

*Leave of Absence**Friday, September 08, 2006***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, September 08, 2006*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Member for Princes Town (Mr. Subhas Panday) requesting leave of absence for the period September 08 to November 03, 2006. I have also received, from the Member for Siparia (Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar), a request for leave of absence for the period September 08 to September 15, 2006. The leave which these Members have requested is granted.

PAPER LAID

Report on a visit of a United Kingdom Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Branch Delegation to Trinidad and Tobago for the period May 27 to June 03, 2006. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**(Presentation)**

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the Fourth 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 of the 2006 appropriation.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, the Government came prepared to answer seven questions on the Order Paper, but it appears that some Members opposite are otherwise engaged. In view of the absence of some Members, the Government will be answering questions Nos. 30 and 38 today.

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (Caroni Central): Mr. Speaker, I was just going to say that in the absence of the Members for St. Augustine, Princes Town and Nariva, we are asking for a deferral of their questions for one week.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Point Fortin Market
(Leaking Roof)**

24. Could the hon. Minister of Local Government indicate:

- (a) whether the Ministry of Local Government is aware of the leaking roof at the Point Fortin Market?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister inform this House when the roof would be repaired in order to bring relief to vendors and customers especially during the rainy season? [*Mr. W. Dookeran*]

**Residents of Oropune and Piarco
(Compensation of)**

25. Could the hon. Minister of Planning and Development indicate when residents of Oropune, Piarco would be compensated for their property acquired for the development of the Piarco International Airport? [*Mr. W. Dookeran*]

**Coastal Erosion
(Point Fortin to Icacos)**

26. Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport indicate:

- (a) whether the Ministry of Works and Transport is aware of coastal erosion taking place in the south western peninsula which is threatening homes from Point Fortin to Icacos?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister inform this House of the plans to protect the south western coastline and the expected starting date for implementation? [*Mr. W. Dookeran*]

**Brian Lara Stadium
(Status of)**

31. With regard to the Brian Lara Stadium, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs advise:

- (i) the status of work being conducted;
- (ii) the expected completion date; and
- (iii) the cost overruns to date?

Could the Minister state what the stadium would be used for in relation to Cricket World Cup 2007? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

Incentives for Cricket Team

32. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs advise what incentives have been given or would be given to our cricket team for winning the regional competition for the first time in 23 years? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**Prisoners on Remand
(Non-Attendance at Courts)**

37. Could the hon. Attorney General indicate:

- (a) whether he is aware that prisoners on remand are usually not brought before Magistrates in various courts at the Magistracy, San Fernando before 11.00 a.m. on a daily basis;
- (b) whether he is aware that there is a severe shortage of police personnel at the holding bay “cell block” at the Magistracy, San Fernando;
- (c) whether this shortage of police personnel has resulted in prisoners not being conveyed to the various Courts on time which has resulted in a chronic delay in the administration of justice; and
- (d) what steps, if any, are being taken to alleviate these problems? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

Flooding at Spring Village and Surrounding Areas

27. Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport indicate:

- (a) whether the Ministry of Works and Transport is aware of the perennial flooding affecting the residents of Spring Village, Dookiesingh Street, Freeman Road and other surrounding areas in the St. Augustine Constituency due to the blockage and poor conditions of the Blackman Ravine?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister inform this House of the present and future plans being undertaken by the Ministry to improve the condition of the ravine? [*Mr. W. Dookeran*]

**Somai, Cap-de-Ville
(Dilapidated Bridge)**

28. Could the hon. Minister of Local Government indicate:

- (a) whether the Ministry of Local Government is aware of the dilapidated bridge at Somai, Cap-de-Ville; and

- (b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister inform this House when the bridge would be reconstructed? [*Mr. W. Dookeran*]

**Caroni River
(Temporary Bridge along Southern Main Road)**

29. Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport indicate:

- (a) whether the Ministry of Works and Transport is aware that the bridge over the Caroni River along the Southern Main Road was due to be constructed since the 1980s and to date has not been constructed and that the temporary bridge over the river is cause for grave concern for the safety of commuters?
- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative could the Minister inform this House if there are plans to construct a new bridge? [*Mr. W. Dookeran*]

Children's Authority

33. Could the hon. Minister of Social Development indicate when the Children's Authority would become functional? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**Remand Home for Young Male Offenders
(Aripo)**

34. Could the hon. Minister of Social Development indicate the status of the remand home for young male offenders at Aripo? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**CEPEP Contracts Awarded
(Information Governing)**

43. Could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment inform this House:

- (a) whether any employees of the State, state enterprises and/or state agencies have been awarded CEPEP contracts;
- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister provide this House with the names of such contractor/contractors; and
- (c) what is the policy used in the award of CEPEP contracts? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

Ownership of former Caroni (1975) Limited Lands

45. With respect to lands formerly owned by Caroni (1975) Limited situated between the western side of the Solomon Hochoy Highway and the former Montserrat Section Office, Couva Main Road, Preysal Flyover, could the Hon. Minister of Finance indicate to this House:

- (a) who is the present occupier of the lands;
- (b) whether the occupier has purchased the said lands or has a lease for the lands;
- (c) whether permission was given to occupy the lands without its being purchased or leased;
- (d) if permission was not given to the occupier to occupy the said lands, whether the Estate Management Development Company has taken steps to remove the trespasser; and
- (e) if the lands were leased, what are the terms of the lease? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Early Childhood Care and Education Centres
(Chaguanas)**

40. Could the hon. Minister of Education indicate whether there are plans to construct Early Childhood Care and Education Centres in the Constituency of Chaguanas? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**Munroe Road Hindu School
(Status of Construction)**

41. Could the hon. Minister of Education inform this House of the status of construction of the Munroe Road Hindu School? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

Smart Card Programme

48. With regard to the Smart Card Programme, could the hon. Minister of Social Development explain to this honourable House:

- (i) how the Smart Card System works;
- (ii) how this system would replace the Share Programme; and
- (iii) the role of the non-governmental organizations which support the Share Programme? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**Denominational/Religious Construction Companies
(Eligibility to tender)**

49. Could the hon. Minister of Education advise whether construction companies owned by or otherwise affiliated to denominational/religious organizations are eligible to tender for contracts to build, repair or renovate schools that fall under their respective jurisdictions? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

**Education Facilities Company Limited
(Board Members' Conflicting Service)**

- 50.** (a) Is the hon. Minister of Education aware whether any member of the board of the Education Facilities Company Limited also serves as a director of any construction company that has tendered for and has been awarded contracts to construct or renovate schools;
- (b) If the Ministry is so aware could the Minister further advise what steps are being taken to avoid such conflict of interests? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

**Denominational Boards of Education
(Adjustment of Electricity Bills Grant)**

- 51.** (a) Could the hon. Minister of Education advise whether there has been any decision to adjust the grant provided to denominational boards of education for the payment of electricity bills in order to absorb the increase in electricity rates?
- (b) If such a decision has been taken, could the Minister inform this House:
- (i) when would the increase in the grant take effect; and
- (ii) would the increase be retroactive to the date that electricity rates were increased? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation
(Disbursement of Funds)**

30. Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:

Could the Minister indicate the amount of money disbursed to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation (TTFF) in relation to World Cup 2006?

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Roger Boynes): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Over the period January 2005 to February 2006, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, provided financial assistance in the sum of \$13,951,801.19 to support football development initiatives from the community level through the professional leagues in preparation for participation at international competitive level, which includes World Cup. This included assistance to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation (TTFF), the Trinidad and Tobago Professional League, the Trinidad and Tobago Women's Football Association and the Stern John Skills Foundation.

Of this amount, the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation received the sum of \$10,174,426.19 to assist in the actual preparation of our senior team for FIFA World Cup 2006. Upon qualifying for the World Cup 2006, the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation was provided with financial assistance in the sum of \$31,209,123.70 to meet its obligation as it related to World Cup. This amount comprised the sum of \$20,787,731.50 from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, representing payment of the bonuses to players and technical staff, both local and foreign, for the qualifying round and salaries and stipends for technical staff, both local and foreign, for the period January to June 2006; \$10,421,392.20 from other government agencies, which included TSTT, National Gas Company, National Lotteries Control Board and Petrotrin.

Mr. Speaker, you will agree that the team proved to be worthy ambassadors of Trinidad and Tobago while in Germany. Their presence and performance under pressure during the World Cup 2006 created an opportunity to market Trinidad and Tobago on the international stage; not only in the sphere of sport, but also in the spheres of trade and culture. The positive impact on the international stage profiled Trinidad and Tobago as the place to be.

The team scored five goals for Trinidad and Tobago:

- it made the name of Trinidad and Tobago known throughout the world;
- it showed that the size of the country should not be an impediment to the attainment of excellence in human endeavour;
- it made room for the cultural expression of Trinidad and Tobago on the international stage;

- it created the environment for economic growth by exposing the opportunities available in Trinidad and Tobago to the international business community; and
- it united this diverse society in a common sense.

In honour of the team's outstanding performance against Sweden, England and Paraguay in the first round World Cup matches in Germany, and because of the five goals I just mentioned, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago disbursed a total of \$32 million to reward the players and technical team. This included:

- the sum of \$1 million in units from the Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust Corporation and \$250,000 in cash for the captain;
- the sum of \$750,000 in units from the Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust Corporation and \$250,000 in cash to 23 members of the team;
- the sum of \$200,000 in units from the Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust Corporation and \$50,000 in cash to 14 players who were part of the squad, but not selected for Germany;
- the sum of \$1 million in cash to the national coach;
- the sum of \$250,000 in cash to three assistant coaches;
- the sum of \$250,000 in cash to nine members of the technical staff; and
- the sum of \$250,000 in cash with respect to the nutritionist.

In August 2006, Cabinet also agreed to provide financial assistance to the TTFB in the sum of \$1 million—which said sum was disbursed—towards the hosting of the Caribbean Football Union Youth Cup, which was held in Trinidad and Tobago over the period August 14 to 27, 2006, as we prepare our team for World Cup 2010.

The total sum disbursed in respect of football development and the FIFA 2006 World Cup, as we prepare our team for 2010, is \$78,160,925.89.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, with due respect, has the Government taken over the running of TTFB and what role does TTFB have now in the development of football?

Hon. R. Boynes: Mr. Speaker, I know that is a different question entirely, but permit me to answer. The Government has not taken over TTF. It is a national sporting organization and it has a certain amount of autonomy as every national sporting organization enjoys. If we interfere with TTF in any way, we run the risk of having a ban by FIFA. So we work with them as a partner, as we do with all our national sporting organizations.

With respect to the plans we have for football, we have a football development plan and we are also in the process of preparing a budget for the support of our venture to ensure that we reach World Cup in 2010. We do have a football development plan that has been talked about throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Ramnath: That is not what he wants to hear.

Mr. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, that is not what I really wanted to hear. The Minister talked about “we” doing this and that. The question I asked is: What is the role of the TTF as far as raising their own funds is concerned? When I was there, it used to be partnership and not total sponsorship.

Mr. Speaker: I should not have allowed you to answer that question in the first place. Do you have another supplemental?

Mr. Ramsaran: No.

Mr. Speaker: I am ruling it out of order. It is a new question.

Sanitary Facilities (Caroni and Felicity Cremation Sites)

38. Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (Chaguanas) asked the hon. Minister of Local Government:

Could the Minister inform this House whether the Ministry has plans to construct proper sanitary facilities at:

- (i) the Caroni Cremation Site, Caroni Savannah Road, Caroni; and
- (ii) the Felicity Cremation Site, Cunupia River, Felicity, Chaguanas?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, in 2004, Cabinet agreed to the development of a policy framework and a programme of action with respect to all cremation sites. In this context, the Ministry of Local Government proposes to develop and upgrade all existing cremation sites, inclusive of Caroni and Felicity, in accordance with the policy.

Oral Answers to Questions
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, September 08 2006

Notwithstanding this, the municipal corporations with responsibility for the Caroni cremation site and the Felicity cremation site, namely the Chaguanas Borough Corporation and the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, have advised that work will commence on the development and upgrade of these facilities in fiscal 2007.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL

Bill to provide for the supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2006 of the sum of the issue 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 be taken later in the proceedings. [*Hon. C. Enill*]

Question put and agreed to.

CARIBBEAN COURT OF JUSTICE TRUST FUND BILL

Senate Amendments

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That the Senate amendment to the Caribbean Court of Justice Trust Fund Bill listed in appendix II be now considered.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 7.

Senate amendment read as follows:

Delete subclause (3) and substitute the following:

- (3) Any person who contravenes subsection (1) commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of two thousand dollars and to imprisonment for twelve months.

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

Question proposed.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, if Members examine the amendment, they will see that it is merely a drafting change, cleaning up the language in clause 7(3).

For the benefit of Members, the original clause 7(3) was:

“Any person who contravenes subsection (1) commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of one thousand dollars or to imprisonment for twelve months or to both such fine and imprisonment.”

In the other place, the view was that this was a bit confusing and it has now been cleaned up to read:

- (3) Any person who contravenes subsection (1) commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of two thousand dollars and to imprisonment for twelve months.

They have deleted the words “or to both such fine and imprisonment”. That was redundant. Under the Interpretation Act, when you have a fine and a custodial sentence, it is subject to judicial discretion and the judge or magistrate could either impose a fine, a jail term or both. It was superfluous and this is just a drafting change to clean up the language.

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,

Be it Resolved that this House adopt the Fourth 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 of the 2006 appropriation.

The Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on September 06, 2006 and agreed to the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$3,397,169,781 or \$3.3 billion for the purpose of further increasing the allocation to the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund and the Infrastructure Development Fund.

The Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund was established in 2000 to sustain public expenditure capacity through periods of revenue downturns stemming from declines in oil and gas prices, and revenue decline from the depletion of these non-renewable resources.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[SEN THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, September 08 2006

In the 2006 budget statement presented to this honourable House on September 28, 2005, the Minister of Finance indicated that Government's expenditure programme for fiscal 2006 was based on an oil-planning price of US \$35 per barrel and a netback gas price of US \$3.75 per MMBTU. He also informed this House that the revenue estimates for fiscal 2006 were based on an oil price of US \$45 per barrel and a netback gas price of US \$3.75 per MMBTU.

A government must make choices between investing in the future and spending today to ensure that our citizens enjoy a better quality standard of living. After all, Mr. Speaker, that is what Vision 2020 is about. The Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund provides for 60 per cent of the surplus revenue derived from the difference between the revenue estimated based on an oil-planning price of US \$35 and a netback gas price of US \$3.75 per MMBTU and that projected, based on an oil-planning price of US \$45 per barrel and a netback gas price of US \$3.75 per MMBTU. The surplus revenue estimated on the basis of these assumptions amounted to \$1.862 billion.

The Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 2006, which was assented to on June 08, 2006, to transfer an additional \$600 million into the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund, brought the total sum approved for transfer to the Fund in fiscal 2006, at that time, to \$2.462 billion.

Based on recent estimates of revenue prepared by the Budget Division, Ministry of Finance, the total oil revenue estimated for 2006 is projected to be approximately \$3.1 billion above the amount estimated based on the US \$35 per barrel price. Based on these new estimates, the Government is now asking this House to authorize yet a further deposit of \$697,169,781 into the Fund, bringing the total sum to be deposited into the Fund for fiscal 2006 to \$3,159,980,552 or \$3.1 billion.

The Government is doing this pursuant to our objective of developing this society and ensuring that we save for a rainy day. The Government is indicating to this Parliament that it proposes to place the full amount or 100 per cent of surplus oil and gas revenues into this Fund.

In 2000, the balance of this Fund stood at \$415 million. In 2001, a further \$600,000 was deposited. This Fund, in 2001, stood at \$1.1 billion. In 2003, this Government transferred \$497.4 to the Fund—half a billion; in 2004, \$1.26 billion; in 2005, \$2.59 billion and we are here today, in 2006, to transfer \$3.1 billion to this Fund. At the end of 2006, therefore, the balance of this Fund will be \$8,528,980,940—savings for a rainy day and for our future. That is \$8.5 billion,

Mr. Speaker. By the end of the 2006 fiscal year, the balance in the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund—this is not the deposit now, but the balance—will increase to \$8,644,571,812.

Mr. Speaker, let me also indicate that the legislation governing this Fund will be before this Parliament before year end. This legislation will provide for:

- the Establishment and purpose of the Fund;
- the appointment, tenure and remuneration of the board;
- meetings and quorum;
- termination of appointments;
- publication of name and members in the *Gazette*;
- functions of the board;
- delegations to an investment entity;
- resources of the Fund;
- the financial investment portfolio;
- deposits to the Fund;
- allocation of annual deposits to the Fund;
- withdrawals from the Fund;
- Fund to be a public account;
- confidentiality issues;
- disclosure of interest;
- reporting to the Parliament; and
- a review mechanism.

This is all embodied in the legislation that we will bring.

Additionally, today, the approval of Parliament is also being sought for the appropriation of additional resources for transfer from the Consolidated Fund to the Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF). The IDF was established by Legal Notice No. 347 of December 29, 1997, under section 43(2) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01 to finance wholly or partially, certain capital projects

under the Government's capital programme. In this regard, the documents that were submitted in response to the questions raised in Finance Committee, especially on the IDF, are comprehensive and detailed.

Operationally, the IDF is the mechanism used, in the main, to finance projects being implemented by existing and newly established special-purpose state entities to execute projects assigned to them by ministries, the Tobago House of Assembly and other state agencies. Importantly, moneys are only utilized in this Fund by the approval of the Parliament. The Government, therefore, proposes to transfer \$5,750 million to the IDF for the year 2006.

Mr. Speaker, in the 2006 budget, the sum of \$2.300 billion was appropriated for transfer into the IDF to undertake a programme of capital projects of an equal sum. The Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Act No. 11 of 2006 authorized the deposit of an additional sum of \$750 million, which brought the total sum deposited into the Fund in fiscal 2006, to \$3.050 billion. The Government now proposes a further sum of \$2.700 billion to be appropriated for deposit into the IDF, which will bring the total sum deposited into the Fund in 2006 to \$5.750 billion.

This Government will continue to implement fiscal policy that balances growth with investment and savings for the benefit of all citizens. We will continue to pursue policies that benefit the vulnerable in our society, the working class, the business community, the unions and, specifically, those in our society who are unable on their own to cope.

This Government is committed to the prudent management of the people's resources. In this regard, when the two transactions for which the approval of this honourable House is being sought are considered, the fiscal account is estimated to register an overall surplus of \$580.1 million.

The revised estimate of revenue for fiscal 2006 is \$38,687.7 million. This can be broken down as follows:

- Revenue collected for the period, \$38,687.7 million;
- Amount to be transferred to the Stabilization Fund, \$3,159.9

This means that available revenue to the Government is calculated at \$35,527.8 million. With a surplus of \$580.1 million, the total amount allocated for expenditure during this year was \$34,947.7 million.

The expenditure of \$34,947.7 million is made up as follows:

• Personnel Expenditure	\$5.1 billion
• Goods and Services	\$3.6 billion
• Minor Equipment Purchase	\$223 million
• Transfer and Subsidies	\$13.6 billion
• Statutory Bodies	\$3.8 billion
• Debt servicing less capital repayments	\$2.4 billion
• Capital Programmes	\$5.2 billion
• GATE	\$250 million
• Unemployment Fund	\$344 million

For purposes of clarity, it should be noted that both transfers will be recorded as expenditure from the Consolidated Fund, as required by the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01 and, therefore, requires that Parliament give approval by way of a supplementary appropriation.

2.00 p.m.

However, in the overall context of Government expenditure, they do not represent additional expenditure, but merely the transfer of funds from the Consolidated Fund to other funds, that is, the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund and the Infrastructure Development Fund.

The exercise today is simply to ensure that we save more and that we transfer to the fund that we use for infrastructure development, an amount that we in the Parliament have already approved and allocated. Based on the resources that are currently available, we are simply doing this appropriation.

With those words, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Gerald Yetming (*St. Joseph*): Mr. Speaker, this Bill, on the surface, is a very simple Bill, but I would have thought that—and I am not too sure whether subsequent speakers will deal with it—in the context of the Infrastructure Development Fund, where a large sum of money is being deposited, that is a simple issue. In the papers we had, we were told that the original allocation from the Infrastructure Development Fund to the Public Sector Investment Programme

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. YETMING]

Friday, September 08 2006

(PSIP) was \$2.3 billion and the intention is that by the end of the year, something to the tune of approximately \$3 billion will be spent.

We asked, at the committee level, for particulars. Today, when I walked in I received the information that I sought, which is the details of the Infrastructure Development Fund, estimates for 2007, giving the 2006 figure, which we knew, and which we debated in the budget debate. This amounted to \$2.3 billion and we are now given the revised figure of \$3.2 billion and we are now given the particulars of where the variances are by Ministry.

Surely, in coming to the Parliament for the supplementary appropriation, we ought to have been provided, as is done when they come for supplementary appropriation to Ministries. At the Finance Committee, we are given the details of what the additional amounts are and the purposes for which they are intended. It is only when we asked for the information at the Finance Committee we are provided with it as we come in today to engage in a debate. Quite frankly, I have not had the time to review the variances between the 2006 estimate, with the total of \$2.3 billion, to the revised expenditure of \$3.2 billion. It is significant because this is not a small sum of money; this is \$0.9 billion.

During the debate, later on in my contribution, I would touch some more on the Infrastructure Development Fund and make the point simply that I would expect that in the future, when there are increases in the drawdown from the Infrastructure Development Fund, outside of what is approved by Parliament, we would be provided with the particulars and not just come with one figure and expect us to say yes without the details.

This Bill has two parts: one is to put approximately \$700 million into the Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund. Mr. Speaker, this Interim Revenue Stabilization Fund has been around, as the Minister mentioned, since 2000. It was a creature of the government of the day. I remember the Leader of the Opposition at the time, the current Prime Minister, making the statement then that putting aside moneys into a stabilization fund is not what he would have done and that the moneys should have been used for infrastructure. Anytime we raised the question of the fact that the oil and gas resources were a depleting asset, he sought to reassure us and the national community that because of the complex geology, as he put it, and maybe because of the information that he has that we do not, we ought not to be too concerned about the depleting asset talk that we have been bandying and, that, therefore, why are we so concerned about a Revenue Stabilization Fund. Then he moved on to saying: "Well we will think about it and

we will review it.” A couple of years later, on Friday, March 04, 2005 the Prime Minister made a statement to Parliament. In that statement he made he spoke about the establishment of the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. He indicated that the Cabinet had agreed to the underlying principles behind the fund. For the first time that I could recall, he said:

“We recognize that our petroleum and gas resources are not unlimited and inevitably those resources could be depleted.”

He used that as the basis for his announcement of the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. He spoke, at the time, of the Government providing the right balance—I think the Member, in piloting the Bill, made reference to that today—between those expenditures required to deliver economic growth and social services and those expenditures required to support a sound and sustainable economy over the medium term.

He went on further to talk about two major issues: one was the question of how much oil and gas income should be spent on the present generation and how much should be saved for future generations. The second was related to the uncertainty of the revenue flows from the oil and gas and how government adjusts its spending to cushion the domestic economy from variations in oil revenue due to sharp and unpredictable variations in oil prices. This is where he laid the foundation for the Heritage Fund on one hand and the Stabilization Fund on the other. I thought that having made his official announcement in Parliament in 2005, we had come a long way from 2001, when the view was that we should spend the money.

I recall when we sought to argue for the continuation of the Fund and tried to justify it with all the reasons for them, the Prime Minister, I believe across the floor, when one of the points we made was that the International Monetary Fund, in its Article IV consultation reports, every year, from 2000, commended the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for the creation of the fund and kept giving advice on how the fund should be legislated. It is because of those funds that some of the ratings that the country has received, whether it is Moody’s or whoever, one reason for which has been as a result of the Government’s policy position and the deposits to the fund. We have come a long way.

What I am little concerned about is the question of the legislation. We are told by the Minister that the legislation will come before us before the end of this year and as a result of which, in the debate today, I will try to limit it to the fund itself

without getting into how the fund should function because that debate will clearly take place before the end of the year.

But in fairness to the Government, notwithstanding the fact that they had been expressing concern, or a different view on the whole question of funds: Stabilization, Heritage or otherwise, they have continued to make deposits to the fund. They have continued to use, as the benchmark, I think, the formula that we had left behind, by and large.

I would quote some numbers, relative to the Government's deposits to the fund over the years, to give an indication of how the fund has developed. I will do so, if only to alert the Minister that in the legislation that should come before us, the manner in which the moneys are computed for depositing into the fund, will be a very critical issue. In fact, that might probably be the most contentious issue in that piece of legislation, if it might turn out to be.

In 2000, the Government put \$450 million into the Fund, the tax revenue from oil companies that year was \$2.4 billion and the \$415 million deposited into the fund worked out to be of 17 per cent of tax revenue. In other words, the tax revenue from oil companies in 2000, of \$2.4 billion, 17 per cent of it was put into the fund. In that year, the total tax and non-tax revenue, which does not include capital receipts or financing, was \$12.153 billion, which works out to be 3.41 per cent, when we consider the \$415 million deposit.

In 2001, \$600 million went into the fund and that computed to be 21.2 per cent of the tax revenue from oil companies, which was \$2.8 billion and 4.25 per cent of the \$14 billion collected from tax and non-tax revenue.

In 2002, no money went into the fund because the tax revenues from oil companies had declined considerably because of certain factors that we had discussed before in this House.

In 2003, the Government put in \$497 million into the fund. That year, tax revenue from oil companies was \$4.345 billion and it computed to 11 per cent of total revenues from oil companies. We moved from 17 per cent of tax revenue from oil companies in 2000, to 21 per cent, then to 11 per cent; a drop. In that same year, when we considered the total tax and non-tax revenue of \$17 billion, the \$497 million that went in works out to be 2.91 per cent; a drop from 2001, from 4.25 per cent to 2.91 per cent.

In 2004—2006, the Government has improved its deposits to the Fund. I am talking in relation to tax revenues and total revenues. I make reference to that because when we compute revenues from oil companies on a projected price for

oil and gas, if we project high, then we would have less revenue on the basis of that formula to put into the fund and, therefore, the percentage of total revenues that we are putting in would be lessened. In some countries they, in fact, tag their deposits to their Stabilization and Heritage Fund as a percentage of revenue, which is why I am quoting these figures.

In 2004, the \$1.263 billion that was put into the fund computed at 23.11 per cent of tax revenues from oil companies and 6.15 per cent of total tax and non-tax revenue.

In 2005, the \$2.593 billion that was deposited, computed at 24 per cent of tax revenue from oil companies of \$10.8 billion and 9.03 per cent of total tax and non-tax revenue. The estimate for this year, when we look at the \$3.16 billion that they are putting into the fund, would compute at 19.5 per cent of the estimated oil companies tax revenue of \$16 billion. We have moved tax revenue from oil companies in 2000 of \$2.4 billion in 2006, just six years later, to \$16.2 billion.

I would expect when the legislation does come and we look at their formula, the legislated formula for computing the moneys that would be put into these funds, when we relate it back to projected revenues from oil companies and projected total tax and non-tax revenue, we would see percentages in the vicinity of 25 per cent of tax revenues from oil companies and a minimum of 10 per cent of total revenues.

As, I said, in fairness to the Government while they have been considering the funds and the basis of the funds, they have continued to put at an increasing rate, percentage-wise, and we have to give them commendation for that. But, unfortunately, they have not been heeding the warnings. We have had warnings from the Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the business community, all having to do with the rate at which we are spending, the nature of the spending, the heating up of the economy and the impact on inflation. I am not too sure, the Government, certainly, has not demonstrated a concern. The Minister in the Ministry of Finance has been saying the right things but, certainly, the actions have not been matching. Under "Fiscal Policy and the management of the energy wealth," the IMF in their Article IV report of 2005, which was issued on October 27, 2005 said:

"While recognizing the need to invest in the economy, the mission cautioned the authorities about the risks posed by the scale and scope of the fiscal expansion. A non-energy deficit of the size projected in the financial

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. YETMING]

Friday, September 08 2006

year 2005/2006 budget raised questions about long term sustainability. More immediately, it risked further exacerbating inflationary pressures.”

They went on to say:

“Furthermore weak institutions could limit the potential to undertake expenditures effectively—for example, Trinidad and Tobago's score in Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index has recently deteriorated.”

There have been warnings.

This is a quote from their 2006 release, following the 2006 Article IV consultation. Their full report has not been issued. They said:

“The mission agrees that record high energy prices present the country with a window of opportunity to set the country on a path to achieve high living standards for current and future generations. However, this requires striking a delicate balance: investing energy windfalls efficiently to advance long-term, economic and social objectives, while pacing the use of energy revenues to avoid overheating the economy and pushing up inflation.

‘Fiscal policy should be at the forefront in fighting demand pressures. A tighter fiscal policy stance would help curb inflation and take pressure off the labour market. In that context, public spending should be contained to reduce the non-energy deficit—which has widened significantly in recent years. Looking ahead, sustainability considerations should anchor fiscal policy so as to avoid the need for sharp spending cuts to tax increases when energy incomes decline.’

Of course, if we believe what the Prime Minister has said—that this is not an oil boom, this is what it is now—In essence, what I read from his recent statement—we ought not to be too concerned about any sharp decline of any commodity price, where it is at is where it is likely to be. The International Monetary Fund, in their concerns about sustainability and the concern about having, at some point, to increase taxes or introduce spending cuts is not something that the Government, it would appear, if we judge from the recent utterances, is not particularly concerned about.

I now come to the Infrastructure Development Fund. The 2006 Public Sector Investment Programme was approved at \$3.8 billion; \$1.5 billion was to come from the Consolidated Fund and \$2.3 billion from the Infrastructure Development

Fund. We are told, when the matter came before us at committee, for the deposit to the Infrastructure Development Fund, that the projected drawdown from the Infrastructure Development Fund, for the PSIP, would be \$3.2 billion; a move from \$2.3 billion, an increase over the budget of \$0.9 billion. This makes reference to the first point I made, which is that we had only now been provided with the information to indicate to us where those increases have taken place to move from the \$2.3 billion to \$3.2 billion. In fact, the PSIP for 2004 was \$1.9 billion. In 2005, it was \$2.8 billion and in 2006, it is going to be \$4.8 billion. We have moved from spending in the PSIP from \$1.9 billion, just two years ago, to \$4.8 billion, which is an increase of \$3 billion in two short years.

In real terms that is not a significant amount, in the context of the great demand for the improvement of the infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago and, considering that in previous years for lack of funds or whatever, the amount that we had been allocating to the PSIP, all administrations before now, has always fallen very short of what ought to have been. There is no alarm that we should spend \$5 billion this year, but I think what we need to be convinced about, and what I think the Government has a responsibility to convince us about, us not meaning the Opposition but the man in the street, is for \$5 billion in infrastructure, what they are getting. Advertisements in the newspapers would not convince them, because what the man in Barrackpore and Toco want to know and see is that for this massive increase in infrastructure spending, that it touches them. We can talk here and the Government can boast about the \$5 billion they have to, can and should spend but unless people can drive in their villages and towns and see improvements, it will appear as if the money is not being spent well.

When today, school children, in spite of the \$5 billion, still have to placard outside of schools because their schools are in a dilapidated condition, police have to be walking out of police stations in Diego Martin, Carenage and St. Joseph because of the dilapidated conditions of the police stations, roads are becoming deplorable, whether in the city or the country, and when health services are not appearing to be to be improving, then the average man in the street would be very—There is a legitimate expectation, when the public reads about this \$5.8 billion in infrastructure development, that there will be improvements in the quality of the infrastructure around them. When they do not see it, it will develop the nature of the protests we are seeing today. Whether it is on the Beetham or Barrackpore, people are burning tyres and blocking the streets out of pure frustration; that they are not getting basic services that they believe they deserve,

particularly in the context of the budgets and the moneys that we are supposed to be spending.

I looked at the PSIP figures and the amounts coming from the Infrastructure Development Fund and I did some work on the figures that we had for 2000, which are the original figures, which is the \$2.3 billion, because I did not have the benefit, before now, of seeing the revised figures. I will give you an example of some of the spending that was budgeted to take place for 2006, if only to give an idea of some of the wrong policy positions being taken by the Government.

In the original budget, \$16 million was allocated to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources for agricultural access roads. One would have thought that, with the warnings that we have been having about the decline in the agricultural sector—the Governor of the Central Bank had cause two years ago to ask the Government to reconsider its policy on agriculture, the impact of the poor production on the prices and its impact on inflation. That is something that has been increasing over the past couple of years. In 2006, budgetary allocations for access roads for agriculture were \$16 million. When we relate that to the amount allocated to the Office of the Prime Minister for his residence of \$25 million, it shows where the priorities of the Government are; that we would allocate \$25 million in the PSIP for the Prime Minister's residence and spend \$16 million for agricultural access roads, one of the critical areas of the economy for feeding ourselves and control of inflation.

Mr. Narine: Thank you very much, Member for St. Joseph, for giving way. The sum of \$16 million was given to the PSIP. Would you care to say what is the rest of funding that was given under the IDF and the rest of funding that we got from the IDF, through going back to Cabinet for a phase two programme? If you do not have the figures, it was \$38 million, together with the money from the IDF and the phase two programme is \$81 million. We have been able to allocate, from the Ministry's funding, \$20 million more. It is not true to say that agricultural infrastructure was only \$16 million. It is untrue to say that.

Mr. G. Yetming: When the Member has his turn he could enlighten us. I am making a comparison on the basis of the Infrastructure Development Fund information that we have. In fact, in the revised figure we got just one or two hours ago, it suggested that the \$16 million went to \$55 million and the figure for the Prime Minister's residence went down from the \$25 million, no doubt because they have not gotten that far in the building of the house. I only made that point, it is a minor point, to show that when we are dealing with the \$5 billion and when

we examine the details of the \$5 billion to be spent, we will see a lot of areas where wrong-spending is taking place; spending that is not consistent with the warnings that we have been given.

Mr. Speaker, under health, the figure in the Infrastructure Development Fund was \$205 million, of which \$125 million was supposed to be allocated to physical investments, hospitals, district health facilities, health centres, et cetera. Today, in the newspapers, we have a report from the Commission of Enquiry into the Health Sector talking about poor management, misappropriation of government property and financial mismanagement. The Chairman of the Commission of Enquiry stated in today's newspapers that the problems of the health sector are monumental. There is no argument from me or this side on the \$200 million or even the \$400 million to be allocated to the health sector. I make the point that in this season of plenty there appears to be little concern for the quality of our spending—We get the money and spend it. There is little interest in control and how the money is spent, to the point where the chairman of this commission of enquiry could report to the nation and we read today about poor management, misappropriation of government property and financial mismanagement. Why is it that a government that has been in office for approximately five years, we could not get our management structures right and that in this season of plenty, we try to get value for our money? Why is it that after we have spent \$3 billion in health, with \$200 million or \$400 million being allocated from the Infrastructure Development Fund that we are talking about now, the individual man in the street cannot go and get a decent level of health care? Boasting about how much money we are spending on the sector does not satisfy the man in the street, because he is not going into the health centres and hospitals and getting better quality care. And it is not that the Government do not have the intention and the will to put the money; they are putting the money. Clearly, we are not managing right.

A simple thing is that it will be interesting to find out from the commission of enquiry whether there is a difference in the level of misappropriation and poor management Regional Health Authority to Regional Health Authority. In other words, are we getting a better quality of work, better financial management and less misappropriation in Tobago, than we are getting at Arima? It is very possible that might be the case. I have argued before that in a small country like Trinidad and Tobago, to have five Regional Health Authorities is absolute madness. There ought only to be one. There could be five divisions, with five divisional managers, but one board. Do not have scarce management talent spread out over five boards

with each one of them doing the absolute same thing but in different ways because there are different approaches. It would be interesting to find out from the commission of enquiry whether there is a difference in the quality of management Regional Health Authority to Regional Health Authority. When you talk about waste, you would have five boards, you have to find the people and pay them, you have to find the infrastructure and each one has a human resource department and an engineer all doing the same thing.

The Ministry of Local Government received \$174 million from the Infrastructure Development Fund. I am not too sure what the revised figure for 2007 is; it is somewhere here. When we look at local government, in this figure of \$174 million, \$70 million of it is for drainage and irrigation programmes and another \$40 million is to deal with development, management and maintenance programmes for municipal roads and drainage infrastructure. I assume that the Barrackpore roads will come under municipal roads. The Minister would complain that this is not a Ministry problem because it is a local government problem and the local government council should be looking at it. He might be right. If the Ministry of Local Government is not being provided with the funding—if you look at the head, under each local government for roads, you might be talking about \$100,000 or thereabouts. The interesting thing is that under the heading: Development, management and maintenance programme for municipal roads and drainage infrastructure, the \$40 million allocated at the origin of 2006 was reduced in the revised figure that was produced to us today, to \$10 million. Why, in the light of the severe difficulties we have been having with rural roads and flooding, is it that a minuscule figure of \$40 million which was allocated to the Ministry of Local Government in 2006, should be reduced in the revised figures presented to us today from \$40 million to \$10 million? We can understand why people in Barrackpore, Debe and elsewhere have to be making noises because clearly, the moneys are not being channelled in the right places. We will see a classic example of that later on.

