is not computerized quickly as far as the police service is concerned, we are going to spin top in mud. We have to do it, we have to have our Internet and intranet, and so on.

This is a small country, you know. When something happens to somebody in Port of Spain, by the time it is on the APB system everybody knows what is taking place. But if you could punch into a computer for a car number, PBT 18, people would be looking out for it. We need to do that. You know if this Bill had money to do that I would be happy. Or even, Minister of Finance, if in next year's budget you could come to this Parliament and say, look we are serious about bringing our police service up to par with our international partners in the developing world and you are going to set up an information system in the Licensing Office and the police service, that would be most welcome.

People talk about crime in this country, yet we have not moved to our modern crime fighting apparatus. The blimp, as far as I am concerned, could be laughable, because if we are planning a crime and the blimp passes, we cool it till the blimp

has gone. I mean that is simple. But if we could really computerize our systems and have things in place so that we would be fighting our crime in a modern way, we could do it. That would not cost this money; it is not going to cost \$4 billion; we have to do that. We have to be serious. Yes we know we have undesirables in the police service; we know we have those who might have passed the age of training; we know all that. That is why we have to even upgrade the qualifications of entry into the police service.

Mr. Speaker, again when we come to dealing with the problems in this country, we must never allow the Government to go on this galloping path rather than to see how we could develop our country between infrastructural development and human development. [*Interruption*] Yes, the path that they gallop on. We have to do that. If we continue to leave out the human resource in our country, we would never solve the problems in our country.

My colleague from Siparia talked about increasing old age pensions. It is much more than increasing old age pensions. We have to set up the whole question and I am sure the Member for St. Ann's East would know about the division of aging. I invite you to go Malta on the next conference, learn and understand that there is a division of aging in the developing world. Now do we deal with the people who are aging? What are we providing for them? What are we doing for them? Not to raise old age pension every election year by \$200 and say, vote for me I am the great Government. We have to create avenues.

For example when I was Minister we started Trinidad and Tobago Association of Retired People (TTARP). This is where we get the people to come and to talk. We have the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP) where we use our senior citizens to work with the young people, share their experiences. We have to go on those programmes. Mr. Speaker government is not by “vaps”.

As I was talking about the vagrancy programme a little earlier, let me come back to what the UNC did. What we did as a government and my friend from Laventille East/Morvant is not here again. He accused me of doing some very unkind things to reduce our vagrancy problem, and of course he knows it is not true; well that is between him and me.

Mr. Hinds: It is being investigated. [*Laughter*]

Mr. M. Ramsaran: But the fact is we were doing these things in an orderly fashion. For example—if I remember and I hope I remember correctly—vagrants were first brought into Riverside Assessment Centre, from there—we hired NGOs at one time, if you go into the records you would see it. We asked the various

NGOs to take 20, 30 people and so on to deal with them. We had in the Riverside Assessment Plaza courses offered by the Ministry to make these people become self-reliant—if I may use that word—to come in there and learn something. We set up the Piparo Rehabilitation Centre, which has been expanded to include more and more people to have them rehabilitated from drugs. That was not to put the vagrants; that was the last stop. After they were cleaned, they were cared for, they became physically strong and they started to be weaned away from drugs, we took them to Piparo so that they would be rehabilitated or some even habilitated to enter into society.

We set up the Audrey Mollineau Home in Barataria for females with psychiatric problems, where we took them there and we dealt with them in collaboration with the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. We worked with one or two homes on Nelson Street, where we dealt with these people. It was being done and planned. This facility you are talking about, was already there to be built. In San Fernando we have a success story, Shamrock House, where it is worked together with the former Mayor of San Fernando—you were there Mr. Speaker; and that is a success story. You have to deal with our issues in an organized manner.

So, Mr. Speaker what really concerns me—and I have plenty I could read from—is that money is thrown at our problems. I looked at the Member for Laventille East/Morvant recently at a rehabilitation function in the prisons. And when I looked at his face, is as if this person I know has aged because of the problems there. Are we going to fix them? Will I succeed? These are the questions you must be asking yourself. Are we doing it in an orderly way? Are we spending the money properly? This is what I want to see, Mr. Speaker. We just cannot come to the Parliament and throw money at every problem.

What is laughable too, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in this whole question of getting more funds. We have to be serious in governance, you know. Our farmers are suffering from lack of agricultural access roads. Yes, we know a couple have been built and I thank the Minister for that, but we should be more aggressive. You want to reduce the cost of living? Food is important. I want to see things being grown. I want to see farmers being encouraged. I do not want to politically compare what happened under the UNC, what happened under the NAR, what happened under the PNM. We are living now where food prices have been spiralling out of control. You go to the market this week ochros are \$2, next week it is \$5, and this is happening all over.

