

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Monday, August 27, 2007*

The House met at 1.00 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**STATUS OF CHILDREN (AMDT.) BILL**

Bill to amend the Status of Children Act, Chap. 46:07 [*The Minister of Social Development*]; read the first time. [*Desk thumping*]

APPROPRIATION BILL**(BUDGET)**

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [August 20, 2007]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: On the last occasion the Minister of Social Development was on his legs and he had used 24 minutes of original time. I now call on the hon. Minister to continue his contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On the last day I sought to remind this House that the approaches that this Government is taking in terms of developing Trinidad and Tobago is not an ad hoc approach; it is a systematic approach that we are taking. I also sought to talk to the House about the desire to strengthen the family unit as we strive to effectively deal with the ills in the society and build a strong nation. I spoke, as well, to the need for a decentralized system for the delivery of social services to communities in Trinidad and Tobago; a system that will assist the Government in unearthing the ills of this society; a system that would be able to assist us to identify problems that are affecting families in the society; a system where the social workers would become more intimately involved in what is taking place in families.

So having identified what the problems are in the family, they would be able to bring to bear the social support services on the family and to bring the appropriate kind of assistance required by the family. For instance, the social worker will not only go into the home to assist, maybe the senior citizen, but in that home might be the grandson who is involved in substances or cocaine. That

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person would be able to require some kind of assistance in terms of helping them to get out of that situation. For example, again, in that home might be a child who is not attending school simply because the birth is not registered, so the social worker would be able to provide some kind of assistance in terms of changing that situation by bringing the social support services, whether it be from the Government or through some non-governmental organization.

So you see, the Government is committed, as well, to working with these non-governmental organizations in terms of assisting them to build capacity so that they would be able to assist in the delivery of social services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I think that it was my friend, the Member for Naparima, in his contribution who enquired as to the status of the consultant that we spoke about some time ago. I wish to indicate to him and to this honourable House that Cabinet has given all the necessary approval and we expect that the consultant will be on board some time during the coming month; in the month of September.

As we proceed, I want to look at the issue of parenting, because you see, you will agree with me that there has been an increase in juvenile delinquency in the society. Possibly because of the increase in juvenile delinquency there has been an increase in crime and criminal activities perpetrated by some young persons in the society. You see, it is important; it is critical that as parents we portray the right examples. It is not a question of “do as I say and not as I do”. You would expect, having delinquent parents, obviously we are going to have delinquent children, so it is necessary for parents to conduct themselves in a way that will impact positively on the lives of their young children.

So we believe that parents must be good role models; they must be exemplars. As a result, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago through the Ministry of Social Development thought it necessary to put in place a National Parenting Programme to give parents the, sort of, technique and assistance to rear better children. But we have recognized, as a Government, that there are some Government agencies doing the same work as well as some non-governmental organizations and we feel that this fragmented approach will not give us the desired result and this is responsible for us having this sort of coordinated approach in terms of the National Parenting Programme.

This Parenting Programme will be able to assist parents—not only parents, but would-be parents as well—to be able to assist their children and bring them up in a way that they would be able to deal with the challenges of life, to be able to

inculcate positive values in their children so that they would be able to understand the importance of respecting other persons in the society; not just respecting other persons, but as well respecting other people's property in the society.

We understand that some of the people who really require the assistance will not actually come to, let us say, a community building or community centre in the respective communities and this programme is intended to reach into some of the homes in terms of the delivery of the programme in an effort to reach people to be able to create the kind of impact and to make the changes that we expect.

But while all this is happening and the programme has to be settled, the National Family Services Division of the Ministry of Social Development is continuing to do its work in terms of providing the support to parents and adults in the society with respect to parenting and so forth. We are doing some of these programmes at present—as we speak—in different communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Similarly, the issue of counselling, you will agree that different people possess different levels of coping skills. Therefore they will require the support and assistance to be able to effectively deal with some of the trying experiences that they might have to go through from time to time. Again, like the National Parenting Programme, there are a number of other agencies and NGOs that would provide this service and we feel that we must have a coordinated approach in terms of dealing with this service to the people of the country. As a result, we have developed an integrated counselling programme to provide this service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

On the issue of mediation—I want to thank the Member for Naparima again. In his contribution he indicated that this programme is actually doing very well in the community. I want to congratulate him for being strong enough to call a spade a spade. If the programme is doing well, he had the guts to come here to admit that the programme is doing well. You see, you would agree that there is a high level of intolerance in the society today. People are no longer willing to take some time to work out their differences. We are living in times now where, if you walk the street and you accidentally bounce someone, you are not sure as to how they will react. This level of intolerance is certainly impacting negatively on the family, because husbands and wives are having difficulty in terms of dealing with their situation. There is not that kind of tolerance to work out situations as they come about. So you find people resorting to abuse, whether it be verbal abuse or physical sometimes, to the extent of the loss of life. It is also impacting negatively on the community. You could well imagine that if, within a family, they are unable to reason and work out situations, you could imagine one neighbour to the other.

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For example, one neighbour's dog might go across to the other neighbour's property and instead of reasoning they would want to resort to violence. These negative situations are impacting on the community. We also have this problem reflecting on what is taking place in our schools. Young children instead of being able to talk out situations, they feel that they must resort to using weapons in schools. That is resulting in crime and criminal activities in the community.

This Government is utilizing the approach of mediation which is a non-adversarial approach to deal with conflict situations. We recognize that there will always be conflict. I do not think that the intention was for us to see the same thing the same way all the time. If that is happening somebody is playing games. There will always be conflict. The important thing is how you manage these conflict situations. That is what we are trying to do through the Mediation Programme. In May 2006, the ministry launched five mediation centres; one in Port of Spain, Cunupia, Point Fortin, San Juan and Couva. Since the launch of these centres 1,820 clients have accessed the services of which 838 were male and 982 females.

I am excited about the statistics because I recognize that a number of our males in communities are recognizing that conflicts can be resolved amicably without resorting to violence. That is what we are working to. To date, 125 matters were mediated on, of which 93 were settled with full agreement; eight with partial agreement and 20 unfortunately, no agreement could be reached. I wish to highlight that of the 125 cases, 82 were referred by the courts of Trinidad and Tobago, while 43 were self-referred. Even the courts of this country are recognizing that some of the matters before them could be handled through mediation. It would save time, cost and prevent the clogging up of matters at the court.

Let me give you an idea of some of the matters that are dealt with at the mediation centres. They deal with family disputes; neighbourhood conflicts; threats and harassment in juvenile disputes. At the centres we do a bit of pre and post mediation counselling. In addition the ministry has adopted a very aggressive approach in ensuring that the principle of mediation will result in creating more peaceful communities in Trinidad and Tobago. At this time, we are conducting some programmes within the communities on anger management for parents, adolescents and teens; building trust and managing conflict in families and communities and leadership skills. Some of the areas in the country where these programmes are being done, I wish to put them on record. It is the first grouping

we have identified in Diego Martin, Port of Spain East, Port of Spain South, Malick, Barataria, San Juan, Chaguanas, Couva, Siparia, Penal/Debe, San Fernando, Point Fortin and Piparo.