Under the Ministry of Works and Transport we have \$162 million originally allocated to major river clearing programmes—I guess this has to do with flooding—comprehensive drainage development programme: Caparo, Honda River, et cetera, infrastructure, rehabilitation and flood mitigation programme and a national programme for the upgrade of drainage channels, all having to do with drainage. That is a total of \$162 million. Nobody could argue with that, because the \$162 million should be increased. Instead, in the revised figures presented to us today, that \$162 million went down to \$39 million. It could be that the

Ministry has not been able to tender out to do whatever. That might be so, but the fact is that for a crisis— because flooding is a crisis, particularly for all those poor people who have to experience it every year—we could not have moved more expeditiously in spending the moneys you have asked for. You probably asked for \$400 million and you got \$162 million and you cannot even spend it, to the point where we are getting revised figures to move the \$162 million to \$39 million. We could understand why the people, particularly in the rural areas and those downtown, are suffering. Unfortunately, they are poor people.

Under the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Brian Lara Multipurpose Complex in Tarouba, called the “Tsunami Shelter” original allocation for 2006 was \$80 million. The first question that many people in the sporting area—not just politicians and casual observers, but people deep into the sporting area—questioned the Tarouba Complex. The Government persisted, in spite of all the objections and suggestions otherwise, and now we are hearing that the Brian Lara Stadium will not be ready. We are now hearing that they will use another cricketing ground, which they could have used in the first place, without having to go through this massive expenditure. The waste will come in when we are preparing the alternative ground. If the Brian Lara Complex is made partially ready, the moneys that would be spent to put up temporary facilities to accommodate whatever they would have to do in these trial games, will be substantial.

Mr. Manning: We are not doing that.

Mr. G. Yetming: In a period of plenty, it is easy to spend money. I am not too sure that the Government is careful. The moneys might be going in the right direction, as in the case of health, but I do not know to what extent they are managing their operations or if they are exercising the leadership to control the waste. The interesting thing about the Brian Lara Complex is, in the revised document that was presented to us two hours ago, the figure is now \$344 million.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. G. Yetming: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Member for Diego Martin West. The Brian Lara Stadium, it is now a fact, we cannot do anything about that. I think the point I want to make is that in this period of plenty—where it is easy to improve and increase the budgetary allocation from \$80 million to \$344 million and not have increases in other more-deserving areas that will impact upon the quality of life that the Minister in piloting this Bill made mention of, all very laudable objectives in the context of 2020—somewhere there is some misdirection.

The Minister made reference to these special purpose companies when he piloted the Bill. Under the Infrastructure Development Fund, in the document we were provided with, it is stated that operationally the IDF is the mechanism used in the main to finance projects being implemented by existing and newly established special purpose companies, to execute projects assigned to them. That is where, in the PSIP, there are two figures, one to come from the IDF and the IDF has the sum that would be dealt with through these special purpose companies. With respect to these special purpose companies, we have been assured that they are purely to grant contracts to the private sector to accomplish the work of the Government. We have been assured that sufficient controls will be put in place. We know that these 15 special purpose companies bypass the Central Tenders Board. We know, if we listened to what happened with UDeCOTT, each one has its own tenders committee.

Mr. Manning: All state enterprises.

Mr. G. Yetming: *[Interruption]* I do not know to what extent. If those companies are purely to distribute contracts—this is another case similar to what I said with respect to the Regional Health Authorities; that we should have 15 companies whose sole requirement is to get the work from the Government, tender it out and award contracts—then maybe the 15 should be one. Why have 15 boards and 15 sets of infrastructure having 15 opportunities for wrong things to take place?

Mr. Speaker, what we are being asked to approve today, as I said at the beginning, we could not question. I commended the Government for its continuing deposits to the Stabilization Fund. We hope to see the legislation as promised, before the end of the year. I hope that the manner of computation of deposits into the fund will not be contentious, because that is going to be the biggest area of debate, if it should come to that. I have made reference back to the fund allocations being percentages benchmark, as percentages of the oil companies tax revenues and

benchmark as percentages of the total tax and non-tax revenues and I gave percentages and I commended the Government for the current percentages.

In the case of the deposit to the Infrastructure Development Fund, I also said that we could never argue with it simply because we never spent sufficient in the past on infrastructure and we need to spend more, except that what I try to highlight and draw the Government's attention to is that there is a legitimate expectation, on our part and on the part of the national community, that when we are spending these billions of dollars in infrastructure, we ought to see a tangible difference in the services we receive and in the quality of our lives.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Housing (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make a relatively short intervention on this very interesting topic of how we proceed in a period of plenty. I simply want to say that—[*Dr. Rowley coughs*] it is not very often that we on this side can say that we support a lot of what was said on the other side.

Mr. Yetming: You did not have to cough to say it.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It shows sincerity of purpose. Mr. Speaker, if the Member for St. Joseph would allow his contribution to be entitled: “Value for Money”, then I think nobody on this side would argue that such an endeavour is what the Government should be about. It is something that needs to attract a national debate.

In this quest for value for money, certain things will come to the fore. One of those things is the whole question of management and management institutions in the country. You cannot keep doing the same thing over and over and expect a different result. We do have some serious management and institutional issues to address in this country, if we are to get value for money in the way we expect it to be had, especially in a situation where any government, such as the Government today, is handling large sums of money. We on this side do not have a problem with being told, as often as we can, that we ought to be careful with the public purse. We take no offence to that and we expect that those on the other side who are paid to do their job will hold the Government to account, with respect to how it goes about managing this country's assets.

Having said that, one would also have to acknowledge that in making decisions at the level of the Government, there usually is never a single decision that is the decision; there usually are options. In deciding on an option to pursue,

whether it is the location of something or the quantum of expenditure on something, when the Government takes a decision on that option, usually you may find that there is a different point of view that it should have been otherwise and you will always get that.

When my friend from St. Joseph started speaking, he made reference to the question of whether we spend or whether we save. There was a point of view that we should be saving a significant portion of our wealth, as against the point of view of the Prime Minister then four or five years ago, that we should be spending that money. That has to be seen not in isolation, but in the context in which one takes a decision as to spend or save.

At the time when we were talking about this fund, we were looking at a situation where the amount of moneys that were likely to be had, given the oil prices at the time and where the budgeting levels were projected, we were not, at that time, looking at the huge sums of moneys that we are now dealing with, given the fact that at that time the difference between the budgeted and oil price was not anywhere as it is now. What we had to focus on, those of us on this side, was the Government's decision to develop the country as quickly as possible and to treat with the missing infrastructure. It was our position that it is better to spend on that infrastructure, as quickly as possible, because we take the position that what we spend now on infrastructure, that infrastructure is not for us. Even though the expenditure is taking place now, in the context of saving for the next generation, that saving does not only have to be in cash in the bank; it has to also be in infrastructure in place, so that the next generation will benefit from that infrastructure.

If we build schools, roads and hospitals, they are not built for those who are alive today; they are built with a life that will serve those who will come in the future. One has to see expenditure on infrastructure today in that context. In fact, you may very well find that given the elements of rising costs—some of which you can control and some of which you cannot control—we do know that over time, the cost of infrastructure does not go down, even when you balance it and adjust it for dollars compared to a previous dollar. When you make the adjustment comparing one dollar one year ago and one dollar today, you still find that the cost of infrastructure does not go down, it always tends to be going up. If you are going to build a house, the advice I give people in the country today, the faster you build the house the better, because the longer you wait the more it will cost

you in the end. If you are committed to building it, it will cost you more the longer you wait. It is the same thing with the country.

We have a system in this country where we dispense public health throughout institutions owned by the State. Given the aspiration of the population for modern quality health care, significant infrastructure still has to be put into the country so as to deliver the expected standard. It is the same thing with the school system. One of the problems that we have been grappling with for a long time is the whole question of the shift-system in schools, because we try to put as many of our children in secondary schools as possible. That is another debate. The bottom line is we did not have the physical infrastructure, so we have a shift-system where two batches of children use the same school. You know what that means. We are not happy with it. There was a time when all we could have done was think about that and say we should do something about it, but after 10 years of decline, where the economy could not afford it, we have come to a period where, fortunately, we have found that the external circumstances influencing our local circumstances have put the country in a position to spend some money on dealing with a problem which we acknowledged a long time ago. What do we expect the Government to do at this time? We have to treat with that infrastructure. Do not be surprised to be told that the Government has a programme to build many tens of schools, so as to be able to eliminate a problem which we acknowledge exists. One cannot solve that problem without expanding the education infrastructure.

3.00 p.m.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, this is not something that is going to go on and on, because this country could only absorb a certain number of schools. So, if during this period, we build a large number of schools—and we have a major school building programme taking place that is going to cost a couple billion dollars—what it means is that having done that, we can then turn our attention to something that we need. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that we will always need to improve our circumstances. At the end of the day, development is about improvement in the quality of life, and that improvement in the quality of life comes in a variety of forms.

In fact, there was a time when an improvement in the quality of life in Port of Spain may have been the train having new seats or going more frequently but, today, in the eyes of many, development in the quality of life has to do with the owning of a motor vehicle so that you could leave when you wish and come when you wish but, what does that do? It increases the number of vehicles on the road

and puts a demand for more roads in the country. You would also find that in the expenditure pattern, we would have to expand our infrastructure in the context of roads and so forth. I do not know how many roads we are going to build in the next 15 or 20 years, but we would certainly have to spend a lot of money on that kind of infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, infrastructure comes in a variety of ways—roads you put as public property for transportation—but there are other kinds of infrastructure that you would have to invest in as well like the economy infrastructure. I noticed that some of the projects got a lot of barracking from persons sometimes who have not sat and thought about what exactly is the country trying to do. I am not saying here the Government; I am saying here the country. It is very easy to make comments and make them look as if the Government is made up of people who are stupid and, therefore, everything the Government does is stupid. If one reflects on this matter, after a while one may want to think: Is it the Government that is not up to mark or is it the commentator that has not given sufficient thought to what he or she is saying? Take, for example, the construction of the waterfront project. When one listens to some commentators who are opposed to the Government's position, one gets the impression that what we are doing is building tall structures to look at them, because we like to look at tall buildings, and we want Port of Spain to look like New York. That could not be a serious position. There is a purpose behind that construction. What is going on down there?

Mr. Speaker, there are two facets to that construction: one is a convention centre; that is economic infrastructure, because if we are able to host conventions in this country, conventions have, as a requirement, the need to provide a significant body of service so as to carry out these conventions. The minute you commit yourself to that kind of service, in effect, you are talking about jobs. I draw your attention to the time when the burning issue in this country was unemployment. Unemployment was approaching 20 per cent.

If one looks at the area of greater Port of Spain—Belmont, Laventille, Success Village and Diego Martin—where are the opportunities for jobs in this environment? How many banana plants are we going to plant in this environment? We can only employ so many persons at Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), and we should not employ that many, God forbid. The bottom line is one has to look at creating opportunities for employment. So, when you decide that one of the areas that you would work on is having convention business in this country, in effect, what you are saying is that you would be providing a national service and creating job opportunities and, therefore, you would provide those

opportunities for persons who live and who are within the catchment area of greater Port of Spain. That is what that convention centre means. The convention centre is not a stand-alone facility. It carries a multi-storey hotel with it, because people who go to conventions have to live somewhere when they are in the country, and that is why we are building that hotel. When you hear comments like: we are building tall buildings; the Government is wasting money and profligacy, that is a lack of understanding of what the country is trying to do. Even those who should know better like my friend from the Central Bank—I understand that he is lighting tyres down in Barrackpore to attract people for Sunday, but that is another story.

The Member for St. Augustine stood in this House and said to me that what we should be doing is saving and investing the money. Okay, fine. I have no problem with saving money. I like to save. Whatever I earn and whatever little I spend, the rest is saved, but one has to understand that investment is not just putting money in the bank. I am sure that he would be happy to hear that we are putting all the money in a bank somewhere in New York and, as far as he is concerned—dropping the name Harvard—that is investment.

Mr. Speaker, when one builds a school in this country; when one builds a convention centre; when one builds a hotel; and when one builds anything that contributes to growth in the economy, that is investment. In a situation where we find ourselves, fortunately, having significant revenues coming into the country, we are able to put aside substantial sums of money as we are doing today and, at the same time, targeting and eliminating some of the bugbears in our country, I think we are doing well, because we are able to do both at the same time. It is not either or, but we are doing both. We are putting aside a substantial sum of money, and we are also spending and expanding the infrastructure in the country.

Mr. Manning: That is the point. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So, when persons do not even bother to read the documents or listen to the statements from the authorities, they would tell you that the Government is wasting money, and that is because they are either being malicious, or cautioning the Government not to be excessive, or they do not understand. In any case, all we are saying is, let us not go overboard in being critical of our fortunes, but try to understand what we are trying to do as a country.

We are not dumb; we are not deaf; but advice is something that you get for free, and very often the worst advice is the one that you get free. I am not taking any advice from my colleague, the Member for St. Augustine. He is one of those

persons who believe that if it comes to you from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank or the International Development Bank (IDB) it has value.

Mr. Speaker, who works at the IMF, the IDB and the World Bank? They are public servants like everybody else. They are well paid; they live in a nice city; and they have nice offices, but sometimes they would tell you some of the most stupid things that you could ever hear. So, when the Member comes here and tells me what the World Bank and the IDB say, I would evaluate exactly what they have said before I take a decision.

Mr. Speaker, take for example, we had a situation in this country where the World Bank doctrine, with respect to the public sector housing programme was that the Government should not spend money on housing, and what the Government should do is put in basic infrastructure, meaning dirt roads, earthen drains and latrines. Mr. Speaker, ask yourself this question: Would the people of Trinidad and Tobago accept that doctrine from the World Bank as the standard for housing in this country? As far as the PNM is concerned the answer is, no. That is why we are going across the country converting dirt roads, earthen drains of an earlier era, to paving roads, proper drainage and sewer. It was the World Bank's position that the Government's involvement should not go at a standard beyond dirt roads and drains. We, as a people, have standards that we are aspiring to, and we are able to afford and to achieve those standards. That is why we have rejected those kinds of policies about dirt roads, dirt drains and latrines in Trinidad and Tobago as a housing policy.

With respect to the whole question of the Government and housing, when I was in the Ministry of Planning and Development, We spent days arguing with public servants from the IDB, who tried to convince us in Trinidad and Tobago that there should be no public sector involvement in the housing construction, and we rejected that position. We knew our country's circumstances. What we had in this country, and what we still have in this country, is a serious housing shortage. We believe that there is a role for the Government in eliminating that shortage so as to bring about an improvement in the quality of life of our citizens. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, those who were opposed to us took the position—in order to break the position of the public servants, as the Minister, I went to Brazil and invited the President of the IDB to come to Trinidad and Tobago to meet with the Prime Minister, to deal with this issue of the public sector role in housing

construction. My colleagues on the other side were so opposed to that policy and programme that when the President of the IDB agreed to come to this country—it was announced that he was coming here—they took the official position and wrote to Washington, asking to have the president impeached, because he was coming to Trinidad and Tobago to support a housing policy which was different from the one they supported.

Mr. Speaker, I make this point only to show you that there are different options when you are in government. You could take the option to do “A” or to do “B”. In the case of housing, the PNM took the option that the State would get involved directly in the construction of houses. That is the PNM position. Our colleagues’ position on the other side is that they would not do that; they would do land preparation of lots, earthen drains and so forth, and we rejected that. It is just a difference in policy.

Mr. Speaker, I was amazed to see that we were able to access preferential low interest funds. Eventually, we convinced the IDB to support a programme in this country, and they put a US \$80 million programme in place in two tranches; a \$40 million up front to be repeated later on, and they insisted that we use it for the lowest income persons and for the Squatter Regularization Programme. That programme is going on today.

Only recently we had announced the whole question of persons being invited to come in if they own a plot of land, which they have inherited or which they have bought. As long as your income is below a certain level, our last programme announced and advertised in recent weeks is that if you have a plot of land, once your income is below a certain level—out of that same IDB programme—you can then get support to build a house as against the Government’s programme where the Government is employing contractors to build. So, individuals can build on individual plots all over the country, and that would give us another 400 or 500 or 5,000 houses. There may be many persons who have plots and who would want to build, so they would now get that support to build in their backyard, or on the side street, or where there is not a HDC housing programme.

Mr. Ramsaran: Could the Minister guarantee that infrastructure support would be given like electricity and so forth?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I just told you that the PNM’s position is wherever there is housing, we support quality infrastructure. We are not in this earthen road; earthen drain and latrine story. In fact, when we look at it; it is not for the HDC to determine that. If a person wants to build in an area where they cannot get

planning approval, well then we cannot help. If, on the other hand, a person could get approval and the size is buildable, what we are putting in place—the assumption is being made that the site is for building, and we would do it with a certain income level. If you have over a certain income, one expects that you would not access this programme, but once you are under a certain income level, and you have the property which you are authorized to use, the programme is there to assist. So far, there are about 150 persons who are currently being processed for that programme, which has only been put out a few weeks ago.

Mr. Speaker, this is how a government treats with a particular programme—disregarding the IMF and the World Bank public servants. [*Desk thumping*] They look at the global arrangement and they come up with these prescriptions, and it is only after they have killed a number of patients they would turn around and say that the prescription is not good. But, we know what we have to do here. We have the confidence to say no to them when we have to say no, and we have the confidence to say yes to them when we have to say yes, and this is one case when we said no to them.

Another case, in that same debate, dealing with the IDB public servants and what we should build, even as they reluctantly agreed to support the programme, they were telling us that if we build low income houses, they must not be more than 800 square feet. Mr. Speaker, picture that! Is that the standard the average family in Trinidad and Tobago would aspire to? In fact, it was not 800 square feet, but 600 square feet. They told us that is what they have built in Ecuador. I told them this is not Ecuador, this is not Mali, this is not Mozambique, but this is Trinidad and Tobago, and we have a different standard, and we refused to build any 600 square foot house in this country. So, we have set our standards slightly higher than that and we have proceeded to build.

Today, our programmes in Trinidad and Tobago like the Squatter Regularization Programme—if you go to San Fernando, Sangre Grande and Pine Settlement in Bois Bande, La Paille, Valencia, P Lands and elsewhere in the country—the same public servants who resisted us in going toward that route would see what we have done there. They are using our programmes now as models of success to talk to other countries. Do you understand? So, you have to be able to say what you want for your country and how you would do it. So, this thing about what the IDB say and what the World Bank say, yes, they would say, but what do you say. Do you agree? It is not a prescription that you would just swallow because they say so. You have to look at it in the context of what Trinidad and Tobago wants to do; what we can afford; how we can get there;

what is good for the people of Trinidad and Tobago; and what would improve their quality of life. [*Desk thumping*]

When we said, through our Prime Minister, that we would be more inclined to spending our new found wealth on our infrastructure, it is not because we would be profligate, and we are wasters, but because we want to see our infrastructure built up as quickly as possible. We know that was our investment which was made early.

At the time when the discussion was taking place as to whether we should spend the money or save it, we were talking about \$400 million. That is the figure we were looking at. I have in our document here at Appendix II—I think at that time my colleague was the Minister of Finance. That was in 2001. In 2001 we were having this debate and the 2000 figure would have been the one in the radar and that figure was \$415 million. We were saying then that if we find ourselves with an additional \$415 million, nice as it sounds, we should put away some savings for our children. If that is the case, we are saying that our children would benefit from an infrastructure, whether it is more schools, more hospitals, or better roads—we would spend that money now and put that infrastructure in place. That is a difference of opinion. That is what we were saying.

However, the following year 2001, the figure was \$600 million, because oil prices were pretty good. At that time, it was at \$30-odd a barrel. In 2003, we were still talking about less than half a billion dollars. In 2004, we are now talking about \$1.2 billion. At that level, we began addressing our own arguments, because spending an additional \$400 million and spending an additional \$1.2 billion are not the same, because you then begin to have capacity issues. So, if I said that I would have spent the \$400 million, because I think we needed to spend it; it is not saying that because we get \$1.2 billion more to hold, and whatever extra we get we would spend. That is why today we are being commended by our colleagues on the other side for saying that. [*Interruption*] I said colleagues. We know who our colleagues are. We are not colleagues of the cabal. The cabal is not our colleagues.

Mr. Ramnath: Am I your colleague?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I always thought that the Member for Couva South is my colleague. Are you saying that you are part of the cabal? [*Laughter*] You do not even get invited to meetings. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, that is why today we can come here and say, with no prompting from outside, that we want to put an additional \$3 billion in the savings kitty,

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 08 2006

because the situation of 2000 is not the same as 2006. On this matter of savings and investment for the future, I think we are at one with the people on the other side who are reasonable, like my friend from St. Joseph. On the question of accelerated infrastructure, I think the PNM has always distinguished itself by building this country's infrastructure with a commitment that no other party has shown in this country. None! [*Desk thumping*] In fact, sometimes in the face of serious objections, the PNM holds its ground on building infrastructure in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I recall, when we were going to build the Twin Towers, there was a particular columnist called the special correspondent, and you would not like to go to the archives and see the volumes that were written against those two towers; one for the Central Bank and one for the Ministry of Finance. Mr. Speaker, I want to ask you to take a moment and use the thousands of square feet of office space in there and multiply it by the average cost per square foot, and ask yourself how much rent the Government would have paid in the last 20-odd years, if we were renting office space for those public servants who are housed in the Twin Towers.

At the time, when we were building the Twin Towers, people were saying that we were building them because we like to build tall buildings, but tall buildings have a purpose. You are hearing the same thing again today. One wonders, do we ever learn, or are we just chronic colonials with short, narrow myopic approaches?

The colonial masters left us with this Parliament; it is a good thing. If we start to build one today, there are persons who are going to say that we are wasting money. The colonial masters left us with QRC. Look at that fine structure! What are we doing today for our children of the future? We are going to build something today, and there are people in this country telling us that we are profligating and we are wasting money. We have to build for the future. The same children that you are talking about, it falls to us to build for them. This expenditure is for them, not for us. We are on our way out. [*Desk thumping*] We are building for the future and, thankfully, contrary to what some of our colleagues are saying—they talk as though they are sorry we have the means to do it; they talk as though they are sorry we are in a position to have these revenues to put to the country's purpose. Do you know what some of them did? They took the money and banked it abroad. What did the PNM do? We are spending the money here and building the infrastructure.

As long as the PNM is in office—we are going to be in office for a long time. I think I should advise my colleagues on the other side—you would see us continuously building up this country's infrastructure to improve the physical and social well-being of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we are in office for; and that is what a government does.

We have reached the point today where people are talking and writing—sometimes even people who should know better are saying that the Government is wasting money. I do not know if they have assessed the construction programme and said, okay, there are some projects that do not find favour with a large number of persons and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is that during the period 2003 to 2006, we have put away approximately \$7,000 million in savings. Does that sound to you as a government that is just trying to waste money? Where in the history of this country did we ever have this kind of savings programme? Fortunately, in parallel with this, we are also building on an unprecedented scale. I want to say something about the building too, because in the same way I talked about the convention centre and the hotel as part of our economic infrastructure, our construction programme that we have embarked upon today is not a programme of “vaps”,

Mr. Speaker, when we were in Opposition, we recognized that unemployment was the scourge of the poor man in this country. If we did not do something to create additional employment levels, we would not be impacting on the quality of life of those persons who fall within the lowest earning capacity, and also the unemployed. So, what we have committed ourselves to doing publicly—and we were elected to do it—was to bring down unemployment in the shortest possible order by creating opportunities, and we said how we would do so. We said that in the short term we would accelerate construction, because in the construction sector we had the ability to create a large number of jobs in a short space of time. So, what did we do? We did exactly what we said we were going to do.

If you look at the construction sector when this Government came into office, there were approximately 70,000 persons engaged in that sector at the time. Today, there are approximately 100,000 persons employed in the construction sector. What that means is approximately 30,000 persons have found jobs in the construction sector; persons who otherwise would have been unemployed. These are 30,000 pay packets going home every fortnight or every month or every week to families who are not starving, and who otherwise would have starved.

Mr. Manning: Multiply that by four.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: There are 30,000 employed persons who are now getting a pay cheque and, at the same time, we are building the country in one form or another. In the housing programme alone there are approximately 20,000 persons on construction sites around the country.

Mr. Ramnath: House padding!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: You talk loosely about house padding and, of course that is just politics and nonsense. [*Interruption*] We have time. There are 20,000 persons receiving pay packets, and they are being identified among those who are contributing to national development. Very often we go on construction sites and we would meet young persons, many of them in their green uniforms from the MuST programme. When you ask a person: How old are you? "I am 25 years." Where do you live? "I am from Point Fortin." Where did you work before? "This is my first job." At age 25 that is a person's first job.

Mr. Sharma: And for years the PNM has ruled.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: You are to be ignored permanently. I am talking now where unemployment is at 6 per cent. It is the PNM rule that has brought it down from where it was to 6 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] Do you understand? You know, today, as we moved toward spending an extra \$1 billion, \$2 billion or \$3 billion on this infrastructure development programme, we would start having capacity issues, and we would have to take a decision now as to whether we slow it down; restrict it to a particular size, or we keep our targets and provide the resources, human and otherwise, to keep the targets that we have set for ourselves, given what we want to do with respect to Trinidad and Tobago becoming a developed country within a certain time frame. And as we do that, and as we bring in the skills that we need to augment what we have at home, we came under attack for bringing in people. When unemployment was at 17 per cent and, probably, higher, they were bringing in Colombians to lay tiles at the Piarco Airport.

Mr. Ramnath: Nonsense!

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes!

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I agree with you that it is nonsense in the face of an unemployment level of 19 per cent or thereabout, we were having Colombians laying tiles at the Piarco Airport but, today, when we are almost at full capacity in the country, and are bringing in additional skills, we are hearing all kinds of talk and all kinds of nonsense. [*Desk thumping*]

We listened to them and we have distilled what they have said and where there are kernels of wisdom in between the mountains of whatever, we would pay attention to them, but we studiously ignore their advice that is meant to derail our programme of national development. National development in any country is always open to widespread debate and that is healthy.

In fact, as a Member of the Parliament, one of the problems that I have in this country is that there is not enough national debate on national issues. That is why this afternoon I was pleased to listen to my colleague, the Member for St. Joseph, because he took a line which dealt with some issues that we could engage in. You do not have to praise me; you do not have to criticize me; but you could confront the issue by ignoring me. The numbers are there; the policies are there, so let us engage in a debate on policies, the numbers, the programmes and the projections. Let us do that and only then would good advice be put in the public domain so that people who inform the public would not be doing a disservice of misinforming the public—the Member probably made an error with respect to agriculture but, again, it may have been inadvertent, because he did not understand that there were other moneys being allocated to agriculture, other than the moneys in that document he had in front of him.

Mr. Speaker, we are in a position today in this country to say that we are focused on developing Trinidad and Tobago. While we would take advice from our colleagues on the other side, the IMF and the World Bank, we, as a Government, have our distilled position, having looked at the entire picture and what we want to do for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, take the whole question of subsidy. The minute you go and talk to anyone from the Bretton Woods groups—those institutions like the IMF and the World Bank—and you mention the word ‘subsidy’, that is a bad word. It is an ideological position that they would take on you. I remember when I was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and we were not in the current fortunate situation, we were in fact coming out of nine years of decline, starting back in 1987 or thereabout, when we tried to support farmers in this country with subsidies, the IMF public servants who were supporting us with the loan programme insisted that we could not and should not provide subsidies to the farming community beyond a certain level.

We fought for the dairy farming industry in that programme, and were given all kinds of highfalutin arguments, like the kinds we get from the Member for St. Augustine, as to why we should not do this or why we should not do that. While

they were telling us that—objecting to our supporting subsidies to dairy farmers in this country—we could not sell a container of condensed milk in Brooklyn, but Holland which is a developed country had three sheep markets in the United States of America. That is the world. They were telling us do not subsidize our farmers, but the farmers in their country, in Europe and the United States of America, were being subsidized.

I went to England sometime ago and I was shown fields where flowers were growing wild and butterflies were flying wild, because farmers were being paid to keep the fields out of production, but they were telling us not to give our dairy farmer 10 cents more. How could you listen to that if you are in a position so to do? Sometimes you may have your hands in the lion's mouth and you have to stroke the lion's mane, but if your hand is not in the lion's mouth, and you have the ability to spend your own money, why do you want to listen to these guys? Unless we are doing something quite wrong or quite profligate, and we are not doing that. We are making sensible decisions.

We have a good idea as to what we want to see in this country, and as an independent country, we are called upon from time to time to make independent decisions, by that I mean independent of the Bretton Woods institutional advice. That is going to happen over and over. This is not something that is going to end with election or the following election. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago would always have to make these kinds of decisions. For us in the PNM, we come out of a political party with a philosophy, committed to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and committed to our own destiny. So, we have no problem in making these decisions, because we know that at the end of the day we are vindicated on the outcome of what we have done for the people of Trinidad and Tobago; not for ourselves, but for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So, when we say that we are in a position now to provide free tertiary education, across the board in Trinidad and Tobago, we know what we are doing. We are making an investment in the human capital of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, like me, you may be touching an individual in a family which creates a kind of social mobility which no other ladder provides. Look at the dollar value of what that policy means! Look at the number of parents who otherwise would have had to find that money to send their children to these institutions or not send them at all. The question is: Could the country afford to have them not sent to the institutions, or could their parents afford to send them using their moneys which they need for other things? So, once the policy says that the Government is going to foot the bill for tertiary education, that is what you get out of our oil and gas

windfall, but do not be surprised, if the same parents get up and say: “So much money is coming into the country and I eh getting nothing”, completely forgetting that had the Government not done that; it would have fallen into the parents’ pockets to send that child to the institution.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for the extension. I did say that I was going to be short, but the topic is too interesting for me to not engage as I would like to.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from St. Joseph did make some reference to the whole question of quantum versus percentage. He said the quantum is large, but on a percentage basis it is small, and that in other countries they would determine how much money would go into the fund as a percentage of the earnings.

Mr. Yetming: What I did say, I gave the percentages of the contributions each year, as a percentage of oil company tax revenue, and as a percentage of total revenue tax and non tax revenue. I showed where it moved from about 2 per cent to about—if I could find the figures now. I made reference to Oman or Kuwait where, I think, they put aside 10 per cent of revenues for the heritage of tax revenues. I was simply saying that whatever format that we have arrived at may not relate to tax revenues as a percentage, but we should benchmark it. I showed where in 2000, as a percentage of oil company tax revenues, it was 17 per cent, and in 2005 it was 24 per cent. So, I was giving credit to the Government. As a percentage of total tax plus non-tax revenues, it was 3.41 per cent in 2000 and 9 per cent in 2005. I was saying that maybe a 10 per cent could be a good benchmark for the future.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Again, we are both saying so much of the same thing today. That was not really the point that I was going to make. The point I was going to make was using a percentage and tying yourself to a percentage is easier to do in a situation where you have extremely large amounts of money, like in the case of those countries where the 90 per cent is going to be able to take care of whatever capacity you could conceive, or in a developed country like Norway where they already have the infrastructure in place. So committing 10 per cent

would not really put them off-track but, in our case, where we may have to be more flexible in terms of how prepared we are to expend on various aspects of our industry or our infrastructure, you would probably see that flexibility going on as against a commitment to a particular percentage, because depending on where we are and what we are trying to do in that particular year or that particular period, you may want to spend more, because what is called for may be different. For example, as we move toward the light rail, it might very well be that during the time when that construction is taking place, there may be a call for expenditure which would require that the national budget address it. However, committing ourselves to a percentage, at this time, I think would be a little premature.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the point that I was making about building now and building in the future, I want to draw your attention to the fact that when we were struggling during the period 1998 to 1999, we went out and built three secondary schools and, as a result of a variety of procrastinations—1993 to 1994 was the time when the ministry determined that the three schools were required, because there were three holes in the system. There was one in Diego Martin, one in Cunupia and one in Sangre Grande. If I may add a fourth, there was one in Tobago. However, by the time we got to the 1997 to 1998, we had reached the point of talking about construction, and we went out to tender to build these schools. It turns out—the construction that was embarked upon after that long gestation period—that those schools were built in the order of \$40 million; the Mason Hall Secondary School; the one at Cunupia and, I think, the one at Sangre Grande. So the cost of a secondary school, of that type, at the time, we were talking about \$40 million.

Subsequently, we moved to talking about removing the shift system, and having to build a set of schools of a similar type. Mr. Speaker, there is no way now that you are going to build a similar school in this country for \$40 million and, in fact, the tenders are coming in the order of four times the price. The same thing goes for a house. So, you see, if we had the resources then to build all the schools that we want to build now, we could have built them all in the \$40 million bracket, but having not done it then, and for whatever reason—it does not matter what is the reason—having to do it 10 years down the road, you are talking about a substantial increase in cost for the same item. That is why the quicker we build the country's infrastructure and get that behind us, the better we are to save for the future, in terms of saving in the fashion that they are talking about, plus saving in the physical environment that they are talking about through the structures that are being built.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague did mention the health sector, and I want to make a little point there. He talked about whether in fact we need all the various Regional Health Authorities. Maybe the jury is still out on that and maybe the debate should take place. However, these issues that we are seeing are management issues, and they would remain management issues within the policies that we are pursuing.

I just want to say that my colleague from St. Joseph is a very apt person to mention that, because it was he as the Minister of Finance who had seen what was happening with respect to the management or mismanagement of the NWRHA and had, in fact, put in place a certain kind of investigation which threw up certain kinds of charges against a certain kind of Senator who, subsequently, I had to see turn around and see the party that had put that Minister in office who had put the investigation in place; who had put the police in place; and who had put the Senator in court; turn around and accuse the PNM of being selective in our treatment and witch-hunting. We were accused of witch-hunting with respect to the NWRHA court matters, and we are still being accused of that but, in fact, it was the Member for St. Joseph who, in seeing what was going on at the NWRHA and the public response to it and the public outcry, had initiated that investigation which resulted in what came about there. Again, these are some of the misinformation that would end up in the public domain, and in the absence of corrections on the record, you may very well find that from time to time that misinformation ends up even in editorials in the country, critical of the PNM, because facts which are stubborn things tend to permeate certain areas with greater difficulty than the other areas.

Mr. Speaker, I just make that point to let the Member understand that what the chairman of the enquiry made reference to today with respect to the state of the RHAs, the statement made today is a problem which has been with us for quite a while and, in fact, we would have to treat with that matter.

It may very well be that the whole argument of whether we need this proliferation of little “thiefdoms” and the layer of bureaucracy, whether in fact that is the best way to manage the country’s assets. I come back now to my original point that what this country really has is a serious management problem which is rooted in some of our institutional arrangements. It does not matter which government is in office. If those arrangements stay in place, you and I are going to have this debate for many years and nothing is going to change.

Mr. Speaker, for example, let us take something like closing for lunch. In this day and age, we go back to the colonial era where the colonial masters had in place public servants who came from London and the tropics, and they went home at certain time and they did certain things. I heard this matter being raised on the radio recently, and it crossed my mind. How logical is it that most persons would get the best time off to go and pay a bill at lunch time. If you go and try to pay a bill in a public office at lunch time, what are you going to meet there? You would see that office closed for lunch, and you would ask yourself: Does this really make sense? The office should really be opened at lunch time, when most people could go and pay their bills. Staggered hours is a management matter.

Mr. Speaker, another matter is the collection of revenues. Recently, I had an experience at the airport, trying to pay the Government some money at the airport to receive an item, only to discover that that collection of revenue—I am trying to pay the Government money—and I have to beg to pay it, because you do not want it. I ended up with my goods not being in my hand, and I have to pay a rent because they do not want to collect my money. I mean, we need to reexamine a number of these systems, so as to be able to come to a point where we can so manage to ensure that we are getting value for money, because there is where the debate started. Yes, we are spending large sums of money, but do we have the systems to ensure that we get good management in place, so that value for money can be had? If we do not have that, we would always have this problem of one government criticizing the other or one commentator criticizing the other.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you an example. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago decided that there was a problem with the quality of the Western Main Road from Point Cumana to Chaguaramas. We used an IDB loan to reconstruct that road during the period 1997 or thereabout. It was a reconstruction programme and a resurfacing programme. For a few weeks, the road between Point Cumana and Chaguaramas was a pleasure to drive on. At the same time, we also knew that the pipeline on that same segment of road had to be replaced, and it was replaced. There were brand new ductile iron pipes laid on the same road. So there were new pipes and a new road. I invite you now to go down there and see how many little “bocases” you have to go through, as a result of poor management; poor execution and whatever else. A project that the country thought it had solved with respect to the pipeline on the road, has come to virtually naught, because WASA dug up every square inch of the road dealing with the pipeline; and leaks every Monday morning.

So, therefore, we now have to decide on what to do. Do we go there and pave it again like that? Do we dig up the pipeline that was put down there seven years ago; a pipeline that should have lasted for 50 years? What went wrong? Something obviously went wrong, and the only answer to that would find itself under the heading of management. If there were good management structures in place that could have never happened. It has happened and it is going to continue happening until we address certain fundamental management issues in this country. This Government is not unaware of that. It is not only there. I am sure that this is happening all over the country, because it is the way the country does business. So, therefore, we have to look at that matter in that way.

My colleague made mention of the special purpose companies and he unflatteringly referred to them as giving out contracts. These companies are not there to give out contracts. In fact, contracts are being given out. If you look in the newspaper today, or last week's, you would see many advertisements where we advertised the job of work to be done to the national community, and those who are inclined to provide services have to compete by way of that advertisement, and they would win bids if they provide a proper bid, so contracts are competed for. They are not giving out contracts. The point I want to make is that those companies are, in fact, project management components of the national management structure.

Mr. Speaker, I said earlier on that if you do not have proper management, you would not get value for money. And because the Government has recognized that, and given what we have embarked upon, and not having in place the kinds of management structures and the project management expertise to manage what we are aiming to do, we have divided the workload into what we have divided it into and we have put project management companies in place to ensure that those elements of work are properly executed and properly managed. We have hired the services from the private sector.

