

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, June 20, 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 Hon. Lawrence Achong, Member of Parliament for Point Fortin requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. I have also received correspondence from hon. Penelope Beckles, Member of Parliament for Arima for the period June 20 to June 22. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Valley, are you answering all these questions?

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, as you know that is not a normal day of the House. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, I do not think—

Mr. Speaker: Let me see if I can assist you.

Mr. Valley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: In other words, I think the Member is appealing to your good graces to perhaps defer these questions for Friday.

Dr. Rafeeq: Until Friday?

Mr. Speaker: Until Friday.

Dr. Rafeeq: Friday is a normal day.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, Friday is a normal day.

Mr. Valley: Friday, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Singh: Are we sitting on Friday?

Mr. Valley: Yes, we are sitting on Friday.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. So, because of the kind indulgence of Members opposite, you have Ministers, until Friday to arm yourselves properly to come and answer these questions that have been on the Order Paper for quite some time.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Brian Lara Stadium

5. (a) With regard to the Brian Lara Stadium, could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs advise:
- (i) the status of work being conducted;
 - (ii) the expected completion date; and
 - (iii) the cost overruns to date?
- (b) Could the Minister state what would the stadium be used for in relation to Cricket World Cup 2007? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT)

36. Could the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education list:
- (a) all the contracts entered into by the University of Trinidad of Tobago (UTT);
 - (b) all consultants whose services are engaged by UTT and the fees paid to them;
 - (c) all legal fees paid to attorneys-at-law for and on behalf of UTT; and
 - (d) all foreign personnel of UTT and their respective salaries? [*Mr. G. Singh*]

Community Development Fund

(Status of)

44. With respect to the Community Development Fund (CDF), could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs inform this House:
- (a) what is the present status of the fund; and
 - (b) the number of recipients and quantum of money disbursed and the purpose of the allocations for fiscal 2005/2006? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**Community Development Bursary Programme
(Details of)**

45. With respect to the Community Development Bursary Programme, could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs indicate to this House:
- (a) the number of recipients of bursaries under the programme; and
 - (b) the quantum of moneys disbursed for fiscal 2005/2006 and for what given purpose? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**SWMCOL/CEPEP Investment Club
(Money Market Account)**

58. Could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment state:
- (a) the purpose of the fund established in the form of a money market account in the name of “SWMCOL/CEPEP Investment Club”;
 - (b) the signatories to that account;
 - (c) the current balance of that account;
 - (d) the average monthly balance of that account since its establishment; and
 - (e) the total amounts contributed annually by SWMCOL to the “SWMCOL/CEPEP Investment Club”? [*Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar*]

**SWMCOL
(Contracts from 2006 to date)**

60. Could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment provide:
- (a) the names of any consultancy firms employed by SWMCOL during the period 2006 to date; and
 - (b) the duration of the contracts and the contract amounts? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Allocation of Funds
(Details of)**

70. Could the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs state the allocations made to TUCO, Soca Monarch and Calypso Tents for the period 2005—2007? [*Mr. G. Singh*]

E-Teck, InterFix LLC and InterFix Ventures LLC

75. Could the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry list the principal terms and conditions of the Shareholders Agreement between E-Teck and InterFix LLC and InterFix Ventures, LLC? [*Mr. G. Singh*]

**Member for Point Fortin
(Details of Prosecution)**

77. Could the hon. Attorney General inform this House of the date on which the file pertaining to the prosecution of the Member for Point Fortin was sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Yolande Pompey Recreation Ground
(Details of)**

79. (a) Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs advise this House as to the extent of work needed in order to fully upgrade and rehabilitate the Yolande Pompey Recreation Ground in Princes Town?
- (b) Could the Minister also advise why this work has not yet been completed? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation
(Financial Contributions)**

82. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth affairs inform this honourable House of:
- (a) all financial contributions made to the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation for World Cup Football 2006; and
- (b) whether any contributions were made to Government regarding FIFA's profit sharing for the World Cup Football 2006? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**Sporting Organizations Coaches
(Financial Assistance)**

83. Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:
- (a) advise whether financial assistance was promised to coaches attached to various sporting organizations; and
- (b) so, would the Minister inform this House of the quantum promised to each body? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**(CWC) Cricket World Cup 2007
(Financial Returns)**

- 84.** Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:
- (a) inform this House whether the Government received any financial returns with regard to (CWC) Cricket World Cup 2007; and
 - (b) also provide the total financial contribution made to the Local Organizing Committee for the Cricket World Cup 2007? [*Mr. M. Ramsaran*]

**Hobsons, Attorneys-at-Law
(Details of Legal Work)**

- 85.** (a) Could the hon. Minister of Finance advise whether the law firm “Hobsons” Attorneys-at-Law of Independence Avenue, San Fernando, has received legal work from the State, State Agencies State Corporations and companies which are wholly or partially owned by the State for the period January 2006 to date;
- (b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, could the Minister provide the name/names of the State Agencies, State Corporations and Companies; and
- (c) Could the Minister also indicate the sum/sums of money paid to “Hobsons” Attorneys-at-Law for each item of work? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

HOMES FOR OLDER PERSONS BILL

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Social Development (Hon. Anthony Roberts): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg to move,

That a Bill to repeal the Homes for Older Persons Act, 2002 and provide for the licensing, regulation and control of Homes for Older Persons, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I am truly grateful for the opportunity to present to this honourable House a Bill to my mind that is very important as this Government proceeds on its path to development. This Bill seeks to repeal the Homes for Older Persons Act, No. 38 of 2000 and replace it with the a new Act which would

also set up a licensing framework for the operations of the residences which provide care for senior citizens who require that kind of assistance.

But, Mr. Speaker, before I proceed, I think it would be necessary for me to put this piece of legislation into context. What we are doing today is debating a Bill on Homes for Older Persons who comprise approximately 6 per cent of the senior citizens of this country at this time.

Dr. Rafeeq: Six per cent of what?

Hon. A. Roberts: Six per cent of older persons in the country.

Hon. Member: I thought it was 3 per cent?

Dr. Rafeeq: Six per cent of older persons who stay at homes?

Hon. A. Roberts: Yes, 6 per cent of the older persons in the country who stay at homes. I want to urge my colleagues to focus on the matter that is before us today because you see it is very easy for us to get carried away and focus on all other issues of ageing which are not what is before us. I know that I really cannot tell Members what to say, but I am trying to urge them to focus on the matter that is before us.

You see, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure Members that they will have an opportunity at a later stage to debate issues and the wider issues of ageing because it is an important issue. This Government will give them the opportunity. And so, those of us who will continue to be Members of this House would have that opportunity to discuss the issues of ageing, and you would note I said “those of us”.

In Trinidad and Tobago today, we have approximately 143,000 senior citizens which is approximately 11 per cent of the population.

Hon. Member: Over 60 or—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. A. Roberts: It is therefore prudent, that as a country, a fast paced developing country, we pay particular attention to this category of citizens. And as a Member enquired across the floor, I think I should let this House know who are the persons who constitute this distinguished category of citizens. Any person who has attained the golden age of 60 is considered to be a senior citizen, and internationally, any country that has a senior citizen population 10 per cent and more, is considered to be an ageing society. So, Trinidad and Tobago has attained that distinction of being an ageing society.

Mr. Speaker, we must appreciate that those persons who are senior citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, have contributed and are continuing to make a tremendous contribution to the development of this beautiful country of ours. The Trinidad and Tobago that we know and most of us feel very proud to be a part of, notwithstanding there are a number of us who seem to be working overtime to spoil this beautiful country, we owe it to the senior citizens of this country and I am confident that my colleagues on the other side would be willing to join with us on this side to pay tribute to the senior citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, those persons who continue to make a positive contribution to the development of our country.

They have given their blood and sweat for this country and I believe that we owe it to them to respond to them positively. We must ensure that in the sunset of their life they enjoy a bit of comfort and happiness. It is said that a country can determine its maturity by the way it treats its senior citizens and I am pleased to state that for this Government, the issue of ageing is a priority; it is high on this Government's agenda. And so this Government has approved a national policy on ageing, I have a copy of this document with me and the goal of this policy is to promote the well-being of older persons in a sustainable manner and to provide them with an opportunity to be integrated in the mainstream of this society. That is what we mean when we talk about social inclusion: to ensure that all citizens are included in the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we are also ensuring that those senior citizens who are in need, that they are assisted, and more so, no senior citizen of this country must ever be made to feel that he is a burden on this society. I want to repeat that, no senior citizen of this country must ever be made to feel he is a burden on this society and so if you would permit me to highlight just a few of the objectives of the National Policy on Ageing. The objectives state:

- To create an environment which will facilitate the meaningful participation and involvement of older persons in the society.
- To create the provision of adequate and cost effective community-based services for older persons.
- To promote wellness, active and healthy ageing among older persons.
- To facilitate their continued participation in family life and the society.

We know that this is very, very important because we believe that the ills that are affecting our society, if we need to fix them, we need to fix the family. And

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so, we believe that our senior citizens, our older persons in society could make a tremendous contribution in assisting, restoring and rebuilding the family unit. Again, one of the objectives states:

- To promote and preserve the dignity and the independence of older persons.

And we could go on and on to list the objectives, but, I only want for the purpose of this debate, just to highlight a couple of these objectives.

Mr. Speaker, also stated in this policy document are priority areas for action, to strengthen the national social security system to facilitate accessibility and effectiveness in delivery of service through the legislative as we are doing today, and administrative reform and to ensure the maintenance of the dignity of older persons. Another priority area for action is to encourage the provision of training and support services to caregivers of older persons, so as to ensure adequate and effective delivery of service.

This Government understands and appreciates the culture of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore, it is very very cognizant of the desires of our older persons to remain in their own homes and to be cared for. And so, the Government has developed a programme to train a cadre of young persons to be able to provide care for the senior citizens; this programme, the Geriatrics Adolescent Partnership Programme will assist in caring for our senior citizens in their own homes. We believe that the removal of senior citizens from their own homes to other forms of accommodation must be a last resort. It must be a last resort after we have tried everything else, but the intention of this Government is to ensure that these persons remain in their own homes and be provided for.

We appreciate that there may be circumstances which require the type of response in terms of taking them to one of these elder persons homes, and so it has become necessary for us to establish the legal framework to regulate the activities of these homes. So, the policy also speaks to legislation and I just want to refer to the policy again. It says that the legislative agenda as it relates to ageing and ageing issues will be effected within a framework that gives high priority to protecting the rights of older persons. In this regard, the following initiatives will be taken in collaboration with relevant ministries and agencies.

The review and amendment of existing legislation: Accordingly, in the short-term a review of the necessary amendments would be conducted on the Homes for Older Persons Act, 2000 and a Private Hospitals Act. The enactment of new legislation as appropriate, for example, legislation related to community care for

older persons and abuse of older persons among others. So, today, we are here. This piece of legislation as you would realize has been informed by this Government's policy to which I referred just a while ago.

Mr. Speaker, this Government does not adopt an ad hoc approach to the business of the people. Legislation is always approached after we have done research and made careful consideration; it is not done by the whims and fancies of individuals. I expect to hear from the other side why, did it take so long? I want to let them know up front as we have learnt from our seniors themselves that, "A hurry bird never built a good nest". I am certain, Mr. Speaker, you have heard that.

One only has to look at the legislation of 2000, Mr. Speaker, and one would appreciate what I am saying. And that is not the only piece of legislation; there are several others. I just want to point out two others: the package of Children's legislation; the Criminal Injuries Compensation legislation, apparently put in place on the run without any careful thought and they come here from time to time and open their mouths. We have heard them, particularly the Member for Siparia who is not here today, you would hear her making reference to both pieces of legislation to which I have just referred, the package of Children's legislation.

