

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

**IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON OCTOBER 17, 2002**

SESSION 2006—2007

VOLUME 23

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 01, 2007

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from sittings of the House: hon. Stanford Callender, Member of Parliament for Tobago West for the period May 30 to June 07 and hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, Member of Parliament for Arouca South from today's sitting of the House. The leave which these Members seek is granted. [*Crosstalk*]

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY BILL

(Appointment of Joint Select Committee)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. President of the Senate, Dr. Linda Baboolal. I will read her communication to me.

“Please be informed that at a Sitting of the Senate held on Tuesday May 22, 2007, the following Resolution which was moved by the Honourable Minister of Public Administration and Information was approved:

‘**BE IT RESOLVED** that the following five (5) Senators be appointed to serve with the five (5) Members appointed by the House of Representatives on the Joint Select Committee established to consider and report on a Bill entitled, ‘An Act to prohibit certain kinds of discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different status, to establish an Equal Opportunity Commission and an Equal Opportunity Tribunal and for other related matters.’

Ms. Christine Kangaloo

Mrs. Christine Sahadeo

Mr. Arnold Piggott

Mr. Wade Mark

Professor Ramesh Deosaran”

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2001. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
2. Annual audited financial statements of the Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation Limited for the year ended December 31, 2006. [*Hon. Colm Imbert*]
3. Annual financial statements of the Business Development Company Limited for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. Colm Imbert*]
4. Annual audited financial statements of Taurus Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. Colm Imbert*]
Papers 2 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
5. Report of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for the period October, 2005 to September, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

DEOXYRIBONUCLEIC ACID (DNA) BILL**Joint Select Committee Report****(Presentation)**

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the fourth interim report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Bill, 2006.

FINANCE BILL

Order for second reading read.

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

That a Bill to provide for the imposition or variation of certain duties and taxes and to introduce other provisions of a fiscal nature and for related matters, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year when the budget was presented, the Government outlined a list of initiatives intended to improve the living conditions for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, we have finalized the legislation which allows us to

implement these promises as we move towards the attainment of the objectives of Vision 2020.

By these measures today, we propose to provide goods and services for the population of Trinidad and Tobago consistent with meeting our commitments to the development of our people. For quite some time now, this country has been experiencing a very favourable and buoyant economic environment which has been reflected by positive internal and external macroeconomic indicators.

We need to remind ourselves that high oil prices are only part of the story of our economy's current success and, by itself, high oil prices will not generate economic sustainability. We should remember that there are several countries that have benefited from oil and other commodity booms and remained immersed in economic difficulties and with uncertain economic prospects. What is our current economic reality? Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth has averaged around 10 per cent over the past five years. In the process, per capita GDP has more than doubled since last year. The unemployment rate has declined to 5 per cent, the lowest ever recorded, and even based on 2002 data, poverty has been cut by one-half to 17 per cent. The rapid growth of the economy and the creation of several new jobs since that time would have reduced this figure even further.

The energy sector has been the made main driver of our economic growth, however, the non-energy sector has grown at a robust 7 per cent every year since 2002. We have a very healthy non-energy export sector, which is the envy of the Caribbean, and further diversification into services, for example, banking and tourism, is proceeding apace. Our energy sector has been diversified to reduce its vulnerability; and now we are a major world exporter of natural gas and petrochemicals.

This is why we say that we have a healthy economy that is built on strong foundations and well positioned for sustained growth and development. But this is not my judgment or the judgment of biased insiders or, in fact, the judgment of the Government. The sentiments are reflected in the assessment of respected international experts. Standard and Poor's, one of the highly respected international credit rating agencies upgraded this country's long-term foreign currency bond ratings from BBB in 2003 to A-minus in August 2007.

Among the reasons that Standard and Poor's have cited for their decision to upgrade our credit ratings are: prudent monetary policy; the buoyant energy sector; the sustained positive performance of the economy and the continued surpluses on the fiscal and external accounts. In its recently published regional economic outlook, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has also recognized Trinidad and Tobago as one of the fastest growing and more dynamic economies in Latin America and

Finance Bill
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, June 01, 2007

the Caribbean region. This is the thirteenth consecutive year of economic expansion and the second year of double-digit growth in the past five years. The energy sector continues to be the main driving force in this impressive growth trend.

While it is a fact that the inflation rate, which tended towards double-digits at the end of 2006, was the primary macroeconomic challenge facing policy makers, the central Government responded by focusing on supply side constraints and public education. It must also be noted that expanding the economy was a necessary step towards achieving the goal of diversifying the economy and providing a platform for our next level of investment. An increase in the inflation rate was inevitable because of the fall in the unemployment rate. If almost everyone is working, then there is more money being spent; consequently, demand increases and this in turn increases prices. Additionally, supply side issues have also contributed to the increase in the inflation rate. Government responded quickly and effectively, using a mix of fiscal and monetary policies.

The efforts of the Government were successful as the headline inflation rate tended downwards from 10 per cent, 9.6 per cent, 9.1 per cent, 8.6 per cent, 8.4 per cent, slowing to 8 per cent in March 2007, which was the fifth consecutive month of decline since the rate peaked at 10 per cent in October 2006. As we have said before, we expect that where there are peculiar situations from time to time, it may go up, but it ultimately is intended to go down in the short term. We have a target of 7 per cent and in the longer term 5 per cent; consequences of our expansion programme.

With this challenge being addressed, the Government continued its programme of pursuing policies designed towards improving the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. To this end, the Government was able to achieve the goal of offering free tertiary education for all citizens, as well as reductions in the personal income and corporate taxes from 30 per cent to 25 per cent. All citizens who cannot afford to pay for medication for chronic diseases now have access to the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (C-DAP). This programme was first introduced in 2003 and provides universal coverage for free drugs for eleven types of diseases. Additionally, all citizens now have access to quality and affordable housing. This policy reflects the Government's desire to carefully set the stage for providing a better quality of life for all our people.

Government's priority is not only focused on the current state of the economy, but also on the future of the economy. The Heritage and Stabilization Fund is one way the Government is addressing this issue. The legislation that would regulate

the management of this fund was recently passed in Parliament in March. The Government, in collaboration with the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, has also launched its financial literacy programme which will give all citizens the knowledge to deal with the basics of everyday financial management.

Accordingly, in light of the fact that a large proportion of the resource rent associated with crude oil and natural gas accrues to the Government, fiscal policy is the primary challenge through which, not only the quantum of revenues—and that is royalties and taxes—is determined, but also the distribution of these revenues through generations. We are, therefore, ensuring that the revenues gained from the country's natural resources will be enjoyed by many generations to come. The measures prescribed in the Bill before this House shows our commitment to ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago will not go the way of other economies that experienced this problem, but will stay on the developmental path that we have chosen.

Mr. Speaker, I will now examine the Finance Bill clause by clause. Clause 1 which cites the short title is self-explanatory. Clause 2 proposes amendments to the Central Tenders Board Ordinance so as to increase the spending limits of the Chief Administrator of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) to the limit authorized for permanent secretaries. Being responsible for the entire island of Tobago, it is only reasonable that the Chief Administrator be given the same resources available to permanent secretaries. Section 27B(2) of the Central Tenders Board Ordinance will therefore be amended to achieve this.

Clause 3 proposes amendments to the Retiring Allowances (Legislative Service) Act, Chap. 2:03, by implementing the recommendations made by the Salaries Review Commission, which improves the retirement allowances of all legislators and their surviving spouses. Let me indicate that at the committee stage there is an error which we will need to correct.

Clause 5(a) and (b) would amend sections 3 and 13(2) of the Gambling and Betting Act. These provisions define slot machines and tokens, removing any ambiguity as to whether slot machines would be considered gambling machines for the purposes of that Act. Accordingly, this measure would enforce the ban on the importation and use of slot machines, which took effect from March 01, 2007, and will reiterate the position of Government on casino-type gaming activities. Government is totally against the operation of casinos and all casino-type establishments. Studies have shown the link between gaming activities and the erosion of societies.

Finance Bill
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, June 01, 2007

Government has acknowledged that in recent years the plight of pensioners needed to be addressed. In an effort to alleviate the financial difficulties of government pensioners, Government has recommended that the minimum pension payable in respect of service under the Government or other public service would be set at \$1,150 per month. This means that all civil servants will receive a pension no less than \$1,150 per month. This will apply to the following categories of pensioners in the Government service:

- Retiring allowance (legislative service) clause 3.
- Judges, (including widows pension) clause 4.
- Prison service, clause 6.
- Retiring allowance, (diplomatic service) clause 7.
- Civil servants, clause 8.
- Widows and orphans pension, clause 9.
- Municipal corporations, clause 10.
- Fire service, clause 13
- President, (including widows pension).
- Prime Minister, (including widows pension).
- Teachers, clause 14;
- Teachers (assisted secondary schools) clause 15.
- Industrial Court.
- Police Service.
- Defence Force.

This measure will take effect from October 1, 2006. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: What about Special Reserve Police?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: All that is covered in this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is committed to caring for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly the most vulnerable, including our senior citizens. We have implemented a number of measures to improve their living conditions, including

access to free medical care and drugs, free bus passes, a minimum old age pension of \$1,150 per month, which is an increase from \$720 in 2001. Clause 11(1)(a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) amends the Old Age Pensions Act, Chap. 32:02, to be renamed as the "Senior Citizens Grant". With effect from October 01, 2006, there will be one qualifying income ceiling, which is income not exceeding \$25,800 annually

Clause 11(1)(f) repeals section 3 of the Old Age Pensions Act. This clause outlines provisions for payments of the Senior Citizens Grant. Prior to October 01, 2006, there were two bands of pensions, where persons whose annual income was less than \$1,200 were entitled to \$1,150 per month and persons whose annual income exceeded \$1,200, but did not exceed \$12,000, were entitled to \$1,050 per month. With effect from October 01, 2006, the person who satisfies the statutory conditions of age and residence and receives an annual income not exceeding \$12,000, is entitled to a Senior Citizens Grant of \$1,150 per month.

Further, the following applies: a person whose annual income does not exceed \$1,200 is entitled to a monthly allowance of \$200; therefore, that person will now receive \$1,350 per month. A person whose annual income exceeds \$1,200, but does not exceed \$12,000, is entitled to a monthly allowance of \$100; therefore, that person will now receive \$1,250 per month.

Clause 11(1)(f)(3) and (4) amends the Old Age Pensions Act to include persons whose annual income does not exceed \$25,800 and who previously did not qualify for old age pension. A person whose annual income exceeds \$12,000, but does not exceed \$25,800 will now be entitled to a monthly grant of one-twelfth of the difference between \$25,800 and the annual income received by that person. A person whose annual income exceeds \$24,000 but does not exceed \$25,800, will now be entitled to a monthly grant of \$150.

Clause 11(2) validates any payment in excess of \$1,050 which is made on or after October 01, 2006, to a person eligible to receive a Senior Citizens' Grant. The payments were, in fact, being made and this Bill seeks to validate those payments.

Clause 12(1) amends section 11A(3) of the Public Assistance Act, Chap 32:03, to increase the Disability Assistance Grant by \$100, from \$800 to \$900. This increase attempts to alleviate the circumstances of physically challenged individuals, catering to their special needs and concerns. As at May 2007, 16,010 persons are benefiting from this grant. Clause 12(2) validates any payment in excess of \$800 made by the board on or after October 01, 2006, to a person eligible to receive disability assistance.

Finance Bill
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, June 01, 2007

Clause 16(1)(a) amends section 8(1)(x) of the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01. Subsection (x) exempts from tax lump sum death benefits paid under a pension plan. The amendment introduces no substantive change in the law, but merely seeks to make clear that this exemption applies to pension plans approved by the Board of Inland Revenue. Clause 16(1)(b) renumbers section 8A of the Income Tax Act, which was introduced in the Finance Act, 2006 as section 8B. This was necessary because there already is in existence a section 8B which was introduced by the Finance Act, 2004.

Clause 16(1)(c) amends sections 10(9) and 10(10) of the Income Tax Act. These provisions deal with deductions for tertiary education expenses. The Finance Act, 2006, sought to limit this deduction to expenses incurred at foreign educational institutions, other than regional public institutions, that is, the University of the West Indies. However, this was not achieved due to a drafting error. The amendment contained in this Bill corrects this error, so as to achieve the intention of limiting the claim for tertiary education expenses to foreign institutions other than regional public institutions. It should be borne in mind that persons attending local institutions, as well as regional public institutions, benefit under the GATE programme.

Sections 10(9) and 10(10) of the Income Tax Act are further amended to increase the deduction for tertiary education from \$18,000 to \$60,000. Section 10(10) also makes it clear that the maximum amount that could be claimed per household is limited to \$60,000. Clause 16(1)(d) repeals section 10B of the Income Tax Act. Section 10B makes provision for a human resource development allowance. A similar provision in the Corporation Tax Act was repealed in the Finance Act, 2006. However, by oversight, the Finance Act, 2006, did not similarly repeal section 10B of the Income Tax Act. This oversight is now being remedied. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Did you say that the mortgage payments made by householders were reflected in the tax break?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: The mortgage deduction is reflected as part of the \$60,000 that was given to all citizens. You would recall that we had a situation in which, if your mortgage was \$10,000 and you had other benefits, you were only limited to that amount. We increased the personal allowance to \$60,000 and gave you the discretion to use it however you chose to and, at the same time, reduced the marginal rate of tax so that you had more income, but you also had more allowances. The net effect of that would be that any allowance previously available to you: savings, mortgages and so on, would have been captured. The ones that

we selected specifically would have been annuities. So you had the personal allowance, \$60,000, you had the annuities and now we have introduced this, because this was the piece that we had not covered for those individuals who would have been studying at foreign universities and would not have been covered through our free tertiary education programme. All those individuals are covered by this particular measure.

Mr. Sharma: Would it be correct to say that it is unlimited now?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: No.

Mr. Sharma: \$60,000 max?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Per year.

Mr. Speaker, clause 16(1)(e) amends section 11(7) of the Income Tax Act. This section provides that wear and tear allowances shall not be granted unless taxes have been paid under the Land and Building Taxes Act and the Municipal Corporations Act. Further, the section stipulates that the taxes must be paid in the year of income in which the claim for wear and tear allowance is made. This condition we considered to be quite harsh. The amendment removes the requirement, therefore, to pay land and building taxes and house rates in the particular year in question. Instead, the claim for wear and tear allowances will now be allowed once the relevant taxes have been paid, not necessarily in the particular income year.

Clause 16(1)(f) amends section 11B(6) of the Income Tax Act. Section 11B(6) prohibits claims for wear and tear on buildings where a person is entitled to similar benefits under the Fiscal Incentives Act, the Tourism Development Act and the Trinidad and Tobago Free Zones Act. The purpose of this provision is to prevent the double claiming of allowances for the same expenditure. However, section 11B(6) does not include capital expenditure under section 13B of the Income Tax Act, which provides for the conversion of a house into a guest house. Accordingly, it is possible to make a double claim for such expenditure. This amendment remedies this so as to prevent such a double claim.