Mr. Yetming: Do we need all of those companies?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Again, we could debate that. Which one do we not need? You see, the Cabinet did not create them all at once. The Cabinet did not get a vaps and create all of these companies. They were created after an assessment of need, because having got the first one to do this, when the other basket of work came up you had a choice. Do you add this to that group or do you create another group to deal with this matter?

Mr. Speaker, for example, I talked earlier on about the building of a number of schools. I think we are embarking upon 80 schools to be able to remove the shift system from the country. Now, the building of 80 schools is a serious national problem, so you would have that project management company to focus and to ensure that those 80 schools are built in a proper way. I said earlier on that the price of one of those schools would be approaching \$200 million or thereabout, and 80 by \$200 million is approximately \$1.6 billion thereabout. That is a lot of money. That company is, in fact, the project management team that would manage that exercise from beginning to end. We have that same thing for the rural development company.

Dr. Nanan: Would the Member give way? Is that the same project team that managed the School Repair Programme?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: No. You were a Minister of Education and I would expect better from you. The School Repair Programme is done largely by small contractors, because there are small components of work like repairing toilets, doing fences and doing roofs, so for that kind of work on a large number of schools we would use a large number of small contractors during the vacation time. What I am talking about is building new schools—adding to the infrastructure; adding to the plan; and building 80 new schools so that no child would be on a shift system. There would be a school there so that the child would go during normal school hours with other children during what is deemed to be normal school hours. Parents have been calling for this for years and we are now in a position to treat with this matter comprehensively. Before, we were doing it one here and one there, but we are trying to eliminate that scourge in the quickest possible time. This programme of school building is a programme that is going to take place in a short space of time. We are going to be building a large number of schools and therein lies the need for a proper management company to manage that. That is what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, that is the same thing that we are doing with the Rural Development Company. There are a number of infrastructures and other issues to be dealt with in rural Trinidad and Tobago. It is our view and our policy that if somebody is living in a rural environment that person should not be deprived, by virtue of that fact, of the kinds of things that other citizens get in the urban area. [*Desk thumping*] So, we are focusing on rural development. [*Interruption*] That company has started and it is working. It is going to take a while. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Lucky: Would the Member give way, please?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Sure.

Miss Lucky: Thank you very much, hon. Member for Diego Martin West. I do take your point and I agree with you wholeheartedly when you say that it is a management problem, and I would go on to say monitoring which is a very important part of management. I do understand fully the example you gave with respect to what happened with the Point Cumana and Chaguaramas situation. My concern is that when these various committees or management teams make a finding of fact and, in the example you gave with WASA coming thereafter and digging up—we know the damage that has occurred. Who would take action against the respective persons who are liable? Would action be taken against these persons? How? I do take your point.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: You see, finding liability is a specialist skill. Sometimes you would hire an engineering firm to do certain things and, at the end of the day, it turns down to a blame game, but proper management at the time when the job is being done is the only way to guarantee that you would stand a good chance of its being done well than to come after and try to find who is liable. To penalize them is probably sometimes not even feasible.

Miss Lucky: I take your point. If I understand you correctly, hon. Member for Diego Martin West—thank you again for giving way—you are going the route of prevention is better than cure. It is better to prevent the situation, but I am agreeing with you, and I am rolling the ball just a little further. I am saying that if there is a finding of fact—it is not the blame game—that some entity has been responsible, or irresponsible as the case may be, I am just asking whether there would be procedural process in place to make such an entity or organization or group responsible, because that would really give the mettle to what is being set up to the infrastructure, as you are suggesting. So, in other words, yes, we are going to monitor and manage, but if there is a finding of fact that would justify some kind of action being taken, we want the assurance that action would be taken, because that would send the powerful message.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I simply want to say that it is not as straightforward as that, and I would direct you to what has happened on the Solomon Hochoy Highway on Comylsa-Lain. So, finding of fact does not in itself guarantee you that you would get reward, and that it would change anything. Just find out what happened with the Comylsa-Lain arrangement with the resurfacing of the Solomon Hochoy Highway, and you are going to understand what I am talking

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. DR. K. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 08 2006

about. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I think I would have touched on the salient points that the Member for St. Joseph raised earlier this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, during the Finance Committee some questions were raised, and I said that I would provide the answers during the debate. I would take a couple minutes now to answer those questions. I am sure that they may have forgotten the questions that they have asked. What we were asked and what we promised to provide was—someone asked about the Land Settlement Agency consultancy contracts that were awarded under the Squatter Regularization Programme and the cost. I just want to indicate that there were five projects that were awarded. With respect to Race Course Road in Arima, a contract was awarded to Vica Bencher Engineering Consultant. In February 2005, the design fees were \$750,000. In Pine Settlement, Sangre Grande, a contract was awarded to the consultant Lee Young and Partners for engineering design and construction supervision in February 2005, and the fee was \$875,000.

4.00 p.m.

In Bon Air North, a contract was awarded to BBFL for the same engineering and design work; that was done in February and the cost was \$668,000. In River Estate, Diego Martin, a contract was awarded to Planning Advisory Consultancy and Antoine and Associates—two different companies—for land use planning and land surveying; the land use planning was awarded in March 2005 at a cost of \$932,000 and the land surveying was awarded in May 2006 at a cost of \$208,000. The Port of Spain squatter study, a contract was awarded to Interplan Consultants in July 2005 for land use planning at a cost of \$1.522 million. That was in response to a specific question that was raised when we were at Finance Committee.

Another question that was asked which I promised to answer during the debate was why we were not putting these commercial complexes in the housing that was being done by the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee (SILWC). The reason is that we have a yardstick of where there are about 1,000 housing units in a new development, we put one of these commercial units there to prevent persons in that community from having a proliferation of shacks to carry out small trading and to allow small trading to be done within the community in a proper environment. We use a yardstick of 1,000 units to determine whether such a facility will go in.

The SILWC developments are small numbers of units being built in areas where infrastructure like that already exists, so there is no need to put additional facilities in those areas.

Mr. Speaker, I think I would have touched on what we are committed to touching on in the last debate, so I want to support very strongly what is before us and to commend the Minister of Finance and his team for so efficiently managing our resources. There are a lot of public servants who work very long hours in the Ministry of Finance who go unnoticed; who provide us with the kind of technical expertise that allows the Government to take the positions that we are talking about. And when the criticism comes that the Government is doing this and the Government is doing that, assuming that the Government is made up of a ship of fools, just remember that there are a lot of very hard working and intelligent public servants who provide the Government with the wherewithal to conduct the country's management in the way we are doing.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The Member did indicate that he wanted to speak, but he would give way to the hon. Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and I thank the hon. Member for Couva South for being so gracious in giving way this evening. Just to facilitate the making of what would be a relatively brief contribution in a debate that is examining a number of aspects of our development and a number of positions adopted by the Government, which ought to be the subject of public scrutiny.

Mr. Speaker, I was late for this Parliament today, but because technology has come to the Parliament I am in a position to compliment my colleague, hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance—[*Desk thumping*—]—for what I thought was an excellent presentation of the Report of the Finance Committee; he did justice to the issues before us and to the Ministry of Finance to which he is a great credit.

In a previous incarnation a divergence emerged between the hon. Member for St. Joseph and the hon. Member for San Fernando East, presenting, as I did at that time, the position of those of us on this side, in relation to how "excess" revenues should be treated in the context of our determination to avoid profligate spending and to ensure a measure of fiscal responsibility in the conduct of our public affairs.

As I recall, the hon. Member for St. Joseph took the view that if you anticipated revenues of a certain level and you were the recipient of revenues at a level plus X over and above what had been anticipated, the excess revenues should be the subject of savings. It is an ideological position. He is saying, if you anticipated revenues at one level and you get revenues at a level higher than the anticipated level, then the excess revenues should be saved. That is the position of the Member for St. Joseph. It was an ideological position.

On behalf of my colleagues on this side, we took issue with that approach, because since 1956, when the PNM was formed, and in a document called the People's Charter, we made it absolutely clear that the PNM would not stick slavishly to ideological positions, especially ideological positions that are enunciated in societies in which the considerations are very different from the considerations in our own society. But rather what we would seek to do is to identify what is most appropriate in our circumstance, seeking to pursue a position of pragmatism as opposed to an ideological position that might be rooted in considerations relevant to other societies, but which may have very little relevance to the society of Trinidad and Tobago. There is a stark difference between the PNM and the UNC on this matter. There was then and there is now.

The position the PNM took was this, that if we are the subject of excess revenues, that is to say, if we anticipated revenues at a certain level but we now are the recipients of revenues at a level higher than the anticipated level of revenues, the excess revenues can be pressed into service in a development programme that is relevant to the society; most important, and there was a big divergence of view on this matter.

You would notice that I am arguing that the excess revenues should be pressed into service in a development programme. The reason for that is this; that you do not want to commit the country in the event that the basis of your excess revenues no longer exists; you do not want to commit the country to a level of expenditure from which we cannot retreat or from which we retreat with a tremendous amount of pain. Therefore for us, what is critical is not so much the level of expenditure, but the level of recurrent expenditure.

What is dangerous is, if we embark on spending that commits us to higher levels of recurrent expenditure and then the source of the excess revenues disappears, then to be able to bring your recurrent expenditure back in line with your recurrent revenues, is what is called structural adjustment. That calls for structural adjustment and in so many cases as we have seen around the world, it

will also call for, in most instances, a reduction in the permanent establishment of the public service. That is the problem! That is the problem, Mr. Speaker. And so, it is not expenditure per se, it is recurrent expenditure and therefore such an argument allows you to embark on a development programme, that is to say development projects that would benefit people today and certainly benefit your future generations, rather than the position taken by the hon. Member for St. Joseph, of saving the money for future generations; benefiting future generations, but current generations not benefiting from it at all.

The PNM's position is, we would bring a benefit to people today and those developments would also be available for the benefit of future generations. It is not a misrepresentation, because you see my colleague for Diego Martin West touched on it and I intervened, because it is necessary to expand on the point, so that the public can understand clearly the difference in the two positions; the position being taken by the PNM on this matter and the position being taken by the Opposition.

Mr. Singh: Then would the hon. Prime Minister state his position on BWEE for the benefit of the public, today.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the matter is not relevant and we will be addressing the Parliament in a budget debate not too long from now. I assure the hon. Member for Caroni East that we would take it up at that time, but for the time being let us stay on the Revenue Stabilization Fund. Revenue Stabilization, that is the point that we are on.

Mr. Speaker, as you embark on a development programme therefore, the constraint that you would face on the basis of the position being articulated by the PNM and the Government, is your ability to execute a development programme at an enhanced level; and that is the constraint. In other words, if by increasing your level of expenditure you are able to provide roads, drains and other essential items of infrastructure that would give our people a higher standard of living and a better quality of life today, then you are justified in doing it; rather than taking the position that I would save it so that I could give a better quality of life, better roads, drains and a higher standard of living to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, tomorrow. It is today as opposed to tomorrow; that is the position. That is the difference in the positions.

Mr. Speaker, as the Government therefore increases the expenditure on its development programme—and we put mechanisms in place to do that—we watch very carefully when adverse effects of that increased expenditure begin to rear

their heads and the real threat in that is; of course, inflation. The real threat is inflation. So the Government has set up mechanisms in place; firstly, to ensure that the capacity of the public sector to execute the development programme is expanded; secondly, the items that are likely to lead to inflation are the subject of special attention. That way you expand your ability to embark on a development programme over and above what normally would have been the case.

In addition to that, I think the Parliament now knows and accepts the position of the Government that the public service is an administration and not an executing agency. Many of the problems we have experienced in the execution of our development programme have stemmed from the fact that over the years we have been seeking to use the public service in a manner for which it was never intended and for which it was never designed. If we want to construct buildings; if we want to build roads, drainage, schools, it is much better to do that outside of the public service arrangements, choosing and preferring to leave the public service to act as the administration for which it was designed. That is the genesis of the special purpose state enterprise; that is all.

It is a mechanism for being able to expeditiously, comprehensively, smoothly and efficiently carry out your development programme at an enhanced level. At the same time you do that, you avoid some of the debilitating effects that would normally have been associated with such higher levels of expenditure, had it been done under the ambit of the public service.

Central Tenders Board at this time is one of the major constraints; we say it all the time. While we have a White Paper on the table and while the Government has agreed to a new system of procurement in the public sector, it will increase capacity in the public service, but still, it would not take us to the level that would afford us a rate of development. Not only is that at an accelerated level but a rate of development which in the context of enhanced revenues to the country becomes consistent with national aspirations.

There are heightened expectations in the country, there is no question about it. Let me put it differently, it is the Government's responsibility to see whether we can meet these heightened aspirations by putting new systems in place and that is what we are seeking to do.

When we say we have formed the Rural Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago; when we say that we have set up the Community Improvement Services Limited company (CISL); when we say that we would press a subsidiary of Petrotrin, Palo Seco Agriculture Enterprises Limited and when we

say that we established the East Port of Spain Development Company, all four of these special purpose state enterprises have been established for precisely the same purpose except that they are operating in different parts of the country, and in the case of the East Development Company Limited operating in a situation which is sociologically different from the rest of the country and therefore requiring special attention, special approaches and an entirely special arrangement. [*Desk thumping*]

I made the point on Tuesday of this week and I would make it again, Mr. Speaker, that there is only one purpose of Government and that is to give the people whom you govern the highest standard of living and the best quality of life of which your country is capable. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is all about. People are at the centre of development and whatever we do, we do it with people in mind and we do it to benefit people, so that—

Mr. Ramnath: That is a campaign speech.

Hon. P. Manning: No, it is not a campaign speech. We put it on the record.

Mr. Ramnath: If I knew you were going to say that I would not have given way.

Hon. P. Manning: I am sorry; I am sorry.

Hon. Member: Too late.

Hon. P. Manning: All that is designed to break my trend of thought, but of course, he is not entirely unknown to me and his ways are not entirely unknown to me.

When the Government, for example, decides that it is going to build a development on the waterfront; and included in the development—my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin West, the hon. Minister of Housing talked about it. He talked about the convention centre and the 24-storey hotel that goes with that.

Hon. Member: That is the UNC plan.

Hon. P. Manning: It is not the UNC plan, Sir. With respect, it is not the UNC plan. We scuttled that within a week of coming into office. Mr. Speaker, let me focus on the other aspect of it. When the Government builds two 26-storey buildings on the port—

Mr. Ramsaran: You should add one more storey.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Chaguanas will do well to address his attention to contemporary matters in the political party of which he is an essential part, and which at this time is engaged in a process that will take decree nisi to decree absolute. [*Laughter*] Be careful.

Mr. Ramnath: Are you saying that he would not be selected?

Hon. P. Manning: It is very unlikely, very unlikely, very unlikely. Mr. Speaker, the two 26-storey buildings, why are we building them? In the simplest explanation for it, we are building office accommodation for the public service. That is what it is. [*Desk thumping*] When we build office accommodation of a high quality for the public service, as indeed we are committed to do, we ensure that the public sector employees are conducting their business in the most comfortable environment that is available to Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we are saying.

We are saying if we put people to work in an environment that is conducive to work, their productivity increases. Their productivity will increase, then it means to say—especially if the ambience is good, as it will be—that their whole approach to service will improve and that the population would benefit from the service provided by these government departments, and will be the recipient of services at an enhanced level. It all boils down to people.

Dr. Rafeeq: What about the public service in the rest of the country?

Hon. P. Manning: One by one you do it. I am being asked by the Member for Caroni Central what about the public service in the rest of the country. Well, it starts somewhere. We started in the capital city—that is where we started, you know—because it is the capital city. We have the administrative complex in Siparia; that is a new facility. The Chancery Lane facility in San Fernando is being built.

In other words, while we put a priority on the capital city at this time, the country's development is not restricted to capital city only, nor is our determination to provide proper accommodation restricted to public servants who work in Port of Spain. It is all over the country. When we say we are going to build a new Parliament building, as indeed we will, new Parliament building—

Mr. Ramsaran: The Member for Diego Martin just say no.

Hon. P. Manning: Sorry?

Mr. Ramsaran: He say no.

Hon. P. Manning: When we say we are going to do it, yes, it would give a different spin to what he has said. When we say we are going to build a new Parliament building, it is to bring the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament into the modern world, as it relates to how parliamentary business is conducted. And to ensure that facilities are now available, which hitherto, had not been available, which will enhance the ability of elected and nominated representatives to conduct their business and to provide a better service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago who elect them and nominate them to office.

Mr. Ramnath: You pay people peanuts to work.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Couva South could protest as much as he wishes, because you see the truth is very difficult to face sometimes. That is the reality of the situation, that is why we built it. It is not built—as the hon. Member for Couva South and some of the hon. Members opposite are wont to say—in the context of the personal aggrandizement of any individual. It is easy to say that; they say it all the time.

Mr. Ramnath: We are talking about payment quality.

Hon. P. Manning: They talk it all the time. All I am saying is that we do it because we are modernizing Trinidad and Tobago, so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago get a better standard of living and a higher quality of life. [*Desk thumping*]

As we put special purpose state enterprises into place, what we do—these are management companies as the Member for Diego Martin West has quite properly and eloquently said—these companies will manage in a much better way the discharge of the development programme, and because of the capacity of these companies over and above what has been the case of the public service, we expand the ability of the public sector to execute a development programme and we accelerate the rate at which the people of Trinidad and Tobago have access to services at a higher level.

In the case of CISL, which was the pilot company, which did a pilot project in Cocoyea Village, South; I invite my colleagues to visit the pilot project to see what is happening in Cocoyea Village, South. All the drains have been fixed.

Hon. Member: What constituency is that?

Hon. P. Manning: It is the San Fernando East constituency, which is a constituency in Trinidad and Tobago and the people in that constituency are entitled to services as much as the people in Caroni East, St. Joseph, Couva South or any other part of the country. You cannot blame the people of San Fernando

East if they have proper representation from their elected representative. You want to blame them for that?

Mr. Ramnath: But the reverse is also true.

Hon. P. Manning: I will take a drink on that, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: Of water?

Hon. P. Manning: Water, of course. The drains are fixed; the roads are properly fixed; the place is properly signed; the street signs are proper, you should see it. While it is not ideal, it is a far cry from what it used to be. What is left for us to do now, as we can see from the pilot project, is to put a proper maintenance arrangement in place, because the local government system, which has the responsibility for doing the maintenance, is at this time in its current state unable to properly discharge that function.

Mr. Ramnath: Correct.

Hon. P. Manning: That is why we have on the table right now a draft White Paper on Local Government Reform. We are determined to reform that system and put it in a position to be able to discharge that maintenance function, among other things, but important in the context of our discussion taking place here now, to discharge that maintenance function that becomes essential following an upgrade of the communities of our new approach to development; in the context of the use of special purpose state enterprises to enhance the level and rate of development of the use of special purpose state enterprises, to bring a quality of life that is more consistent with their own aspirations earlier to a greater number of our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. That is what is happening. That is what we are doing.

So, Mr. Speaker, in the interim the CEPEP programme—because the fact is maligned—is taking up the slack and doing the maintenance in some of these communities, which cannot be done and which is not being properly done right now by local government. When we do the local government reform exercise, our policy of making the public service an administration instead of an executing agency, we are going to have to decide how the local government bodies are going to function within this context, but that is for another time and for another debate.

Suffice it to say, that we concentrate now on the absorptive capacity of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and to be able to do that, the Cabinet has

established a subcommittee that deals with the construction sector and it is chaired at this time by the very distinguished Member for Diego Martin East.

What they do? What that standing committee does, it looks at all the items that are critical to the construction sector which is what we have targeted for acceleration in our development rate, and it takes steps as early as possible to ensure an adequate supply and ensure that these items do not contribute to higher levels of inflation.

We have been moving so fast that indeed some of it has developed, but recently we have given out additional lands for quarrying and over time the supply of aggregates will increase and therefore the price of aggregates will come back down.

Mr. Speaker, we have been looking at cement. The cement company says that they can supply 95 per cent of the cement requirements for Trinidad and Tobago, but over 80 per cent of the requirements for the Caribbean. But it is one economic space and while we are concerned about supply, it is not just supply; it is supply at the appropriate price. If cement is being exported from Trinidad and Tobago and being sold in the Caribbean at the same price at which it is being sold in Trinidad and Tobago, then clearly something is unacceptable about the price at which it is being sold in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is the reason therefore why we go to the Caricom Secretariat and ask for an exemption from the common external tariff (CET) to allow imports. That is how we are going to do it. We are going to allow imports of cement; we would do the same for steel. It is a different story in steel because we have one supplier.

May I also make this point that the classic model does not work in Trinidad and Tobago; we are a small economy for a start, and it is easy and it has in fact happened, that dominant suppliers have emerged in different subsectors. When dominant suppliers have emerged then the competition policy does not work. The argument about competition does not work well. We are seeing it in steel right now. We have one supplier of steel and therefore that supplier of steel has control over the supply. It supplies some today, some tomorrow, I will work one shift rather than three shifts; I will not tool up and so on.

If the Government takes the position that because we have a domestic production of the item then we would not seek—well we would seek to protect from imports in the first instance—ourselves to do any importation, then what we do is, leave the domestic construction sector at the mercy of one supplier in the context of the particular item. In this case, steel. To be able to smooth the market

out and keep the prices down and control the inflation, you open the market and you allow imports of steel. That is how the Government of Trinidad and Tobago sees it. Therefore we go to the Caricom Secretariat and we apply for derogation in the CET, and that is how we have been doing it; item by item by item.

If concrete has emerged as a problem, as indeed it has, what do we do? What the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has decided to do in that situation is to allow those who operate some of the bigger contracts to have their own batching plants. So they do not have to wait on one company; one company that has emerged as a dominant supplier in the market. We have to understand it. I am not an economist, but the economists among us will understand readily that in a small economy like this, the considerations of competition do not work well.

That is why it is important that a country like this does not adhere slavishly to any ideological position that is enunciated in countries with circumstances far different from ours and enunciated in circumstances that bear little or no relevance to Trinidad and Tobago. The inflation is also caused by food.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea and will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.01 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Hon. P. Manning: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when the adjournment was taken for tea, we were discussing the need to accelerate the rate of the country's development to meet a national aspiration and indicating the mechanisms that the Government was utilizing to achieve that. We were discussing one of the major restrictions on our ability to do that and that restriction is inflation. We had discussed a mechanism that the Government had put in place, that is to say, a standing committee on the construction sector to minimize the effects of that and eliminate them, if it is possible to do that; and we were just about to discuss the issue of food because that is another area that is contributing to inflation; without going into details of it at this time, too much of the detail, because we would have a chance to do so when the budget comes.

Suffice it to say that it is a question here of supply and demand, that the market is an open market and that imports of food items come in, but that where the problems seem to exist as the statistics show us, is more in the items of food that we grow locally and our response to that has been to make more lands available for agriculture. In particular, we look with some measure of pride on the

policy we pursued when the activities of Caroni (1975) Limited were wound up and as part of the settlement an arrangement that gives access of two acres of land per person to some of those who were affected by it. I almost said adversely, but they have come out quite well, so it is not adversely at all. And that we are—

Hon Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. P. Manning: They came out quite well.

Mr. Imbert: Very well.

Hon. P. Manning: We are moving now to execute that aspect of the settlement that makes land available to these workers so that they press that land into productive pursuits, the growing particularly of short crop vegetables, which the statistics show the area in which the prices have shot up and shot up significantly and where an intervention of this nature can have a significant effect on the inflation in the country and seek to bring it back down and keep it under control. So that is food.

Mr. Speaker, the other area which we would have to look at closely in the context of inflation, is the price of labour; the cost of labour; and particularly, the cost of skilled labour. Again, a consideration of supply and demand and as the demand for that labour goes up, if the supply is not increased in some way, then the cost of the labour goes up and we experience very high prices on the one hand, very high cost for the service on the one hand and a shortage and unavailability of the skill on the other.

Mercifully, on January 01 of this year, the treaty establishing the Caricom Single Market came into force affecting six countries of the region and then by June 30, the other six countries of Caricom signed that treaty. And so, 12 countries are now involved with the Caricom Single Market, the main feature of which is free movement of skills in the region; and immediately, the Trinidad and Tobago economy is able to draw on the skills of the region and it includes Guyana. The skills of the region including Guyana and I say it for the benefit of hon. Members opposite having regard to the way they see everything. Guyana is an essential part of that and skilled labour coming in is not the subject of any discrimination; what matters to us is not what race you are, but what skill you can provide. That is consistent with the provisions of the Caricom Single Market arrangement and it is in place now, and while a limited number of skills is available to us from this source, it is significant in the context of the rate of development that we target and our ability to achieve that to which we aspire.

Mr. Speaker, skills, the import of labour. There is no country in similar circumstances of Trinidad and Tobago seeking to pursue as ambitious a development objective as we are, that has been able to do it purely on the basis of its domestic resources. China is not in a similar situation because it has what? 1.2 billion people and is developing at this time, parts of the country which means that there are significant flows of labour from other parts of the country to those parts. It is a kind of internal transfer rather than what it would be for a much smaller society like ours where the skills come from outside. In the Middle East, we see it all the time; in Saudi Arabia there are about one million Pakistanis who are operating there. It is happening in Dubai and it is happening in several other countries.

One of the options available, therefore, to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as we seek to accelerate the development programme and as we seek to minimize the inflation, is the turnkey construction contract where the project is designed on the basis of skills outside of our country. You do that when you have reached the limit of the architectural engineering skills of the domestic economy—where the materials for construction, much of it brought in from outside to the extent that there is a shortage of it inside; and where the actual labour can be brought in from outside as Trinidad and Tobago moves inexorably to full employment, the unemployment levels now being of the order of 6.7, 6.8 and 6.9 per cent.

The director of the CSO tells me that since the margin of error is two percentage points in this computation, effectively, we are looking at a band of unemployment somewhere between 5 per cent and 9 per cent of the labour force; 5 per cent of the labour force being the target that we set ourselves for full employment. I am told by the director of the CSO further, that the shortages of skills that are beginning to develop in this economy tell us that indeed we have attained full employment.

So we are now at the stage where if we want to continue development at an accelerated rate or even to accelerate it further as it is appropriate, we are going to have to do some importation of labour. Let me tell you, we have been doing that for sometime in the country, but it would happen to a slightly greater extent and we would now move to do construction on a 24/7 basis, which means that a lot of facilities that we are building would become available to the national community at a much earlier time. So that is another mechanism. *[Interruption]* I am sorry?

Hon. Member: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the difference between politicians and statesmen is that the politician looks for the benefit in the immediate short-term; the statesman looks to the future like 2020, and that is another thing. [*Desk thumping*] That is another aspect of difference between those who aspire on that side and those who achieve on this side. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, another constraint. I think it was the hon. Member for St. Joseph in his contribution who raised it and asked whether the quality of service provided by the public service would improve as a result of the high level of expenditure, the accelerated development programme and the facilities that we provide. While the answer is yes, there is another constraint that has to be addressed. And to put it simply, without trying to complicate the debate unduly, the country has reached the stage where we now have to seriously consider what arrangements we would put in place for the discharge of the human resource management function in the public service.

Mr. Speaker, it has become very relevant also in the context of the constitutional reform; the role of the service commissions and in particular, the role of a department called the Chief Personnel Officer (CPO) and the management of the human resource function in the individual ministries. These are issues that have now come into stark focus as we move forward in our development, an issue that has to be addressed. When we come to constitution reform, we would have to decide what is the model that we would now put in place that replaces existing arrangements with then acknowledged limitations in the public service. What do we put in place to ensure that we have a smooth discharge of the human resource management function and the public service operates as smoothly as it is anticipated to operate and certainly, as seems to operate in the private sector.

We are going to have to decide that and may I tell you, I should just advise the Parliament, that quietly we have been discussing this matter in the Government and that we are about to put some arrangements in place to study that issue, and to assist us in coming to some conclusion as to how we discharge this function as the Government contemplates, the draft Constitutions that have been published. One by Sir Ellis Clarke on the one hand and the other, by the Principles of Fairness Committee; to determine what the Government's position would be on the discharge of the human resource management function that needs to be enshrined in new constitutional arrangements. That is a matter that we are also looking at.

Mr. Speaker, there is one other feature of the special purposes, state enterprises that we have pressed into service to expand the country's capacity that can usefully detain us for a short while at this time and it is the use of the small contractors. In the pilot project, there were 33 contracts awarded to 19 contractors in Cocoyea Village South, 12 of whom came from the village of Cocoyea. Not only that, but the 12 contractors from the village and the other contractors as it became necessary to supplement the core labour that they had, employed people from the village in which the contract was being executed.

What it means to say is that as we accelerate the development programme, we have found a mechanism to include the small man in the developmental objectives of the country and to ensure that the communities in which the development programme is being executed, also benefit to the extent that whatever surplus labour exists in those communities is pressed into service in the development of their own communities.

What it means also is that they bring a level of commitment to the work that they do because it is work for them, the communities in which they live and operate and therefore, we seem to get benefits all around by this new approach. It is an attempt and a significant attempt to ensure that the wealth of the country trickles down to the people at the base, the economic base of the society and the Government is quite pleased indeed with how this has operated.

May I say, without letting out any secrets of the budget to come, that as priorities go, we are giving priority to the allocation of financial resources to these special purpose state enterprises in fiscal year 2006/2007, so that you would see in the communities a much greater amount of activity providing better services—roads, drains, electricity, water, what have you employing to a greater extent people from the community especially in rural Trinidad and Tobago where there is still some surplus labour. You would see all of that and you would see the success of the Government's efforts to bring the small man into the mainstream of sharing in the enhanced revenues and what some people say, the oil wealth of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It is all-embracing, it is comprehensive. All of this you do not hear coming from the Opposition, you know. You do not hear any of this.

Mr. Ramnath: It is not feasible.

Hon. P. Manning: You are not hearing any of this coming from those who criticize the Government. Those who do it have not taken the time to think and to look carefully at what the Government is doing. Many of the comments that they

have made are comments that are not informed by knowledge. Mr. Speaker, there is a proverb which goes this way:

"There is gold and there are precious stones, but the lips informed by knowledge are a precious jewel."

Mr. Speaker, indeed, in this discourse, the lips that are informed by knowledge are indeed a precious jewel. Not enough of that exists in this country. That is why it is necessary in this debate to take the opportunity to put some of these things into the record and to expose to the national community, the rationale behind what the Government is doing. And it is an opportunity that I welcome, occasioned largely by the contribution of the very distinguished Member for St. Joseph.

So the small man is involved; community labour is involved; small contractors are involved and we seek to refine the system all the time. You see, recently—well, perhaps we would leave that for another time.

The hon. Member for St. Joseph also made reference to the Brian Lara Stadium and in condemnatory terms. Mr. Speaker, how easily we forget. How easily we forget. Because, when Brian Lara, that icon, that national hero hit 400 runs and broke his own record for the second time, we sought to honour him in a number of ways. One of the ways that we agreed on in honouring him was to establish an academy for cricket; the critical element of which would be a new cricket stadium, a new facility for sports medicine and the application of technology to the development of cricket. The sports medicine facility being applicable not just to cricket, but to all other sports on which we embark in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what we agreed on.

Therefore, the construction on the Brian Lara Stadium was consistent with the agreement and position enunciated by the Government, consistent with that position to enhance the development of cricket in Trinidad and Tobago and cricket in the region. I need hardly remind hon. Members that one of the planks on which the integration movement has been built is West Indies cricket. University of the West Indies versus West Indies cricket and there are a couple others. West Indies cricket is a very important plank of Caribbean integration. And what we also said—

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

Motion made, That the hon. Prime Minister's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. P. Manning: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to you and to hon. Members for your very kind indulgence. We were talking about the Brian Lara Stadium; we were talking about West Indies cricket and the importance of it. We were talking about the Government's decision to make a contribution in this regard to return the West Indies to a position of supremacy in cricket by establishing an academy for cricket in recognition of the sterling performance and achievement of that national hero, Brian Lara—sports medicine facility and technology for cricket development.

The ICC World Cup Series Cricket of 2006, influenced our decision only in one way, the timing of the construction of the facility. Whether there was ICC cricket or there was not ICC cricket, the facility would have been constructed. It was not ICC cricket that dictated that; it was something else, another achievement that on which we were embarked. But please, what I am trying to avoid is that you take decisions based on misinformation and the propaganda which as you know, there is no shortage of in this country at this time. So that did not influence it. What we sought to do was to build it at this time, to see whether we could build it in time to make some kind of contribution to that cricket. Our position on that cricket was well known.

We made it clear that we wished no part of it, but we would do whatever we are called upon to do in the interest of Caribbean integration. That was our position. Was it not? That was our position. And I would tell you something else, a number of people who objected to that position initially, are now saying, perhaps Trinidad and Tobago was quite right in the position it adopted.

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. P. Manning: You would see when the cost emerges. You would see. What we sought to do here therefore, was to accelerate the construction of the facility to see whether it could make any contribution, however small, to the ICC World Cup Cricket of 2007. It has been selected for warm-up matches. Warm-up match, there is no big thing about a warm-up match. It is not a critical event. If a warm-up match cannot be done at a new stadium, you could do it somewhere else. We have the facility at St. Augustine; you could do it anywhere else. You have Guaracara Park; you have so many others. In other words, it is not critical to World Series Cricket; it is not critical to World Cup Cricket 2007, nor was it

designed for that purpose. It was not designed to make any critical contribution. The contribution to be made to cricket by Trinidad and Tobago would be made by the Queen's Park Oval. Everybody knows that. Everybody knows that, but we were using the occasion of it to see whether we could accelerate the construction of that facility in time to participate in it. There is no other reason and I tell you this: when that facility is finished, it would be the premier cricketing facility in the Caribbean. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Cabinet approved draft legislation for the establishment of the Revenue Stabilization Fund, to get back to the contribution of the hon. Member for St. Joseph. The situation that faces us today is a little different from the situation that faced us then. Because you see, the budget for fiscal year 2006 is predicated on an oil price of \$45 a barrel, but the expenditure from the budget is predicated on an oil price of \$35 a barrel. In other words, we have \$10 a barrel flexibility in terms of expenditure versus revenue and it is consistent with the point I made initially, that what you have to control is not so much expenditure, it is recurrent expenditure.

Of course, you control all expenditure but recurrent expenditure, that is what must not be allowed to get out of hand. That is why in predicating our expenditure on an oil price significantly lower than the price on which we predicate our revenues, we are making a significant intervention now in seeking to ensure that there is no profligate spending and we do not put the country in a position where a reduction in the additional source of revenue would lead us to a situation where we are going to have to embark on major structural adjustment. That is why it is done that way.

We are in the happy position today, that notwithstanding that oil prices are running at \$70 a barrel, and therefore, we are earning revenues over and above what was anticipated even in a situation where we had put a safeguard in place—and what the Government has been doing and what the Government has done in this Finance Committee Report is to appropriate all the extra money to savings, the Revenue Stabilization Fund. But we only do it, not from an ideological perspective, but we do it because we feel that we have reached to the limit of the productive capacity of the economy and that we are not able to spend any more money productively and efficiently, and therefore, we appropriate it to savings. That is why we are proud of the fact that in the Revenue Stabilization Fund, by the end of this year you would have approximately \$8.5 billion and in this Finance Committee Report, we are appropriating approximately \$691 million more to the Revenue Stabilization Fund.

So, Mr. Speaker, there you have it. The Revenue Stabilization Fund is not ideological in nature; we put it in place because it is very pragmatic because at this time we are not able to efficiently spend that money. We are, therefore, making an arrangement whereby that money would be savings for future generations. When we come to the Revenue Stabilization Fund debate, we would introduce another element into all of this and that is the need for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago or the opportunity for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to gain additional revenues now on the basis of investments that we can make for revenue purposes, similar to what other countries have done.

I remind the hon. Member for St. Joseph and other Members that Saudi Arabia now gains as much revenue from investments as it gains from oil. It is very important, so that they have diversified their economy and their source of revenue away from oil to investments, and Trinidad and Tobago is going to have to consider how we do it.

In fact, just Tuesday of this week we announced that now that we have reached to this juncture, the time has come to bring all the players in the energy sector together again, and we would do it in Tobago as it was done 1975. Bring them all together again, prepare the papers and let us talk; all the stakeholders, domestically and foreign. Some of the foreign companies that operate here; some of those which are intending to come to operate, we would invite them all. Let us hear what everybody else has to say and we would indeed invite hon. Members opposite to participate in this most significant exercise. Let us talk; let us see; let us pool our resources; let us pool our intellectual capacity and present international development; let us discuss and let us now determine what would be the best way to move forward.

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

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I normally do not have regrets, but if it is one regret I have today is to have given way to my hon. friend from San Fernando East. I was very impressed with the contribution by my friend from Diego Martin West; it is one of those days when he chose to focus on issues rather than personalities. I was impressed by his very honest assessment of the problems that we face as a small country blessed with riches which have come our way as a result of international events. He identified the main issue in relation to investing in the future through infrastructural development as that of management only to give way to the Prime Minister who

rambled and tried to handle a whole host of issues without dealing with the problems associated with delivery and the constraints associated with delivery.

On the one hand, you have a concern being expressed about the need for greater management skills; for a greater number of people and more efficient running of government business. On the other hand, we have a solution being proffered and that is, let us proliferate state enterprises.

5.30 p.m.

The Prime Minister, obviously, is responding to his critics outside of this House, about their concern for the proliferation of state enterprises. The history of state enterprises is well known; characterized by inefficiency, corruption and the high cost of operation. This country had moved away from state enterprises to the extent that very few existed before this last term of government.