Mr. Speaker, it took the PNM to have to put the kind of work that is necessary into this legislation and they would have the opportunity to see the kind of work that we have done and have the opportunity to debate that piece of legislation when it comes before the House. I consider them to the shameless to come here; shameless group of—Mr. Speaker, you could continue the rest of it; it might not be parliamentary to say what I have to say—people.

Mr. Speaker: Do not bring me at all into your argument, but, please, let us get back to the Bill before us.

Hon. A. Roberts: I am guided by you, Mr. Speaker. But the truth is, we have attempted—when I say "we," the Ministry of Social Development—to operationalize the Act of 2000 and we experienced grave difficulty in doing so. So, we were advised that the best approach in dealing with this piece of legislation is to repeal the Act, No. 38 of 2000, and replace it with this new legislation. And let me take a few minutes, maybe, to highlight some of the deficiencies in that old Act and point out some of the areas in the new legislation. We had problems from the beginning.

Mr. Speaker, the interpretation section, section 3 provides separate definitions for the words “Home” and “Homes for Older Person” and so we felt that it was necessary to have it clarified.

Secondly, while section 6(1) provides that the Minister may, subject to the terms of the Act, grant licence, section 9(2) provides that a division of ageing may within two months of receiving an application issue or refuse a license. Section 9 provides that a license could not be granted unless, among other things, the premises and equipment are assessed by the Facility Review Team. It should be noted that the Act does not give the Facility Review Team the legal authority to enter homes for that exercise.

Again, the Act does not make any provision for the surrendering of a licence by the manager or owner of a home, nor for the necessary arrangements which would have to be made for the residents in such circumstances.

Section 15 duplicates the requirements previously established under section 6(2) concerning the use of unlicensed premises and should therefore be deleted. In addition, certain issues which were identified in the Law Commission Report of 1988 have become critical as confirmed by recent studies and should now be addressed in legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that available data indicate that as much as 94 per cent of older people reside in the community, and as I have indicated previously, it is only 6 per cent of our senior citizens who reside in older persons homes, as well, according to the United Nations Population Division, 2006 recent data, life expectancy of males in Trinidad and Tobago is now 78 years, while the females is 81, so the ladies are living longer than the men and it tells us that people are living longer because of improved health care. So, it is felt that the older persons care board has catered for the legislation of 2000, and should be removed as it is better suited to treat with care issues of the broader population of older persons and it should be addressed in comprehensive legislation of ageing to which I referred earlier on.

In fact, what is required of the care board can now be taken care of or that responsibility can be assumed by the Division of Ageing. Again, the impracticability of acquiring professionals to function on a full-time basis on the Facility Review Team, these professionals hold substantive jobs in the public service. Instead, the team should be drawn from a wider range of professions to perform biannual inspections of the physical requirements of homes, such as safety measures, storage facilities, lighting and ventilation and so on.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that the finding of the Facility Review Team must affect the licence arrangements, such as the renewal, suspension and replication of the homes. The new Bill proposes the introduction of inspectors, comprised of contract staff drawn from various professions to be added to the Division of ageing. These inspectors will monitor specifically the quality of care provided at the homes and develop the kind of mechanisms for monitoring homes in compliance with the established standard of care.

A major area of concern in the care of older persons is elderly abuse, and sadly, this was not addressed in the Act of 2000. We believe that this issue of elderly abuse, is sufficiently important and we feel that it is now adequately addressed in Part V of the new legislation. I wish to indicate as well that Members should take note that the Regulations are laid for their consideration because upon the passage of this piece of legislation, the Government is ready to hit the ground running in terms of getting the legislation going.

So, you see, we are urging Members to treat this piece of legislation as serious. As I indicated earlier on, I am hoping that Members will keep focus on the matter before them; and once more I also give the assurance that this House will have the opportunity—because we consider it to be very, very important—to deal with the whole question of ageing at a later stage.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Nizam Baksh (*Naparima*): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to contribute in this debate. I feel this is a very special occasion for me in that I have had the fortunate experience of working as a social welfare officer in the early 1970s and then the opportunity to also serve as a parliamentary secretary in the Ministry of Social Development.

I recall my days as a public servant in the Social Welfare Division; my first assignment was in the Laventille district.

Mr. Hinds: You were paid to do work you did not do and now you are criticizing the Government?

Mr. N. Baksh: No. [*Laughter*] I will tell you about that. Even in those days, you were given a little notebook with an elastic band, similar to those the police receive, and you were given a black bag to walk with your files to do your

investigations. My first advice when I took up the appointment was, "Never walk with this notebook and that bag when you are going up to that district." You had to walk with your files in your hands to visit the homes. That was because of the criminal activities that took place even since then. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: What?

Mr. N. Baksh: That was my experience. In those days you had to walk house-to-house to visit, discuss and meet with the people. It was really a learning experience for me during those days that I spent as an officer working the Laventille district. Up to today, some of those memories remain with me very vividly.

When you look at the situations in which the elderly and, particularly so, the poorer people, the conditions in which they have to reside, the cramped situations, it begs that we have not been doing enough to help those persons who are very vulnerable.

Today the Minister told us that we should not speak about ageing, when he himself started off by speaking about the ageing persons in the society. It is strange to me, they say that they are attaching so much importance to this Bill, but it only addresses 6 per cent of the elderly. What happens to the other 94 per cent of those persons, the majority? This is why I feel very strongly that this Government should have presented today a holistic Bill on ageing rather than come with an ad hoc and piecemeal Bill at this time. [*Desk thumping*]

It might sound appeasing and encouraging to those 6 per cent that you are addressing something, but the real focus should be the residences where these persons have to stay, the 6 per cent who really need this kind of assistance by staying in homes for the elderly.

The 94 per cent outside the range we are speaking about today, need to be addressed. As a matter of fact, I feel very strongly that before we brought this Bill today we should have had a survey done on all the persons 60 years and over. This would have given an idea what their status was with regard to their health and their ability to work. In doing that, we would have been able to better assess their needs and those over 60 years. We need the assistance of the Government. So whether they were residing in homes or not, we needed this kind of information.

In that survey you would have captured the homes and residences where persons over 60 years stay. That was why it was important to do this investigation or have a commission of inquiry on homes, their existing conditions, their facilities, the services offered and fees charged.

We know that the PNM is visionless, has very little foresight; that is why today they are coming with a Bill to address only 6 per cent of the population of those 60 years and over. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: That is why you are in Opposition!

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. N. Baksh: I have friends who came from the public service and when they retired they had absolutely no plans or expectations of what would happen when they left office. I thought that it was going to be very appropriate and helpful that the Government, knowing that you have a large number of persons in the public service and private sector who retire at 60, you would have encouraged them to hold seminars in preparing persons for retirement. This is very critical. Very many persons leave employment and when they get into that new area they become frustrated. Illness and a host of problems enter at that age.

This Bill to repeal Act 38 of 2000 took this Government six years. The Minister could not defend the action of the Government by bringing a Bill so late. He talked about the inefficiencies of the Bill of 2000, but it took them six years to bring this Bill today; in the 12th hour of governance. Why so long to recognize the shortcomings? Is this the PNM style of operation? [*Crosstalk*] They are talking a lot about finding solutions to the ills of this country, at this point in time, but we know that they are not able to implement or deliver, and this is why we are hearing that certain things will take place in the next two or three years from now.

I have a list of a couple outstanding bills: Criminal Injuries Compensation, Children's Authority, Children's Community Residence, Foster Homes and Nurseries and the Green Fund Bill. [*Crosstalk*] There are a number of bills outstanding and they are taking so long to see daylight with this Government. [*Crosstalk*] We have to look at education, health and transport for our elderly citizens. We have the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division Report of 2006, which says that we have 145,000 persons over 60 years, 11 per cent of the population. Again, this Bill addresses only 6 per cent of 145,000 persons; that is approximately 8,600 persons. There is absolutely no concern for the 136,000 persons outside that category now. Today would have been an opportune day to bring a programme to address the holistic situation with regard to the elderly. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: We could debate it today. We could tell you all we are doing.

Mr. N. Baksh: You should have provided us with the documents and the report so we could have discussed it today. It was a very good opportunity for that.

This is why we are saying that the Government is only making a piecemeal approach here and we need to address it in a holistic way. Demographers have indicated that over 10 per cent is considered an ageing society and by 2020 Trinidad and Tobago is expected to reach approximately 230,000 persons over the age of 60. By then, 15 per cent of our population would be senior citizens. What are the Government's plans to cater for this? Are we going to wait until we reach the year 2020 to come up with plans?

Now that we are able to predict it very early, we can sit and come up with some solutions and plans to implement well in advance. We know that this Government can only act in a crisis and when there is chaos. They would want to put the blame on everybody else and do nothing; so this is going to be a blame game. Is the solution then to have a baby boom to solve that problem and create a balance? Is it that the criminals are doing the job for the Government with the alarming and disturbing murder rate, that we are going to have the senior citizens numbers reduced.

If we are looking at this holistically, we need to take into consideration the problems and issues of education, with regard to the churning out of criminals in our education system. When you look at the stories in the newspapers, you want to know if in addition to churning out criminals, we have sex maniacs in the schools. Are these going to be the role models for the future? This is something we need to address, because we are looking ahead and it is important that we pay some attention and put some programmes in place to deal with this. Mr. Speaker, these are all signs of the times.

Mr. Hinds: Any recommendations?

Mr. N. Baksh: At the end; I will give some recommendations later on. This is something we need to address, because another 10 or 20 years from now, we can have an ageing population and not address the issues to deal with that.

I have listed one or two things here. What we are seeing very often is that the PNM dreams. They always keep coming up with new ideas, sometimes very ad hoc, but those dreams are becoming the citizens' nightmare and that is something we have to look at. Citizens are inundated with the public relations propaganda and heavy bombardment from various ministries in the newspapers, on television and, recently, with radio programmes. This is very deliberate, but misleading in some instances as well.

With regard to health, education, community development, social services, legal services, planning and development, works and transport and sports—let me preface my specific concerns on the Bill by highlighting some of the woes and problems in the delivery service faced by our citizens in particular, and others in general.

Mr. Speaker, for the last couple months we have been reading in the media about the issues and problems faced by citizens and mainly senior citizens with regard to passports. Recently the Government has introduced the machine readable passports. This is the peak season for travel and there is the highest demand for these passports.

I looked at an article, just to give an idea of the pressing need for this:

"After waiting hours in Immigration line.

No emergency passports

Natalie Sutherland desperately wants to visit her dying father in Anguilla and has been trying fruitlessly to obtain an emergency passport.

After standing in line for over five hours, she said she was turned away by 'aggressive, impatient' police officers at the Immigration Office in Port of Spain yesterday morning.

Like Sutherland, dozens of people hoping to get emergency passports were sent home empty-handed as they did not obtain a number when the doors opened at 6 a.m. Some claimed they were there 'keeping their space' since 1 a.m.

But they were told by police officers and immigration officials they would have to return tomorrow and do it all over again, as the office was only dealing with the first 182 people in line because numbers 'ran out'."

These persons really want to visit other persons who are ailing and could probably die at any minute. They have been experiencing this frustration with regard to obtaining these passports.

There is another situation:

"Sixty-four-year-old Marlene Julien said yesterday was not the first time she was turned away either.

'I left home on Friday at 4 a.m., I was told to come back today (yesterday). I am sick. I have to get intestinal surgery this month at Port of Spain General. I

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may need further medical attention after the surgery. I must get my passport before I am cut, if I have to travel to be treated abroad."

These are the kinds of problems that the senior citizens face when they need to travel for medical purposes. They are stuck and we need to address this, because it is really frustrating; the priority is for medical treatment.

I also looked at the health sector; this seems to be the cream of them all; it could take the cake with regard to the problems faced by our senior citizens. This is why I said in my opening remarks that we need to bring a Bill that would address the situation of our senior citizens holistically, rather than just look at piecemeal legislation. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: This is your Act. We are repealing your Act.