We consider this approach of providing this kind of programme in the community as part of Government's crime fighting initiative. We are urging the participants to learn to talk it out instead of fighting it out and, worse yet, instead of shooting it out. Our goal is to foster social harmony and create peaceful communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

As we continue our attempt to improve the status of families in Trinidad and Tobago, one of this Government's policies is that no citizen of this country must go hungry. You will appreciate that poverty eradication has to be high on this Government's agenda. I listened carefully to comments from the Member for Chaguanas when he was making his contribution and made reference to the survey of living conditions done in 2005. Sometimes, this life could be a bit strange. The Member was prepared to accept the results of previous surveys which adopted the same formula to arrive at their results. The results could have been about 34 per cent of persons living under poverty in Trinidad and Tobago but, unfortunately, he has a problem to accept the good news to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that the poverty level has dropped, as the Prime Minister indicated in his presentation, to 16.7 per cent. He was reading from the draft report when he was saying 17.1 per cent, but the final report had said 16.7 per cent. He cannot deal with the good news.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you Members for extending my time.

The Member for Chaguanas is having real problems coming to terms with the fact that the survey indicated that poverty has been reduced significantly in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to tell him that he could put it in his pipe and smoke it. I want to give him some further advice. It is better to smoke that than to smoke tobacco. The report never indicated that there is no poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. The report said that there has been a significant reduction. We are actually making an effort to eradicate poverty from the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago.

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This Government, in collaboration with the European Union, has developed strategies to fight poverty. It did not happen just like that. Strategies are in place. The strategies involve the coming together of government agencies and civil society organizations to form the Regional Social Human Development Councils (RSHDC). They can be located in each municipality in Trinidad and Tobago. They are doing their work and some are functioning better than others. The non-governmental organizations come from the bowels of the communities and understood what is taking place in the communities. They know the persons who are experiencing hunger and this unfortunate situation in their lives. They could identify these people for some assistance.

The RSHDCs have the responsibility to provide funding for projects which must be specific. They must be one to deal with poverty alleviation within that community. I am pleased to report to this honourable House that at this time there are 300 projects throughout Trinidad and Tobago. To date, we have disbursed \$6.2 million to work on these poverty reduction programmes. On Wednesday of this week, in Curepe, we will be distributing some funds to some of these non-governmental organizations to get involved in these projects to assist persons in the community to deal with the question of poverty. Some of the projects that they are involved in are homework centres to inculcate in the minds of the young ones that they need to get involved in the culture of learning. You can deal with the whole cycle of poverty and help them to come out of that cycle. We have done projects in terms of grow box so that they can assist persons to get involved in providing food for their families. There are computer literacy programmes; job training programmes such as welding, carpentry and food preservation. The whole thrust is to help persons.

This Government is not supporting the handout approach. It is a question of empowering persons so that they would be able to help themselves and their families in the future. These programmes are having an impact on the lives of vulnerable persons. When we get the report that poverty has been reduced and it is now 16.7 per cent, it is because of the programmes and strategy of the Government.

The report is a very useful one because it has identified certain parts of Trinidad and Tobago where poverty is more rooted than others. As a result of the report we are able to target these areas to bring relief to some of these persons. We target these areas through the community caravans. We go into a community with all the social sector ministries with the social programmes and we interact with the community and get people involved in the programmes in an effort to help them change their circumstances in life.

1.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that is the approach we are taking. That is a decentralized approach that we are taking to deal with poverty, and it is bearing fruits. We are going to continue as aggressive as we can, in terms of dealing with poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.

The report is now receiving the attention of Cabinet and Cabinet will determine, thereafter, as to how we proceed. I can tell you from now that we, at the Ministry of Social Development, are putting things in place to conduct another survey of living conditions. It is important for us to always know where we are—to have a yardstick to measure and see the work we are doing, whether it is impacting on the society, whether we are getting the kind of results and if there is need for us to make changes, in terms of the strategy. Our desire is to ensure that in this beautiful country of ours, poverty is no more.

One of the programmes that we were doing that assisted in the alleviation of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago was the SHARE programme where persons in the community were given food hampers to assist them. As I have indicated to you, the policy of this Government is that no citizen of Trinidad and Tobago must ever go hungry. God has blessed us with the resources that we have. We are committed to ensuring that the people of Trinidad and Tobago benefit from the resources of this beautiful country.

Mr. Speaker, we have replaced the SHARE programme with the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme. In the SHARE programme you would recall that they delivered food hampers. With respect to the food hamper, the person who received it could not have gotten perishable items. Sometimes they were given a sack of flour and the recipient did not need an entire sack of flour. It was possible that they needed five pounds or 10 pounds of flour. That was one of the weaknesses of that system. Sometimes the persons who distributed these hampers really did not know how to speak to people or how to treat people. That is a problem for this Government because we are concerned about the dignity of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Remember I told you earlier on that one of the pillars of Vision 2020 is nurturing a caring society. The way they handled the distribution of the hamper was not the kind of way that we would want to see our people in Trinidad and Tobago being treated. The Conditional Cash Transfer Programme would remove the kind of problems that I have indicated.

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You now have the opportunity to receive more foodstuff than you could have gotten in the hamper distribution. You have an opportunity to get the foodstuff in the quantity that you require. You now have the opportunity, through this programme, to get foodstuff which was considered perishable. You can get meat, fish and fruits, as a result of this Conditional Cash Transfer Programme.

I indicated earlier on that the intention is not to create that kind of handout syndrome. As a result, we have put a life to a person receiving the card. You are supposed to be on the card for not more than two years so as to give you an opportunity to participate in one of the Government's social programmes, so that you would be able to skill yourself to participate in the development of Trinidad and Tobago and the development of your life and your family's life. That is the programme. You have an opportunity to participate in the programme and while skilling yourself, you have the opportunity to receive foodstuff from the Government.

We understand that there are persons who would not be able to participate in the social programmes because maybe they are ill and a bit frail and would be unable to participate because of their age. The Government, in the case, is prepared to provide foodstuff for such persons until they would have expired.

At this time there were approximately 18,000 persons participating in the programme and we have opened some sub-offices throughout Trinidad and Tobago because we understand that if you are in such a situation and you do not have money to buy food it would be difficult for you to travel to Port of Spain to access the programme. We have offices in Port of Spain, Chaguanas, Couva, San Fernando, Princes Town, Point Fortin, Sangre Grande, San Juan and Tobago. The intention is to ensure that we have these offices in each of the municipalities in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me move quickly to certain members of the family. I want to turn my attention to the senior citizens of our nation. When we say "senior citizens", we are referring to persons who are 60 years and over. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: From February I am a senior citizen.

Hon. A. Roberts: Persons in and out of the Parliament who are 60 years and over. I am having an idea as to who is 60 years and over. I note the acknowledgment. At this time in Trinidad and Tobago, we have approximately 143,000 such citizens who are 60 years and over. That is approximately 11 per cent of the population. It is noted that this is the fastest growing group of citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. As a responsible Government, we need to pay particular attention to this group of citizens. The Government has put in place a policy on ageing, as I have indicated, in the spirit of nurturing a caring society.

I want people to understand that the contribution that this Government is making towards the welfare of the senior citizens—we are not doing them a favour. We are making a contribution to a group of persons who have made tremendous contribution to the development of this beautiful country; this country of which we all feel proud to be a citizen—proud Trinidadians and Tobagonians. They went before and toiled and shaped this country. Today we are benefitting from the fruits of their labour. As a result, we believe that we owe it to them. The goal of this policy is to ensure the sustainable well-being of the population of older persons in Trinidad and Tobago, by facilitating the attainment of their basic human needs and to ensure that those in need are assisted and that older persons are treated as important resource, rather than appearing to be a burden on society. Certainly, they are not a burden on this society. They have earned every cent, more so, in these times, because of health care where people are living longer.

The life expectancy of the male is now 78 years and the female—[*Interruption*] I heard my colleague from Tobago East, as if she is saying to me that she thinks that men should be living longer—the life expectancy is 81 years. It is a fact that women are living longer than men. I am certain that there are many reasons why this is so.