We are now seeing a reintroduction of these state enterprises, to the extent that the ministries responsible for delivery, in my view, are not able to deliver the goods and services expected by the population, because of the interference in the jobs of these ministries. To say that the public service is about administration and that the state enterprise sector is about delivery is nothing but an effort to undermine the administration of the ministries in the country. [*Desk thumping*] I know that when I have to complain or raise a matter concerning roads in the country, that I go to the Minister of Works and Transport.

Mr. Imbert: Who has served you well; be honest.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I expect that the Minister of Works and Transport would have, not only the resources, but also the people who would deliver.

Mr. Imbert: And we have done so.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Now I hear about a National Infrastructure Development Company (NIDCO), not the National Entrepreneurship Development Company (NEDCO), having to do a series of projects which, hitherto, were the responsibility of the Ministry of Works and Transport. If the Ministry of Works and Transport wishes to expand its operations so that it could be more efficient, I see no difficulty in the Minister seeking to have Cabinet's approval, or Parliament's approval, if necessary, to carry out these works; but clearly this is about politicking. This has nothing to do with creating efficiencies in the system. It is about finding jobs for just about anybody who supports the Prime Minister personally, so he could develop his own cabal— [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: You have one too.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—so he could undermine his own Ministers. I say this without reservation, because the problem the Government and the people face has to do with the lack of delivery. When you listen to the contributors from the other side in the debate today, you want to know whether you are really living in Trinidad and Tobago, because nothing has been happening in terms of providing the citizens with better infrastructure and basic necessities. The Member for Point Fortin, who is not here today, had to lead demonstrations in Point Fortin in order to have roads paved. The people of Barrackpore continued to demonstrate because of the absence of basic facilities. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: "Dey stop; dey stop!"

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, do you know what was shocking? They went with the army. Hundreds of people are murdered in this country; places have been identified as areas where gangs and criminals reside, to the extent that the Government has agreed to meeting with gang leaders, so they know who they are, but you do not hear about the army placing people under curfew, as they have done in Cunjal, as they have done in Rochard Douglas Road, as they have done in New Colonial Road, GP Road and so forth.

Mr. Singh: "Dey" would get some suicide bombers soon.

Mr. K. Ramnath: One of the best representatives in this Parliament is the Member for Naparima, who is always asking questions and raising issues about his constituency. If the Ministry of Works and Transport is given the staff and management resources, in particular, a lot of these issues which have nothing to do with money would be addressed.

Mr. Imbert: Talk about the Couva roads, "nuh". You said that you would say something. [*Crosstalk*] He volunteered; I did not ask him.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I worked in the area between Barrackpore and Guayaguayare for 12 years, so I know the area intimately. It is a road that is, virtually, in a valley; that is why they call it "The Valley Line". From time immemorial it has been subjected to flooding and consequent damage. Today, in a country with so many resources, with so much money at its disposal, there have been no plans to deal with that particular problem. [*Crosstalk*] I talk for everybody, my dear friend from Chaguanas, including you.

Mr. Imbert: He is the MP for Barrackpore.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I used that as an example, because I know the area. The people have every right to demonstrate. They have every right to stand up to the police and the army and say to them, "Get to hell out of Barrackpore, because we are the ones experiencing the problems." The Prime Minister came here and painted such a great picture of all his dreams and all his plans; none of which are working. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rahael: A lot of them are working.

Mr. K. Ramnath: When I hear the comments coming from the other side, I wonder whether they understand what was happening before they came into office. For someone who was not in office and who experienced a revolutionary government in power between 1995 and 2000 and who experienced the beginning of a new growth path for the country—[*Laughter*]

Dr. Rowley: That is why they did not come back.

Mr. K. Ramnath:—I could attest to the contributions made, as an outsider at the time, far more those persons who were in the Parliament.

Let me give you an example. The Member for Diego Martin West presented his thesis about investment in the future and focused on infrastructure. That is what he spoke about for his 75 minutes. I wondered whether he did not realize that the Piarco Airport was one such project. The very people who today are complaining that a school which cost \$40 million in 1993/1994 would now cost \$200 million, have been so totally uncharitable about those who ran this country before and faced the same escalation in prices. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: We are opposed to the theft.

Mr. K. Ramnath: If you have certain policemen in the country who are sympathetic to the Government in power, you can instruct them to lock up Opposition politicians and lay all kinds of spurious charges which may never be heard in my lifetime. I recall during the first oil boom, the Hall of Justice, the Mount Hope Hospital, the twin towers and the port; all these ambitious projects and the escalation and variation in costs, in some cases almost equal to the original cost. They behave as if variations and escalations happen to be a feature of a UNC government.

What do you think we were doing when we conceptualized and built a new terminal building at Piarco, especially at a time when the old structure had become totally irrelevant and people had to walk for hundreds of yards in the rain and could not get their luggage and cargo? What do you understand by building

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. RAMNATH]

Friday, September 08 2006

100 primary schools, pre-schools and secondary schools in that period of time? That was an investment in the future. That was about improving the infrastructure. They have not built any schools. Five years have gone and they are now talking about building new schools to cater for the change in the shift system.

What about the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from San Fernando to Golconda? I heard about the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from Golconda to Debe and I have not seen one yard of earth cleared since the year 2001; that was investing in the future. There was also the conversion of Caroni (1975) Limited roads into what we call the ring roads. This ambitious Government is talking about building a three-mile highway to Princes Town and putting in a toll gate.

Mr. Imbert: Is there a shorter one? It could be one mile or more.

Mr. K. Ramnath: It is a lot of talk. When you listen to the philosophy and not the ideology—now we are getting a lecture between ideology and philosophy; somebody might get up and start talking about pragmatism—you ask yourself whether they believe that the people of this country do not understand the role of government and do not have expectations. The bridges that were built in the period 1995 to 2000 were built at a phenomenal rate and provided road users with the opportunity they never had before, from Guayaguayare to Toco and different parts of the country; that was investment in the future by investment in the infrastructure.

I am hearing about this waterfront convention centre. That whole waterfront project constituted one out of five initiatives in the diversification of the economy. A Hyatt Hotel is nothing new. I recall that during one of the first debates here when we came into Opposition, some Member on the Government side—it could very well have been the Member for Diego Martin West—went to town attacking the Member for St. Joseph for wanting to build a convention centre and a multi-storey hotel by Hyatt itself. Interestingly, Mr. Calder Hart was the man who was involved in that project; except we did not know until recently that he was PNM. *[Laughter]*

I recall very well that the Member for St. Joseph was attacked for saying that we were going to guarantee a certain number of rooms, because hotels were not going to come here and build huge buildings with large numbers of rooms, when they have no guarantee that they would have a certain occupancy rate. What do you think we do with Virgin Airways, British Airways and those companies that fly from London to Tobago? We buy seats, whether people sit in them or not, so

we could guarantee that these airlines would come to Tobago and provide an opportunity for people to travel back and forth. That waterfront project was not conceptualized by the PNM. Interestingly, the budget of 2001 was \$16 billion, compared to \$41 billion. We were able to invest in the future by way of investment in infrastructural projects.

I think I have made the point. There is nothing new. What is new is the building of drains in Cocoyea. That is the greatest achievement of the Prime Minister's administration, some little company called CISL. What was great about this achievement, to quote him, was the employment of people in Cocoyea, 19 little contractors and so forth and so on. The former mayor of San Fernando said openly that he was a ceremonial idiot; that was his own remark.

Mr. Imbert: He is half right.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I see my honourable friend from San Fernando West smiling, because she knows what I am saying. The mayor of San Fernando wanted to find out why CEPEP money and gangs were not attached to the borough of San Fernando so he and the councillors could have told them where they wanted work done. But, of course, that belongs to the Prime Minister; he would not allow even his own PNM colleagues to have any say in how this programme runs. So instead of giving the mayor of San Fernando and the corporation the money, which was so badly needed to fix Palmiste—with which you are very familiar, Mr. Speaker—to fix Cocoyea and to fix San Fernando and the environs, he sets up CISL as a pilot project. On this pilot project we could write a paper and go to some international forum and deliver it as the hallmark of PNM rule in this country [*Crosstalk*] based on philosophy, not ideology.

I make this point because if we are to deal with the management problems in the public service, then we should get down to dealing with those problems; not setting up little groups all over the place. I do not want to go into the CEPEP programme, but I would just indicate to you that it is accountable to no one. The contractor is hired through some kind of political arrangement and he decides where the gang goes.

The Minister of Public Utilities wrote to me and indicated that she was going to ensure that CEPEP provided a maintenance service to my office grounds, which happen to be very large. They come and spend a little while; they leave because they have to go somewhere else and the place is in bush and so forth.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. RAMNATH]

Friday, September 08 2006

I am not here to complain about CEPEP. In a modern world, you are saying, "I am going to replace the public service with a series of little projects," which are politically run and accountable to one man, and that is the Prime Minister.

So \$41 billion, moneys into the Revenue Stabilization Infrastructure Development Fund; somebody reading about it would say that we are doing very well. When you ask the people in Brasso Venado and you ask the people in Mundo Nuevo—*[Interruption]* and the Member for Diego Martin East is very aware that it takes hours to get to Mundo Nuevo because they have abandoned that area of the Member for Caroni East's constituency.

Mr. Imbert: And Malgretoute. *[Interruption]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: Now La Horquetta/Talparo. If we address the issue of management in the public service, then the Ministry would become aware of the acute problems that exist throughout the country. You would not have people burning tyres, blocking roads and standing up to the police. You would not have to put the police and army through this kind of situation, when people are genuinely upset about what is happening in the country and have to take action of their own. The Ministry would have been responding.

Mr. Imbert: To what?

Mr. K. Ramnath: So there is all talk and no action. Now we hear about the Rural Development Company. I want to take issue with the acting Leader of Government Business, one of my favourite friends from the other side.

Hon. Member: Friend, you say? *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: I read in the newspaper either yesterday or today, some scathing remarks about local government. Who is the Minister of Local Government? He is not here today. "They do not know their responsibility; they do not know what roads belong to them." Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, just imagine the geography: from Talparo south of Arima, to the Guaracara River, to Tabaquite, through Longdenville, bypassing Chaguanas, coming into Edinburgh 500 and so forth, gets \$1.5 billion a year in the development programme; that is for infrastructural development. The Minister did not avail himself of the opportunity to find the facts.

Mr. Imbert: Look it right here.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Or, perhaps, he does not care to learn the truth. That is instead of making the resources available to the local government bodies. I am

quite sure that you could consult the Member for Toco/Manzanilla and the Member for St. Ann's East with respect to their intense frustrations when they were involved, at some level, in local government; \$1.5 million is given for infrastructure works.

Mr. Imbert: Not true. *[Interruption]*

Mr. K. Ramnath: You speak after me; you could speak any time. They have abandoned local government. Because they have failed in local government, they are now coming with another promise of reform of local government. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, \$175 million for eight or 10 regional corporations. What do you expect councillor Awong to do? I know him very well; he is a very decent man. These are people who are faced with an angry electorate on a daily basis, having to take a lot of criticisms from people, when they do not have the resources to carry out infrastructural development. And the Government boasts about how much money it has and all its plans, as if it has not been in power for the last 40 years; 40 years it has been in power.

Mr. Manning: Between 1986 and 1991 too?

Mr. K. Ramnath: You failed miserably over those years. They have been in power for 39 and a half years.

Hon. Member: You were in the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR).

Mr. K. Ramnath: For six years my government were in power; we did phenomenal things.

Mr. Manning: Like the airport?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Something of which you should be proud. I was in government for one year and six months, or something like that. *[Interruption]* What you had before was a pig pen. *[Interruption]* You used your police and your secret service to persecute Members of the Opposition. You will never get any one of them charged or convicted. You will never have anybody convicted. You will use your police as you used them to hound the Chief Justice. That was your personal mission as Prime Minister; to hound the Chief Justice, because he would not do things to suit you; as you have done to the former Leader of the Opposition. *[Interruption]* I am so respectful, I would give way.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. He argued that I hounded the Chief Justice because he would not do that which I would wish him to do. I wonder: What specifically did I ask the Chief Justice to do that he did not wish to? I wonder if the Member could enlighten us, please.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You asked him to resign or face prosecution and when he refused, you did, in fact, prosecute him. [*Laughter*] You would see the outcome of all that very soon. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has gotten to a point where he has to decide everything. If he does not like something, he is going to make sure that he has his way. The philosophy on that side, as enunciated by the founding father, was: "No damn dog bark." I must admit, a lot of pot hounds bark on my side.

Mr. Imbert: What did you say, that you have pot hounds on that side?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I was not referring to my honourable friends; but if you notice, they dare not stand up in the face of national complaints of inefficiency and corruption; they dare not say a word on that side. [*Crosstalk*]

Caroni lands, they came out quite well. They shut down Caroni (1975) Limited almost two years ago and not a root of cassava has been planned in any of the two-acre plots. Up to now, no one has a document saying, "You can go and occupy the lands." [*Interruption*]

Mr. Narine: Thanks for giving way to me, Member for Couva South. I have visited those areas and recently I was in Orange Grove, Jerningham, Waterloo and those areas. We have over 4,000 farmers registered; they have farmers' badges, and they have been occupying their two-acre plots. I am certain that if you check with the Member for Chaguanas, he would tell you that in Jerningham we already have about 70 farmers occupying lands; so it is not true to say what you did.

Mr. Manning: Misinformation.

Mr. K. Ramnath: These people had to draw for lots. They drew and were then told, in many cases, "We are not giving you those lands again; you have to go somewhere else and occupy the lands." That programme has been a failure. They might have registered those people who were given the lots, but there is no contribution to agriculture; that programme has not worked.

Imagine one of the conditions is that you cannot even build a shack on the land so you can be there to look after your crops. If anybody wants to find out, just go and find out. The type of conditionalities tied attached to those two acres make it almost impossible for persons to accept those conditions. [*Interruption*]
[*Mr. Narine stands*]

Mr. Narine: Member, would you give way once more?

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, I would prefer if you reply to me when you have a chance.

Hon. Members: Tell us the conditions!

Mr. Speaker: The Member is not giving way.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I have been very charitable this afternoon. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Narine: Why are you misleading the people like that?

Mr. K. Ramnath: What stole the Prime Minister's show was when he said that based on the fact that we have such a shortage of skilled labour, we have reached full employment. The shortage of skilled labour is an indication that we have reached full employment. If you have an economy in which lots of projects are going on, whether they are State or private projects; people are building homes and so on, more money is available as a result of the oil boom, then quite naturally there would be pressure on services and prices. This country has a shortage of skilled labour and it has nothing to do with full employment. If there is a shortage of skilled labour, there is a shortage of skilled labour.

Instead of the Government coming up with a plan to deal with this issue of skills, they advertise on-the-job training (OJT). On-the-job training for six months does not help anybody. It is a good programme to keep persons disciplined. It is a good programme to have them do something, but we have to develop schools in this country that are focused on the training of people, to the extent, that on completion of such a programme, they could be licensed and could go out in the world of work as competent tradesmen.

A lot of our skilled labour has left this country. In the oil industry today, there is a shortage of skilled labour, because a lot of skilled people went abroad looking for work; but we were not training anybody. The John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and the San Fernando Technical Institute which were designed for a particular purpose were converted to the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT).

Mr. Imbert: By you. The College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago was your creation.

Mr. K. Ramnath: We dealt with the issue of the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute a long time ago and that was settled, because the Member provided a lot of misinformation to the House.

Dr. Rowley: You want to reopen it? Stay out of it.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Misinformation; but that is not my forte. The shortage of skilled labour is as a result of failure to prepare people for the market. You come here today and say, "I am going to bring Guyanese; I am going to bring people from the Caribbean islands." So that it would not be said, "What happen to Guyana?", they slip it in. "We are going to bring Guyanese to work." What skilled labour is there in Guyana that we do not have in Trinidad and Tobago? I am trying to find out what is the experience of industry in Guyana that would provide us with skilled labour from that country?

Mr. Imbert: You do not want them to come?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Why are you patronizing Bharath Jagdeo and when he needed pumps and Georgetown was under four feet of water, you waited until the flood disappeared before you sent them? [*Crosstalk*] You are patronizing Bharath Jagdeo, only because he has won another term.

Dr. Rowley: Patronize him to get what?

Mr. K. Ramnath: You and your Caricom dreams.

These are some of my observations with respect to the contributions made. The admission from the other side is that, "We recognize that we have the money, we have a difficulty in spending it and we have a difficulty in showing what we have done."

I must admit that the Minister of Housing could show a lot for the moneys available to him, because, of course, the housing programme, as you see it, and the distribution, are purely for political purposes.

Dr. Rowley: Come on.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not against subsidized housing. I am not against standards. I am not against toilet facilities and concrete drains. I believe you should have standards and if the World Bank says otherwise, you were right to tell them where to get off. It is clear to me that the efficiency we have seen with respect to the construction of houses in the country is—

Dr. Rowley: Management.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Now I understand why you were attacking the Prime Minister during his 75 minutes. [*Laughter*]

There have been notable improvements in the number of units constructed. I want to ask the Member why he has abandoned the former Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee (SILWC) estates. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Are you talking about SILWC? It has not been abandoned. In fact, Cabinet has taken the decision to make it a subsidiary of the Housing Development Corporation (HDC), but in the meantime, it has been doing yeoman service as part of the general management team of the national housing programme, especially in the rural areas. In fact, SILWC is doing a whole lot more than it was doing in the past. In the context that SILWC was, specifically, by statute meant to deal with sugar workers who are not there now, we have converted it into another function and it is doing very well. You might have observed that not one person has lost his job at SILWC.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Are you saying, hon. Minister, that we could expect to see a programme of investment in the SILWC housing estates in the near future?

Dr. Rowley: You are talking specifically about areas built by SILWC? We are doing a general upgrade in the national housing stock. In fact, we are doing work "bandayjam"; where there is work to be done, we will do it and the work is ongoing. It is an ongoing programme.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Thank you, because I will be in touch with you. One of the largest areas is Dow Village in California. There are no sewer plants there; the roads are in poor condition; the drainage is earthen.

Dr. Rowley: Now you understand why you do not do that, because you have to come back and fix it after.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I have seen no work. I trust that after I am finished here today, we could meet and discuss a programme to rehabilitate such an estate. [*Interruption*] I am expecting that you would say yes. I do not want to know why you objected to the World Bank. I agree with you. I am hearing from my friend from Diego Martin West that the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee housing estate would be receiving attention and funding urgently.

Dr. Rowley: Do not quote me. I said it is an ongoing programme.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The National Housing Authority, through some programme they have called PURE—you know they have all these acronyms—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: There is no PURE in HDC; that is a Ministry of Works and Transport programme.

Mr. K. Ramnath: They paved 23 roads in the NHA housing estate in Couva and where there were no roads to pave, they constructed a road in order to pave it.

Mr. Imbert: What?

Mr. K. Ramnath: One of those roads runs alongside my home, because I live there.

Mr. Narine: "De" man fix Balisier Street. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath: While I appreciate that work was done there— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: You are trying to say "Thank you"?

Mr. K. Ramnath:—because they have a PNM councillor representing that area, they would pave 23 roads there and not a single one in the Dow Village SILWC property. It is okay for Members opposite to delude their constituents, but my constituents understand that the government in power is responsible for the equal distribution of wealth across the country. It is your duty, not to discriminate, but to ensure that you do not pave 23 roads in one area and next door not one is being paved.

Let me get to my substantive contribution. [*Crosstalk*] We heard all kinds of things about cement and steel and all what they were planning to do. I want to draw the House's attention and that of the Minister in the Ministry of Finance who moved the Motion, to a document Tuesday, October 22, 2002, *Strategic Investments and Reform on Energy*. It says that given our resource endowment, the energy sector would continue to be the main engine of growth in our economy.

"It is well known that this sector is undergoing profound changes as a result of which we are being transformed from an oil-based to a gas-based economy. Oil production would continue to play an important role and with the recent oil find by BhP Billiton, oil production is expected to rise from the current level of 120,000 barrels a day to 200,000 barrels a day by mid 2006." [*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I raised that point because all of what we are talking about here today in terms of this increased wealth and what we are doing with it, has to do with revenue from the oil industry, in particular. It has to do with the unprecedented increases in oil prices; not as a result of what we do in Trinidad and Tobago, but as a result of what is happening globally. We were expecting to increase production to 200,000 barrels in day in 2006. The sad story is that we are not even close to 150,000 barrels today and we are seeing continuing decline in the Teak, Samaan and Poui Fields of BP's operation, which has been leased out to Repsol, with a 15 per cent ownership by Petrotrin. The production from those fields is now in the vicinity of about 25,000 barrels, down from 100,000 barrels several years ago.

While we are talking about how to spend the money coming from the industry, we have to talk about how we are going to replace reserves and how we are going to increase our take from the oil and gas that we produce. The former Minister of Energy and Energy Industries had, in this House, presented a position that all expired leases would have been subject to renegotiation and that the Government was going to undertake a seismic survey on land in the southern basin so as to determine potential for further exploration and consequent production. Unfortunately, he demitted office and nothing really has been done in that area. So while we are experiencing increase in the price of oil, we are seeing a decline in oil production.

When the budget debate comes, we would talk a lot more about that. But the fact of the matter is that our tax regime has to take into account the phenomenal increase in prices and we should be looking at increases in taxation at the higher price levels. I do not think the present bands for supplemental petroleum tax are sufficient, in light of prices exceeding \$70 a barrel. Oil companies must be made to pay higher taxes when higher prices are fetched for that commodity, simply because when you produce a barrel of oil, you would never be able to replace it. The bands need to be reviewed.

Mr. Imbert: We did. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: All the Minister from Diego Martin East is concerned about is how to pave over some roads and do a very poor job. He does not care about how the money is coming; he is on the spending side of the equation. [*Crosstalk*]

The other issue is the rape of our natural gas resources. At the moment, we are told that we cannot do anything about the increase in royalty payments. Imagine you are extracting close to 3 billion cubic feet of gas a day and you are getting

one and a half cents per thousand million BTU from these companies. What you get in return is a promise that, "If you wait until 2010," which was an agreement reached a long time ago, "we will give you a certain tranche of gas" which the Government can use for whatever purpose. That tranche of gas was given for electricity generation, in case the Member for Diego Martin West does not know. That tranche of gas was given in lieu of royalty.

Dr. Rowley: You do not know what you are talking about.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Do you want to correct me? Go ahead.

Dr. Rowley: We do not have to wait until 2010 to get any such gas.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I did not say that. I said that you have to wait until 2010 to change the royalty arrangements; not to get the gas.

Mr. Imbert: That is not true.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I would not take on the Leader of Government Business. He does not know the business.

Dr. Rowley: He is misleading the House.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The former Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would tell you that one of the conditionalities with respect to the LNG was that if they were going to invest, we were going to have a moratorium on royalty increases.

Dr. Rowley: Which plant, LNG 1, 2 or 3?

Mr. K. Ramnath: Why do you not go and research, Member for Diego Martin West. You suffer from ignorance of the matter. You should go and research the matter. You are a Member of the Cabinet, go and look at the notes. [*Crosstalk*]

In lieu of not paying royalty, they provided the Government with a tranche of gas for electricity generation. The National Gas Company (NGC) has indicated that the gas does not belong to them, but to the Government, but they would transport it. That gas was going to be used by Alcoa and Alutrint for aluminium smelting. I know that as a fact. Today, I am reading in the newspaper: "No downstream industries in aluminium; we are not going to invest." Suddenly, there is a change of position. All the time, "We are going to build an aluminium smelter in Chatham and we are going to build it regardless of the consequences; Chatham will have a smelter; I am not speaking to the people there." In the newspapers

today I saw where the Prime Minister said, "We are not going to invest in such a project unless we are guaranteed that there would be downstream industries associated with it."

I want to ask whether the tranche of gas that was promised to Alcoa would still be made to Alcoa, or whether that tranche was part of the investment in that operation. We are not getting our fair share of revenue from the gas industry. They are boasting that we are now a gas-based economy. We are talking about revenues coming from the oil and gas industry, but no country would allow such an important natural resource to fetch a royalty of one and a half cents US per million BTU. Whatever the reason for the arrangement to postpone the introduction of higher taxes on natural gas, we have to start renegotiating. I was encouraged when I read in today's newspaper a statement by Dr. Saith when he said that they are now talking to British Gas and EOG Resources with respect to production sharing agreements which would now make it possible for us to get a better deal from gas production. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Rowley: We have production sharing agreements.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You are a hard rock geologist; why are you getting involved in this matter? You have not followed the developments in the oil and gas industry; you probably need to go back and serve an apprenticeship.

Dr. Rowley: With whom?

Mr. K. Ramnath: With anybody who knows; the Prime Minister, he is your mentor. I would not have you as a student. *[Laughter]* *[Crosstalk]*

Dr. Saith said that the Petroleum Taxes Act would be amended to reflect those changes and that companies would be asked to compete for blocks in the competitive bidding process on the existing price bands. He also said that those terms would be subject to windfall profit 5 tax using the base negotiated with the existing bands.

We have spent all day talking about roads, drains, Cocoyea and CEPEP and no one has bothered to talk about where the money is coming from and how we are going in the circumstances to ensure that our resources are not exploited in such a way that we do not benefit from it. That is the issue. Whatever the reason for previous agreements, we must make sure now that we get a better deal for our natural resources. In fact, all new leases should be subject to improved benefits for Trinidad and Tobago. I imagine that is not a consideration for some of these Ministers. Dr. Saith said that the reserves of natural gas stood at 34.9 trillion cubic feet.

I was going to ask the Member for Port of Spain South whether he provided this information, because in the last bit of information he provided to this House the figure was substantially lower than that; unless we are looking at possible reserves. How can you base your industrialization project on probable reserves and so forth? In fact, the proven natural gas reserves in this country stand conservatively around 21 trillion cubic feet, at this time. The country is made to believe that we have an inexhaustible supply of this important commodity. The last thing in the world that we should be doing is giving this population a false sense of security.

Dr. Rowley: But they have economic security.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I imagine that the Member for Diego Martin West is tired. He is not accustomed to being lectured to. He was the dean of geology at the university.

Dr. Rowley: I was not the dean; get things right. I was the head of department.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He was professor? Head of department. I am quite sure that he would love to be head of department of that side. [Laughter] Unfortunately, your time has not come.

Mr. Hinds: You have no side.

Dr. Rowley: You would not understand that.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Your aspirations have been thwarted, as much as you tried. Maybe you should help me in my own aspirations. [Laughter] [Crosstalk]

Dr. Rowley: I am not in the cabal business. [Laughter] [Crosstalk]

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, in reading the newspapers, I am seeing Dr. Saith saying that we were now going to, possibly sell gas to Mexico. Then I heard the Prime Minister say that we were going to land troops in Washington. I really got frightened when he threatened President Bush with invasion. Then he said, when he got to his senses, "Maybe we could divert the ships so that we would not get Henry Hub mark up price for our natural gas; we would get 30 cents more if we move it to Mexico." I said to myself that something is really happening to this gentleman. He has, virtually, declared war on America. He is moving the ships to Mexico. [Crosstalk] Unfortunately, the PNM Government could not even convince their Caribbean neighbours that we should be the preferred supplier of

fuels to those Caribbean islands. They allowed President Chavez to take away the most lucrative market that we have.

Mr. Imbert: He sells at a loss.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The best price we get for our products is from the Eastern Caribbean market. I am saying that with authority. The best price we fetch is from our Eastern Caribbean market. The extraregional market is slightly lower and the international market is even less. We get more money from our brothers in the Eastern Caribbean. Our Government that boast of how competent they are in terms of their relationship with Caricom and our neighbours, allowed Venezuela to slip the rug from under their feet. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: In the face of the conditions offered by Venezuela to our Caribbean neighbours, what better conditions would you have offered to our Caribbean brothers to ensure they took our offer and not Venezuela's?

Mr. K. Ramnath: If the hon. Member wishes that I should join the other side and perform the function of Minister of Energy, I would give it some thought.

Dr. Rowley: I asked you a simple question. You had a five-day stint in the NAR; you have no credibility. You were the first NAR minister to be fired. You have no answer.

Mr. Ramnath: He admits that they have blundered. He wants an answer; when we get into government, I would provide that to the country. I remember a former Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, saying that there was an attempt by Venezuela to recolonize the Caribbean. Many of them do not even remember that, because their interest in the PNM and politics was really to pursue their own ambitions.

Dr. Rowley: The PNM is an institution; it has a history; it has continuity.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Today, the best market for our fuels and products has been lost to Venezuela. Since they know all the answers, they should tell us what initiatives they took, apart from contributing to some fund, to prevent people who are our brothers in the Caribbean and are facing difficult times, from having no choice but to say, "We are going to look elsewhere."

Dr. Rowley: Answer the question I asked you.

Mr. K. Ramnath: That is a question to be answered by those in power. Why have you failed? You should answer that.

Dr. Rowley: We have not failed.

Mr. K. Ramnath: They are now talking about selling gas to Mexico. At one time, the pipe dream was the pipeline through the Caribbean. This Prime Minister comes up with all kinds of pie-in-the-sky projects and pipe dreams.

Miss Seukeran: At least he thinks.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The volume of the pipeline is enough to supply almost all the Eastern Caribbean for probably a week and the Member knows what I am talking about, he is smiling. There are no industries there; you are not going to sell gas to St. Vincent and Grenada to start building a UM plant or a methanol plant or something like that? [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. K. Ramnath: Precisely. So why did you come up with that pipe dream? Why did you influence the Prime Minister to build this pipeline for power generation? Power generation is now done through diesel engines, fuel oil and so forth. It could also be done if you have LNG terminals in the islands with a ship going to the islands and providing them.

Mr. Imbert: What about regasification?

Mr. K. Ramnath: And regasification, yes you can do that. It is well known that it can be done on a small scale and soon we are going to lose even that potential.

Jamaica is talking to us now about a terminal and regasification plant. When the Prime Minister of Jamaica came here that was one of the issues she raised, except that she was saying that we should be selling gas to Jamaica at the same price we are selling to KC Confectionery. So the energy policy is subject to much review. You all have not considered that we are living off this oil boom and have forgotten what is going to take place in the event that there is a catastrophic drop in the price of oil and consequently, once oil prices start to drop, gas prices follow. We are talking about energy in British thermal units so it follows.

We can go back to what happened in the 1980s after the boom of the 1970s when this country returned to a standard of living that created poverty in the society for a very long time and we said never again. We had a whole series of long-term funds coming out of the boom. All that money was dissipated on all these projects.

I was looking at what Mr. Pantin, the economist, had to say and I realized that he upsets quite a few persons on the other side. He said buoyant oil and gas prices create illusions. For example, that if you put up multi-storey structures, or build overpasses or even monorails in some way that means your society is developed. That is a misconception.

“Buoyant hydrocarbon production and prices does not contribute towards sustainable development, but ironically contributes to unsustainable development,”

Pantin happens to be the Chairman of the RIC.

A senior economist, Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon, said:

“...we need a greater saving effort, notwithstanding what we are doing with the Revenue Stabilization/Heritage Fund, we are not doing enough. Clearly, if we don't spend as much as we do, then we have an option of increased savings.”

That whole argument was turned and twisted by the Member for Diego Martin West to suggest that savings are also investments in infrastructural development and so forth.

It continues:

“I think we are behind (in savings) and we have a very far distance to go because we did not just start having oil and gas prices... We must remember that we have to work harder to build the savings as we have nothing to show for the 70's boom we had.”

Dr. Rowley: Empty talk, clichés.

Mr. Imbert: “Ole” talk; empty words.

Mr. K. Ramnath: You understand the arrogance? When you are being advised by people who have looked at similar situations in the past and elsewhere, you have this arrogance coming from the Government, particularly the Member for Diego Martin East who has no interest in what happens to oil and gas prices, once he can pave over roads that have no foundation. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. K. Ramnath: Mr. Speaker, you know Mr. Conrad Enill—I do not know if it is the same gentleman here—warns ministries to cut spending? He is saying in a very practical way what the others are saying; that we have to cut spending.

Dr. Rowley: Cut waste.

Mr. K. Ramnath: If we are going to cut waste, then you may have to leave the Cabinet. I do not want to quote Mr. Enill, it is in the *Trinidad Guardian* of September 07, 2006 and he said to remember the whole thing is driven by revenue and he went on to talk of a set of draft numbers and the numbers are too high and so forth.

That is the point that is being made; that you need to increase the savings rate. You need to understand that this is a gift from heaven, you need to understand that you must plan for the replacement of reserves, we must thank our lucky stars for blessing us with high oil and gas prices, and we must have a plan as a country so that we can benefit as much as possible from the incomes that oil and gas companies are having from this boom.

To continue the criminal profligacy that has characterized the Government's spending in the country will make sure that as a country we are going to suffer the same consequences as we did after the boom. I am saying that the time has come when Government has to look at the whole spending apparatus such as the multitude of state enterprises created to get some short-term gains and not looking at the strengthening of the institutions and improving the management capability of the various government departments.

Thank you.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, now perhaps we will see the customary running away of the Member for Couva South. "Yuh could start running now, that is your habit."

Mr. Speaker, one of the good things about the live broadcast is that people can now listen to Members of Parliament such as the Member for Couva South in totality and judge for themselves whether what he is saying makes sense; whether what he is saying is truthful; or whether he is just regurgitating the usual tired, old clap trap for which he is infamous and then run away as he is also infamous for.

I cannot recall a single serious debate in this House, where the Member has not uttered his usual diatribe and then "skedaddled" out of the Parliament because he does not want to face the truth.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things he did at the end was to quote certain purveyors of doom and gloom, who have been prophesying doom and gloom for this country since the 1970s. These purveyors of doom and gloom are the ones who told us not to liberalize the economy; not to float the currency; not to

monetize our petroleum reserves. They told us to leave the oil and gas in the ground, not to monetize it. They told us to close our petrochemical industries at Point Lisas because they were sunset industries and they would have no value to this country. The good thing is that not even the UNC government, of which the Member for St. Joseph was the Minister of Finance for some time, listened to them. Thank God! Because if anybody in this country had taken them seriously “crapaud smoke we pipe”. And the Member knows that, that is what bothers me, Mr. Speaker.

What I also find incredible about the things the Member says is that he knows they are not true. He was present in this Parliament when the Prime Minister delivered the last budget speech, and where he announced that effective from 2005, the Government had conducted an extensive review of the country’s taxation regime and that new regimes had been established for the taxation of income from oil and gas.

Today in September 2006, not in 2010, or some imaginary year in the convoluted mind of the Member for Couva South, we receive a fair market price for our natural gas as opposed to a predefined contract price which was what obtained under his administration. Now the revenues that we get from natural gas are pegged to the actual market price, not some fixed price that does not allow us to benefit from higher petroleum prices.

Mr. Speaker, he knows that. He knows that the new oil and gas taxation regime is already in force and if we look at the actual revenue figures in terms of what is coming into this country in revenue—I will just deal with companies alone—this puts paid to the untruths told by the Member opposite.

In 2001, taxes on income and profits from companies were \$4.5 billion; in fiscal 2006, we are looking at \$21 billion.

Mr. Ramnath: What was the price of gas in 2001?

Hon. C. Imbert: In 2005, it was \$13 billion, in 2004, it was \$8 billion; in 2003, it was \$6 billion. You are looking at a change from \$4.5 billion essentially from petroleum to \$21 billion and we have gone from \$13 billion in 2005, to \$21 billion in 2006 primarily because of the reform of the oil and gas taxation regime with which he is very familiar.

Mr. Speaker, he works in an oil company and he knows exactly what is going on.

Mr. Ramnath: He is misleading the House.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am misleading the House? Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva South reminds me of an old fairy tale. Do you know the fellow they called Rip Van Winkle? He fell asleep by a river under a tree and slept for 20 years and when he got up the whole world had changed? The Member for Couva South reminds me of that fairy tale character. He has been sleeping for the last three years. He is utterly confused. He just does not know or does not care to know about the fundamental changes that have been made in our oil and gas taxation regime using the expertise of an international consultant from Holland.

Mr. Hinds: You mean although he is qualified he never had a refresher course?

Hon. C. Imbert: We have been able to negotiate with the oil companies, changes in the taxation regime which his government had tied us down to. In fact, his government signed contracts for oil and gas which would have locked this country into no change. For years this country would have not been allowed to benefit from the increased revenues coming from the very high petroleum prices at this point in time. We have changed the SPT regime. It is just incredible that somebody who is working for an oil company, being well aware of the fundamental and drastic changes that have been made, in a senior position in an oil company despite the fact that his major expertise at that oil company is to look after raincoats and safety boots. [*Laughter*] That is what he does for a “day wuk.”

Safety helmets, safety boots, yellow raincoats and safety goggles—he is the manager of those things. Despite the fact that he is limited to dealing with gloves and things like that and other items of protective clothing, he distributes items of protective clothing, he would at least hear—when he walks from the storeroom to the front gate to check how many “fellas” wearing safety boots and so forth—somebody talking about the fundamental changes that are being made to our taxation regime.

Mr. Speaker, all I can say is that the irreversible fracturing of the UNC has sent him crazy. It must be very stressful because I looked at the television last night and saw one of their stalwart local government councillors, Councillor Boondoo from the Caparo area has decided that he does not want to have anything to do with them. He resigned from the UNC party. You know, if I were the Member for Couva South and saw this kind of thing taking place every day—I look in the newspapers and see they are putting up posters and are in all kinds of character assassination of the political leader.

Imagine the Deputy Leader of the UNC, or several deputy leaders of the UNC spending all their waking hours plotting, planning and implementing character assassination of the Political Leader of the UNC. That is what they do all their waking hours; sticking posters all over Tunapuna. That is why the Member for St. Augustine is not here, he is up there taking down all those dirty posters they have been creating and putting up.