Mr. N. Baksh: There is a critical situation where we have a lack of bed spaces in the hospitals. I am aware that we have some long-stay patients. I think that these persons can be placed in geriatric homes run by NGOs with subventions by the Government. [*Desk thumping*] I know at one time we used to have geriatric wards at the hospitals, which dealt with elderly persons. They were able to get treatment in the hospital; but that seems to be history now. We should build geriatric homes to assist these persons and remove those long-stay patients from the hospitals to make room for the critical situation we have these days. [*Crosstalk*]

With regard to homes for the elderly, we should ensure that district medical officers and district nurses make visits to these homes. I see in the Regulations and in the Bill that the homes are required to ensure that they get a medical report on the patients at different times, one on entry and one every year. In areas where we have district medical offices and health centres, we should make it a must that the DMO, the district health nurse and even the health inspector visit these homes on a regular basis.

Another problem we come across in this country right now with regard to the elderly and the population at large, is with birth certificates. If you want to get your pension, they are asking you for your new birth certificate. If you are trying to get the conditional cash transfer cards, they are asking for the new birth certificate. Persons claim that they have horrors getting these new birth certificates. We have to find a way to address these issues. Once they put some rule in place—perhaps the Government does not look at the problems it creates and the bottlenecks when it makes demands and puts forward requests. It is

something we have got to look at. When you have the elderly going to these places, lining up for hours and they are unable to get service, it is something we have to address.

The Minister of Legal Affairs made some mention of the new birth certificates, that they would carry a pin number and you would be able to track persons from birth to death. I have a little concern with the extent of the information that would be carried on this. I know that the term "smart card" will come up very soon with regard to that. I feel that would be an invasion of the privacy of citizens. It is something we have got to watch carefully as it develops. I know that the Prime Minister visited Israel on one of his visits and a number of things came up. I saw on the Internet that the smart card gives that kind of information. I do not want to delve into that today, but it shows the kind of information that would be catered for on that smart card. That is why I said that it could a trespass and cause an invasion of privacy.

I want to look at the issue of transport, because when I talk to some of the senior citizens in my constituency—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: You are talking about things in society that affect old people, but I think you need to relate it to the homes.

Mr. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, while we are addressing specifically only 6 per cent of the elderly, they too move around and have problems with transport. [*Desk thumping*] I am taking the issues as they face them. I am just trying to highlight the problems these persons face. We need to address them. Perhaps, younger persons could take the stress when they go outside there, but these senior citizens who have to travel have difficulties; some cannot travel for long distances without having to use washrooms or they need to have their meals. When they have to spend three and four hours on the road to get from one point to the next, this is where the problem of transport comes in. I think we need to look at this. I am looking at it in a wider perspective.

Mr. Speaker: I agree with you, but all I am saying to you is that you relate it to what is before us.

Mr. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, I listened to you already.

I was making the point earlier on that every PNM dream is a citizen's nightmare. When these senior citizens take ill and go to these homes, they do not have doctors stationed there. You may have somebody who takes in with a heart condition and you need to get him to the medical centres; this is where the

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problem comes in. I am suggesting too that the homes should have, as part of Government's programme, dedicated transport vehicles; just like the Emergency Health Services (EHS); you can make an emergency call and request transport, so too you could have dedicated transport for the senior citizens at those homes.

You can also do this by making prior arrangement for the times they have to go for medical treatment or they may have to get documents for the bank to support their stay at these homes or pension. This is where they need assistance with regard to transport. I am suggesting today that this is one of the measures that the Government could implement to assist those persons at the homes for the elderly.

Only recently, with all the water woes we had, an elderly bedridden cancer patient was calling for water every two days, because she had a limited storage facility. This is something we need to address, because I see that in the Regulations these homes must have a potable supply of water. I want to ensure that they do not have a crisis situation when we reach in the dry season. I want to find out from Government what plans have been put in place to ensure that those homes can get an adequate supply of water on demand.

I know the experience of the public at large when you call to make an appointment with the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA). That is a problem; you do not get the water until three or four days afterwards. So we must give special consideration to these homes for older persons to ensure that in any crisis they should be given an adequate and prompt supply of water when needed. They should have storage as well. If you have a dry spell for a continuous period, then it is going to be difficult for them to get water for storage. It is something we need to look at as well.

I also feel very strongly that persons at these homes should have opportunities for learning and sharing knowledge at the homes and interacting with their peers. It is necessary to have these facilities at the homes. We know that a lot of senior citizens are very knowledgeable. Those who have retired from very good positions, they may have worked in areas where they had acquired certain skills and they would want to share with those around them and younger persons as well. We should ensure that you have the kind of facilities at these homes to allow these opportunities to take place.

I publicly thank the Trinidad and Tobago Association for Retired Persons (TTARP) for their involvement in activities and programmes for senior citizens. Those of you who are former public servants and others as well would know that

you can have membership there. They have a lot of programmes and social activities that the elderly can benefit from. They are a lobbying body as well and they negotiate discounts at merchants' stores. This would help persons with the few dollars they get as pension; they would be able to stretch them a little further. We want to see that they could, perhaps, extend their membership to other members of the private sector as well. I know so far it has been within the confines of retired public servants.

They also have a medical assistance plan. They assist in employment on a part-time and full-time basis. While this is done privately, the Government needs to address this as well, because many persons who are in good health and have reached the age of 60 can still work and they may want to work for two or three hours. Things have changed over the years and we can employ persons to work for two or three hours or half a day and get a lot out of them, because of the wealth of experience they would have acquired over the years. So those persons remaining in the homes and becoming bored and frustrated, if we provide opportunity for them, they could continue to live healthy and active lives; as the Minister called it, their "golden years". It is something we need to address as well.

They would also be able to develop a skills bank. I know that you had a retired persons training programme under the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs. Today, if we had that skills bank we would have been able to source the different skills we need and really share the experiences with other members as well. [*Crosstalk*] I also want to commend the other organizations that make substantial and tangible contributions to the elderly. We have a number of NGOs assisting in this regard and some of them with very little or no assistance from the Government.

I know for a fact that some of the homes, about nine of them, get grants from Government for assistance to the elderly. Now that we have inspectors and a facility review team to look at the homes, we must have equal treatment to all the homes with regard to grants to assist these persons. They are doing yeoman service, which the Government is unable to do at this time.

This Bill focuses only on private homes, which are likely to accept able-bodied persons only, instead of those who are chronically ill or physically challenged. So where would those persons go? Sometimes they do not have the means to pay for other services and, obviously, when they are physically challenged or chronically ill, to remain in any home would cost a lot more money than those who are able-bodied. It is an area we have to look at.

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I have spoken to a few persons outside the constituency and I came across persons who live in squatting areas. For one, they could not afford a comfortable living or comfortable housing. They have the extended family situation—parents who are 60-years-old and unable to afford to go to a home for the elderly. Government must, of necessity, do something to address the needs of these persons who need this help more than anybody else, at this time. They could find geriatric homes or the Government itself, through subventions, could establish homes through NGOs that these persons could go to without having to pay a fee. These are the types of programmes that we want to look at, because not everybody is at the same level economically.

I observed too that in some of these homes, the managers or owners are appointed as nominees to collect the pensions on behalf of the residents. By and large, the persons in these homes are pensioners. I see a problem there, in that, under the new Bill that was passed here with regard to pensions, pensions are now going to be paid at different levels, on a sliding scale. These homes for the elderly would be budgeting so, for example, if they have 20 senior citizens coming, they would forecast their income at a certain level.

You are going to find that if you have 20 senior citizens who are recipients of old age pension, you could end up with 20 of them having different senior citizens grants coming to them. You have a means level now, a ceiling, of \$2,150, but if someone has a small income or they get some assistance, it works out to a figure of \$1,400. It means that they are going to get \$750 difference, but somebody who is assessed at \$1,410 would get \$10 less. Every senior citizen who is a beneficiary of the senior citizens grant is likely to get a different figure. I see that, not only creating a problem for the managers of the homes who will have a shortfall in their income, but it is also going to create a problem for the officers at the Social Welfare Division. When previously you had a band that allowed some flexibility, today that band is no longer there and it is going to pose some problems, because each officer could assess someone on a different level.

I could go and speak to someone and in my interpretation and interview could obtain different information. Another person could talk to that same person, but interpret everything differently, and you could end up with two different figures, and this is going to create havoc with those pensioners, once this is implemented. I know too that the cheques are prepared by another agency. I think, perhaps, that it is time the Government should look at addressing this issue by doing it in-house.

I will just make a brief comment, because I already mentioned the difference and shortfall in the income of these homes. We have the ceiling of \$2,150. I heard previously that the Prime Minister said they were going to increase the national insurance to \$2,000. This is going to mean that a person getting NIS could still go to the old age pension office and apply for old age pension and get a grant of \$150; that is the difference. When you look at the cost factor in preparing these cheques, it is better that they increase the NIS to \$2,150 and remove 10,000 clients from the Social Welfare Division and make that workload less, so things could work out smoother at that level. Taking it up to that \$2,150 is going to solve a lot of problems.

I also feel that the Senior Citizens Grant should be based on the cost of living and it should be adjusted every year. I made the point earlier that very often 100 per cent of the Senior Citizens Grant is taken by those who manage the homes for elderly citizens. I have looked at some other jurisdictions and I have seen that if persons have to use their Senior Citizens Grant to pay for the cost of remaining in these homes, it be specified that a certain sum should remain with the senior citizen, so that he could have something to spend for small demands.

The Government should have come with a minimum and maximum fee as a guideline to the two sets of homes, type one and type two, so the owners of these homes could formulate their cost to the senior citizens. Without this, I feel that senior citizens could be taken advantage of, in this regard, and we need to give them some help. This is why I said that it should be mandated that they remain with a part of their grant for their personal expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, I know that almost all those persons who remain at homes for the elderly have to visit the Social Welfare Office from time to time. Those offices are not really client-oriented. If you go to most of them, the officers need to be a lot friendlier and courteous in the way they deal with the elderly. PNM Governments have been in office for over 40 years and today we still see very dilapidated district offices. In fact, if you walk into a rum shop and you walk into that office, you feel very little difference with regard to the physical facilities. Today, these senior citizens still have to stand at a counter in these district offices and wait in lines for many hours before they could be attended to. There are also no designated sitting areas in these offices for senior citizens who come to look after their pensions.

I made the point earlier that senior citizens, because of their conditions, may need to use washrooms. If you go to one of these public offices, like the Social Welfare Office, you would never be able to find washrooms. This is something

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we need to address, if we are talking about a 2020 vision; it must also include our senior citizens, whether they are in or outside homes.

When senior citizens at these homes have to apply for their old age pension, it takes sometimes about six months before they can get the funds. Why does the Government not accept applications before their 65th birthday, as is done in other countries. I know in Canada this is done; you can apply three to six months beforehand, and because of that period of processing they can get it just a few days after their 60th birthday. This is something we could look at.

There are other grants as well given to senior citizens and persons staying in homes for older persons. I want to identify two categories of those persons: those living in their own homes with relatives and those living in designated homes. We need to pay some attention to that. The Housing Development Corporation has home repair grants up to \$15,000. I want to make an appeal to the Minister of Housing, the Member for Diego Martin West, if some consideration could be given to persons who do not live in homes for the elderly, but live at home and they need some assistance to repair those homes to live comfortably. I am sure that if we have to wait on the lottery system, they may not have a chance, so we feel they should be given special consideration with regard to the application for assistance to do some renovations to meet their needs. In fact, this could be very well assessed, and based on this assessment, the needs could be filled by Government.

