

Leave of Absence

Friday, December 08, 2006

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, December 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 Mr. Nizam Baksh (Naparima), Mr. Ganga Singh (Caroni East) and Dr. Adesh Nanan (Tabaquite), all of whom have requested to be absent from today's sitting of the House. The leave which these Members have requested is granted.

PAPER LAID

The Civil Aviation [(No. 15) Air Navigation Services] Regulations, 2006.
[*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of those on this side of the House, I want to wish the Member for Tabaquite a speedy recovery. Since he is absent today, I ask that the questions on the Order Paper in his name be deferred for one week, including the questions posed by the Member for Nariva.

Dr. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, we will agree, not because the Member for Tabaquite is ill, because he has asked me to ask the questions on his behalf, but because they are not ready with the answers.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Computerization of Schools

(Details of)

- 15.** Could the hon. Minister of Education inform this honourable House:
- (a) How many computers have been delivered to the following schools during the period 2005-2006:
 - (i) The Mayo Roman Catholic Primary School;
 - (ii) The Gasparillo Government Primary School;
 - (iii) The St. Stephens Anglican Primary School; and

- (b) What software packages were purchased for the computers? [*Dr. A. Nanan*]

Disbursement of Moneys

- 16.** (a) Could the hon. Minister of Education advise how much money was disbursed by the International Development Bank to the Secondary Education Modernization Programme during the period 2005—2006; and
- (b) How much interest has been paid by the Government on the undisbursed amount of the Secondary Education Modernization Programme loan for the said period? [*Dr. A. Nanan*]

Deshifting of Government Secondary Schools

(Status of)

- 17.** Could the hon. Minister of Education advise:
- (a) How many government secondary schools have been deshifted annually from 2005—2006; and
- (b) The time frame for the completion of the said deshifting exercise? [*Dr. A. Nanan*]

Victoria District Education Office

(Status of)

- 23.** Could the hon. Minister of Education state:
- (a) Whether the building housing the Victoria District Education office on Sutton Street, San Fernando is state owned or privately owned.
- (i) if privately owned, would the Minister state from whom is the property rented and at what cost to taxpayers; and
- (ii) what departments are housed in the building and how is the floor space presently occupied? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

Swaha Hindu College

(Details of)

- 24.** (a) Could the hon. Minister of Education state when will the Swaha Hindu College in Coalmine, Sangre Grande be ready to accommodate students?
- (b) How much money has been spent up to October 31, 2006 on the building? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

**Biche Presbyterian Primary School
(Opening of)**

25. Would the hon. Minister of Education state what plans the Ministry of Education has for the opening of the Biche Presbyterian Primary School, now that the Presbyterian School Board has made a formal request for the school to be opened? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

**Collapse of Justice System in Trinidad and Tobago
(Freeing of Murder Accused)**

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of this House for the purpose of discussing the following matter as a definite matter of urgent public importance: the collapse of the system of justice in Trinidad and Tobago demonstrated by the freeing of several persons accused of murder by the High Court.

The matter is definite as it pertains specifically to the current failures of the system of justice to meet its obligations to the public. The matter is urgent because the Judiciary and the judicial system are two pillars that not only uphold and enforce the law but, by extension, maintain order in the society.

The matter is of public importance because the fact that statistically 999 in every 1,000 murderers escapes the law; 33 per cent of preliminary enquiries in the Port of Spain Magistrates' Court are being prematurely ended because of witness intimidation. There are over 432,000 cases pending at the Magistrates' Courts.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the leave which the hon. Member for Siparia has requested is denied and, again, this is a matter that eminently qualifies under Standing Order 11.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

The Minister of Trade and Industries and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, we do have a statement to be made in the House by the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment but we ask that that matter be deferred for later in the sitting.

Question put and agreed to.

HERITAGE AND STABILISATION FUND (NO. 2) Bill

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [November 10, 2006]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (*Fyzabad*): Mr. Speaker, let me at this early stage acknowledge the assistance rendered by the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant to my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, and to indicate that is how Members, when they are abroad, should proceed to be on the lookout for each other. I understand that during that trip to Colombia—

Hon. Members: Dominica.

Mr. C. Sharma: I was just making sure that everybody was paying attention. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Once you are also paying attention. [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I understand that both Members, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and the Member for Tabaquite got ill and one had to obtain larger medical attention and that brings us to a very important point, which might be related to the matter at hand. What is it that obtains for Members of Parliament that is different for Ministers of Government to obtain medical attention?

In the present context there are no provisions available for Members of Parliament unlike Ministers of Government. This matter has been raised in this Parliament on numerous occasions and it would be worth the Parliament's time, perhaps under your guidance and your fatherly approach, to make sure that matter is attended to.

It would be very sad to have Members fall ill in the exercise of their duty. One would appreciate that both the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and the Member for Tabaquite were on the business of Trinidad and Tobago when they got ill. When you look at Members on both sides of the House. Many are getting grey, many are aging and with that comes illness. Including your good self, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let me assure you that it is a matter that is very worthy of consideration by the House Committee and the distinguished Member

for Tabaquite, who is the subject matter of your contribution so far, is a Member of that Committee. May I suggest to you that you implore him to raise the matter in the House Committee. All Members will have my support.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, one of the challenges that you pose for us is that you always guide us correctly. It is hardly possible to find you at fault in that regard, of course, there are exceptions.

The matter that needs to be addressed today is a very interesting matter that has attracted the attention of all of us in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, nationals of Trinidad and Tobago who live elsewhere now are very concerned. This country continues to be blessed by the Supreme Being to be a country very rich in minerals and in human resources. While we have the ability to earn a lot of money we do not seem to have the ability to manage it well or to invest it.

Mr. Speaker, as we talk about the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, what comes to the average man on the street? Three words: heritage, stabilization and fund. [*Interruption*] Fund, not “F U N”, the Government treats this like “F U N” but it is really “F U N D”. For the average citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, heritage and stabilisation means something futuristic. It tends to lend a degree of comfort but when you look at what obtains in the country at the present time—and I am reminded of a Standing Order, I do not remember the number, which says that the Member should not repeat things. Also a Member should not ask a question to which he knows the answer. For instance, it would be difficult for a Member to ask what colour is the Red House; he is expected to know it is red.

I saw in one of today's newspaper the former Prime Minister and former Member for Couva North was being interviewed by police officers and the questions they posed were to answers they already knew; answers which are in the public records of Trinidad and Tobago.

How does that relate to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund? It is sending to the national community that this is what the Government is using its funds for; that this is on what taxpayers' moneys are being spent rather than the moneys being invested. It also communicates to the average citizen a lack of confidence in the system and when there is a lack of confidence it is going to affect our investments; it is going to affect how we spend our moneys and what we do. I want to have that point recorded to make sure that we do not appear to be persecuting citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, regardless of who they are. We have to be very careful.

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Mr. Speaker, what is also happening is that we are seeing a development in this country where more and more people are attempting to leave this country, to migrate, to the United States, to Canada and elsewhere. Members on both sides of the House would report to you, Mr. Speaker, that over the last two or three years more and more passport forms are being signed. People are looking for every effort to migrate. We are seeing a new line of business coming into this country; immigration consultants from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. When you look at what the Bill wants to do it says: "An Act to provide for the establishment and management of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and for matters related thereto."

On the last day we met in this House to discuss this particular matter, we were graced by the hon. Prime Minister who, when you look at the *Hansard*, spoke for more than 45 pages and he certainly made some good points. But when you look at what obtained before from the Member for Diego Martin East and the Member for Diego Martin West, it begs the question, from where do these Members get their information? It seems as if Members, under the privilege of Parliament, can get up here and say almost anything and say nothing at the same time. Mr. Speaker, again we have to be very careful.

I raise this point simply because when a Government Member speaks, unlike a Member in the Opposition, both are responsible, but Government Members talk Government policies and we on this side on both benches challenge those policies and try to add value. I think the Prime Minister made the point that we on this side are his partners in governance and for too long a number of Members from the Government side think, for some reason, that the Members of the Opposition are the enemy and that is just not correct. We have a role to play. We are talking about the governance of Trinidad and Tobago, which is a collective effort and when that is done properly more of us would benefit from such exercises in the country.

Mr. Speaker, one of the challenges facing the world today, and if I can draw your attention to the *US News*, a Special Annual Report, it does not have a date, but it is said that one of the crises the world faces is leadership at all levels. Why is this so important? It is important because it is the leaders who prepare us to live in any part of the world and I want to localize the leadership of Trinidad and Tobago. In the current scenario the Prime Minister is the leader of the country, but who is his alternate leader?

Mr. Manning: Oh, we know, we know.

Mr. C. Sharma: I am sure you do not know. It is the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Manning: No, no, no, no.

Mr. C. Sharma: I am not talking about your deputy, you know.

Mr. Manning: Who are you talking about?

Mr. C. Sharma: The Leader of the Opposition. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Manning: No, no, no. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: Your deputy is another matter.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, for the Prime Minister to be a good leader he must have the cooperation of the Opposition, which he obtains. What we are seeing over and over, however, is that there is absolutely no meaningful consultation, no real measure of wanting to work together in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago. This Opposition, as I know it, has never come to this Parliament and asked for any favours, and I am sure it will not happen. But at the same time, like other Members, we represent Trinidad and Tobago. In representing Trinidad and Tobago we must make sure that the proposals we bring to this House, the support we lend to any legislation of the Government, must arrive at the best decision that benefits all of us.

I was on the point of leadership and I want to suggest, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the hon. Prime Minister, that the current scenario that the country finds itself in—and I do not need to go into statistics of murders, kidnappings, rapes, poor management at the Government level, the failure of infrastructure—is begging the question: What is wrong? The simple answer to what is wrong is leadership. There must be solutions to it.

At one time this country was governed in a very meaningful and measurable way.

Mrs. Job-Davis: When?

Mr. C. Sharma: I am glad that the Member for Tobago East responded because Tobago seems not to get communication. There was a time not too long ago that this country was a place to live; people looked forward to awaking on mornings; people looked forward to going to social engagements; to participating in business and sports; they were excited about living in this country, but in a short few years all that has changed.

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Today, in the season of Christmas, parties are being held during the days now, they are no longer held at night. Even though they attempt to go until 6.00 to 7.00 o'clock there are security officers. In all the nightclubs and entertainment clubs in Port of Spain and elsewhere, there are security guards. Our sons and daughters who go from time to time, they need to be escorted because they need to be protected. So it begs the question that we need to revisit how we do things.

When the presenter of this Bill, the hon. Minister—the regularity with which we see the hon. Minister in this House is a welcoming sign of things to come. I hope in the future he comes as an elected Member.

Mr. Speaker, to expand on what I am saying I want to deal with a few key elements of this fund. This fund will provide savings for future generations and a cushion in the event of a drop in oil and natural gas. I want to deal with the question of “The Fund will provide savings for future generations.” Where is the future generation going to come from? The simple answer is that the future generation has to come from us. We have to contribute to the future generation, but if we are not enjoying a good quality of life then we are going to produce a poor generation into the future. We have to look at all the facilities and all the support services that contribute to the present generation.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Fyzabad for giving way. Are you saying that before we put aside money for the wellbeing and enjoyment of the future generations we ought to ensure that current generations are enjoying an appropriate standard of living?

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is very close to the point. *[Laughter]* He is extremely close.

Mr. Partap: But not close enough.

Mr. C. Sharma: In another place I would have said dangerously close. But you are right, Mr. Prime Minister, we have to make sure—

Mr. Manning: But they take issues with that for the longest while—

Mr. C. Sharma: That is why we are debating. Any issue that arises in this House must be treated with; if they are right, so be it. The present generation must make sure they benefit across the board from what we are spending now.

Mr. Manning: And therefore we finally agree.

Mr. C. Sharma: Well, if you agree, then it has to be on both sides of the House.

Mr. Manning: Yes, well you and me.

Mr. C. Sharma: Well, I would want you to include the Back Bench on both sides. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, it is important that we look at the present generation in all its manifestations. Let us ask some basic questions. Are our people happy? Are our mothers and fathers in this country happy? Happiness is a difficult thing to measure, but are their needs being attended to? Whatever the answer is, it needs to be debated. A large number of people in this country, their basic needs are not attended to by the State. The State has a responsibility!

Mr. Speaker, I feel very confident in my heart that the Prime Minister, as leader of the country, wants that to obtain but he seems not to have the support of his Ministers and his colleagues. I cannot understand why any Minister on the other side would take it upon himself to discriminate and to frustrate the will of the people. How is it any Minister—if I could look at the Member for Arouca South as the Minister of Planning and Development: Is this Minister satisfied—I would give way if you wish to reply, I do not mean you personally, I mean in your ministry for which you are largely responsible—that in the development of Trinidad and Tobago all the constituencies and all the communities are attended to? If you answer yes, I will tell you that you are wrong. Members on both sides will tell you that there are basic things that are not coming to their constituencies, four years and \$100 billion later. I say this to you in good faith because at the end of the day you are my parliamentary colleague.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much for giving way. One of the reasons that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago established the special purposes companies like CISL, RuDeCoTT, PSAEL, UdeCott was for exactly what you are making the point on today, that it seemed as though development was only taking place, perhaps, in the towns and more specifically in Port of Spain. In an effort to ensure that did not persist we determined that we needed to have companies with a need for a geographic spread. So that RuDeCoTT takes care of the areas within south and parts of central Trinidad, PSAEL takes care of specifically deep south Trinidad and the south eastern peninsula, CISL takes care of within the north-east and north-west and East Port of Spain Development Company, specifically for the geographical area of East Port of Spain.

If you look at that you will see amongst those companies the entire Trinidad is being taken care of. You may know that work has already started through PSAEL, CISL, and through RuDeCoTT and you will see more work taking place this year.

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In Tobago there is a Special Purpose Company which has already been established and that will become operational. I think in an effort to answer that specific question—because two years ago the Prime Minister made the point in his budget wind-up that there was a concern that development was not being spread throughout the country; not only physical development but development of the human resources. In a concerted effort to do that we have established these companies and you would also understand that programmes like MuST, HYPE and so on are also being spread throughout the country. So I would like to refute what you have just said.

Mr. C. Sharma: I thought you really confirmed what I just said. I am glad it is the Member for Arouca South, because this is a pregnant example of the current generation bringing into the future generation the care that must go with it. [*Laughter*] I thank you very much, hon. Minister. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: That is why we have to keep this Government in power because I am trying to ensure that the future generations get what they deserve.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, the Minister introduced a very important element and, again, when we cooperate there is so much more that we can achieve. I sometimes think that if the Prime Minister was a member of the Opposition and we went into Government, we would achieve so much more. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Mr. Speaker, I would have my colleague from Fyzabad understand that I occupied those hallowed benches between 1988 and 1991 and between 1996 and 2001 and I “ain’t” going back there! Having regard to the treatment that was meted out to us on that side by those on this side, at that time; not me; I “ain’t” going back there! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister in his earlier manifestation was on this side; it was no choice of his. It was our doing when we were here. I am sorry to say that it is going to happen again and on this occasion you are lending support to it.