An aggressive Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and Minister of Planning and Development—Members for Arouca North and South—

Members for planned our agriculture and access roads; encouraged people to bring seeds, fertilizers and what have you. I went on the Chaguaramas Seed Centre, when I went there they had three seeds, at least they had more than me. They had three. What were they? Bodi, ochroe and corn, nothing else. I went to the St. Augustine Nursery—I like my gardening, when you come home by me you would see, you would love them—nothing on sale there. People sitting there doing nothing, and you could deny that, Minister. Nothing is provided. So we have government centres dealing with agriculture and they have nothing to show.

Mr. Speaker, really and truly, I know that Government want to come and impress us and they want to do certain things which I read. I studied this document carefully, and I could not help being really worried that I do not see, and if I am wrong correct me. Maybe I have scales in my eyes, I do not know, but tell me how the money that was spent in this country is not reflecting on the quality of life we live in Trinidad and Tobago. We have to understand that.

I would continue to worry and work with or without being a Member of Parliament, as I did before. I would continue to do that. I could go on and on talking about the ills, but I just want to spend about two or three minutes into continuing my quest for this Government to establish our Children's Authority. Please do that.

I only did a precis of what these Children Acts are about. Just let me read some, maybe it could appeal to some of your consciences.

"Children in need of care and protection

22. (1) Where it appears to the authority that a child—

- (a) has neither parent nor guardian who is fit to exercise care and guardianship;
- (b) is lost or has been and remains abandoned by his parents or guardians;
- (c) whose parents or guardian are prevented by—
 - (i) reason of mental or bodily disease;..."

All these things happen in Trinidad and Tobago.

- "(ii) infirmity or other incapacity; or
- (iii) any other circumstances,

from providing for his up-bringing, and there is no available person or persons capable, fit or willing to undertake the care of such child;

- (d) is exposed to moral danger;
- (e) is beyond the control of his parents or guardians;
- (f) is ill-treated or neglected in a manner likely to cause him suffering or injury to health;
- (g) is destitute, or is wandering without any settled place of abode and without visible means of subsistence; or
- (h) is begging or receiving alms; or
- (i) is found loitering for the purpose of begging or receiving alms,

and that the intervention of the Authority is necessary in the best interests of the child, it shall investigate the matter and it shall be lawful where appropriate for the Authority to receive the child, into its care."

Mr. Speaker, I have read these few sentences and I hope that people opposite with conscience could raise it at the next Cabinet meeting. Maybe you do not have the time, maybe you are busy people, and you know sometimes the busier you are you tend to neglect what is important. Let us appoint a committee, Leader of Government Business, to investigate—I do not mind serving on the committee, free of charge, I do not want any money [*Desk thumping*]*—to let us see how we could establish this Children's Authority, how we could make it work.*

I would not like to see another Amy or Sean Luke. I would not like to read about another person being bugged and drowned. I do not want to see children on the streets when they should be in school. I do not want to see children being used as drug mules. I do not want to see children being abandoned in our country. And talking to the parents might be just blowing in the wind. Some of them were abandoned children, so they would have their children abandoned. Some of them have been abused as children, and they do not see anything wrong with abuse. So we have to really face the problem, grapple with the horns and see how we could put this thing right.

Mr. Speaker, I want to end by saying, that I want to really see established in this country care givers and social workers who really care to help us, because as the Government is aware, we have this heated economy, moving ahead at full speed, having our smelter plants and so on, but the human values are being

deteriorated daily and some of us must take up that slack to ensure that we love this country both infrastructurally and socially.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the Member for Diego Martin East would take this in good faith, because I know he sets very high standards for himself. And I have to say on his presentation this evening I would have to give him zero out of 10, because he seemed to be too engrossed in FIFA-style politics. When he spoke about the World Cup and football, the supplementary appropriation speaks to the Cricket World Cup. So I know he sets very high standards for himself, that is why I said I have to give him zero out of 10 for his presentation. It is only his high standards that I have made that statement. So I am sorry, but I know he would take it in good faith.

Mr. Speaker, I entered into this debate because of my concern for the children of the nation. I do so based on the supplementary appropriation before the House this evening. It is important to trace the history of this particular component that is being discussed in the supplementary appropriation, which is under the heading: "Teaching and Learning Strategies", the sub-component of the said loan. And I am glad that the hon. Minister is here, because we have certain questions to ask.

The loan is US \$105 million that is driving the Secondary Education Modernization Programme. The disbursement period is seven years. The loan, if I recall, was signed in 1999 by the United National Congress government. I also want to remind the House, in case they have forgotten, that it is the United National Congress government that also signed the US \$50 million World Bank loan. So the United National Congress government signed both loans, in case they did not recognize that. [*Interruption*] You could respond to me, you have a lot of time.

Hon. Member: You talking about Hazel. You talking about Hazel.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We said we are not going to talk after you. You said you were only going to talk for 10 minutes.