I know that the Ministry gives grants for wheelchairs, spectacles and walking aids and it also gives dietary grants. I think that we should get some more information for the benefit of Members of Parliament, so we could advise our constituents who are in need. We could let them know how to access these grants. I hope that the Minister in his winding-up would take the opportunity to advise us and the public at large how to access some of these grants under his control. We would also like to know the amount of allocations provided for these grants; this could help us to motivate and encourage persons to access these benefits, because sometimes they are not aware.

This morning while I was getting dressed to come here, someone came to me. He is physically challenged and was looking for some assistance. When I looked at the pictures, it really hurt me to see the conditions under which this person lived. He was unable to earn a living; he was not quite 60, but physically challenged. *[Mr. Baksh shows picture]* You can see from the picture that he has one leg. I was told that he had a kidney removed and on his second leg he has a brace. If you look at the condition of this house: missing galvanize sheeting, the

partitions falling apart. This guy was not from the constituency of Nariva, I think he was from the constituency of Ortoire/Mayaro, but he lives not far from where I live. I really was taken aback when he came to ask what I could do to help.

I thought that if the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro was here I would have sat and discussed this with him. I really would have liked to, perhaps, chat with the Minister of Housing to see if anything could be done directly to help this chap. He is a beneficiary of the \$800 from the Government and he said that he really found it difficult to do anything to repair his house. This article said:

“Ramcharon Ramlokhan's life of struggle and hardship can be enough to make anyone want to commit suicide.

Ramlokhan was born with Spina Bifida (a defect in which the spinal column is not completely formed). As a result of taking antibiotics for a bladder infection, his left kidney became infected and had to be removed.

His right leg was amputated below the knee after that limb also became infected and gangrenous. He cannot afford a proper prosthetic leg and the badly fitting one he uses, causing strain on his other leg which is in a brace. Both of his parents are dead and he has been fending for himself in a rundown shack for several years.

'...I just living to dead and sometimes I feel to take my own life. Can't someone, anyone in this whole country help me. I need help real bad,' Ramlokhan cried as he lay on a bed with sheets that had not been changed in weeks."

His consolation was:

"I already born the way I am and I can't change that. All I am begging for is help. I want to live in dignity..."

It is something that is very appealing and I make this offer that if anyone is willing to assist, I could be the conduit to give him this assistance.

Mr. Speaker, when you go out there, you see the conditions of some of our elderly. I know the homes also cater for those under 60 years as well. We need to look at this; look at the plight of these citizens who do not know where to turn to get assistance. I always feel that MPs should be given a grant to assist in these kinds of needs and other situations as well; it could be controlled by the Parliament. It is something we should look at urgently; I feel very strongly about this. *[Interruption]*

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Before the hon. Member continues, again let me appeal to you. You cannot talk about old people at large. There are multitudinous problems that old people face. Please, relate it to the Bill before us and relate your argument to what is before us, which is the Homes For Older Persons. So relate the problems that you say old people face to the Bill before us.

Mr. N. Baksh: Mr. Speaker, when I look at the situations with regard to the senior citizens and homes for the elderly, I feel we should change the term "elderly persons". When we say "senior citizens", it gives a little more dignity to the name. When I looked at the Schedule, every line where it made reference to elderly persons at those homes is kind of downgrading. This is why I feel we should have a change in the name of the homes "senior citizens centres". [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: To refer to someone as elderly is degrading? Come off it!

Mr. N. Baksh: The term "elderly" has a kind of stigma; if you address them as senior citizens, you give them a little lift.

In these centres for the elderly they should ensure that they have certain facilities. We are talking about the home care services that will be required at these homes. When the inspectors and the facility review team go to these homes, they must ensure that the quality of the buildings meets the required standards. The Minister admitted that right now there are a number of homes not registered and they were operating. So I know we have a time frame of one year which these homes are going to be given to update and have all the facilities and equipment required, to make sure they are up to mark. I want to emphasize that it is very critical, because you are going to have some persons who are physically challenged and you need to know whether they are going to have all the ramps to approach these homes and provide transport for them.

The Minister spoke about the GAP programme and those persons assisting those outside the senior citizens homes. When I looked at the GAP programme, nowhere do we understand what rates those who are trained to assist as caregivers will be getting. While persons have been trained initially for a few weeks or

maybe two or three months, they are very likely to get employment at some of the homes for older persons. Once they get in there, they should have an opportunity or it should become mandatory that they would be able to access further training to obtain the skills necessary to properly treat and deal with persons at these homes.

In my view it is very critical that they have recommendations in place or facilities in place to ensure that these persons are trained a little more than they are trained at this time. We need to establish something like age care education, so that these persons, just as we do with the MuST and HYPE programmes, can do skills training. I think this is a critical area, because we are likely to have more and more senior citizens and we need to address this very specifically.

I also feel that we should have a special grant to assist the disabled who would want to put in minor adaptations in their own facilities to accommodate them when they have to go to the washroom or to have their baths, because you need to have all the handrails and the other things required. Just as we are catering for that in homes for the elderly, we need to look at that when they are outside as well, to see what assistance they can give.

So in addition to the several grants that are provided for citizens, we must look at a grant to enable the disabled. We could call it a disabled facilities grant. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: That grant is available!

Mr. N. Baksh: We know that this is an election year and we are going to have a lot of burning issues coming up. We feel that in doing that, we must not only have talk and a lot of promises, but we need to get action. I observed that with a lot of the issues being raised, the delivery time is outside the six-month period within which we are likely to have a general election. Let us not just have a lot of grandiose plans, but let us have delivery to those persons who will benefit mostly.

I take this opportunity to thank you and I hope that the Minister would take some of these points and address the issues and problems of our elderly in these homes.

Thank you.

The Minister in the Ministry of National Security and Minister in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the hon. Member for St. Ann's East in the debate on the Homes for

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Older Persons Bill. Permit me to begin my very short contribution by offering the words of the book of life, Psalm 71 verse nine, which says and I quote:

"Cast me not off in the time of old age; Forsake me not when my strength faileth."

Mrs. Job-Davis: Jah Rastafari! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: I went there because as I contemplated the purpose of these very important measures, I know that, in essence, older persons are at the heart of this legislation. I felt it necessary, as I contemplated the issues, to bring a spiritual perspective, if you like, to these measures. As I have already demonstrated and will demonstrate again, even in the book of life, the Bible, there is support, reverence and due respect to be given to our elderly. The same could be found in the Holy Qur'an, the Bhagavad Gita and for those who are familiar, the Torah. All these religious books share that in common; they ask us to respect the aged and the elderly and to treat them in a certain way. In some texts you would see that there are implications for failing so to do.

The Mighty Stalin, Black Stalin—[*Interruption*] Just before I give way, it appears that the mention of God interfered with my friend.

Dr. Rafeeq: No; I was so impressed that you mentioned God that I had to respond. You mentioned the Bible; I just want to quote what the Qur'an says:

"And thy Lord has decreed that you should serve none but him and do good to parents. If either or both of them reach old age with thee, say not fie to them nor chide them, and speak to them a generous word and lower to them the wings of humility out of mercy and say, 'My Lord have mercy on them as they brought me up when I was little.'" [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: "Where Pundit Sharma?"

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you Member for Caroni Central. It would be very nice if one of our Hindu brothers or sisters opposite can find support in the Gita and lend support at this time. I would give way for that reason. [*Crosstalk*] Maybe they are not familiar with it.

Mr. Speaker: Maybe when the pundit arrives, he would assist you. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, I should wait.

I know that we share our party in common, and some may think that this is a partisan platitude. I really want to compliment my friend, the Member for St.

Ann's East, who for those who took time to listen would have observed that for the past year or so he has been, with the help of some very hardworking and specialized well trained, learned technocrats from his Ministry—and I know, Mr. Speaker, that you do not encourage the calling of names, so I would not; but one is seated here in the Chamber today—doing a tremendous amount of work with the elderly from the Ministry of Social Development. I think they deserve as a unit the highest praise. [*Desk thumping*]

I sat with pride some time ago and listened to the Member for St. Ann's East, while watching my television, reminding the national community that in the spirit of caring, the measures that are before us today dealing with senior citizens homes, are but a small part of the larger matrix; a small part of the patchwork of good, clean and caring thoughts and measures that are all designed to make the life of the elderly as comfortable and as blessed as it deserves to be. [*Crosstalk*]

We have to remember that the elderly, having become infirm and having retired from active service, wherever they may have performed it, represent part of the engine room, part of the growth process of our nation. So all that we are today, really would have been achieved and accomplished on the backs, shoulders, minds and spirits of those who are now elderly.

My friend, the Member for Naparima, made a very strong argument for us to desist from using the term "elderly", which he appeared to find pejorative and he suggested that we replace that with the concept of "senior citizens". I do not think that the word "elderly" is offensive in any way, therefore, I do not think that we have to give too much attention to that. He made a very good point when he spoke about persons having to wait until they get to age 65 before they could apply for the old age pension, so to speak, now called the Senior Citizens Grant.

Really, there are difficulties here. I imagine, and I have seen a couple of documents and files, they could be very thick; a lot of information has to be gathered, so by the time the person gets to age 65 and is entitled to the benefit and makes the application, this long process starts. Oftentimes, a major contributory factor being the inefficiency of some elements of the public service. We need to be more efficient, and no one could gainsay that. Too much time is lost, and sometimes the benefit is payable two and three years after application at age 65. He made a very useful suggestion, that we could probably begin to take applications before the person gets to age 65, so that would be well and truly ready by age 65, assuming that all the documents have been submitted and they are ready to go, hit the ground running, as it were. That was a useful suggestion.

I was told by the hon. Minister that part of the problem in Trinidad and Tobago is that there is a tremendous amount of dishonesty. There are many persons who spend their moments, spend all their lives, trying to defraud other people, including the State with bogus documents. I understand that there are many fraud investigations in this realm, and part of the reason for the inordinate delay, as it would appear to the applicant, has to do with officers being very careful to get everything correct, because there is a lot of fraud around it, a lot of trickery and scampishness in Trinidad and Tobago. There are many people who are long dead and pensions are still being paid in their names, so this is something they are addressing now; cleaning up, tidying up, trying to get to the bottom of it. There are many persons before the court on fraud matters in this regard. I trust that would continue.

The Member for St. Ann's East has been busy in the national community telling us that a number of senior citizens activity centres have been established. These I suspect would be located strategically close to the homes that we are regulating today. As we regulate these homes to make the legal regime more solid and better able to cope with some of the deficiencies in the system now, these senior citizens activity centres would be strategically located so that persons in these homes and even those outside can access these centres.

3.00 p.m.

I am advised that there are already centres in St. James, Maloney, Rio Claro and Couva. Those who may say that we are a Port of Spain Government will find that Rio Claro is a long way from Port of Spain. Those who come with the foolish argument that we are only concerned with so-called PNM areas, Couva is not a so-called PNM area. Last week in another debate I had reason to say that that analysis about PNM area and UNC area is a thing of the past. The demographics of Trinidad and Tobago no longer lend themselves to that kind of simplistic analysis, but yet we hear it over and over in this House. I suspect that long before I came to this House that thing about PNM area, DLP area and UNC area was coded language for race talk, but now we have gone a long way past that so we could leave that aside.

At any rate in a very short while one will be established in Pleasantville. That is to be opened next Thursday. That is done to satisfy the concerns of the Member for Naparima in conjunction and collaboration with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Of course, we understand that NGOs have a critical role to play in the governance of our country. This is an area in which such a role can be demonstrated easily. I think that the Ministry of Social Development and my friend the Member for St. Ann's East for that reason alone deserve our highest praise.

If that were all, I would stop quite easily but that is not all. I heard him say and I felt so proud because if we are lucky we too would become old. We would probably have to stay in one of the homes that we are regulating today. Certainly, whether we stay in one or not, one day if we are lucky we would become old. I heard my friend telling the national community that we are providing therapy for the elderly through the provision of swimming pools. More than that, there are existing swimming pools that they could not access. I saw on the television a particular type of chair where the senior citizen can get into it and it swivels around into the pool.