Clause 16(1)(g) amends section 16(3) of the Income Tax Act. At present, section 16(3) prohibits the set-off of losses from any trade, business or farming against income from employment or profession. However, losses from other sources of income, such as rental income, may be set-off against income from employment or profession. The Board of Inland Revenue has noted that taxpayers have been increasingly utilizing losses from sources other than trade, business or farming to reduce their income from employment or profession. The amendments

Finance Bill
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, June 01, 2007

to section 16(3) would prohibit the set-off of any losses against employment or professional income.

Section 16(1)(h) deletes section 34 of the Income Tax Act. Section 34 provides for a 5 per cent tax on the surrender value of life insurance policies that were issued prior to January 01, 1989. This provision sought to recover some of the taxes foregone as a result of tax deductions claimed in respect of premiums paid on life insurance policies. This deduction was abolished 18 years ago. Accordingly, in the vast majority of cases, the 5 per cent tax would be applied to premiums that were not eligible for a tax deduction. In these circumstances, this tax appears to be unnecessary and is, therefore, being abolished.

Clause 16(1)(i) amends section 134(10) of the Income Tax Act. This section quantifies the taxable benefit in the hands of employees where motor vehicles and other equipment are made available to them by their employer. Section 134(10) specifies the benefit as 50 per cent of the wear and tear or rental value of the motor vehicle or equipment. There is some uncertainty as to whether a benefit would accrue to the employee if the employer chooses not to claim wear and tear on the particular motor vehicle or equipment. The amendment removes any doubt that a taxable benefit would accrue to an employee, notwithstanding the fact that his employer chooses not to claim wear and tear on the motor vehicle or equipment.

Mr. Ramnath: That is a punitive tax!

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Clause 16(1)(j) amends the Seventh Schedule of the Income Tax Act. In order to calculate wear and tear allowances, assets are placed in a class specified in the Seventh Schedule and the wear and tear percentage relating to that class is used to determine the allowance. This is known as the “pooling concept”. However, certain buildings and structures on which wear and tear allowances may be claimed were never placed in any of the classes in the Seventh Schedule. For the sake of clarity and completeness, the following assets are now included in class A of the Seventh Schedule:

- (i) Buildings, structures and improvements thereon completed on or after January 01, 1995; and
- (ii) Industrial buildings and structures under the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act acquired prior to January 01, 2006.

Mr. Speaker, clause 17(a) amends section 10J of the Corporation Tax Act, Chap. 75:02. this section provides an allowance for the sponsorship of audio,

visual or video productions. Prior to 2006, companies could have claimed 150 per cent of the actual expenditure up to a maximum of \$1 million. The Finance Act, 2006 removed the 150 per cent uplift so that only the actual expenditure could be claimed. The effect of this amendment is to reintroduce the 150 per cent uplift for the sponsorship of audio, visual or video productions. This, of course, is consistent with our objective of putting in place a mechanism to assist with that particular industry.

Clause 17(c) provides that production companies, in addition to the 150 per cent in respect of its own production, may also claim in the aggregate an amount of \$1 million with respect to its sponsorship of sporting and artistic works not related to its own business. Clause 17(d) reintroduces section 16 of the Corporation Tax Act which was repealed by the Finance Act 2006. Section 16 provides for a tax deduction for improved property development companies. Such companies are entitled to a deduction equal to 15 per cent of the capital expenditure on the construction of commercial or industrial buildings. It should be noted that this provision is being reintroduced for a limited time only, in order to deal with projects that had already commenced prior to the enactment of the Finance Act, 2006. Accordingly, the deduction will only be granted where construction commenced before December 31, 2005, and is completed by December 31, 2007.

Clause 17(e) amends the First Schedule of the Corporation Tax Act. The Finance Act, 2006 reduced the rate of corporation tax from 30 per cent to 25 per cent. This was done through an amendment to paragraph 1 of the First Schedule to the Corporation Tax Act. However, paragraph 2 of the First Schedule was not likewise amended; accordingly, certain profits of insurance companies are still technically taxable at the rate of 30 per cent, although this was clearly not the intention. This amendment seeks to remedy that oversight.

Clause 18(1)(a) increases the exemption from stamp duty on the conveyance of a property to be used as a residence from \$350,000 to \$450,000. Clause 18(1)(b) similarly increases the exemption from stamp duty on the mortgage of a residential property from to \$315,000 to \$450,000. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Panday: What would be the rate above \$450,000?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: The rate above \$450,000, I think, would be the current rate that exists with the limit.

Mr. Panday: I thought the limit would change above \$450,000?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: No; what we sought to do is to bring it up so that there would be more people who would not have to pay the stamp duty.

Mr. Panday: I thought it would be a movement through the whole Schedule.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: That is something we will be looking at, but it is not contemplated in this amendment.

Clause 18(2) seeks to validate the actions of the Board of Inland Revenue in applying the increased exemptions from stamp duty on residential properties from January 01, 2007 in anticipation of the enactment of the Finance Bill, 2007. Clause 19 amends the Miscellaneous Taxes Act to provide for the appointment of the Green Fund Advisory Committee. This committee is to be appointed by the Minister with responsibility for environment. Section 64 of the Miscellaneous Taxes Act provides that the purpose of the Green Fund is to financially assist organizations and community groups that are engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment.

The function of the Green Fund Advisory Committee would be to advise the Minister on the certification of such activities. With the publication of the regulations, applicants may now seek funding for their activities from the Green Fund. Their applications must fulfill the requirements as set out by section 62 of the regulations if they are to be successful. The regulations require the application to be accompanied by:

- Proof of incorporation or registration of the community group or organization;
- The constitution of the community group or organization;
- The names, addresses and, where available, other contact details of the office holders of the community group or organization;
- The level of membership of the community group or organization;
- Evidence that the activity in respect of which funding is required is to be undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago;
- The details of the activity, including:
 - the output and outcomes of the activity and the expected benefit to the environment,
 - the expected duration of the activity;
 - the human and other resources required;

- the related contribution of the applicant to the activity by the use of its own monetary and other resources;
- targets and performance indicators of the activity; costing of the activity;
- details of the budget and related timeline for the activity;
- future projections and cost benefit analysis of the activity, and
- details of projects for which funding is already received or in respect of which an application has been made by the applicant together with the source of the funding.

The committee will have a minimum of five and a maximum of nine members, with experience and qualifications in the field of finance, environmental management, law and forestry. Members may be appointed for a term of two years and may be reappointed for no more than two terms. Clause 18 also makes provision for the procedure at meetings of the committee. The clause also specifically requires committee members to declare their interest and excuse themselves from deliberations on any matter in which they may have an interest. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Nanan: Could you just tell us if the committee has been appointed?

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: The committee has not been appointed. It is going to be appointed as soon as this Bill is passed, to the best of my knowledge.

Clause 20 proposes amendments to the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01. Clause 20(a) to (f) makes provision to amend the Customs Act to empower the Comptroller of Customs and Excise to issue standing and general orders regulating the duties performed by the customs offices and, therefore, removing all legal ambiguity to the Comptroller's ruling. Further, under these clauses, new fines and sentences will be established resulting in a more efficient and effective Customs and Excise Division. In the 2006/2007 Budget, consistent with promoting the education and knowledge base of the society, Government proposed to exempt from Value Added Tax and customs duty, all computer peripherals in addition to those accessories that were already free of those taxes, pursuant to previous legislation. As a result of the implementation of revised structure of the common external tariff, based on the 2007 Revision of the Harmonized System (HS) Nomenclature, changes occurred with respect to the classification computer accessories due to technological progress in this area.

Finance Bill
[SEN. THE HON. C. ENILL]

Friday, June 01, 2007

Resulting from these changes, an anomaly occurred whereby a number of computer parts that were free of duty and VAT under the preceding HS 2002 have now become liable to the payment of these taxes as exemptions were aligned to specific tariff heading numbers. Accordingly, clause 20(g) and (h) amends the Second Schedule of the Customs Act by zero rating computer peripherals as well as machinery, equipment and materials in respect of Internet and broadband services.

Clause 21(a) amends section 2 of the Fiscal Incentives Act in the definition of “industry” by deleting the words “not being agricultural”. Clause 21(b) inserts the following after section 31 of the Fiscal Incentives Act. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Nanan: You talked about Internet and broadband access, but what about regular computer software with respect to peripherals? I ask this because the prices of parts for computers are going up.

Sen. The Hon. C. Enill: Again, this measure is intended simply to deal with something that occurred as a result of our going into the 2007 Harmonized System, where changes occurred that affected some of these issues. Other than Internet and broadband, that is a matter not addressed here. We could address it in the future, but it is not contemplated here. What is being contemplated here is simply to fix something that we found out had occurred as a result of going into this new Harmonized System; but we will be addressing that.

Clause 21(b) inserts the following after section 31 of the Fiscal Incentives Act:

“Section 5(1)(a)(i) of this Act shall apply only to an enterprise which was granted benefits under the section prior to January 01, 2008.”

Clause 21(c) repeals section 34 of the Act. Clause 22 amends the Value Added Tax Act, 1989, by zero-rating computer peripherals as well as machinery, equipment and material in respect of Internet and broadband services. This is the VAT side.

Clause 23 amends the Foreign Investment Act, 1990 to clarify that the order relates to land, not only for residential use, but for business and trade purposes. Clause 24 seeks to validate the collection of certain fees by the Registrar of Companies. Clause 25 sets out the commencement date of the provisions of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Bill, 2007 shall support the Government in continuing to provide for the welfare of this nation’s people. These measures that the Parliament

will debate will contribute towards making Trinidad and Tobago a developed nation, certainly, if not before, by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I propose the question for debate, I would wish that you revisit the item “Statements by Ministers”; it has been passed but the Prime Minister wishes to make a statement. Does the Prime Minister have leave of the House to make a statement?

Hon. Members: Yes. [*Crosstalk*] We want the date! [*Laughter*]

**PUBLIC HEALTH CARE SERVICES
(Commission of Enquiry into)**

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table the report of the Commission of Enquiry into the operation and delivery of public health care services in Trinidad and Tobago.

On June 9, 2004, His Excellency President George Maxwell Richards appointed a Commission of Enquiry into the operation and delivery of the public health care services of Trinidad and Tobago under the Chairmanship of Mr. Hector Mc Clean. The Commission was requested to submit its report within six months of its first sitting.

Mr. Mc Clean resigned in January 2005, soon after which he passed away. As a consequence of this, a new Chairman, Mrs. Gladys Gafoor, was appointed on March 10, 2005. The Commission proceeded to carry out its mandate by adopting the following approaches:

1. Inviting through notices in the print media, submissions from the public on the public health care system;
2. Conducting research and surveys through interviews with officials and professionals;
3. Visiting medical institutions and meeting with staff and patients;
4. Holding town meetings; and
5. Holding private and public sittings.

The public sittings commenced on September 11, 2006.

The report was presented to His Excellency The President on April 13, 2007 and, with the authority of Cabinet, I today lay this Report on the Table of this honourable House.

Public Health Care Services
[HON. P. MANNING]

Friday, June 01, 2007

As a consequence of the numerous recommendations made in respect of almost every aspect of the public health system, the Government decided to establish a small technical committee to examine the many recommendations of the Commission with a view to prioritizing them and to determining how best they should be implemented or otherwise addressed. The committee comprising of the undermentioned persons has been requested to complete its deliberations within one month. The persons are:

Ms. Myrna Thompson	Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries—Chairperson;
Ms. Margaret Richardson	Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health;
Ms. Donna Ferraz	Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Public Administration and Information;
Ms. Rosetta Jeffers	Human Resource Specialist in the Personnel Department; and
Mr. Kesraj Seegobin	Director, Central Audit Committee, Ministry of Finance.

In view of some of the allegations contained in the report and for the purpose of total transparency, I propose to send a copy of the report of the Commission to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Commissioner of Police and the Integrity Commission. In addition, the Government proposes to launch appropriate investigations where such has been indicated by the Commission.

May I take this opportunity to express the profound gratitude of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to all the commissioners for the time, effort and energy they contributed to national service in an effort to analyze and assess the requirements of the public health service in Trinidad and Tobago and, particularly, to Mrs. Gladys Gafoor, the Chairman, under whose expert guidance the exercise was brought to a successful conclusion.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ramnath: Rahael, you should get up and resign!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Rahael: Soon, soon. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that we suspend the second reading of the Finance Bill in order to do the Motion for the adoption of the report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Bill, the Breathalyzer Report.

Agreed to.

MOTOR VEHICLES AND ROAD TRAFFIC (AMDT.) BILL**Joint Select Committee Report
(Adoption)**

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

Be it resolved that the report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Bill be adopted.

At a sitting held on Friday 03 November, 2006, in the House of Representatives and at a similar sitting of the other place on November 17 2006, the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Bill, 2006, was referred to a Joint Select Committee for consideration and report. The Members of the committee were as follows: myself, as Chairman; Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds; Ms. Penelope Beckles; Dr. Adesh Nanan; Miss Gillian Lucky from this House and Mr. John Jeremie, SC; Mrs. Joan Yuille-Williams; Mr. Satish Ramroop; Dr. Tim Gopeesingh and Prof. Ramesh Deosaran from the other place.

In completing its mandate, the committee met on eight separate occasions in camera and met with three groups of persons on the recommendation of committee Members. These groups were deemed to have detailed or expert knowledge on the subject of alcohol, intoxication and the workings of the breath analyzer. On each occasion when these groups of experts made presentations to the committee, they were done by way of electronic power point presentations in order to assist the committee with its deliberations.

Members of the committee were also presented with an opportunity to view samples of various breath analyzing devices, and the functioning of these devices inspired real live demonstrations. In fact, we had actual demonstrations of breathalyzers with the group, "Arrive Alive!" Let me convey my thanks to the following persons, Mr. Kirk Waithe, Mr. Brent Batson, Dr. Andrew Persad and

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, June 01, 2007

Mr. Om Lalla. Members of Arrive Alive! made a presentation and demonstration to the committee on the actual working of a breath analyzing instrument, where they brought volunteers before the committee, caused these volunteers to imbibe alcoholic beverages in our presence—I think it was wine and beer, if I remember correctly—in the committee room, not in the Parliament Chamber.

The persons were tested before they imbibed the alcoholic beverages and afterwards. A particular period of time was allowed to elapse so that the alcohol could be assimilated into the bloodstream and we saw a real live demonstration of the effects of alcohol on persons.

In fact, in the particular demonstration, what became very clear to us was that the gender of a person and also his or her body mass has a significant influence on that person's ability to absorb alcohol. In fact, a large man was found to be better able to absorb alcohol than a small woman. [*Crosstalk*] Small men definitely will have problems as well, but it was clearly an issue with gender. In particular, we discovered that women are more susceptible to the effects of alcohol than men and large persons are less susceptible than small persons.