I want to touch on the point raised by the hon. Minister of Planning and Development and that is the special purpose companies. We have agreed that has to take place but, again, Members on this side would tell you that we have written to those special purpose companies and to date we have gotten no meaningful responses. It seems as if—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Fyzabad again for giving way. I am sorry to have to interject as often as this but we have made it clear that the special purpose state enterprises do not respond to representation. They get their instructions directly from the Ministry of Planning and Development, and any representation has to be made to the Government, not to the company. We are trying to depoliticize the companies and take the companies out of that cut and thrust of the political process. Therefore, if any Member of this House would address the company directly, the company is mandated not to respond. The company takes its instructions from the Minister of Planning and Development and therefore you address whatever concerns you have to the Government rather than to the company.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I am extremely happy for the intervention of the hon. Prime Minister. This is what we are saying that, we, in the Opposition are partners in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago. It is okay for those special purpose companies to visit the constituencies of the Members opposite, at the invitation of Members opposite. It is okay for those companies to treat with correspondence and requests from Members opposite and we have seen it!

Mr. Manning: No, no.

Mr. C. Sharma: We have seen it in Toco/Manzanilla. We have seen special purpose companies going—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, that is not so! In fact, what happens is that a list of projects is given to the companies and on the basis of the instructions that the companies get they go out into the field and examine what has to be done. The companies are also mandated to consult with the residents of the areas that they go into but on the basis of the instructions that they have from the Government.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Would the Member give way?

Mr. C. Sharma: Sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for giving way. I just wanted to make the point that very recently the Prime Minister, the Minister of Local Government and the Minister of Planning and Development did a tour of some of RuDeCoTT's projects and those projects were in Dow Village, Enterprise, St. Helena and Kelly Village. If you look at where we went, those are not PNM-controlled areas. Well, maybe they are PNM controlled but they are represented—they are PNM controlled now because everybody is coming to the PNM—by Opposition Members. So what you are saying is totally incorrect.

Additionally, no Members write the companies and even if they tried to do that it has to come back to the Ministry under which these companies fall. It is totally incorrect to say that if you write you do not get help but when we write we get help; that is not how the companies have been operating, that is totally incorrect. There is work being carried out and the residents of the area have said that they are very pleased with the work.

Mr. C. Sharma: Let me assure you that you are not right on this occasion. The point is that Members of Parliament are obligated by the oath of office they have taken to discharge their responsibilities, which is largely to seek the interest of the people they represent across the constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago and at the same time not to deny—I am certain the hon. Prime Minister would see people, in his constituency office, from Fyzabad, Siparia and from other constituencies and so would other Members of Parliament on both sides. I receive people from Point Fortin where you have no representation; from La Brea where you have very little and elsewhere, but the point is you have to attend to it.

2.00 p.m.

Member for Diego Martin East, I made the point at the beginning that you said very little when you had an opportunity, now you must listen. When people come to us, we cannot act outside the law. I cannot say, as a Member of Parliament, that I cannot write to an outfit in Trinidad and Tobago that is funded by the taxpayers' dollars. The Prime Minister needs to revisit that.

When a group approaches me in the constituency of Fyzabad to look at a recreation ground and that ground is being attended to by one of the 14 special purposes committees, nothing in law should prevent me from writing to that outfit and saying that the members of the Delhi Road recreation ground have come to me and are seeking to have lights installed.

Mr. Manning: The Government you tell that to; not the company, the Government.

Mr. C. Sharma: That is the point. So when your constituent comes to the Member of Parliament, what does he do with it?

Mr. Manning: Write to the Minister.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Write me!

Mr. C. Sharma: That is very good. Write to the Minister. Let us reflect on the short history and let us be very frank and very honest. This is the month of the birth of Christ, so let us make sure we do not hide behind this.

When Members of the Opposition write to Ministers of Government—let us take the Member for Arouca North—I have just treated with the Member for Arouca South—he has not been able to deliver one access road based on representation made; not one single access road.

Mr. Imbert: Not true!

Mr. Narine: I thank the Member for Fyzabad for giving way. During the last two years, we did 150 roads and I assure you that 90 were in Opposition areas because those are the agricultural districts. If you should visit Siparia constituency, you would realize that a networking of Cunjal, Platanite and Jagroop Trace, accumulated, is 45 kilometres of road.

Hon. Members: All Opposition areas.

Mr. Narine: Those were addressed to me—Nariva constituency, 25 roads between Cumuto and Manzanilla. You will recall that the Member—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Jagroop Trace is not in the constituency of Siparia. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Narine: At this time. [*Interruption*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order! Order! Hon. Members, if you give way, you will have to allow the Member to whom you have given way to make his contribution. Do not, when you have that opportunity, abuse it. Please continue.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I am glad you drew that to our attention. It was not for him to give a whole response. It was simply to clarify something. He does not have to take 20 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, so the first point I am attempting to make is that the fund will provide savings for future generations. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. C. Sharma: We agree that it is to impress upon the Government that the present generation, a large number of us, seem very unhappy with what is available. If you go into any health centre in this country, 50 per cent—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin East and hon. Member for Nariva, if you wish to carry on a conversation the way you are carrying on, the door is right there. [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Sharma: And that could be for a long time, “eh”.

Mr. Valley: You know!

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I was at the point of the current generation. We must make sure we do everything; we must invest in our current generation, so that the future generation could have a better place. That is the intention of all governments. When we look at current expenditure and current distribution of state resources, it does not reflect that. That is the point I wish to capture in the mind of the Prime Minister.

Secondly, the legislation seeks to develop alternative income to support state expenditure—a very interesting one. I am glad the hon. Minister is here because when he was here two weeks ago, he misled this House. Hon. Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, when you are here, you must level with us. On the last occasion we spoke about BWIA. You did not say to us—we would have given you the advice—we saw what the Government sold our facilities in London for—£5 million or £6 million. That is worth £42 million; that is TT \$420 million.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Sharma: You keep quiet; you know nothing!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Diego Martin East, they showed you the door once.

Hon. Enill: I thank the hon. Member for giving way. This is an issue that BWIA's board, through William Lucie-Smith spent 35 minutes this morning discussing. The fact is that the slots are simply allocations for time and they were, in fact, negotiated by the two carriers they were dealing with as part of the overall restructuring of Caribbean Airlines Limited. The question that I answered had to do with BWIA and the issues posed. That issue came up afterwards and I dealt with it. It did not come up during the course of our discussion.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, may I remind the hon. Minister that Ministers must not have short memories; they must not remember conveniently. On that occasion, I asked the Minister what alternative work or programmes were available to earn revenue. We were hearing about it. For the Minister to say that the slots we use at London's Heathrow Airport—he said to this House that we either use it or lose it. Every other airline that has sold slots has earned 10 and 20 times more money.

The Member for Diego Martin Central, under a previous manifestation, when he was a consultant to the Acker group, made millions of dollars.

[*Mr. Valley stands*]

How much you make?

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker! You cannot go outside and say that. You will never take the chance and go outside and say that.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please! I assume you have given way.

Mr. Valley: He is crazy!

Mr. Speaker: If you are rising, you must rise on a point of order.

Mr. Valley: I am rising on a point of order, Mr. Speaker—36(5). I am asking the Member to withdraw that statement immediately or to prove it. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Standing Order 36(5) says:

“No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member of either Chamber.”

Sometimes you say things in jest, which get a reaction, which is perhaps exactly what happened. [*Laughter*] The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central is perfectly right in raising that Standing Order. I think you are wrong. I am directing you to be careful about what you may have said in jest.

Mr. Valley: I am sorry. I am asking that he withdraw that statement.

Mr. Speaker: I think he was about to do that.

Mr. C. Sharma: I will withdraw the part where I said he made millions, but I did not say US dollars. He made hundreds of thousands of dollars. There is no question about that. If the Minister is saying he did not make that; that is okay.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Member again either to withdraw it or prove it. That is all I am asking. Otherwise, I would have to ask that the matter be taken to the Privileges Committee. This is a very serious matter, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Do not prolong the issue, please. Withdraw it!

Mr. C. Sharma: When we started this, we were told that two Members were ill. I do not want to be the cause of a third Member getting ill. I withdraw it. [*Desk thumping*] I will say how much money he made on the next occasion.

The legislation seeks to develop alternative income to support state expenditure. I was on the point where the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has sold the BWIA slots at the Heathrow Airport for £5 million or £6 million. It was confirmed by the hon. Minister on a radio programme. On the last day, when the Minister spoke about BWIA in this House, he did not indicate that, even though it was

asked. For him to say today that it was under consideration and the sums were not arrived at might just be a delay tactic.

The point is that this legislation we are treating with seeks to develop alternative income. Here was a golden opportunity. Here was a wheel you did not have to recreate. He could have looked at what the other airlines were doing. All of them have had similar slots at Heathrow Airport, which they were selling for one reason or other or giving up and earning large sums of money. We are told—and we have seen the information from economic issues in the aviation business—that that could have obtained £42 million, which is in excess of \$420 million. *[Interruption]* The Minister is saying it is not true. Are you satisfied that £5 million is what it is worth, hon. Minister?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Minister is saying that he agrees that it is worth £5 million. They have not brought that to this House or to the national community. They cannot keep selling this country and every time we raise a question, they say what it is worth. When they were in opposition, they said rum bond was worth billions of dollars and now that they are in government, the price has been reduced by 150 per cent. When in opposition, they know the highest prices. When in opposition—

Mr. Manning: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. C. Sharma: You must stop drinking—all who drink, including the Member for Diego Martin Central.

Mr. Manning: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. C. Sharma: That Member is no longer a Member of this House. That is not proper.

The point is that to develop the alternative income we are calling on the Government to say to the national community what sums of money the slots in BWIA should have obtained, how it was arrived at and who are the persons responsible for selling it for £5 million.

Secondly, in recent months, the question of the smelter plant has come up time and again. One of the burning questions that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago want answered is: What moneys are we selling the national gas at? I saw that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, in a press conference, indicated that the investors would not come here if they are not certain that gas would be

available for a long period. Would it be true to say that the investors are coming here because they are getting the natural gas dog cheap?

Mr. Manning: No, that is not true.

Mr. C. Sharma: Well, at what prices are they getting it?

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am very glad that the Member for Fyzabad has given way on this matter. The price at which gas is sold to these companies is a commercial transaction that normally is kept confidential. The minute the Government of Trinidad and Tobago discloses the gas price, either by force or for any other reason, immediately the companies that under normal circumstances would come to Trinidad and Tobago to operate would now have to take that into consideration as they contemplate the countries in which they must invest. Those are commercial transactions of great value to their competition and hon. Members opposite must be much more judicious and understand better the system in which they work and not bring those things to the fore in the way in which they are doing it.

We can make it public, but they know what will happen. The investors will go elsewhere because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is not confidential. In fact, as we reform the Constitution of this country, that is an issue we are going to have to consider—the role of state enterprises. If Members opposite continue the way they are going then they are saying that the State has no right to be involved in business of any kind. That is what they are saying.

Mr. C. Sharma: Again, that is why Opposition and Government are really partners in governance. When they are in opposition, they raise all these things and they run all over the country; they run as far as the United Kingdom to say that they are giving away this and that. In this very Parliament, the hon. Prime Minister indicated that we had negotiated a much less price for something in the oil sector.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, again, we were talking about the price at which gas was bought, not the price at which gas was sold. There is a difference. The NGC buys gas from the producers on the east coast and sells to the consumers and we use that mechanism so that the Government has a flexibility to set the price at levels that ensure that the industries could come, so that we could have the industrialization that we have and which has to date put us in a position where our pattern of industrialization is admired by so many countries in the world that they come for technical advice.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, that does not change the fact that this legislation that we are debating seeks to develop alternative income. As a result, there must be some information that obtains to all of us, not just the Opposition, that tells the national community that the government of the day, whichever government is in office, is using and investing the moneys of the State in an intelligent way, meaning that the money that they are spending on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago is bringing returns.

Before you go to alternative income, you first have to look at what we are spending. When you look at projects across this country in the last four years—to date we have spent in excess of \$100 billion—in many instances we are not seeing returns. We are seeing overspending. The Brian Lara Stadium in Marabella is a good example. We saw the workers walking off the job yesterday. Is that value for money? We saw, on the Scarborough Hospital, almost an entire private development benefiting from it. Is that good spending of taxpayers' money? You cannot waste the money of the State on one hand and then say you want to bring legislation that seeks to develop alternative income. It is like earning \$10 a month, wasting \$9, then saying you want to develop alternative income. You must first use what you have wisely and invest it.

When you look at what is happening in the country; when you look at infrastructure failure; when you look at the quantum of money being spent on many government projects, you are not seeing the returns for it. We cannot continue this way.

I want to read a short article from page 4 of the *Business Express* magazine dated December 06, 2006. It is an article written by Kim Boodram. It reads:

“The Lord might forgive you for calling His name in vain around town this Christmas. Because He might do the same at the sight of some of the prices!”

What is the author saying here?

“Be prepared, early shoppers say, to either make changes in your Christmas routine, or spend some extra change. From all indications, a middle-class family is looking at a budget that is at least—at least—\$2,000 more in 2006 than it was in 2005.”

And they have 25 per cent of our population living under the poverty line. Where are they going to get this money? [*Interruption*] Whether it is 17 per cent according to one Minister or 20 per cent according to another Minister, or 25 per

cent, the fact is that a middle-class family is expected to spend \$2,000 more this Christmas. This is courtesy the government of the day.

“The number one culprit is inflation, which has peaked at 10 per cent and is primarily being driven by Government spending, high food prices...”

Here, the Government is the agent of inflation. The Government is causing prices to rise. The Government is causing people, more than 20 per cent—I am moving between the 17 per cent and the 25 per cent—who cannot feed themselves.

“Last year, inflation had hovered around seven per cent during the Christmas season, which was still outside this country’s ‘comfort zone’...”

So when it was 7 per cent, it was too bad. Now at 10 per cent plus, you can imagine what it is.

“It was blamed then on high food prices as a result of crops lost to floods and heavy rains.”

So earlier, when I said the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources attends very meekly to the agricultural industry, you see the reflection here.

“Increases on imported goods are usually blamed on a lack of efficiency at the Port of Port of Spain and higher workers’ wages.

Last month, Central Bank Governor, Ewart Williams, declared this to be the most expensive Christmas in 12 years.”