Hon. Member: Now it is 75.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, it is important. The disbursement period is seven years. There is a credit fee attached to the loan, .75 per cent per year on the undisbursed amount. We have to ask the question here this evening of the Minister of Finance; tell us what is the undisbursed amount of the Secondary Education Modernization Programme loan. Because there is a certain period, I said seven

years, for disbursement. Is it that the Government has sidelined this particular loan? Is it that they are not using this particular IDB loan any more, because of the windfall with respect to the oil and gas revenues?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: May I?

Dr. A. Nanan: Sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much. The loan that you are speaking about is still being utilized. You would probably know having been a party to the loan, that part of the loan was for infrastructural development and another part is for what is called the soft side of the education programme. At this time the loan that deals with the soft side of the education programme is being put in place.

As a matter of fact we have been able to renegotiate some of the things that we will be doing in that loan, so that things dealing with early childhood and ensuring that we have universal early childhood education, that is being dealt with by the loan. Certainly because of the funding that we do have in the Government, we have been able to utilize government funds and the loan funds in order to accelerate the building of schools and other educational centres. But the loan is being utilized.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I asked the question. You know when I ask a question I expect a proper answer. But I asked the question based on the fact, if the Member would recall, that particular sub-component of the loan is 100 per cent financed by the loan. I do not know if you know that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Dr. A. Nanan: So that is 100 per cent financing. That is why I asked what is the disbursement from the IDB with respect to that particular loan. Because if the Member said that they are in the soft, I am aware that they were supposed to be — In fact they were supposed to be a long time ago according to the schedule; that you were supposed to be way back in terms of the implementation of that particular component.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Member, for giving way. In that regard in particular, because of the fact that the utilization of the loan in relation to the buildings was not utilized at the rate it should have been utilized when the loan had first been negotiated, we had to, as I said, utilize government funding to ensure that the infrastructural part of the loan was utilized over a period of time. But because it took so long during the time that you had negotiated the loan, we had to ensure that we used government funding in order to start the building projects.

As I said, the soft side of the loan, which you rightly said is 100 per cent financed by the IDB, is now being executed. I am just repeating what I said because the information that you have is not quite accurate.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to get into a debate because I know the Member would lose. Apparently the Member is not aware that the infrastructural component of the loan was totally funded by the Government.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Not totally.

Dr. A. Nanan: It was 100 per cent, check the documents you would see that. One hundred per cent funding for that building programme was handed to you? That is why I am asking the question; in fact that is why I am entering the debate, because we are seeing tardiness by the Government. When you see a big advertisement in the newspaper asking for the Communications Unit of the Ministry of Education, you have to ask certain questions. Media Relations Officer, Events Manager, Marketing Specialist; what is this Ministry about? This Ministry is suppose to be putting— *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I do not want to quarrel this evening—computers in libraries. *[Interruption]* I am not giving way again.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I did not ask you to give way.

Dr. A. Nanan: CD ROMs in libraries, VCRs in libraries, multi-media projectors in libraries.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You are giving wrong information that is why you would not give way.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, the Member apparently is not aware of the components of that loan; of that particular component are teaching and learning strategies. The Minister is not aware. I have to point out that in this society, what is supposed to happen currently and is not happening in that Ministry of Education. That Ministry has fallen behind and they are attempting to hoodwink the population by this unit.

Mr. Valley: That is not true.

Dr. A. Nanan: That is true. That is true.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That is not true.

Dr. A. Nanan: Every single secondary school in this country is supposed to be equipped according to this loan, at this time. *[Interruption]* I am not asking for your protection, Mr. Speaker, because I can handle every one of them. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Speaker: I am well aware of that, hon. Member, so carry on.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I am here to make the point that in the education environment we are supposed to be so far ahead, it is saddening to see the state we are in now. And the Minister of Planning and Development is responsible. You are supposed to be driving that Ministry.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What state we are in? Tell me. What state we are in?

Dr. A. Nanan: You come with a supplement and variation of appropriation on the development programme under that Public Sector Investment Programme and you come here and say yes, we are moving money, but you are not driving that ministry. You may be driving other ministries but you are not driving that ministry. You are supposed to ensure that that Ministry follows on the development programme and to ensure that that loan is followed through. The people will come here and say that is why you have to renegotiate, because you cannot meet the time lines.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We did not have to renegotiate that.

Dr. A. Nanan: The Prime Minister must be aware of that. You are supposed to be controlling every single ministry. That is why you were given that portfolio.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You want me to talk.

Dr. A. Nanan: No, I am just telling you. But tell the Prime Minister, tell the Minister to do the work. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order please!

Dr. A. Nanan: You come to the Parliament, you come to beg for the allocation for us to approve.

Mr. Manning: You are getting hot.