We also received presentation from Prof. Lexley Pinto Pereira of the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the University of the West Indies and Dr. Sandra Reid, Director of the Caribbean Institute on Alcoholism and other Drug Problems. The presentations by the experts, Prof. Pereira and Dr. Reid, were extremely helpful to the committee in terms of giving Members a better understanding of the effects of alcohol on the body and, indeed, the effect that alcohol has on the reflexes of a person driving on the road and his or her general demeanour when driving on the road. [*Crosstalk*]

The committee went through the Bill clause by clause. We examined all the clauses and, on completion, reported the identified areas which needed reworking to the Chief Parliamentary Counsel. As a result, a redrafted Bill was requested, prepared and issued for inclusion in the printing of the committee's final report. After having completed its work, a draft report of the committee's work was prepared and circulated to Members of this House on Thursday, March 15, 2007, with an initial deadline for comments of Monday, March 19, 2007. This report included a recommendation that an aggressive public education campaign should be undertaken to ensure that members of the public are well informed about the legislation and its implication.

Mr. Speaker, in the redrafted Bill, which is in the Report, for those Members who may wish to look at it, we put in a proclamation provision that this Act shall come

into operation on such day as may be fixed by the President by proclamation. The reason for that is once the House and Senate agree, there will be required an aggressive public education campaign and also completion of the training of police officers in the use of breath analyzing instruments. It was the view of the committee that should take somewhere from one to three months, after which the breathalyzer will be fully implemented for use in Trinidad and Tobago.

The committee gave Members additional time to deliberate and submit their comments on the draft report and Members were written to and asked to indicate whether there were any additional changes or comments they wished to make to the report before it was confirmed in its final form. A final report of the committee was produced and circulated to Members for signature on Wednesday, March 21, 2007. Members of the committee were also given another opportunity to voice any concerns they might have had by Wednesday, March 28, 2007.

On March 28, we were able to get eight out of the 10 Members to sign the Report and in the absence of the submission of any objections or minority reports, the Chairman ordered the printing of the Report of the Joint Select Committee. The Report was laid in this House on Wednesday, April 25, and in the Senate on Tuesday, May 01, 2007.

Mr. Speaker, I wish at this stage to thank all Members of the committee for the work they did. We had eight vibrant meetings, as you can see from the deliberations of the committee in this Report, which has 289 pages. You can see that we had very vibrant meetings. There was full participation by all concerned and I must say that I found a genuine desire on the part of every Member of the committee to ensure that the breathalyzer legislation, when implemented, would be workable and satisfy the requirements of this House and the country at large.

2.30 p.m.

As is customary, when a matter has been sent to a Joint Select Committee, it is not my intention to engage in any comprehensive debate because the deliberations of the Committee are contained in this 289 pages of the report which has been in this Parliament now for approximately one month, and, therefore, available to all Members and even members of the public.

I would also say that in the redrafting of the legislation which starts at page 51 of the report we sought to take account and we sought to incorporate the requests of the Leader of the Opposition and also the Congress of the People, and Mr. Speaker, I am satisfied that the redrafted Bill which we will deal with in due

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, June 01, 2007

course, properly addresses the concerns raised by Members of the Opposition in this House, and also in the Committee.

Mr. Speaker, the amendment to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, the Breathalyser Bill is long overdue. The experts who presented this matter to us were able to tell us that scientific research in other countries had indicated that a significant percentage of fatal road accidents are attributed to persons driving under the influence of alcohol. In fact, one of the experts—I am not certain whether it was Professor Pereira or Dr. Reid—actually came with published research from one of the developed countries which indicated that in excess of 30 per cent of accidents are attributed to persons driving under the influence of alcohol. The experts were also able to show us published research on what has happened in other countries when the breathalyzer had been introduced. There was a marked reduction in fatal accidents and accidents causing serious bodily injuries in those countries where there had been an introduction of the breathalyser and analysis of drivers.

I need not belabour this issue much longer, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to thank all persons who sat on the Committee and made useful contributions. I thank the Opposition for their support during the Committee meeting, and I thank them in advance for their support as we go forward to the adoption of this report and to the passage of the Breathalyzer Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar (*Siparia*): Mr. Speaker, I shall not detain this House very long. In keeping with the protocol as referred to by the hon. Minister, this matter has been thrashed out in the Joint Select Committee. Indeed, we on this side had recommended that the Bill be sent to a Joint Select Committee so that we could take all the comments on board that we would be able to pass good legislation eventually when we came to the Committee stage and the finer stages of this Bill.

I believe that this legislation has been talked about in this country for over 26 years and, therefore, it would be a landmark legislation for all of us. In recent weeks, while the carnage on the road has been there, it seems to have escalated in the past several weeks, and of course, our sympathies are with the victims. The Minister made a very important point when he said that the experts indicated that 30 per cent of fatal road accidents were persons driving under the influence of alcohol.

Mr. Speaker, that leaves us with another 70 per cent which is far in excess of the 30 per cent. So, while we welcome this legislation, indeed, when we met with the hon. Prime Minister, it was one of the pieces of legislation during our anti-crime talks that we had discussed and agreed upon, that we should try to put in place as early as possible. We are happy to see that this legislation has gone as far as it has.

I would like to point out however that whilst the expectations may be great, given this legislation that with the road carnage, the road accidents and so forth, there would be a reduction, and we welcome that reduction, there is still the 70 per cent fatal road accidents that we need to deal with and what causes that. Someone sent me a text this morning. I am saying okay, breathalyzer, all well and good, but what about all the other reckless drivers who are not driving under the control of dangerous drugs or alcohol, but nonetheless will cause another 70 per cent of the road accidents? Therefore, it comes back to enforcement of existing law.

I think we all accept that it is not legislation alone, indeed sometimes it is not even the legislation because the legislation is already there; it has to do with enforcement. And once again, we see reckless driving, dangerous driving on the roads and this is not in respect of the Minister of Works and Transport, but it has to come from the Minister of National Security. I know there was an amendment to this Act, I think it was in 2000 with respect to setting up traffic wardens and a ticket system and, perhaps, the time has come and gone when that should also be included in amendments and enforcements with respect to the Act. And, therefore, we can deal with the 70 per cent of road traffic accidents. The 30 per cent are persons driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol but the 70 per cent will still be there and therefore we must also deal with that. The ticket system has also worked well in other countries and perhaps, the hon. Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, we are asking that he give some priority to this as well if we are to deal with dangerous driving on the roads.

I had indicated to the Hon. Minister when he spoke with me earlier in the week, that given the workings of the Committee, the expert opinions, our own inputs through our Committee Members, that we were satisfied that the amendments made took into account recommendations we had made when spoken in the debate.

Crime amongst those, as shown in the report has to do with section 70 of the parent law and in the initial Bill that came to the House, section 70 of parent Act was repealed entirely by clause 4 of the Bill that we had debated. I am happy to

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[MRS. PERSAD-BISSESSAR]

Friday, June 01, 2007

see it is now being amended to take on board our comment which was, “whereas section 70 of the parent Act had created the offence of driving under the influence of drink or drug, the new Bill that was brought back by the Minister had excluded driving under the influence of drugs and we felt that was a retrograde step”. What was already law you were taking out.

I am very happy to see that the Committee has now accepted our recommendation, so we have indeed kept the original section 70(1) and we now include subclause 4—the Minister by order to approve the device to be used for detection of drugs pursuant to that 70(1). I think that will take us far ahead.

In the Committee stage, there may be one or two drafting matters that we can take on board but I want to say we welcome this legislation but we need to go a bit further, we need to deal with the 70 per cent of fatal accidents and, of course, non-fatal accidents, the proportions may be very much the same. We have not dealt with that; we have not been dealing with it and, indeed, several other accidents within the last week from my readings of the reports, did not have to do with driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Mr. Speaker, with those words, I thank you.

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town*): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition has indicated we on this side of the House fully support the legislation. And like the hon. Member for Siparia—she spoke about the 70 per cent which will not be caught by this piece of legislation—I think it is incumbent that as the House of Representatives of the people, we shall explore that area of the 70 per cent which this Bill has not caught.

Mr. Speaker, speeding is a problem on the roads in this country, especially those young people who go to Zen and lime all night; they may not drink, but they lime all night and two o'clock in the morning they come down the road and half sleeping and “X” the board going down the road, and fly off the road and die.

Mr. Speaker, do you know in Trinidad and Tobago, our speed trap system cannot work at nights? The only time that a speed trap system can work is during the daylight and it is the most primitive thing you can ever find.

The police marks a spot, a distance, and they go with the stopwatches and there is a policeman hiding behind a post and another policeman further down, and as the car passes, one policeman gives a sign and as the car passes, clicks it

and then they have to work out how fast one is travelling. We are talking about breathalyser and about going to 2020 vision. I humbly submit that that type of practice has to come to an end.

I asked the hon. Member for Laventille/East Morvant, what is the situation with speed trap. He admitted in this hon. House that they cannot perform at nights so the public knows that at nights one can drive as mad as you want because there are no speed traps.

Many of the deaths occur in the night. Many of the serious accidents occur in the night because everybody knows you can speed as you like. Another problem about the antiquity of the system is that the police marks the spot on the road so if you are going down on the highway, look for a 'P' or white mark and you will know that is a speed trap. The motor vehicle drivers slow down as they reach the speed trap and when they know they have passed the speed trap, it is down the road again.

Mr. Speaker, there is one just off Gasparillo. We are asking the Government today to tell us if they are going to modernize the system of speed trap. In other places there are radar guns. When would the radar guns come? It was said today that it took about three months to have this law implemented because one has to train policemen. Why can we not go into the system right away about using radar guns for speed traps and start training police officers at this time? The hon. Minister indicated that accidents cost \$125 million per annum on the Treasury. I am certain that if we modernize that system that it will not cost us more than \$10 million and we will deal with that issue. It is not only of dealing with the cost to the Treasury, but one must look at the cost of the lives. Nine out of ten times when you hear about fatal accidents it is persons of 20, 21 and 22 years. We are losing our young lives, and as such we need to tame them and to let them know we are dealing with that speeding.

If they said 30 per cent are due to drunk driving, I feel about 60 per cent are due to speeding. We would like to hear the Minister today speaking about radar guns for speeding so that we could use speed traps at night.

Another issue is the condition of motor vehicles. At one time, most motor vehicles had to have an annual inspection especially public service vehicles. When one pays taxes at the pump, inspection went through the window at the licence office. What the Government did after that was to set up private inspection places. And this Government we ask them today, to tell us how many persons have been charged for driving vehicles on the roads without being inspected. One would see 99.9 of the vehicles on the roads which should have passed inspection have not passed inspection.

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, June 01, 2007

I heard that many of the licensing garages have approached the Minister, they have been begging the Minister to have the law enforced and today, most of those inspection areas where people have spent thousands and thousands of dollars, they are left idle and while they are left idle, and we have put them there to deal with these problems, there are vehicles on the roads which are running in defective conditions and causing accidents. That is a serious thing that the Government should look at and we will take the next 10 per cent of the accidents on the roads because the vehicles will be checked.

Let us say 6,000 to 8,000 policemen are on the road—the Member for Diego Martin West indicated that the problem in the police service started when they went on the 40-hours per week. [*Interruption*] I know that you cannot say anything original. He says he is quoting. I never knew the Member had the capacity to say anything original so I bow to him. He was quoting. There are not enough policemen on the roads because maybe policemen are working overtime and taking their compensatory time, so you find a situation where at no point in time there are sufficient numbers of policemen on the road. If one is travelling from Port of Spain to San Fernando, it is lucky if one sees a policeman on a motor bike on the road. When drivers do not see a policeman on the road they get the impression, they could take a chance. On that process of taking a chance there are fatal accidents.

I make a suggestion that instead of making our dear brothers and sisters paint stones and humiliate them the way this Government is humiliating them, we could take those—I know people who are painting stones with two and three subjects—and make them traffic wardens. Mechanize; clean up the place. Do not tell me you do not know how to clean up the place and do not tell me—hon. Prime Minister, you humiliate our brothers and sisters, having them under the hoe and rake in the hot sun all day, on the highways and on the road, instead of having them use a whacker, you can mechanize the job with wheel tractors. You can put mechanized sweepers so that they can sweep the road and have those big tanks going down the road, and miles and miles of road that would be cleaned up. You do have the say that you have to keep those poor workers in subjugation and a type of slavery because you want them to clean up the place.

I say keeping the environment clean is a great thing but we can mechanize cleaning the environment and those persons, instead of having them being humiliated the way this Government is having them at the side of the road, holding a blind as though they are playing mas, when they use the whacker and stones are flying about, blocking stones. When they are not painting stones they are block stones. I say

educate and train them and let us make them traffic wardens so that you will have them on the streets and that will serve another purpose, and the purpose that will serve is releasing the policemen to do real criminal work.

And the fact that you have those persons on the road, those persons would not only be traffic wardens but would be persons who, by their presence, could act as witnesses when other people commit crimes. They would see when a car passes down the road, they would see so and so and the police could utilize those persons who are traffic wardens to assist them in dealing with crime. And you do not have to have a degree for that. The only thing we are asking is if you are doing it, do it through meritocracy and not only PNM have hacks in it. And that is a way we could deal with the issue.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister comes today and speaks about thanking us, mamaguying us. We support it. We ask, why are you not doing your work? For example, they go on CPA conferences and it seems to me that all the orderliness we see in other countries, the moment they come off the plane, they forget it.

Road signs—go on the highways. No road signs. They should be reminding people at every 300 or 400 yards, reduce speed, watch your speed. Keep on reminding them that you want to drive safe, reach alive, encourage people; keep reminding them that as they drive along the highways; they will remember what their functions on the highways are.

Mr. Speaker, the highways are bereft of signs. I wonder if this Minister is an engineer. If one travels along the roads and one sees a double bend, the sign is about eight inches by eight inches and about two inches thick. Nine out of ten times one cannot see the signs. You need to put big signs so people will see them; so that the signage on the roads needs to be dealt with. If we do not do that, and if the Government does not set the example and set the tone that they are interested in ensuring that accidents do not take place, people would say they are only passing laws and when they pass the law they would not implement it, as this law. One would have thought that they would have had all the instruments in place; they would have trained the police officers because this Bill went to the Committee since December. You tell me now, it is May, and you could not have trained people by now. You are asking for three months again in order to implement the Act. If you were really serious about it you would have done that already.

Mr. Speaker, there are many ways to deal with these traffic problems but I think although this is a step in the right direction, it is a small step and there is a lot of work to do.