The Government has put in place programmes to take care of our healthy active seniors. One of the programmes we have in place is our senior activity centres. We are doing these senior activity centres together with some of the NGOs in Trinidad and Tobago. We have opened, to date, six of these senior activity centres; one in St. James, Maloney, Chaguanas, Rio Claro, Pleasantville and Scarborough. These centres provide our seniors with an environment so that they could interact with their peers and participate in a range of other programmes and activities. It assists them as well to be able to deal with the pain of loneliness. Loneliness is a difficult time in a senior's life, especially the women who are living longer when their husbands would have departed this life and their children would have gone on either to university or would have gotten married and they are alone. These senior activity centres provide the environment so that they could participate with their peers and colleagues and deal with such situations.

Many of them have a wealth of experience that we all can learn from because there is no need for us to attempt to reinvent the wheel—that institutional memory we can learn from them and continue the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

As well, this Government has opened an information centre which is referred to as an Older Persons Information Centre (OPIC). The seniors of this country, instead of having to run up and down the place to find information as it relates to

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care providers, data on ageing, medical equipment and where you can find a home to place senior citizens, all you need to do is to make contact with OPIC and they would provide you with that information. The office is Beacon Building, at the bottom of St. Vincent Street and Independence Square. You can access OPIC for information.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as we are on senior citizens, the hon. Prime Minister was very clear in his fiscal measures. He indicated that with respect to the Senior Citizens Grant, there is an increase of \$300 taking the grant to \$1,650. This Government has increased this grant by three times the amount in five years, demonstrating our commitment to ensuring that our senior citizens are able to cope with their day-to-day living. In addition to increasing the pension, we have lifted the ceiling.

We indicated that there was a ceiling of \$2,150, and there is now a ceiling of \$2,500 monthly. The measure also gives public service pensioners who were receiving less than \$1,650 a month an increase by bringing them up to \$1,650, in addition to the increase in their NIS pension. As you know, that pension has now been increased from \$1,000 to \$2,000 from January 01, 2008. They will also receive a back pay for the months of October, November and December, and they will continue to receive the \$2,000 per month from January 01, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, we are keeping faith with the senior citizens of this country. We have had several meetings and fora with senior citizens in this country. For this year, we had six of these fora in Trinidad and two in Tobago, where we interacted with the ordinary senior citizens by giving them an opportunity to discuss issues, and to say how they feel about things in the country and to make their recommendations. We are simply responding to the concerns of the senior citizens in this country.

Mr. Speaker, these payments to senior citizens are in addition to the number of other grants that they can access in the society. With respect to repairing their homes, there are grants from the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs Self-Help Programme to assist them. There is also burial assistance, medical grants, dietary grants and a number of other grants that we can assist them to get a wheelchair, a walking stick, glasses or whatever assistance they need. We provide the grants to be able to assist them in those areas.

In terms of transportation, we have the free bus pass from the Ministry of Social Development and, in addition, the ministry is now putting in place "Dial-a-Ride", so that these senior citizens will not have to put themselves at risk. There

will be specific transportation taking them up from their homes and taking them back to their homes. So, these are some of the things that we are putting in place to deal with our senior citizens.

Within recent times, we have had the passage of the Homes for Older Persons Bill 2007, and we are looking at the 6 per cent of our senior citizens who are living in these homes by ensuring that the quality of the physical condition of the homes and the standard of care are what they are supposed to be. We have put things in place to ensure that we can monitor them.

More importantly, we are looking at elderly abuse. There may be a situation where a senior citizen is being abused in a home, and we now have provisions to be able to deal with that situation. We have a right, as a Government, to take care of those among us who are in a less fortunate situation.

Mr. Speaker, at the local board offices, we are doing all that we can in terms of improving these offices so that when our senior citizens come to see these officers, they will feel comfortable. As they conduct their business at the local board offices, they will be provided with tea or coffee when they walk in—not with cane sugar in it, but with Equal. At this time, we are remodelling these offices to take care of our seniors.

Mr. Speaker, let me quickly move on to our disabled community of which between 4 and 5 per cent of persons are disabled. This Government is very committed to assisting these persons. I want people to understand that the disabled persons have equal rights as every other citizen in Trinidad and Tobago. We are committed to full inclusion and the holistic development of all persons with disabilities in our society.

Mr. Speaker, you would have heard from the presentation of the hon. Prime Minister that in the fiscal measures there is also an increase of the Disability Assistant Grant. That grant is now \$1,100 per month but, more importantly, it is the lifting of the ceiling. There is a ceiling of \$300 and persons receiving more than \$300 were unable to access this grant. This is a punitive measure which was put in place in 1999 by the former government, and we have increased that grant to \$1,000.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the issue of children, I want to indicate quickly—my time has slipped out on me—that you will note that one of the pieces of legislation which was laid in the House today is the new package of children legislation. We have done much work on them and I want to take the opportunity to thank the officers from the Ministry of Social Development. I would also like

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to thank the sub-committee from the Family Court and the Chief Parliamentary Counsel for the work and time that they have spent on the package.

The package has now been extended. We have amendments to the Children's Authority Bill, 2007. We thought that we should put the whole issue of children into context. We have the Family Court Bill—Mr. Speaker, just one second. I just want to finish this area—the Children's Community Residences and Foster Care and Nurseries Bill; the Status of Children Bill, the Adoption of Children Bill, the International Child Abduction Bill and the Children Bill. I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: On some other occasion you will continue telling us about this.
[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Subhas Panday (*Princes Town*): Mr. Speaker, thank you. I want to congratulate the Member for St. Ann's East on his contribution. One could see that he had much more to say. In that light, I wish to also congratulate the Member for Naparima, my colleague who sits on my left, for a good contribution. As the Member for St. Ann's East indicated, he had a handle on his topic, and he was man enough to say what he meant and to say how he felt. Indeed, he is not a man of many words, but the words that he gave us are, indeed, food for thought.
[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in that light, I would also like to congratulate the hon. Leader of the Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] When one sees her photograph in the newspaper, one can easily say, beauty and brain. Mr. Speaker, unlike the presenter of the budget, she was clear and concise. Her statements were compelling. She was not ruffled as she went along. She did not need to call herself “an energizer bunny”, but in her you could have seen the strength, determination and the qualities of leadership.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Member for Oropouche indicated on the day of the presentation of the budget—He said that “she will rip it apart”. That is, indeed, what she did. Her contribution, as I said, it was penetrating, but an area of her contribution which caught my attention, and also the attention of the nation, was the perceived corruption of the PNM—the corruption in the mega projects like the Waterfront Project and the \$15 billion rapid rail project. She showed concern, not only her, but the entire country is showing concern about that.

The Member for Diego Martin East tried to attack her, but his attack was merely a feeble response to a penetrating contribution. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, she was concerned, because she saw opportunities for corruption. Mr. Speaker, she indicated that there was, indeed, that speck of corruption and all that

the Member for Diego Martin East could have said was that everything was above board. Mr. Speaker, we ask the question: How could everything be above board when you have the Cabinet taking decisions? The Cabinet and the negotiating team which negotiated against Bouygues—was headed by your advisers. The advisers who advised the Government and the technocrats who advised the Government are experts, like Jerry Hospedales.

2.00 p.m.

That was the man who was given the authority to close down Caroni (1975) Limited. When he did it under his watch, millions of dollars of Caroni (1975) Limited plant and equipment disappeared. When he was questioned about it, what did he say? When you are closing down such a large organization you could expect this extent of disappearance; by extension \$27 million; by extension they accepted that there was "tiefing" and corruption. That was the man who advised this Government to deal with Bouygues.