Hon. Member: How many pools are there in the country?

Hon. F. Hinds: How many pools are there in the country? I do not have that answer. I can answer how many fools there are in the country, but pools I do not know. You should tell us how many were constructed during a certain period of which you might be well aware. I am not going there. This is not partisan small talk. This is serious.

Mr. Singh: It is a gentler Bill.

Hon. F. Hinds: It is a kinder gentler Bill. I noticed that the Leader of the UNC was not kinder and gentler to you a few moments ago.

Mr. Singh: I will be kind to him.

Hon. F. Hinds: You will be kind to him.

Mr. Singh: Only for today.

Hon. F. Hinds: Only for today. [*Laughter*] What an unkind man he is.

I heard the Member for Naparima talking about abuse of the elderly. It is difficult not to accuse the UNC of abuse of elderly people. If only because I see they have one elderly citizen about 73 years old with a red beret up and down Trinidad and Tobago making something of a—I want to find a parliamentary word—perambulating up and down the country without an obvious puppeteer. That is abusive. They should have retired that gentleman a long time ago. It would have brought great benefit to the UNC and certainly, the national community and to the Member for Siparia who was asking about fool a while ago. I think that she was trying to draw a certain answer from me. I am not getting involved in “dem people kangkatang”.

As I indicated, I compliment the Member for St. Ann’s East because as simple as it sounds it is a major advance. I saw the joy and excitement on the elderly

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people's faces as they were able to go into the pool; submerge themselves and enjoy that which they may have done in their earlier years. There are elder persons information centres along with the regime that we are offering today to make life better for the elderly. There are certain types of behaviour that you cannot legislate. You could say thou shalt not kill. We say that it is a crime to commit murder. There are many types of behaviour short of criminal conduct that are very hard to regulate and it depends on the individual. It has to do with education, socialization and an understanding of the dictates of the Quran, as the Member for Caroni Central brought to our attention a while ago and an understanding and appreciation of some of the offerings of the Bible and other holybooks.

In the homes that we regulate today those who work there, from the cleaners to the carers and managers they have to—if I may use the words of the Member for Caroni East—be kinder and gentler in the dispensation of their services. *[Interruption]* I will take that. They want the elderly people to come to the homes because for the most part it is a business. If the elderly people are not resident at the home the business would fail. They are happy to have them but once they come oftentimes the treatment of the elderly is not commensurate with the desire to have them in the first place. I am asking all persons who are responsible in these homes and even outside to be more patient, tolerant and respectful to the elderly. As I said, if we are lucky we would get to those ages. While their bodies may be older, infirm, weaker, with sagging muscles and failing eyesight, for the most part their minds remain untouched. They have emotions just like anyone else. It is a kind of understanding that we must have and live with constantly in this whole thing.

Black Stalin has a song which asks us how do we expect the young people in the society to feel when they see the older persons being treated in a certain way. I wish I could remember the name of the song. He is one of my favourite artistes but for the moment the concept is powerful. He is making the point that as young persons you look around the society and you know that you will get to that age if God so intends it. You want to see the elderly people treated in a certain way, otherwise it would not be encouraging for you to work hard and contribute in the society if you feel you would be treated with ignominy and badly later on.

Before I resume my seat, I want to deal very briefly with the kind of behaviour that is not abuse in the sense that it was used in this debate and goes beyond mere abuse and lack of patience, respect and courtesy to the elderly but out and out criminal abuse against them. I speak from the capacity of the office I

hold in the Ministry of National Security. The police has had to deal with reports of serious criminal offences against the elderly. Perhaps about a year and a half ago, I read in shock and horror of an 87 year old citizen being raped by a young man. That would not have been the only occasion. What manner of man or beast would find himself raping an 87 year old helpless woman? He has to be sick. That is a serious criminal offence. Many of them are robbed. I am informed by the hon. Minister that an old persons' home in Woodbrook was robbed recently. Little pests! Young strong healthy men with their dirty little guns and nasty little knives walking cowardly as they are in an old persons' home to meet helpless nurses and caregivers to rob the home.

Mr. Partap: Children of the PNM.

Hon. F. Hinds: I hear the Member for Nariva saying, "children of the PNM". He does not know where the offenders or the assailants came from. This is probably the first time that he is hearing about the issue. He does not know who they are; who they voted for; which community in Trinidad and Tobago they come from, but he sits foolishly and stereotypes saying, "children of the PNM". That is the problem. He does not know if the persons were using rasta wigs as happened sometime ago when another UNC operator made much noise in this House about a certain group. That kind of stupidity we can live without. He is obviously disadvantaged, and challenged. I will attend to him later on. We will have enough time for that outside here. I will not dishonour this House.

I was making the point that it would take a real sick mind to traumatize these people. I understand that these persons were seriously traumatized because of the behaviour of some young man or men in this society. Gas tanks! When I was a young man—I heard the Member for Diego Martin West make reference to it last week—and we were on the block and saw an elderly person coming up the road with two baskets, we ran to the person to assist with the baskets and kept a close eye to see if the person had any oranges or bananas in there. You know when the person reached their gate it was very likely that the person would return an act of kindness and give you two oranges or bananas or \$2. You saw an elderly person with a gas tank; you took it and helped the person. I do it to this day. There are those who will take the gas tank from the elderly and go away with it to buy cocaine and these sick things.

The Bible also tells us honour thy father and thy mother so that thy days shall be long in this land. [*Interruption*] I am not a pastor. I say this in passing but I believe the words. While the Bible talks about honouring thy father and thy mother, these young criminals do not understand that while their victim may not

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be their actual mother or father, the victim is indeed a mother or a father. It is somebody's mother or father who is the victim of their stupid, evil and selfish crime.

I know a young man in Hermitage Road in the Gonzales community where I grew up. I will not call his name here. I remember that he used to be abusive to old people. An old pastor was going around the savannah one Sunday morning the young man asked the man for some money and he said that he did not have, and he and another one beat the man to a pulp on the ground. Shortly after that for apparently no explicable reason, he seemed to have lost his composure. To this day he is about the place drifting without any previous history of mental imbalance. I do not know what happened. I am warning the young men of this country. This is why I began as I did. There is a spiritual dimension to crime. I am warning them. Live clean! Do the right things and do not hurt the elderly! While it may not be your mother, it might be "yuh pardner mudder and yuh doh even know".

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what happened, if you would permit me a minute. In the United States, a young man, a gangster, got the name Normad. I am talking about a real case because his counsellor was in Trinidad and shared the experience with me. He was getting involved in anti-social behaviour. His mother was a nurse and she left him in the house. His gang came home after she left that night and inveigled him to go to a red light district to do something. Let me put it like that. She was on the job from 11.00 to 7.00 a.m, I was told by the counsellor. This is a real case. The young men went down the road. She got a call from a neighbour saying that the neighbour had seen the young man down in that area. She left her job about 1 o'clock and went to find her son. She ended up being attacked by the gang and raped in the dark in the bush close to where she was walking. They beat her to a pulp including Normad and raped her senselessly over and over. In order to demonstrate to his friends how sick and bad he was, he decided he would go again. His friends were pleading with him to leave the scene. He wanted to show them that he was a sick bad guy so he decided to go again. When he went the second time on the woman she called his name. They said he vomited when he realized that the woman he had attacked was his mother. This happened in this sick world.

Of course, he was moved under their laws from his state to another state for treatment and counselling. After years of that in the home he did well in all the programmes at the institution. He succeeded and was top of the class. When they were about to graduate he went to his tutor and broke down in tears in an

argument with another young lady. Based on the arrangements, the group that took him did not know why he came there and he admitted that night. On the following day of the graduation he and his mother were supposed to have reunited for the first time. He could not take it. He committed suicide that night. Normad, Texas, United States.

I went there for two reasons. I am being asked by the Member for Siparia—I am not speaking to them alone; I am speaking to the young men and the few young women in this country who will attack elderly people and people generally with nasty criminality. There are those who will blame the Government for criminal behaviour. What they do not understand is that when a murder is committed, the police do not go for Mr. Manning or the Minister of National Security or the Attorney General. They go for the person whom they suspect did it. There is personal responsibility in this. The other reason I made that point is to demonstrate that there is a spiritual dimension to what we do.

In Never Dirty in my constituency, as we come here today to deal with these measures to establish a regime to make older people safer and better cared for in the homes, that for the most part they pay money out of their little pension and with the support of caring family members—very often the younger family members have to go to work, so they reluctantly put the elderly people in these homes. Our culture does not easily lend itself to that. We prefer to keep the elderly in our homes. Sometimes it is necessary and these measures are critical. In my constituency a 70 year old woman was murdered about eight or nine months ago. The Member for Fyzabad says gleefully, “Every day”.

Mr. Speaker: You should be in a happy mood today. You should be half happy.

Member for Laventille East/Morvant, could you come back to the Bill before us please?

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I had an opportunity to visit some countries in Asia, Korea, China, these oriental countries so to speak. I have not been to Africa, but from my learning and reading about African societies and antiquity, the elderly were treated always with reverence and respect. I was in a bus in Korea with my guide and interpreter and every time an elderly person came on the bus without a word he got up and made way for the elderly person to have a seat. In Trinidad and Tobago that is a thing of the past and I am calling on Trinidad and Tobago to return to these pristine, beautiful and God-fearing ways. That is all I am saying. Imperfect as we might be.

I had indicated that my intervention would be short. I support the Member for St. Ann's East with the measures before us. I am aware that other Members on this side will elucidate on the many other benefits that are available to the elderly in our community for their sustenance and general well-being, so I did not touch those. I conclude praying and hoping to God—not my friends on the other side, they know better although they pretend sometimes to be ignorant—that the young people in Trinidad and Tobago who happen to listen to this debate will understand, as I conclude by reading Proverbs 23:22 which says,

“Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.”

All the senior citizens are our fathers and mothers. We should give them love, respect and care as though they were our own.

Mr. Manohar Ramsaran (*Chaguanas*): Mr. Speaker, when I listen to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, I want to tell him that he must be consistent. The Bible that he quoted has been there for hundreds of years and remains consistent and applicable to today. He must remember what he did when he was in opposition. I want to remind the Member for St. Ann's East that he came once in response to a Motion on the Adjournment, when I asked about the Government's refusal to raise the financial ceiling from a paltry \$300 per month for people with disabilities to access as a disability grant. In his response he said,

“The Ministry of Finance at this stage is preparing the relevant documentation to come before this Parliament so that the payments could be made, and again, I give you the assurance that these persons will receive their funding no later than May 15, 2007.”

I asked this on April 20, 2007. I make this pronouncement because the then Member for Laventille East/Morvant, the then Member for St. Ann's East, his predecessor, supported the Bill that came to this House in 1998 to deal with the matter of the ceiling but not one of these Members said anything. They voted with us; they did not abstain or vote against that we should reduce the ceiling to \$300 so that the ministry could make certain adjustments and then come back to Parliament to raise it. This time do not trust your friend. I warn the senior citizens of this country that they cannot trust the People's National Movement to deal with their affairs. I will go on to make more and more revelations.

Let me finish with the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. He spoke about God and the Member for Caroni Central spoke about Islam. In Hinduism parents are considered next to God. As a matter of fact, you are supposed to revere and

worship your parents as God on earth. If you go to Hindu prayers you would see where children do arti of their parents; bow at their feet and receive their blessings. We consider our parents to be representatives of Lord on earth to see about us and protect us. When people come here and talk glibly about what religion says, we must understand that we are competing against religions because we all do what is good. My problem is with bringing God in Parliament and basing your argument on God at the beginning and the end. Whatever is said by the other side cannot be true. Another tenet is that truth is what religions are built on. I end there with that.