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, June 01, 2007

There was an accident last week on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway near Aranguez, where young people lost their lives and the policemen behaved as though they were operating in the Orinoco in South America. They wanted to find out about some black Almera passing and they wanted assistance. Imagine in 2007 in the 21st Century, is that the way the police will work. Is that the way they will do investigations? Somebody must come and tell us—first of all, we ask, how many black Almeras Trinidad has? One would have thought why not put cameras, CCTV, let us say along the Churchill Roosevelt Highway, along the Uriah Butler Highway at every traffic light, intersection, branch road? If you have this CC Television and a car is coming down the road and an accident takes place at Aranguez, the camera will take it up. If that car is going east and then turns off on the Solomon Hochoy Highway and you could pick up that car again, and you could pick up that car straight down to an area where the person is going and by so doing you could zone in on the culprit. But as the police stands today, the police are begging for somebody to come and tell them about some black Almera and from there they will move on.

If we want 2020 vision we have got to go forward, and we ask that you do not tell us that the cost to put up CC Television cameras will be too exorbitant and we cannot afford it because today you said that these accidents cost the State \$125 million. For example, if we are going to spend \$125 million to deal with all aspects of traffic—[*Interruption*] And this process will not only deal with road traffic problems, but it will deal with criminal elements. The cameras will be extending policemen 24 hours per day, and they do it in most country.

I wonder—are we not moving in that direction? But the joke does not end there. The incompetence of this Government will cause accidents to continue. If you own a motor vehicle and you sell that vehicle a man pays you and he goes with the vehicle, after a while that person who buys the vehicle will sell it to another person, and another person, and that person becomes involved in an accident and kills somebody. When you start to search, you hear Mr. ‘D’ caused the accident, and he bought it from Mr. ‘B’. Mr. ‘B’ does not know who is Mr. ‘C’, and as we go along the line you get lost in the process. Also, that system of inefficiency at the licensing office is permitting criminals to get away and unless we deal with computerizing the licensing office then you cannot deal with the issue of cameras, you cannot deal with effective policing, where police can have computers in their cars and the moment an accident takes place, one can go on the computer and find out who is the owner, where the cars are registered and so forth. If you do not do that then we are spinning top in mud.

I recommend apart from the Government resigning, that the law be amended, that the vendor who sells a car, you put an obligation on him to ensure that the motor vehicle is transferred and if he fails to transfer the motorcar within 24 hours or 48 hours of sale, he should be fined a sum of about \$10,000. And the person who purchased the car must also have an obligation to have the car transferred and if he does not do it apart from a fine, confiscate it. We must put pressure on the vendor and the purchaser because we cannot police everything like this. But if they know that we are putting pressure on them they will ensure that the licensing office straightens up because the office is in a state, and breathalyzer or no breathalyser, unless we deal with that licensing office—I am not casting aspersions on any particular person, but on the system. If we do not deal with that system of computerization, we cannot modernize the system of traffic control and I will be happy to hear the Minister say today that it has been completed.

Mr. Speaker, the time might come also where every Tom, Dick and Harry could issue a licence plate, no sort of control whatsoever. Maybe, the time has come where we should have personalized licence plates, where if you purchase your first vehicle, that licence plate stays with you. The Member for San Fernando East, SF PM 12, Patrick Manning; we know where he lives. So that when a car is involved in an accident by decoding—[*Interruption*] it is pushing me to call you 32, 16 or 36.

3.00 p.m.

The time has come where there might be need for us to modernize the system of issuing licence plates, so that if someone commits an offence it is easy to locate them. For example, the Member for Nariva lives in the Princes Town region. We could probably divide the country into 14 regions according to the regional corporations, so it would be Nariva/Mayaro, NM, his initials and a number. In so doing, we may be able to put order in the system.

The aim of putting this order in the system is, not only to deal with road traffic accidents, but also to deal with crime. Instead of paying Mastrofski \$80 million, these are simple things we can do to deal with crime. We can add the \$80 million to the \$125 million, \$200 million. Send him home! As a people, we have our indigenous problems.

Do you know what Mastrofski does? He asks the officers what they think he should do and takes the information and brings it to you and you swallow it like a catfish—hook, line and sinker. [*Desk thumping*] We are people. We have problems. We must find indigenous ways of dealing with our problems. We have our offenders; we know them. Our society is a special society and we must find special ways to deal with them.

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, June 01, 2007

Mr. Speaker, although we come here today in a conciliatory mood, I still want to put those points on the table so that the hon. Prime Minister [*Interruption*—I am not bothering with you; you are shaking your head like a puppet—would look at them and we will have a holistic view of dealing with crime at all levels.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): Mr. Speaker, thank you for recognizing me. I am not accustomed speaking in the House. I see you look rather surprised. I congratulate the Minister for bringing this piece of legislation, but I have a small concern. Initially, the Minister indicated that 30 per cent of the accident load could be attributed to driving under the influence of alcohol and that there is a 70 per cent that has not been accounted for. It could be due to dangerous driving, breaking of red lights and lack of police presence.

However, I want to put a topic on the table that may be quite dear to certain people's hearts and minds and may get me some level of unpopularity. Can the Minister look into the use of cellphones while driving. [*Desk thumping*] Text messaging and totally animated conversations by the driver or the occupants passing cellphones around, if you add it to the use of alcohol, will increase the accident load.

When I was preparing for this debate—I did not realize we were not going to speak much—I took the opportunity to look at the Internet. I typed in “motor vehicle accidents and cellphone use” and there is an interesting article from the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 1997, where it was looked into and where people indicated that cellphones were responsible for certain accidents. In this study, a couple thousand accidents were looked into—and I commend this to the Minister—and the cellphone records of the driver at the time of impact, as well as the occupants in the car, were looked at. It was found that the use of cellphones figured quite prominently in the accidents and, at the point of impact, the cellphones were being used. The conclusion of the study was that when cellphones are used while driving, it quadrupled the fatal accident rate. So if you look at it, driving under the influence, as well as cellphones, is responsible for a very large number of our fatal accidents.

If we go back in history, we are a society where alcohol use and driving has been around for a long time. Do you not find it strange that since the technology of the cellphone has come out a little stronger—there is greater use of the cellphone—that there are a lot more fatal accidents? I remember, in the distant past, when a school child in St. James, about five to eight years old—we were in office—died as a result of a driver on a cellphone not paying attention—this is when cellphones had just come out. He ran his car into a group of children crossing the road and killed one of

them. Nothing occurred as a result of that. I do not know if the person was on a murder charge or a manslaughter charge, but he was driving without due process on a cellphone.

In Barataria/San Juan, the reason I asked for the walkover in the area of the Solo factory, is that an old lady was crossing the road—this was a couple years ago and there was no walkover—and a gentleman “ran amok” and killed the lady. It was observed—cellphone use. Once you are paying attention to a cellphone, you are not going to look at what is in front of you, if your conversation is animated or if you are texting.

I want the Minister to take this on board quite seriously because in the United States of America, North America and different countries, you should not use a cellphone while driving. If you get a call, you are to pull aside, answer your cellphone and come back into the mainstream of traffic. That is the point I commend that the Minister take on board as soon as possible.

Another thing is that this Bill is not about driving under the influence; it is about accidents and the loss of lives. Nowhere have I ever found that a car in a showroom or driving by itself can cause an accident. Cars do not cause accidents. Traffic lights do not cause accidents. Medians do not cause accidents. I really believe that people not paying attention will cause an accident. Accidents are caused by people not paying attention and exhibiting certain behaviors.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to find out—and the Minister can answer me this—when someone has an accident and damages public property, who pays for it to be repaired? Is it the person who was driving without due care and attention or under the influence? Is it the person who was talking on the cellphone and not paying attention? *[Interruption]* I believe, as the Member for Diego Martin West has indicated, it is the taxpayer. We pay for people who are driving under certain influences.

I make another call to the Minister to make some effort, since he is the Minister of Works and Transport, to find a way for insurance companies to pay the Government for that damage or the people will pay for that damage. In doing so, their insurance premiums will go up and there will be a mark against their names. The whole idea of this Bill is not so much to stop drunk driving, but to prevent the carnage on the roads. That is the main objective. The secondary objective is that alcohol may contribute a certain amount of it. So we have gone through the process of the breathalyzer; we have gone a long way with this legislation; each successive government was supposed to bring it and we now have it before us.

The penalties should be heavy and done in such a manner—the Member for Princes Town brought up the topic of the computerization of the Licensing Division. I want to go a step further and ask that we think about introducing levels of licensing. In Canada, it is G1, G2 and full G. This is some information on the graduated licences for automobile drivers, which was handed to me by the Member for Caroni East.

In the class G1, new drivers of passenger vehicles learn to drive with six important conditions with a G1 licence—that is the initial one. A new driver must hold a G1 licence for a minimum of 12 months before attempting the G1 road test. This time can be reduced to eight months if he successfully completes an approved driver education course.

Drivers earn more privileges after passing their G1 road test. As a G1 driver a person is required:

- to maintain a zero blood alcohol level while driving;
- be accompanied by a fully licensed driver, who has at least four years' driving experience and has a blood alcohol level less than to .05 per cent, in case he or she needs to take over the wheel;
- ensure the accompanying driver is the only other person in the front seat;
- ensure the number of passengers in the vehicle is limited to the number of working seat belts;
- refrain from driving on Ontario's "400 series" highway, the main highways;
- refrain from driving between midnight and 5.00 a.m.

For the G2 licence:

- they must have the G2 licence for a minimum of 12 months before they can attend the G2 road test;
- they must maintain a zero blood alcohol level while driving;
- they must ensure that the number of passengers in the vehicle is limited to the number of working seat belts.

There are different classes, Mr. Speaker.

We spent a lot of time passing a Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Bill. It is going to be good politics, but our primary objective in this House at the end of the day is to make sure that the roads are safer. We heard about CCTV cameras.

Lastly, I want to indicate that the level of road rage in this country is extremely high. It is a psychological problem and, as a result of road rage, people enter the highways and byways in a certain psychological attitude. I ask the Minister of Works and Transport to talk with the Minister of National Security to find a way to have road blocks to maintain good driving sense; but try his best not to do it only on holiday weekends when people are heading out to certain areas. I find that the police tend to have road blocks on holiday weekends.

I remember, on Easter Monday, I was driving my family to church and there was a roadblock. *[Interruption]* I was driving; I was not going. I was driving them. I was going to drop them there. I am not like you, Member for San Fernando East. There was a roadblock at 6.00 o'clock in the morning and that was crazy. It accomplished nothing except a horrendous movement.

I think the development of road rage—*[Interruption]* Profiteers? Who is profiting from what? Mr. Speaker, the development of road rage is real and that is responsible for a lot of fast driving, in and out driving and anger on the roads. We could decrease the amount of road rage by having a combined approach to roadblocks and assessment. I know when people are in a roadblock, the criminals already have their cellphones telling their friends not to pass there. So the people who suffer are the law-abiding citizens, who do not do that on a cellphone.

There is one last thing I would like the Minister of Works and Transport to take on board. Member for San Fernando East, listen to this one! We have stopped smoking ads, but we have not stopped the alcohol ads and we should start looking in the direction of stopping them in this country.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Miss Gillian Lucky (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I assure you that my intervention this afternoon is not going to be long. It is going to be quite short and not said with its normal enthusiasm, simply because—

Mr. Ramnath: *[Inaudible]*

Miss G. Lucky: Do not predict me, Member for Couva South. You are a part of this contribution I am making this afternoon. I thank you for your intervention in reminding me.

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[MISS LUCKY]

Friday, June 01, 2007

Mr. Speaker, it was truly an honour to be part of the joint select committee that dealt with this very important issue. There are many who feel that when legislation is taken to joint select committees—and we have very important pieces that have gone to a joint select committee: the DNA legislation, the Equal Opportunity Bill and the breathalyzer legislation, as it was called—it is simply a matter of sitting there and going through the mechanics.

We all recognize the importance of this type of legislation and moreso what happens when those of us who belong to the legislative arm of the State do not do what we are supposed to do and spend too much time with the politics. We have seen instances in which legislation has been passed and the flaws are discovered far too late, when it is in a court system, and where people get by on the deficiencies of the legislation or on technicalities.

I do not think there should be any apology made for the length of time that it took. There were instances when some Members, including myself, could not make the meetings, but for those of us who attended, every time we met it was with a view to getting it right. It did involve some going back and double and triple checking. We can take some level of comfort in knowing that even in the United Kingdom, a country that is known for leading the way in legislation, they, too, have had to go back to the drawing boards in some instances—in some instances back to square one—to make sure they got it right.

At least with the joint select committee we benefited from expertise; not just the legal that is necessary, but also from the expertise of persons who know about alcohol and its ill effects—what it can do to the system. It is important to get this piece of legislation right legally, but it is also important to recognize that we are dealing with other factors—medical and social factors—and this has to be worked into the legislation.

Like the Member for Diego Martin East, who chaired the committee, I, too, want to say thank you to Prof. Pinto Pereira and Dr. Sandra Reid and all the members whose names were listed by the Minister and who are members of “Arrive Alive!”. By seeing, hearing and understanding, we the members of the committee, got a better idea of how the system will work; what will be some of the challenges and how best we can implement legislation in such a way really to send the message.

This brings me to my second point. It is going to be a culture shock for this country. Trinidad and Tobago is a country that is known for its wining and dining, encouraging an atmosphere of total enjoyment, but it cannot be total enjoyment to the extent of reckless abandon. Things have to be done in moderation. I see the

Member for San Fernando East nodding. That is the fact. Nobody says you cannot have a good time, but you have to have one in a moderate fashion. If it is a situation where things get out of control, then the time has come for people who accompany others to take responsibility.

I am not limiting this to driving and I am not going deliberately or in a clandestine fashion to embarrass anybody who belongs to this House. However, we must know of instances where colleagues have had too much to drink, led themselves into embarrassing moments that have gone into the public domain; have been the subject of calypsos and other things and you rock back and say that the person was wrong and there are persons who are judgmental and say they should have known better. I am not making excuses for them, but I go one step further and say: Where were their friends? Where were the persons who could have told them they were having too much to drink and that they should stop? [*Desk thumping*] That, to me, is what a true friend is. I am not saying your friends should cover up.

If your hands have been found in the cookie jar, I am not saying to cover up. I am saying that when it comes to things like drinking and you are out with a group of friends—the Member for Baratavia/San Juan, whose field is medicine, made the point—go into the preventative measures. Do not reach a situation where you have to console friends. Say, “Listen, you have had too much to drink”, even if it means that your friend gets vex with you. So be it! It is better to know you did all you could to prevent a disaster than you just wanted to be among your peers and be cool.

It will be a culture shock. This is not just for young people. We have the view in this country that young people are the only ones subject to this kind of temptation. That is not true. It could be anybody. I have prosecuted in courtrooms for motor manslaughter, now called death caused by dangerous driving or death caused by reckless driving. I have seen the ages: from the young—those in their teens and early twenties—to those who are very old—a man who was in his 60s or 70s. I agree that not all of them were related to drinking too much but, at the end of the day, we have to understand that we have a responsibility.