In such a large endeavour as a \$15 billion rail project, we ask how many millions does he think acceptable to be lost in corruption and kickback? Caroni (1975) Limited, a smaller enterprise than this, he said \$27 million is okay, let it go. These are the people who are advising you. The hon. Leader of the Opposition made some startling revelations when she spoke about the Waterfront Project; when she called for the Waterfront Project to be stopped.

Mr. Manning: What did she say about it?

Mr. S. Panday: I am coming to it, Mr. hon. Prime Minister. You are trying to throw me off?

Mr. Manning: No, no.

Mr. S. Panday: When she said let us have a forensic audit—

Mr. Manning: Why?

Mr. S. Panday: I will show you now, Mr. Prime Minister. Because of the relationship PNM secretary, Andre Monteil, [*Desk thumping*] Calder Hart, Bouygues and the HDL; that is why. I will show you how it ties up. Andre Monteil, the PNM secretary—treasurer—"ain't no saint"; is no saint. The PNM and their friends are deep in corruption and I will show you it in a few minutes. And they are now in these mega projects where there is so much money that they feel they could thief and they have so much you will not miss it.

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As I said, Monteil was the Chairman of the Home Mortgage Bank. What is the Home Mortgage Bank? A quasi-legal body. A bank which was incorporated by the Parliament of the people and the PNM put Monteil as the Chairman of that bank. They also put Calder Hart as a director of the said bank. You see how it working out.

Mr. Manning: How? How? How?

Mr. S. Panday: I will show you in a minute. Calder Hart who is a member of the Home Mortgage Bank is also the Chairman of NIDCO and the Chairman of UDeCOTT. These companies which are involved in the mega projects and it seems to me, that contract just run down this man they call Monteil. Because Monteil is also the Director of Home Construction Limited. So Calder Hart, Monteil and Bouygues; they gave Bouygues and Home Construction Limited of which Monteil is the Chairman to build the Waterfront Project as a joint venture. Do you not see opportunity? Do you not see interlocking directorships? Do you not see the opportunity for insider information—

Hon. Member: Insider trading.

Mr. S. Panday: —and insider trading? All of them in the Government have caused it; the Government has created the situation where they are given the opportunity and the chance for corruption. I will show how the PNM deals with corruption. Do not forget Calder Hart, who is a member of the Home Mortgage Bank and the operative NIDCO.

They also advise the Government in the award of the contract to this same firm, who had a joint venture enterprise with Home Construction; they advised them on the rapid rail project. It seems to me that this PNM has taken their cohorts who have the ability to manipulate and they put a few of them in top positions in all the areas so they could monitor and maneuver themselves, while the ordinary poor PNM outside there, you are throwing some crumbs on the table for them; for the CEPEP people and the URP people and you have your big boys at the top raking in billions of dollars. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Valley: Mr. Speaker, just for the record, Mr. Calder Hart is no longer the CEO of Home Mortgage Bank.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. who? We are talking about the time. Do not try to run away from the past; the past is here to haunt you. [*Desk thumping*] The past is haunting you so you are trying to distance yourself from Calder Hart; you are trying to distance yourself from everybody after the horse has bolted from the stable. [*Desk thumping*] But your history is confronting you now.

As a matter of fact, the *Saturday Express*, how did they describe it? How they describe the PNM in action? It says:

"Bobol in the billions"

That is the way you are perceived and I am saying—

Mr. Valley: Keep your brush for yourself.

Mr. S. Panday: Keep your brush for yourself—I will show you and you will feel shame just now. The Leader of the Opposition was accurate and on the button. And not only she, but Transparency International supported her. And if one looks at the *Saturday Guardian* again, after you delivered the budget. It says:

"...TTTI has several reasons for challenging Government's claims about transparency and integrity and value for money."

So while you are on your budget presentation, in the safety of the portals of this honourable House and making statements like: "The people also know that it is done with integrity, transparency and accountability. They recognize that the very clear vision and take courage to take action. Government has been employing the nation's resources to bring light to every area of national endeavour in the safety of the portals of this institution."

While they are boasting here, hear how the people are thinking about them when they said:

"...TTTI has several reasons for challenging Government's claims about transparency and integrity and value for money."

You are saying one thing; you have no credibility; you said that on Friday and on Saturday hear what the people are saying about you; you have no credibility, Mr. Prime Minister. It says:

"The nation has been told many times that Government's decision was informed by several studies undertaken since 1967 that recommended rapid rail. Calls on Government by TTTI, the Association of Professional Engineers, the Joint Consultative Council of the construction industry and others to publish those studies, paid for by taxpayers, have been ignored."

by this Government. As a matter of fact, what you have to hide? You are talking in your budget presentation, just transparency. Why are you hiding information? What do you have to hide? They go onto say:

"Many are left to speculate that the decision to adopt rapid rail was not supported by any adequate technical studies, hence the secrecy."

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That is what they say. They ask for public consultation on the small highways from San Fernando to Princes Town; small projects; public consultation. Why no public consultation on the spending of \$50 billion? [*Desk thumping*] That is the question they are asking you.

"Value for money?" that is all you are saying, as you said in your budget statement. Value for what money? Hear what this Government is doing:

"The fact is that Government has committed the country to a massive investment (estimated initially at \$20, then \$15, then \$10 and now \$7 billion) without the benefit of a financial feasibility study specific to the rapid rail..."

Hear what the Government is saying:

"Minister of..."

Jokes

"and Transport is on public record as saying that he saw no need for a financial feasibility study..."

no need for accountability.

"to support the choice of rapid rail..."

because such a study—hear the lame excuses:

"Such a study... would further delay the project"

Sixty-seven to now—[*Prime Minister leaves his seat*] Prime Minister, I want to come back to HDB and Monteil. It says:

"Therefore, this project, arguably one of the most expensive infrastructure projects ever undertaken in the country, has been contracted..."

Hear how they are mortgaging us; how they are mortgaging the children; the future generation of this country. It says:

"without a fixed budget and without a financial feasibility study to justify the investment..."

So while you are talking about credibility, the country is saying they have no credibility in this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Indeed, that is what the hon. Member for Siparia was speaking about.

Mr. Speaker, Transparency International, the professional engineers, they have a right so to do, because I am going to analyze something here and you will see how they are in corruption. Let us take that issue of the NHA, I do not want to call it the—

Mr. Manning: HDC.

Mr. S. Panday: No, I do not want to call it that, people would not understand it—let us talk about the NHA; you will say HDC, but the people understand that the NHA is a government body, it is not a private enterprise. So HDC, NHA. When one looks at what took place the NHA/HDC and the Home Mortgage Bank, you cannot describe that with any other word except that they are thieving big. [*Desk thumping*] They are thieving PNM style.

They are sophisticated in the thieving and people call it “institutionalized tiefing”. That is what PNM is at this stage, “institutionalized tiefing”; “tiefing” the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Because, Mr. Speaker, you will see where they say there is nothing legally wrong, but yet the Prime Minister says it goes against the grain of the integrity of the PNM. Thief! That is what we are.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: Shameless!

Mr. S. Panday: Shameless? Indeed the PNM is shameless in the way they are stealing the people's money. [*Desk thumping*] Member for Laventille East/Morvant, your constituency has the most murders and you are a junior Minister of National Security, shame on you! When the Prime Minister is doing his survey, I am sure he would take that into consideration—you going home. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: You gone already.