So, what is the government of the day doing for the national community? The most expensive Christmas in 12 years means the most expensive Divali, the most expensive Eid-ul-Fitr, the most expensive Easter. Every day, it is much too expensive for the average citizen to live in this country. It is difficult to understand that the more money we have, the higher the cost of living. It has to do with management and leadership.

“This time, high alcohol prices were thrown into the cocktail—a feasible cause since this country alcohol consumption usually doubles at Christmas time and Carnival.”

The Government is forcing people to drink more, too. The social researchers have said that many people drink to get away from the reality of the world—stress, hardship.

Mrs. Job-Davis: What about you?

Mr. C. Sharma: I consume Ghee. Do you know what Ghee is?

“This year’s budget brought an increased customs levy of 15 per cent on alcohol and cigarettes...”

Food prices have increased by 26 per cent...”

And the Government must answer today what they are doing to assist those poor families.

“fruits and vegetables by 19.9 per cent...”

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Sharma: I thank Members on all sides of the House.

Mr. Valley: Except me.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, so here, on December 06, 2006, two days ago, we have an article written in the *Business Express* showing that the cost of living is beyond the reach of a large section of the community. The Prime Minister indicated early in my contribution that he agrees that the Government has to deal with the current situation. How do we deal with it?

Before I go there, the article continues that the *Business Express* found a few people—I emphasize “few”—who did not mind. One man indicated that his expenses would run in excess of \$4,000 from last year.

Legislation in the country and government policies must reach out to all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. There must be very little exceptions. You may not be able to obtain 100 per cent.

The first point is that the cost of living, as it obtains now, is beyond the reach of many people in the country. The question is: What is the Government doing about it? I suggest that we re-visit the cost of living for people across the board. We know what a food basket should contain. The CSO has some information on that, even though they do not declare what is the weight of those goods. They may identify 20 or 30 items. If they use the average size in the United States or elsewhere, it tells you that it should contain maybe a five-pound package of flour and two pounds of sugar.

In Trinidad and Tobago, because of the Government's influence—they have to bat for the Government; they give them instructions—they say it has sugar and flour. They do not say the weight. More than that, unlike the ones done outside of Trinidad and Tobago, it identifies the number of persons that would be treated with, with this food basket.

In Trinidad and Tobago we do not have that. They simply say that there is a food basket that contains 25 items costing so much. So, in the country, we do not know, based on the Government information—this is how the Government hides the information. One of the risks we run, when we look at what obtains in the country is political interference in many quarters. Because the Government peddles influence in all these quarters, we can never get an accurate report, which is to the disaster of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We should be making every effort to treat with our citizens across the board, but because the Government wants to hide the information—they want to say that the crime statistics are much lower than they are. In many police stations, they are not forwarding the reports. In fact, in many police stations, they will not even take the reports because they do not want that report, based on the influence of the Government, to be the statistics of the country. [*Interruption*]

I will address your question just now. In a particular police station, for instance, there is a competition now to see which station will have the least reports so that they would look good in the eyes of the Government. Every day cars are stolen, but that is not reflected. Every day people are being held up and a lot of it is not being reflected. The Government is putting its fingers everywhere to hold back information.

On the question of inflation, many have argued that a lot has to do with Government's spending. Why is the Government spending so much? Is it for the benefit of the country or for the benefit of business people?

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Sharma: The Government's spending, is it reaching out to the people? The answer is no. When you look at the infrastructure across the country—simple road maintenance; many homes are without pipe-borne water and we are spending millions of dollars for pipe-borne water and we are not seeing it. In many places, electricity is being cut off at different points and nobody seems to know.

Mr. Speaker, moneys from the existing Revenue Stabilisation Fund will be transferred to the new fund. The money deposited into the Fund will be based on

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the price of oil and gas over an 11-year period. The scale will be dependent on estimated petroleum revenues for each quarter. If the revenues exceed the projection by more than 10 per cent, the excess will be placed in the Fund.

Again, we are not told what the dollar value of these are, so that no one knows for sure what sums of money will come. It goes further. If the revenues are lower than 10 per cent, then the Minister of Finance will have lien on how much money is deposited into this Fund. As a check and balance against fluctuations, a deposit will have to be made no later than one month following the end of the quarter.

Another point I want to raise is that the investment assets of the Fund will be held in financial investment portfolio, while the cash resources will be held in the financial investment account. Last day, we asked the Minister about this aspect of the investment. When we look at the sums of money at the present time and when we asked the Minister on the last day, we were not satisfied that the Fund is vested in a way that would bring meaningful returns.

I refer the House to the *Guardian Business Report* of November 23, 2006, page 19, and the heading is “Choosing between Revenue or Expenditure Stabilisation”. I will read the first one or two paragraphs:

“Over the past few years oil prices have moved from a low of US \$9 per barrel in 1999...”

That is when the UNC was in government. It would be instructive for us to obtain what this country obtained when the oil was US \$9 per barrel. The cost of living was much lower. More people could have afforded to live. There were more sustainable jobs. We were seeing infrastructure across the country. Today the Government is obtaining in excess of \$78 per barrel, moving from US \$9. What are we seeing for US \$78? More murders, more infrastructure failure, lack of medication at the hospitals; people unable to get operations; schools collapsing all over; police stations being closed; protests everywhere; water no longer in our pipes; at US \$78 per barrel. It comes back to the point of governance and leadership.

2.30 p.m.

What is the country lacking? It is not money. The country is lacking leadership.

“T&T is very dependent on revenues from the energy sector. This sector is anticipated to grow by 20 per cent in fiscal 2007.

As indicated during the year oil prices peaked at US \$78 per barrel. At the time of writing it has fallen to US \$55. Last week, commentary from a number of analysts suggests that in response to an anticipated slow down in global economic growth into 2007.”

That brings us to our current situation, which is, are we preparing for such?. If it comes, we have no control over it. We must be prepared. If it does not come, it will still benefit the country. By that I mean that there must be across-the-board development and concern for all our citizens.

“A couple of weeks ago, in this column, I explained...”

The author is Ian Narine.

“that capital markets do not like violation as it impedes ones ability to plan and makes for an unstable operating environment. At a macroeconomic level the story is no different so that...in government spending on account...”

must be taken into consideration.

The author is saying that there must be checks and balances. Many people have been arguing this across Trinidad and Tobago. Many financial experts are saying that we are overspending. The Government has to tell the country what measures it will take. Already, wherever you go there is the difficulty to obtain simple services in the country.

I want to refer to the monthly publication of the *Trinidad and Tobago Review*, dated December 04, 2006. I think, if I am correct, the editor of this might be the very distinguished economist Dr. Lloyd Best. He says:

“Wanted: a Heritage Fund!

Protecting our grandchildren's backpay”

He sees the long term effect of this.

“The Bill allows the current generation to consume the wealth of future generations within a short ten-year period unlike, for example, the highly rated Alaska Permanent Fund which prohibits the withdrawal of principal from the fund without a full referendum of the Alaskan citizens.”

I think it was the Leader of the Opposition who indicated that management of this fund must not come from those selected by the Government. They must have a wider participation because you want to be certain that this fund benefits the country.

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I want to read two paragraphs.

“The very important Heritage and Stabilization Fund Bill (HSF) held the attention of Parliament over the last three weeks.”

And if I may add, continues to do so.

“The Bill provides for the legal governance structure for the establishment and management of the HSF, a mechanism for systematic saving of part of the windfall revenues earned from the oil and gas business from time to time.

The concept of a revenue stabilization fund was first introduced by the UNC Government in the 1999—2000 fiscal year.”

This is not something that the present Government is bringing. The UNC saw the wisdom of it and brought it in.

“In 2003, consistent with best practice across the world, the PNM Government promised to bring legislation to Parliament governing the operations of the Fund. After 3 years that promise has finally been fulfilled.”

This is only because we brought pressure on the Government. We kept telling the Government, you are overspending, not investing the people's money and not preparing for the future generation. After three years of pressure from the UNC, the Government has brought it.

“Unfortunately, the Bill before the House is particularly weak in many areas...”

The experts are saying this and we have also said it:

“Unfortunately, the Bill before the House is particularly weak in many areas including such critical ones as provision for future generations...”

We identified the Bill as an Act to provide for the establishment and management of the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. I went further to say that it took into consideration that the fund will provide savings for future generations and a cushion in the event of a drop in oil or natural gas prices. We all agreed on that, but the legislation is not treating with it. All the Members on this side have raised it with the Government, and the Government’s response has been very irrelevant and not relating to what we have brought to their attention.

It goes further:

“rules of accumulation and withdrawal and arrangements for managing the Fund. Entrapped in its own philosophy on savings, the Government seems to have taken long to play wrong.”

That is interesting. It seems the Government has taken long to play wrong.

“It is apparent that the government is not prepared to ‘walk the talk’.”

This is in the *Review*.

“What is worse is that the opposition, caught up in its own brand of politics, has also failed to bring the major weaknesses or to offer meaningful alternatives.”

At the time of writing, the author would not have known the presentations of the Opposition Members on both Benches. We have raised the weaknesses of this. I hope the author reflects it. That is why I have read it.

The most glaring weakness of the Bill is that it is heritage in name only. I started off by talking about that.

“The preamble to the Bill states that the purpose of the Fund is to save and invest surplus petroleum revenue derived from the production business in order to inter alia ‘provide savings for future generations’. Yet, there is no element of the Bill that caters to this particular objective except through chance.”

We have raised that matter.

“This is not an oversight since it is the PNM Government that introduced the concept of heritage into the objectives of the Fund in the first place.”

It was drawn to the Government's attention.

“One can only conclude that the failure to deal with the Heritage portion was a deliberate choice.”

That is the difficulty with the Government. They, oftentimes, bring things to benefit either themselves or a selected few. This is their doing. They have had many opportunities and still have to correct it.

“The root cause...may well be the apparent lack of understanding of the concepts of Heritage and Stabilization and the oft-criticized decision of the Government to lump them into one. Let us return therefore to the basic definition.

The term Stabilization Fund is self-explanatory—it's a fund that stabilizes or smoothes fluctuations in recurrent revenue caused by volatility in petroleum prices.”

We have argued this on numerous times. The Government invites the debate; we come and debate and present arguments. We went further and looked at what

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obtains. The Leader of the Opposition identified the Norway Fund. She went on to identify best practices for the Heritage and Stabilization Fund. She made reference to the International Monetary Fund's publication, *Trinidad and Tobago's, the Energy Boom and Proposal for Sustainable Fiscal Policy*. This started in the 1970s. The Government does not have to recreate the wheel. The information is there. There are many international and global practices that tell us what we could do.

The presenter of the Bill, the Minister of Finance, indicated that they have looked at what obtained outside. Why has he come with such weak legislation? The reason is that they use it to treat with some people. The Government has a tendency to legislate for a few. When you look at how the revenue is going, the UTT is a good example. We have seen at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, hundreds of millions of taxpayers' money going, we do not know where. We are seeing people emerging with diplomas that are not being considered and are not accredited in the first instance—hundreds of millions of dollars.

Let me continue:

“When prices and revenues are higher than expected, surplus revenues are deposited in the Fund. When prices, and therefore revenues, are lower than expected withdrawals are permitted from the Fund to make up for the shortfall. In contrast, the aim of a Heritage Fund is simply to create wealth for future generations. If that purpose is to be fulfilled there can be NO withdrawals for the purpose of revenue stabilization.”

That is basic understanding. I think it was the Member for St. Joseph or St. Augustine who made that point. Why is the Government not listening? It is not listening because it has sold itself out to a few political investors. Who are the people in the country who are making millions and millions of dollars on a daily and annual basis? The poor are getting poorer and a few are getting richer. Who are these few? Are they the ones that have the Government in their back pockets?

“If that purpose is to be fulfilled, there can be NO withdrawals for the purpose of revenue stabilization.”

That makes sense. What will happen is that the Government will choose to withdraw when the oil price drops by \$1.00. They would then say that they legislated. When we came with the legislation, you did not say anything. There should be no withdrawal for the purpose of revenue stabilization.

“The two purposes are mutually exclusive and therefore cannot be governed by the same rules. Indeed, in the medium term there should be no withdrawals from the Heritage portion of the Fund.”

We ask the Government to seriously consider.

“The current bill makes no special provision to satisfy the Heritage objective. The rules of withdrawal permit the Minister to withdraw up to 25 per cent of the balance of the entire Fund in order to make up a revenue shortfall.”

Knowing the history of the PNM, they must be waiting to do us—robbing our future generations.

“The current balance in the HSF Fund stands at an estimated US \$1.3 billion.”

This is approximately \$9 billion. I raised this matter with the hon. Minister, the last time he spoke. The investment aspect of it did not seem to be bringing the returns we feel it should be bringing.

“Assuming a sustained period of falling prices and less than expected revenues, this balance will be cut to less than US \$500 million within five years and under US \$100 million in ten years. “

Can you see what we are finding ourselves in, if allowed to go unchecked, without the Government giving consideration to the viewpoints of the Opposition and thinkers in the national community? You are looking at a fund that can be worth less than US \$100 million in less than 10 years.

“In short, the Bill allows current generation to consume the wealth of future generations within a short ten-year period. Several alternatives are available.”

I would quickly go into some of them.

“One example is the highly rated Alaska Permanent Fund which prohibits the withdrawal of principal from the Fund without a full referendum to the Alaskan citizens.”

We want to suggest that any withdrawals must come back here for full debate and approval.

“The Fund also has a dividend programme which in 2003 paid each citizen the sum of approximately US \$1,963.”

That is why I raised with the hon. Minister on the last occasion the investment aspect of it and I suggested that we were not seeing the returns. If we do not see the returns, then there is nothing to pass on to the citizens.

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“The Heritage portion of the Fund also requires separate rules of accumulation. If the intent is to provide wealth for future generations then deposits to the fund should not be constrained by revenue or prices.”

That is a very important point. [*Interruption*] Hand you the paper? You cannot read. If you read, you do not understand. I will email it. Give me your email address and I will send it to you.

“Savings for the future should be a priority and not an option for money left over after expenses.”

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important point. It is part of the culture of this country—from the days of our ancestors who came from different parts of the world—the emphasis on savings. The Government demonstrates that. The Government must show by example that the savings aspect of the revenue of the country is extremely important. More than that, it is for the national community to also follow.

I want to read from a little guide presented by this article:

“Heritage and
Stabilization Fund
Summary of Key
Provisions

Management

A Board of Governors appointed by the President
on the advice of the Minister”

In this instance, the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition would be our recommendation. So that there will be the widest participation and the best minds coming together.

“Rules of accumulation Quarterly deposits made. When actual Petroleum revenues exceed estimated by more than 10 per cent, full amount of the excess deposited. If excess is less than 10 per cent deposits made at the discretion of the Minister.

Petroleum revenues estimated using an eleven year rolling average of prices—(5 years before and after current year.)