Dr. A. Nanan: No, I am not hot, Mr. Prime Minister, I am just upset. Because when the loan was negotiated it was an entire landscape put forward for the country. The Minister of Planning and Development must understand that particular loan and how the education environment is supposed to be enhanced. So when you come here and you look at the schools—I did not come here to make these complaints out of the air. If you call the secondary schools, “No, we are not expecting any CD ROMs, no VCRs, no computers”.

I know what is going to happen. What is going to happen is something is going to come in the newspaper, the Minister would stand on a platform and say, okay, you are getting 40 computers in this school. It is not supposed to be so. Every single secondary school in this country is supposed to have between 18 to

40 computers in a computer lab. This is not a piecemeal propaganda attempt. You cannot have that. *[Interruption]* No. Those science and technology labs are already existing in those secondary schools. You have to upgrade them, give them the materials. That Minister of Planning and Development is supposed to be driving that Minister and ensure that the materials are in schools. That is what is happening.

The science labs in this country are suffering and, Mr. Speaker, the curriculum is supposed to be reformed at this point in time. I read in a document—in fact in the budget document that you read, Prime Minister—that the secondary school curriculum has been reformed and now they are moving backwards to the primary and the early childhood, so they have streamlining taking place.

6.30 p.m.

If they have already reformed the curriculum, which is part of the technology education component, then they were supposed to have improved the science and technology labs; that is not happening. It is supposed to be happening in every single school. Do not let them fool you with all these big programmes about anger management; deal with the components that would bring quality in the education system. Take charge of that particular Ministry. That Ministry is supposed to be driving the Prime Minister's Vision 2020. *[Interruption]* You are supposed to take charge; that Ministry is not performing. *[Crosstalk]*

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It is performing very well; better than it ever has.

Hon. Member: “Eh heh?”

Dr. A. Nanan: I am not talking out of the air; talk to the secondary school principals. Did you hear that a school almost burnt down in Princes Town? Why do you think those things are happening? You are not exciting the minds of the students. You are supposed to excite the minds of the students. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. S. Panday: True; true!

Dr. A. Nanan: Put computers in the schools. In fact, Prime Minister, the libraries are the multimedia centres; they would be the models. They would be the excitement areas for the schools. It was built in that way; that you would put all the information there; that you would have Internet access for them; multimedia projectors; screens; you would bring in your computers on trolleys; to make learning exciting for them, so they would not waste time in school. You would have new material in the libraries; new magazines for students to read thus increasing literacy and numeracy.

Part of the component of that loan was to put more computers in schools, especially dealing with illiteracy and numeracy rates. You have to concentrate, that is why I said that the Minister of Planning and Development was not doing her work. She has to ensure that her Ministry is performing.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: “What I do you today?” [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

Dr. A. Nanan: We heard about the librarians.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You and I have the same birth date. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. A. Nanan: The Member for Diego Martin East spoke about librarians and said that we do not want to send the librarians on scholarship. Apparently the Member is not even aware that with the loan component, the Learning Resource Centre in Couva is supposed to be driving these school libraries. But you have turfs developing, where Nalis wants to take over the domain of the school libraries. That was supposed to be controlled from the Learning Resource Centre in Couva, which was designed in such a way that its electronic capability would facilitate that; but we are not seeing that. We heard the Member for Diego Martin East—and, again, I hope he takes this in good faith—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Blows! [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Doh make him angry, eh; doh hurt him.”

Dr. A. Nanan: Okay, I would leave that part then. [*Laughter*]

So we have the Learning Resource Centre in Couva; in fact, there is a component of this loan of which the Minister of Planning and development must be aware.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You know I allocated the money for roads.

Dr. A. Nanan: There is a component of the loan in this same section which deals with printing and production material at the Learning Resource Centre in Couva. They are supposed to be supplying science work books to all these schools. It is like a mosaic: everything has its place. We are seeing a haphazard approach, but the Minister of Planning and Development has to ensure that there is a mosaic in that Ministry.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: There is a mosaic.

Dr. A. Nanan: That is the wrong mosaic. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, not only do the libraries have to be upgraded and the science and technology labs have to be in place, you also have another aspect, another exciting arena for the country, in this day and age, which is the magnet school concept; get that going.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That has started; what is wrong with you?

Dr. A. Nanan: The magnet schools are supposed to be in place. You are telling me that and nothing is happening? Tell the Prime Minister that; let him go and open a magnet school; that is great publicity for you. [*Crosstalk*] You do not understand the concept of the magnet school.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: If you understand it, you tell us about it. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I know that the hon. Member has not sought my protection, but certainly I have to protect the Hansard reporter; so, please, try to cool it a bit.

Mr. Sharma: Hinds, magnet, not maggots.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, this is not a debate to score points.

Mr. Imbert: What is it then?

Dr. A. Nanan: I am not scoring points here. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: That is true:

Dr. A. Nanan: Although I would give you zero for your contribution.