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker—condition—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: He dead on arrival. [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. Panday:—Andre Monteil, the treasurer of the PNM, a top honcho in the PNM, a long-standing member of the PNM; the man that deals and collects the money of the PNM, who holds the PNM purse.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM took this man, the treasurer of the PNM, and made him Chairman of the NHA or the HDC. That is power! Not only that, they will not put him Chairman on the Port—not that at all—they put him in the Home Mortgage Bank. So you see how the PNM thinking; NHA housing, Home Mortgage Bank, money to build the houses and the Home Mortgage Bank is a quasi legal organization—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: Quasi state.

Mr. S. Panday: Quasi state organization. Sorry, thank you, Member. It is a quasi state organization, which gives loans to unsuspecting homeowners. As the Member for Caroni East says, quasi, partly owned by the Government, and that the Government through the Central Bank or the Central Bank had 15 per cent ownership.

Mr. Speaker, this man, Monteil, was also Chairman of the CLICO Investment Bank. But the PNM again, housing and building and money for materials as a lineup, they hit him; they throw him in the Education Facilities Company Limited, again spending money. Mr. Prime Minister, you indeed made a mistake to put him in such close proximity to the Minister of Education, your wife, Hazel Manning.

Mr. Singh: No, his interest is only man.

Mr. S. Panday. I did not mean anything—

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. S. Panday:—I have great respect for the lady, I did not mean anything sarcastic about her. I am telling you, he could put her in trouble. Mr. Speaker, he is also a senior operative of CLICO.

As Chairman of the NHA of which Calder Hart, the man who is given all the big contracts in the Port, took \$100 million of the people's money, moneys which are raised by bonds and he put it in his bank, the bank in which he was Chairman. I would go slowly so you would understand it. How could you do that?

The Prime Minister came before this Parliament and said, "Oh, short-term investment." How could the Chairman of the NHA take public money and put in a private bank? What did Calder Hart, who is a member of that board, say or are they associates and thieves together? Are they covering up together? According to company law, he probably declares his interest and moves aside. We want to find out who were the members of the NHA or the HDC, apart from Calder Hart, who encouraged the movement of State money to a private organization?

Mr. Speaker, this man they called Monteil should at least have some shame. I am Chairman of the NHA allowing money to go into a bank in which I am the Chairman also. How it looks? How does it look? So, having done that; being a high operative in CLICO—maybe a Chairman or some other thing—he influenced CLICO to sell the shares in the Home Mortgage Bank to himself and his lovely wife through the company, Stone Street Capital Limited; 43 per cent of the shares of the Home Mortgage Bank, a quasi state bank. That man, because he is the PNM treasurer, 43 per cent of the bank he owns.

Hon. Member: 46 per cent.

Mr. S. Panday: Forty-six per cent. That makes him the largest—imagine a private man, a member of the public, Chairman of the Home Mortgage Bank will be the greatest shareholder in a quasi state bank. How could this happen? Where in the world this could happen? Only with the PNM. If that is not corruption, tell me what is corruption? So CLICO now is a private company. What upsets me about the Prime Minister is that certain things took place and when he sent directives to the Central Bank, the terms of reference were very narrow, and we would explain that as we go along.

So, Monteil, PNM treasurer, is the largest shareholder in a quasi state bank and you want to talk about people. This man who is now the biggest shareholder in the Home Mortgage Bank is also Chairman of the NHA and I would show you how the PNM digs out poor people eye. When you have a house to build, the Minister for Diego Martin West, who is now the Minister of Housing and who was once the Member of Planning and Development—I do not know if he has contact there still—but if you want to go and build your house on your own and to take a loan from a commercial bank, Planning and Development giving you pressure, you cannot build. All kinds of obstacles in your way! Then NHA of which Andre Monteil is the Chairman, will tell you: "Why do you not allow the NHA to build for you?" Then he would direct you to the Home Mortgage Bank (HMB) of which he is Chairman and majority shareholder. So this poor unsuspecting house owner will go and take the loan from the Home Mortgage Bank. You are taking the loan from Andre Monteil bank; so the interest for 25 years, you are feeding Andre Monteil.

Hon. Member: AMB, it is not HMB.

Mr. S. Panday: Yes. You say you are feeding the PNM; you are holding PNM children, generation of PNM children and choking them to death. That is what the PNM is doing.

Mr. Speaker, hear what happens when you go to the Home Mortgage Bank. NHA is building your house; so, your see, is that not interlocking directorship? Is that not bobol, where the Chairman of the NHA forcing you to go to the Home Mortgage Bank and he is also Chairman and owner of the Home Mortgage Bank, or before this company? When NHA starts to build your house—NHA in corruption again—it would not hire a certified contractor to build. Instead, they will give one of the PNM honchos the contract. He does not know the difference

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between a nail and a screw. He does not even have a hammer; he does not know the difference between a 2b2 and a 2b4. [Laughter] You could hit him with one of those and he would not feel it.

Mr. Manning: [Inaudible]

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker—you could heckle how much you want, Mr. Prime Minister, you will take this one. They build, so therefore, the PNM man gets the contract, big contract from NHA, large sum of money and he now subcontract it. He subcontract it to a contractor who does not know anything about it. As a result, what the poor house owner gets from the NHA and the Home Mortgage Bank is an inferior house. You know what that poor man has to do? Mr. Prime Minister, I tell you to go and check, this is a true case in Buen Intento in the constituency of Princes Town.

Mr. Speaker, they had said they will put purlin, but because they rake up and thief the money, he ended up getting wood rafters. You know what he has to do? He has to go and take another loan, in order to complete the house; and that is the way the PNM is having the poor people. What is sad about it is, they do not have a system of giving houses, so they give their PNM friends the land for the houses and it is their PNM people that this PNM Government is digging out their eye. That is what is happening, PNM brutalizing PNM people. You give them a little 15 per cent here and a 15 per cent there and an increase here, but "Oh Lord", you have your fans on the throats of poor people, including PNM people, and today we stand up on behalf of PNM people who have been brutalized by the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, I am certain that the hon. Prime Minister would know that a director like this insider trading by the use of interlocking directorships, that directors go to jail for that. You remember the Chairman of Exxon went to jail? [Interruption]

Mr. Manning: Enron.

Mr. S. Panday: Enron. That is what gets me annoyed with the Prime Minister—you know and you allow the thing to go on. That gets me annoyed. Andre Monteil should be in jail. The PNM treasurer should be in jail, but you have him there on a pedestal still. You know what is wrong and you condone it, I will show you how you did it, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, after he did this, suddenly, NHA money placed in Monteil bank in February and in March they buy the shares. Quick, quick! Look at the swiftness at which money from NHA going into Monteil bank and how quickly Monteil buys the shares. Money went in March in the CLICO Investment Bank and

in March, Monteil came back and bought the shares of CLICO. What is going on? What is going on, Mr. Prime Minister? But hear what happened. A few days after when he realized everything was set, this man did not tender his resignation to you, Mr. Prime Minister, he offered it to you a few days after.

Shortly after, he did what he had to do and he set himself up to suck the blood of this nation PNM style for a number of years; he offered you his resignation. I want to ask you something here today, Mr. Prime Minister. Why did you ask him, “do not offer it, tender it”? Because when I tender, I say, "Here is my resignation." When I offer you, I say, "You decide what you want to do chief."

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. Panday: Hold on. He felt that you had confidence in him, so he offered you, hoping—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. Panday: I do not know, maybe not for you to accept it.

Mr. Manning: And what happened?