Rules of withdrawal Where actual Petroleum revenues fall below estimate by at least 10 per cent..."

We are suggesting that the Minister bring to the Parliament for the withdrawal of a part of it, not all of it. There would be full disclosure and full debate.

"Fund Manager Independent investment... by the Central Bank."

To make sure that the moneys are intelligently and wisely deposited. The Government has a history, when we look at the early Penny Bank/Workers' Bank and early National Commercial Bank, the Government's intervention and mismanagement caused all of it to go down the drain.

"Investment Portfolio US Dollar denominated. No rules specified in Bill. Guidelines to be provided by the Board of Governors."

With respect to reporting rules, we want to suggest that there be quarterly reports, once the investments take place, and the reports laid in the Parliament so that the national community could have an input.

As I come to the close of my contribution, I want to quickly recap that the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund has indicated that the purpose is to provide for a rainy day. I made the point and I want to re-emphasize that, initially, we must look at the current situation in the country where the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are not enjoying a quality of life that reflects our wealth. Too many of our citizens are living under the poverty line. Too many of our citizens are unable to access basic, everyday life needs and simple things such as water and medication.

As a result, we have to make sure, if this generation is going to provide for future generations, that the Government come on a level playing field and bring to the Parliament, treat with the issues we have raised and treat with the response of the national community. We have seen the national community of late taking action into their own hands and making their voices heard. We have seen it in the smelter plant, where they are saying that it is not beneficial to the country. There are many schools of thought that suggest that. Our state resources are going down if we allow that to happen.

We are seeing the wastage of money in government projects across the board. We are seeing creations; some private, some semi-private and some with hidden Government agenda. The UTT is a good example, billions of dollars and the citizens are not benefiting.

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I appeal to the hon. Minister to ensure that when he comes to this House he comes with noble intentions and demonstrates that in his presentation.

Thank you.

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to lend support to the Heritage and Stabilization Fund (No. 2) Bill, 2006. As stated clearly, the purpose of the Bill is to set funds aside for three purposes. The first is to deal with a situation in which, some time in the future, there might be a fall in petroleum prices, below what we have defined as the long-term price.

Secondly, the Bill provides for a situation in which petroleum resources were to decline; to tide us over so that we would have time for the adjustment.

Thirdly, the Bill provides for intergenerational transfers. That is the concept of heritage. Perhaps, it is appropriate, at this time, to indicate to Members that amendments have been circulated to the Bill.

At this time also—as you know I was not here for the debate but I have had the benefit of the *Hansard* and I think, honestly, we owe a debt of gratitude to the Member for St. Joseph, who made valuable contributions with respect to the operations of the Bill.

One would see, for example, in the amendment, taking the point made by the Member for Fyzabad a while ago, that there is that protection at clause 15(3) of the Bill on page 9; the amendment which says that no drawings would be made for stabilization if the effect of that drawing would cause the fund to fall below US \$1 billion.

If one takes into consideration the fact that at present there is TT \$8.6 billion in the fund and that that limitation sets aside TT \$6.3 billion for heritage, therefore, one sees that the stabilization part of the Fund, at this time, is a mere TT \$2.3 billion.

I make the other point, which was made by my colleague when he opened the debate, that since we came into Government we have been putting into the Interim Stabilisation Fund almost 100 per cent and in other cases almost 100 per cent of the surplus, as defined.

I make another point that while some on the other side, both the Members for Siparia and Fyzabad, attempt to claim paternity for this Bill, let me make the point quite clearly that is not so. The genesis—I will develop that point—of this Bill is

the fact that petroleum revenues are buoyant right now. The revenues are buoyant not simply because of prices, but also because of production.

While oil production may be falling—for example, in 2001, oil production was 6.5 million cubic metres; in 2006, it is estimated at 5.6 million cubic metres, a fall of 13.9 per cent—when we look at what has happened with gas production, one sees that while in 2001, the production was 16,336 million cubic metres, in 2006 it is estimated at 25,720 million cubic metres. In other words, there was growth over the period of 57.4 per cent. Because of the buoyant revenues, thus the concept of surplus or excess revenues, part of which is to be saved. That is what this Bill is about.

This Bill is different from the last one. This Bill talks about using a moving average to determine the budgeted price for petroleum resources. We go back five years, we go forward five years and we take the current and we say what is average price over that period. That is the price we use in the budget. To the extent that revenues are above that, we put 60 per cent of that in the fund.

As we would discuss in a while, we use part of the excess revenues to do other things. I am not simply speaking about the 40 per cent because the 40 per cent, which is the excess, determined by use, the moving average goes into a strategic investment fund. I am talking about excess revenues arising out of the quantity improvement, that it is different from the last Bill.

This is different from the last Bill because we do not contemplate on net borrowing while we are putting funds aside. I want to make this point because when the Member talks about their starting this thing in 1999/2000, the Member for Siparia failed to tell us that in the same year in which they put \$415.3 million in the fund in the first year, 1999/2000, they went and borrowed externally \$2,360 million. You put \$415 million and say, I am saving this, but then you go to the external market and borrow \$2.3 billion. In the same year they repaid \$731.8 million on the external market and received a further \$31.5 million from divestment.

There were net borrowings in that year of \$1,628.9 million. One can see that in the Central Bank's Annual Report for 2001—of course, the Governor of the Central Bank is now the Leader of the Congress of the People—therefore, there was no savings in that year. As a matter of fact, there was negative savings. That is why we had an issue with that. Let me give the Member for St. Joseph a chance.

Mr. Yetming: You introduced into the debate the first time a strategic investment account. We have not heard that before.

Hon. K. Valley: No, no, let me clarify immediately. The money that is going into the fund is 60 per cent of the excess revenues. Agreed? The other 40 per cent is not to be frittered away. It goes into the Consolidated Fund and the intent of the Government is to set up what we call a Strategic Investment Fund, to take positions for long-term growth.

Mr. Yetming: Once you decide in the Act, by law, that you will put 60 per cent into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and the 40 per cent—you have the right to do what you want with it. You are introducing a new element into the debate. Clearly, we would want this Strategic Investment Fund.

Hon. K. Valley: I am making the simple point that while people feel that this Government is a wild Indian and is spending money, we are not doing that. We are meeting that commitment to put the 60 per cent, as determined, into the fund, but we are not frittering away the other 40 per cent, and more than that, I will show in a while, we are doing some other things. As the Jamaican would say: “Do not be previous.”

I am making the point that we had a difficulty with that type of economics and financing that you put \$400 million and say, I am saving that but you run and borrow \$3.3 billion. It makes no sense. That is why we had a difficulty with that. We said, in a situation in which there is need to develop the country, it made no sense putting your savings when you have to go and borrow more than you are putting aside.

You know the borrowing rate is always higher than the savings rate, so it costs us even more. We had a fundamental difficulty with that. We were making the point that investment is what is important. When you are saving, you are saving in what is known as financial assets, you are buying paper, bonds and equity, but somebody must use that money eventually on basic physical, productive assets.

Why would we, when we have needs in Trinidad and Tobago—to point the Member for Fyzabad who makes some good points when he is sober—to develop the country? Why would we do that? When you say, therefore, that at the end of the period you had \$1.5 billion in the fund, that is not correct. Because you might have had that in the fund but remember you had \$1,628.9 million in net borrowings. There were no savings there.

In passing also we should note that in addition to the amount saved, the Government is also using part of this excess revenue that we are earning at present to

do a number of things. First of all we are using it to build human resource capability, because we see that in our quest for 2020, there are certain things we have to do.

In our manifesto, from which we won the 2002 election, we said clearly that in this first five-year period when the committee that is looking at Vision 2020 do their work and develop their strategic plans—we know that there are certain things that are fundamental and, therefore, we would put that in place—we would invest in our human resource.

When we looked at education. For example, while in 2001 they spent \$1,686.3 million on education including tertiary education, that figure in 2006 is now \$4,534.1 million. The investment in education was almost tripled. That is what we have done. In addition to setting aside funds for a rainy day for intergenerational transfer, we are also building current capacity for savings. One would normally expect annual increases of approximately 10 per cent. One sees that it is extremely significant.

When you look at health, we have invested in building a healthy population. When the Minister of Health introduced CDAP he was ensuring that we invest in our people. As we move to 2020, we do not only want an educated population, we also want a healthy population. When you look at the figures, you will see that while we were spending \$891.8 million in 2001 on health, in 2006 we are now spending \$2,826.9 million. That is an increase of 217 per cent. That is investment in our people. We were investing in our people. We are ensuring that they are properly housed.

You know our commitment to have 100,000 homes for our people over a 10-year period. You know that in the last budget, we said anybody who is earning up to \$8,000 will qualify for a mortgage of 2 per cent. We said if you want to convert a transient to a citizen, ensure that he has his own home. While in 2001, we were spending \$103.3 million in housing, in 2006, we are spending \$266.3 million; an increase of 158 per cent.

We are also providing for the fortunate. Our social safety net moved from \$2 billion in 2001, to \$4.5 billion in 2006, investing in our people. We put it another way and we said that part of the petroleum wealth must be shared with our people. It is an energy dividend.

That is not all. We are using part of this excess revenue to provide needed infrastructure. When you look at the capital expenditure programme, you will see again in 2001 the expenditure was \$929.6 million. In 2006, the expenditure is

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\$3.8 billion. That is what we are doing. Public debt, we have used that excess revenue to reduce our external indebtedness. The external indebtedness in 2001 was \$9,731 million; at present, it is \$8,184.6 million. That is a reduction of 16 per cent. When you look at our external public debt as a percentage of GDP, you see that it has fallen from 19 per cent in 2001. That is what we have been doing with our surplus.

We have also used it to ease the burden on our taxpayers. When we increased the tax deduction from \$25,000 to \$60,000, we provided a benefit to our taxpayers. When we provide a subsidy at the pump of \$2 billion in 2006, we are providing that energy dividend to our people. We have used it most significantly to diversify the economy. That is why when I heard my colleague, the Member for Siparia, open her contribution and state that we are becoming extremely dependent on the energy sector and that we have taken no steps to diversify the economy, and that we are repeating the mistakes of the past because the last time around we did not diversify the economy, I was at a loss. How, with any credibility, could the Member say that, when in fact, Point Lisas stares us in our face?

There was a time—I made the point some time before—when we used to flare natural gas. It has been 20 or 30 years ago, thank God for Dr. Julien, since we started our natural gas to build ammonia and methanol to use it in ISPAT, which is now MITAL. Point Lisas stares her in her face and she says that there has been no diversification in the economy.

Lately, we have taken natural gas into the GDP and the Member is saying that we have not diversified the economy. It is appalling and hypocritical, as it were, to be talking about no attempt to diversify the economy while, at the same time, when the Government attempts to put that infrastructure in place to allow for further diversification of the economy, they lead a charge. You know what I am talking about, Mr. Speaker. Of course, I am talking about the aluminium smelter, which provides another base for the industrial development of Trinidad and Tobago. At the same time they charge us with the failure to diversify the economy, they are saying that we ought not to diversify the economy.

Mr. Speaker, the Member spent some time on the issue of a lack of diversification of the economy and she touched my corn because that is my responsibility. As Minister of Trade and Industry, our mandate is to develop the non-energy sector. I would like to think that I have been doing my job. You must understand when I say that she touched my corn. We have been pursuing that mission to position Trinidad and Tobago as the manufacturing—that has been our mission—transshipment

and commercial platform in the hemisphere. We believe that our strategic position helps us or gives us that locational advantage to serve as a trade, transport and financial hub between North and South America.

I want to spend some time on this diversification issue this afternoon because other than that, I think the Member, in her contribution, dealt with two other issues which are being disposed. She dealt with the concept of oil shock and what will happen if we have an oil shock. She was corrected by the Member for San Fernando East who told her to listen. We do not talk about shock, we talk about depletion and that there is an arithmetical formula that one can determine how a well would decline over time.

The other issue the Member dealt with was—*[Interruption]* Let me give way while—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Dookeran: Thank you Minister for giving way. I was intrigued by your statement that your job was to develop the non-energy sector. I want to simply ask whether you will address the fact that the fiscal deficit in the non-energy sector has moved from approximately 4 per cent 10 years ago, to a current level of 15 per cent and will you indicate that is a measurement of the success of your performance of your portfolio?

Mr. Manning: Success in the energy policy.

Mr. Dookeran: Let him answer.

Hon. K. Valley: I will answer, because it indicates a shallowness. We on this side do not talk about a non-energy deficit. We talk about a net domestic budget deficit, which is much more relevant, as far as we are concerned.

Let me correct you also. It has not moved from 4 per cent, 10 years ago. It was less than 4 per cent three years ago; the non-energy deficit that you are talking about. Today it is said that it is 15 per cent. I say it is immaterial. Until you start telling me about a non-tourism deficit in Barbados or Antigua, "doh tell me nothing about a non-energy deficit". If you want to talk about monetizing the economy, talk to me about the net domestic budget deficit. That is what is relevant. This thing about trying to divide an economy between energy and so on, money is fungible.

Mr. Dookeran: That is precisely what I am saying. Whatever name you call it, you have seen a deterioration in the deficit position in the non-energy sector. I was asking you, in your presentation, whether or not you will venture to explain that as a measure of the performance of the sector?

Hon. K. Valley: No. I am saying that a non-energy deficit tells me nothing. If you listen to me you will learn a few things this afternoon. The non-energy deficit is different from the net domestic budget deficit. The net domestic budget deficit takes into consideration the foreign flows. What we look at is the element that monetizes the economy. I think that is what you are talking about. You talk about the net domestic budget deficit. The non-energy deficit simply talks about the amount of funds that we have to use from our main sector to support the non-energy sector. In this period, when we are doing so many things—I have just mentioned to you that we are using the excess revenues from the energy sector to build the human resource to make sure we have a healthy population and build houses for our people. That is what we are doing. We are investing it.

I do not have a difficulty. At some point in time, as the non-energy sector responds and there is more coming from it, that deficit would reduce. I say quite simply, if you do not tell the Barbadians about a non-tourism deficit, "doh come tell me about a non-energy deficit". It is what we have. We have to use the moneys from there to build sustainability in the other areas.

Mr. Manning: I do not understand why that is so hard to understand. That is the simplest thing to understand. Use what you have. "They teach" me that in geology school.

Hon. K. Valley: I was making the point that the Member's contribution dealt with three issues, the oil shock, which has been dealt with. She then dealt with what she termed best practice, quoting from the International Monetary Fund but she failed, as I said. The International Monetary Fund counselled that if you are borrowing more than you are saving, you are not really making sense. She did not see that part.

In any case, I think that the amendments made to the Bill will take care of most of the issues she raised. That is why I wanted to spend some time on the issue of diversification.