This is a debate to benefit the country. I am here to make sure that after this debate, the Minister would get her work done for every single school. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*] Every single school would get computer labs and overhead projectors with large screen monitors. In fact, not only are they supposed to get those things, but there are supposed to be computer labs with 18 to 40 computers in the magnet schools, which you are not aware of. About six of these magnet schools are supposed to be designed with the private sector. I said that before. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: Where did you learn your chemistry? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. A. Nanan: I hope that through all this chaos and confusion, the Prime Minister has his blinkers on, because he needs to hear what I am saying and forget all these asides. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: He needs blinkers to hear you?

Dr. A. Nanan: Forget the rest of the group, Mr. Prime Minister, because this is directed at you.

Mr. Imbert: But blinkers are to see.

Dr. A. Nanan: These schools are supposed to be involved with the private sector. We have a large industrial centre in Point Lisas; they would be working with the private sector; bring in the machinery. Even the marine environment could be part of the school compound. In the magnet school you have the new concept where you bring the industry straight into the school. Other schools would come to visit and you would have cross-referencing, so best practices could develop. We have to see that on the landscape; we have to see the magnet schools.

I heard the Minister of Education say that after Form Five the curriculum is being structured in such a way that you could move straight into the world of work. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: You were a Minister of Education for five years? I now understand why we have so much crime in this country.

Mr. Partap: Ooh! Bad, bad; very unkind.

Dr. A. Nanan: I am speaking to the Prime Minister. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Ramsaran: The best they ever had.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, it is the link now between the industry and the school. Member for Arouca South, the Minister of Education said—[*Interruption*] it is in the *Hansard*, you could check it—that there is a new concept in secondary school, the National Certificate of Secondary Education. You know that is nothing new. That was there in the White Paper under your time; I do not have to explain that to you, so to score points by saying it is something new in the system; it was always there, whether you give it to Form One or Form Three.

The other issue is the technical vocational qualification; a new exam is being introduced by the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC): you move from Form Five to the world of work. I do not know if you could recall that in this particular loan—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You are talking to me now and not the Prime Minister?

Dr. A. Nanan: Yes, you have to drive this component for the Prime Minister to get the work done. [*Laughter*]

You have that particular component, the technical vocational educational training aspect. There was a view by the consultants that we should only have mathematics, science and other subjects for five years, and leave out tech/voc from the school environment; make technical vocational educational training a post-secondary aspect. I do not know if you have changed from operating that particular way.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You all did that.

Dr. A. Nanan: The Minister is now saying that the technical/vocational exam would take place from Forms Three and Five. I guess from the curriculum structure now that you are preparing the students to go, if they want, from Form Five to the world of work or go from Form Six and do technical/vocational training; but all this has a price.

It has been to be structured in such a way that you have the back-up facilities. You cannot just have this thing in a vacuum, so if you are moving to that particular technical aspect you must have certain things. That is why, in this particular loan, they allow you to buy specific computers to enhance this aspect of technical/vocational training. I am sure you are aware of that, Member for Diego Martin East. There is a lot of software you can acquire to assist the student.

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Teaching and learning strategy.

Dr. A. Nanan: The loan makes allowances for that, under the particular component. Not only are you going to give 14 computers to a lab, but you would also have the opportunity to buy specific computers with specific software. I know, Prime Minister, that they tried to impress the Opposition with this large document of replies, but the Ministry of Finance just accepted the Minister of Education's faxed documents. They did not check them.

You are saying in one part of the document that you are supplying the computer specifications. On this particular sheet, all they have is, "Computer equipment, page 22" of another document and "a copy of the specifications is attached", as well as the listing of the 134 public-assisted secondary schools that would be receiving the equipment.

I have a few more things to say, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Valley: You have half an hour.

Dr. A. Nanan: This is incomplete. [*Crosstalk*] I have more things for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Partap: You have more time; go ahead.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: For me or the Prime Minister?

Dr. A. Nanan: I could send my information to the Prime Minister by email.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Do you want my email address too? [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. A. Nanan: Prime Minister, I made a statement in the Finance Committee with respect to the incentives for teachers in rural areas, and the Minister of Planning and Development said that I was wrong. In fact, I saw a reply here that it was already introduced in 2002. There is another aspect though, the housing allowance for teachers. All you have is an incentive allowance of 6 per cent, but there is a requirement that you also consider housing. That was a component I was looking for and did not see.

I want to stay within the document. I want to get to the point for the Member for Diego Martin East, the situation concerning the radar at the airport. [*Crosstalk*] I might come back to education. When I read the document, I asked the question based on what was supplied. The question was really to find out about the radar at the airport. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Dr. A. Nanan: The reply came back and I want to make reference to it. The reply to the question stated that the Redic node and radar data remote sharing equipment were the items of navigation equipment being procured. These are not radar equipment, but they allow access to radar information from other territories. Replacement of the Trinidad radar could take about 18 months, before the required downpayment is made. Is the Government considering replacing the Trinidad radar, because it said, "after the required downpayment is made." Is the Government going to make a down payment on a radar?