I understand why the Member for Couva South is so rattled, that he could come to this House and talk such arrant foolishness. When he sees prominent members of the UNC cabal, the little cabal, it is an oxymoron “eh”, a little cabal group. They talk about themselves as a little cabal group but I understand how the Member for Couva South feels when he has to open the newspapers and see ranking members of the little cabal group *in flagrante delicto*. [Laughter] [Newspaper passed to Hon. C. Imbert] in all sorts of domestic disputes and escapades in high society areas; and in my constituency of all places. I did not know all of this was going on. This has to be shown to me. So I can understand why the Member is so rattled. This is why he comes into this Parliament so confused. Let me educate him before he leaves.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the Member for Couva South complain bitterly that the Government had paved 23 roads in the NHA development in Couva where he lives including even the road by his house.

Mr. Ramnath: Not by my house.

Hon. C. Imbert: Close to his house.

Mr. Ramnath: Close to my house.

Hon. C. Imbert: Imagine an Opposition Member of Parliament coming to this House and complaining that 23 roads in his constituency have been paved and he said we even created a road to pave it.

Mr. Narine: He get plenty.

Hon. C. Imbert: So 24 roads in one part of the constituency of Couva South.

Mr. Narine: I got two roads paved by me.

Hon. C. Imbert: My colleagues have not been treated so favourably. Can you imagine, the Member for Couva South is in Opposition and he is complaining that the Government has paved 24 roads in one part of his constituency? That is why I say he is rattled. He is disturbed, he is “conffled”, he is off balance, he is “bazodee” with the daily diet of licks we see in the newspapers.

His brain is coagulating, for I had read in the newspapers where the Member for Couva North said that the Member for St. Augustine is the most undemocratic man that he has ever encountered in his entire life. This is the same Member for Couva North who endorsed the Member for St. Augustine to be the only candidate for political leader of the UNC just a couple months ago, and I have lived to see the day that now he is going up and down the country holding cottage meetings in every nook and cranny saying: “We have to get rid of that man.” He is talking about one of his own people, that is why the Member for Couva South is “bazodee” with licks. That is why he would say this kind of nonsense that there are no training programmes in this country. Imagine he said that, and they destroyed John S. Donaldson Technical Institute (John D) and San Fernando Technical Institute (San Fernando Tech).

Mr. Speaker, is this hon. gentleman opposite for real? When the UNC demitted office it had brought technical education in this country at the technical and craft level—[*Member passes magazine to Hon. C. Imbert*] “Nah, nah, I not in that.” They had brought technical education and training at the craft and technician level to their knees. The John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and the San Fernando Technical Institute in the mid to late 1990s, enrolment in technician and craft programmes was in excess of 2,000 students; in 1998 it was at the level of 2,500.

Mr. Ramnath: Nonsense!

Hon. C. Imbert: When the UNC demitted office, or they were thrown out in 2001, the enrolment in technical training and craft training at those two institutes had gone down to 300; they ran John Donaldson and San Fernando Technical into the ground. They reduced the enrolment at these two technical colleges by over 80 per cent and the few students who were still going there, 300-odd down from 2,500—3,000 they made them pay, they introduced fees. And what did the caring PNM Government do? What did the forward-looking PNM do?

[*Mr. Ramnath leaves the Chamber*]

Hon. Member: Look, he is running away!

Hon. C. Imbert: He is always running away, he “cyar take licks.” It is all right because I am speaking to the people of Trinidad and Tobago live on Channel 11. It is all right, a lot of people are watching the programme. “Yuh better watch yuh contents.”

What has the PNM done? In 2006 it has restored the enrolment at the John Donaldson Technical Institute and the San Fernando Technical Institute which is now in excess of 4,000. [*Desk thumping*] From 300 under the UNC to 4,000 under the PNM.

Mr. Hart: That is performance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Persons enrolled in technical training programmes at John Donaldson and San Fernando Tech; 300 under them to 4,000 under us and climbing and it is free of charge, no fees. We have spent millions, at least \$50 million in upgrading the laboratories, infrastructure and the classrooms, and putting in state-of-the-art equipment and this is the kind of thing they are saying we are engaging in profligacy.

We increased the enrolment in technical training overall in tertiary education. When the UNC left office there were approximately 20,000 persons undergoing training at the tertiary level. The last time I checked, which was at least one year ago, the figure had reached 35,000 and I am certain as I speak today there are now at least 40,000 persons who are benefiting from the free tertiary education programmes of the PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*]

That is an additional 20,000 persons who are enrolled in post secondary and tertiary training. It is a fact, the figures are there, and you have the mushrooming of private training colleges all over the country. There are more than 25 accredited tertiary level institutions in the private sector; there are now three universities in Trinidad and Tobago where there was one when they were in office. There was the University of the West Indies (UWI), now we have the University of the Southern Caribbean and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) in addition to the University of the West Indies.

The enrolment of UWI has virtually doubled over the period the PNM has been in office. [*Desk thumping*] I know all of this because people come up to me as a Member of Parliament all the time and thank the PNM Government, thank me—and I am sure all my colleagues experience all this—for the fantastic array of training programmes and student and tuition support that this PNM administration has introduced, and the explosion in technical training in this country.

The very creation of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, a technical university focusing on training in the oil and gas sector, training our children for the country's future, training in industry, manufacturing, and linking up with prestigious universities all over the world such as the University of Cambridge, University of Texas at Austin and prominent universities in Canada. The Energy

Institute in Madrid, Spain, the Tata group in India, the Moscow Institute of Technology, that is all as a result of the forward-looking programmes of the PNM administration. Thousands and thousands.

Not like the thousands and thousands of tourists who were supposed to come for Miss Universe. That is what they know how to do. To blow \$100 million on a one-night stand for three tourists to come which was what Miss Universe was all about. But we have thousands and thousands of young people benefiting from free tertiary education and being focused into technical education creating the future engineers and technologists that this country requires in order to take its rightful place among the developed countries of the world. That is what we have been able to do in the last four and a half years. Double the tertiary enrolment in this country, restore technical training more than 1000 per cent of what it was in 2001, and Rip Van Winkle, alias the Member for Couva South, stands in this Parliament and tells me the Government is doing nothing for technical training. We created the Multi-sector Skills Training Programme taking underprivileged youths off the streets giving them a second chance. We targeted that particular group of persons who had not completed their secondary education, brought them into a skills training programme so that we could give them the opportunity to upgrade themselves and move up in a seamless system of education, qualifying them at level 1 of the vocational training programme.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education is soon to embark on another programme Level II in the Multi-sector skills Training Programme to create master masons, master technicians, general foremen, artisans of all kinds. And in Laventille, a shining beacon to the brilliance of the PNM, the Laventille Institute of Technology and Continuing Education, a brainchild of the Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant.

We converted an old, burnt-out building that was used for the storage of alcohol into a centre for educational excellence in the depressed areas of Laventille and Morvant. We are now doing technician training programmes, journeyman programmes with schools out of Germany training young men and women in automotive engineering, sophisticated welding, creating the future welders, the MIG welders, the young men and women who will now work in our oil and gas industry who will work to fabricate oil platforms which is what is taking place in the La Brea area on the LABIDCO estate. All of these things have happened over the last four and a half years.

I have to hear the Member for Couva South tell me that we are not doing anything to train people. That is why I have to call him Rip Van Winkle. He is not living here, in this country.

7.00 p.m.

I have to deal with his issues one by one. I will come to the Member for St. Joseph last because he raised some good points that we as a country need to discuss. It is not that I agreed with everything he said. We need to put these items on the national agenda when you talk about them. In this country there is a little group—I would not call them a “lil cabal”—of talkers who want to tell this entire country what we must do and what we must not do. They are very noisy and are always telling us what we must do and what we must not do. I am not speaking about the Member for St. Joseph, lest he get the wrong impression. Certainly he does not fall into that category. There is a group of armchair critics who never built anything in their life or created anything. They sit down and continuously critique the development plans of this country. They are intellectually bankrupt. Intellectual frauds are what I call them. We need to answer them. We need to take the fight to them, and show the intellectual bankruptcy in some of the pious mouthings that we have to hear on the radio all the time.

Let me deal with some of the issues. In this year’s Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF), completely contrary to what the Member for Couva South said, local government corporations were allocated the sum of \$175 million. If you go to Head 7, 01 in the document that was circulated you would see \$174,908,000.00, the grand total of funds allocated to local government corporations in fiscal 2006 for development. Not \$1 million which is what we have to hear from the Member for Couva South.

Let me jump to one of the points made by the Member for St. Joseph. He saw that included in the \$175 million was a \$40 million item which was originally allocated for infrastructure in the local government system, for the development, management and maintenance programme for municipal roads and drainage infrastructure. The Member pointed out that the year end performance is anticipated to be about \$10 million under that item. The expenditure has not been mobilized; it has not been disbursed. That tells us that the local government system has not been able to mobilize those funds. The way the Infrastructural Development Fund works is that it utilizes the services of special purpose state enterprises. There is an agreed framework where projects are defined, conceptualized, estimates are prepared; there are terms of reference and scope of works for the

projects. Then, the local government bodies access these funds based on the agreed list of projects which is reviewed and updated according to specific rules.

When you see \$40 million was allocated for the development of municipal roads and the local government bodies have been unable to mobilize those funds, it tells you that there is a lack of capacity within the local government system. The real truth is that even in my area in Diego Martin, I recognize that the Diego Martin Corporation has a difficulty in accessing and mobilizing the funds allocated for them. The same is all over the country in all these local government corporations. They are very weak in administration and project management. They seem incapable of doing the necessary paperwork that is required to get these projects done. That is certainly something that needs to be dealt with. There are no two ways about it. In the Ministry of Works and Transport we do not have these problems. It is not in the IDF's expenditure on the Programme for the Upgrading of Road Efficiency (PURE). It drives me crazy when people say the PURE programme because the "P" in PURE is for programme.

We have been able to spend a significant sum of money under our recurrent vote. That is where it is Member for St. Joseph. You will not be able to see it today. I am sure that you did not bring that document with you. We had an allocation of \$310 million for road rehabilitation and maintenance in this year's allocation. I am happy to report that we have been able to mobilize in excess of that. I am happy to tell you that using the services of Nipdec as a special purpose state enterprise we have been able to mobilize and expend our full allocation and use other recurrent votes where we have been able to generate savings. We have been able to do much work in the road sector in this fiscal year. I will report this in the budget.

The same does not apply to drainage, the particular line item that the Member for St. Joseph highlighted where the performance has not been as projected. That is a particular programme called paving and walling of drainage channels. It is not clearing and dredging of rivers. That is also covered under our recurrent vote. We have been able to do significant clearing and dredging of rivers. The Member for Chaguanas can attest to that. He said it the last time we were in Parliament. He confirmed that in fiscal 2006, the Ministry of Works and Transport has been able to do a substantial amount of clearing and dredging of rivers. You would not see that under the IDF. These are things we now have to regularize.

While the hon. Members opposite were speaking, I told the Minister of Finance that in next year's budget we need to centralize the paving, upgrading and rehabilitation of roads under the IDF and place PURE under the IDF rather than having some funds in the recurrent vote, some in the PSIP and some in the IDF. It can cause certain persons to draw the wrong conclusions as has occurred in this particular case with the Member for St. Joseph. If the Member for St. Joseph had been glancing through the papers of this week, 5th—8th he would have seen advertisements day after day inviting tenders for drainage projects, paving and walling of ravines by the National Infrastructure Development Company. One day during this week my secretary pointed out to me that in one of the papers—it might have been *The Trinidad Guardian*—virtually every page—

Mr. Yetming: Today.

Hon. C. Imbert: As well today, there was an advertisement from the National Infrastructure Development Company. We are working. Things do not happen just so. It has taken some time to get to the point to mobilize the national Infrastructure Development Company. Remember this is a new special purpose state enterprise. You cannot wave a magic wand today and tomorrow, a special purpose state enterprise would have the capacity of a ministry, notwithstanding the fact that a ministry may be inefficient in the execution function. There would still be engineers and accountants to recruit. You cannot create NIDCO today and tomorrow it would be full of engineers, accountants, project managers and quantity surveyors.

Over the last several months the National Infrastructure Development Company has been able to acquire professional staff; resolve its procurement procedures; get conceptual designs completed; project briefs; terms of reference; project definitions; scope of works and surveys resulting in the flood of advertisements that you have seen in the newspapers during this week. Now that tenders are being invited for a multitude of projects, you would see highway projects in Diego Martin. I can report to the Member for Diego Martin West that one of the advertisements that came out this week was an invitation to tender for the construction of the overpass that would take you from the north bound side of the Diego Martin Highway over to Westmoorings to facilitate the construction of the secondary schools in that area.

In addition, one of the other projects that tenders were invited for this week is the completion of the dualling of that little piece of the Diego Martin Highway between Victoria Gardens and Acton Court. I must confess that only a couple months ago I discovered that was part of the Diego Martin Highway which was

never completed. If you visualize it, after the Diego Martin Highway passes Victoria Gardens it becomes a main road. It is no longer a highway. There are all sorts of entrances, exits, gas stations, shopping malls and little businesses. That was the old Diego Martin Main Road. The original plan was that as you pass Victoria Gardens to the east and continue the dual carriageway to link to Acton Court on the eastern side of that big tree or on the western side of the Union area—We have now invited tenders so that the section between Victoria Gardens and Morne Coco Road would become a local road. That would facilitate the businesses and the highway would veer off to the east and there would be free flow from Cocorite to Petit Valley and Diego Martin. All these tenders were invited during this week and a number of other drainage projects.

Over 20 projects have been put out for tender. We expect to get bids within the next month and construction to commence maybe a month or two after. Towards the end of this calendar year we would see a flurry of activity in terms of walling and paving of ravines. It is national in scope. If you look at the ads you would see that we are in St. Augustine, San Fernando, Caroni, Couva, Diego Martin, Chaguanas, all over the country. Whereas you may not have seen a large drawdown in the IDF in terms of that particular line item of walling and paving of ravines in fiscal 2006, you would see a big jump in fiscal 2007. I am certain that we would have to go back to the Minister of Finance to ask for increased allocations under that particular line item. I hope that explains what might appear as anomalies in the system.

In terms of why we are doing it, we definitely want to move away from the central public service being an execution agency. It is a policy decision of the Government to use the special purpose enterprises for the execution of these functions. Accountability and transparency—that issue was raised by the Member for St. Joseph—and the question of value for money, these things occupy all of us. We are not sitting on this side like a set of crazy people going pell-mell into and hell-bent on this developmental thrust. We have the same concerns that you have.

We are concerned that a school that could have cost \$40 million six years ago could now be two or three times the cost. We are very concerned about inflation, artificial inflation and price gouging in the local construction sector with certain elements in that sector taking advantage of the huge demand chasing the small supply and jacking up prices. You have aggregate for example. Three years ago the cost of a truckload of gravel was \$700, now it is \$2,000. What inputs have changed in the supply of aggregate? The equipment is not more expensive. The

stone has no additional cost. The cost is in winning and mining the stone. The price of gasoline and diesel has not gone up and labour has not gone up that much. There is nothing to justify a threefold or 300 per cent increase in the price of aggregate, except a desire on the part of certain operators in the industry to make super profits because of the demand. The same thing has happened with ready-mix concrete. It has doubled in the last 12 months. The price of cement has not gone up to any significant extent.

Many people who operate these ready-mix concrete plants have an integrated facility. They have a quarry. To them the price of aggregate has not gone up in any significant way, yet they double the price of ready-mix concrete. This is why we have made a conscious decision in terms of some of the big players in the industry like Readymix West Indies, Home Construction, Bestcrete and others, to withdraw their demand from the market by giving them their quarry. The gravel they would have to purchase from the market they would produce it from their quarries which would release other products into the market and hopefully, create the supply to balance the demand and get the price down. We are also giving out several leases to small and medium sized operators in an effort to deal with the demand and supply equation. We have to look at Government's intervention in the sector.

We were following a plan of privatizing the Government's quarries.

Dr. Nanan: Would the Minister give way?

Hon. C. Imbert: Certainly.

Dr. Nanan: I wanted to follow your trend of thought and I am listening very carefully. You made reference to the Member for Diego Martin West when he spoke about \$40 million for a school in 2000. It is my recollection and the Member for Diego Martin West might be a little off because the schools did not cost more than \$28 million at that time.

Hon. C. Imbert: I would not quibble about that. The tender prices that are coming in now are substantially more. The schools that are being proposed or put out to tender may be larger because of the changes in the curriculum—and I am aware that is so—and the need for separate laboratories and audio-visual facilities. That explains part of the increase in cost. There is a definite inflation component that cannot be explained other than the desire of operators in the industry to make super profits while they can. I will not quibble with you about whether it is \$28 million, \$30 million or \$40 million. I do not think that is relevant. The point that is being made here is that the tender prices which are coming now are

substantially more than they were. The problem is that it is too much demand chasing too little supply.

As I said before I was interrupted, over the last year we have been pursuing a policy geared towards privatization of government quarries. I think that we may have to revisit this situation. If you continue to privatize government's quarries you may not achieve the results that you are looking for. You may be putting products into the hands of certain private sector operators, thereby creating the environment for them to make more profits. You may not get a true demand and supply situation. We are revisiting that and we may have to come up with a mixed model with privatization of some of the assets and try to make the state agencies like National Quarries more efficient. We have to bring more quarry lands under National Quarries into production and act as a counterbalance in the market. You need to know this.

One thing that concerns me specifically is the question of value for money. I find that it is a very challenging problem because the kind of prices we are getting now are astronomical. Sometimes you get one bid. Today, that is happening in the economy. When you put out a large project to tender instead of getting two, three, four or five bids so you get a responsive scenario, you are getting one and two bids. When you look at the prices they do not make any sense. You know you are not getting value for your money and as a government you have to take a step back. It may not be apparent but there are projects that have been tendered in the last six to nine months that I told them to freeze because I did not like the prices we were getting. Contractors are tendering three and four times the prices they tendered six months before, for the same things. Something as simple as excavation where there is no material component whatsoever and it is simply equipment, persons would charge a rate for excavation in January 2006 and in July 2006, they double the rate. Same person, same equipment. We are putting the brakes on some of the projects. We have to be careful because we have a developmental agenda. If you slow it down too much and re-tender you might be affected with inflation.

I listened to the people who are saying that we should slow down and stop spending. I noticed that they are no longer saying that we should stop spending on infrastructure. One of the good things that have come out of the debate that has been raging for the last couple months is an acknowledgement on the part of the commentators that money should be spent on infrastructure. The Prime Minister referred to that to some extent when he said that there are increased expectations in the country today. People want you to do things in a couple months or a year or

two that in the past they might have waited for five and ten years. Now, they want it in five or ten days. It is because of the buoyancy of the economy and the fact that people are aware that our revenue base is very strong, we have the revenue and the demands people are making of the Government are far more than they made in the past.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin East and the Minister of Works and Transport has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the hon. Member for Caroni Central for extending my time. I wonder if he had permission to do that. [*Laughter*] You are the boss. I am sure that you extended my time because I might be saying a few things that might be of interest to you.

The point is that you have to balance the situation. I am glad that I am now seeing a recognition among the commentators, that there is no argument with increasing expenditure on the country's basic infrastructure as roads, drainage, water supply, transportation, health care facilities, schools and housing. I am glad that I am seeing a recognition among the commentators that that is something we have to do.

What bothers me is the contradiction in terms of these very activities as the paving of roads. This week we had a protest in Barrackpore. The ministry had options; they could have dropped everything; run down to Barrackpore and mobilize a contractor in two hours to pave the road. Of course, it would not have been properly planned; the contract would not have been properly negotiated; the price might have been double what it should be and the work would have been of a sub-standard quality. We did not do that. We have to ensure that we have proper engineering investigations; definition of the work; we would get market price for the work and the work would be done. As I indicated to the Member for Naparima, we are targeting the month of October to commence the rehabilitation of Papourie Road. That is the main thoroughfare in Barrackpore from the M2 Ring Road called the Picton area.

I happen to know some of the areas. I laughed when the Member for Couva South was talking. We would be rehabilitating from the Picton area to the Barrackpore Police Station. I was considering starting from the SS Erin Road,

Member for Naparima, instead of rehabilitating from the end of the M2 Ring Road to the Barrackpore Police Station. We are looking to see if we can go from the SS Erin Road to Barrackpore. Your cup will flow over. You will get more than you asked for. There was no point in getting hysterical, flustered and flying down into that area and doing a bad job.

I will talk about that because it is a common fallacy that is twisted by Members opposite. I have used this example to show that we have to be careful in this environment that the country, the Government and the people do not get ripped off. We have a situation where a number of contractors believe it is a feeding frenzy and believe that they can engage in price escalation. It is happening in housing. I happen to know houses that were tendered last year, the same houses were tendered 12 months later and the price increases are substantial. The Minister of Housing is dealing with that. We are not taking that just so. *[Interruption]*

The Member for Fyzabad has a penchant for speaking untruths. Let me deal with the Point Fortin matter. As the Minister of Works and Transport I went to Point Fortin in January 2006, at the invitation of some community groups, taxi drivers and the Member for Point Fortin. We did a detailed investigation of the Southern Main Road from San Fernando to Point Fortin. We examined what was required to rehabilitate the Southern Main Road, from San Fernando to Point Fortin to bring it up to a particular standard. It took four weeks to do that. It took us into February. We then mobilized contractors but because of the Carnival period we deferred commencement of the programme and scheduled it to begin just after Ash Wednesday. It was a period of six to eight weeks from the time I had gone to Point Fortin at the request of the Member of Parliament, the taxi drivers and so on, to the time the work was scheduled to begin.

The day before the contractors were ready to mobilize, a couple days before after Ash Wednesday,—almost two months after the initial visit while all the engineering designs, estimates and contracts were being resolved, some persons in the area protested. Eventually we had to tell them, as you know, that we had been planning to do this work for the last two months. They had seen the engineers taking their measurements; contractors doing their surveys and after two months of preparatory work, if they do not come away from the road we cannot pave it. That is why the protesters withdrew and the contractors were able to go the next day.

That is public knowledge. My first visit to Point Fortin in January is a matter of public record. It was recorded in the newspapers and shown on television. It

suits devious Members of the Opposition to give the false and misleading impression that this Minister was able to mobilize an \$18 million road-paving programme, comprising complete rehabilitation of 20 kilometres of road in 24 hours and do it to the highest international standard.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I wish I was that good. I wish I was capable of looking at 20 kilometres of road with diverse conditions, with diverse geology—some areas requiring complete reconstruction; some areas, like in the La Brea area requiring specialist geotechnical solutions; some areas like in Vance River requiring stabilization of the underlying soil; other areas requiring milling; other areas requiring insulation of underground culverts; other areas requiring strengthening of bridges; other areas requiring installation of additional road foundation—and to mobilize, not one but two separate contractors, one on the first 10 kilometres between the Godineau River and Rousillac, and the other between Rousillac and La Brea. I was able to do all that in 24 hours. Mr. Speaker, it suits the devious Members of the Opposition to tell this untruth in Trinidad and Tobago.

The fact is that it took two months from the time I first went to Point Fortin to the time that the paving work on the Southern Main Road was mobilized, and in Papourie, I want to take less than two months. Recognizing that there is a situation in that area that requires intervention, we are going to do it in four to six weeks. We are going to work much faster than we worked on the Southern Main Road problem. I do not really care about what untruths persons from the Opposition wish to utter because I am live and direct on national television. You can go and tell whomever you want to tell all the nonsense you want to tell. I know that intelligent people are watching me right now and they know the truth. They know that it took me two months, after going to Point Fortin, to mobilize that job and it would take me between four and six weeks to mobilize a properly engineered solution to the rehabilitation at Papourie Road.

Mr. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Minister for giving way. I want to make an inquiry on the St. Croix Road where work is being done in phase 1 and there has been a major landslip in phase 2, where half of the road has dropped lower than 7 feet. I had requested that work be undertaken simultaneously with phase 1 and was given a time frame to start immediately after the last Carnival but to date nothing has started, could you throw some light on that, please?

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I would not give way the next time. I thought the Member was going to ask me a question; I was not expecting a political speech. You will have your turn to speak and if you want to know, ask a question.

I really find it ironic that you have to start telling me about your being promised something Carnival last year. You are asking me! I was appointed Minister of Works in May 2005. For your information, Carnival last—

Mr. Baksh: No, this year.

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh, this year, you have changed your story now, Carnival this year.

Mr. Baksh: The last Carnival.

Hon. C. Imbert: Last year, this year; get it right!

Mr. Speaker, what bothers me about the hon. Members opposite—and that is why their party is disintegrating—is that they have a difficulty dealing with reality and truth! I read in the newspapers the other day where somebody wrote a letter to the editor praising the Member for—Where is he today? Is he out burning tyres and putting up posters in Tunapuna?—Oropouche. I read a letter in the newspaper from some resident—maybe he wrote it himself, it could be under a pen name—praising the Member for Oropouche for his intervention in getting roads in Penal and Debe paved. This is what we have to deal with in this country!

The Member for Oropouche requested of the Minister of Works and Transport, me, that we deal with certain local government roads in the constituency of Oropouche, roads that should have been dealt by the Penal/Debe Corporation. The Member came to me and we looked at the situation, assessed it and we decided to help out. We went through the system and planned our programme and decided to rehabilitate the important link roads like Suchit Trace, Ghandi Trace and so on. We finished it to the highest standards, this PNM Government, and I had to read in the newspaper where somebody was thanking Moonilal for that. Arrant rubbish! The initial representation was not made by the Member for Oropouche. The initial representation was made by the Penal/Debe Chamber of Commerce. It is a matter of public record as well that I was invited to the Penal/Debe area by the Penal/Debe Chamber of Commerce. After I toured the area with the members of the Penal/Debe Chamber of Commerce, we worked out a programme and then proceeded to rehabilitate the roads in the Penal/Debe area, identified to us by the business community in the area. They have had the decency to acknowledge the response of the Ministry of Works and Transport, but not them.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Couva South told me in the tea room about a month ago—the Member for Chaguanas is laughing because he heard him—he said: “Boy, ah never see roads paved so in meh life! That was the Member for

Couva South about one month ago in the tea room. Ah never see roads paved so in meh life. Under the UNC it nuttin so. It is as if you have paved every single road in my constituency. I am going to acknowledge you and compliment you in the Parliament!” What does he do, Mr. Speaker? He comes today and says I am discriminating against him. *[Interruption]* Yesterday was yesterday—the Member for Chaguanas has explained it to me—and today is today. So yesterday in the tea room the Member for Couva South complimented me for rehabilitating roads in the constituency of Couva South and today, after he confirms that we have paved 23 roads in Couva, he says it is discrimination because we did not pave roads in Dow Village. Why the UNC did not pave roads in Dow Village? Mr. Speaker, I know they get vexed every time I say that but I will keep saying it! Why the UNC did not pave the roads in Dow Village? Couva South is your heartland; you had six years to pave the roads in Dow Village! You did not pave a single road! But you are boldfaced enough to now ask the PNM to deal with all the rural areas, which were neglected by the UNC!

But we will do it! What you did not do for your people, for your supporters; we will do it, because we are a national Government. *[Desk thumping]* That is why we are going to properly rehabilitate the roads in Barrackpore; that is why we are going to rehabilitate the roads in Dow Village; that is why we have paved Suchit Trace, Ghandi Trace, Bunsee Trace—I have lost count of the roads that we have rehabilitated in areas that are not yet represented by the PNM, but are soon to be.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have?

Mr. Speaker: You have seven minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: I have plenty time. A “fella” came up to me outside and I recognized him as one of the persons who usually find themselves hanging around hon. Members opposite. I asked him: What can I do for you? You do not normally come and speak to me. I normally see you associating with the “fellas” from the other side. He said: “The UNC will not regain government in my lifetime—the “fella” is about 45 years old—and therefore, I, my children and my children's children have decided to support the People's National Movement.”

Mr. Sharma: Cheap politics.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is happening in every part of the country today. *[Interruption]* After we have rehabilitated the roads in Barrackpore—

Mr. Sharma: Yes, you will get the votes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, we will get the votes because the people of Barrackpore will realize that what they did not get from the UNC, they are going to get from the PNM—[*Interruption*—as are the people in Caroni, in Couva—

Mr. Sharma: Yes.

Hon. C. Imbert: The people in Barataria, [*Interruption*] in Pointe-a-Pierre—Member for Fyzabad, you better start looking for a job. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: If I were to count the time that you are contributing when you are not on your feet, I can minus it from the time that you are really supposed to speak. Let the Member make his contribution. You will have a full 75 minutes, uninterrupted, I can assure you.

Mr. Sharma: [*Inaudible*] on this side.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, someone told me the other day—I did not hear it myself—that there was some programme where they interviewed the Member for Barataria/San Juan and asked him about an opinion on some poll, maybe it was the NACTA poll or something like that. This happened just this week. They asked the Member for Barataria/San Juan what he thought about the NACTA poll, which said that if elections were called now the PNM would win 31 seats. He said that poll is wrong. So they said: “Dr. Khan, how could you say that poll is wrong?” He said: “That poll is not right; if elections were called now PNM would win 41 seats.” [*Laughter*] This is what is happening in this country. Their supporters are leaving them in droves.

Mr. Hart: Centre of Excellence, Saturday.

Mr. Yetming: Sunday.

Hon. C. Imbert: [*Laughter*] I admire the enthusiasm of the Member for St. Joseph. In fact, Member for St. Joseph, I admire your solo enthusiasm and, I mean, hope springs eternal.

The fact is that it is typical of the Members opposite to come into this Parliament and pretend that the PNM administration is not a national government, that we are not dealing with people at a national level. If I were to list the roads that have been paved by the PNM in the last 12 months in the constituencies now represented by the Opposition UNC, I would need about three hours. The people

in those areas know that and that is why they cannot fool them any more! That is why that “fella” had to tell me that he knows that in his lifetime—and he plans to live to 75—he is now 45 years old—he will never see the UNC in any form of government again and that is why he and his children would vote PNM. We know that too, and that is why we are trying our best to reach out to every part of the community.

The Member for Caroni East invited me to his constituency about six or eight months ago. I got a lot of flack in my own party for going to the constituency office of an Opposition Member. I was told that was infra dig but I went any-way; I took my blows. I toured the constituency of Caroni East, with the Member for Caroni East, and we spent over \$20 million rehabilitating, virtually, every single road in the constituency. It will be a PNM constituency in the next election, so we are just paving the way for the acceptance of the constituency of Caroni East into the family of PNM. [*Desk thumping*] The point is, Mr. Speaker, the people who live in these areas are aware. We are paving Longdenville Main Road and the Member for Caroni Central knows that. If he spends five minutes going out into his constituency—I do not know if he does—

Dr. Rafeeq: I do.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am just saying that I do not know if you do because there are some that do not. If the Member for Caroni Central spends five minutes going into his constituency he will know. [*Interruption*] It is 7.53 p.m.; I have time. I have at least 10 minutes more. The Procedural Motion would be attended to; do not worry. The Member for Caroni Central knows that we paved Longdenville Main Road—

Mr. Narine: That is why Boondoo resigned.

Hon. C. Imbert: Of course. [*Crosstalk*] Councillor Sahadeo Boondoo.

Mr. Narine: I now understand.

Dr. Rowley: Who is Boondoo?

Mr. Narine: He is the Councillor—

Hon. C. Imbert: Councillor Sahadeo Boondoo. The Member for Arouca North is giving an opinion that it is because we have done so much work in that area—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, the Members know they get quick responses. The Member for Naparima called me, despite all the internal problems in their party; despite the

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, September 08 2006

fact that they seem to have four Members of Parliament for Naparima. There is the de facto Member, hon. Nizam Baksh; then you have the Member for St. Augustine, the Political Leader of the UNC who called me and told me to speak to him. Mr. Dookeran said: "Speak to me, do not talk to Nizam!" Then you have the Member for Siparia who said: "I am the Opposition Leader; you have to talk to me." Then today I heard the Member for Couva South—

Hon. Member: The acting Opposition Leader.

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh, that is what he is? Thank you very much, Member for Chaguanas. The Member for Couva South in this capacity, apparently, as acting Opposition Leader, he is now lobbying for the people in Barrackpore. The Member for Naparima knows he spoke to me; we discussed it as men and we have come to an agreement to deal with the situation with his constituents. [*Crosstalk*] The fact is, if after we rehabilitate Papourie Road and other roads in the area, the Member for Naparima wants to make a lot of noise and pretend it was not done; it would not matter to me, the people living there will know that the PNM has rehabilitated their roads. It is like Nariva.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move a Procedural Motion that this House continue to sit until the completion of this Motion, the Variation of Appropriation Bill, and the Motion dealing with the Contingencies Fund.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (Adoption)

Hon. C. Imbert: The Member for Nariva told me the other day that he does not have to clean the shoes any more. We have put so much asphalt into the constituency of Nariva that it could sink. We have paved virtually every road and we are dealing with landslips right through the constituency of Nariva. [*Interruption*] We win that already. That is now the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla, which we welcome into the PNM family as soon as the next election is called.

Hon. Member: That is why you are doing the work.

Hon. C. Imbert: No. We have done the work to demonstrate to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we are magnanimous, that we are a national government, that despite all the "ole" talk on the other side, despite all the antiquated, obsolete bleating, this old paranoid insular approach to politics, where

you carry on and beat up about discrimination, victimization;—the words only have “tion” at the end. That is all they could say.

As the Member for Couva South today conceded that we have paved 23 roads in his constituency, he could not help himself. He is a creature of habit. His natural instincts took over. After shouting that we had paved 23 roads in his constituency he said—Mr. Speaker, do you see discrimination? This is just typical and symptomatic of the Members opposite.

Mr. Speaker, to return to the issues raised by the Member for St. Joseph, please be assured that we are very cognizant of the pitfalls and dangers that could arise from an overheated economy; that could arise from a burgeoning construction sector.

In fact, we are trying to move away from the traditional system. We are trying to move towards a system of qualification, based on assessment so that one would rank or select contractors based on their capability to do projects. Then we would negotiate benchmark prices with them rather than submit ourselves to the vagaries of open competitive tendering because you are going to find yourself at the mercy of contractors.

In fact, that is how the railway system is being done. The preliminary selection is based on qualifications. We have received five bids for the rapid railway project from very large international consortiums, some of the largest contractors in the world and we are now going through the process of ranking these bids. We are ranking them based on their qualifications, their track record, the strength of the consortiums that have been assembled in terms of their financial capability, technical capability, references from other sovereign governments and so on. We would establish a merit list out of that and then we will start to negotiate a price for the system based on international benchmarks. If the person that is ranked first, in terms of qualifications, is unwilling to accept a price based on standard international benchmark prices for typical railway systems, then we will go on to the second rank. In other words, we would go through that system—keeping our eyes on the value for money objective—in order to arrive at a properly qualified contractor who will be able to do the job for international benchmark price to ensure that we get value for money and the country is not ripped off.

It is very complicated and the pace at which we are doing infrastructure is presenting new challenges to us every day, and I welcome the intervention of the

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, September 08 2006

Member for St. Joseph because he has very important issues, in particular, how do you successfully meet the challenge and the national objective of getting value for money.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (*Fyzabad*): Mr. Speaker, we have just witnessed a comedy of errors. Before the Member for Diego Martin West runs away,—we have witnessed Members misleading the House, and I will deal with that in a few minutes.

The Member for Diego Martin East thinks if he fixes a road when Members of the Opposition raise concerns he is doing this country a favour. I must tell him that he is doing the country no favour. He speaks the truth only by accident. He misled this House; he said he went to Point Fortin in January, but I do not know whom he is trying to fool. Those who watched him a while ago on national television would know that he has a history of making himself a fool whenever he speaks. How is it that the Member for Naparima made representation; the Member for Oropouche made representation; the Member for Naparima indicated that more than a year ago the matter was raised about a road—The Minister said he was appointed Minister in May 2005. Who cares when he was appointed Minister? He is not spending money left by his father and mother. He is spending the money of the State so he has to catch himself and be careful.

When the Member for Couva South indicated that 23 roads were fixed in his constituency, the 23 roads are in the NHA housing projects. What this Government practises is geopolitical discrimination. They went into the NHA areas where they have the votes.

The Member for Couva South will tell you that when those units were built, I think it was 901 units, but not a single person from that area got a house. They all came from outside the area. They were party supporters. The PNM has a history of this. If we are looking for 2010 and 2020 development, this is not the way to go.

The Member for Oropouche makes representation and what do the PNM Government do? They practise divide and rule. We have a legal representative in the House, the Member for Oropouche, and he chooses to deal with another party to give them the awards. The Minister misled the House; he rarely speaks the truth only by accident. When were the contracts awarded for the Point Fortin to La Brea work? He did not tell us. I will tell you when it was done. It was done

after the protest because that is PNM area and when the PNM started to rise up they got scared. Look at the work! I will show, in the next 74 minutes, that the majority of work done in this country by the PNM is in PNM-held areas. When they go into the UNC areas they look to see where the PNM votes are. It is easy to calculate. You just look at a polling station say Pepper Village Government School they would get more PNM votes there. Where are those people coming from? That is public information and that is where they go and do the work. They cannot fool anybody; this country is in crisis and the PNM is encouraging it.

The Member for Diego Martin East started by saying—He speaks but he does not make sense. He is not truthful. He keeps running away. He does not engage in serious debate. He has a difficulty treating with the truth.

He talks about oil and gas prices; whom is he trying to fool? Every administration negotiates whatever prices are obtainable at the given point in time. This is done by the government of every country in the world. When the UNC administration were in governance, they negotiated what prices were available, engaging the same consultants, so they got the best price. Of course, whatever price we got before 1995 was what the PNM had negotiated. Then UNC left office and PNM came in and they negotiated again. They have to keep negotiating. The world is a place of negotiations.