There are many cars on the roads. Some would argue that there are too many cars on the road and we have to understand that with the Breathalyser legislation being passed and implemented, we will need an intense campaign—education awareness. Let us stop apologizing for telling people that if they are drunk, they should not drive. We should not put a quantum—two beers or three beers. We

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[MISS LUCKY]

Friday, June 01, 2007

learnt that every human being reacts differently with respect to alcohol and even though the average person—you might have a benchmark; you may not go beyond a certain amount, but this concept of people saying: “Don’t worry; I can hold my liquor”, means what?

It is a fact when you intake alcohol, your powers to discern on the roads are impaired. That is a fact, therefore we have to understand, with respect to being on the roads, it is not always about being right. Sometimes people, when they get into an accident, the first thing they say is that they were right. But I think we should also ask: How could it have been avoided? In other words, if you had not drunk alcohol, maybe your reflexes might have been sharper; maybe you might have been more aware and maybe the disaster or collision could have been prevented. This, to me, is the way we should start thinking.

The third point is that politicians will have to show the way. Let us understand the seriousness of it as I take a drink of water. Let us face it. It is election time; it is silly season and there will be those who will want to make examples of others. Whether that is the reason that we as politicians obey the law—because we know it is the right thing to do or we are afraid to get caught—let us understand that the day any politician gets caught with this legislation, he or she will be made an example of by the court. *[Interruption]* I am not talking about discrimination, you know. I am coming to that next. I am talking about the fact that we have a responsibility. The best way to implement laws, Member for San Fernando East, in my view, is to show that politicians are adhering to them. I say that without apology.

I, too, like to go out and have a good time, but ever since I became more aware that this legislation would be passed, I, too, have started ensuring that when I go out I am more responsible than I would usually be. I am not pretending to be a saint. I am saying that is what we have to do. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Manning: I have stopped drinking alcohol, now.

Miss G. Lucky: Well, look at that. I do not know if that is advice you got from a prophetess or anybody else, but that is good.

The point is though that everybody will have to be treated equally. So whether you were coming from a PNM party, a UNC party, a COP party, a Prime Minister’s function, an embassy function, a carnival fete, a chutney fete or the Speaker’s function—you know I do not like to bring the Speaker into this—or any function, the reality is that you are—*[Interruption]* If it is? Yes, Member for Oropouche,

make sure you have a designated driver or do what is done in other countries. Using your cellphone, pull to the side of the road, call home and say that you need somebody to take you home.

Speaking about equality, I want to be so careful about this, Mr. Speaker, and I am not going to be irrelevant to what is being discussed. I remember well the Member for Diego Martin West making the point during one of his contributions that he would not use this forum or platform to make his points; he would go to the court. I am saying to him, rightly so, he has chosen that avenue. I appear in courtrooms almost on a daily basis and I will not use the court to make my points because of my profession. That is why I wear my tie in the Parliament and at official functions and so; not in the court.

I have heard my name being riddled with political venom from certain persons in this House when I stood up and said that I would fight for country and that we needed to go beyond Indian Arrival Day and Emancipation Day. I never said to remove them. I said that we must now find a way of including everybody and having a Trinidad and Tobago Day. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I said. But because of political wickedness [*Interruption*] I expose my aces when I know I am going to hang Jacks and I will hang their Jack one by one.

I called in on a radio programme and told that person who was the moderator that I never said that we should have no Indian Arrival Day. In fact, in this very House, in budget after budget contribution, I have been saying, let us think Trinidad and Tobago because you are leaving some people out. I never said to get rid of Indian Arrival Day, but to suit their purposes, Indian Arrival Day being celebrated very recently, they needed to have some fodder and I was the lucky fodder. But they have climbed the wrong lucky tree. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, now that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is in an evil mood, I just wanted to ask a question before the House heats up a little more than it already has. Is the hon. Member suggesting that we might celebrate Indian Arrival Day, Emancipation Day and similar days on the same day and name it say, Heritage Day? Is that something to which she would subscribe?

Miss G. Lucky: No. I am saying that I would like the celebration of all ethnic groups to be upgraded and, in some instances, included on a sustained basis. I will explain what I mean, Member for San Fernando East. I ask you to indulge me. You have asked a specific question that has to get this answer. I have thought about it long and hard because this is not the first time that I am responding to you on it.

About four years ago, I made the suggestion that we needed to have something the equivalent of what is had at EPCOT whereby there are different countries. I was saying that in Trinidad and Tobago we need to have some acreage of land that we can call a heritage or cultural site and, on a daily basis, you will have access to all the cultures that we have; our music, our culture, our dances, whatever it may be. I said to do it on a sustained basis. The Chinese had a wait of 200 years before they got a formal day to celebrate their arrival. What about the Amerindians? What about those of mixed heritage who are excluded by one group and excluded by the other? Member for Tunapuna, you may know of what I speak. That is why—to answer you, Member for San Fernando East—I am saying to have a Trinidad and Tobago Day.

You cannot leave out Tobago either. What do we really know about Tobago heritage? I am saying Mr. Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East, just to consider having a Trinidad and Tobago Day in which you can have everyone, but I never said get rid of. I did not say it because I wanted to be politically correct. I wanted to say that while we deal with all the other issues, their ramifications and repercussions, let us see how best we can still deal with the issue that we do not have a celebration of Trinidad and Tobago Day.

Dr. Moonilal: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, thank you for giving way. I am following the discussion. In the event that there is a day that brings the different groups together on one day, whether heritage or otherwise, what then do you think should be done with the Indian Arrival Day or Emancipation Day? Will those days continue in addition to the umbrella day?

Mr. Speaker: Before Members get carried away with this very interesting topic, do not forget we are on a Bill dealing with road traffic.

Miss G. Lucky: Mr. Speaker, I have said it and I am repeating that I am not saying to get rid of. You have to understand our sequential history which starts with the Amerindians who, incidentally, have no day for themselves. If we get a Trinidad and Tobago Day it may take years or generations and let those who come thereafter determine what they may take away or give. For now, I am specifically fighting for a day for Trinidad and Tobago when everybody, including the East Indian and Africans, can come together. That is what I am fighting for.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. Is she is suggesting that she should not drink on that day. [*Laughter*] She has to be relevant, you see. I am asking: On such a day, can you celebrate Indian Arrival Day, Emancipation, Amerindian Heritage Day, Syrian/Lebanese Day, Baptist Day? Is that an approach that you favour or not?

3.30 p.m.

Miss G. Lucky: What I am saying to you, Member for San Fernando East, is that your having included everything, we will then need a Trinidad and Tobago week. You cannot take everything. That is what is called the melting pot approach. I am not suggesting melting pot, I am suggesting mosaic, whereby you still have those days. It will eventually—because we do not have the level of patriotism to support taking a way everything and having one day. If you are saying not take away then, Member for San Fernando East, I agree. I do not want to take away from what the focus of the Bill is. I have said it and I would repeat it—Member for Diego Martin East, I take your point, but it was important to say it—that the important point is that I am fighting and there are people fighting for a Trinidad and Tobago Day, to build a level of patriotism, so when we have Bills such as this, people will understand, let us come together, work as a team, put politics aside and let us get the interest of the people first. That is what we need.

Let me point out that within recent times, we have seen in Hollywood many of the stars that thought they were untouchable, have now come under the law for driving while under the influence; Paris Hilton being one of them and even in Bollywood, a top star Salman Khan. Whether it is Hollywood or Bollywood, nobody is spared from the force of the law. That is what we have to understand in this country. There must be no selective enforcement.

There are two last points I wish to make. One of them is that the Member for Barataria/San Juan spoke about the need for legislation, with respect to the use of cellphones while driving. I do not only endorse that, but I go one step further and say that today it is cellphones and tomorrow it will be DVDs, because there are portable DVDs in vehicles. As the technology with respect to cars increases, you would find that there would be electronic devices that can distract. In those circumstances, I am suggesting that we look—when moving on to that kind of legislation with the cellphones—to widen it immediately to cellphones and any other type or kind of electronic device or mechanism that could lead to distraction. It is something to think about and it cannot be dealt with today. I understand that.

Finally, it is the issue of defensive driving. I really believe in this country—I heard the Member for Barataria/San Juan quote what is done in North America with the different grades of licences that are given and that some credits or points are given if you avail yourself of driving techniques that would help you to be a better driver on the road. I am wondering whether it could not be incorporated during that time when young people, especially, are learning to drive that they go

to recognized—in the same way we have primary and tertiary institutes that are accredited for motor vehicle inspection units that are supposed to be approved—defensive driving tutors who have been approved—not fly-by-night places—and they take a course, however short or long, in defensive driving.

I wish to end where I have started. When there has been a disastrous accident one of the issues will be who was right and who was wrong, but where there is death or irreparable damage, it is not who is right or who is wrong because you cannot bring back human beings who might have been part of the damage or who might have lost their lives. Therefore, I think if we take this holistic approach, it will do what the Member for Princes Town is asking, and that is to ensure when there is implementation of this piece of long-awaited legislation, we will make sure that we hit the ground running and we get it right.

I thank you.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to contribute on this matter dealing with our heritage and our historical perspective. In some communities, as you well know, consumption of different products is part of heritage.

I want, for a few minutes, to raise a couple of issues related to the debate. I want to begin by saying that it is a very, very interesting debate. Several Members are making some important points. I want to make a perspective that I thought is also missing somewhere in the debate, which is the perspective of young people. We will stand in Parliament, in our jacket and tie, pontificate and give a sermon and talk about alcohol being barred and that we should not be consuming and driving. We are really speaking in many ways to the converted. The people, particularly our younger folk, who will be ones subject to the risk late at nights, are not in the House.

Secondly, I am not sure they are watching Channels 11 or 4 at this moment. They are probably resting to go out later.

As someone who, over the years, has spent a lot of time at university, both here and abroad and participated in student union work, I have a perspective to share from that youth. I have been engaged in the work of student politics for five or six years, both in Trinidad and Tobago and abroad. There is a point, at that age we are dealing with, where young men and women, teenagers, participate in drinking heavily and then go off in their vehicle and drive recklessly on the road. They go to and from clubs; not just one. There are clubs you go to first and at a particular time there is another type of club where you go to later. When you are

finished with that, in the wee hours of the morning, there is another place you go to. First of all, those young people will not be convinced by any Member of Parliament giving a speech. They will not be convinced about the “rightness” and “wrongness” of issues, based upon parliamentary speeches. I can tell you that.

Even now, I still frequent some of the more popular and less popular spots. I limit my geographical area to in and around San Fernando, close to my house, for obvious reasons, but there are times when I also interface and meet what I consider to be the youths that we are dealing with; the targeted population. I need to make his point at this moment. It is not all young people we are dealing with. It is really a small group of young people, not all, who will be involved in clubbing and drinking. In Britain it is called binge drinking and driving. It is really a small number that we can actually profile. We know the places they would go to and where they are likely to be liming. Maybe we should also undertake some studies to profile this group that is at risk, as we do for any other social problem. If it is HIV/AIDS or other problems affecting young people such as teenage pregnancy, we should profile and target certain groups, which we believe to be the groups most at risk. It is the same issue with drinking and driving.

It is an uncomfortable issue because we may feel and come to a conclusion, that this group really involves a different class of young people as well. Maybe they belong to an upper class or middle upper class group. First of all they must have access to a vehicle and can drive a vehicle. They must first have a motorcar and have access to a car to move in the night. It cannot be young people at the lowest round, at the working class and sub-working class level. They take the maxi taxis and the PTSC buses. Who is driving? Who has control of a vehicle from their parents? Which clubs do they go to? Where do they live? We need to promote youth education and awareness by young people, not old people and people who are in jacket and tie with conservative haircut and do not wear an earring in their left ear. We need to get our young people involved in education and awareness, to help other young people. That is the key, not the speeches like that. We should target the groups.

Many of us would remember—I have vivid memories, I am sure my colleagues would remember as well—when we were at that stage at university and in secondary school, I am not sure how much we were listening to elders telling us this might be dangerous or that might be dangerous. We did what we had to do. If we were going outside to attend a few parties to imbibe and have some lime, we do it. But the time has changed. I think that is an important issue as well. Twenty or thirty years ago maybe we did not have as many vehicles on

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, June 01, 2007

the road, as much speeding or maybe we did not have enough roads. We certainly did not have the clubs we have today. You need to relate to the society today, based upon what exists and not what you think happened 25 years or 30 years ago. Passing good legislation; that is only the beginning.

I want to tell this Government in all fairness, that it has come maybe 100 lives too late with this legislation. Maybe we could have saved lives had this come four or five years ago. That is an important point. I wanted to raise that matter. My issue concerns the perspective of the young.

The Government, through different agencies of the Ministry of Works and Transport should also target the youth groups and groups in secondary schools. There are student societies in all secondary schools. At the university and now at all tertiary level institutions, there are youth councils, like small unions of young people who are in school. Target those groups for inclusion into your awareness and education programme, so that they will communicate to the others.

The last point I want to make is why it is a young person in this country would be going to club whatever—I do not want to call names because I do not want to appear to be biased in anyway—on Friday night, have excessive drink, drive a motorcar and go on the highway and crash and, God forbid, they will kill themselves and take other lives. If that young person goes on an airplane and travels for three hours to Miami, tomorrow night they would not do that. It cannot be that they are prone to that. They cannot do that in New York, Miami, London, Holland or Canada. You go to the same young people who would do this here and meet them in Canada and they are liming in a restaurant and bar, which is half of a mile from their house and they would tell you: "I am not driving. Let us take the taxi and go home." I would say: "Why?" They would say: "Hello, the police will come behind me, check and I will lose my licence for three years and I cannot handle not having my licence for three years." In that society, which is just six hours away by airplane, their behaviour changes, in relation to a society that implements the law and brings sanction. [*Interruption*]

I am dealing with serious matters and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is clowning around. He is the Minister of National Security that is even more frightening than the jokes coming from him. He should take an interest in the young people and try to save lives. Maybe it is a lack of caring. I do not know. Maybe it is a lack of compassion or maybe it is something else.

The issue—it is a combination of all—is that you need, as a Government, to create the environment of law and order, of strict adherence to the law and of

enforcing the law. If you drive on the highway from Port of Spain to San Fernando, as many of us do, if on that journey which can last one hour without traffic and two hours with traffic, you would be fortunate if you see two police cars along the way. Forget CCTV, I do not think we have reached the highest level of technology as yet. You would be lucky if you see two police vehicles on the way patrolling. If you see any, they will be going at a fast speed towards a problem or a crime scene. They are not patrolling. We do not have police cars patrolling the roads.

There was a time in this country when you were driving within 10 minutes, you would see a police car. They would have been patrolling, not speeding off going to a crime scene. That is how you stop these accidents at night. There are spots along the East-West Corridor and the highway—the Member for Barataria/San Juan alluded to that—where you know between midnight and 4.00 a.m., young people are coming from clubs and there will be a problem.