I ask that in the context of the fact that we are now in the hurricane season. In fact, we are in the second day of the hurricane season and we have already seen weather patterns changing drastically. This particular link was the Doppler radar that was supposed to be at the weather station in my constituency in Tabaquite at Brasso Venado. We have not heard anything or seen any updates; I do not know if there is going to be any.

Miss Beckles: They are busy building it; we are fixing the road too.

Mr. Imbert: Penny, do not encourage him.

Dr. A. Nanan: I asked that because I heard that the Organization for Disaster Preparedness and Management is ready. Ready for what, a flood? What is it ready for?

Mr. Imbert: They are ready for you. It is ready for all disasters.

Dr. A. Nanan: We have to be very careful. I urge the Prime Minister that building the stadium in Torouba for the tsunami is all well and good.

Mr. Manning: For the tsunami?

Dr. A. Nanan: You said the tsunami relief centre in Torouba. [*Laughter*] Just out of curiosity, I have been tracking that particular volcano off Grenada and there is some activity. I do not know if the Prime Minister has foresight, but there is some activity there.

Mr. Manning: There is activity off Grenada?

Dr. A. Nanan: Yes; you actually saw recently very disturbing shifts in the Gulf of Paria. In fact, the water there was looking like the Bocas, at some point in time, so we have to be concerned.

Mr. Imbert: Was it a tsunami?

Dr. A. Nanan: You can make a joke about it, but we have to be concerned about any changes in the currents in the Gulf of Paria. That is one aspect of it.

Mr. Hinds: Is there anything we can do to change or stop it?

Mr. Imbert: In conclusion, therefore—

Dr. A. Nanan: The radar to be put in Brasso Venado is behind schedule once again.

Miss Beckles: They are going good.

Dr. A. Nanan: I do not know if I would be around when that radar is finished in Brasso Venado.

Miss Beckles: You are not going back as a candidate? I would put in a good word for you. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. A. Nanan: I do not mean as a candidate. I do not know if I would be alive when that particular radar comes on stream, but it is important. If the Organization for Disaster Preparedness and Management has to be totally prepared, they are operating blindly.

Miss Beckles: I agree with that.

Dr. A. Nanan: They have to be able to utilize radar detection, especially in the hurricane season. I just wanted to make that point with respect to the lack of a radar, because from time to time the Metrological Division says that it is going to buy parts for the old radar. I want the Minister to be aware that is a ploy they always use, because they do not want to buy a radar. They are always going to buy parts. Every time they buy parts for the radar and they install them, they have to buy more parts because it does not work. So rather than throw money away like that, they should look toward the replacement of the radar.

Mr. Speaker, before I wind up, I want to deal with one more matter.

Miss Beckles: He looked at you again.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: “Is me again.”

Dr. A. Nanan: The Ministry of Tourism.

Miss Beckles: That is his pet topic.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Planning and Development would not take an answer like what I got here. On page 13 I asked about the number of strategic plans the Ministry prepared over the past four years. I do not know who was taking notes:

“The status of the Inter-American Development Bank loan granted for institutional strengthening at the Ministry...”

I am sure that the Minister would recognize that I did not ask that question here. I asked that question under the education component, so it was wrong there. I asked about the Ministry of Tourism and here is the reply:

“Prior to September 2004, the Ministry of Tourism was formerly the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.”

What does that have to do with it?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They just wanted to be specific.

Dr. A. Nanan: “From September 2004 to date the Ministry of Tourism has not been able to finalize its strategic plan. However, they are presently working on such a plan which is expected to be completed by the end of July 2006.”
[*Crosstalk*]

The Minister of Planning and Development has to drive this, because the IDB loan was driving the community tourism that the Member for Fyzabad asked about. I was trying to find out whether the loan was renegotiated. Did it come to an end? Is community tourism going to be continued with respect to that IDB loan?

Mr. Speaker, I made some observations—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Especially to the Minister of Planning and Development.

Dr. A. Nanan:—with respect to the document before us, the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill. I also made some specific statements with regard to the failure of the Ministry of Education and the role the Minister of Planning and Development has to play in that particular Ministry.

I thank you.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank all those who contributed to the debate. [Interruption]

Mr. Sharma: We are supporting you; no need to respond.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: The contributions would improve the process and we would certainly look at them. As soon as this exercise is completed, the Government goes into looking at its new budget and during that time and instance the compendium of reports would be available, in the context of what has been done, what has not been done, how the money has been spent and so forth. Insofar as the two key issues coming out of the discussion were concerned, one had to do with our social agenda and the other had to do with our economic performance. Quite frankly, those are matters that over the last five years or so we have been focussing on.