When oil was \$9 per barrel—you cannot compare work done at \$9 per barrel. Mr. Speaker, it is like a family. When we joined this House we were given a salary of \$3,300 per month and in those days I drove a Cortina. Now the salary is \$10,000 to \$12,000 and the Member for Tunapuna drives a Benz, because the allowances are different so you go with what your pay packet could afford. If the country was earning \$9 per barrel then, you buy what \$9 per barrel could buy. If the country is earning \$75 per barrel then you buy what the country—They say more roads are paved, but look at the cost! Nothing the PNM Government does—I want to pay tribute to the hon. Minister, Sen. Conrad Enill. Since Minister Conrad Enill came into the Government there has been a slight difference in approaches, because he encourages the Government to cut costs and I suspect there is less corruption. But it is history; it is well-known the world over that the most corrupt government in this part of the world is the PNM. I am not the author of that statement. *[Interruption]* You read *The Parliamentarian*; I have a copy of it too. You could read it; you have 75 minutes. It is racism and discrimination. *[Interruption]* Everybody knows that you use the police in the country. Everybody knows that you use the Judiciary as much as you can and you get your results. When the Member for Tunapuna assaulted a Member, nothing came out of it. You see, it plays for the PNM.

Mr. Narine: The Member for Siparia said something else and you are saying—

Mr. C. Sharma: Yes, forget what the Member for Siparia said. The Member for Diego Martin East said since they came into power that there have been three universities. What nonsense! Whom are you fooling? And you are on national television! There were always three universities. The [*Inaudible*] Caribbean Union College was the Andrews University or whatever it was in Maracas St. Joseph; a name change. The University of Trinidad and Tobago is all the existing facilities; there has only been a name change; there is no new university, and UWI has been around. The Minister is so conceited at times, he cannot remember a Middlesex University had a campus here through the Hindu Credit Union. Everything is a lie, lie, lie; misleading the national community and he gives the impression that they are doing so much work; with whose money, Sir? Mr. Speaker, spending—a lot of times overspending; thank God Minister Conrad Enill is there to put checks and balances.

He spoke about multi-skills, all those programmes. He said the multi-skills programmes took youths off the streets. What were they doing on the streets? Who put them on the streets? It is the PNM. That is what this country got for supporting the PNM. They put them on the streets. What an insult; what an embarrassment this country has suffered at the hands of the PNM.

Let us visit some of the PNM corruption known all over the world. Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent on LABIDCO. Whose pocket has it gone into? The Hall of Justice, cost overrun over cost overrun; the Financial Complex; Mount Hope Medical Sciences Complex; schools. There is corruption everywhere. Member for Diego Martin West keeps hiding. I have raised on numerous occasions that not a single NHA house has come within budget.

8.00 p.m.

When the Prime Minister asked, and answered not true, he would give it the next day. He came today and did not say a thing about it but it slipped out the mouth of the Member for Diego Martin East. He said the Minister of Housing is having a problem with high cost now. All the time the Minister of Housing and Member for Diego Martin West was saying no cost overruns. Let the public know under the Freedom of Information Act; we would ask the question and I hope the Minister, in his reply today, would tell us which housing project has come within budget—and two budgets, within time and within money budgeted. Not a single

one. The PNM must stop misleading the national community. They are not doing us any favour. I did not come seeking a favour from the PNM. Can you imagine me doing that? I want nothing from the PNM. But I am not letting them take advantage as they do. They use the police; they use their power; they can give URP jobs; they can give CEPEP jobs and they can give jobs in MTS, in WASA, in T&TEC. This is what this country has reached to. You have to be a PNM. “We are going to win which seat”. How are you going to win it? By paving a road using taxpayers’ money. Is that what we have reached to in this country? No representation. Misrepresentation and you want to win it.

The hon. Prime Minister said that when there is excess revenue, some of it must be used for development. I want him to know we support that but let there be equal distribution. It cannot be that every project you look at is in a PNM area. It cannot be. People are getting fed up. Those persons who protested in La Brea some time ago, they were getting fed up. The Minister claimed that he was invited by the Member for Point Fortin and by other interest groups. If they knew, why did they protest? It is because they do not believe the PNM. They know the PNM plays games. When the people in Barrackpore protested they were locked up, some were beaten up and they had to go to court. With excess revenue, we are looking for fairness, we are looking for some distribution, and do not feel for a minute, hon. Ministers opposite, that you are doing the Opposition a favour when you treat with a request. If you do not do it so, so be it. It would be done later.

Let us use the resources of the country to develop our people and not to divide them. All PNM does is divide and divide and divide. The Prime Minister said that the current generation must benefit but let us look at how they are benefiting. What are our citizens benefiting from? Murders and more murders. The Prime Minister claimed that unemployment is at a very low figure but, 30 per cent of the people are living under the poverty line, less than US \$2. That is \$12.60 per day. That is what the PNM has brought us, a few years from 2020. So who is benefiting? It would seem hon. Speaker, those Members opposite are benefiting the most. The levels of corruption have not changed. When one looks at the international reports that obtain on the country today, they showing that there is mismanagement and there is corruption. There is not a single international report that does not say that. Not a single one.

When we are using the money of the people—true the PNM are in Government and they have access to the Treasury, but there must be some consultation. How will I know as the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, and Members opposite, and

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, September 08 2006

all Members for that matter, what is going to be spent? I have a few suggestions which I will come to in the minute. Maybe I can come to that right away.

I want to suggest to the hon. Minister of Finance that Government expenditure is a key policy document on information so we must know. We are never told anything, not just us in the Opposition but the country at large. There must be a comprehensive policy document obtainable either by public print or in some website so that any citizen of this country could know that these moneys are going to be spent on X, Y, or Z and how recommendations or requests can be made and how they can be treated with. Draft budget documents should be submitted to this Parliament so there could be consultation on just how you want to have consultation on the draft Constitution, and it is being advanced.

When we came today, and I cannot suggest to you, but I can observe that the documents given to us today are useless. When are we going to study them? Thank God we would not be ruled out of order today. But when would we study these documents? We met this here at 130 p.m.; totally unfair. This never happened under the UNC at all. Never!

The draft budget document and financial documents, where we are going to spend taxpayers' money, should always be available to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, so we would know what we are spending, why we are spending because every so often the same roads are being paved again and again and we do not know who is benefiting from same. In addition to the budgetary documents, there should also be non-financial performance data. Is it every six months you would pave the same road or build over? NHA spends the same money on the same set of apartment buildings. The Minister of Finance should be very concerned about that. I was going to say you should be very ashamed of that, but I would not say that. I have a degree of respect for you because you come over like a professional. I do not know what you are behind the scenes. The point is every week the same NHA apartments are being fixed, Jennifer Lopez getting paid, John X getting contracts, month after month. The budget documents should include a medium term, a long term, so we know what we are dealing with. We know over five years what we are going to see or for whatever period is left. Comparative information should be available on actual revenue and expenditure for the period. We do not have that so we do not know where the money is coming from, how much is going to be spent and on what projects.

Mr. Speaker, through you, where are the recommendations made of the representatives of this House on both sides? For instance, currently there are 36 Members of Parliament, all elected through the same process on the same day,

and that is why they are called representatives. They are required to make representation. How does the Government treat with representation? And let me suggest how they treat with it. Representations from Opposition Members are not treated with unless they feel they can milk and benefit from it. If they find there is a Member on the opposite benches who is against the Opposition they will treat with that one to buy favours. Expenditure should be presented in full terms so we would know. Every so often—and I will come to the document presented to the House in a few minutes—they claim they are going to spend \$10 million on project X and when the project is completed it reaches \$15 million and nobody knows why.

I recall, based on a question asked in this House in 2004—I think it was asked by the Member for Tabaquite as it related to WASA projects in Mayaro. They spent \$10 million on a water project to benefit 121 persons all because Mayaro is a PNM constituency. That is how the PNM is prepared to waste money and we will come to see what happens in a few minutes. I want to suggest too that there must be the economic knowledge and assumptions underlying such a report to say okay, we are expecting to earn this revenue during this period and for next year we expect to earn so much; how much of it is going into public expenditure, how much of it is going into savings. And where the public expenditure is established, which projects and why.

I want to further advance the points I have made thus far on what we saw. The pages of this document are not numbered so I do not know if the hon. Minister has the summary of the document. We see, for instance, the Tobago House of Assembly 2006 Estimates—\$80 million plus. But the revised estimate is \$189 million and certainly, Tobago has to be treated differently. You are moving from \$80 million to \$189 million with a population of 40,000.

I want you to look at the Tunapuna/Regional Piarco Corporation, with 265,000 persons getting about \$5 million or \$6 million. So there is no fairness, no understanding. Nobody knows why you are doing things. Is it to win the two seats in Tobago? Is it to satisfy the Tobago House of Assembly? There must be some explanation and you keep doing this over and over.

Mr. Speaker, in today's newspapers the head of the Commission of Inquiry the enquiry into the Ministry of Health has expressed tremendous concerns and people across the country are concerned about health, because health is something close to their hearts. I am sure the Minister is doing his best but he could do a lot better. Look at what is happening. You had an estimate of \$205 million and you

have gone to \$126 million. What is the justification for that? Hospitals are without medication. *[Interruption]* That is the point.

You do not have medication; you do not have tablets; you do not have enough doctors; you do not have enough hospital beds, but you keep moving money. What kind of management is this? The Government are responsible for the citizens in the public institutions. They have an obligation. We moved from one failed Minister of Health, former Member for Caroni East, to a bigger failure. Is that what we are moving to? I mean Member for Diego Martin East. That was to make sure you are in the conversation.

We see the Ministry of Housing, very interesting, from \$285 million to \$418 million confirming the point I have been making that the Member for Diego Martin West was not truthful about it in the least bit. How have we arrived at \$418 million? I want to say a few things about that. In every housing development there are a lot of kickbacks and I want to know who is receiving that. I am calling for a public inquiry. The Opposition is calling for a public inquiry into how taxpayers' moneys are spent in the Ministry of Housing because we do not know who is receiving the houses.

Recently—hon. Minister of Finance, if I could obtain your undivided attention through the Speaker *[Interruption]* you play Englishman and discriminate and suffer the people of Trinidad and Tobago and go on TV and speak proper English and fool them. They have no interest in that. They want representation, they want truthfulness and that is something you do not demonstrate the least bit. You feel being a comedian will advance the cause of the PNM, paving a road in Barackpore and fooling the people. Not at all! *[Interruption]* He should not pave it. Do not pave it. You are doing them a favour, but I am coming back to the Ministry of Housing.

Recently there was a public advertisement put out by the Housing Development Corporation advising citizens—and I want you to communicate that the PNM members must not get the forms before the UNC members. Those days are gone. Everything the PNM members must get first.

When there are jobs the PNM members get the forms, fill them in, and apply. Jobs are already given and then the advertisements come out. Those days are gone, a small country, everybody knows everybody. You employ consultants across the board, no advertisements. Why do you do this? Do you not feel ashamed? You want to be a citizen of this country and move it to 2020 and you are prepared to sell yourself for a little jacket and tie. Let us move away from that.

The application for subsidy laid out certain conditions. There was no condition that you should have any amount of money. It says you may have goodwill meaning you have some money on the ground or you may have labour. The interviews have started and they have changed the rules saying that you must have whatever amounts of money you are hoping to get. The limit is \$20,000. If you hope to get \$10,000 make sure you have \$10,000. That is discrimination. You cannot do that. It is against the law. I have referred it to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Public Utilities, \$216,000 to \$333,000. That is one ministry that every Member of the Opposition will endorse because I think the Member for Arima attempts to be the fairest she could be. I can imagine the political pressure the Minister could be going through. It is such a sad thing that the Minister has to hide to treat—I am not suggesting the Member for Arima has to do that, but Ministers opposite have to treat with you behind the corridors—scared.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources delivers absolutely nothing. The Member has the loudest voice, fools nobody in the country. You cannot see any access road; subsidies gone through; agricultural produce at its lowest; no encouragement; no food security.

The Ministry of Works and Transport. The Minister just boasted of his capability. It is not capability to deliver; it is capability to collect; moving from \$282 million to \$164 million. While I am on this let me just make a few comments, on whatever companies you call them, multipurpose companies to deliver. All the time for the last 30 to 40 years—under the UNC administration the very Ministries were delivering. Here comes the PNM saying the ministries are not executing agencies, they are administrative. Nowhere in the law it says that but the Government says that for a purpose. There are 15 companies, it is 15 sets of kickbacks. There is corruption across the board. This is a free-for-all. The country has an oil boom and there is much money available so let us spend it among ourselves, let us collect as much as we can.

The Ministry of Social Development. From \$20 million to \$12 million. What is going on? Social Development—people are unable to receive basic goods and services but you are reducing the money.

Mr. Speaker, we saw the Prime Minister's residence being assigned \$25 million. Whether it is \$25 million, \$40 million or \$50 million so be it, but the construction of the official residence of the Hon. Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago is \$2.5 million. When this document was prepared it was Chief Justice

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, September 08 2006

Sat Sharma. Now it is Chief Justice somebody else; you see, this \$2.5 million will move to \$10 million, \$20 million. So what is that? It is normal if you are asking that. Discrimination.

Twenty-nine police officers were appointed, and none of them resembling me. How can I tell the national community that the 29 officers do not reflect the population of this country? There are no Indian officers, no Chinese officers. What is going on in this country? Is this how we are going to achieve 2020 status? In Petrotrin everyone whose name is Singh or Sinanan is moved out. In WASA it is same thing, in T&TEC it is same thing. In the Ministry of Health you cannot do that. I thought you were threatening my brother working there and you would do the same thing. I know you are smarter than that. In fact, the Office of the Prime Minister has moved from \$41 million to \$26 million, but we will see an increase later on when I come to that.

We go to public buildings. Earlier the Minister of Housing argued that we could save so much money if we did not have to rent. Mr. Speaker, do you know whom they rent from? They encouraged party supporters and hacks including Government Ministers, to put up buildings and rent them for themselves. That is public information, and maybe nothing is wrong with that but it is insider trading. They boast that they are putting up these 26-storey buildings to reduce the rent but all the time they are renting from friends and family across the board. It has now moved—public buildings from \$41 million to \$26 million in the first instance. You are arguing from both sides.

If you are saying you are constructing buildings to reduce rental, and public servants would have a better place, how are you reducing the expenditure? It should be increased. But the only assumption I could arrive at is that they have told their friends put up a few more buildings, we are going to rent at enormous rent and in return you would give us a little kickback for the elections and so.

Mr. Speaker, this country is really in crisis largely because of the PNM. What have our citizens done to deserve a PNM Government? This is a beautiful country coming from the early days to now, I cannot understand it.

Mr. Speaker, if this document had come to us much earlier, which is a requirement—Social infrastructure, \$9.8 million to \$50 million plus. When you keep increasing the social structure, are you developing a dependency syndrome? And the answer is yes. In fact, when you look at that total development it has moved from \$41 million to \$97 million. Mr. Speaker, no money is being spent to add value to the national community of Trinidad and Tobago. Recreation and

culture, \$6 million to \$31 million. When you look at what obtains—Carnival—\$200 million, \$300 million spent and no big deal. Carifesta, \$2 million to \$3 million, maybe \$30 million, \$40 million, \$60 million, I do not know the amount. Best Village, \$50 million, \$60 million, \$70 million because those promote PNM culture. You do not see the same thing going for Eid, Divali.

In fact, in another two or three weeks Ramleela would begin. The world's oldest street festival, ten days in 10 or 12 venues and you would see they get a token from the PNM, \$6,000 or \$7,000 and if you see how the Ministers come to hand over that as if they come from God. They want a chariot to reach there. When you reach there you have to *golaga* them; \$6,000 and that is what they have to do. Is this what they reduced this country to? It is a shame. You go to a Ramleela to hand over a cheque for \$7,000; you should be embarrassed. You are not doing people a favour. Divali, they have to run you down for some money.

They put steel bands in the schools, very good. What about the harmoniums? What about the other instruments? It must only be a PNM culture. The time is coming when the people are going to rise. There has been much bloodshed all over the world, before my time and after my time there will be. It is Government that makes it happen. Nobody else, and if the Opposition fail to draw it to the Government's attention, they will be contributing to it. You have a Minister of Works coming and saying, "I am paving here and there, you should be happy". Under the UNC we paved. We did not say we were paving PNM area. We are responsible for Trinidad and Tobago. The opposition is the Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, under public buildings, and time will not permit this but maybe the journalists—they should do a detailed and comprehensive thing, look at all the expenditure and you would see the amount of money, PNM area, PNM area, and I will demonstrate as much as I could.

I want to focus on what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago, and I will come to the regional corporations on which the Member for Diego Martin East misled this House and purposely so. Trinidad House from \$12 million reduced to \$10 million. Treasury building from \$2 million to \$4.5 million.

Community Development \$113 million. You would have heard the Prime Minister talking about how much work is happening in his constituency. Look at the number of buildings that have gone up in the Prime Minister's constituency. It has nothing to do with good representation. It is the Prime Minister. He calls the

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, September 08 2006

shots, but there is no fairness and equality. But there must be a limit to that. The time will come when he will not be the Prime Minister or the Member for San Fernando East.

Community improvement service, \$36 million. Could the hon. Minister tell us where this money is going to be spent? What quantum—when they tell us and the Member for Laventille West, if she participates when they say they are going to do 10 community centres, the one in Fyzabad, \$200,000; San Fernando West, \$4 million; Point Fortin—PNM —\$4 million; Naparima—UNC—half a million. Every single one. Look at the last ten community centres built by the PNM and look how many in the PNM areas, and how many in the UNC and you would see all the UNC ones are the cheapest. Discrimination. I do not know how to put up with that. I do not know how people are containing themselves in the country I really do not know. In another country they would not.

The development of rural communities—\$69 million. Nobody knows where this money is going to be spent, nobody knows how it is going to be spent. What you do know it is going to be spent after—you would hear it by the way, no consultation, no public information.

Mr. Speaker, what a shame. Look where this country has reached. In most cases they identified the projects. Perhaps, it would be worth your time to look at this document and, perhaps, make a suggestion; because the pages are not numbered if you make a reference all Head 7, 01. You cannot say what number and so forth, you could say a sub-head. Upgrade of community infrastructure in South and southeast Trinidad, \$8 million. While I am on community development I want to talk about a PNM pet programme which was inherited from the NAR. It turned to the PNM, it turned to the UNC and has fallen back to the PNM, a most political programme, dangerously political. If the Government does not take heed of this others will, and if the Government does not take action others will take action because the responsibility of a Member of Parliament is to take action and he is required to take action within the law and if he takes action outside of the law, he will pay a price but sometimes he may be required to pay a price to make the point.

Self-Help estimates, \$15 million and they are being given \$32 million. I want the Minister responsible for Self-Help to tell this House, to produce the information that would show the majority of projects have been done in PNM constituencies and the majority of expenditure as well. It could not be by accident. We could not be coming year after year and pointing that out.

Applications from the constituency of Fyzabad are still pending; applications from Laventille West are all finished. Diego Martin East, all finished.

The Member for Diego Martin East is saying “You are in Opposition”. So the money belongs to them.

What a shame. You are not in Government so none for you. So the people of Fyzabad must suffer. There would come a time when they would not suffer and that time is coming very close. Whether in my lifetime or your lifetime or your family’s lifetime or my family’s lifetime, they will not. The longest rope has to have an end.

Wars have been fought over these things. Do not fool yourself with what is happening in the UNC. In the UNC we could talk, in the PNM you are prepared to wear that jacket and tie and make a few dollars and say nothing. If you are treated like a dog, you could not care less and many of you are like that. Many of you are like that so here we can talk. Manohar can talk any time but you fear to talk. You cannot talk. You talk, you are out. That is the difference. One of the good things—and since the Ministers have raised it, let me spend a minute on it. This is an admirable quality. No matter what happens in the PNM, you are treated like a dog, they kick you, you stay, because “I am a Minister; tomorrow I can get the tax-free car and I could give my friend a contract”. In the UNC you stand up. Hamza can go to his practice; he can go home; he is a retiree [*Laughter*] and I can go home. Adesh is a dentist.

I am coming back to Self-Help. Recently we saw some heavy winds that blew off some roofs—Point Fortin; PNM; no problem; Application made, vouchers given; La Brea, same story, roofs blown out, no problem; Application made, vouchers paid; Fyzabad roofs blown off. Application made; comes Sen. Christine Sahadeo and the Minister asked what is wrong with it. Going into the PNM office, which is a private office and treated with. That is discrimination; that is racism and—[*Interruption*]Let me make the point; you will speak. You cannot defend everything.

8.30 p.m.

So, in La Brea, the Commission does not treat with the UNC. In Point Fortin, it does not do that; but in Fyzabad, it does it and from the PNM office. It is calling the people, using the information that is confidential. That has to come to an end and it will come to an end during my representation. I will engage any process to bring it to an end—discrimination—any process. I know you will join me. [*Interruption*]

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, September 08 2006

You pretend you do not know. I will tell you what it is. The employment of doctors in the Ministry of Health is discrimination. You brought in pharmacists to satisfy private enterprise. *[Interruption]* Of course! They cannot work? I will take you to a drugstore in a few days and tell you where they are working. *[Interruption]* Which one you said, not SuperPharm? I did not say that. Be careful! I know that is at the top of your head. *[Interruption]* You see! You are satisfied. Suddenly you have to bring doctors—treated in a particular way; professionals in this country—treated in a particular way. Once you think, they are not leaning on the side of the PNM, pressure for them. There must be an end to it.

Look at your housing allocations. Who are to get these houses? PNM members. I made the point the other day and the Prime Minister rose. I said that in Tarouba, of all the houses allotted up to that point in time, there was none for Taroubans. Outsiders! How long will they take that my friend? How long?

Agriculture, forestry and fishing—from 18 to 68. We will see nothing in return for it. This is the worst this Ministry has ever been. They “lick-up” Caroni (1975) Limited and the only reason they destroyed Caroni is that they are pumping US \$250 million into BWIA, which is losing money and bringing no foreign exchange. Caroni (1975) Limited was bringing foreign change, helping with the environment, maintaining recreation grounds, reducing the food bill, guaranteeing a supply of fresh food every day and you “lick down” that industry simply because Caroni (1975) Limited represented persons that appeared not to be supporting the PNM. There was no other justification for it and you are proud that you have closed Caroni (1975) Limited. Oh my God! Look at what we have reached to!

Agricultural access roads—\$16 million and moved to \$55 million. Let me tell you how that money will be spent, Mr. Speaker. Some of it certainly will be spent in some good areas, but a lot will be spent where PNM members and their families have bought lands. *[Interruption]* You always want information. I will give you the information. Totally useless, but you want the information.

Agricultural access roads—the 2006 estimates, \$16 million; revised estimate, \$55 million. I am saying that of this \$55 million, some of it will be spent to reach agricultural communities and the other amount leading to lands owned by PNM members and/or their friends or associates. Let the Minister get up and defend it. I will produce information at a later time. *[Interruption]* Small world. Do you not think that people in the ministry are fed up? You do not think they are seeing?

Do you think that because you are the Minister, they will not give out the information? They have to. There is the Freedom of Information Act.

Under schools, I see construction of South Oropouche Government School, \$2 million. I do not know what it is for, but I welcome it. Let us look at the schools—at the construction of the Ste. Madeleine Government School. That school has been completed a while. I see \$2 million. That is in the Prime Minister's constituency. That school was built for \$30 million to \$40 million for a school population of 141 students. It is the Prime Minister's constituency. If the Prime Minister wants it, you have to do it.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, very interestingly, the El Socorro South Government, estimate, \$1.2 million; revised estimate, zero; Iacos Government from \$4 million to \$7 million—PNM area—I am glad they are getting a school; St. Mary's Government—I am not sure where that is, from \$9 million to \$2 million; Cunupia Primary School, remaining at \$2 million. The one I wanted to draw attention to is Enterprise Government School, estimate, \$1.4 million; revised estimate, \$625,000. That is the kind of thing we are seeing all over.

The number of schools goes from 164 to 173. We agree that schools are important. We want to see schools, but we want to see equality and fairness. Let the schools be built wherever they are needed. They must not be more expensive in the PNM areas and less expensive and take longer in the UNC areas. That must stop immediately.

Under equipment and vehicles, general public services, physical investments, hospitals, district health facilities, health centres, estimate of \$125 million, revised estimate, \$50 million. What is this saying? There is no need for health care in the country?

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

Hon. Members, it is a good time to take the dinner break. When we return, will someone move the motion for the extension? I will put the question when I get back.

The sitting is suspended for dinner and will resume at 9.15 p.m. promptly.

8.37 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

9.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Motion made, That the speaking time of the hon. Member be extended by 30 minutes. [Dr. A. Nanan]

Question put and negatived.

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*): Mr. Speaker, it is very unusual to start a contribution in this manner. It is not the norm to do this and I want to record my displeasure.

I start by reading from today's editorial in the *Guardian*. I am quoting.

“Moreover, human productive capacity and competitive economic development would have been stifled by the excessive carbon monoxide fumes generated by the slow crawl.”

This is traffic jam. This is in response to the Prime Minister when he said that he is building, in Port of Spain, office buildings, which will cater for the public service of Trinidad and Tobago. My question is: After people have travelled for two or three hours in a traffic jam, which I am sure is increasing daily—we all experience that—

I was coming to Port of Spain around 12.00 noon—an unusual time of day for traffic to be heading south—and the traffic started at Munroe Road and at Grand Bazaar there was still traffic. I thought this to be very unusual, but nothing surprises me anymore with traffic jams. Recently, the Minister would know, with the hole in the southbound part of the highway, tremendous traffic jams were created.

When the Prime Minister tells this House about building these offices and having nice places for civil servants to work, I would like to see that infrastructure developed so that our people—yes, we are building these offices, but what about the feeders? How are we dealing with traffic jams? This is the most vexing problem in this country today.

I was reading some literature on traffic jams recently and I discovered that after half an hour in a traffic jam, a person becomes so irritated he can commit a crime and after two hours in a traffic jam a person could be a potential murderer. I read that in an international journal. I thought that I would let the Prime Minister know that we in this country cannot be easily fooled into believing that erecting these buildings would solve the problems in the area. There might be comfortable offices, but for people to reach there—we have to look at the transportation system before we look at anything else.

I recommend that an aggressive policy be developed to deal with the traffic situation and transport system in Trinidad and Tobago. It is something that we must not leave out at all when we are planning for the future.

Another point the Prime Minister made, to which I have to respond, has to do with sport, cricket in particular. When he mentioned Trinidad's contribution to West Indian cricket, he started sounding good and I almost applauded. However, later on, he stated that if the Brian Lara Stadium is not ready, it is no big thing because we can use elsewhere. To me this was confusing.

We have not yet been told the final cost of the Brian Lara facility—I spoke with the hon. Minister and, for the record, and off the record, answers are not coming that easily. At what stage is the building of that stadium, Mr. Speaker? We have not heard.

I go back to the Prime Minister. I felt disappointed when he said that he did not want to be part of World Cup 2007. I am a cricket fan. We are all cricket fans in Trinidad and Tobago and the West Indies. Cricket is one common thread that is stronger than any other in Caricom. For cricket to be treated in that manner is not fair to the sportspeople of Trinidad and Tobago. The Prime Minister must really understand what he is talking about as far as cricket is concerned.

He went on to talk about Brian Lara, this icon. I put it on record in this Parliament for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to know that the best batsman I have seen in my time is Brian Lara. There is no question about that. To trivialize the matter and to have the World Cup 2007, which to my mind is one of the biggest sporting events to be held in this part of the world, treated like that by the hon. Prime Minister—I believe he should rethink that issue.

He said practice matches are no big thing, but I would love to have India, Sri Lanka, Canada and Bermuda hear the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago saying that a warm-up match is no big thing. To reach your peak, you have to warm up. You have to have good warm-up games. I think that the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs himself told me that the warm-up games would be against bigger teams. For example, the warm-up games would not be India against Wanderers; it would be India against England, for example, who would be here to play these warm-up games. It is other countries who will be coming to Trinidad and Tobago.

I am saying that the practice games should not be treated like that. As a matter of fact, there might be better games for games, for example, Bermuda versus Canada or India versus Canada or Sri Lanka versus Bermuda. The warm-up

games will be better matches to look at. India and Sri Lanka will be the two senior teams playing in Trinidad and their warm-up games will be, may be, against England, Australia and Pakistan. People will want to see these games. The Prime Minister does not understand what he got himself into this evening and I want to correct him.

He stood up and maybe he believed he was talking to people who do not know and understand cricket. Brian Lara did not break his own record. I am sure my friend, the Member for Tunapuna, will agree with me. Brian Lara broke his record the second time around; that was held by Matthew Hayden, from Australia.

Mr. Hinds: He set the record of 375 and he did better than that.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: He said he broke his own record. [*Interruption*] He broke the record for the second time and we accept that. He broke the record that was held at the time by Matthew Hayden of Australia. This is just to correct it because young people might be listening to the Prime Minister and be misled. I do not believe that much in cricket statistics, but there are people who would have statistics at their fingertips, so we have to be careful about that.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes people say things that we just allow to pass. Schools reopened this term amidst strikes by the security guards of MTS. I saw no reaction from Government or government agencies to this vexing question. I saw on the news that children who were supposed to be in school, because there were no guards there, were in places that they were not supposed to be and it was business as usual.

Nobody batted an eyelid and, to compound matters, wherever MTS guards were stationed, the same thing occurred. In Chaguaramas, for example, in the District Revenue Office—my friend, the Member for Diego Martin West alluded to it—people went to pay their taxes and to change their cheques and there was a notice “Closed until further notice”. When they in government treat their clientele like that, it is not fair. Chaguanas people had to wait two or three days to pay their bills, their taxes, to change their cheques, or they had to go elsewhere—maybe Port of Spain. This is the manner in which our country is being governed.

I want people to understand. Yes, the Minister of Works and Transport has done work across the country, but, at the same time, I sense some arrogance this evening when he addressed the Member for Naparima. He is the Minister.

Mr. Imbert: I told him he could get whatever he wants.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: You are the Minister. You are in government. The Opposition and the rest of country would have to come to you for goods and services. That is the system unless we listen to our friend, the Member for Fyzabad, and have a constituency fund that we can spend. Until that time comes, we have to rely on the Government for goods and services for our constituents. To dismiss him and say that it is the second road he asked for, as if he is begging for something—I want to put it on record that it is the right of every citizen of this country to be treated fairly. It is enshrined in our Constitution.

While we are in office, we are here temporarily so we have to understand that we should do things properly. We are in the public glare now, not only are we live on TV, but the media have opened up recently where all our actions are reported whether in the *TnT Mirror* [Laughter] or—

Mr. Imbert: What is in the *Mirror*?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I do not want to trivialize this. We have to understand our every move is being observed out there. When we talk about setting examples for our families, we have to be above everything else.

I followed the news recently about Prime Minister Blair in England; he was forced to announce his resignation because of allegations of certain things he caused. Yet we in Trinidad and Tobago, as leaders, would come here and do everything wrong under the sun and expect to remain in office. Do you know what is causing that, Mr. Speaker? I am guilty of that and we have all been guilty of that. [Interruption]

Let me say it. I have experience in this country that leaders from way back, when I was a youngster, would make mistakes and their followers would not acknowledge their mistakes—they would dismiss the mistakes. For example, if the Minister of Works and Transport does something wrong and the people like him, they would try to repaint him, try to make him appear to be something else just to keep worshipping him and making him an idol.

When these people fail the society, are we surprised? If a fish rots from the top, then you know what would happen. When we see the decay of our leaders, coming into this Parliament and being arrogant, like they are God's gift to Trinidad and Tobago, and we do wrong things, are we surprised that the people we are leading would commit these crimes? This is not the first time I have asked this here. A few months ago I asked that. Here I am asking it again.

We have to be very careful what we do. I am making a passionate plea for all of us, as leaders in our country, to lift our standards. Let us do that or we would reap something that we would not want to reap.

Mr. Imbert: Whom are you speaking about?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I am speaking to all of us.

My colleague, the Member for Couva South, accused us, maybe on the back bench, of being “pot-hounds”. [*Interruption*] Yes, he said that. “Pot-hounds” who spoke and you cannot speak on that side! I am not a “pot-hound” and I will say, in this Parliament, that I will not stand for what is wrong on either side of this House. [*Desk thumping*] What is wrong is wrong and cannot be right. That is enough about this “pot-hound” thing.

Mr. Speaker, my friend, the Member for Diego Martin West, the statement he made this evening was quite interesting. Here, the Prime Minister is touting this building to be his next office and I heard the Member for Diego Martin West when he said that if we build a new Parliament now people would say we are spending too much money. I looked at him very straight faced. I looked at the Prime Minister; the Prime Minister looked at him. Later on the Prime Minister put a different spin.

Again, Member for Diego Martin West, if you believe that the Parliament should remain the Parliament get up and say that. Do not say that you are not building a new Parliament. You have conflicting views. [*Interruption*] I just bring this to the table because I believe that it was a snide remark from the Member for Diego Martin West.

Dr. Rowley: [*Holds up magazine*] I want you to quote this in the *Hansard*—page 152.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I would like to examine quickly, some issues, which are important to me, my constituents and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If we look at the document before us, and examine the various heads, I have noticed that the Ministry of Finance had a huge increase in the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), from \$42 million to \$247 million; the Ministry of Planning and Development, from \$2.7 million to \$113 million; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, \$19 million to \$69 million, but I have not read what this is for, and I want to applaud it because we have been saying—and I want to be fair—is that the agricultural sector has not been serviced with access roads and so on.

I would like to ask the Member for Arouca North, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, that when we are doing this project, let us deal with the people who need these more. I have invited the Minister to visit my constituency to have a first-hand look at how people struggle to bring forth produce. Having the moneys here looks good, but we need to have meaningful input into agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, there are many things I want to put on record. If you look at the general index—I have the latest, March 2005—you would see the Index of Retail Prices, the base January 2003—100 per cent. If you look at column one, all items from 2003 to now, with the base of 100 per cent, prices have increased and it is now reading 167.8; an increase of 67.8 per cent between 2003 and March 2005. When we look at food, this has moved, in 2003, from 100 per cent to 144.9 per cent in March 2005. There is an alarming increase in the price of food. If you look at the other items index, you see that there is generally an increase.

9.35 p.m.

In 2004, the import bill for food was \$2.215 billion. This is a staggering figure for the import of food and I know the reasons but, at the same time, we in Trinidad and Tobago could do much better to impact this figure if we meaningfully attack or develop the agricultural sector.

In 2005, this figure jumped to \$2.7 billion, an increase by \$5 billion. So far, in 2006, from January—April, the figure has been \$861,421.50. If you multiply this by four, it would be more than \$3 billion. The food import bill would be higher later on in the year since we are approaching Christmas.

In 2006, we are facing a food import bill of more than \$3 billion. That is why the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources—I am not saying that he does not know, maybe does not understand the impact that agriculture could have on a decrease in the food bill. Then the Minister of Finance would be happy to know that the balance of trade deficit could be lower. We must understand this.

In running a country, every Minister would have a role to play. That is why I started talking about the arrogance of Ministers and their getting angry when the Opposition speaks. We have to understand that we have 1.3 million people to look at. We have to be good examples and good workers.

I would continue with this before I go there. As I mentioned, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources got a \$50 million increase, which I am

happy about. The Ministry of Education got an increase of \$50 million. I would go into the details shortly, to show what has happened there.

Under the Ministry of Health, I have noticed, with some alarm, that they have lost approximately \$75 million. This is where I find something is not right. Promises were made in this country.

When you look at the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, there is another increase from \$216 million to \$323 million. Again, when I read the details I saw the work that is being done. I want to acknowledge that it is something of which I am proud. In the rural constituencies—although Chaguanas is semi-rural/semi-urban, and there are incidents of crime—people believe that if there are streetlights, crime will decrease. I do not share that view, but that is the belief. I am happy to see that almost every lamp-post has a streetlight. It is a dream that I thought could have never happened. It has happened and I would like to thank the Cabinet and the Minister for making it happen. I thank her sincerely.

Of course, the Ministry of Local Government lost \$55 million. I cannot understand that. The Ministry of Works and Transport lost some money, or did not use some money? That one is very surprising.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs had a substantial gain. Of course, this is explained by the Brian Lara Stadium fiasco. I do not want to say Brian Lara fiasco. The newspapers have been reporting these days that Lara is given another chance. I thought he was fired from his captaincy. It was so misleading.

I want to go quickly to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. Before I go there I want to thank my colleagues for pointing out to me that the construction of a technology centre in Chaguanas has been omitted from the estimates. When I saw that, when the budget was presented, I felt good for my constituents, but now I see that it has been removed and I would like the Minister to tell me why. This can be found under Head 54: Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education.

Recently, I saw my good friend, the Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, was given the Swaran Kumar Award by the Hindu Credit Union. I do not want to go into the life of the Minister, but receiving an award from a person in Chaguanas—Let me remind the people of Chaguanas of what that Minister did to us in Chaguanas. In 1999/2000, money was allocated to build a modern library in Chaguanas with all the facilities that the borough and people of Chaguanas would enjoy. When I asked a question in 2002, the Minister got up and said that he could not support building a library

in Chaguanas. I was devastated by that because Chaguanas now has six secondary schools and many primary schools and we also have the largest population, as far as a borough or city is concerned. I have been saying that all along. The EBC report will show that the Chaguanas Borough Corporation has approximately 60,000 electors; Point Fortin Borough Corporation, 40,000 and Port of Spain City Corporation, 30,000. Chaguanas is double the size of Port of Spain and yet Chaguanas is being treated as if it is not recognized.