Mr. S. Panday: In the quietness of the night, you accepted it. You accepted it without anybody knowing and you know why you did that, Mr. Prime Minister? You did that as you hoped that when he had moved out of the scene, he would not be in the firing line and the issue would die. You participated in that, Mr. Prime Minister.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I just want to thank the hon. Member for Princes Town for giving way I just want to advise this honourable House that, when the resignation of Mr. Monteil from the chief state agencies was accepted, a public statement was made on the matter. It was not done in the dead of any night.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. S. Panday: That is the most quiet public statement I have ever heard. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: The public statement was quiet.

Mr. S. Panday: The most “unpublic” statement I have ever heard.

Ms. Seukeran: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. S. Panday: You believe because you have family in the PNM “you safe”? [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*] You could be as incompetent as you want; you believe you have contact and “you safe”? Not at all.

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The hon. Prime Minister is here; he likes to jump up; here is an opportunity to jump up. Did you ask him why he was tendering his resignation? I am waiting. [*Mr. Panday sits*] [*Laughter*] He will not get up this time. Did you ask him why he was tendering his resignation? Did he do anything wrong? You put him there. How long did you put him there for? Why did he cut short his journey to happiness?

Mr. Prime Minister, did you ask him, "Look, Mr. Monteil, something is looking suspicious; why are you resigning, not only from the Home Mortgage Bank and the NHA, but also from the Education Facilities Board?" Did you not become suspicious or was it that Monteil was one of those persons who could buy 10 \$100,000 tickets to come to eat and drink?

Mr. Singh: Jerry Narace only sold him one.

Mr. S. Panday: These are questions which the population is now asking you. You do not have to go to an energy conference to announce it; you are in the highest court of the land, the highest forum in the land, the Parliament; say so now or forever hold your peace.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister said that he accepted it and that he made a statement. If you really were genuine about making it public, you would have said why he resigned. You would have given the population the reason he resigned. Why did you allow it to be like a love affair between you and Monteil?

You would realize that the State or the Central Bank has a 15 per cent share in the Home Mortgage Bank, which amounted to 2.4 million shares, so the State is still in an organization in which Monteil owns 6 million shares. So although he has resigned, you are still riding shotgun with him, because you and your Government are still associates with Monteil in the Home Mortgage Bank. He is the majority shareholder and you, like a little boy, are following him with your 15 per cent. That is where we are. That is why we talk about corruption. That was what the Member for Siparia spoke about.

Why did the hon. Prime Minister not come to the House when a top operative of the PNM resigned from three boards? There is a section on the Order Paper which reads, "Announcements by Ministers". The Prime Minister has a way that he comes before the House to make statements at 4.20 p.m. Why did you not make a statement about that?

As a matter of fact, the "S" had to burst in the Parliament by the Opposition, by the Member for Caroni East. When the "S" burst, it was as though you had to give the Prime Minister a vitamin injection to get him to move. They pushed him in a corner trying to get him to move.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what the Member for Diego Martin said when the question was raised in the Parliament? "What we telling you here today, if I am lying say I am lying and shout me down." But before anything was done, the Member for Diego Martin West, the Minister of Housing, called the Member for Caroni East, "Liar, liar, liar". [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: The word is unparliamentary.

Hon. Members: He is quoting!

Mr. S. Panday: That was what he said. The reason was that in the PNM "hooliganish" manner, when you try to investigate, they pound you on your face to threaten you, "lick you down with teacup", as the case may be, for you to stay quiet. [*Crosstalk*] So liar, liar, liar. The Minister of Housing, under whose jurisdiction is the Housing Development Company, said that there was lying.

I do not know in the struggle for leadership of the PNM on which side Monteil was. He came out here to defend Monteil; "old wounds not healing". [*Laughter*] I see that your whole Cabinet has abandoned you today; "old wounds not healing". That Minister defended Monteil by calling the messenger trying to attack him. Mr. Speaker, that was the former Minister of Planning.

Let me tell you how deep this thing goes. If HDC, of which the Member for Diego Martin West is in charge, assigns you a plot of land, you have to build within a certain time. When the Ministry of Planning and Development prevents you; it puts all kinds of obstacles in your way; then they take away your lot. It is by duress that same Member for Diego Martin West, the same Member who failed to turn up at your handing over ceremony recently, takes away your land. That is what the HDC does.

They confiscate the land, forcing you to go to that bank. Do you smell something funny? Do you smell something with a pungent odor or something fishy with the way the HDC treats poor people? After you purchase the plot, they take it away from you and tell you, "Go and look for another one, if there is any." Is that the way the Member for Diego Martin West treats poor people?

"He gone down to Bagatelle" and playing badjohn for the Member for Diego Martin Central, told him, "I will deal with you after election". Is that the way this PNM treats poor people, while the top of PNM weeping away the gravy of this country at the extent of the poor? That is the extent of "bobol" that takes place.

I raise this issue because in Princes Town after a house is built, the homeowners have to come near the posts and put iron support to hold the house,

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because "de house dancing like a tree in the breeze." It is wavering like a tree in the breeze. The people of Princes Town, of the Buen Intento Housing Estate, have asked me to bring this to the attention of the Prime Minister and the public.

As a matter of fact, at the present time, a wife of a Member of Parliament is constructing substandard houses in Buen Intento using illegal immigrants. "But allyuh in power; allyuh could do what yuh want." [*Crosstalk*] They are not Chinese. That is the level of corruption of the PNM.

So when you come here and boast that you are building 25,000 houses for people, look at what you are doing them. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I will like to correct something, just in case the wrong impression has been given. Your reference to liar, liar, liar, did not happen in this House, so I will not want the wrong impression to be given; that happened outside of this House.

Mr. Singh: Cabinet!

Mr. Speaker: Wherever it happened, it did not happen inside this House; I just want to make that pretty clear.

Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Princes Town 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. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, I would say then that when the matter was raised in the Parliament, the Member for Caroni East was attacked in a most brutal manner and was called a stranger to the truth.

The Prime Minister was forced to send the matter to the Central Bank for directions. The hon. Prime Minister came here and read a report on Friday, August 17, in which he indicated that he had decided to deal with the Monteil issue. So after the "S" was burst, the hon. Prime Minister came to the house on Wednesday, May 09, 2000, and said that he had intended to send the matter to the Central Bank.

It was strange and surprising that the hon. Prime Minister, having sent this in May, would come to the House and make such a statement on August 17, when the Central Bank had given its recommendation since May 31, 2007. Mr. Prime Minister, why did you put it under your hands or wherever you wanted to put it?

Why did you hide it for so long? The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago reported on the transfer of the Home Mortgage Bank shares to Stone Street Capital since May 31. You had that report in your hand. Unless the Members of this honourable House had pried it out of you, as though they were extracting a tooth without anesthetic from your mouth, you came on the August 17 and presented it. Why? Two reports.

What did the Central Bank say? I will show you the institutional statement. Prior to 2005, there was a restriction on the transfer of shares. This PNM came in 2005 and amended the Home Mortgage Bank Act. The only area they amended was the one which dealt with the disposal of shares; strange.

Section 27 would then go on to say:

"There are no restrictions on share ownership or share transfer. There shall be no rights of pre-emption in respect of share transfer."

Hear what this Government did by amending the law:

"...the shares of the [HM] Bank shall be under the control of the directors..."

That is Monteil and Calder Hart:

"who may from time to time allot or otherwise dispose of all or any of the same to such persons on such terms and conditions as the directors shall think fit."

This is a quasi state bank; how could you give the directors that power?

2.45 p.m.