The first point I want to make is that it is incorrect to state that there has been no diversification. If one were to look at what is happening in the manufacturing sector, one would see that over the period 2002 to present, the manufacturing sector averaged an annual growth rate of 9.6 per cent; the services sector, 6.8 per cent; the total non-petroleum sector, averaged 7 per cent over the period. When you look at the data in more detail, you would see that in 2003, the manufacturing sector grew by 12.2 per cent. Overall GDP in that year was 14.4 per cent. In 2004,

the manufacturing sector grew by 8.6 per cent, higher than the petroleum sector, which grew in that year by 8.2 per cent. That was repeated in 2005.

In 2005—look at the *Review of the Economy*, it is there—the manufacturing sector grew by 11.6 per cent and the petroleum sector grew by 8.4 per cent. In this year, the petroleum sector is expected to grow by 20.6 per cent and the manufacturing sector by still a healthy 11.8 per cent. This is what it is. That is the annual report, the *Review of the Economy*. I am not making up the statistics.

In 2001, the manufacturing sector—when they were in Government—grew by 0.5 per cent.

Mr. Manning: What year was that?

Hon. K. Valley: In 2005.

Mr. Manning: They are talking about non-energy performance.

Hon. K. Valley: That is what they most likely have in mind. I want to let them know that there is now an active Minister there motivating the sector. In 2006 the sector grew by 11.6 per cent.

Mr. Manning: As opposed to what existed before.

Hon. K. Valley: It is no longer 0.5 per cent. If you look at the manufacturing GDP in numbers and current price, in 2001 it was \$4,154.1 million. In 2006, it has increased to \$6,491.8 million.

Mr. Manning: Repeat that statistics.

Hon. K. Valley: In 2001, manufacturing GDP was \$4.1 billion. It has now gone to \$6.5 billion, increasing by 56.3 per cent. When you look at constant price GDP, it increased from \$4.1 billion in 2001 to \$6.3 billion in 2006, from an annual average growth rate of 8.9 per cent. Constant price is real terms. You want real terms. Current prices over the period have increased by 56.3 per cent. That is what it is.

Our strategy is simple. We are doing our job. As I said, we are positioning Trinidad and Tobago in a particular way. We say that our medium term strategy is to integrate our economy within Latin America. In this age of globalization, we need to practise with people our size. That is what informed our quest to have our trade agreements with countries in Latin America, Cuba, Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. We see our push, first of all, as part of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy and secondly, following the ACS and the wider Caribbean.

You would recall that the ACS came before the FTAA. After the FTAA came, the ACS went on a backburner. Now that there is a hiatus, there is that window to bring the ACS back to the forefront. That is the attempt. We believe in incremental approaches. From the CSME, take on the wider Caribbean, have your trade agreements and market access agreements so that you can use that fact to attract investors to locate here and access the markets, not simply in Trinidad and Tobago and Caricom, but the markets around us—clear strategy.

In the meantime, we still have our preferential agreements into Europe. My colleague in the Ministry has returned from negotiations of the economic partnership agreement, which is to replace the preferential agreement. That is going to ensure that we continue to have access into that market.

We have preferential access at this time into Canada and we have already written the Minister of Trade in Canada. I, as the person responsible and the lead person for bilateral trade in Caricom, have written the Minister of Trade in Canada, indicating that we are desirous of negotiating a bilateral agreement with Canada.

We have done a similar thing with the United States. As you know, Mr. Speaker, CBI ran out last year and we are continuing to receive the benefits of CBI from the United States simply because of good measures.

Uruguay is still objecting. We are dealing with the situation, but we are talking with the United States. We expect to get the extension up to 2008. Beyond that, we expect to have a free trade agreement.

Notwithstanding the commendable performance of the manufacturing sector and the notable advances in developing the non-oil sector, there is need for further diversification. That is why, two years ago, the Business Development Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, identified certain sectors of the economy and said, given that we have a competitive advantage in these sectors, we will attempt to develop these sectors. They are well known. We have said it on a number of occasions.

The seven sectors are food and beverage, printing and packaging, fish and fish processing, merchant marine, leisure marine, music and entertainment and the film industry.

We have now completed strategic plans of these sectors. We have established companies and the Government is putting moneys to develop these strategic plans with the quest to move towards sustainability.

With respect to eTecK, and the ICP Park, they are doing their share. The aluminium smelter and polyethylene is supposed to provide what is called super downstream. Super downstream is the term we use, because we are now using natural gas to go into alumina and that product would be the basis of further downstream operations in Trinidad and Tobago. We would then be able to attract more and more foreign investors. Similarly, with the polyethylene, which comes from natural gas, but which is the basis for further processing and further downstream opportunities. Those are the efforts we are making at diversifying the economy.

Mr. Speaker, two months ago, we spoke about the bilateral investment treaties that we have signed with Mexico and India, with a view to attracting investors from these places.

Members would know of the European investment mission that the Government led a while ago. The fact that there are plans for a Far East investment mission in late February/early March—

We therefore, see clearly a way forward. We know that today we are dependent on our energy resources in the main, but we are encouraged by the fact that there has been significant growth in the manufacturing sector. Every week—it is getting very close to every day—I am speaking to persons who want to come to Trinidad and Tobago to invest in the non-energy sector.

We are encouraging our private sector to seek joint venture arrangements and other types of strategic alliances with foreigners so that there can be some level of hand holding as we engage the world.

3.30 p.m.

With respect to our Latin American initiative, one already knows that we have labelled Spanish as our first foreign language. I see my colleague—I nearly come like his Leader answering the Member for Caroni East, but I would not do that, I know he is the Member for Chaguanas. Let me go off on a tangent, reading the *Hansard* I could not help but notice that the Member for St. Augustine, in his whole contribution, on about five occasions referred to the Member for Diego Martin East as the Member for Diego Martin Central, simply because he was acting for me, sitting in this chair. Could we really take him seriously? Could you imagine that he is looking at a short white man [*Laughter*] simply because he is sitting in my chair and calling him me, and people want to take you seriously, you have to be joking. On about five occasions, not once, on five occasions.

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Mr. Speaker, let me continue, please. I am making the point that the Government is on a clear track to diversify the economy using part of the excess revenues from the energy sector to do so and that we are getting results as can be seen quite clearly from the growth that we are seeing in the manufacturing sector. I want to tell you that a similar thing is happening in the services sector, which is just that, to go out on their missions.

A recent mission to the Dominican Republic which 10 of our service professionals engaged in, came back with glowing reports. We feel certain that with this legislation, as we set funds aside for a rainy day and for intergenerational transfer, while using some to develop our human resource potential; while using some to ensure that we have the capacity, the infrastructure, and for the support of budding industries, that our future is in good hands.

When Members look at the Bill you will note that the last clause—I think it is—makes provision for a review in five years. We were saying clearly—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central 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. Speaker: Before you continue, is the Minister making her statement before or after the tea break?

Hon. K. Valley: Before the tea break.

Mr. Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. K. Valley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am making the point that the Bill provides for a review in five years, because as I said, we wanted to see how it operates. Conceptually, what one would like is a situation in which withdrawal for sustainability is limited to an interest element only. We have not gotten to that point as yet, but as the fund grows one can see a situation where the principal will remain intact and the interest only will be used in a situation where withdrawal is required.

We have shown our good intentions by listening to the comments of the Opposition. There was never any intent on our side to do anything other than what we said we would do to set some of the excess revenues aside and we would do that as we have done under the interim stabilisation fund since we came in. We

would do that, so that we had no difficulty whatsoever by listening to the comments of Members opposite.

I want to make the point also on the issue of accountability. I think it was the Member for Siparia who dealt with the issue. These are public accounts; public accounts audited by the Auditor General with the laying in Parliament therefore subject to the Public Accounts Committee. I have chaired that committee in the past and I know any chairman can get whatever information he wants, if he is good. It is clear that there is transparency required; there is the accountability required for good order. And the other issue, this thing about having the board appointed by the President, I think that was adequately dealt with by both my colleagues, the Member for Diego Martin East, who said quite clearly that listen, it is appalling, the whole idea is appalling, and the Member for San Fernando East who saw it in terms of constitution reform.

Mr. Speaker, quite simply, our system says that the Executive is held and checked by the legislative; that is what it is. We have no system to hold persons who are outside of this system accountable. Therefore, in commending this Bill to my hon. colleagues, I ask that they take into consideration the fact that the Government has been true to its word since its beginning in office in 2002.

In concluding, let me just deal with one or two other issues that have come up in the debate. The first one is this whole issue of rising prices in inflation. I said the other night at a function and I really believe it; that this issue of inflation is simply a by-product of our success as a government.

The whole purpose of a government is to improve the standard of living of the population. From what I have said, I am sure you are convinced that this Government has been able to do that. We have improved; there is not an individual in Trinidad and Tobago who is not better off than he was in 2001. Whether it is the taxpayer, whose tax bill has now been reduced; whether it is the old age pensioner who is now receiving a heavier paycheck; whether it is the Government; whether it is the private sector; whether it is the consumer, we have all received benefits; we are all better off. Ask the manufacturer or any business man whether he is better off.

The aggregate demand is the aggregate demand of the demand of the consumer, the Government and the business people. And it has increased. Any economist knows that while you can change demand like that, if one has money, that supply is normally fixed in the short term, and that the issue of inflation is one of management managing the demand supply balance.

The Government has said quite clearly that we will manage the by-product of our success. We have taken steps with respect to managing aggregate demand. The Central Bank very successfully raised some \$700 million on the market and from my understanding they could have done more. My colleague, Minister Enill, had said time and time again, there is a re-prioritization of Government's capital expenditure programme. We are dealing with that, the fiscal, as well as the monetary.

On the supply side, the Government has asked me to chair a committee looking at relaxing the constraints on supply and we have started to work. We are looking at food; we are looking at labour; we are looking at construction material. They say "It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good" meaning that in everything there might be some good. I make the point that inflation is a very important economic signal. It is what tells suppliers that they ought perhaps to increase capacity; to put more on the market; that without rising prices; without a movement in prices there would be limited growth. It is what spurs production; it is not all negative; getting out of hand is negative.

When you see an economy with inflation rates of 2 per cent and so on, bet your bottom dollar very little is happening in that economy; it is flat; growth is flat. An economy that is growing like ours at 12 per cent must have a certain level of inflation. We have to manage it and that is our task.

The Government is committed to doing its part. Consumers who benefited over the years and whose disposable income is now so much better, they also must do their part. And as my boss, the Prime Minister says from time to time, business also must do its part. We have an obligation as the Government to put a certain infrastructure in place for the benefit, that facilitative environment; it cost money to do that, but we do it for the benefit, basically, of the country; of the business sector so that they can run with it.

Mr. Dookeran: I do not know if I heard correctly, you said that inflation is a by-product of success—

Hon. K. Valley: Of our success.

Mr. Dookeran: —of your success in managing the economy and that the Central Bank may have done part but they could have done more.

Hon. K. Valley: I said the Central Bank raised \$700 million.

Mr. Dookeran: You said it clear; is that what I interpret what you said?

Hon. K. Valley: I am saying that the bond was oversubscribed. The bond was oversubscribed and I am sure you understand that is what I was saying, unless you are really dyslexic.

Mr. Dookeran: In any event, the question is, would you deny the fact that one of the functions of good management was to forecast what was likely to have happened and take appropriate steps beforehand. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Valley: That is the next issue I was coming to. That is your previous—What I like about you is, that you find a phrase and you beat it to death; you make it a cliché in one speech.

Mr. Dookeran: Answer the question.

Hon. K. Valley: I am answering your question; I am coming to your question, but in my own time. “Behind the curve”, “you must be ahead of the curve”, “you must be behind the curve”, how many times did you use that in your contribution? About 20 times. You went even so far to say that the Central Bank should have been acting before the curve, with respect to the raising of the \$700 million. [*Interruption*] Let me finish. In other words, he was telling us that they must raise the money before there was a need to raise the money. You understand what I am saying? But when the guy could look at Colm Imbert and call him the Member for Diego Martin Central, what do you expect? [*Crosstalk*] I will give way anytime.

Mr. Dookeran: I am trying to keep the debate not at a frivolous level.

Hon. K. Valley: Neither am I.

Mr. Dookeran: I am saying that if you are saying that inflation is the by-product of your economic success, would it not have been better economic management to have anticipated ahead of the curve what is likely to happen and take the steps beforehand.

Hon. K. Valley: The “curve”, the “curve” again.

Mr. Dookeran: I am using that. And just making the comment frivolous is not dealing with the issues.

Hon. K. Valley: I do not know why you think I was making it frivolous. If I am making it frivolous, it is what you said. I was merely quoting what you said about “ahead of the curve”. [*Interruption*] I did; “ahead of the curve”; I can point it out to you. On the 20 occasions, I thought you were constipated.

Mr. Speaker, I really do not know what the Member was suggesting. We have a situation where there is too much money in the economy and the Government is taking steps to reduce the liquidity in the system to manage demand. We are doing that; at the same time we are saying we are going to re-prioritize our capital expenditure programme and we are dealing with the supply side; basic.

Now, there are certain things that we have to do and what the Member for St. Augustine needs to understand is that life is a balance and that there is no free lunch. If you want to develop the country then you have to give something. You have to give a bit more inflation to get the infrastructure right in a quick time frame so that you will reap the benefits of what you are doing much earlier; basic econ; first year econ. That is what it is. If you find that it is overheating, then you say listen, let us pull back and that is what we are doing. No magic to that. No magic to that, Mr. Speaker.

I was winding up. The last point in closing—really, I am sorry, Conrad—but I think I can say it no better. I want to quote my colleague when he says that “the Bill is rooted in the philosophy of responsible fiscal management, spending for growth”, in other words, investing. This is what some people do not understand. I will make the point again that when you save you save in financial assets, but somebody has to use the hard cash for physical assets, because that is where it is ready. So the end product must always be investment. We have invested in our people; we have invested in certain sectors that we feel will take us beyond 2020; beyond energy; that is what we have done. We are saying that we feel certain that the platform that we have provided, it is a platform of growth and stabilization for the future.

I thank you, most sincerely, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central indicated a couple of points. Just one point I would like to have clarification by the hon. Minister. He indicated that they are developing the non-oil sector in such a manner to take over from the oil sector when the time arrives. However, in the first part of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund (No. 2) Bill the Minister of Finance, Sen. The hon. Conrad Enill, indicated that the non-energy sector growth is expected to remain at a certain level, 6.5 per cent with no growth and the sub sectors of finance, insurance and real estate contributing to 7.5 per cent; just as a small aside.