The Prime Minister made a statement a couple of months ago that he knows that Chaguanas is growing and that he is going to build a hospital. He said that he is talking to John Hopkins to build a big hospital in Chaguanas, yet we have a son of the oil, the Minister of Public Administration and Information and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, receiving an award from the people of Chaguanas. It is not that I begrudge the award, but I believe that we should be careful when giving awards. Here, a son of Chaguanas, who attended the same secondary school that I attended, who understood the problems of the children in that part of the world, and now a library has been denied. He came and made that announcement and that was it. I asked him to reconsider and he said that NALIS told him that and that is that, yet he is receiving an award from Chaguanas. These are the things I do not agree with.

I want to see a society where things could be seen and understood. I thought I would introduce that because I believe that the Government has now taken off the technology centre in Chaguanas, which is another blow to the constituency of Chaguanas and the surrounding areas. We now have Chaguanas East and Chaguanas West.

I want to touch on the Ministry of Social Development. I have seen the Minister in the news today, which indicated that the Ministry of Social Development lost \$8 million. I want to read into the record a few things I saw today. I cannot let this pass.

“Child Abduction Bill coming soon. They were advised of the urgency of these pieces of legislation, as well as the challenges the Government would have in securing the required majority to pass certain legislation in Parliament. He proposed amendments to improve the existing Acts. As well, it was felt that the issue of international child abduction is a critical issue and it was not adequately addressed in the package of legislation. This package of legislation he spoke about were the Children's Bill, which he mentioned later.”

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. RAMSARAN]

Friday, September 08 2006

That is Minister Roberts. When I saw this in the newspapers—I have to remind the Parliament and myself that we are talking about 2000 legislation. We are in 2006 and I spoke about this almost four months ago. The Minister is still proposing. I do not know what is wrong. We are giving up \$8 million from the ministry and all we want to see is the establishment of the Children's Authority Bill. The Bills have problems. Bring them to the Parliament and let us deal with them and go back out there. Do not sit there and allow what is happening to continue.

For example, teenagers were arrested in the protest in Naparima. I am ashamed of the way in which children are treated in this country. I do not believe, if the laws were in place, that children should be allowed to protest. Some adults should be arrested. The children should not be arrested. Of course, they could have been taken, but some responsible adults—Let us say the army really went in there and used arms, fired guns, 15-year-old children would have been killed. If we do not have the laws in place, the Children's Authority Bill would deal with that, because a child is a person up to the age of 18 years. When we see children being abused and used I have to talk about it.

Dr. Rowley: By the parents?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: By anybody. We have seen a house being destroyed with children in it.

Dr. Rowley: Where?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Somewhere in Port of Spain. There were two: the CRY Foundation and the ARK. I am not talking about the merits or demerits of the case, all I am saying is when things are put in place we can deal with them. We can accuse each other and shout at each other, but are we really moving to make these things happen? I could go more into social development, but I want it to rest there. I do not want to narrow it.

The vagrancy problem was also mentioned by the Minister yesterday. This problem is rising. Again, we saw money being moved from the ministry because the Minister is not ready to deal with addressing the vagrancy problem. You said that the people have protested against the site. Can you tell me what is the latest with the vagrancy problem? The Minister may speak about it later. The fact is that these are two burning issues that must be dealt with. I am tired of seeing moneys being returned to other ministries, via your ministry, and I would like to see that something is really done to deal with social development.

I hope I can reach sports very quickly; apparently it is not coming to the fore. I have it here. The stadium has taken some money. I saw 153 corporation grounds to be refurbished at \$33,000 per ground. What happened to this project, has it been started? Am I reading correctly that it costs \$33,000 per ground, or was it put into the budget by mistake? It is really very confusing that we can have a ground in Trinidad and Tobago to be repaired at \$33,000? Why was this put in? I do not have to read it. I remember clearly that it was 153 grounds to be rehabilitated by the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. Maybe we have to cut them. On the other hand, we had a huge sum being spent on the Brian Lara Stadium. The imbalance is something that I find very confusing.

Minister, if you read the relevant document, maybe you can explain to us what this is about. If you do not, I would wait for the answer another time. It does not seem right. My friend from Tunapuna said that is for cutting the grounds. That means that a cheap cutter would be used to cut the grounds. We have to be careful what we put in documents that come before the Parliament. It is very important that we understand what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, there are other areas I want to touch on. The Ministry of Health has given up quite a huge sum of money. If the ministry was working properly—maybe there are reasons for the ministry not working. It could be the system or the bureaucratic delays. Tell the country. By now the Chaguanas Health Centre should have been completed because you have given up much more than what the health centre would have cost us. I do not know if you would have spoken to the Prime Minister, who got up and said that he is talking to John Hopkins because the hospital we have might be too small for Chaguanas and that there would be a big hospital in Chaguanas. This is in *Hansard*. Maybe you can speak with him privately and say: “What are you talking about? Is it the same \$23 million hospital I am building, or is it that you want to build something else?” If you can talk to the Prime Minister, maybe we can have a clear message coming out. I know that they are friends because they “lime” in the same spots. I have seen them a few times. I hope things have not fallen out.

My contribution this evening is one of a very serious nature. When the Minister comes to this House to do these things, we always talk about it. There should be meaningful ways to spend our money. I think more Ministers should get into the debate. They can spend half an hour or 20 minutes to tell us why the money was not spent. This is important. My friend from St. Joseph said that the money you see in the budget—we know, we have been there—is sometimes a quarter of what you requested because the Ministers are very ambitious. The

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MR. RAMSARAN]

Friday, September 08 2006

Minister may make a request for \$500 million and get \$100 million and they would then come and give up \$25 million. Are the systems in place? Is the PSIP working as it is supposed to work? These are questions that I would like answered.

I would like the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to get up and say: "I have received \$50 million more and I have systems in place." There are approximately 20 days for the end of the financial year. Has the money come too late or have plans already been made to spend the money? I do not know. Today is September 08. Today is two days before September 10 and there are 22 days left in the month. Can we finish these things? I do not know. I should have loved to hear somebody say: "This is the money I got and I have to give up \$30 million or \$40 million and this is the reason I had to give it up."

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources could say to us: "I have received more money than I asked for and this is what I am going to do." When you tell the country this, people would have more confidence in not only the PNM, but in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. I say it all the time; maybe I sound like a voice in the wilderness; I would like to see honest people with integrity leading our country in every sphere: politics, sports, culture, whatever there is. We must have people there who can make us proud. To be fair to you, no one's name came to my mind. If I want I can go into that, but I would not.

Before I sit I want to read one more thing into the record from today's *Guardian*. I am sorry the Minister of Works and Transport is not here.

"Facing yet another form of road hazard, the Works Minister was playing well the blame-game in Parliament on Wednesday, saying the predecessor UNC government should have fixed the roads in Barrackpore in its six-year term.

Incidentally, while resident frustrations are understood, there can be no justification for illegal behaviour to draw attention to concerns. If every community and interest group were to follow suit, anarchy would soon prevail."

The *Guardian* admits that if everybody who needs roads protests, there would be anarchy. It is not that they are blaming the residents for protesting, they are blaming the Minister for not providing the roads.

"But to cut the ground from under Minister Imbert, he must be made to acknowledge that this present PNM Government has had five years at it

and if the time from previous stints in office is to be counted, the PNM would have a grand total of 39 years at neglecting rural roads and failing to provide a national transport system that would have at least avoided the severity of today's problems.”

I have put it into the record. When you have some time you will read it again. Is this the same Minister who spoke about inflation? He said that he could not understand inflation.

Again, I put on record something from former President of the Senate, Mr. Michael Williams. What he wrote here does not sound like that to me.

“Too many dollars chasing too little resources has caused massive inflation. But to Manning and his government, money is no problem. They simply dip into the Treasury as the oil price rises to unprecedented levels, and the gas just keeps flowing.

Then Jennifer Baptiste and Robert Guiseppi demand 30—40 per cent wage increases so their workers and their children can still get three meals a day. But Central Bank Governor Ewart Williams, advises the old-time remedy for inflation, ‘ban yuh belly, hold strain, get by on two meals a day or eat less,’ and Manning chimes in with ‘this is the cost of national development, this is no boom, it will not last a long time.’

Manning's ill-conceived development policy has devalued our savings by at least 25 per cent.”

I agree with this.

“Thousands of families, widows and pensioners, who have been tending their nest eggs at their banks and UTC—to build their dream house, to fix the kitchen floor, or repair the leaking roof, to add the extra room for mother, or the annex in the back for grandfather—have learnt, to their dismay, that today's costs could be 40 per cent higher, and a reliable contractor is hard to find.

The HDC and UDeCott can pay whatever it costs to boost Manning's ego with steel and concrete buildings, but you and I, and all Trinis, bear the burden for Manning's madness. Not only have grocery baskets got lighter and lighter with the same pay packet, but our home improvement dreams simply slipped out of reach, as concrete costs doubled and building materials and labour (if you can find any) have escalated out of your reach.

In pursuing a skyscraper skyline in a hurry, Manning merrily pulled the rug from under us, and the Prime Minister's dream is now the people's nightmare.”

I thought that justifies what I have been trying to say. While we have been moving in one particular way, I have always taken a slant for human development. I want to, again, plead with the Minister of Social Development on that side. Let us build our landscape. I have nothing against tall buildings, Member for Diego Martin West. They look good, but at the same time, we must correct the human problems. Let us get rid of our problems with the children and social displacement. Side by side, I say to the hon. Minister, “the budget is around the corner; let us not only increase pensions because we believe that it is an election year, but let us increase it in a substantial manner, so that our pensioners and persons with disabilities could be protected.”

I want to stress that I do not totally support a welfare system, but our pensioners and socially disabled people must be given priority. Not only are we creating a division of aging; we need much more than that. I recommend that we look at the inflation rate of 59 per cent, which I mentioned before. We cannot recommend an increase of 59 per cent, but when we look at the other increases I have read earlier, and one has to face the grocery—my friend from Tunapuna would like to have a Mercedes Benz—we must have the means to do it. I would like to recommend that the pensioners and persons with disabilities receive at least \$2,000 per month. More than that, I would like to see an adjustment in the age from 65 to 60. I would like to see a tiered system that could deal with everyone from age 60 and upwards, who would receive a pension. We must have that scale, so that people who would earn a little more would get a higher pension.

With respect to the issue of marrying the ceiling, we have to seriously consider that. I met with someone from Barrackpore two days ago. I do not want to go into extra time. That person has one leg and cancer. He received three months of NIS benefits at \$1,500 per month. When he went to apply for his disability allowance, he was refused because he had already received NIS benefits. I thought that was cruel. I thought, as soon as he was finished receiving those three months' benefit, he could have gone back to get his disability allowance. I advised him to do that. I would like to see the ceiling being seriously considered. If a person earned an additional \$300 from a pension somewhere, that person is debarred from receiving pension. We should look at that. If it means doing it in a sliding rule way, we should do it because I cannot, for the life of me,

understand how the Government expects, in today's world, a senior citizen to survive on \$1,000 per month. It is just not possible.

I want to make these recommendations and hope that in a couple days, when the budget is announced, we can say that the most vulnerable groups in our society are treated well.

I heard the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs speak of \$100 million for the football team. That is a one-off thing. I would like to see the people challenged in our country given that sort of treatment, which I think they deserve.

With those few words, I thank you very much.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me thank, once again, all those who contributed to the observations on this particular debate. Let me try to deal with a couple of the issues that have not been dealt with by any of the other speakers on this side.

The Member for Chaguanas raised some issues. He talked about the traffic jam issue. The Minister of Works and Transport has a plan for that issue and that plan is well in hand. In the course of time, I think, he will share it with the community and we would understand what his strategy is.

As it relates to the expenditure for the Ministry of Finance, quite frankly, that is really expenditure for the Estate Management Company Limited. That company is dealing with the promise made to the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited, insofar as the residential lots and the agricultural plots are concerned. That is where that allocation is going.

The allocation to the Ministry of Planning and Development talked about is really for UDeCOTT, CISL and PSPL; those are companies that are involved in enhancing communities and ensuring that communities are better off.

Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the debate this evening, I found an interesting discussion taking place. On the one hand, I heard the Member for Fyzabad talking about discrimination and on the other hand, I heard the Member for Chaguanas talking about the fact that almost every pole in his constituency has a streetlight on it. I wondered—I am trying to understand the discrimination charge in the context of the pattern of expenditure that we have. It is very difficult, I think, in a real sense, to discriminate in the system that we operate under, because if you understand how the system is managed, I can tell you that we have a number of individuals who are in senior positions of power, who do not support the party

that forms the Government. In a real sense, if there is any discrimination that is taking place, certainly it is not Government policy to so do. If it was government policy to so do, we would have a different set of policies. Where we decided to put the resources and where we have decided to allocate expertise and put funds it is really about making sure that Trinidad and Tobago, as a country, moves forward. Therefore, if it is that in some instances and some areas there appears to be discrimination, we have to examine those who are charged with the implementation responsibility. Certainly, that is not the policy of this Government.

Mr. Speaker, social services and providing for the poor, the aged, the infirm and the disabled—all that is something that this Government, today, is taking a lot of licks for. Because when you look at the pattern of expenditure, where the Government's expenditure is and where the Government has increased its expenditure by approximately four times, it really is not in construction. Construction is 10 per cent of our expenditure. The allocations are for the construction of buildings and those kinds of things, and in many instances, those things are funded on their own, on the basis of the economics. In a real sense, they are business activities that have a string of income attached to them and not the Treasury.

The Government has spent in health, education, social services and national security and I do not understand how it is possible, in the face of the population's cry for these services, for us, as a Government, to do anything but attempt to support them at this point in time.

We talked about the issue of inflation. We cannot talk about inflation without understanding that we live in a globalized environment and a global economy in which, today, the price of oil is going to impact on your country's goods and services. If we look at the world economy, Europe, Japan, United States and all the G8 countries, what we see happening is similar to what is occurring in the Trinidad and Tobago economy. The fact of the matter is that during times of high oil prices, inflation happens because the cost of goods is in fact affected by inputs in some of the commodities that end up with consumers. In a real sense, therefore, two things are happening now that will create some challenges for us. The first is that great demand in China and India has risen by approximately 5 per cent and that is going to stay. That is real demand. Unfortunately, by policy, they have taken a decision to expand the capital expenditure programme and they are basically involved in a lot of infrastructure work. It is the infrastructure work that they are involved in that is creating a global shortage. The other thing about that is

that there is also a global shortage that will take place shortly in food, and we are aware of that. When we do the budget this year we would announce some of the measures that we intend to take.

There is another point that we need to understand. This is something we would have to collectively try to and understand. I was talking to a farmer who has a farm in Toco and he asked me a simple question: How much do you pay for breadfruit, I think it was. I said: "Well." He said: "Let me tell you. My wife went to the supermarket and she is paying \$24.50 per pound." He said: "When it leaves me on the farm in Toco, it leaves me at \$1.50." It leaves Toco at \$1.50 and by the time it gets to Westmoorings it is \$24.50. The question that, therefore, needs to be answered is: How is it possible that in the system we have and the way that we have organized it, you have between Toco and Westmoorings, that element of cost that is now with the consumer? When we say that a lot of the inflation is markup inflation, it is so. In a real sense, this Government has picked up external inflation.

The price of gas today is still \$2.70. When we worked it out, it should be \$5.20. We picked it up. The price of petrol should be twice what it is today. If the Government were not subsidizing it to the extent that we are, the fact of the matter is we would have the inflation, but we do not. Therefore, we do not see signs of external inflation being imported as yet, because of that particular price subsidy. What we do see though are charges that are being passed on to the consumer as a consequence of increases in freight and insurance and that we could understand and appreciate. Something is wrong with the way that we have organized the system, or the way the system is organized, at this point in time and the Government will be looking at ways to deal with that in the not too distant future.

Mr. Speaker, time and again we have heard this issue about transparency and information. It is very difficult, in a budget of \$30 billion or \$40 billion, with 25 ministries, to determine exactly what people want to find out within the context of information. Five years ago, this economy was \$50 billion and revenues \$12 billion. Today we are at approximately \$110 billion and we are about \$30 billion or \$35 billion. That creates for you different challenges, but insofar as accountability and transparency are concerned, we have gone on record time and again making the following observations: Insofar as policy is concerned, short term and medium term, whenever we lay the budget documents in this Parliament, one document that we lay is called the *Social and Economic Policy Framework*. That, encapsulates policy for every single ministry so everybody has a view, understanding and appreciation of what the Government intends to do.

In addition to that, there is the *Public Sector Investment Programme*, a document which highlights on a project by project basis by ministries, what the intention and allocation of funds are. You are right, the call, at any point in time, for resources, is way in excess of what we have the ability to deal with. This year, for example—on the basis of aggregate demand from ministries, which is somewhere in the vicinity of \$29 billion, projects that are already in the pipeline, approved and waiting for funding—we will spend between \$3 billion and \$5 billion. That means that you still have \$24 billion of projects approved within the pipeline simply waiting on resources. Therefore, when we come to exercises like this, we make a judgment as to whether or not the moneys that were allocated are in fact needed at this point in time. If it is not needed at this point in time, it simply shifts to another project. In many instances, there are reasons why projects do not get funding.

If a project gets funding at the beginning of the year and by the time we get to the review, which is about June or July, we have a fair idea as to whether that project will be funded within the next three months, because we recognize that if it is a project through central government, then the Central Tenders Board basically closes by July 15, because we need confirmation of funds—That is the system. Therefore, in a lot of instances, when you see moneys being reallocated, it is not spite or any of those things; it is simply utilizing the resources that are available to balance the demands that you have, recognizing that you really cannot fulfil all the requirements at any point in time.

I guess the question that arises is this: If you have \$29 billion of projects, by projects I guess we could consider that to be needs in the society, and you have the opportunity to deal with it because you have revenue, on what basis can you say no to the citizens of this country, who are asking you to deal with that? Yes, it is a fact that as we look at the various fundamentals, as we call them, we have to balance them in such a way. But, in a lot of instances, there are transitional arrangements that we have to put in place to make sure that it happens. We know what they are and we are doing them. We have a team of some of the best technocrats available to us and, therefore, whenever we act, we act on the base of sound advice. If it is that there are people in the society who make statements and we do not listen to them, it is because we take those statements through our processes, based on our requirements and information, and come to a different conclusion.

There are many in our society who are unfamiliar with public policy issues. I myself, coming into Government and understanding how the system works, still

have a difficulty with considering savings as expenditure. One of the things that happen, for example, is that because of the accounting system that we have and the way we have to move money from the Consolidated Fund, based on the allocation process, we find ourselves in a situation where savings are counted as expenditure. Therefore, when commentators say to us: “Your expenditure is too high,” what they are basically saying to us is that we should not save. We cannot accept that, because by policy we are saying that as gas and oil, or as prices basically go all over the place, what we are seeking to do is to take some resources and build financial assets so that over the long term, these financial assets will give you a return, which can replace revenues that you may lose as a result of the depleting assets. That is the strategy.

The Member for Fyzabad raised the question about poverty. The last survey of living conditions that we did in this country was in 1992. The GDP was \$23.1 billion, unemployment rate was 15 per cent and at that time it said that 30 per cent of the people in this country lived under the poverty line. Today, in 2006, our GDP is \$110 billion and our unemployment rate is close to 6.9 per cent. Anybody who wants a job can find one. In fact, many people are working at two jobs now. We have a situation where the business community is saying to us: “We are looking for people.” We have a situation where everybody in this country, who wants to be educated, can do so, because the Government will not discriminate against you simply because you are without means. The Government takes the position that every citizen has a right. Therefore, in those circumstances, in the last two years, we had \$5 billion in social services programmes. On the basis of very specific policies of this administration, I cannot understand how we still hold to the view that the number of people who live under the poverty line in 1992 still exists today.

Mr. Ramsaran: Thanks for giving way. Could you tell us what is the margin of the poverty line?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Mr. Speaker, I have a view, but the study, as I understand, is completed or would be completed. The study was done and the analysis is being done and I am pretty sure that by the time we get to the budget we will have the correct number, but it cannot be 30 per cent. When you input the numbers based on the way it works, it cannot be 30 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we reject the view that has been expressed that every project has been in a PNM area because, quite frankly, we have just heard from the Member for Chaguanas and the Member for Couva South that they have had projects and

the last time I checked those areas were not PNM areas. The issue that we have on this side is that the Minister—anyhow I am not going there.

I want to deal with two other issues. One has to do with a comment made by the Member for Couva South. The Government has received revenues today because of deliberate policy. I had the unfortunate job of coming into Government, seeing high oil prices and in fact receiving less revenue during a high oil price situation. That happened for the first two years that we were in Government. When we examined it, what we saw was that the administration before us and possibly the one before that as well had negotiated a regime based on a different environment and we sought to do a number of things. In doing those things, we also dealt with the issue that had to do with the question about reserves. We interacted with the companies and the first thing we did was that we dealt with the supplemental petroleum tax, to make it a true SPT. That is to say, as the price moves, the country gets a benefit and the producers get a benefit. We have dealt with that. We also looked at gas contracts and said that what you get, that is what we will tax you on. We fixed that. We also looked at production-sharing contracts; another mechanism. We are moving to the stage now where production-sharing contracts will be taxed. That is the third element of that particular exercise. While we were negotiating this, we also negotiated a work programme with the companies that said while we are doing this now, over the next three years, we will incentivize you to go out into deep areas and actually do more production.

When we look at the hydrocarbon production profile of this country, we see that it has changed from what it was in 1970 and 1980. In a real sense, gas is today the dominant product within the sector. We believe that the time has now come for us to start to equalize that and, therefore, we are doing things to make sure that we deal with that particular issue.

We are replacing energy assets with financial assets. That is a deliberate policy. The other thing that we are noticing is that today the world is slightly different from what it was in the 1970s and 1980s and, therefore, those who say that some of the same things will happen really do not understand what is going on in the world today. Two things have changed in the world today. One is the issue of globalization and the other one is the role of the private sector in the global economy. Those things have changed the dynamics in the world, such that private sector flows throughout the world are impacting on inflation in some ways and in a real sense, therefore, global inflation is now much lower than it would

have been, given the same circumstances some time ago. We know these things and we are looking at these things and we are seeing things.

I want to deal with a comment made by the Member for St. Joseph. The IDF works in a particular way. We allocate funds to the IDF. We basically determine what ministries will be affected and when we come to the Parliament, we lay out the details of what we have done. That is how the IDF programme works; similar to the PSIP and as far as I remember, when we came to the Parliament on the last occasion, we identified all the projects and where they were going. All the issues you had raised in the context of the information, that is being prepared right now and will be available to you very shortly, when the budget is presented.

The Member talked about the quality of spending; we agree. Some of the measures that we are seeking to take in our reform exercises in the constitutional issues reflect our understanding of this issue and the possible solution to that particular problem. We understand the issues. Contrary to popular opinion, we do in fact listen, but it cannot be that our pact with the population, our commitment to the population, and our programme of delivery to the population, in which they have said to us: “Go forth and implement,” would be impacted or derailed in midterm by those who never shared our philosophy in the first instance. It cannot be and, therefore—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramsaran: Thanks for giving way again. Before you finish, I know you are winding up, I asked a question and I want to repeat it: How confident are you that in 20-odd days the changes you have made and the moneys you have requested would be spent?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Insofar as the IDF is concerned, the mechanism that is in place will allow us to spend it, maybe not within the time frame. Let me explain that. The IDF is a fund and we have projects that are ongoing. One of the challenges we face when we go through the PSIP and the Consolidated Fund is that by the end of July to whenever you pass a budget in October, nothing happens; because there is absolutely no way that you could access the funds. What the IDF has done is that it has given us the ability to continue projects throughout that period and, therefore, when we report to you at the end of the financial year, we will say to you: This is what was deposited into the fund, these are the areas in which the projects were completed, this is where we have reached and this is what now goes into the next year. It then goes on like that. That is the benefit of the IDF. It allows you to actually, over a period that was not available to you before, continue with the work and, therefore, to move the delivery process

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[SEN THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, September 08 2006

forward. That is why we went into that mechanism and that is how we propose to deal with that, and the money is not lost.

What happens is, now you know the story, at the end of the year, there is a mad frenzy to pay bills and to do all kinds of things because people believe if you do not spend it, then you lose it. What this mechanism does is that it allows us to deposit it. That is why when you ask for details about where it is going, I could tell you that we have \$29 billion worth of calls on it. We are doing it on the basis of projects, priorities, of what is available and what the Cabinet has agreed to be appropriate. It is not a new mechanism. It has been there since 1979.

There is just one more point. There are those who said that we had funds before and we spent them, what is different? What is different about this one? When we come to the Parliament before the end of this year with the legislation for the Heritage and Stabilization Fund, the Parliament will determine whether we could spend those or not. This administration is making sure that, for whatever the reason, once we set this aside we put a system in place that allows us not to want to get involved in having to do it in circumstances or in times when there may be the temptation to so do, and to exercise some restraint and responsibility to ensure that the pain we suffered on the last occasion, we do not suffer that again. We propose to bring that to the Table.

On this matter, I think that we have addressed most of the issues. With those few words, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Fourth 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 of the 2006 appropriation.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) BILL

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

That a Bill to provide for the Supplementary Appropriation for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2006 of the sum of the issue which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2006, be now read a second time.

Question proposed.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, today seems to be a day of funds. The Government is reporting to the Parliament, or attempting to report, on the expenditure of taxpayers' money. The question is, as the Minister indicated very briefly, the source of the funds.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 39(1). The subject matter of the Bill before us has been completely ventilated, the entire issue, and I now ask that the question be put forthwith.

Dr. Nanan: Standing Order 70(1) states very clearly that, with respect to this particular Bill the Member has a right to speak, but he has to be confined to additional expenditures as stated in this particular Standing Order.

Mr. Imbert: I am rising under Standing Order 39(1).

Dr. Nanan: I am rising under Standing Order 70(1).

Mr. Speaker: The Standing Order does say that a Member can speak on the Supplementary Appropriation Bill and his contribution shall be strictly confined to the matter for which additional expenditure is required. However, Standing Order 39(1) does in fact say:

“After a question has been proposed any Member may at any time during the course of debate rise in his place and claim to move ‘That the question be now put’ and unless it appears to the Chair that that motion is an abuse of the rules of the House or an infringement of the rights of the minority, the question ‘That the question be now put’ shall be put forthwith...”

I have been in this Parliament from 1995 and since then I have always known it that there is hardly any debate on the second reading of an Appropriation Bill, because almost everything would have been ventilated. Had the Member for Naparima got up, I would have liked to hear from him because he was the only Member who did not participate in the debate on the report. Following custom in this House, I am taking Standing Order 39 and I shall proceed to put the question.
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Nanan: So there would be no debate on this?

Mr. Speaker: Are you going to raise another Standing Order? There is no debate really.

Dr. Nanan: I know that there is no debate but—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: No, if you are going to refer me to Standing Order 70(1) you do not need to do that.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

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

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

10.35 p.m.

**CONTINGENCIES FUND
(INCREASE OF)**

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

Whereas section 18(1) of the Exchequer and Audit Ordinance, 1959 (hereinafter referred to as “the Ordinance”) provided for the establishment of a Contingencies Fund by issues from the Consolidated Fund not exceeding in the aggregate one million, five hundred thousand dollars or such greater sum as the House of Representatives may, by resolution, approve to defray unforeseen expenditure:

And whereas by Resolution passed by the House of Representatives under section 18(1) of the Ordinance on the 29th day of May, 1970 the authorized limit of one million, five hundred thousand dollars was increased to the sum of five million dollars and thereafter by a subsequent Resolution passed by the House of Representatives on the 14th day of September, 1979 the sum of five million dollars was increased to the sum of twenty-five million dollars:

And whereas by the Law Revision Order No. 1 of 1980 (published as Legal Notice No. 214 of 1980) and also by the Law Revision Order No. 1 of 1990 (published as Legal Notice No. 233 of 1990), the Ordinance, after its revision, was entitled “the Exchequer and Audit Act (Chap. 69:01)” and section 18(1) of the Ordinance became section 16(1):

And whereas section 16(1) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01 provides for the establishment of a Contingencies Fund by issues from the Consolidated Fund not exceeding in the aggregate one million, five hundred thousand dollars or such greater sum as Parliament may, by resolution approve, to defray unforeseen expenditure:

And whereas the Minister is satisfied that the present authorized limit of twenty-five million dollars which was fixed in the year 1979 is, in 2006 inadequate to defray unforeseen expenditure and should be increased to the sum of one hundred million dollars:

Be it resolved that the Contingencies Fund be increased to one hundred million dollars.

Mr. Speaker, the matter for the consideration of the House is a resolution to increase the Contingencies Fund from \$25 million to \$100 million.

In the 2006 *Estimates of Expenditure* under Head 18: Ministry of Finance, the sum of \$75 million was approved to be transferred to the Contingencies Fund. This, when done, would increase the fund balance from \$25 million to \$100 million.

This approval was included as a part of the Appropriation Act, 2006; Act No. 29 of 2005 dated October 18, 2005. However, in order to comply with this decision, it is necessary to follow the procedures as set out in section 16(1) of the Exchequer and Audit Act which reads in subsection (1):

“The Minister may establish a Contingencies Fund by issues from the Consolidated Fund not exceeding in the aggregate one million five hundred thousand dollars or such greater sum as Parliament may by resolution approve, to defray unforeseen expenditure.”

This, therefore, states that a resolution of Parliament is necessary to actually increase the Contingencies Fund.

Mr. Speaker, on May 29, 1970 by a resolution passed in Parliament, the size of the fund was increased to \$5 million. On September 14, 1979 it was subsequently increased to \$25 million by a resolution passed and, today, 27 years later, this motion seeks to increase this fund to \$100 million.

The limit authorized in 1979 of \$25 million is not considered adequate today to deal with issues which may be caused by natural disasters. Mr. Speaker, we cannot determine the occurrence of natural disasters nor predict the magnitude of possible destruction. What is quite evident is that in recent times the Caribbean region has experienced the dramatic change in weather patterns including an increase in the occurrence and severity of storms and hurricanes, as well as other severe events such as those we witnessed over the last two years.

Contingencies Fund
[SEN THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, September 08 2006

In fact, hurricane related destruction was responsible for the growth of expenditure in the following economies: Over the last year, for example, the Bahamas, 3.5 per cent; Jamaica, 1.6 per cent; Grenada, 1.5 per cent; and in Trinidad and Tobago we had some challenges as well.

In the event that a disaster occurs, the Government must have the ability to respond to the needs of citizens, and this is done through the Contingencies Fund. Mr. Speaker, the Contingencies Fund also provides for shortfalls in the sum provided for any service in a financial year, and also to be able to finance any new service for which no provision was made in the Appropriation Act related to that financial year.

Section 16(4) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69.01 also states that moneys advanced from the Contingencies Fund must be replaced as soon as possible. In order to complete this matter so that funds that are already approved by this Parliament can be transferred to this fund in accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Act, this resolution must be passed.

Mr. Speaker, I, therefore, beg to move that this resolution to increase the Contingencies Fund from \$25 million to \$100 million be affirmed.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Nizam Baksh (*Naparima*): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to talk, on this occasion, on the motion before us. Just before I enter into this matter, I just want to refer you to an observation I made, and I think the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas made mention of it also, and that is the traffic problem.

I observed very closely what occurred there with the construction work that is being done on the inner side of the highway. You had a blockade of one lane for about a distance of 100 feet, and this caused traffic to back up right up to Grand Bazaar. This would continue to occur because they are working continuously on the inner side of the highway. I also observed that there was no police control as well.

If there were cones separating one lane, and they were using the shoulder of the highway, this would have provided two lanes for the free flow of traffic. In this case, it would have minimized the amount of traffic that we are experiencing on that highway, at that point in time. I think this little solution could solve that big problem which may go on for days.

Now, since I returned from my vacation, I noticed that debates are being transmitted live on Channel 11 Cable TV. We, in rural districts, still suffer from lack of facilities. Part of the problem is that we do not have Cable TV in rural areas, and I live in a rural community in Barrackpore. So the roads may be bad, and the people do not have the opportunity to see what is happening within the walls of this Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: If I may, just for the edification of the hon. Member and all Members, the committee on broadcasting which I have the honour to chair, will be looking at increasing the coverage. We do understand that the cable company would probably just cover 14 per cent of the households in the country. The committee, in fact, will be looking at increasing that coverage, so that those persons who do not have Cable TV would also receive the coverage on Channel 11.

Mr. N. Baksh: Thank you very much for that enlightenment. I hope this would be done soon. It could be considered as a Christmas gift to the people in Naparima and other constituencies.

Earlier today the Prime Minister mentioned that he was able to listen and view the Minister's presentation whilst he was on his way to Parliament. Technology is advancing at a speed, and we are sometimes unable to cope with it. I hope the day would come when, perhaps, we would stay in our offices and make our contributions to Parliament, because technology is advancing at such a rapid pace.

Mr. Speaker, I have a little concern. These proceedings are being televised live, and I have observed that since we are on television, we seem to be setting a pace where we would go up to midnight, and I have a concern with security. Everybody knows that when the Parliament is closed; people like myself and everybody else here is at risk in this situation. I really have a concern, not only for Members of Parliament, but also for the members of staff as well. When we are leaving here we could be looked at not knowing that people are looking at us in this situation. This is a concern that I wanted to raise. I do not know how we could address this matter. I know that after 10 o'clock we are given the facility to remain at a hotel, but sometimes you are not aware when this would take place, so you do not come prepared to remain in these facilities. Perhaps, the House Committee would have to devise some means so that we could look after the security of our Members and also staff. I am saying this because of my own experience. I think this is something we need to look at.

Contingencies Fund
[MR. BAKSH]

Friday, September 08 2006

What we are doing here today is increasing the funding for exigencies in the service, and I want to support this move. I know that because of the change in global weather patterns and so forth, we may not be able to predict, as much as we try to, what we could expect during the hurricane season. I know, basically, that natural disasters are related to storms and hurricanes and this is associated with heavy rains and flooding, and there is where we have most of our problems. We have to prepare ourselves for these problems especially in the rainy season.

Mr. Speaker, one of our problems—we have experienced this whenever there is heavy rainfall—is poor management of our drainage system and so forth. Last year, I know that the Prime Minister visited several constituencies bordering Naparima, Siparia and Oropouche and so forth, and we saw some work being done. Very often, they go to these watercourses with heavy equipment, and they would only take off the grass from the rivers and so forth, and not enough work is being done with respect to realignment in some of these areas. I know this is something that we have to look at. We have to put in proper management with regard to this aspect of it.

So, when we talk about preventive management, it means that we could save a lot of money, and the money that we are allocating here which is \$100 million, should not be spent willy-nilly. We would have to organize ourselves to ensure that we are getting value for the money that we are spending.

There are a number of matters that we have to look at. I could tell you, from my own experience in Barrackpore. We have three high schools and four primary schools in Barrackpore and wherever it rains in the area we would get flash flooding and, immediately, these schools would have to send the children home, and a number of school hours are lost. It is a pity I could not get the number of school hours that have been lost over the years or even for one year—even persons who have to travel to get to work.

Recently, there was this protest for roads in one area, and you had rainfall, and vehicles were unable to pass through. So, it means that the persons who were going to work had to remove themselves from the Papourie Road and go across to Ciperio Road, and you could take an extra 45 minutes to get to San Fernando. These are matters we have to address. While we are allocating money, we must put in programmes that would last for a long time, so that we would not be spending this kind of money on an annual basis when we have a situation like this.

I also observed that when there are projects going on, especially in areas like these, the people from the various ministries—in this case, it may be the Ministry of Works and Transport—who are responsible for the supervision of these projects, I am not sure that they are really qualified and competent. That person may be just a clerk in the office, and they would send that person and, perhaps, what that person would do is just check the number of hours that the equipment worked in the area. With regard to the scope of work and the nature of work to be done, I am not sure that they are capable of overseeing this aspect of the work. So, in order for us to get value for our money, we must have competent people looking after this, so that we could get a good job done in the area, and we would not have to be repeating ourselves all the time.

As I am talking about flooding and drainage and so forth, I want to move to the Water and Sewerage Authority. When we have disasters and we have to treat with them—there are times we would have fires such as a bush fire or homes or businesses being destroyed—and very often we would see in the print media or the electronic media the next day that the firemen were unable to get an adequate supply of water in areas when they go to fight fires. We have to make sure that there is a good supply of water. I know that in the areas like Barrackpore, we have very low water pressure. There are some areas where you get water once a week, and in other areas once a month. This is a problem we have to address, if we are looking at natural and other disasters.

I would like to suggest that we install hydrants. I know we have done this in Port of Spain. I have seen the hydrants there, but we have to look at this matter outside the urban areas as well. If you go to Debe or Barrackpore, there are a number of communities that are well developed and, I think, in these areas we need hydrants. We do not need only one hydrant where WASA trucks would go and fill water during the dry season. This is something that we have to put in place, so that in the event of a fire in these far off communities, you would get water. So, there is need for more water hydrants in these rural communities in preparation for disasters which may occur at any time.

I want to make reference here to the management at WASA. Sometimes programmes are being undertaken and they are not quite sure of what they are doing. Over a year ago, I have written to the ministry for a water service along the Rochard-Douglas Road. This is on the upper end. For those persons who know the area this is from the No. 7 scale—the cane scales and so forth—to the near end of St. Mary's Village in Moruga. This is a distance of two kilometres.