It seems that we need to do a little more in communicating what we have done and we need to deal with the question of how the individuals in society have benefited. One of the problems is that as an individual today, we live in a world that is not real, because, to a very large extent, the Government has done so much to assist individuals, that there is a disconnect with reality. Let us take, for instance, the price of oil.

The Government is spending and continues to spend today sufficient of our resources so that the common man, the poor man, does not have to feel the impact of a \$70 price of oil. If you translate that into real terms, our price of petroleum today is based on a before \$25 price of oil. If you translate that in real terms, the cost of petroleum at the pump should be four times what it is now. Understand what that is going to do, as it relates to the economy; that is one issue.

The Government is dealing with that in a particular way and that is impacting. Let us look at the question of education. What is the Government doing as it relates to the educational agenda? What is it doing to those who cannot afford? Translate that as well and you have another benefit available. What is the Government doing in the context of health? When you take all those things together and not look at them separately and try to pick holes in them on an individual basis, you really see the totality of what the Government has done. What we have not done enough of is boast about it; we really have not.

Mr. Sharma: You need to fight a seat.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: You stay with that.

Hon. Member: Fyzabad.

Mr. Imbert: We will send him to Tabaquite.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: One of the things we have been able to do and we apologize for doing it, is that we took the economy we inherited and grew it.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The oil price went up.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: No, no, no; we grew it, because we did some things deliberately. We had a position when we got into government where the price of oil was going higher, but the Government was receiving less revenue. The reason for that was because the regime we met in place did not extract the best benefits for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We spent a number of years and fixed that and if today we have been able to achieve revenues at a rate and at a level, it is because of those measures. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They do not understand what you just said. [*Crosstalk*] You in particular do not understand what he just said.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: At the time that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was discussed and the IMF talked about expenditure, we went through a painful process of saying to them that we were not talking about spending all that money, because our parliamentary systems that we have currently lock us into a particular situation. It locks us into a situation which says that if we do not do this now, come July 15, this country closes down. Because, unfortunately, when you have a project and you have worked on it and you get to a stage where you have a contract and you need to, basically, get it approved, you go to the Central Tenders Board and it says, "Can I get confirmation of funds, please?"

Mr. Sharma: If you were there Wednesday, all this would have been answered and you would have saved time.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: They did not invite me. [*Crosstalk*] When you do not have a confirmation of funds, you lose the opportunity to do anything July, August, September, until such time that the budget is approved again. We saw that last year. Last year it worked; we were able to do exactly what we did: Give the funds to the ministries and our rate of implementation improved such that we got a lot of things done, but we were also able to show a surplus after putting aside money for saving.

The other issue is that when you look at expenditure, we have savings inside there, but the way our system is, it treats with it as expenditure. I also have the difficulty, from time to time, of trying to reconcile the legislative requirement, the

parliamentary requirement, with the real world. In the requirement for example, we do not need to talk about where revenue is coming from, all that is required is for us to talk about certain heads of expenditure; not even those that are direct charges. But we do not do that; we try to give a full picture and we try to explain all the bits and pieces.

Mr. Sharma: The problem is a lack of consultation.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: We are going to be producing very shortly the major Government achievements. You would recall that when we came into government we identified exactly what our priorities were going to be. We did two things: we said that these were our priorities and we said that we wanted to get to a particular stage in a particular time frame. For those who malign Vision 2020, it is really about getting Trinidad and Tobago to a stage where, in the shortest possible time, our citizens can believe, on balance, that there is no difference between circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago and that of a developed country. That would be in terms of quality of service and opportunities. If you actually look at where we are going and what we are doing, you would see the evolution of some of the plans we have.

Infrastructure, for example, is a consequence of putting individuals in a position to deliver a quality service. When that happens, you can, in fact, bring all your activities into one area and then start to translate to the kind of state you want. A lot of the things we are doing now are based on world-class standards. Everything we do now, the test of whether it is something that we should spend money on, is asking: Where is it going to get us in the context of this vision that we have? *[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: Beg to move and let us retire to the tearoom. It is going good. *[Laughter]*

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: There is a plan. We are following the plan. Yes, sometimes we need to talk to you more, but in a lot of instances the environment does not allow you to hear what we are saying. Everything I have said this evening, in the context of how and why we do things, has not made any impact at all on the contributions that have been made. What has, in fact, happened is that we have looked at specific areas.

You could always find areas that you can hold out as being areas of some kind of issue. But on balance, if you look at what the Government has done, if you look at what the Government is seeking to do, really and truly, at the end of it all, all of us, this side at least, intends to stay and live in this country. To the extent

that we intend to do that, we intend to make it a better place, so that when those who come after us inherit this town, it is something we can be justly proud of, the same way that we were proud of some of the things we inherited.