In the Hague, where I spent a few years, when you go to the popular clubs and you come out of the clubs, if you had too much you might mistake a police car for a taxi and jump in the back seat and tell the driver: “Take me home.” The police car was parked in front the club. What are they doing there? They are staying by that club to spot people coming out, who they have reason to believe are under the influence of alcohol who would go into the parking lot and take a car and drive. The police wait there. Not me, but there may be somebody who would come out and think that it is a taxi. When would we reach the level, in a small country with resources, where we can afford to have police vehicles and manpower that would target the few—it is not many—clubs at the particular hours? If you can save one life you can prevent all these pictures of parents, brothers and sisters crying on the front page. Police cars should be placed for two or three hours at particular clubs to monitor the movement of these young people.

You have to get enforcement, otherwise all the lecturing and preaching will mean nothing. Unless a young person does not know that he or she will lose his licence for three years or is fined—in fact it is not worth anything because if you pay a bar bill for \$500, what is a fine for \$600? The fine is not the issue. The loss of the drivers' permit will affect you most—you cannot drive. Build the society with that respect.

They are now putting walkovers along the way, which is a very good thing, so that at least innocent people will be protected from these reckless drivers. You must have the compassion to spot these areas and put it. Even when they have put the walkovers—Do you know what is the most amazing thing? They have put a

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, June 01, 2007

walkover in El Dorado and another lower down the road and they have failed to cater for persons who are differently-abled. That is one of the most obscene levels of discrimination.

It was not surprising that Mr. George Daniel, President of the Trinidad and Tobago Chapter of Disabled Peoples International, on May 17, 2007 had a press release which indicated:

"The Trinidad and Tobago Chapter of Disabled People's International is calling for the immediate removal of the Minister of Works and Transport, Mr. Colm Imbert. This Minister has demonstrated that he is not fit for public office and he cannot be trusted with the people's business.

On October 19, 2006 in a telephone conversation, we drew to the Minister's attention our observation that a walkover was being constructed at Powder Magazine, Cocorite and there was no indication that the walkover would be accessible for those citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that endure some form of disability, particularly those living in the immediate area.

The Minister put the blame for this 'oversight' squarely on his engineers and he gave his firm commitment to ensuring that not only the walkover at Powder Magazine would be accessible for persons with disabilities, but those at the El Socorro and Curepe walkovers.

As of this day, May 17, 2007, two of the three walkovers that the Minister assured us would be made accessible for persons with disabilities, are in fact not accessible.

The Minister, therefore, has deliberately misled the disabled community even after being written to on the same matter on October 20, 2006."

I have the next letter they wrote.

"We cannot go on like this. Citizens must hold those in high office accountable for their words as well as their action. The Disabled Peoples International is calling on the national community to join with us in our call for the immediate removal of Minister Colm Imbert from public office.

George Daniel

President

Trinidad and Tobago Disabled Peoples International."

If you do not take care to protect innocent human beings, especially the disabled, other people will call it otherwise. If you do not do that when you are in Government—the differently-abled—and you do not have the resources, foresight and vision to protect persons, could we really trust you implementing this law to create a law-abiding society where young people will then feel that the law would be enforced to protect them? Mr. Speaker, I humbly suggest we would not.

While we welcome this legislation, we indeed participate in forming this legislation, we are not convinced that the Government will implement this legislation which will be to the benefit of the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (*Fyzabad*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I heard from the Member for Oropouche, I thought your Parliament Chamber was becoming a confession Chamber. I heard the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre say: “When I said to remove Indian Arrival Day, I was saying something else”. I heard the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East saying: “I did not discriminate because I did not give funding”. This comedy of errors that we see playing off in the Parliament is very unfortunate.

When the introduction of Indian Arrival Day and the host of other observations were introduced in this debate and treated by the hon. Prime Minister, it is not about a Trinidad and Tobago Day. It is about nationals of Trinidad and Tobago being treated equally and fairly every day.

We just observed Indian Arrival Day, where the consumption of alcohol was at the lowest compared to other festivals. The Member for Arouca North told me that he did have a single drink on that day; he drank the day before. Not a cent was given to the groups celebrating Indian Arrival Day. We saw two of the largest groups making the point over and over—[*Interruption*] The Member for Diego Martin can say anything, everybody knows his history. I will come to that in a few minutes. [*Continuous interruption and crosstalk*]

There are a number of factors.

Mr. Speaker: One minute. Hon. Members, please, let us hear the Member in silence. I will give you a little time on what you are on because two Members participated in it, but if you could come quickly and then move on.

Mr. C. Sharma: I will move away from it right away, Mr. Speaker. I learnt earlier today that Miss Peters who worked in this Parliament died. On behalf of my colleagues on both sides, we want to extend our deepest sympathy. Many of

us would have seen her in the tearoom. The lady whom I suspect used to clean. I know the staff must be very sad at this moment. If I were the Speaker I would have adjourned the House to give them the time off, but that time will come in the future, perhaps.

When I heard the hon. Minister move the Motion today in his capacity as a Minister, and Chairman of the Committee, I thought that he was setting a very dangerous precedent. He is suggesting or attempting to suggest that the problem with road accidents in Trinidad and Tobago is as a result of drunk driving. That cannot be the case. There are a number of other factors. A Minister, in particular, in moving government policy, must not seem to suggest that. The majority of us who drive on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago do not drink alcohol. He has not any present statistics to show that the majority of accidents on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago are as a result of drunk driving. Let us make that very, very clear. My good friend from La Brea would have the occasional drink and he has never had an accident in his almost 40 years of driving. It has nothing to do with drinking as the Minister intended to say.

There are other reasons which I want to deal with to some extent. One reason is equipment failure. What do I mean by equipment failure? While cars are engineered very well to encourage safe driving, certainly there is failure in the equipment such as brakes for instance. Oftentimes when you go to a garage and see a car that was involved in an accident and do some investigations, it is not as a result of drunk driving, although that certainly contributes. I do not want to deny that fact.

Long ago cars would pull into the licensing offices for inspection now very little of that happens today. The Government, under the UNC has set up garages where vehicles could have been inspected. Perhaps, we need to emphasize that again.

With respect to tyres, lately we have seen a number of accidents in Trinidad and Tobago. The last two or three days we saw a number of accidents occurred which had nothing to do with drunk driving, but tyres are suddenly blowing out. They took place at the Mosquito Creek and Claxton Bay. Again, we have to find out more about the inspection of these tyres. Are these tyres meeting the requirements and what is the Government doing to encourage the best tyres to be made available? You want to reduce. One can say that free trade allows you to bring in tyres. The Government's policy must reflect that. We are seeing too many accidents and if one of the major causes is poor quality tyres, then let us get the better quality tyres, even if it means that the Government has to subsidize it.

Steering suspension is connected to poor roadway maintenance. When you look at poor roadway maintenance in Trinidad and Tobago and roadway designs, they contribute to a number of accidents. When you look at the poor maintenance, by this Government, in terms of repairing roads in Trinidad and Tobago and the traffic congestion that we are seeing, it is leading to that level of frustration.

I remember under the UNC we had a pothole maintenance team. Once a pothole appeared on the road within 48 hours, maximum, we were able to effect repairs. A drop into a pothole at any speed can cause an accident. Again, we have seen many, many cases. We saw many protests in the country about poor road conditions and the high cost of maintenance, where taxi drivers and other road users were making the point that the maintenance on the roads is extremely poor.

In the case of Fyzabad, I remember there were 43 different points of protest and the Government took note of it and quickly paved those roads when they heard that the next protest would have been at Mosquito Creek. Again, the Government must not communicate to the national community that all the road accidents are as a result of drunk driving and that they would be bringing legislation. No, make sure you treat fair and square, across the board.

I want to look at roadway designs. Oftentimes, we see roads across the country where there seems to be an absence of proper engineering. What is the Government doing about it? What is happening?

The other thing is visibility on the roads. Lately, we have seen street lighting to a large extent. We understand that the relative of a Government Minister has a contract to supply street lighting at a cost of approximately \$700 million. Again, the street lighting programme is reaching the national community. How is it being done? The Government did not get up one Monday morning and say: "This week or the next month we would spend \$700 million on lighting and not fix a single pothole".

Roadway services: Oftentimes, no matter which road you drive on in this country, there seems to be a tendency not to treat with the roadway services. By that I also mean the pavements, the quality of work we are seeing and the lack of supervision. Roadway services lend to traffic speed and traffic volume. We have to make sure that at all times we maximize that.

With respect to roadway markings, lately there seems to be no effort by the Government to make sure that the roads are marked properly. There should be white lines on the road where one can overtake and the yellow lines to indicate when you should slow down. This government is asleep. It seems to be drinking

too much and sleeping too late. I cannot see how the Government is concerned about this thing when it is not treating with other issues. What percentage of road accidents is as a result of driving under the influence? The Minister has not indicated that. He has come here with a broad brush.

Mr. Imbert: I had indicated in my presentation, as was confirmed by the Opposition Leader, that in one of the presentations made to the committee, a published research has indicated that in excess of 30 per cent of road fatalities—this is from a developed country and there was a view that in Trinidad and Tobago it may be evenly higher—were attributed to driving under the influence of alcohol. I did give the information.

Mr. C. Sharma: That is exactly the point; I was making. This Government spends hundreds of millions of dollars on all kinds of consultations and projects and here the Minister is acknowledging that they borrowed a report from somewhere that says 30 per cent. What foolishness is this? Here we are deciding on legislation. You are deciding that 30 per cent in another country that has no relationship to Trinidad and Tobago—you have used that as a basis. What foolishness? I am surprised that the Member for Diego Martin West lends support to that foolishness, but so be it.

Traffic control devices and traffic light signals—how often do we drive and the lights are on amber or are not working? What is happening? The Member for Diego Martin West has embarrassed the whole country. Imagine \$5 million worth of materials that could have gone to fixing roads has ended up in a private investment in which the Minister has an interest. They could have paid for traffic lights. [*Interruption*] He has put some in somebody's pocket.

Speed limit signs, school crossings for children, turning lanes and traffic circles or roundabouts—the Government has done absolutely nothing. This is an election year and they would give a lot of rum and roti as they have been doing. Last week we saw it at the Eddie Hart's Sports Grounds. They spoke about it. When you look at the Government's expenditure at functions, 30 per cent or 40 per cent is on alcohol purchase.

Crash barriers, speed bumps, high curving guardrails, concrete barriers—these things are not on the roads anymore. No wonder we are seeing so many accidents.

Traffic flow—Do you know what this Government did coming into Port of Spain? In the El Socorro region they have increased the lanes to four. There is no distance between the cars and now there are three lanes. They are fooling the

country. That is an accident hazard, which was drawn to the Minister's attention. Absolutely nothing! It is the same thing at the Caroni Bridge.

This Government has no intelligence. It is not improving the quality of life. The country is at its worst. They have come with a piece of legislation. Everything is Joint Select Committee. That is now the new trend. If you want to kill something, send it to the Joint Select Committee.

As we approach the rainy season which has started yesterday, I am sure we enjoyed the rain last night and earlier today. Year after year we have seen the Government putting absolutely no measures in place for the weather to assist drivers. In Port of Spain you can see persons trying to cross the streets in two and three feet of water. Cars have stalled. They have done absolutely nothing.

The Minister made reference to what obtains elsewhere. I do not know which country he referred to. I suspect it is the United Kingdom. There must be facilities available to assist people. What we really want to do is reduce the number of accidents.

I want to share some thoughts on poor maintenance. The international studies that the Minister referred to also indicated—because I know the report that he referred to—that road maintenance contributes to motor vehicle accidents. Once there is poor road maintenance, there will be accidents. As a result, there must be maintenance schedules. Nobody in this country knows when a road will be maintained. Today you see a pothole 10 inches in diameter, you make 100 phone calls and it goes to 3 feet in diameter; from 2 inches to 4 inches to 10 inches. There is absolutely no road maintenance.

Part of the Government's project is to remove garbage from the drains and leave it on the roads. You could be driving along the highway and have to pull away from the garbage that was removed from the drain that stays there until it falls back into the drain to cause an accident. You do not need an international consultant to tell you that.

Faded road signs—There is no road schedule of renewing road signs; absolutely none. *[Interruption]* Are we on that? Okay.

The breathalyser, as the hon. Prime Minister correctly identified, will not and cannot solve the problem. Since there is a concern about the breathalyser, I have seen that there is a new cellphone with a built-in device to test the blood alcohol level of users. This will not only warn them if they have had too much to drink and drive—maybe, Mr. Speaker, you can introduce that for Members of

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, June 01, 2007

Parliament—it can also be programmed to block them from making embarrassing—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: What do you have against Members of Parliament drinking?

Mr. C. Sharma: My colleague from Couva South will be happy to receive one—drunken calls in the middle of the night to friends, parents and bosses.

Mr. Ramnath: I take Communion.

Mr. C. Sharma: When the user blows into the phone, if their blood alcohol level is over the legal limit, the telephone displays a sound that indicates to you and shows you the motor vehicles involved in an accident. The user can also programme the cellphone to block selected numbers in the phone address book to prevent them from getting calls that they may not want to treat with. Again, this telephone is available in the United States and elsewhere.

We need to find ways to have responsible drivers on the roads. Many speakers before me have indicated the question of defensive driving and getting the insurance companies involved.

There is also the question of training and information, which we need to ensure becomes part of the drive of the Government. In the report, the Minister indicated that potholes cause accidents. I made that point earlier. Let us get back the pothole gang on the system. Potholes should be a thing of the past.

Roadway construction—Mr. Speaker, both you and the hon. Prime Minister have driven up and down. During the roadway construction there is very little policing and little care. At nights a barrel is placed in a hole in the road with no lighting. Do you need a consultant to tell you that we need to take care of that?

I want to talk about driver behaviour. People tend to blame someone else when a mistake or accident occurs. In a recent study it was concluded that 80 per cent of the drivers involved in motor vehicle accidents believed that the other party could have done something to avoid the accident. But 5 per cent admitted that they were the ones at fault. Some mistakes occurred when a driver became distracted, perhaps by a cellphone call or a spilled cup of coffee. Very few accidents resulted from the act of God, like a tree falling on a vehicle, except Trinidad being the classic, where we saw a horse entering a car.

Could I make an appeal to the hon. Minister and Prime Minister that the young lady whose car was destroyed as a result be compensated? She does not seem to have comprehensive insurance. The entire car was written off. The horse entered the car. It is in the front page of today's *Guardian*. In the meantime, the

young lady is without a motor car and we may want to treat with her. Oftentimes, when an animal causes an accident nobody claims ownership of the animal. The owner of the motor vehicle finds himself responsible for taking care of his vehicle.

Speed kills. The faster the speed of a vehicle, the greater the risk of an accident. We know that. The point I am making again requires us to encourage our young sons and daughters in particular.

When looking at the research in Trinidad and Tobago, a number of these accidents involved young drivers. As responsible parents, we need to find a way to treat with them and encourage them. The time has come where if they have to go out, maybe we should hire taxis for them or send a driver with them.

Young people need avenues to explore and for sports. The question of drag racing is a serious issue in Trinidad and Tobago. You would recall that the UNC indicated when it is returned to government it would certainly look at some drag racing facilities to make sure that we treat with those people.