The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund (No. 2) Bill, the philosophy of the Bill seems to be that of investment, that of growth, and I commend the Government for doing that. But I want to take us back a bit when the United National Congress was in government and we started with the Revenue Stabilisation Fund. This was a brainchild of the then Minister of Finance and the function of that Revenue Stabilisation Fund was exactly the philosophy of what this Bill articulates; providing for the future in case of a decrease in oil dollar output, et cetera.

However, as I go back a bit, the legislation was not passed because of the circumstances that surrounded that era of our politics. During the 18/18 scenario when no Speaker was selected, there was a budget passed and there was a budget to be used, however the House did not sit very often as a result of its being prorogued a couple of times. The Revenue Stabilisation Fund became a cash cow for the Government that was installed by ANR Robinson with less votes and given the mandate to govern without movement of the Constitution.

As a result of it, that era of our existence saw the Revenue Stabilisation Fund money being utilized for things such as the movement of book grants; certain give outs and handouts in order to buy votes for the upcoming election which occurred nine months thereafter. This was what the Revenue Stabilisation Fund was used for. And I say that again, Mr. Speaker because when we look at the amendment to the Bill itself, we have the establishment of the purpose of the fund. This is the amendment, may I read it; is that okay?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Dr. F. Khan: It says:

“The purpose of the Fund is to save and invest surplus petroleum revenues derived from production business in order to—

- (a) cushion the impact on or sustain public expenditure capacity during periods of revenue downturn whether caused by a fall in prices of crude oil or natural gas;
- (b) generate an alternate stream of income so as to support public expenditure capacity as a result of revenue downturn caused by the depletion of non-renewable petroleum resources; and
- (c) provide savings for future generations.”

(b) says “generate an alternate stream of income so as to support public expenditure capacity as a result of revenue downturn caused by the depletion.” That is in keeping with what I just started off with, that should the time arise when we need some money from the public purse—because money from the Consolidated Fund will be put into this Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—if and when the oil revenue or natural gas revenue drops, money will be used from that fund for public expenditure. This is what it says here; it is in the legislation.

As a result of that, are we going to see the same type of movement; the same type of—as they say—utilization of the funds for the Government to stay in office? Is it going to be a private fund from the Government to stay in office? This is the

concern—and the Member for St. Joseph has indicated that—that 60 per cent will be going in, what happens to the other 40 per cent? These types of, as they say, inconsistencies.

This debate has gone in a certain direction and the Member for Diego Martin Central indicated that—I forgot what he said now. Anyway, what I want to tell him, the proverb is that “Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat the same in the future”. If we forgot what occurred in the past as a result of utilization of funds to ensure public funds giving private gain—that is the definition of corruption in the dictionary; utilization of public funds for private gain. If you spin it in such a manner, utilization of the Revenue Stabilisation Fund in the 18/18 scenario was used for private gain of the PNM to win the election so that was a form of corruption which is now hauled before the courts.

A lot of things have been said; a lot of development is occurring; a lot of things are happening, but while the rate of inflation has been seen to be a very good thing as said by the Member for Diego Martin Central, the rate of inflation seems to be a measure of our success. I think that Venezuela where the bolivar is approximately 2.2400 to 1 is definitely a very successful country. I will say also Guyana, in which the inflation rate has skyrocketed to such an extent, by that definition is a very successful country.

I hope the Government is not trying to tell this population that the higher the rate of inflation, the better off we are. I do not understand that level of economics because that level of economics eludes me although it is basic economics. When one looks at that inflation rate, if you put \$1,000 in a bank account when the inflation was zero and then it turns into 10 per cent; do you know if it stays at 10 per cent, within five to eight years that \$1,000 would be worth approximately \$500? It will be exactly half; 50 per cent of its value.

If we are putting this money into a fund for our future generations—which hopefully we are not going to spend on vote-getting activities—what will be the value of that currency at that time? Is it going to be half or is it going to be put into investments that are going to give us a better rate of return than the inflation rate? The way the inflation rate is going in this country, I could tell you that we are not better off where food prices are concerned. We are pushing the button of inflation and the Government is convincing themselves that this is a good thing; it is a measure of success. It is like saying in this country “all ah we is one”; remember that. One of the few people who demonstrated this, and I have to

commend him, is the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, who took care of Adesh Nanan, and I would like to commend him for that movement; I read it in the newspaper.

Mr. Speaker, when we start to believe these rhetorics of this type of thing; when we start telling ourselves that the rate of inflation is a measure of success, people will start to believe it. The Prime Minister in his opening statement in this debate indicated that when one speaks in Parliament one has to restrict one's contribution. He went on to say that any foolishness that is said in Parliament is repeated on the streets and he is right. If I could just find the part of it, he said that here:

“If the Government is doing well, then it is critical that hon. Members opposite be careful in how they make their contributions to the House...”

And it keeps going on. That is what he said. That whatever is said in this Parliament John Public outside there listens to and the supporters, whoever they may be, believe it. When you start saying that the rate of inflation at 10 per cent is a measure of “our” success, they take it to mean that it is not a bad thing; we could continue spending; we could keep going on.

As a result of that, that level—I would have to use the Prime Minister's words—of “dotish” talk should be put exactly where it belongs, back out of this House, because I will tell you something, the rate of inflation, as it starts to climb, we are worse off. Whether people get more pensions, a higher salary, tax breaks; whether they get any of those handouts, what will happen is that they will be eroded by the inflation rate and you will end up having less money, although you have a larger quantity. You ask anybody in Venezuela; anybody in Argentina; anybody in Brazil; anybody in Guyana; anybody in Jamaica if they are better off with the inflation rate.

4.00 p.m.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Augustine was once the Central Bank Governor and that may have been a curse because now he has gone into politics people are attacking him for what he says politically and making a jest of certain things. And as a result of that, one has to start listening to what the messenger has to say about the economy, rather than just attacking and trivializing whatever is said because he made a very important point about the level of inflation; the higher the inflation rate is the measure of success of a government. One has to take that to understand that that being said in this honourable House is going to be believed.

So, the buildings that are going up, we have a lot of demand/pull type of inflation; demand for construction materials, demand for workers, demand—

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, just for the record, I never said that the level of inflation is a measure of our success. I said it was a by-product of our success; one can even say it was a cost of our success. I never said it was a measure of our success.

Miss Lucky: But it is indicative of success.

Dr. F. Khan: Point taken, but is that not the same thing? Mr. Speaker, when the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central indicates that all prices are going up and things are being taken into consideration; construction materials, food, labour, et cetera, how are we going to harness the labour part of it when we are supposed to be enjoying full employment? According to the Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, this country has reached significant milestones where we have now full employment—reached full employment, I think, 5 per cent.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I gave you a lot of money and you are running a house—or I gave somebody, I should not bring you into the debate—a lot of money and said, okay, you take all this money and hire anyone you want but just do not produce anything, would not everyone be working, Mr. Speaker? When you have a lot of money and a large bank account you could do what you want with it, and the end of the day if you produce nothing, the money is spent on nothing and it is consumed. Our consumption rate and our consumption movement is phenomenal; when you have—and I think the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central even said that it was \$800 million on health expenditure that went to \$2 billion, almost 200 per cent.

And if you look at the social sector and the number of social programmes—you have social programmes and nobody is against—at the last count was almost 128 social programmes. We have social programmes for everything. *[Interruption]* What I am saying is that this is expenditure of money and expenditure movement and I just want to go into a little small part of it. I never thought that I would have to quote from Emile Elias but I have to do it here. This is *Sunday Express*, November 26, 2006. *[Interruption]* What is happening in this country, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a construction boom; buildings are going up, you see it all over in the skyline, everything, cranes, whatever; and Mr. Elias said he was one of the founding members of the Trinidad and Tobago Transparency Institute and he is writing a column on this papers, indicating that Calder Hart called in the consultants

who were supposed to do the Centre for the Performing Arts and told them that financial inducements had been offered by the Chinese under the condition that they be allowed to design and build the Centre for the Performing Arts.

This is what it said. He said that financial inducements were given by the Chinese and he goes on to say that the bribe payers index Transparency International publishes the two exporting countries at the top of this bribe paying index are China and India—and he had this to say—that the Chinese are being given the go ahead by Calder Hart and people are wondering how such a mid-level mortgage bureaucrat had attained such influence over the definition of what national development really is in Trinidad and Tobago.

So we have connected that buildings are going up in this country where our local contractors and our local people are not being given the opportunity to do it; they are being pushed aside, for as Mr. Emile Elias says, the consultants who were told that financial inducements were offered—he did not say to Calder Hart, Calder Hart said financial inducements were offered, and as a result the local team was dismissed and the project handed to a Chinese contractor on a sole selective tender basis, with no competition.

Mr. Speaker, what is this country coming to? Sole selective tendering without any sort of competition seems to be the order of the day. [*Interruption*] We had sole selective tendering on the blimp;—

Mr. Rahael: Would the hon. Member give way?

Dr. F. Khan:—sole selective tendering on the “Eye-in-the-sky”; sole selective tendering in almost everything.

Mr. Rahael: Would you give way?

Dr. F. Khan: Sure.

Mr. Rahael: Thank you very much, hon. Member for Baratavia/San Juan for giving way. I think an explanation is required. What Mr. Elias did not tell you is that the local contractor and the local architects came up with a package of a cost to build the centre of some \$780 million, when the budget that the Cabinet and the Government had put in place was for \$450 million. The Chinese came forward and gave us a proposal for a design/build centre for \$480 million and we are still looking to shave off some of the cost. The local consultants had certain specifications, as an example, the steel that was required must come from the United States and the cost of that steel—when the Chinese looked at the proposal they realized that they could get steel from other parts of the world that is of the

same quality at a lower price and they were able to come in for \$480 million, that is \$300 million less and that is why we are looking towards the Chinese doing the centre.

Dr. F. Khan: I am extremely glad for the explanation, Mr. Speaker, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, because I was recently in conversation with somebody and I would not say who; that their country had tendered for a certain type of material in this country or somewhere and the specifications that they had, cost, let us say "X" amount of dollars and, lo and behold, they heard nothing about it and it ended up with the Chinese obtaining the contract on the same basis because they said that the things were cheaper.

Two things: When they examined the differences in the quality of the item that came from the other place it was not as good or structurally strong as what was coming from the higher cost place. And maybe for some reason these construction people when they say they want to get steel from a certain place there is a reason for doing so, maybe because of the experiences that they had with the—as they say—material of a less quality. And also, Mr. Speaker, the Chinese government bankrolls the Chinese, but our Government does not bankroll our contractors. As a result of that, the workers from China are able to do things at a cheaper rate because that is how the government or the Chinese Republic are able to enter and infiltrate these areas as a result of bankrolling certain firms from China. Somebody could prove me wrong on that.

Mr. Imbert: That is not true.

Mr. Rahael: Would you give way again? Again, thank you very much for giving way. Hon. Member, are you telling me that—I indicated that the quality of the steel, in fact, was just as good as the steel from the US; do you know that there is a deficit of trade between China and the United States of America to the tune of billions of dollars per month? Is it therefore that the United States is buying inferior quality from China? That is not what it is; it is that the Chinese can produce good quality products at lower prices than many countries in the world and therefore, it is not a matter of quality, it is just a matter of productivity and the fact that part of it, may be their labour cost in China and therefore that is why their prices are cheaper. And China is the leading exporter of many products to the entire world and that does not mean that their quality is not good. So I want to assure you that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago when it comes to procuring material from China is that of quality.

Dr. F. Khan: I thank the Member for the explanation again, through you, Mr. Speaker. Quality could be defined in different terms and quality at the end of the

day—quality of cloth is different to quality of steel; quality of dresses is different to quality of steel; quality of other things is different to the quality of steel, and the thing about it is, why would Mr. Emile Elias [*Interruption*] be so concerned about the financial inducements that the Chinese were supposed to be given, as Calder Hart says, so that they can build the Centre for the Performing Arts and push out our local consultants? Because there is another part of it which I did not read. The article goes on to say that in his recent letter to Transparency International, Dr. Rowley, in defending the current Government's record on alleged corruption in public procurement, asked the question, is the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago a clearing house for sole selective contracts like it was when the billion dollar airport project was handed to Nipdec with instructions to give it to a particular contractor? This is what he said. And when Patrick Manning—when the Member for San Fernando East was Leader of the Opposition he promised the JCC that he would take effective steps if returned to power to ensure, not only that corruption of the public procurement process we saw at the Piarco terminal would never be repeated, but that this would be enshrined in law. We all therefore supported his re-election in 2001 and 2002.

So this is what is being said here, Mr. Speaker. And now you have, after giving their support, we have our local contractors and architects, et cetera, being pushed out for Chinese architects and contractors, as a result of low cost strategy. Low cost strategy, it would be very easy by the Chinese, but is it not that sometimes we have to learn to take care of our own, Mr. Speaker. Because \$300 million for a system—

Mr. Imbert: I thank the Member for giving way. There are some things that, apparently, the hon. Member is not aware of. On many occasions within the last year or two when government ministries and state enterprises have gone out for bids in the local sector, in some cases they have received no bids, in some cases one bid, in some cases two bids, and on enquiry, when we asked why have you not been bidding, the response invariably is, we have enough work and we can pick and choose our projects. In particular, there was a particular project where a local contractor said that they were avoiding that project because it was in the public eye and they did not want to be judged by the public, in terms of their performance. From what you are saying, I get the sense that you are of the view that local contractors are not being given work and so on; that is entirely incorrect. With all of the contractors that we come into contact with they are stretched to maximum capacity and are having difficulty in taking on additional work. We have projects in the Ministry of Works, and Transport for example,

where contractors have received more than one job and are finding it difficult to mobilize because they simply do not have the technical resources, they simply do not have the equipment, they simply do not have the capability. So that this concept that local contractors are not being given opportunities is entirely incorrect.

Dr. F. Khan: Okay, thank you Member.

Mr. Speaker: Before you continue we did mention that the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment has a statement for the House, so I now call on the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

**Response on the Symposium for the establishment
of an aluminium industry in Trinidad and Tobago**

The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment (Hon. Penelope Beckles): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement. I propose this afternoon to highlight some of the recent initiatives undertaken by this Government to address some of the concerns regarding the establishment of an aluminium industry in Trinidad and Tobago, and to reaffirm the emphasis being placed by this Government on ensuring the protection of health and environment.

At a meeting recently in La Brea, at which the Prime Minister addressed the audience, there were calls for public involvement in the decision-making process on the establishment of an aluminium industry in Trinidad and Tobago. The hon. Prime Minister on behalf of the Government, and ever sensitive to public concerns, announced that a forum would be held where the facts surrounding the decision to pursue the aluminium option would be discussed. Also every opportunity would be given at the forum to individuals to air their opinions and concerns.