We are going to continue to do what we said we would do, that is, expand the economy, increase revenue, create more opportunities, get on with our implementation, look at the social services and provide the level of security that people have come to expect. [*Crosstalk*]

The one issue for me that we have to address collectively is the question of dialogue. In a lot of instances we create some of the difficulties that we have, because we set the tone in the way we deliberate. We set the done tone in the way we communicate.

Mr. Partap: Arrogance!

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Sometimes in communicating, we do not understand the messages we are sending and when people accept them, we have a problem with that. Mr. Speaker, at the end of it all, we will succeed. At the end of it all, we will be stronger and the process we are going through now is simply part of the greater experience and part of the learning that would make us a good democracy.

With those few words, and by your leave, I beg to move.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Third Report of the 2005/2006 Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, on proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of the 2006 appropriation.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) BILL

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill):
Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum of the issue which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2006, be now read a second time.

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

Question proposed.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Mr. Speaker, I would be very brief. I wanted to quickly comment on the statement made by the hon. Prime Minister in the House earlier, as part of his contribution as it relates to the matter in front of us.

I am sure all Members have that statement, but I think in it the Prime Minister indicated what he thought was happening in this country. If I could cause you to look at page 1 of the statement:

“Throughout human history the management of diversity has always been a great challenge for Government and society.”

I raise this in the context of the request for the \$4 billion and to suggest to the hon. Prime Minister that one of the challenges we face on both sides of this House and citizens across Trinidad and Tobago is this feeling of being part of what obtains in the country.

As I listened to the closing remarks of the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, I think he attempted to say that there is a communication problem, especially with us here in the Opposition. Moneys are approved by the Parliament, but we are not part of it through no fault of ours. For instance, there is absolutely no consultation and one would say that, perhaps, that is what the Westminster system causes. We also have the power to change that.

Mr. Manning: Local government reform is the beginning of that.

Mr. C. Sharma: That may be so, but until that time moneys have to be spent. We could look at the areas in which we could have small inputs. For instance, we build different things, community centres, pan theatres, whatever, there must be some role for the elected representatives. Under your watch is the best time to start it; that would lend to the constitutional reform you talk about. As it is now, you have 36 Members of Parliament sitting here and all of us on this side are largely useless, no fault of ours. Representation comes to our office on a daily basis. We both have been in Opposition and you would know the challenges that we face. [*Crosstalk*]

Oh God, “doh spoil a good ting nuh,” please; let us be Christian today.

Mr. Speaker: Please, speak to me.

Mr. C. Sharma: I want to make the point that at the end of the day we all have to add value. I agree with my friend from Chaguanas, whom I have not agreed with for a very long time. I agree with the closing comments of the hon. Minister, because normally we do not speak at this time; when a Bill is moved, we just close. But I was moved, because I felt some Christian values coming out of the Government since this morning when the Prime Minister spoke. I felt that there was a desire to reach out and I want to help him reach out. [*Desk thumping*] In doing that, all of us would benefit.

Finance Bill
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, June 02, 2006

Prime Minister, I represent one of the most diverse constituencies in this whole country, Fyzabad. It is almost 50/50 with the rainbow representation of the country. For the PNM or UNC to win, they both have to get votes from the other side. The short point is that there is a real reflection of Trinidad and Tobago in the constituency of Fyzabad. I am sure there are other similar constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago.

There is a cry out there for us to save our souls. The death of those children recently has to be a wake-up call; including the murders we have been seeing and all those other things. This is not a blame game; it is too late to blame. Now is the time to come together. I give the commitment that all of us are willing to come together to solve the problems in this country.

In the first instance, we are individuals. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. C. Sharma: We are parents; we are husbands, spouses. At the end of the day, we are family. There is too much hurt and crime out there. The budget must find meaningful ways of reducing that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. C. Sharma: Here is an open invitation to involve all 36 Members of Parliament. When you sit there, Prime Minister, you are the head of 36 Members of Parliament, whether we like it or not. You are the Prime Minister of this country; I cannot change that.

Mr. Narine: For a long, long time.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Prime Minister of the country represents all of Trinidad and Tobago. You are blessed to have the opportunity to have tremendous wealth; not just financial wealth, but the intelligence of the society today is much more than it was a few years ago. The mix in the society is much greater than it was years ago. There is no Indian or African community in this country anymore; perhaps that obtained a few years ago.

I would close, Mr. Speaker, with the appeal: Let us do it together in this round. Let us start with this \$4 billion and whatever comes after.

Thank you.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. Speaker, whatever we may think, those are the sentiments that need to be expressed on an ongoing basis. We need to put some words and actions to those sentiments. On that note, I beg to move.

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Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, June 9, 2006 at 1.30 p.m.

I inform Members that the Government plans to complete the debate on the Local Government Motion which was in progress on May 12, 2006, followed by Bill No. 3 on today's Order Paper, the Fair Trading Bill.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.13 p.m.