It is clear that we are very much in support of this Bill. We have made the point on numerous occasions that the Opposition is the partner of the Government and that responsible Bills that come to the House will obtain our support. This is one such Bill.

I want, in closing, to ask the Minister to make sure that whilst driving under the influence is a major concern, he looks at the other areas we have spoken about; which are equipment failure, roadway designs, poor roadway maintenance and driver behaviour.

The Prime Minister was outside when I made the observation of the confession of your good self and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre on the Government's behaviour in not supporting matters that may encourage people to go and have a drink. I spoke on the issues you were both talking about. Indian Arrival Day is a good example. A number of bodies indicated that they did not get their funding in time. That certainly would have frustrated some of them in going into the rum shops.

Thank you.

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I intervene for a few minutes to point out, in this particular report, an important area dealing with the level, in terms of the concentration of alcohol in the blood stream. I do so, not for any plaudits, but to put on the record, with respect to the levels.

In the committee it was discussed and .08 per cent is what is being put forward by the Minister and was agreed to by the committee. I had a concern with respect to this particular concentration. From .02 per cent to .08 per cent there are certain difficulties. *[Interruption]* This is not about Scarborough. I am dealing with concrete facts, Member for Diego Martin West. I am not dealing with gravel and sand. I am dealing with alcohol. From .02 per cent to .08 per cent, as you move along there are certain impairments in the function of a driver or a person operating a vehicle. The research is there, in terms of industry. The tolerance level in industry is from zero tolerance to .02 per cent. *[Interruption and crosstalk]* What do you mean? I will ignore him, apparently he does not want to contribute. He wants to get on the *Hansard* for his constituents to see that he is making a contribution in Parliament. He must be ashamed to stand in the Parliament to make a contribution. I am making a contribution as a member of the committee, which I am entitled to do. I want to point out to the national community that the UNC made an intervention in the debate. You should not speak. You did not have time to go to Cabinet because you were playing golf in Chaguaramas. Do not make me go in the Scarborough Secondary School. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Please, Member for Tabaquite, do not take the bait, address the Speaker.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I do not understand what the bait is about. This is an issue dealing with lives. What is the Member talking about?

Dr. Rowley: You were part of the committee. Sit down.

Dr. A. Nanan: I pointed it out to the Minister and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. I must congratulate him because he also pointed out that I was making a substantive contribution in that committee. The point I was making was in terms of operating machinery. The Government is saying that .08 per cent will be the level above which you are legally drunk. But in Norway and Sweden, the tolerance level is anything under .02 per cent. There is still a level of opportunity between .02 per cent and .08 per cent. From .02 per cent there is impairment, in terms of alcohol. Even at .05 per cent it is very difficult to operate a vehicle.

I was pointing out and the Member pointed out, in terms of culture shock, whether it is .02 per cent, .05 per cent or .08 per cent it will still be a culture shock. Why go to the lowest limit of .08 per cent, when we could have a level of .05 per cent? At that level from .02 per cent to .05 per cent, there will be a certain kind of impairment on the driver. It has been proven that it is very difficult to operate a vehicle at the concentration of over .05 per cent. That is the point I was making at that time.

The other point I was making is that we are dealing with this legislation with respect to the breathalyser, but how are we going to capture, in the marine industry, alcohol being used on boats. That was another area that concerned me with respect to the use of alcohol on boats and the level that would be allowed.

That is why I stood in the debate. The Member for Diego Martin West should know that. If you look at the record you would see that he does not attend a single meeting in the joint select committees. Check the record and you will see that and he is a member of the committee.

I thank you.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): “Whoo!” Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all Members opposite for the contributions that they have made. I would summarize them in the time we have before tea. I want to signal that if I go beyond 4.30 p.m., I would move a Procedural Motion that we go until we complete the matter.

The Member for Siparia, Opposition Leader, spoke about the other factors that lead to fatalities and injury resulting from road accidents. The Member is absolutely right, the breathalyser is one part, one brick in a wall or one element in a mosaic, if we use the language of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. It is the Government's intention to come to Parliament within the next three to four months to deal with the other elements of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, that deals with reckless driving.

The Member for Barataria/San Juan was absolutely correct, cars do not cause accidents; people do. We need to focus on the fact that it is the inconsiderate and reckless driver that causes the accident, human tragedy, death and dismemberment. I would like to give the Opposition Leader the assurance that we will be addressing all of these issues.

The revamping of the ticket system—Member for Princes Town, we would certainly be coming with the upgrade of the systems for speed traps. We would certainly be coming back to Parliament to amend the traffic laws to allow the use of radars. That is next on the agenda. [*Interruption*]

I have listed all of them: traffic wardens and inspection of vehicles. The system of inspection of vehicles is outdated. The penalties are small and the actual fee that the garages collect is less than \$200. I think it is \$160. Inflation has overtaken the financial viability of the vehicle inspection system. It cost the

Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill
[HON. C. IMBERT]

Friday, June 01, 2007

private garages in excess of \$165 to actually do the inspection on the vehicles, yet that is what, by law, they are mandated to collect. We would be overhauling that as well and making the whole system more viable.

I totally agree with Members opposite who spoke about the lack of police on the roads. I share your views and something has to be done about that. It is not just the lack of police on the roads; it is the lack of enforcement of the traffic laws.

Within the capital city of Port of Spain, I am concerned on the question of enforcement of the parking regulations within Port of Spain and the removal of improperly parked motor vehicles. Many of the things said by Members opposite struck a chord on this side and we are in total agreement with you, in terms of the need to completely overhaul our motor vehicles and road traffic laws and also to upgrade the enforcement.

There are some points I want to make before we close. The Member for Fyzabad wanted to know about statistics. If you go to page 122 of the report, you will see that we had a presentation from Prof. Pereira, who is an eminent expert from the Faculty of Medicine at the UWI. Prof. Pereira reported as follows: I would read into the record:

“Alcohol use is a well established factor for motor vehicle accidents and 39 per cent of all traffic fatalities in the United States are actually due to alcohol.”

We did not pull the figure out of a hat. We had presentations from local scientists from UWI who gave us the information. There is absolutely no doubt that alcohol is probably the most significant causative factor of traffic fatalities; not just in Trinidad and Tobago, but in the world.

There is the question of closed-circuit television cameras. You may not be aware, Member for Princes Town, but we announced at a post-Cabinet press conference approximately one month ago that the Cabinet approved a contract and the invitation of tenders at a cost of \$35 million for a traffic management system, essentially involving the installation of closed-circuit television cameras at intersections at traffic accident-prone locations in the country. The tender documents have been prepared and shortly tenders will be invited for a system. Hopefully, within the next six months, we would have the introduction of the closed-circuit television surveillance system in Trinidad and Tobago. You are absolutely right, this will go a long way too, not only in controlling accidents. In

the United States people are aware that there are television cameras on traffic signals at busy intersections and as a result they drive accordingly.

I want to endorse the point made by the Member for Oropouche that some young persons in particular will drink and drive in Trinidad and Tobago and then hop on a plane and go to Miami, Toronto, or wherever as the case may be, and their behaviour would change radically. The reason given by the Member for Oropouche is absolutely correct; it is a question of enforcement. Because when these young people go to these other countries, they are aware that there are police officers waiting outside the pubs and bars and they will be arrested and will lose their licence. Therefore, the question of enforcement is extremely relevant.

I also rather liked the suggestion from the Member for Oropouche. It is one of the first times I have ever heard him make sense—I am serious—when he said that we in this House are in our jackets and ties and are preaching to the converted, but the message must go out to the youth. We must target the youth. We must go into the schools and the universities and develop programmes that will capture the imagination of young people and get them to understand exactly why driving under the influence of alcohol is so dangerous. I totally endorse that. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: You are not competent.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is all right, you can say what you want.

Basically, that is it. The question of cellphones is completely correct. The matter of cellphones raised by the Member for Barataria/San Juan is next, because there is absolutely no doubt with respect to the statistics that the Member—when persons use cellphones and text messages while driving it quadruples the risk of an accident. We have to target all the causative factors for serious road accidents, traffic fatalities, driving under the influence, using cellphones while driving, reckless driving and speeding.

In several Caribbean countries, the fine for speeding is significantly more than it is in Trinidad and Tobago and we need to get serious about all of this.

Notwithstanding the fact that I know it is election season everybody—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Panday: Thank you Minister. There is a serious problem at South Quay, City Gate. There are two persons stopping the traffic every two or three minutes to allow people to cross, is the Government considering putting a walkover there also for the differently-abled persons?

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, we are. I was about to wind up, but you have reminded me. Let me address that matter raised by the Member for Oropouche about access to walkovers by differently-abled people. We are addressing that. In developed countries there are many different mechanisms that are used to deal with that. We are examining, at this point in time, a number of approaches to resolve the issue that has been raised. We certainly do intend to put a walkover at City Gate and we certainly do intend to ensure that the walkovers that we have already installed and are to be installed in Trinidad and Tobago are accessible by the differently-abled.

In fact, notwithstanding what may be in the public domain, the Ministry of Works and Transport is going to be meeting with Disabled Peoples International in the very near future to discuss exactly what kind of system we can use to make walkovers accessible to the differently-abled.

I wish to thank everyone on that side. As I said, I know it is election season, but in between the rhetoric, the contributions were excellent. If you sift out the rhetoric, the contributions were excellent, in terms of recommendations for dealing with the carnage on the roads and reducing—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: You are being nice.

Hon. C. Imbert: Of course I am being nice, I am not stupid. I need your support. I am not going to abuse you today. I want to thank all Members for their contributions. We will certainly take all the suggestions on board. When we return to this House—with the comprehensive overhaul of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, which we hope to be able to do within the next three months—we will be using the *Hansard* of hon. Members today and on other occasions, to assist us in the reform of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act.

With those few words, I beg to move that—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Panday: Minister, before you sit, since you said that you would be coming with a comprehensive review of the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act, could you also look at the Motor Vehicles (Third Party Insurance Act) at the same time? Right now I think the sum of \$2 million resulted from an accident. Sometimes eight or nine persons are injured and cannot get any money.

Another issue is that there are many persons paying insurance, but when you pay insurance you expect the insurance to cover you. Lo and behold you get into an accident only to hear that the insurance company goes under. That person,

although he has paid insurance and had insurance up to the time of the accident, the insurance company goes under and he is left with that in his hand. Could we look at that?

Hon. C. Imbert: We most certainly will. I am going to use the *Hansard* of the deliberations today. I genuinely mean what I said. We genuinely mean what we said and I thank Members for their contributions.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

4.30 p.m.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I wish to move a Procedural Motion that the House continue with this matter until completion.

Question put and agreed to.

MOTOR VEHICLES AND ROAD TRAFFIC (AMDT.) BILL

Question put That the Bill be now read a third time.

The House voted: Ayes 29

AYES

Imbert, Hon. C.

Manning, Hon. P.

Rowley, Hon. Dr. K

Narine, Hon. J.

Boynes, Hon. R.

Rahael, Hon. J.

Roberts, Hon. R.

Bereaux, H.

James, Hon. J.

Hart, Hon. E.

Seukeran, Hon. D.

Job-Davis, Hon. E.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Khan, F.

Rafeeq, Dr. H.

Persad-Bissessar, Mrs. K.

Ramnath, K.

Sharma, C.

Partap, H.

Nanan, Dr. A.

Panday, S.

Baksh, N.

Moonilal, Dr. R.

Singh, G.

Dookeran, W.

Yetming, G.

Ramsaran, M.

Lucky, Miss G.

Khan, Dr. F.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting of this House is suspended for tea and we will resume at 5.05 p.m.

4.33 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

FINANCE BILL

Question proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. The matter before us this afternoon entitled the Finance Bill, 2007 and presented by

the Minister in the Ministry of Finance is, indeed, an umbrella piece of legislation; a sort of catch-all Bill, which seeks to make amendments to as many as 22 pieces of legislation; in fact (a) to (v) coming down the line.

Clearly, let me say at the beginning, I do not intend to speak on the amendments for all 22 pieces of legislation. I want to concentrate my contribution along certain lines. I will begin with a discussion on some of the policy issues emanating from the Bill. I will then deal only with a few issues related to education, environment, information, technology and, of course, a central piece of amendment dealing with pensions. My colleagues on the Front Bench would address, in some detail, the issues of pension reform, environment and education.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is an umbrella piece of legislation, but it is also significant in that it is almost a piece of legislation that seeks to correct errors. It is a Bill which really deals with a lot of errors made by the Government over the past five or six years, at several of the clauses listed. It is really an attempt to correct mistakes made in the legislation before, either by omission or inadvertently, where the Government found itself in a position where it passed legislation, and has now returned to the House to correct the legislation, because of the failure to implement. So, it is really dealing with the issue of errors.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, June 06, 2007 at 1.30 p.m. on which day we will be doing the report of the Finance Committee and the Variation of Appropriation Bill that flows from that.

Dr. Rafeeq: There are matters on the adjournment to be raised. The Minister of Education is here so, maybe, we could deal with one of the matters.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much for reminding me. This being Friday, we all seem anxious to get out of here.

Denominational Schools Boards (Change in Government's Policy)

Mr. Harry Partap (Nariva): Mr. Speaker, thank you. I am glad that the hon. Minister has found it possible to be with us, and I hope to get a reply at the end. Mr. Speaker, the Motion before us this afternoon relates to the change in Government policy with regard to its dealings with denominational schools boards of education.

Denominational Schools Boards
[MR. PARTAP]

Friday, June 01, 2007

By 1960 Dr. Eric Williams lost, decisively, the battle to kick out the religious bodies from their involvement in education. As an act of appeasement, he issued through the then Minister of Education John S. Donaldson, a Concordat, which set out the relationship between the State and the church in education. Apparently, Dr. Williams had no intention of honouring this Concordat because he never invited the religious bodies to sign the document, but the subterfuge backfired. The Concordat remained in effect for 47 years assuming the force of a convention and, as the lawyers would say, it is now settled law. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the PNM, in 2007 is trying the 1960 stunt all over again but, I warn them, it failed then and it will fail again. The United National Congress (UNC) during its short period in Government, not only honoured the Concordat, but expanded it by partnering with religious bodies in establishing new schools. [*Desk thumping*]

We knew, as everybody does, that the schools run by religious bodies have always done better in educating our children in every sense of the word. So, during our six years in office we expanded the Concordat to include, for the first time, schools for the Baptist community, the Pentecostals and provided additional schools for the Christian, Hindu and Muslim communities. In other words, the UNC facilitated the involvement of religious bodies in education. We are committed to further strengthening and facilitating this church/State involvement in education after the next general election.

Mr. Speaker, it has come to our notice that the Minister of Education has submitted to Cabinet plans to interfere and subvert the Concordat. The hon. Minister's first real excursion in undermining the 1960 Concordat came in 2005, two years ago, in the form of a memorandum of understanding (MOU), purportedly to regularize the Church/State involvement in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE).