Pursuant to this commitment, the South Trinidad Chamber of Industry and Commerce in collaboration with the National Energy Corporation, the University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad and Tobago hosted a symposium on the aluminium industry in Trinidad and Tobago in south Trinidad on Wednesday, December 06, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, in this regard I would like to take this opportunity to thank the South Trinidad Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the National Energy Corporation, the University of the West Indies and the University of Trinidad and Tobago for graciously organizing this very well planned and informative symposium. The symposium was attended by a wide cross section of stakeholders, including

Government officials, community leaders, community members, various interest groups, and NGOs, and touched on a myriad of issues and a wide variety of options were expressed. There was an expert panel comprising representatives of the University of the West Indies, the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Gas Company, the National Energy Corporation, the Environmental Management Authority, medical and occupational health and safety experts, and professionals involved in the international aluminium industry.

Mr. Speaker, the Government views the symposium to have been an outstanding success and genuinely welcome all the feedback received from all those who participated. The wealth of information which was disseminated, and the contributions from both the experts and the delegates allowed for healthy discussion and sharing of ideas. I have mentioned in previous statements to this honourable House that the Government is fully cognizant of the necessity to guard against environmental degradation and the maintenance of a stable eco-system. Hence I give members the unqualified assurance that critical measures are being put in place for the protection of human health and the environment. In addition, strict measures are also being put in place to ensure the preservation of the health and safety of the communities surrounding the proposed aluminium smelters. Most of these issues and measures were highlighted in the symposium, where assurances were given that with adequate precautions, the construction and operation of the smelters should pose no significant health risk to individuals or the environment.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the Environmental Management Act of 2000, it is now the responsibility of the Environmental Management Authority through the stringent requirement of the Certificate of Environmental Clearance process, to ensure that the aluminium smelter designs include pollution prevention systems and appropriate technological developments available to ensure that emissions released into the environment are within national and internationally prescribed standards. In fact, it was highlighted by the representative of the Environmental Management Authority that the absence thus far of domestic legislation in some areas will force the application of higher standards than would otherwise be the case. In this regard, given that precautions for all the environmental and health issues are being addressed, the Government is of the view that there are no significant issues which would debar the establishment of the aluminium industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

In closing, I wish to indicate that in keeping with the Government's earlier statement to have a Motion on the aluminium industry debated in this honourable House—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. P. Beckles:—a Motion to be filed by this Government will read as follows:

Whereas the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has set itself the objective of establishing Trinidad and Tobago as a modern industrialized State;

And whereas the Government has identified aluminium manufacturing as an element in future industrial development of Trinidad and Tobago;

And whereas objections have been raised to the proposed development of such an aluminium manufacturing industry on health and environmental grounds.

Be it resolved that this House approve the development of an Aluminium Industry in Trinidad and Tobago subject to all the appropriate and necessary safeguards being put in place.

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

HERITAGE AND STABILIZATION FUND (NO. 2) BILL

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, now, aluminium coming. Mr. Speaker, I want to continue with this article for a short while again. When the Member for Diego Martin East spoke, he told us about the contractors being stretched to capacity.

Mr. Imbert: Not bidding.

Dr. F. Khan: They are not bidding, they are stretched to capacity. I want to remind the hon. Members about the City of Troy—remember the Trojan Horse—and beware of the Greeks bringing gifts; nobody does anything for nothing, so if you get something for \$400 million and our people said \$700 million, that might be the start of the Trojan Horse in this part of the world that will eventually—no, you will get the gift, you will get the Trojan Horse, but at the end of the day you may get a destruction of your city.

It sounds good initially and it sounds nice but—

Miss Lucky: At the cost of what?

Dr. F. Khan:—when a government bankrolls their citizens, and in Jamaica the Chinese government bankrolls its citizens into the supermarket industry and different other industries and they are coming here with something else.

And when a man like Emile Elias, who is known for his outbursts indicates that Calder Hart—I want to continue to stress this point—called in the consultants and told them that financial inducements have been offered by the Chinese on

condition that they be allowed to design and build the centre. Then he goes on to say that people are correctly wondering how a foreign middle level mortgage bureaucrat has attained such influence over the definition of what national development really is in Trinidad and Tobago. We need to be aware that Transparency International publishes a second index ‘the bribe payer index’ and the two exporting countries at the top of that worldwide list are China and India. We had experience with India under the UNC with dog rice and the old sugar mills sold to Caroni as new, and that never worked up to today. Are we to believe that the Chinese contractors operating in Trinidad and Tobago are only, allegedly corrupt in other parts of the world?

Mr. Speaker, the thing I am trying to bring out is that our people are being dispossessed.

Mr. Imbert: You are next to Yetming and you are saying that.

Dr. F. Khan: He is not Chinese, he is Japanese.

Mr. Imbert: That is apartheid. [*Inaudible*]

Dr. F. Khan: He is Trinidadian. Mr. Speaker, on that note, the Member for Diego Martin East brought a point as you say, Mr. Yetming is not Chinese.

Mr. Imbert: He is not?

Dr. F. Khan: He is Trinidadian. He is from Trinidad and Tobago. We are all Trinidadians and Tobagonians—you including everybody here—and it is time we stop saying you are Indian, you are African, you are Chinese, you are this and you are that.

Miss Lucky: Thank you very much. Well said. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. F. Khan: It is time you stop doing it. [*Crosstalk*] When the UNC was in office—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. F. Khan:—we were able to use our own people to do our development. We made sure that our people—

Miss Lucky: I have Chinese in me.

Hon. Member: Corrupted.

Dr. F. Khan: Look Emile Elias said that PNM corrupt too with Calder Hart and sole selective tendering. [*Interruption*] No, the sole selective tendering with the blimp, the “eye-in-the-sky”—what is the other one—the OPVs.

Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Bill
[DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, December 08, 2006

Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that for some strange reason now that the PNM is in office we cannot seem to get things done on that basis. Take for instance, “\$2 billion to close BWIA”, “1,000 lose jobs”, “\$300 million start for new airline”; this is in the *Newsday*, Saturday, December 02. When you dissect this 1,000 of our citizens would be out of a job and with a good VSEP package; that is what they say. The same way, how many thousands of Caroni workers are now suffering who had VSEP packages. And a lot of them are suffering, they cannot get the land that was promised to them, they cannot get the systems that were promised to them, but they were dispossessed.

Our future in this country will not belong to our Trinidadian and Tobagonian brothers and sisters. It may belong to the other system and other people who are entering this country, because the Heritage and Stabilisation Bill—and I go back to it a little, Mr. Speaker—the money that is put there will be for them because a lot of us might not be here due to the effects and the actions of the PNM Government.”

Miss Lucky: The smelter.

Dr. F. Khan: The smelter, too. Now that we are going to have smelter, Mr. Speaker, we might all die. [*Interruption*] There is the show, “Mad Max 1, 2 and 3 Beyond Thunder Moment”, you ever saw it, Mr. Speaker, good shows, Mel Gibson, Tina Turner. It showed you what could happen with holocausts. We may start in Chatham, people might start to get unusual cancers, they may start to get stomach cancers, but the system in this country of reporting in certain surgical movements or whatever, only if you die there is a cancer registry, there is no real reporting on the cancers that enter, only if you die. If you die the cancer is reported, so if you die from cancer the registry takes over, however, if somebody enters the system with stomach cancer, lung cancer, liver cancer, nasal cancer, cancer of the—what the aluminium smelter is going to do is that you are going to get a lot of respiratory cancers, nasal, pharyngeal tracheobronchial and also pulmonary; that is what you are going to get. But it is not going to be recorded because there is no recording system in this country for people who enter a hospital with cancer except when they die and the volume that will die over a period of time will not be recorded, so at the end of the day we will not know. I have urged the Minister that maybe, he could indicate to the people in the Ministry of Health that one should start documenting; documenting on record sent to the ministry what cancers came in this month; we do it for communicable diseases.

Mr. Rahael: Whatever treatment is given to patients at the National Radiation Centre is recorded.

Dr. F. Khan: Sometimes you do surgical movement and they do not go to radiotherapy. What I am saying, any cancer that comes in like communicable diseases should be recorded, and you are able to have a database. [*Interruption*] I am just saying database.

Mr. Rahael: I would just like to inform the hon. Member, and again, thank you for giving way, that any person who requires radiation or chemotherapy and attends the National Radiation Centre in St. James is recorded. And just to give you a figure, as of today, for the year 2006, 1,141 new patients were treated at the National Radiation Centre in St. James. The figures are already alarming.

Dr. F. Khan: Minister, I could give you some figures of people who did not go to St. James.

Mr. Rahael: I know—

Dr. F. Khan: I could call it—[*Interruption*] Not chemotherapy, people go for radiation for prostate cancer; what I am saying to you is that there should be a private and public sector, we have a database for what is coming in. In doing so, Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*] what I am saying is that you are able to tell what cancers are going to come out from the vicinity of the Chatham area and the aluminium smelter plant by recording it up front.

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

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we broke for the tea break, I was just indicating to the Minister of Health, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, that we need to have some form of record keeping and database management for the cancer cases, with names and addresses when they come in to both private and public hospital for management. Right now as the Minister said, there is a situation at the National Oncology Centre where cancer treatment cases are recorded, but there are a lot of cancer cases that enter the hospital but do not go to the Radiotherapy Centre. And I was saying, a database management is going to be accurate based on demographic area, demographic information and what type of cancer is occurring as a result of the area. I see that the statement by the Minister, indicated: "Government to address some of the concerns regarding the establishment of an aluminium industry and to reaffirm the emphasis being placed on this Government on ensuring the protection of human health and the environment."

Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Bill
[DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, December 08, 2006

Mr. Speaker, we know and I have learnt it in the last 11 years, that the Opposition will have its say all the time and the Speaker allows that, but the Government will have its way because they have the majority. That is the system and we have to understand that: We can speak as much about it. So if the aluminium smelters do come into the country, although some of the population, are dead set against, some are for it, one has to put things in place to understand whether the demographics of cancer are going to increase.

Mr. Speaker: We heard from the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment that a Motion will be filed, I think it is downstairs, dealing with the aluminium smelter—do not anticipate it, save your fire for the other occasion with respect to aluminium smelters.

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for guiding me. I am just indicating that maybe when in the public expenditure on the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Bill, you might be able to use some of that to set up the database. I go back to this part “Establishment and purpose of Fund”, clause 3(2) where it says that:

“The purpose of the Fund is to save and invest surplus petroleum revenues, derived from production business in order to —

- (a) cushion the impact on or sustain public expenditure capacity during periods of revenue downturn whether caused by a fall in crude oil or natural gas;
- (b) generate an alternate stream of income so as to support public expenditure...”

Also Mr. Speaker, 3(1) says:

“There is hereby established the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund to be denominated in the currency of the United States dollar.”

Mr. Speaker, I just want to read a little thing here from the *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday, December 02, 2006 that states, “World Oil Prices Slip”. This is an article out of London and I quote:

“World oil prices fell slightly on profit-taking yesterday, though they remained close to two-month high points and amid further sign that the OPEC export group intends to cut its output again, (dealing with the problem)...”

So this is one part of it and another headline:

“Hard landing fears hit dollar

The dollar fell further on the currency markets yesterday as weak US economic data heightened investor fears that the US economy could be heading for a hard landing.

The latest sell-off, which has been particularly sharp against the euro and sterling, came after figures suggesting US manufacturing had contracted for the first time in three-and-a-half years in November.

The US currency plunged 0.8 per cent to a fresh 20-month low of \$1.3348 against the euro and 1 per cent...against the pound, a new 14-year trough”

The reason I said this, we are experiencing a very high level of inflation rate, which is not being curbed, and it has been indicated that is the secret of our success.

Mr. Speaker, we are saving this fund in US dollars; we see the US dollar has been declining for years, so against the euro and also the sterling, one wonders if the currency movement is going to take place with investment analysis so that we will be saving this fund in hard currency that we will not lose as a result of both bilateral demons of inflation and currency exchange rate fluctuations.

Also, world oil prices slipped which means to say that we will be depending very soon on our natural gas reserves, et cetera, to buffer this stabilization fund and I am going back a bit to what we were speaking about when I indicated the Calder Hart’s Chinese factor and the use of foreign professionals, those bankrolled by the Government and having certain financial inducements. We go to what has been happening over the last couple of years in the PNM Government and it started off with the Yardies.

The Yardies were brought in to so called “buffer” and decide on the movement in the police service. In other words, indicating that our police after almost 40 years have now been deemed to be not as proficient and professional as they should be. We were initially told that these Yardies were CIA men, then British Secret Agents, MI5, et cetera, only to be told that they were retired police officers from wherever they came from and money is being expended to have these gentlemen, as they say beef up the police service, and in doing so, they are enjoying salaries that are way above our senior police officers, and I wonder if this is the trend that is taking place. Because here we are speaking about putting money into a Heritage and Stabilisation Fund for our future generations, and at the same time bring in as they say, Trojan horses bearing gifts to destroy whatever movements and saying that we have full employment.

Full employment in the terms of CEPEP, URP, Social Services and giving handouts is really not sustainable full employment. Once the money flow decreases—if it ever does, hopefully it will not—what is going to happen to our nationals who have become dependent on CEPEP, URP, Social Services and on everything else? All of that is pulling in inflation to some extent. We were indicating to the Government a couple years ago that we should utilize those services so that we can, as they say, have a food development programme rather than a clean drain programme.

Mr. Speaker, \$800 million is being spent on CEPEP and when a small shower of rain, you end up with floods all over the place, so obviously, the performance factor, the measurement of the performance of CEPEP is dismal. I go back to something else.

When we took \$2 billion to close BWIA and the movement was done by certain individuals who brought in another foreigner, a fellow called Davis, to close down the airline and for some strange reason, he has decided to carry it to a low cost strategy rather than a differentiated type of strategy. The low cost strategy he is intending to put forward is similar to that of Southwest Airlines, no frills, low cost, whatever, whatever.

Mr. Speaker, one may be able to imitate a low cost movement, but one might not be able to imitate what really went on in Southwest Airlines, which is the people's and the intangible type of movement in that airline. So we end up closing BWIA, putting a thousand people on the breadline, rather than trying to work another system or the Government should throw a lot of money behind to find out exactly what was the cause and what was the differentiation fracture we might be able to do. So I am saying another foreigner came in, as the Chinese came in, what Emile Elias said and now another one has come and then we go to this one. *Trinidad Guardian*, Saturday December 02 and I quote what is happening here:

“No bids on three blocks

Many of the major oil and gas companies opted not to bid for the shallow and nearshore blocks which were opened by the Minister of Energy on Thursday.

Instead it has potentially opened the door for our people to bid.

So what I am saying, we are not good enough to open systems to go this way, but we are here, since the Government is taking note of this, to bring in foreigners because our people seem to be either overworked, overburdened, overbid and at the

end of the day not being able to transfer across into a productive nature. And the last point I want to make, Mr. Speaker, we are taking money from—and building and being proud of it—UTT.