Contingencies Fund
[MR. BAKSH]

Friday, September 08 2006

Earlier this year, they started laying some pipes. I saw a letter which was distributed to villagers saying that they are going to start a six-inch line there. What they were actually doing was starting the project where there is already a WASA main in that area. I am convinced that that project should be in an area where there are no water mains; a distance of two kilometres. I got the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment and I pointed out this matter.

At that point in time, what they were saying was that asbestos was in the main pipes, and they wanted to change them. Again, I pointed out to her that when you are being futuristic and looking at the supply of water, there is going to be a great demand, and since there are one or two additional projects in the area, you would need to increase the water mains. As a result of that, the Minister agreed willingly, and now an 18-inch water main is being put down in the area. We have to plan for all of these emergencies when a situation arises. That is why I am talking about preventive management and so forth. This is the kind of thing that we would want to see done so that it would fall within the scope of Vision 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I also looked at the road repairs that are currently taking place, in light of the recent protest. I have looked at programmes in other countries, and when you have a trench like that they would go back and excavate three or four inches and make sure that you get the amount of hot mix into the base and then it is properly rolled and so forth. I saw this morning that they are making a potato bank on the road there, and they are not excavating the two or three inches to allow the finished job to be levelled to the old road. We have to look at that matter. I did not want to talk to anybody, but I said that I would relate this to the Minister. This is something that if we really want to upgrade ourselves and to show that we have standards in preparation for all these disasters we are contemplating might reach us, we would have to show that we are prepared for them. This is what we have to do.

I share the concerns of the Member for Diego Martin West, but when we are getting into these programmes and so forth, I ask myself the question: Why do we not put water mains in the middle of the road where you have shoulders and, perhaps, if where you do not have shoulders you could spend some money and put shoulders, and there would be need for less maintenance work on the roads. Again, this is to show that we have vision and we know what we are doing. Wherever you go where you have these water mains, you could see in certain areas that if you have damage there, it would occur over and over again. Perhaps, this is because of the quality of work that we are getting from our contractors.

Again, we need to address this matter so that we could prevent some of the mishaps and misfortunes we may experience later on.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at agriculture. Very often when we have flooding and disasters—

Mr. Speaker: I am not quite sure whether you are on the motion before us. I am hearing you, but I think you are a bit premature. I think the budget is in the next two or three weeks or thereabout, so you need to relate your contribution to the Contingencies Fund.

Mr. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, thank you, I am guided. What I am trying to relate here really is that we get a number of complaints from time to time with respect to agriculture, especially where there is flooding, and then there is the issue of compensation and so forth. I am touching on this matter because this is one of the main problems we have in agricultural areas like in the constituency of Naparima. I want to relate this to Naparima. I have more information there. Our most productive agricultural lands lie in our constituency.

Mr. Narine: They have grade seven lands.

Mr. N. Baksh: This also applies to the food crops and poultry farmers who are affected. We get complaints from them, and I am not sure that we are addressing this matter sufficiently, because very often we hear that the Minister is going to compensate people and cheques are being given out to the value of \$36 and \$40. I am not going to go into that matter.

Mr. Narine: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for giving way. I keep hearing the word compensation, but there is nothing in the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Marine Resources like compensation; it is relief. Thank you.

Mr. N. Baksh: Well, whatever it is; whether it is compensation or relief, it is based on some value. In light of the figure that we are increasing, which is \$100 million, this is a substantial amount. I want to suggest and recommend that consideration be given in light of this funding for farmers, to an increase in relief or compensation, whatever it is called. There are some farmers, because of the extent of the damage; they may go totally out of business. I want to recommend that we give these farmers who may have suffered damage and so forth, a start-up capital to assist them. I would suggest a timely relief for these farmers who may experience these difficulties.

Contingencies Fund
[MR. BAKSH]

Friday, September 08 2006

Mr. Speaker, very often we hear that these reliefs take an unduly long time to reach these farmers. I want to make a suggestion that we consider decentralization and give local government—we are talking about expanding the responsibilities of local government—the responsibility for payments, and the assessment should be done by the agricultural extension officers. So, there would be two agencies and nobody would say that they are doing anything in collusion and they are giving out money freely. This recommendation is to expedite the relief to persons who may have suffered in these areas and so forth. This is why I am making the point here this evening.

I would also like to look at roads. If we have a timely intervention in times of natural disasters and so forth, we must be able to provide roads and communication links that would take us quickly there. Among the communication links that we could establish are roads that are necessary to take us to those critical points.

I remember last year that there was flooding in Mafeking, Ortoire/Mayaro and in the Tableland area and so forth, and it was difficult to reach some of those areas, because of the local government roads and so forth. I want to make the point that we need to put in additional roads to assist when we have these problems so that we would be able to reach in time and serve the people in a timely fashion. These roads fall under the Ministry of Works and Transport and the regional corporations, and we could actually see more potholes than roads.

The Minister of Works and Transport said that we are going to see some relief work in the Barrackpore area. One of the things I have observed along those roads is that they have started marking the roads where they are going to dig up, and they have started putting in gravel and compacting. I also observed the edges, and they are soft because they are waterlogged. Sometimes you would have banks on the roadside to prevent the water from going onto the road, and this is one of the problems. The water that is being retained on the road edges is causing the road to sink very easily. So, we have to address that matter as well.

Now, in Barrackpore, there are 37 new oil wells in the area. This was confirmed by the Member for Couva South. You know, we could expect a disaster—God forbid we do not have one—but we have to prepare ourselves; in case something happens we would be able to take relief to the people as quickly as possible. We do not have any helipad there so we do not expect a helicopter to reach there, but we need to address this matter.

I have information that there is a pipeline along the GP Road that is leaking. The residents are complaining about the smell that they are getting from the gas line there, and we need to look at this matter in case there is a disaster in that area.

We are talking about a national transportation system and I have recommended some roads prior to the budget. I am sure that the development of these roads would help if there is a disaster which may occur in the area there; flooding or otherwise. I have recommended a road from Barrackpore to Galeota along the Rochard-Douglas Road to Trinity and Edward Trace. This is a route that many contractors use, and also service companies from La Romaine and San Fernando to get to Galeota point.

I have also recommended a road from Barrackpore to Gasparillo. If you look at the transportation hub in that area, all the roads within that area run from an east to west direction. I am suggesting that you construct a road from north to south, and this road could be used to get from Barrackpore to Ciperio Road. You would be crossing the Manahambre Road, the Naparima-Mayaro Road and then you would reach to a point in Gasparillo. This road would provide quick access to any of those areas in case of emergencies and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, there is one road which is Inverness Road, and this road is between Lothians and the Ciperio Road, and it is 1.5 kilometres long. That road has a good foundation and it could be used as an alternative, in case of any disaster in that area. Heavy construction work is going on at St. Croix Road, and sometimes because of these excavators sitting on the road there you have traffic jams which could delay you for half an hour. I am suggesting that some attention be given to that road in case of any disaster. This could be done. I have also recommended the opening of a cottage road which has been abandoned for some years now. I recall that as a student going to high school, we used that road and it has now been abandoned.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about disaster funding. Very often this funding is centralized. I want to recommend that a special fund be given to the regional corporations for disasters. When we have a disaster in an area it is the technical officers of the regional corporation that would make the assessment, and then it is forwarded to the other agencies and so forth for assistance. I am recommending that the regional corporations be given a funding. They should be given a fixed funding, whether it is \$100,000 or \$200,000, and whenever that money is used, it should be replaced in order to maintain a fixed level.

Contingencies Fund
[MR. BAKSH]

Friday, September 08 2006

I would now like to address decanting centres. Whenever we have problems in our areas we hear that community centres and schools are allocated as shelters and so forth, and there are no facilities to accommodate persons in these shelters. Last year, I remember hearing on the news—they called a number of centres and schools in the Barrackpore area, and I took my vehicle and I drove around to a few of these centres, because they said that these centres were open, and there was not a single person around. I called the regional corporation to find out and they did not even have any information.

There was one instance where we had a roof being blown off and they did not even have a tarpaulin to assist the people at that point in time in an emergency. I am saying that these are the little things we have to address when we have these kinds of emergencies. The regional corporations say that they do not have any funds for disasters; and they would squeeze a little \$1 or \$2 there, and a tarpaulin costs about \$300, and they cannot afford to buy it. We need to address this matter in a proper way. In certain areas we must be able to put down decanting centres, fully equipped in preparation for any emergency, et cetera. These are some of the things that we should be doing, at this point in time, because as we say, money is not a problem. We have to know how to organize ourselves, and with Vision 2020, we must show that we have the ability to do these things.

Now, in each regional corporation you have a disaster preparedness committee. I want to suggest that MPs be ex officio members of these committees, because very often citizens come to us and when we go to these committees there is much running around, and lack of information and so forth. So, I am also suggesting that Members of Parliament become ex officio members of these committees in the regional corporations.

Mr. Speaker, we need to also look at our health centres to see whether they are fully equipped for emergencies of this kind. We also need to address this matter. I know that during the last election an ambulance was located at the Rochard-Douglas Health Centre. I cannot say for what reason, but shortly afterwards this ambulance was removed. I am making a plea today for this ambulance to be returned to the Rochard-Douglas Health Centre. When you make a call for an ambulance it has to come from San Fernando and then it has to go to Barrackpore and then return to San Fernando. We could save time and lives if we have an ambulance located in Barrackpore.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Commission for Self Help has a large funding to assist persons in emergencies. There was a situation where a constituent of

mine, Nazam Mohammed, from Cumutto Road in Barrackpore—there was a freak storm and a tree fell on his roof and damaged half of his house. On Wednesday, August 23, 2006 the technical officers from the Princes Town Regional Corporation visited him and made a report and gave him a letter to go to the Commission for Self Help. He went and completed the necessary application forms, and up to today that family has not yet received any assistance. I would like to see something done urgently about this matter. These are the little things that we need to put in place to give timely assistance when a difficulty arises.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about natural disasters and so forth, but I feel that we need to look at other emergency assistance. I am going to mention one here. We have to be innovative when we are doing things. We are hearing about families being disintegrated because of problems at home and so forth. I want to recommend today that we look at this matter a little more closely, and assist those families. In those circumstances, we would be able to help children who are in situations like that, and there would not be too many persons on the streets. We could render some assistance. I know there are agencies.

In conclusion, I want to suggest that we have consultation with MPs prior to the preparation of the budget. Very often we have to be beseeching, complaining and protesting to get things done. MPs should be involved so that they could relate with the line Ministers and get some of these projects on their budget estimates, and we would not hear that they do not have funding for this project or funding for that project. There must be some consultation.

I know that I have been writing several letters prior to the budget preparation to several Ministers; few of them respond or acknowledge them, and fewer include anything in their budget estimates. If we are talking about Vision 2020, and we are talking about collaboration with the Members of Parliament on the opposite side, then this is one way we could do it.

Mr. Speaker, when a mother gives birth to twins or triplets and so forth, that mother's milk goes equally to all her children. When we talk about the natural patrimony and governance of this country, we do not like to see inequality. Very often you would hear about inequality, so we want them to be like that mother and give equal treatment to all the children in this country. I just make this as my closing note here. I know that there are several villages in the constituency of Naparima that are suffering for assistance, and we want equal treatment in this aspect.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. This particular matter that we are debating, clearly demonstrates an abuse of process by the Government. What has happened today, in the earlier Bill we have debated, is that these Bills came rather late. One would have expected that the Government would have taken time to prepare the Bills, and they would have had enough time. There was absolutely no notice, and we were given these Bills. This is becoming the norm of the Government, to bring legislation to the House without any allowance of time for debate.

Mr. Speaker, why is this happening? Is the Government taking us for granted? Is it because the Government feel that they have the majority they could bring any piece of legislation here? It is either you treat with this matter or you do not treat with it. It is very unfair, not just to Members of the Opposition, but to the national community, because Members of Parliament, on both sides of the House, have a responsibility to discuss with their constituents the Bills that would be coming to the House, and also to obtain their opinions and ideas and so forth.

The Opposition was given absolutely no time to read, analyse, research and prepare for the debate. Perhaps, this is why very often we have to get up and say that you are out of line. If I get this Bill 10 minutes before I come to this House, at what point do I prepare? I have been here since 1.30 p.m. and this is the third piece of legislation that we are dealing with. [*Interruption*] The Member for Tunapuna is agreeing. He is saying all of us, but he is not talking. He is in the Government and they make the policies. You see, the Government do not have to say anything. They have the mover of the Bill, and oftentimes they have their research staff. In fact, they have the advantage.

The Member for Tunapuna is correct. They have the advantage of being in Government. They have that added advantage and, in addition, they have the ministry staff, so they could get anything prepared. Even while they are here, they could send for something. Could you imagine the difficulty that I would have to send to Fyzabad? The research staff at MPs' offices on both sides, except for those who are Ministers, are underpaid; they do not get travelling; and they do not have access to computers.

Mr. Imbert: They have Internet services too.

Mr. C. Sharma: That is another point. I want to thank the hon. Member for Diego Martin East. I want to make a plug here, as I am making my contribution, and that is the time has come where the Government needs to treat with its partners in governance if we are to ensure that the country moves forward.

Mr. Speaker, I want to signal that the Opposition is in support of this fund. We find that it is very important, more so, because of developments all over the world. The Minister has not indicated to us the formula that he has engaged in order to arrive at the fund. He made reference to the 1979 budget when, at that time, \$25 million went into the fund. If he had used the same formula when the \$25 million and \$2 billion went into the fund, now that the budget is close to \$40 billion, you should be getting in excess of \$400 million. So, the question of \$100 million, while it sounds like a lot of money, it may not be very much. In fact it was the Member for Diego Martin West who said that a school which was built four years ago would now cost the Government \$200 million. So, if we have a disaster, why not use that as an example and you would see that it is a small sum of money.

When *Katrina* hit New Orleans, and this was shown on television for weeks and months, coming out of that it was said that maybe we should prepare for, at least, a week in a disaster. Disaster here means both natural and manmade. If you have to cater for 1.3 million citizens in Trinidad and Tobago for a week, if there is a natural disaster, then you are really putting away \$10 per person per day for those seven days. I am wondering if the Minister is with me. If you are going to prepare for a natural disaster, for example, if there is a storm or a hurricane, and people are displaced and need to be treated with for one week; 1.3 million x 7 about 800 million persons over the seven days—if you have \$100 million you are only giving them about \$8 and that is a Chubby in the morning, one bara and channa and a cup of tea in the evening. Again, you have to arrive at a workable figure.

The Minister also made the point—Member for Tunapuna, you could intervene at any time. Do you have something to ask? What is your question?

Mr. Hart: You are saying that they would be given \$8, and I am asking you: How much should they be given in your opinion? That is all I am asking.

Mr. C. Sharma: I thought by now you would start asking intelligent questions. The Minister also said that this fund could purchase or pay for new services, but the Minister did not indicate what those new services are. One has to be very careful with those new services since there is no formula at this point in time. I think the Member for Naparima was making the point, that since there is no formula, the Minister of Finance should look at what funds could be available to offices of Members of Parliament to treat with a disaster when it comes. That is similar to a constituency fund which obtains in Jamaica. Disasters come, not perhaps in the whole country.

Contingencies Fund
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, September 08 2006

On the last occasion, there were winds in the south-west in constituencies like Point Fortin, La Brea, Fyzabad and Siparia. Every constituency should know that it could access funds when there is an emergency so that it could spend the money. Many of us are aware that the disaster preparedness group is only a co-ordinating agency, and it makes no resources available. It is left up to Members of Parliament to find resources which is very difficult. More than that, it is unfair to Members of Parliament on both sides that whilst a Member of Parliament who is a Minister may have a little more influence to obtain a bit more, at the end of the day. We need to treat with citizens and the time has come where citizens must know that they could turn to their MPs in times of disasters and obtain some kind of meaningful assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that the Minister could tell us how he arrived at that increase, and what we can look for in the future. I think we have been warned by all the international thinkers about weather patterns and natural disasters and so forth that would be coming closer home.

Now, why are the Government choosing this time to do this when they are very close to leaving office? In another few months the PNM would be out of office and out of Government. Could the Minister tell us what this fund has been used for? This Contingencies Fund came into operation since 1979. Have we ever used this fund for anything? The Minister indicated that we could pay for new services, but we do not know if such was paid for from the \$25 million, and if it was refunded at some later time.

One of the questions that come to mind is: Are the Government seeing any potential problem and they would need to use this quantum of money? How did the Government arrive at \$100 million? Are they seeing floods and so forth? Are they seeing man-made disasters? Are they thinking because of their policies, people are going to revolt in the country? Is it because of the discriminatory practices that there would be some kind of uprising? Why the sum of \$100 million? What are they seeing? They must have some intelligence. Is it that they have conducted a poll and people are saying that they are fed up with the PNM? You saw the protest in Point Fortin; you saw the march for peace in Laventille; and you saw the protests in Barrackpore and elsewhere. Are these going to escalate? Are we going to see protest after protest? Are we going to see what we saw in Barrackpore—the use of armed force like the regiment and police beating up people and taking advantage of them? Are we going to see more of that? As the Minister said, this fund is going to pay for new services. Is he going to hide those new services? One has to be very careful. The Government have an obligation

to say exactly what these services are. The national community must be told. Again, the national community must not feel that the Government are spending \$100 million, and we do not know for what. We must know.

The Government claim that they are always ready for a hurricane, and when one looks at their conduct in a one-day flood, it is zero, because when Port of Spain floods there is no assistance. School children are stranded. When there is flooding in communities there is absolutely no assistance.

Recently, we have been seeing a number of accidents at workplaces and with the absence of OSHA; it is not having any real impact. Is the fund intended to treat with such industrial accidents and so forth? Again, the Government needs to tell us. The Government comes almost like a thief in the night and brings this matter without giving any background information on it. The Minister spent less than two or three minutes telling us what this fund is all about.

Mr. Speaker, recently, there was a march from Point Fortin to Port of Spain by citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are opposed to the effects of the aluminium smelter. Is this fund intended to treat with those persons who might so be affected? It is said that people would get cancer and people would get sick, and the natural water would be contaminated and so forth. Again, you see, this is a Government of secrecy. No one is sure. We see the destruction of wildlife and lands in that area and, certainly, there is going to be fallout from this. There is already fallout from this plant in Chatham and La Brea. Again, is this fund intended to treat with such matters?

Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if I am allowed to refer to the Minister when he was closing the last debate, but he said that at this time he could not indicate what the poverty level is. Is this fund intended to treat with the poverty level? Is it intended to treat with the failure of the Ministry of Health to provide services at the national hospitals? Is the Government raising the Constituency Fund level so that it could be used in the fight against poverty and situations that we are not aware of?

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at food prices in Trinidad and Tobago, and the Minister made reference to this, they are very high and people are unable to feed themselves, so this would lead to malnutrition and illness of a different kind. Again, is this fund seeing something coming out of that, and it is intended to treat with it? If this is the case, we must be told and, perhaps, we could make suggestions, because that may not be the best way to go. In the last few days we saw where the cost of bread went up. This is something I presume that all of us consume on a daily basis, and many families are unable to purchase bread.

Contingencies Fund
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, September 08 2006

Pension has remained the same, and the Member for Chaguanas indicated a particular case and another Member indicated it as well that people are finding it difficult to survive in this country. Once that starts happening it would become a disaster. In many countries this fund treats not only with natural disasters, but with manmade disasters—the blowing up of the World Trade Centre in New York is another man-made incident, and we saw where lives were lost. So, again, we have to prepare for these things.

In 1990 people came to this Parliament and did a particular act. Those things are real. We saw the kidnappings in the country, and people are being held for ransom, and families are held at gunpoint. It is a very frightening development. Whilst we welcome the fund, there must be much more information that tells us exactly what the Government is thinking.

We would like to know when this fund is to be used. How will the national community know what would qualify? The Minister did not give us any guidance. We know that the Parliament is the authority, at a later point, but how the people in Fyzabad would know that something has happened and this fund is available? There has been no information whatsoever. What about the authority to spend this fund? We must learn from the New Orleans situation where a lot of money was spent, where the accounting would be coming from.

The Member for Naparima made the point that as it obtains now, with respect to the local government bodies; nobody knows what could be purchased. What would be the criteria for deciding if this fund is for projects or the communities? I drew the example with respect to the heavy winds in Point Fortin, La Brea and Fyzabad recently. How do we know that in the future such things would qualify?

Mr. Speaker, when the economy is as strong as it is now, perhaps this is a good time to look at putting more money in such a situation; not just in this particular fund, but similar funds that may be available at this time. I want to suggest that the Minister revisit or share with us the formula and, perhaps, we could make suggestions.

When the Minister talked about this fund, the idea came to me that the Government should explore the possibilities of assisting low income families to establish a similar fund for themselves. Let us say, persons who are earning an income of less than \$2,000 per month, for every dollar that they put into an account—the fund would only be used for an emergency, and the criteria for that emergency fund should be established—the Government should also put a dollar.

That would be a very good thing to encourage families to save plus they would have something to fall back on.

I am certain that you would have experienced this in an earlier manifestation in your career where people would come to your office and cry, real tears, because of a situation—a baby may be ill and in hospital and the parents may not have any money, or a husband who is a taxi driver may have gotten into an accident and got his foot broken, so he has no income, no pension, no insurance—NIS or other. I would like the Minister to explore that. I know in some countries they have been looking at that matter.

Mr. Speaker, I made the point and I want to repeat it that this fund is intended for emergency spending and, again, we must know the criteria. What is going to happen is that the Government could say that this fund would be used to purchase any new services, and it may be used, not necessarily by this Government, but by any government for the wrong things and, as a result, it would defeat the purpose of having the fund.

The last point I want to raise is what obtained in African countries when there were lots of money available. It is “boom-and-bust” budgeting, as experienced in Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana. We have to be careful that we do not find ourselves in similar situations. When one looks at what obtains in Trinidad, in the past, a previous PNM administration—we saw it happen to us and we are coming very closely to it again. One reason why perhaps this could happen again is that there is no transparency; there is not enough consultation. We must never forget the experiences of the three countries that I have identified. I do not want to go into the details. I am certain the Minister is very conversant with this research. It is used in many countries like ours where we find ourselves with a lot of wealth and we do not know how to manage it.

Mr. Speaker, today, this learning is used in many places to remind governments all over the world that when you have an abundance of money, or you have more than you think that you would ever have, you should be prepared to save, invest in your infrastructure, and invest in your human resource to make sure that you could reduce situations of these kinds that I have described.

I have looked where some of these funds have had successes. In Florida theatre have been notable good successes. One of the most successful areas where they have established very good criteria and so forth is, I think, Oklahoma. There is where the bombings took place. They had to come up with this funding almost immediately—within hours.

Contingencies Fund
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, September 08 2006

Mr. Speaker, you would also recall where a particular person used fertilizer and bombed a particular place. So, again, there is enough learning to make sure that this fund could work in consultation with the Opposition and other players in the community who would be able to lend support to make it work very well.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. [*Desk thumping*]

11.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Are you giving way?

Dr. Nanan: No.

Mr. Speaker: I regret to advise the hon. Member for Chaguanas that the acting Chief Whip is not giving way. I did recognize him first.

Dr. Adesh Nanan (Tabaquite): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This particular debate takes us into some perspective tonight.

Hon. Member: No, history.

Dr. A. Nanan: No history, but it has to be placed in the context because what we are doing here is setting up a Contingencies Fund, and increasing the fund from \$25 million to \$100 million. You would recall that in 1979, when this particular exercise was done, right after 1979 there was a kind of crash because of the situation with the boom and bust in the economy. I would like to place it in the context because the Prime Minister, earlier in this House, made reference to scripture, and I also want to make reference to scripture; to Proverbs 21:20. It says:

“There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.”

I want to do some quick recollection this evening because it is important. The Member for Fyzabad spoke about the trigger mechanism for this particular fund. The hon. Minister must be aware—if he is not aware I am sure we would be told—that if there is a disaster, the Prime Minister has to declare the area as a national disaster area before any fund can kick in. I do not know if this Contingencies Fund goes in the same direction; if the Prime Minister has to declare the area a national disaster area before this fund can be utilized. We are in a situation, is it that the Government is seeing a potential disaster on the horizon? I know that this particular fund is for unforeseen expenditure, but when we are dealing with national disasters we can have some kind of predictions. Mr. Speaker, because of the situation with the

Meteorological Services Division in this country, we definitely need a Contingencies Fund. Because of the last forecasting of tropical storms and forecasting in this particular region, we are subject to a national disaster happening on our doorstep.

A lot of these storms originate off the African continent, but sometimes a storm can appear on your doorstep; just a hundred miles away there can be the formation of a storm and in less than 24 hours the storm arrives very close to the island. That happened two years ago off Antigua. *[Interruption]* No, I am just showing you the reference; it could happen here too. Just recently there was a storm about 100 miles away and it just disappeared because of the atmospheric conditions. Because of the situation that we are in now in the hurricane season, anywhere between the African coast and the Caribbean islands, there are conditions that are favourable in certain areas that there can be any cyclic formation taking place and quickly developing into a storm.

Mr. Imbert: *[Inaudible]*

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, apparently the Member for Diego Martin East is not aware of any meteorological terms, I think he needs to get a little more enlightenment from the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment.

I am putting it in the context because it is important; we are setting up a Contingencies Fund. We have the disaster situation with respect to tropical storms and hurricanes. We also have a situation where I made reference to the currents in the Gulf of Paria, and very turbulent waters at times occurring for no reason at all. It can be as a result of that underwater volcano off Grenada, Kick'im Jenny, that can affect the currents on the west coast. You know the Prime Minister has that foresight and he is building that tsunami shelter. The relevance here is, in the tsunami shelter, if the money is not enough in the particular year to continue the construction of that tsunami shelter, they can always tap into the Contingencies Fund for the extra revenue for the particular tsunami shelter. This is the particular area with respect to unforeseen expenditure that can take place; whether it is a volcano erupting off Grenada; or a storm coming off the African coast.

I also want to relate to my constituency because I am in a peculiar situation where I had two incidents. There was a freak storm in my constituency and 76 roofs were blown off in the Macaulay area. At that time, the Cabinet directive was that the Prime Minister had to declare the area a national disaster area before any funding could be accessed, and the directive had to come from NEMA. It was unfortunate because the regional corporations would have done the early

Contingencies Fund
[DR. NANAN]

Friday, September 08 2006

assessment of the disaster that took place with respect to the loss of roofs and the amount of material that was required. But the regional corporation did the work in terms of the request; they could not have handled that particular amount of money that was being asked for. They provided tarpaulins; the normal materials they can supply; of course mattresses were probably provided by private suppliers.

The point here is, when there was going to be an access to a larger amount of money via—and at that time if I recall, it was \$10 million you could have accessed, because of the disaster; once the Prime Minister declared the area a disaster. I do not know if that still operates with respect to the Cabinet directive and the prerogative of the Prime Minister for a national disaster situation now that this Contingencies Fund is being increased from \$25 million to \$100 million. The situation there in Macaulay was that we were never able to access any funding. The roofs were lost and there was no compensation.

If there is an incident like this, where 76 roofs again or more are blown off in a particular area, we need to know how would the Government be accessing this Contingencies Fund. Would it be through the Organization of Disaster Preparedness and Management and what is the exact mechanism—as the Member for Fyzabad had asked? Because we are Members of Parliament and we are the ones who are on the ground once an incident takes place. We have to go to the particular area and inform the community what they can access; there are certain areas that you can go; self-help is one of the areas, but we still need a large amount of money if there is a major disaster in a particular area. So, the Minister must say what is the trigger mechanism for this particular fund.

I have another area that I want to discuss. I said two situations in my constituency; the other one was the eruption of the Piparo volcano and there was no prior warning with respect to this particular mud volcano. It happened early one morning where the volcano just erupted and one kilometre of the area was declared unsafe, and, of course, engineers from the Ministry of Works and Transport came in and assessed the situation. They told the residents that they had to relocate from that particular area of the volcano. There was no preparation in place in terms of relocation. The army came in to maintain law and order in the particular area.

The Member of Parliament, and party had to go from house to house to ask people to move because this is now a disaster area, but nobody would leave his home and go somewhere else, because all his belongings are there. So, we must

have a situation, we must have this kind of preparation in place. Mention was made here about decanting centres and shelters. This particular Contingencies Fund can be used in such a way that if there is any disaster of this particular scope then there must be some kind of immediate relief. What we are asking for is immediate relief, because if the relief comes at all, it comes late in the proceedings when people are already handicapped. Even the relocation of the people from the Piparo volcano site took years to accomplish and I think up to today they have not been satisfied. We do not want to run into a situation like that where we are totally unprepared and the community suffers tremendous hardships because of these disasters.

The fund also makes allowance, whether it is a natural disaster or an unforeseen expenditure. Reference was made here in terms of another analogy or analysis, where in the family environment there are contingencies funds, families do operate with respect to a saving opportunity, where there is a certain amount of allocation. I think in terms of the percentages, more than 5 or 10 per cent of the monthly income is put towards a contingencies fund. There is that small analogy compared to this \$100 million.

We ask today, is that \$100 million enough, in terms of proper planning and the access and the amount of money that is required, because we saw in areas of natural disasters, it is quite a lot of acreage and especially in densely populated areas, it can be an expensive proposition. I mentioned it in an earlier debate about the aluminium smelter and if the Government is moving towards building an aluminium smelter. Of course, the Member for Point Fortin says there would be no relocation through smelters. I hope that you would look again at the debate that took place initially in terms of the smelter and the health hazards.

In terms of relocation of people in particular areas, I said before that if there is any kind of incident there that can be a disaster area; in fact, the whole of Point Lisas can be also a disaster prone area. And if I do have to go into shipping a little because it is important. I just want to point out two areas because these disasters could be a plane crash. *[Interruption]* No, but the unforeseen expenditure; it can be; I am not wishing for that to happen, but there is a possibility that there can be a plane crash or it can be a cruise ship—*[Interruption]* Yes, yes. So those are the possibilities.

I really intervened in this debate, Mr. Speaker, to point out that we are not really preparing for any disasters in this country; that is why I think the Government is putting so much emphasis on a Contingencies Fund.

Mr. Narine: The Member for Tabaquite is the biggest disaster for Tabaquite.

Dr. A. Nanan: And Member for Arouca North, you really should not intervene here because you are one of culprits with respect to lack of disaster preparedness in your area, in terms of the relief for the farmers, because you are very tardy in delivering that kind of relief or compensation.

Mr. Narine: The Member of Parliament for Tabaquite is the biggest disaster.

Dr. A. Nanan: Because my constituency was flooded out and up to now the farmers have not been compensated at all, although many requests were made to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

Mr. Narine: They went and plant in the river. [*Laughter*]

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I thank you.

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would not be too long, I just want to ask a few questions. I sat here and listened to the hon. Minister and my question is, when last has this fund kicked in and to assist whom and where? I heard it mentioned, but what are some of the uses of the money that is in the Contingencies Fund and what is it used for? What is the process by which such funds can be released? Who will authorize the release of these funds? Then the Minister mentioned that moneys may be used where not appropriated. This is the part that really had me worried a bit and, of course, the accountability and the checks and balances of this fund, because I mean, we are dealing with money and we have to deal with that. Then as the debate widened I could not help but remember an article I read in today's *Mirror*—not only the front page: "Piarco, Crown Point Airports terrorism risk"

It is mentioned that both airports could be a terror risk. What is it saying here, the report to summarize, is that both airports are under security risk, coming out of 9/11 and even more recently what happened in London. The complaints from the Customs and Excise and other personnel at the airport are that nothing is being done to really improve the quality of our security there. Then when you talk about Contingencies Fund, I am wondering if these risks are being taken into consideration; because we have got to face it. We hear reports daily about people trying to take over airports and so on, so I am a bit worried.

Also, there is another report—you are talking about the security problems in our country. Senior police officers reported to me that certain officers who took part in certain investigations against prominent figures in the country, have been

sent on trips and have been promoted. If this is in fact so, it is to me a security risk. [*Interruption*] I have heard that. Let me read:

“Jobs for the boys’ cry senior cops

Some senior officers of the Police Service are questioning the promotion of five officers to the rank of Senior Superintendent—ahead of a number of other officers who are senior to them.

‘These are handpicked officers,’ one cop complained.

The Police Service Commission elevated six officers from the rank of Superintendent, to Senior Superintendent, seven from the rank of Assistant Superintendent to Superintendent and nine from Inspector to Assistant Superintendent.”

The names of the officers are mentioned, Mr. Speaker, I do not want to put it in the record.

“But seven senior officers have filed for judicial review over the failure of the Police Service Commission (PSC) to promote them to the rank of Senior Superintendent.”

Mr. Speaker, I am bringing this into the picture because when you look at the security of our nation, we got to have our security officers or police officers happy *Laughter*—You laugh at it. When they are not—

Dr. Rowley: What does that have to do with the Contingencies Fund?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: When I see the police officers from the United Kingdom, for example, they receive much more salary than our officers; is the morale affected? This is something we have to ask ourselves. And when we have our people—

Miss Seukeran: Are you talking about variety?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: No, no, morale; I am talking about morale. Mr. Speaker, I just bring this quickly to the table and of course, I asked those questions before. It is important that we hear this from the Government; what is happening. You know, we have been in the back bench and three Members in front spoke and the common courtesy was not granted to me. That is why sometimes, I think I have made the right decision to sit in the back bench.

Hon. Member: Get ready to resign.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I have not yet resigned from the UNC nor do I have any intention of doing so in the foreseeable future.

Dr. Rowley: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I am here—Mr. Speaker, you know at this hour of the night you try to get—I just wanted to ask three questions, now I am talking more than I am supposed to. I now feel very exonerated that I have chosen to sit in the back bench. [*Desk thumping*] This was an accident; I was reading the back page.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Conrad Enill): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A number of the questions that were asked are relevant to some debate, but what basically are we trying to do? We approved on October 18, 2005, \$75 million in the Appropriation Act, as part of an amount that we believed that we should put into this fund. Why did we do that? You would recall that during the last two years we have had disasters in Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Vincent, Haiti, and the list continues. We have seen a pattern of disaster that hitherto we had not understood and we were of the view that we should not allow our citizens, in the unlikely event or in the event that these things occur, to find themselves in a situation where we do not have a contingency allocation in place.

What is a contingency? Mr. Speaker, by definition, contingency means unforeseen and therefore all the issues that were talked about in the context of agriculture and infrastructure, they would be dealt with in the normal course of our budgets, because that is how we plan these issues. The Minister of Social Development has a fund that will assist those in need during the times of temporary disaster and so on.

What this really is? It is a fund that—in this case the Act gives the Minister the responsibility to deal with unforeseen expenditure. Now, the Act also says—and we have repeated it for transparency, because we believe in full disclosure—that the fund also provides for shortfalls to finance any new service for which no provision was made in the Appropriation Act. It did not say that now, it said that since 1979 when the Parliament, in setting up the legislation for this particular fund, decided in its wisdom that it must so do. So, to ask those questions now is really, I think, to question whether the decision of the Parliament that was made at that point in time is relevant. I believe in collective wisdom and I believe that there is nothing that I have seen that basically changes that particular position.

This is a sum of money allocated for a particular purpose. Mr. Speaker, you would recall that during the course of this administration we put in place the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management. That has been set up to deal

with most of the issues that have been raised in the context of our trying to determine, in the event that a disaster occurs, how to manage the particular issues. One of the complaints we have had is that there has been no funding for these operations, and that it is a coordinating operation and so on.

What this fund does is it allows us a window of opportunity to respond in circumstances where we have to respond in an unforeseen situation, in a very short space of time. The point is made that sometimes we make decisions and it takes a very, very long time for us to carry out those decisions. If a disaster occurs, for example, and you have to mobilize people; you have to go into the community and so on; at this point in time, based on using the normal system that we have, going through the Central Tenders Board; getting three quotations; making sure you do all those kinds of things; two months later you are still waiting.

What this fund does, is it allows the Minister of Finance, by warrant, to simply go in; get the thing done—because these are not normal circumstances—and bring relief to those in need, and that is really the purpose of this particular fund.

The question of the amount; I think the amount was arrived at on the basis of the allocation that we did when we were planning the budget. Like everything else, we have a constraint in terms of revenue and we would put resources on the basis of what is available.

Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the fund, the release of the fund and how it is to be used. This is a fund that is set up under the Exchequer and Audit Act, and it clearly states in that Act under what circumstances, how and by what process these moneys can be spent. As everything else, when this fund is set up under the Exchequer and Audit Act, it is subject to parliamentary scrutiny with all the accountability processes; the reporting to Parliament; the joint select committee; the questions from Members and so on. Therefore, any question about the use and benefit of this fund can, in fact, come before this House.

I believe a question was asked: how was some of these moneys used? If I recall, where we have used this over the recent past, was in fact to provide assistance to some of these countries that found themselves in deep difficulties; this is where those funds came from. I think in the Grenada case when you had the two hurricanes, this is where our donation to them came from.

Mr. Speaker, this is a really simple exercise. The reason that we wanted to do it now is that if we did not do it, then the moneys that we had allocated to put

Contingencies Fund
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, September 08 2006

into the fund would have to go back into the Consolidated Fund, because although we have approved it in the budget, it cannot be transferred; as in the same case with the Revenue Stabilization or Infrastructure Development Fund unless we do this today.

So, this is simply completing an exercise that we started a year ago, when we came before the Parliament and approved \$75 million. The law says we must do this and we are seeking to do this now to bring that into account and we are asking for your support in this particular motion.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Contingencies Fund be increased to one hundred million dollars.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, September 15, 2006 at 1.30 p.m. On that day we shall be dealing with Bills on the Order Paper: Bills nos. one, two and the Bill that came from the Senate with respect to law revision.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly

Adjourned at 12.03 a.m.