The Member talked about fraudulent people among our senior citizens. This kind of information about fraudulent people without one iota of evidence is but dangerous. You are now accusing people 65 years and older. He said fraudulent people and the Minister is dealing with fraud.

Dr. Rowley: Persons were getting old age pension and they had died.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I heard; you can check *Hansard*. I am worried about that statement because we know that there are people over 65 years who might be before the courts. To accuse senior citizens of committing fraud to get old age pension is an indictment against the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Rowley: He did not say that.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: He said that and it is in *Hansard*. There is no error. Check *Hansard*.

He went on to say that people are not properly treated in these homes. Somebody said it is true. We are in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago debating a Bill to deal with older persons. When people come to this House especially Ministers, I expect them to have evidence to support these accusations. I expect the Minister to say what is happening and call the names of the homes. We will accept that. To come here and make these accusations against the senior citizens, I am a bit worried about that.

You come to Parliament and tell us that these people are treated badly in homes; name the homes. Who treated them badly and what actions were taken by the Ministry of Social Development? Why come back to Parliament seven years later to amend or repeal and replace an Act that was passed in 2000? Where did we go wrong or where did the Government believe that this—

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Standing Order 33(4).

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Speaker, 33(4) says—

Mr. Speaker: No, no. I know.

Hon. F. Hinds: You accept?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Hon. F. Hinds: The Member for Chaguanas is saying that I am accusing senior citizens of fraud as they apply for pension. That is not what I said. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order, Member for Fyzabad.

Hon. F. Hinds: I said that there are persons who use the opportunity of those applications by citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and try to perpetrate fraud against the State. I was not speaking about the applicants. I was talking about bogus documents and I gave examples. I did say that there are bona fide pensioners who have died and persons are still collecting money in their names. The Member is quite wrong.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: This is mid-week. What would appear to be two simple Bills, please do not let it get out of hand.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, the *Hansard* will prove who is right and who is wrong. I am sure persons who are living out there—and what he said with a little deviation of the language will not change my mind. I am not here to defend what I do not know about. All I want is for the Government to lay on the table the frauds committed and we would deal with that. That is why this Bill was put in place in 2000. I am asking the question seven years later. The Minister did not say why it was necessary to change this. Did it fail in the Ministry in any way? Was it proclaimed and put into place? [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It could not be.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: How could it not be? As a Member of the Opposition, when we are dealing with these Bills and make our contributions, one must deal with the merits and demerits of this Bill. They were in Opposition then, this Bill was debated and it took quite a while. In their contributions they had nothing to say about the Bill. How come they are sitting on the other side and saying the Bill is wrong and could not be proclaimed. My question to the hon. Minister is: What was wrong with the Bill, except to say the Minister shall appoint houses, and not the committee? Tell me in 2000, in section 8(1)—if I may put into the record.

“An application for a licence to operate a Home for Older Persons shall be made in writing to the Division of Aging.

- (2) An application made under subsection (1) shall contain the particulars set out in the First Schedule.”

Mr. Speaker, what did they do? In 2007, big amendment! “A person who wishes to operate a home shall apply to the Minister in the form set out in the Second Schedule”. We established a Division of Ageing to deal with the issue of ageing in this country, but seven years later this Government is praising the Division of Ageing. A little right they will have to receive and process an application is now taken away by the Minister as if he cannot trust anybody but himself. To apply for a home you shall apply to the Minister, pay the non-refundable application fee set out in Part A and meet the requirements for licensing under this Act and regulation.

Mr. Speaker, if this Bill was kept back for seven years, could the amendments not have been made and we could have come and discussed it? I have received no justification why this Bill was not proclaimed and not put in place if we are serious about senior citizens in this country. That is why I started by saying we cannot trust them. I know they will get angry by that statement, but it is a fact. If I examine all that has been said as a senior citizen, you will be convinced and the people out there will be convinced that they do not understand or care about ageing in this country. They just do not. The Minister spoke about people not being properly treated in these homes. Again, this is an accusation. Mr. Speaker, you will agree with me, and I sat with you on other committees. This Parliament is supposed to be a place where one comes with evidence and facts especially from the Government side. Coming to this House and saying people are not properly treated in these homes—

Mr. Speaker, the Bill that we passed in 2000, and the Bill before us make provisions to deal with people who are treated badly in these homes. Again, the Minister came and said people are not properly treated in these homes. Where is the evidence? Nothing in the legislation of 2000 will omit that clause or provisions—where is the evidence? Which are the homes? Because you have homes across the country which I would talk about later. Which of these homes are not treating people properly? Have their subventions been stopped? What have they been doing? These things bother me to the core—that the Minister comes to this House and makes blanket statements about the caregivers of this country that are becoming scarcer by the day. The Minister went on to talk about treating older people well, and if we do not do that we will face the wrath of God.

Mr. Speaker, there is a circle of treatment. It must start with the parents. We must treat our children properly. We must ensure their rights are enshrined in the Constitution; we must make sure that they attend school; we must make sure they follow the right way of living, and we must treat them well so when we get old they will see about us. For the Minister to come to this Parliament and talk about people that are not properly treated in these homes, again, I ask the questions: Where are these homes? What treatment was meted out to these people that is not fair? I would like to know too, because it is important that we weed out the bad elements in the society. Not just come to this Parliament and make blanket statements. It is dangerous and this country, as we are all aware is headed down the precipice of maybe, no return as far as criminality is concerned—one cannot come to this Parliament and talk about that.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister talked about criminal acts committed against senior citizens. I could talk about many acts committed all around this country today, but I ask the question: Who is the Minister of National Security? Which is the Government in place to deal with these questions? Maybe, the Minister has joined the Opposition, I do not know.

Recently, I learnt of heinous crimes being committed in the constituency and surrounding areas of Central Trinidad against people and were never reported, were never in the newspapers. It is as if they are committed on a daily basis—For the Minister to admit that, again, it shows that the PNM has failed and as Minister of National Security, he has admitted failure. When he spoke about the litany of attacks against our senior citizens I could extend it across the entire community.

A few days ago a couple from the constituency of Caroni East—one of my friend's relatives, persons went to his home. There was an elderly gentleman among them. They attacked the home, they beat up the elder person with a gun butt to his head, left about three persons bleeding, took everything they had. The police were called and they did not go to that house until at least 24 hours later. This is what is meted out to people out there. I met a younger person about 23 years old who told me she was kidnapped. She reported the matter and nothing happened. She is so scared that she does not leave her house at all. She resigned from her job.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for bringing to the fore the inability of the PNM and especially the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and the other Minister to deal with crime in this country. When it affects senior citizens in homes and outside the homes, it sort of contradicts his own statement when he said that a country is judged by how it treats its senior citizens. So, we must be

careful about what we say. That is why, in my opening statement, I said, truth must not be for today, but truth must stand the test of time.

The Minister spoke about a Woodbrook home which was robbed by people—maybe, he knows about it, but I would like him to tell us what has happened. Were persons apprehended? Why did they attack the senior citizens home? We are in the Opposition. We are not supposed to receive complaints from them. They are supposed to tell us what they did to deal with the problem, Mr. Speaker.

I am reminded when you look at the Member for Laventille East/Morvant crying crocodile tears, saying things and trying to substantiate them again misquoting to defend himself as a Government Minister. Let me come back to the Member for St. Ann's East. He said 6 per cent of older persons stay in senior citizens homes, out of a population of one hundred and something thousand, is quite a large number. I would like to find out where these homes are.

If I remember correctly what I read, there are nine homes that are now within the purview or which receive assistance from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I am looking at a document; I call them glossy documents propaganda. The Siparia Home for the Aged received \$21,000; Mayaro Home for the Aged, \$15,000; La Brea Senior Citizens Home, \$19,000; Sangre Grande Home, \$21,000; Toco Home for the Aged, \$16,000, Point Fortin Home for the Aged, \$22,000, Chaguanas Home for the Aged, \$19,000; Couva Home for the Aged \$19,000 and McDonald Home for the Aged, \$27,000.

Mr. Speaker, these are but nine homes. How could 8,000 persons stay in those homes? My friend from Caroni East did his calculations and I accept that. Is it to mislead this Parliament? Is it to mislead the country that we are seeing about 8,000 senior citizens in nine homes? I find that so hard to understand. I believe to come in this Parliament is to speak the truth and let the country know what is happening. The major question we continue to ask is: Why come with this Bill at this stage? The Member anticipated that we would talk in the debate about how long it took. But, it is seven years and nothing substantial! If something substantial was done with this Bill, tell us. Because I could examine it clause by clause, and one would see that nothing substantial really took place with this Bill. And when you compare it with the 2000 Bill there is nothing basic to talk about except that they changed things here and there to substantiate the delay. I am very worried that this Government continues to treat our senior citizens with disrespect.

Mr. Speaker, we make the point from time to time the population is ageing—we have that evidence that by the year 2010 we will have x number of aged

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persons, more than there were in 2000. But what is happening to deal with or to anticipate these problems? Nothing! They come with this Bill and I will repeat, to hoodwink the senior citizens of this country—and if we go back and I have been asking questions about senior citizens—Government's failure to pay the increased pension.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member came to this House and promised senior citizens, the older persons whom we are talking about, they promised that their pensions will be increased from January 01, 2007. I am convinced that months later people did not receive that increase. They did not. It was a false promise to this House and we cannot continue to have our senior citizens live like that.

Mr. Speaker, with particular reference to the former sugar workers, WASA and T&TEC workers who receive a paltry pension now. In those days, maybe, it was an attractive pension, but people would save and put into an investment fund, a pension fund and what have you and would say when they reach 60 years, they would be receiving \$500 and that would be a sufficient amount of money to survive on but of course, with inflation and the cost of living, that has dwindled. Today, \$500 cannot do anything. It has been corrected in paper. National Insurance, \$1,500—this Government promised as from January 01, 2007. To this day, nobody received old age pension based on the raised ceiling. So, how could the senior citizen trust this Government? They cannot.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, let me thank the Member for giving way, especially because he is a Member of the back bench Opposition. The Member is aware that the amendment was passed in the Finance Bill which was just enacted and that, in effect, the senior citizens would be entitled to a back-pay from January 01. The Member made the comment last year, we corrected it and, therefore—one saying it was not paid, the next is saying it is being paid. I do not understand, Mr. Speaker. In other words, we were paying it administratively, not illegally. Either it was being paid or not. There is an entitlement from January 01, there is a commitment by the Government that it would make the adjustment and it has done so.

Mr. Speaker, the rule as it stands right now with the NIS, is that if one is getting less than the \$1,100 pension, the difference is made up. In other words, up to \$2,150.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I am not in Government and I am not privy to the latest development, but from what I know, the pension was not paid. I am taking the Minister's word and the *Hansard* if that is not paid, that back pay will be paid to those people.

Mr. Speaker, I remember that said Member promising to pay us for the 18/18 scenario.

Mr. Speaker: I happened to read a judgment in favour of the hon. Member for Fyzabad. So let us just leave it there.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Just to put on record the hon. Member's promise—

Mr. Valley: May I just say that there is a Bill before the Parliament to that effect.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that any government or anybody—and you are a lawyer and you would know if a judgment will go against you. So they run to the Parliament with a Bill to pay—as a good lawyer you must know if you are going to win or lose. Ask my friend from Diego Martin West.

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, if the Member would give way. The judgment seems to have been influenced by the commitment of the Government to pay?

Mr. Speaker: While all this may be very nice indeed, we are on a particularly different Bill.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that the Members on that side, arrogance has overtaken them. They believe that the Law Lords in London listened to their debates in the Parliament. I am really amazed because when one goes to England and talks about Trinidad and Tobago: “Who is that?” “Trinidad and who?” I would say there is a fellow called Brian Lara or other people. “Oh yes, yes.” Not Ken Valley or the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. These people are living in a fool's paradise.