So this PNM Government gave Monteil and his boys the authority to play with the shares of the bank, and in section 28, as we say, they had a free run. Mr. Speaker, do you know before 2005 they could not have done what they did? The PNM opened the gate for corruption to take place and the treasurer did that.

Mr. Speaker, they came back to this House again in January 2007 with another amendment to the Home Mortgage Bank Act and it received presidential assent on February 06, 2007 and that amendment did not try to take cognizance to protect shareholders or the public interest, it just shifted.

It said that the 2007 amendment removed from the Home Mortgage Bank the application of the Financial Institutions Act, 1993 with effect from July, 2005 and it merely gave the Central Bank the responsibility for the supervision of the financial activities of the Merchant Bank, Mortgage Bank, and the Trust

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Company, collective investment funds of the Home Mortgage Bank (HMB). They did not take steps to protect the public's interest because the Government had 15 per cent shares in that.

Mr. Speaker, the moment Monteil saw that they did this in February and they were not attacking him, he did what he did. Or it would appear to me the PNM facilitated such a move.

Mr. Singh: Orchestrated.

Mr. S. Panday: Orchestrated, it would appear. Mr. Speaker, so when the Prime Minister spoke to the Central Bank, he merely asked the question of the Central Bank for the legality of the transfer of the shares. I am surprised to know that there are so many lawyers on the Government side and they did not know that section 28 existed. You asked the question, surely you would know the answer. What did the Central Bank say? It said they complied with section 28. I am saying that is institutionalized "tiefing", specialized "tiefing", a kind of "tiefing" that can only take place PNM style. "Yuh want to heckle meh?" "Yuh ask meh about questions, ask meh now." "Look de evidence here from de Central Bank Report."

Mr. Speaker, what is strange is that the Central Bank says that particular attention should be paid to corporate governance in financial institutions and acceptable governance practices require board members like Calder Hart and Monteil, especially Monteil, especially the Chair of any financial institution to operate in a manner that avoids any real, potential or apparent conflict within their private interest, that is interest in the Clico Merchant Bank and their fiduciary duties or responsibilities.

Monteil, the Chair, is expected to uphold the highest standards so that the public confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity, and impartiality of his actions are above and beyond reproach.

Members opposite, what do you have to say about this? Where is your conscience? Members of the PNM, where is your conscience? Look what the bank is saying. You all did not know that? Instead, you set the framework for the "tiefing" to take place.

It says this obligation which we speak about is not fully discharged by simply acting within the law. Their obligation to be honest, to be a person of trust, integrity, objectivity, impartiality and above reproach is not discharged by merely acting; to be objective and above reproach is not discharged by merely acting within the law.

So Monteil caught the Central Bank and everybody by surprise so they cannot do him anything. It said:

“It is our view that a higher standard of governance is expected in the case of board members of the Home Mortgage Bank if only because the Home Mortgage Bank was created by a special government statute to perform a public purpose.”

That is to help poor people in obtaining houses. Instead, the PNM used the bank to dig out poor people’s eye, and to brutalize poor people with its corruption. The development of housing finance for the market of Trinidad and Tobago in line with the special status. This is a bank that enjoys special status. It says:

“The Home Mortgage Bank enjoys certain fiscal and statutory privileges linked with public policy mandate.”

You talk about corruption, Mr. Prime Minister? That is corruption! You talk about lack of integrity? That is lack of integrity!

Mr. Speaker, the Member said 46 per cent ownership of the Home Mortgage Bank, a bank which was formed for public purpose, places Stone Street Capital with Monteil and his loving wife as the controlling shareholder with the co-owner of the entity, being Chairman of the Board.

This could impact on public perception and confidence in an institution with quasi-public objectives and was established by Parliament for public interest purposes and to implement Government policy. The PNM has duped all the Members of this House to permit this large amount of “tiefing”.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the original share structure before the PNM came with its amendment in 2005, put restrictions on the transfers and then removed them and section 28 says that there is need to have control only on the issues of new shares, but Monteil knew what was going on. He knew once you are an existing shareholder you can transfer shares willingly and this Government allowed that.

Mr. Speaker, why I call it institutional “tiefing” is because it said the transfer of Clico shares to Stone Street Capital goes against the spirit of the amendment and the Prime Minister came here and read only half of the statement.

The new share structure is inconsistent with the original philosophy. We saw the Home Mortgage Bank as an institution for public purposes and the Central Bank made certain recommendations since May 31. I would like to ask the Prime

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Minister if he considered all the recommendations the Central Bank made to him to deal with this “tiefing” at the Home Mortgage Bank.

The hon. Prime Minister came to this House and gave a history of the matter and he admitted that Monteil took poor people’s money and put it in his own bank. He went on to say that since section 28 of the Act speaks only about the transfer of shares, the Prime Minister came to this House and told us that advice from the Central Bank and I quote from the document: “Statement by the hon. Prime Minister, House of Representatives”.

“...given that the 2007 amendment did not treat with the issues relating to the share structure of the Home Mortgage Bank, the Central Bank has advised that it is of the view that the transfer of the shares to Stone Street Capital is legal...”

The Prime Minister is giving us half of the story. Nothing about morality in public affairs, it is legal.

“and as such, there is no basis under the Home Mortgage Bank Act to seek a reversal of the transaction. However, the Central Bank has also advised that in its view, the new share structure following the transaction is inconsistent with the original philosophy, which saw the Home Mortgage Bank as an institution with a public purpose like the Unit Trust Corporation.”

That is where Monteil grabbed the bank. It continues:

“The Central Bank has also expressed the view that the new share structure is inconsistent with the intention of the 2005 amendment to the Act, which envisaged the listing of the shares on the Stock Exchange to produce a broad representative ownership structure.”

Mr. Speaker, that is what the Prime Minister said, as if he is crying now.

“The earlier 2005 amendment removed various classes of shareholding, provided for the unrestricted transfer of shares and accordingly initiated the process for public participation in the Home Mortgage Bank...”

Mr. Speaker, so the Prime Minister came with that part of the story and told the House in typical PNM style as though he is on the platform—we will beat them in the south, we will beat them in the east. Well, take it here now, Mr. Prime Minister, take it now. Hear how the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance intends to deal with such a serious matter. He continues:

“Mr. Speaker, as an initial step, the Government and the Central Bank have agreed in principle on the arrangements whereby the shareholding of the

Central Bank in the Home Mortgage Bank—2,400,000 shares—would be sold to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago...”

So he gave the impression as the “bad John” on the street. “All those thieves, ah coming for them.”

Mr. Speaker, to the Corporation Sole, Minister of Finance, following that sale, hear how the hon. Prime Minister intends to deal with it.

“Following that sale, the Government would consult with the other shareholders of the Home Mortgage Bank on determining the broad parameters which would govern an Initial Public Offer (IPO)...”

So he says after me—the Corporation Sole gets the share; I am going to have a discussion with Monteil.

You are going to have discussions with Monteil? A man who has committed such an atrocious act on the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

3.00 p.m.

Is that the way you intend to deal with it? Or is it, as Jerry Narace says, the PNM takes care of its own? Is it that? You are going to talk to Monteil? Send the police for him instead; send the Director of Public Prosecutions; send him to jail! Instead, you are going to talk to him to determine broad parameters. Oh, no, Mr. Prime Minister!

Mr. Singh: Tell them what the Central Bank had to say about the shares.

Mr. S. Panday: I am coming to that; I am just going through this to show what the Prime Minister brought to the House.