That memorandum of understanding was a surreptitious and vulgar attempt by the Minister of Education to lure the church boards into a joint-management arrangement that would have emasculated the role of the boards and given them a minority voice in the management of the schools. That MOU would have given the Ministry of Education the right to appoint teachers in denominational schools and in a crisis, surrender church property to the Government. That was, in effect, the requirement of the MOU if the religious bodies chose to participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme. It would have been a total surrender of the involvement of religious bodies in the field of education, and it would have been a tragedy.

Mr. Speaker, the 19 religious bodies responded by forming an Association of Denominational Boards of Education to fight this apparent attack by a Government who was handed office on the basis of moral and spiritual values. Since 2005, the association had been discussing their objections to the MOU with the Minister and the Ministry of Education. However, without notice and like a thief in the night, the Minister of Education converted the MOU into a memorandum of agreement (MOA). Indeed, this was a misnomer because there was no agreement. There could not have been any agreement with the MOA, because the association had no opportunity to examine the final document.

The hon. Minister took a unilateral decision to take the MOA to Cabinet for approval, and is now blackmailing the denominational boards into signing a cat-in-bag agreement that could force them out of the education system. This MOA undermines the spirit and intent of the 1960 Concordat and represents a radical departure from the long-standing relationship between the State and the church in education.

The MOA has introduced for the first time, mediation, arbitration and termination clauses which give the right to the State to effect compulsory acquisition of the churches' property if no agreement can be reached on matters under arbitration. The sinister plot to chase the denominational boards out of education is embedded in these clauses. It is not beyond the PNM to hatch up complaints against the denominational boards, and to have them placed for mediation, arbitration and termination.

This is how the PNM operates. We have seen it in the shameless attack on the political leader of the UNC and Member for Couva North, Basdeo Panday. [*Desk thumping*] We have seen it in the matter of the Chief Justice. Subterfuge and conspiracy!

Mr. Speaker, the Concordat provided a formula in which the churches would maintain control of their schools while the Government provides the teachers and all physical requirements. The Government is now demanding that the denominational boards contribute towards the operating costs of the schools, and that the boards be responsible for the supply of all requisite furniture. The boards would now be responsible for repairs to the buildings and all sanitary facilities.

It would seem to us, Mr. Speaker, that the Ministry of Education, through its main consultant, Ken Burgess, is currently carrying out a systematic plan to blackmail the denominational boards into submission. The Ministry of Education, through its officials, has signalled to the boards that none of their schools will be repaired or rebuilt until this MOA is signed.

Denominational Schools Boards
[MR. PARTAP]

Friday, June 01, 2007

I do not have to remind you who this Ken Burgess is. He was the architect of the wicked and vicious propaganda spread against the Biche High School by the PNM through two of its most vocal Ministers, one of whom is involved in a scandal relating to the Scarborough General Hospital and the other misled a commission of enquiry into believing that a voter was dead when, in fact, that voter was alive.

The PNM has denied the children of Biche their secondary school, as they are today using the children of the nation as pawns in its impasse with the denominational boards. The PNM continues to take wicked and vicious actions against the children of our nation. This is why, 21 students from the Elswick Presbyterian School in Tableland stared death in the face when the maxi taxi transporting them to the Poole Presbyterian School, five miles away, ended up in a ditch. That school was closed down two years ago, and the Minister of Education is holding students and teachers to ransom in order to force the Presbyterian Primary Schools Board of Education to sign the memorandum. But, under pressure from parents, the Minister quickly agreed to construct a pre-fab building to accommodate the students at the old school site in Tableland.

Mr. Speaker, for the past six years, children attending the Biche Presbyterian School travel six kilometres to share accommodation at the Cushe Government School. Their school has not been repaired, because the Minister of Education is holding them to ransom so that they can get their way with the board.

It is the same at the Roussillac Presbyterian School; Minister Hazel Manning is holding the children to ransom to force the MOA down the throats of the boards. And the same is happening to students at the Lengua Presbyterian School; the Kanhai Presbyterian School and the Harmony Hall Presbyterian School. Their new building is on hold.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister is hiding Government's grab for church schools behind the National Procurement Policy. This policy has not even reached Parliament. However, the boards have been observing accountability and transparency in all of its financial affairs. I know that. In fact, all school repairs or new constructions must carry a completion certificate issued by a government agency before funds are released by the ministry for payment to contractors. That is the accountability and transparency and they do it. Therefore, the question of public accountability, transparency, and value for money does not arise since the boards act only as a conduit for payment to contractors in the repair and rebuilding programme. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister can say what he wants. I know. I have been on the board.

By putting on hold the repairs and rebuilding of schools run by the denominational boards of education until this MOA is signed, is an arrogant grab for church schools by this PNM Government, and a willful disrespect for the collaborative approach spelt out in the Concordat 47 years ago. You cannot use that against me. I was a member of the board. I am no longer a member of the board. [*Crosstalk*]

The hon. Minister appears to have a vendetta against the denominational boards of education in much the same way that her husband, the Prime Minister seems to have a vendetta against the Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago.

We demand that the Minister of Education withdraw this obnoxious and spiteful MOA and resume forthwith the repairs and rebuilding of schools run by denominational boards. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister must stop, at once, adding to the distress of our children.

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

The Minister of Education (Sen. The Hon. Hazel Manning): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I am really grateful for this opportunity to inform this honourable House of some of the current developments in the education policy, and how wrong these developments are being interpreted as changes in Government's policy by those on the other side.

The Government's policy with regard to its dealing with denominational school boards of education has been developed over the past 45 years. The policy is guided by two major documents; the Concordat of 1960 and the Education Act of 1966. Mr. Speaker, I want to put on record what the Concordat states, and I quote:

- “(1) In relation to property, the ownership and right of direct control and management of all denominational primary and secondary schools will be assured to the denominations in whatever modifications of the existing system that may subsequently be introduced in the New Education Ordinance, and all existing rights, so far as property is concerned, will be respected.
- (2) In denominational schools, no books or apparatus to which the denominational authority formally objects, will be introduced or imposed.”

The Concordat further states:

- “(4) The right of appointment, retention, promotion, transfer and dismissal of teachers in Primary Schools will rest with the Public Service Commission.”

Denominational Schools Boards
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Friday, June 01, 2007

Specifically, with respect to secondary schools, the Concordat emphasizes:

“The Governing Bodies of these schools will continue to be responsible for the administration of these schools and for their maintenance, repair and furnishing.”

I want to repeat that.

“The Governing Bodies of these schools will continue to be responsible for the administration of these schools and for their maintenance, repair and furnishing.”

Mr. Speaker, the Concordat states that. [*Desk thumping*] The Concordat states:

“These schools will continue to qualify for Government Aid.”

The Education Act of 1966 states in section 3:

“The powers conferred on the Minister by this Act shall be exercised so as to ensure—

- (a) the promotion of the education of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the establishment of institutions devoted to that purpose by means of which he shall thereby contribute towards the development of the human resources, physical, mental, moral and spiritual of the community;
- (b) The establishment of a system of education designed to provide adequately for the planning and development of an educational service related to the changing needs of the community;
- (c) the effective execution of the education policy of the Government.”

So, with respect to the board of management of assisted schools the Act at section 17 states:

“Subject to this Act and of any regulations made there-under, a Board with regard to assisted schools under its management—

- (a) shall have the control and management of all matters relating to the establishment and maintenance of new schools, the making of application for the recognition of new schools, the maintenance of existing schools, the re-building or extension of schools and such other matters relating to the organization of such schools as may from time to time be referred to them.
- (b) shall receive, disburse and account for the expenditure of such grants-in-aid as may from time to time be allocated to them from public funds,”

Hon. Members: They must account.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the Act goes on to say:

“(c) shall be responsible to the Minister for the efficient maintenance of schools under its authority, for the provision of all requisite furniture and for keeping school buildings in a good state of repair and sanitation;”

Mr. Manning: The board is responsible.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: The ministry is not supposed to be fixing schools. This is an indication of the joint responsibility between denominational boards of education and the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Specifically, with respect to accountability the Act enunciates at section 18:

“(1) The Board of an assisted school shall provide for full and true accounts, respecting receipt and expenditure of public funds, to be kept in the manner prescribed by Regulations made under this Act, or (if the manner of keeping the accounts is not so prescribed) in a manner approved by the Minister.”

It goes on to say:

“(2) For the purpose of the audit of such accounts, the Board of an assisted school is a statutory authority within the meaning of Part V of the Exchequer and Audit Act.”

Mr. Speaker, the ministry’s current approach in no way reflects a change in Government’s policy or relationship, especially a negative change. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: Repeat it.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: The ministry’s current approach in no way reflects a change in Government’s policy or relationship, especially a negative change, rather it shows the Government’s intention to deepen the relationship between the denominational boards and the State.

Some current practices which support Government’s policy with regard to its dealing with the denominational boards of education are as follows:

- (1) With respect to the staffing of schools, the boards interview perspective teachers for appointment to the teaching service, and they recommend those perspective teachers to be employed in their schools; we are not changing that.

Denominational Schools Boards
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Friday, June 01, 2007

- (2) The boards make recommendations to the teaching service on matters of promotion and transfer; we are not changing that.
- (3) The Ministry of Education generally supports the boards in their recommendations with respect to the above. We are going to continue to support the boards.
- (4) The Government pays the full salaries, gratuities and pensions of teachers of denominational schools; and we are not changing that.
- (5) Each denominational school receives a grant for the operation of each school under its purview; and we are not changing that. We would continue to provide grants which include upkeep allowance, contributions of salaries of auxiliary staff, minor equipment and per capita grant for practical subjects.
- (6) Denominational secondary schools are allowed to select 20 per cent of their intake to their schools on the basis of the merit in SEA; we are not changing that either.
- (7) The Government contributes two-thirds of all construction cost for repairs and renovation works to denominational secondary schools, and three-quarters of the construction cost for primary schools. The board is required to pay only one-quarter and one-third of these costs.
- (8) The Government contributes 100 per cent for works related to sanitation and electrification.

Mr. Manning: We are not changing that.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: Mr. Speaker, since 2002 the Ministry of Education had embarked on a number of reformed initiatives in its quest for a modernized system that provides quality education for all. The Ministry of Education has informed and involved the denominational boards on each step along the way. We have been talking to them almost on a monthly basis since the year 2002. These reformed initiatives which are part of a holistic Government plan include:

- (a) modernization of the curriculum;
- (b) implementation of school-based management;
- (c) the use of school development plans;

- (d) continuous assessment;
- (e) teacher professional development; and
- (f) monitoring and supervision of schools.

All of that is to ensure that there is quality education for all; certification for all; the development of well-rounded and innovative, caring and productive citizens to contribute to social and economic development of the country.

Arising from the modernized curriculum is the necessity to have physical facilities which are in accord with the requirements of a modernized curriculum. The upshot of this is a comprehensive programme for the rebuilding and upgrading the renovation of almost all the schools in the country.

Mr. Speaker, 70 per cent of the primary schools in the country are denominational schools. We have repaired over 890 of those schools to date. Two weeks ago, Cabinet approved almost 300 schools to be repaired. So, we are repairing denominational schools. What we are also looking at is the cost of these schools.

The cost for the construction of an early childhood centre is approximately \$2 million; the cost of construction of a primary school for 720 children is approximately \$20 million; the cost of construction of a modernized secondary school for 875 children is approximately \$90 million and, therefore, we have challenges. The challenges include accountability and transparency and the total involvement of the community. *[Desk thumping]*

To overcome these challenges, the Ministry of Education developed a national model for education from early childhood care straight through primary to secondary school, and a supporting memorandum of understanding for early childhood care. The reason we did it for early childhood care was that early childhood care is nowhere on the Concordat. This is the first time in this country that early childhood care has been formalized. It was never formalized, and we had to have an agreement in place to be able to manage the early childhood sector. We are now putting a contract in place for primary and secondary schools to guide the process of school construction at a cost of \$20 million for a primary school and \$90 million for a secondary school.

The national model or the structure which guarantees education talks about national unity—and that is why we are doing it—to produce innovative and caring citizens. It talks about a central role for democratic education and providing a well articulated universal education programme for 15 to 16 years for our children.

Denominational Schools Boards
[SEN. THE HON. H. MANNING]

Friday, June 01, 2007

The Ministry of Education and the denominational boards of education have been in intense discussion for the last two years. We have been engaging them in every step along the way. Therefore, it is essential to meet the mandate of the Financial Act and the Auditor General's annual investigation. Mr. Speaker, failing to do that will result in matters of answering to the Integrity Commission and a public commission of enquiry.

Discussions with denominational boards are based on the fact that we now want to provide for the denominational boards 100 per cent cost to upgrade and rebuild schools. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we want to do. We are saying at the cost of \$2 million, \$20 million and \$90 million the board must sign a memorandum of understanding and a contract on how these funds can be managed to ensure transparency and accountability. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Manning: That is what it is.

Sen. The Hon. H. Manning: If we do not do that, I am sure that the Members on the other side would be the first to call for the Auditor General to investigate what is happening in the Ministry of Education. Our call for transparency is also in keeping with the relevant sections of the Act of 1966. I want to repeat where section 18 of the Education Act says:

“The Board of an assisted school shall provide for full and true accounts, respecting receipt and expenditure of public funds, to be kept in the manner prescribed by Regulations made under this Act, or (if the manner of keeping the accounts is not so prescribed) in a manner approved by the Minister.

For the purpose of the audit of such accounts, the Board of an assisted school is a statutory authority within the meaning of Part V of the Exchequer and Audit Act.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to end by saying that the Government's current approach in no way reflects a change in Government's policy or relationship, but rather it shows the Government's intention to strengthen an effective working relationship between the board and the Government.

The Ministry of Education continues to be guided by the Concordat and by the Education Act, and does not intend to deviate from the tenets of the Concordat and the Education Act. We do look forward to a continuous and harmonious relationship with denominational boards of education. We will continue to

dialogue with the denominational boards—we are going to meet them again soon—to achieve and maintain this.

The Ministry of Education has been very attentive and accommodating to the suggestions of the boards. The main reason for this is to promote and to ensure harmonious relationships between the denominational boards of management, the Ministry of Education and the State. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the question, there is a matter of Private Business which I would like to attend to, and with your indulgence I propose to do that. I am now going to ask the Clerk to proceed.

INCORPORATION OF TRUSTEES OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO BILL

Question put and agreed to, That a Bill to repeal and replace the Presbyterian Church Incorporation Ordinance, 1893 and provide for the incorporation of certain persons as Trustees of the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago, be now read a second time.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill referred to a special select committee of the House appointed by the Speaker as follows: Mrs. Dianne Seukeran, (Chairman), Mrs. Eulalie James, Member; Mr. Edward Hart, Member; Mr. Harry Partap, Member; Mr. Manohar Ramsaran, Member.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.45 p.m.