Mr. Speaker, just to put on record briefly with their permission: Judgment of the lords of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council delivered on June 20, 2007. It came in because of their promises.

Mr. Speaker: I have already said that the chief litigant in this matter, the hon. Member for Fyzabad, on behalf of 18 Members, he has won his case. So, you do not need to read anything into the record. It does not affect this Bill before us.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, it does. There are senior citizens on this side of the House and we have to put it into the record that we would need that kind of money.

“The appellants were, in the Board's opinion, justified in instructing two leading counsel and the Board will certify accordingly.”

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Mr. Speaker, promises by the Member did not materialize. What we believe in—the law lords of England have ruled in our favour, so you know why we cannot have the Caribbean Court of Appeal.

Mr. Speaker, whenever we come to the Parliament to debate senior citizens issues, and we are speaking about homes for older persons, I want to say it is a business as admitted by one of the Ministers—and they would attract clients. If these people do not get old age pension that will satisfy their entry requirements they would not be allowed in most cases. This \$2,150 per month when it reaches there. I want to put on record once more that public servants in this country who have retired a long time ago are now well below \$2,150. Something should be done to increase ex-public servants' pension to deal with it in a particular way so that they too, if their families cannot afford, can put them in a senior citizens home where they will be cared for.

I am again putting on the record of the Parliament that the Government should look at the pension of public servants who served this country before 1980, and served the country well. Now they too, are living the life of a destitute.

Just to correct the information. People are not put into homes because their children cannot afford to. Some of these people fall on hard times. Destitution, whatever you want to call it. They cannot maintain their homes at this time because of the spiralling cost of living. I do not know if it would be increased any more but maybe, under this Government it could. The senior citizens are in a very disadvantaged position. And, when we come to this Parliament to talk about repeating and replacing this Act—this Bill has about 36 clauses. You come to this Parliament as if you are scared to debate the Bill and scared to talk about what this Bill is based on and why the need for it. Because, the Minister has anticipated our reply.

Mr. Speaker, I always say in this Parliament if a Government Minister comes to this place and is talking about a piece of legislation, we on this side are not in office. We do not have the privilege of having officers in a division, and it is not my habit even to go in the former Ministry where I was, to ask for information. I do not do that. But we expect the Minister to come to this Parliament and tell us the policy behind the Bill, what it hopes to achieve, and maybe, touch on the important clauses so that you could convince the Members on this side that the Government is serious. But when you come like a “cagey” and trying to put people to sleep at 1.30 p.m. and nobody hears what you said, we cannot respond.

We are in support of ensuring that our senior citizens get proper treatment in the homes that are being subsidized by the Government. But tell us what you are

doing. Do not come sheepishly, and this is what I am worried about, Mr. Speaker. Also, they talk about the Senior Citizens Grant. It was mentioned today again, and I want to put on record my concern about this senior citizens grant as it affects the entry requirements to these homes.

One paragraph I must talk about and maybe ask for an explanation on from the hon. Minister if he knows the explanation. A grant under this Act is subject to review and maybe increased, decreased or discontinued—this is in the Finance Bill. When I use this statement, that you cannot trust this Government with the lives of our senior citizens—this paragraph has me worried as a would-be senior citizen much more for people out there. Why must this be put into legislation? Is it a scare to the senior citizen? [*Crosstalk*] Member for Diego Martin Central, this place is alive and we have to talk. [*Interruption*] I like to correct him because he jumps up from time to time like a Jack-in-the-box and says nothing. I want to ask him to stay quiet and be at ease. The point I am making is the Government cannot convince the senior citizens out there that they care. So, to make this threat about reviewed, decreased or increased, I am concerned.

I believe that a person who spent his entire life in this country when that person reaches 60 his future should be put in place by himself first—I am not saying that he should be depending on a hand-out situation, but the Government is responsible for putting pension schemes in place, putting insurance schemes in place to deal with one's retirement. The hon. Prime Minister recently said, and which is of very grave concern to me, that everything will be okay next year—increased National Insurance to \$2,000.

Mr. Speaker, I read the report laid in the Parliament recently about insurance and the viability and so forth. In that report it shows that the National Insurance Board have a surplus of \$75 million in addition to the assets they have accrued over time. The National Insurance Board is in a position to pay not only \$2,000 pensions but to increase every aspect of life for the senior citizens of this country. Maybe it is time that the National Insurance Board built senior citizens homes or older persons homes to deal with their clients who served over time. The whole review of dealing with the Division of Ageing is not to get up one morning and say we established a Division of Ageing. That and all is false. That was done under the previous administration, not even this. And I do not go about claiming responsibility. I am talking about today's world. We are supposed to ensure that people live a life that they could be comfortable with, and nobody could deny that.

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Mr. Speaker, do you know that in these older persons homes—I am saying these things and they could correct me if I am wrong—but for a Government Minister to make these statements I feel it is wrong. They should talk to the other Minister. When somebody goes to these homes they pay a monthly upkeep allowance of maybe \$2,000 to \$3,000 a month. Mr. Speaker, it does not include medicine, and we know what is taking place with CDAP in Trinidad and Tobago. You can read it in the health report by the Commission of Enquiry Chairman, Gladys Gafoor, where medicine that is really needed by senior citizens is unavailable in pharmacies.

When these people pay their monthly allowance to stay in these homes they are left with little. If a person smokes, he has to go out there and maybe buy a half pack of cigarettes—at this age people would say do not smoke, but one has to accept the habits of our senior citizens. They have to actually live in poverty and if they are ill, diabetic, or have any problems the CDAP is not helping them. My friend from Caroni Central could allude to that. We know what is happening in the health industry.

I am asking the Minister, let us approve this Bill and look at it clause by clause in the committee stage and make the necessary adjustments. The question of policy to deal with our people must be answered. I am not at all happy with this Bill. I would like if someone could tell me now, before I take my seat, what are the factors for this Bill changing after seven years without having it proclaimed and put into force, I shall be happy for that answer. But I cannot be satisfied at this time with what is taking place.

Mr. Speaker, no citizen in this country must be a burden as said by my good friend. And I agree with him. The tone of the Government is as if the senior citizens are burdens on this country. And I ask Members opposite to let us come together to ensure that we deal with the problems that they face from time to time.

My good friend from St. Ann's East always likes to use the word "shameless". I do not know where these words come from. If one does not have that compassion, that humility, one cannot deal with the problem of a social nature, and, especially when dealing with senior citizens.

I heard the Member once in this Parliament shouting at the top of his voice in an answer to a question why people were not paid their pension as if to score political points. I thought it was a sad day for a Minister of Social Development. A Minister of Social Development is supposed to understand the plight of the poor, the needy, the aged, but we are not getting that. I criticize but we must make

recommendations. Before I make any recommendations, the Bill said that senior citizens homes are not only for people 60 years and over. It could be people younger, it could be persons with disabilities, it could be persons anywhere and I turn to this vexing question of persons with disabilities going to stay in these homes.

4.00 p.m.

I have read it; I have not seen it, so I am asking that you show me where it is. Are these homes being built to accommodate people with disabilities? People with disabilities now make up an important part of our community—maybe another 10 per cent that we have to deal with.

My leader and I have spoken recently at a meeting with disabled members of the community and there are many concerns. The fact is that people with disabilities must be catered for. I would like—unless you believe I am going off the Bill, Mr. Speaker—I do not want you to chastise me, but in this Bill it states quite clearly that these homes are not only for persons 60 years and over, but for people who need them.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that the Government of the day does not wish to learn about the problems that face the elderly and the disabled in Trinidad and Tobago. The hon. Minister—if I repeat myself, I am sorry—promised to raise the ceiling to ensure that the disabled population—*[Interruption]* Maybe for you because your conscience may be pricking you, but the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that people with disabilities live in this country on \$900 per month. I am sure you have friends who have disabled relatives and you understand the costs they face.

I dare anybody here to tell me which senior citizens home would charge \$900 per month and I would surrender, but that is not possible. It goes deeper than that. The Trinidad and Tobago Chapter of Disabled People International wrote the hon. Prime Minister on March 05, 2007 and this, to me, is a vexing state of affairs. We have the Ministry of Social Development's national policy on personal disabilities in which they talk about accessibility. Every car park is to deal with it; group homes are to deal with disabilities, to provide for them; hearing impairment, public buildings are to be fitted with devices for the disabled; but no such thing has happened and maybe, under that Government, it will never happen.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago recently attended a conference to deal with the disabled. *[Interruption]* If you research there, you will see what has been done. Everything I speak about has been done. To answer the hon. Member, for people with disabilities, the Minister of Social Development, in that period,

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ensured that we had a policy to deal with disability affairs. We set up a Disability Affairs Management Board; we set out a staff to deal specifically with disabled people and, of course, we expected government to have been continuous.

March 05, 2007

The Hon. Patrick Manning,
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago,
Office of the Prime Minister,
Whitehall.

Signing and Ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol

The Hon. Prime Minister,

The National Executive and Members of Trinidad and Tobago Disabled People International are extremely concerned that we have not heard from our government re. the signing and ratifying of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which is to take place on March 30, 2007 at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

This correspondence serves to remind you that we had previously sought your assistance by letter dated December 14, 2006, to ensure that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago signs and ratifies the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on March 30, 2007.

Hon. Prime Minister, the convention, as you know, requires countries to guarantee that persons with disabilities be free from exploitation and abuse and is the first human rights treaty to be adopted in the 21st Century.

This convention is the most important thing in our life and the life of persons with personal disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago and we merely wanted to enquire how the process has been going since time is the essence.

Mr. Speaker, that was in March 2007. The Prime Minister was written before December 14, 2006 and, again, on January 27, 2007 about dealing with this.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has been signed by Caribbean countries, which, to me, is an insult to our country. We have many advocates who, from time to time, raise issues of this nature, and Trinidad and Tobago has not yet ratified this convention. I want just to put on the record that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

was signed by Dominica; Antigua and Barbuda; and Jamaica, but there is no Trinidad and Tobago position on this matter. There is no proper representation internationally. We are asking the Government to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. [*Desk thumping*]

We can talk to them as much as we want. I say this again: there are people with impaired vision who also go to these homes and need special attention. Is this Bill silent on how we deal with people with disabilities? Impaired vision is also a part of that. They want us to find out what is taking place because their needs must be met. When we come to Parliament, after seven years, and we cannot deal with problems that affect the challenged people in our society, I am afraid that we do not understand the whole question of the Ministry of Social Development.

They come here and announce glibly an increase in pension of \$100, take seven months to pay it, and have people out there waiting. When budget statements are read, people wait on an increase in old age pension. Do you know why? Because people are becoming poorer, and the older we get, with the challenges of life, we get poorer. For those persons with the intention of going to senior citizens homes, I am warning this Parliament that the cost for entry into these homes will increase dramatically because of the cost to administer these homes. We have to understand what is taking place.

I would like to ask a couple questions on the Bill itself. The previous Bill had a board dealing with the entire question of the running of homes for senior citizens. In the previous Bill—and I want to examine this a bit—certain things were put there so that we would understand the function of the Bill. I am putting this on record in case Members on the other side forget. The board was set up to ensure that we operate the Bill in a particular way. The Board shall be called the older persons care board.

“(2) The board shall consist of a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman...”

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

Ms. Seukeran: Can the hon. Member clarify something for me? He is reading from the Act. He was then the Minister in charge of it. Can he clarify whether he had devised a policy that guided that Bill and if there is a document?

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Sure, there is. Every matter that came to the Parliament, and I remember my then Attorney General who, whenever we came with a bill before the Parliament, would want the policy defined. Before a bill was approved by our Cabinet, the policy should have informed that Bill, so the answer is, yes. If you go to the Ministry—unfortunately, I did not take documents home, but there was a policy to deal with this, which was discussed for at least three or four years with the Law Review Commission and whomever to ensure that we came up with something that we believe would work.