Now the University of Trinidad and Tobago came about as a result of the Government wanting to bring, I would think, a certain level of technological improvement into the system. UTT is a good idea, but what it is being used for is to silence the University of the West Indies by means of currency throughout, is not as it is supposed to be. That is the same movement Forbes Burnham did in Guyana. Forbes Burnham brought in the University of Guyana and he did not partake in the University of the West Indies, and as a result of that, he was able to put his intellectuals into that university and controlled the major companies et cetera, both public and private after a while.

It is a system that Castro has implemented in Cuba and Chavez is also implementing it. When I see that our money is going like \$2.7 million to Southern Alberta Institute of Technology; \$18.7 million to the University of Texas; zero millions dollars going to Trinidad and Tobago, UWI; Cambridge University, \$21 million; South Hampton University \$3 million, et cetera; and Johns Hopkins University, \$60 million, the life of the contract.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I make mention of these figures for the simple reason that what is happening herein because the history of what occurs does not really change in their actions. If the PNM Government is going to throw money at this level to various universities to bring expertise to that of the University of Trinidad and Tobago—I want to go a little further before I jump back to this point. When the University of London gives external law degrees to different institutions in this country, they are granted LLB degrees from the University of London. When the UWI medical degree, MBBS—we were given the charter by the University of London, our degrees were recognized in London.

Mr. Speaker, I want the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education to look into this. We are giving money out to various specialist institutions, millions of

dollars who are coming to give programmes and have developed programmes in UTT, but yet when you look at this part of it, and I am going to read it:

“A UTT site contact with Cambridge University and a subsidiary company, Cambridge Manufacturing Industry Limited was clear that ‘for the avoidance of doubt, the parties agreed that UTT students shall not receive any University accreditation as a result of attending and successfully completing any course developed under this agreement’.”

So, what we are having, our money is paying these people to come in to develop programmes, but we are not good enough, in the UTT, to be given the degree that they have for their people. So what I am saying, that is a dichotomy in itself. So when we take public money and give it to this type of movement in view of developing a system or organizing a system, I want to find out exactly why the University of Trinidad and Tobago degree will not be recognized; and Ken Julien, who is under attack these days indicates that the accreditation will come to graduates who leave UTT. But if the Government of the day is paying that kind of money from the funds that are available to them, why is it not that Johns Hopkins if they are given a programme here, the people who are developed in that programme will be given a Johns Hopkins Medical Degree or a Massachusetts Institution of Technology Degree or that type of degree?

So if we are utilizing our money in that regard, when the Prime Minister comes and boasts about jobs and jobs for all; low unemployment rate; the non-oil sector is improving; and the Member for St. Augustine did not know what he is speaking about, I want to say, take note. Mr. Speaker, the Trojan horses which is the Chinese factor, nothing wrong with China, but their human rights record is not as great, but yet nobody is seeing that part of it, even the United States is not seeing that part of it. Remember Tiananmen Square what occurred there? People are not supposed to speak about that; if you go to China and you talk about it, everybody shuts up and you are escorted out of the country.

So, what I am saying to you, we are bringing this level inside this country; we are not taking care of our own people; we are bringing foreigners right now to deal with us; we are giving sole selective tenders. When the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Bill comes really into vogue, a couple years down the road, when we see oil prices slipping and US dollars decreasing, who says that they are not going to use it to buffer and give out these monies to these foreigners who are not taking care of our people?

And lastly, I want the Minister or the Prime Minister if he does listen, to indicate and demand that if he is paying that kind of money to UTT and those

kinds of institutions that the degrees that they have and the degrees that they confer should be that of the University in collaboration with UTT.

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

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make a brief contribution in this debate and I do so proudly because we are discussing the administration of a fund that was conceived and created by the United National Congress. When the Member for Diego Martin Central was speaking, he said that we are trying to take paternity; we are not trying to take paternity for the Bill; we are taking paternity for the fund. This fund was established, as you know in 2000 and the interim fund was established in 2000 when the oil price was about \$20 per barrel.

We, in Trinidad and Tobago, are in a very fortunate position, in that, we are discussing today how to save money, whereas other countries are discussing how to balance their budgets and some of them are even going cap in hand to multi-lateral agencies for funding to run their affairs. So we are in a very fortunate position that we are discussing today how to save money.

The Prime Minister when he was speaking made reference to a statement made by the Member for St. Augustine, when the Member for St. Augustine said, “We have today a government in retreat”, and the Prime Minister used his 75 minutes regaling us with statistics, talking about the Government's performance. But the Prime Minister only gave half of the story and I would like to complete the picture by giving the other half of the story.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said that the unemployment rate—and the Prime Minister has been saying that in Parliament and outside of Parliament; he has been beating his chest and saying that the unemployment rate has now come down to 5.9 per cent. What does this mean? In 1995, when the UNC took office, the unemployment rate was 17.2 per cent; in 2001, when we left office the unemployment rate was 10.8 per cent. So the UNC had brought down the unemployment rate by 6.4 per cent during the six years that we were in office. The unemployment rate in 2001 was 10.8 per cent; the Prime Minister said it is now 5.9 per cent; that is 4.2 per cent.

They have brought down the unemployment by 4.2 or 4.3 per cent and they are beating their chest all over the place. The unemployment rate had come down by 5.8/5.9 per cent [*Desk thumping*] when the oil price was \$9 a barrel to \$18 a barrel; we brought down the unemployment rate by 5.9 per cent. You have an oil price of \$60/\$70 per barrel; you have brought down the unemployment rate by 4.8

per cent and you are beating your chest and saying you have done so well. But, this 5.9 per cent or 4.6 or the 4.8 they have brought it down by, they have included in that the thousands who are in the Civilian Conservation Corps which did not exist in our time, the OJT, CEPEP, and other programmes they make up, those that have been employed.

The Prime Minister himself said again and I have the *Hansard* here, but he did say that during the period 2001 to now, they have employed 45,000 persons. They have employed 45,000 persons more from 2001 to now. So if you add all the OJTs, Civilian Conservation Corps, CEPEP and URP, those are the employment opportunities that this Government has created. So when the Prime Minister said that the unemployment rate has come down to 5.9 per cent, we must understand it in that context. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Sorry?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: He said that you do not like poor people, that is why you are complaining about CEPEP and so on.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, let me make the point once and for all on behalf of all of us here. We have nothing against the workers who are employed in CEPEP; we have nothing against them. [*Desk thumping*] We have nothing against workers who are employed in OJT; we have nothing against workers who are employed in URP; we have nothing against workers who are in the CCC; we have nothing against these workers. What we are saying is that they should be given the opportunity to get better, well-paid sustainable employment; well-paid jobs. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we are saying; that is the point we are making.

Mr. Valley: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Sorry? You agree with that? Thank you. The next piece of the spreadsheet I want to read, Mr. Speaker, is murders. The Prime Minister said how the Government was doing so well and the last statement he made before he concluded his contribution is and I quote:

“Government has done well by today providing a significantly improved standard of living and quality of life than that to which the people of this country had become accustomed and certainly, which they experienced in 2001.”

Mr. Speaker, the murder rate in 1999, one hundred and something; 1996, 120; 1997, 115; 1998, 97; 1999, 92; 2000, 103; 2001, 151; these were the murder

statistics during the time that the UNC was in office. These statistics the Prime Minister did not read. In 2002, when the PNM took office, 171; 2003, 229; 2004, 260; 2005, 386 and up to today, 350 and counting. These are statistics that the Prime Minister did not read. What he said was that right now Trinidad is the place to be. If Trinidad is the place to be right now, then he has to explain to us why so many people are leaving Trinidad; why so many are migrating? The professionals, businessmen, those who can afford it, people are migrating and leaving Trinidad and not only that, when the UNC was in office many people who were living abroad were coming back to Trinidad to live, that is certainly not happening anymore. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I just want to deal with one more and that is kidnapping. Before this Government came into office in 2002, kidnapping was not in the vocabulary of Trinidad and Tobago. We were not hearing about kidnapping and I am talking about kidnapping for ransom. We never heard about kidnapping for ransom before this Government came into office. The statistics are here. Kidnapping: 2001, 135; 2002, 235; 2003, 235; 2004, 177; 2005, 380; and 101 so far.

As we speak—and I do not know if the situation has changed since I came to Parliament—the young lady who was kidnapped from Couva, I do not think she has been located as yet. I know the husband very well, he is a good friend of mine. He was a pilot with BWIA; he has two young children, seven years and four years. Up to now he does not know where his wife is. His wife was kidnapped from her home on her birthday and our sympathies go out to him and we hope that they can have a speedy resolution in that he can find his wife as quickly as possible.

That is what is happening. Those are the statistics that the Prime Minister did not mention when he was reading his spreadsheets on how well the Government has done. But, there is one issue that I would really like to address in a few minutes and that is the issue—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Rahael: I thought you said that is the last issue?

Dr. H. Rafeeq: I said the last one I wanted to read on the spreadsheet. There is one issue that I want to address in the next few minutes and that is—the economists will talk in their own language about it—the issue of inflation. The Member for Diego Martin East, the Member for Diego Martin West, the Member for San Fernando East, all of them said when they were speaking, that the inflation was mainly due to food prices. If that is in fact true, then who is responsible for the increase in food prices in this country?

Mr. Rahael: The middlemen.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Who is responsible for the food prices going up by 26 per cent, 30 per cent, 50 per cent and 60 per cent? Who is responsible for that and who is responsible for correcting that situation? We told this Government before they closed Caroni (1975) Limited they should have come here with a food policy for Trinidad and Tobago; that is what they should have done. They should have brought a food policy for Trinidad and Tobago and Caroni (1975) Limited certainly would have been a key element in that food policy. They went ahead and closed Caroni (1975) Limited, nothing was done, and today we are paying high prices for food. The Minister said that vegetables went up by 60 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to ask and I do not know if the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources can tell us? How much food we import in this country and what is the policy as far as the Government is concerned? Within the next few years how much food would the Government like us to import and how much the Government would like us to produce locally? What kind of ratio does the Government want; how much food we import and how much food we grow locally?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: He has no idea.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: We would like to know what kind of analysis has been done as to how much of each of the vegetables we consume on an annual basis: how much tomatoes we consumed; how much pumpkin we consume; and how much lettuce we consume. Do we have that kind of information? If we have that kind of information, then how much do we plan to grow in Trinidad and Tobago and how much do we plan to import? Do we know all of these things?

Mr. Speaker, does this Government have any strategic initiative as to plant food? Let us take one vegetable, tomatoes for instance. Does this Government know—as I said how much we need in Trinidad on an annual basis—as far as the soil conditions are concerned, where are the best places in Trinidad that tomatoes can grow? Does the Government know how many people would be required to grow the amount of tomatoes that we need on an annual basis in Trinidad and Tobago? Does the Government know all of these things? Then why do you not implement it?

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, why did we have to endure a 60 per cent increase in vegetables before they did that? Mr. Speaker, if this Government had a proper policy on

agriculture, it would have said, "Okay, we will take out 1,000 or 2,000 acres for tomatoes," or whatever. Some of the workers from Caroni (1975) Limited could have been deployed there and they would have started that project. They could have gone on like that and over a period of a few years we would have become self-sufficient, as far as vegetables are concerned. Today, we would not have had to pay the prices we now do; there would not have been the level of inflation we now have.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture is not an encouraging enterprise for any young person; it is difficult work and sometimes there are so many risks associated with it. It is difficult to attract people to come into the agricultural sector. The Government had about 9,000 persons already employed in the agricultural sector, who had been there for so long. The Government should have courted these workers and ensured that they stayed in agriculture in order to develop the agricultural industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

What did the Government do? The Government laid off all these persons. They trained some of them. With the moneys they got, some of these persons bought maxi-taxis and opened little parlours. A lot of them will not be going back into agriculture, regardless of what type of incentives you give them. The young persons who are accessing the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) will only be interested in agriculture, as far as the lands they can get, but they will not remain in it for any sustainable length of time.

Mr. Speaker, I promised that I would not be long, so if I am permitted, I will make one final point.

The Member for San Juan/Barataria spoke quite a lot on the health issue, but there is just one issue I will like to raise. Over the last few weeks we have seen coming out of the news media horror stories in the health sector. I will just like to bring to the attention of the Minister—not that I do not think he already knows—the plight of persons in the Caura Hospital.

This article is from the *Express* of Wednesday 06 December, 2006. I will read a few paragraphs of it:

"Dr. Dottin Ramoutar is the thoracic medical director of the Caura Chest Hospital. He said that this facility currently has no working generator."

The Minister said a while ago that the Minister of Health has been given \$2.8 billion, but Dr. Dottin Ramoutar said that this facility has no working generator.

“This creates a major problem in the operations in the hospital. When there is a disruption of power all operations in the hospital critical or otherwise cease immediately.’ ‘Another major problem is the absence of a working switchboard system making it difficult for calls to be received to and from the location.’ He said that he had been promised a new one a long time now, but it is yet to materialize. Ramoutar said also that another major problem at the hospital was the X-ray machine, which was more than 30 years old. Because of the age of the machine there is an increased risk of radiation. Asked why one was not bought before, he said whenever he asked he was told that there never was money enough to buy a new one.”

Mr. Speaker, an X-ray machine is the most important investigation that is required in the thoracic hospital in Caura. If you do not have a proper X-ray machine, then you cannot treat your patients properly. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Rahael: I just want to inform the hon. Member that an X-ray machine for Caura and also for Chaguanas has already been on order and delivery is expected momentarily.

Dr. H. Rafeeq: After six years of this Government receiving so much money—

Mr. Rahael: That X-ray machine was out of order long before that. Why did you not change it?

Dr. H. Rafeeq: You are now going into your sixth year and now looking at purchasing one? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. H. Rafeeq: Mr. Speaker, there is a lot I can say, as far as the health sector is concerned, but we will leave that for another time. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. H. Rafeeq: For some time now, the CT scan machine in the San Fernando General Hospital has not been working. Poor people are now going around with lists to collect \$2,700 to go to private nursing homes to have a CT scan done. That is certainly deplorable; poor people in an age where the Minister of Health has \$2.8 billion; in an age where in the Mount Hope hospital a dog can get a CT scan; [*Desk thumping*] and we have people in the San Fernando hospital having to go around with a list, begging for \$2,700 to have a CT scan done in Port of Spain. [*Crosstalk*]

With these few words, I thank the Members for giving me this opportunity and I know that we will have other opportunities to raise other issues.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House be now adjourned to Friday, December 15, at 1.30 p.m. I inform Members that on that day the Government plans to debate Bill No. 2 on the today's Order Paper, the Immigration (Advance Passenger Information) Bill. I beg to move. [*Crosstalk*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.37 p.m.