Mr. Roberts: Could you provide us with a copy of that policy? We have searched the entire Ministry.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: Mr. Speaker, apparently he was sleeping. I said, unfortunately, I did not take the documents home. I thought I had another four years in the Government until the Member for Couva North and the Member for Couva South clashed and ensured that the Government did not go on. It is not my habit to take government documents home, but I am sure if you do your work properly and keep awake, you will find—

“The Board shall consist of a chairman”—Mr. Speaker, they can say what they want; I know that I left a policy. “The Board shall consist of a Chairman”—I am asking these questions because I want the hon. Minister to tell me, even though he did not find a policy, the Bill itself, if he reads it carefully, paragraph by paragraph, clause by clause, he would see a policy coming from the Bill itself. I am saying that there was a policy. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I am reading these sections into the record so that the Government could tell me what they disagreed with.

“The board shall consist of a Chairman, a Deputy Chairman...”

We put on it:

- “(a) a Quality Control Officer;
- (b) two officers attached to the Ministry of Health...
- (c) a medical practitioner...

- (a) a Principal Medical Officer...
- (b) a nutritionist...
- (c) a social worker with experience in geriatric care;
- (d) a social psychologist;
- (e) an occupational therapist; and
- (f) a senior officer of the Division of Ageing.”

Mr. Speaker, the board was to advise the Minister on all matters relating to the care of older persons, the administration of the Act and standards to be observed in the care of older persons. What more policy do they want than that, Mr. Speaker?

“(b) guiding and assisting the Division on the implementation of the Act.”

These and other responsibilities were given to the board. I want to tell you that under “Licensing of homes for Older Persons”, they are here.

- “6. (1) The Minister may, subject to this Act, grant a licence for the use of any premises as a Home for Older Persons.
- (2) No person shall establish, conduct, maintain or use any premises as a Home for Older Persons in Trinidad and Tobago without a valid licence issued by the Minister under this Act.”

Is the Government against this?

“(4) Where premises are used as a Home for Older Persons...the occupier and all persons concerned in the management of the Home or in the admission thereto or treatment of any person therein commits an offence.”

once they are contrary to this Act—

“(5) Each licence shall be issued only in respect of the premises and persons named in the application.”

I can go on and read the entire Act and ask the Government with which part they disagreed and we will find that they cannot answer.

Even in the First Schedule, which they have replaced, it is quite clear how a home shall be established. What did they do? They gave the Minister supreme authority and they are appointing a review team. I am confused. These people are

under the watch of the Minister to do most of what was in the Act, but they now come and say they have a review team to deal with certain requirements of the Act. Why move the board, have them as a review team and the responsibilities might be the same? Why was this done? Is it—as we on this side believe—to buy time?

The Facility Review Team shall have the following powers. Let me read the team because it was not read by the Minister—I do not know why, because this is supposed to be an important part. Clause 27 states:

“(3) A Committee established under subsection (1), shall consist of three or more persons each having qualifications or experience as:

- (a) a medical practitioner;
- (b) a fire officer;
- (c) a public health inspector;
- (d) a registered nurse;
- (e) an accountant;
- (f) a senior planning officer from the Town and Country Planning Division; or
- (g) a person with experience and training in quality management...

28 (1) The Facility Review Team shall have the following powers:

- (a) to enter with the consent of the owner or occupier and inspect:
 - (i) the interior...”

of a home and so on.

Mr. Speaker, if you have a medical doctor, a senior planning officer and an accountant going into an older persons home and asking to do these things—they are also in this Bill appointing an inspector of homes. It is silent on who these inspectors will be; how they will be hired and what their responsibilities are. They have the review team, which will be doing the same thing.

This whole Bill is to come to this Parliament and tell the national population that they did not deal with senior citizens’ problems for the last seven years and to

blame the previous government because they did not have a Bill like ours. This is the eleventh hour. When will this Bill be assented to and proclaimed? When will it come into effect? This is to hoodwink the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why the senior citizens cannot trust the Government with the little future they have left. This is but another delay tactic in dealing with the serious issues.

My friends said do not talk about the Children Bill. It is the same issue. It was passed in 1999, dealing with every aspect of the child, and it was not proclaimed. They will come back. I am still waiting. Election is around the corner. Will this be another area where they will come back to hoodwink the population? Again, children's issues will not be put at the forefront, in the very same way that this Bill to protect our senior citizens will not be effected on time. I believe that we are wasting time in this Parliament. We have to be fair to the people. They understand. They know. Everybody in this country will know how long it takes to pass a Bill, unless the Government is very interested.

Another one is the Equal Opportunity Bill. I want to repeat a favourite phrase of mine. I, the Member for Chaguanas, will give you every Bill you want to deal with crime and I know that you cannot use them because you do not have the political will to deal with crime. I have said that many times, and I will repeat it in the context of legislation that has been delayed and you come to this Parliament as if you care. When the Member said we must not make politics with this Bill, I agree with him. Do you know what could have been done? I challenge anybody to compare the Bill and the Act and tell me what was so earth shattering that they had to change it. They continue to come to this Parliament to hoodwink people and make them believe they are doing something.

When we talk about senior citizens homes, I want to put on record that, seven years later, after having passed this Bill, I thought I would have seen a country on par with any developed country in the world in dealing with its senior citizens and their ailments, but nothing like that happened. Then they come seven years later and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is praising people for what they did for senior citizens.

Yes, there are people out there who really care about senior citizens, but we also have people who do not care. I am sure the PNM falls into the latter category. We can ask people to compare the Bill and the Act and let them see how the Government is attempting to hoodwink senior citizens. We not only talk, but we make recommendations.

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One of the areas that a Congress of the People government would look at is the question of universal pension. Of course, we will not go into the details of this futuristic thinking, but in this country you must understand that to manage old age pensions takes hundreds of officers, some of whom act with impunity. My friends opposite cannot disagree with me.

When they go to examine someone for old age pension, public assistance or disability grant, it is as if they have done something wrong, as my friend alluded to this afternoon. It is as if they are all fraudsters. Complaints come to my office on a daily basis about this. If someone is receiving a disability grant, as I mentioned before, in the instance of an employee of the late Vindra Naipaul, who was fired because that person was working as an assistant part-time cashier—she was disabled and they found something for her to do. She lost the \$900 a month because she was working for another \$300. Do you understand, Mr. Speaker, how these officers operate? If they can free them up to do meaningful social work, that would be beneficial for this country. We have to understand that, when we go as officers to these homes, we do not act inappropriately because it is terrible. It is sad when we deal that way.

I put the Minister on alert that the Congress of the People will be looking at a universal pension and proper ceilings will be set. They need to free the officers to do much more important work in dealing with the fallout of crime and so on. More will be said, I am sure, when the date is announced.

The point I was making earlier was that I have been very close to people who are visually impaired and they do not need handouts. They need opportunities to do what they want to do. They need the encouragement of the people in office to make them better human beings. They would hate to sit in a home for older persons, because they believe they can contribute more to the life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We have to look at those things and I am sure the Congress of the People would look at improving the quality of life of all our people, not only by giving handouts.

As I said before, we are not here to criticize, but we are here to also see how we can make some meaningful recommendations. I am sure it is too late for the Member for St. Ann's East, but to whoever will be the next government, they need to look at how we deal with people's issues in future. We must not deal with people's issues as we deal with the economy. It is in shambles.

I am now reading a book *Government's Role in fighting Corruption* and I cannot forget the opening words: "Corruption steals from the poor." When

Ministers and senior officers of Government are corrupt and are using state resources, Mr. Speaker, and that which is left for the less fortunate in the society is being eroded, I warn Members opposite, whom I will not call by name. How do we deal with that?

I am sure the universal pension covers it, but now there are people who do not understand. I put this on record so that the Minister could share it with his Ministry. When people reach 65, they would have put away—most of us must have put away—money for a rainy day. Even the Government has done that with the excess revenue in oil. When we look at senior citizens, some of them would have \$30,000 in the bank or would have bought a lot of land. They have to transfer it, sell it or get rid of it in some way or throw away their bank books. They have to be absolutely poor just to tell the Minister that senior citizens' income—

Mr. Speaker: I think you are confusing two things. You seem to be focusing on pensions and we are on to older persons and homes.

Mr. M. Ramsaran: I hope I have not lost my trend. The entry requirement to homes for older persons is a steep one and if we do not tie the old age pension to this requirement, we would have no use for homes and the destitution continues. I made that point earlier.

Mr. Speaker, this is a serious statement I am going to make because complaints came to me even when I was a Minister and I tried to rectify them. If you own a house—the Member for La Brea owns quite a few houses—it is the revenue that comes from your house that makes up your income ceiling. If you own a parlour, it is your income. If you have a taxi, it is the income because at 65 and over, you are not supposed to be driving a taxi to earn that huge income. I want people to understand that.

I know senior citizens. Everyone here would know senior citizens because we are Members of Parliament. The officer would come and say: Your house looks big, no pension for you; but the law says the income ceiling. If the house is rented for \$500 per month, then you do not qualify. If you do not have any rentals, you could have a house as big as this Red House, you are entitled to old age pension.

Another issue is the five years you live abroad. People have thrown away their passport, Mr. Speaker, because the officer asked for the passport; and it is the way they ask for it, as if it is a crime to leave the country. I am saying these things because I started by saying that the Government of the day must earn the trust and respect of the senior citizens. We have to do it by making promises that we can keep.

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I have the Budget Statement, 2005. If you read the Social Sector Investment Programme, every year promises are made to the senior citizens. I am sure we heard of none that has started. If that 11 per cent of senior citizens understand this Government, they will know that they are not being treated fairly.

As I go on with some of the recommendations, Mr. Speaker, this one is directed towards this Bill. There is little stimulation of homes for the elderly and a programme of support should be developed for them. When you enter a home for senior citizens, there is little or nothing to do. I recommend that something be done to make them live their golden years with some pride. This question of ageing must be dealt with in a holistic manner and not piece by piece.

We have that segment of the population which the Minister always talks about, that every 10 years there will be an increase in senior citizens and that is something we must accept. My friend stated that with crime taking place there might not be that growth because it will not grow as projected.

This question of senior citizens and how we manage their resources should be taken very seriously. I cannot stand here and allow this Government to come willy nilly, scared to tell us why this Bill was expanded. I beg someone to tell me why, after seven years without any fundamental changes, this was not proclaimed. Are they telling the senior citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that they do not care about them? “All I want you to do is, on budget day, sit by your radio or watch Channel 11 and the Prime Minister will announce another \$100 for you.” Is that how we treat people—another \$100 in pension? National insurance was announced by the hon. Prime Minister. I will go into that in much more detail at another time.

I have documents here with the issues I keep raising—I was talking about recommendations. This was in 2005. Now, with the advent of the Congress of the People and the universal pension scheme, what I asked for in 2005—I wrote the Prime Minister—I called for the qualifying age for old age pension to be reduced to 60; pension must be increased to \$1,500 per month to deal with all these issues; and the income ceiling to calculate the means test be raised to \$18,000 per annum.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting is suspended for tea and will be resumed at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Do you want to adjourn? I am sorry.

Adjournment

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ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry, because the intention is to adjourn at this time until Friday, at 1.30 p.m.

On that day, as you know we have to, before the end of June, put in place the new Police Service Commission. Therefore, in discussions with the Opposition, they have agreed that we would be able to do this on Friday and we would have Private Member's Day on the following Friday, June 29, 2007, at 1.30 p.m. Therefore, I would like to move the adjournment of the House at this time.

I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday, June 22, 2007, at 1.30 p.m. I want to inform Members that the motion with respect to the Police Service Commission would be taken first, after which we would continue the debate on this matter and we would follow with the Accreditation Bill.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.32 p.m.