Mr. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, are you not aware that the Securities and Exchange Commission can only deal with shares that are trading on the stock exchange? What craziness or madness got into your head to send to the Securities and Exchange Commission for advice when you know, in fact, they have no power? They could do nothing about it. Is it that you are giving the impression that you are doing nothing when you are like a top spinning in one spot and going nowhere? Is it that? Why did you want to send this to the Securities and Exchange Commission? You should send it to the Director of Public Prosecutions. Why did you send it there? Why did you not send it to the Integrity Commission like when “dem” boys you want to get rid of, like the Member for Diego Martin West? If they sneeze, the Integrity Commission for “dem”.

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Why did you not send Monteil? Why did you not send this transaction to the Integrity Commission? Why did you send it to the Securities and Exchange Commission?

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Princes Town for giving way once again. I just want to clarify the record, that when this matter was first raised in the Parliament, the Prime Minister announced that the issue had been referred to the Commissioner of Police, to the Integrity Commission and to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. S. Panday: Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. Like “dem fellas” know who to investigate and who not to investigate!

Mr. Manning: That is not true.

Mr. S. Panday: I will not be bold to say that the Prime Minister is some distance from the truth. But the question is, you sent it to the Commission of Police. Have you asked him how far the investigations have reached?

Mr. Manning: That has nothing to do with me.

Mr. S. Panday: How do you mean it has nothing to do with you? You are the Corporation Sole; you have an obligation to act; you have an obligation in the interest of the public to find out how far they have gone against Monteil for stealing the public money! Or is it because he is a PNM you just send it—I want to ask you the question: Did you send the matter to the Commissioner of Police and to the Integrity Commission with the same narrow parameters that you sent to the Central Bank, where they cannot do anything?

Mr. Manning: I thank the Member again, Mr. Speaker. The matters were sent to these agencies so these agencies can act as they consider appropriate. They were given no guidelines, no parameters. They have the legal instruments under which they operate. It is not a matter for the Prime Minister to tell them how to act.

Mr. S. Panday: Thank you very much. You could run, but you cannot hide!
Mr. Singh: I want to thank the hon. Member for giving way. Mr. Speaker, you would realize that I raised this matter and I want to say to this honourable House that this is the first time that the Prime Minister has indicated that he sent this matter to the Commissioner of Police—

Mr. Manning: Oh no.

Mr. Singh: It is the first time that he has indicated publicly.

Mr. Manning: Oh no.

Mr. Singh: I will go into the record of *Hansard*. I have been following this matter very intensely. It is the first time to the Commissioner of Police; first time to the Director of Public Prosecutions and first time to the Integrity Commission. I have no problem with it being the first time, but certainly I recall that the Prime Minister said that he would seek the reports of the SEC and the Central Bank, certainly not the other three.

Mr. S. Panday: I want to humbly ask the hon. Prime Minister: When did you send it? Today is what day in August, the 27th? Did you send it within the last 10 days? Because, Mr. Prime Minister, if you had sent it before August 17, why did you hide that from the House? Your report is dated August 17. If you had sent it before August 17, why did you not inform the House of what you did? I want to ask you then: Did you send it between the 17th and now, when you were on one of those conferences on crime? When? This is a most recent report; this is the Parliament that raised it; this is Parliament that has an interest in it! Why did you not tell the Parliament?

Mr. Prime Minister, where is your memory? Because this report is only 10 days old. Tell us when you sent it to the Commissioner. [*Short pause*] The Prime Minister cannot get up. The Prime Minister is stuck in his seat. You are talking about “tief”! That is “tief”!

I want to ask the Prime Minister another question here today. The Central Bank made two recommendations, you remember. Why did you only bring one recommendation to the House? Why did you not bring all the recommendations that the Central Bank made, to the Parliament? Listen to what the Central Bank said; listen to the advice of the Central Bank. The Central Bank bawling and crying:

“Given where we are now and in the spirit of good corporate governance there would seem to be two options:

- (I) If Stone Street Capital maintains its shareholding, there is a case for changing the legislation...to eliminate the HMB’s special status and incorporate it under the Companies Act as a financial entity which would fall under the ambit of the FIA.”

Maybe that is the diffused and convoluted direction they took. But listen to what the Central Bank recommended to you, Mr. Prime Minister:

“(II) Alternatively we may consider using moral suasion to convince...”

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Monteil and his wife, that is:

“Stone Street Capital to divest its shares so as to preserve the purpose...”
of the Act.

Mr. Manning: What did the Government say?

Mr. S. Panday: I am coming to it. It says this is the preferred option.

Mr. Manning: What did the Government say?

Mr. S. Panday: Wait! The Central Bank said this is the way you should go:

“This latter is obviously the preferred option as it supports the original mandate of the institution. The pursuit of this ‘public purpose’ mandate has brought significant benefits to the population since the HMB has acted to provide liquidity to the mortgage market, and more recently contain the cost of mortgage lending and increase competition in the mortgage market.”

Instead, do you know what Monteil did? Monteil turned it upside down.

Mr. Manning: What did the Central Bank say?

Mr. S. Panday: Hold on. It says, if you are going that way—they even advise you how to do it:

“However, putting the preferred option...”

Which you have failed to bring to the House; you failed to tell the House that the Central Bank had given you another option to save the population. It says:

“However, putting the preferred option into practice may raise several challenges.

On the issue of valuation, for instance, one would need to guard against the likelihood that the sale by Stone Street Capital results in sizable capital gains to the company.”

They are trying to prevent Monteil from “tiefing” more! They want to hold him down and they tell you how to do it!

“One way to avoid this is to use the NIB as the initial purchaser at a pre-determined price,..”

Because “all of all yuh is one”.

“...equal to the amount paid by Stone Street plus all interest and expenses incurred.”

I say, “Doh give him a damn cent!” No interest for him!

“Of course, there would need to be (i) a prior agreement that the shares will be listed publicly by a specific time...”

The question I want to ask you, Mr. Prime Minister: Why did you not bring all the options that the Central Bank gave you, to the House? The second option, which is the preferred option, why did you hide it from the House? You had this information since May 31! You came to the House on August 17. We ask you: If you did not even want to do it, why did you not come to the House and tell the House: “The Central Bank has given me a way to save the country.” Why did you not do that!

I am asking you now to answer this question. Monteil, who is the PNM Treasurer, did anybody ask him—

Mr. Manning: Let me ask you a question.

Mr. S. Panday: No, do not ask me a question. I am on the floor! Do not ask me any question. My time is running out too. The question is: Why did you hide this information from the Parliament? The question was raised in the Parliament. Why did you bring a half-baked answer? I ask you this question before I close: Why are you apparently trying to protect the big thieves in the PNM?

Mr. Manning: Before you close; before you close—

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, my time is up—

Mr. Speaker: You are not giving way?

Mr. Manning: Before you close—

Mr. S. Panday: When I asked you to stand up, you “sit” down like you have glue on your seat. Now you want to stand up? No! I asked you a few questions just now, you did not want to answer. You want to play politics with me; you want to jump out of the hole! Never! Never! Never!

Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize to the House because I did not get the opportunity to speak on my area: the administration of justice and crime. But I am certain my friends would join me in carrying that fight. I know we will carry the fight and the PNM is a set “a tief”. That is what “dey is”! The biggest “tief”! Institutional “tiefing” and we want to tell the poor people in Trinidad and Tobago how the PNM “digging out dey eye.”

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

The Minister of Health (Hon. John Rahael): Mr. Speaker, let me begin, first of all, by congratulating the Minister of Finance and the hon. Prime Minister on his budget presentation and, by extension, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. When I heard the Member for Princes Town talk about corruption and “tief”, you would believe that the years 1996 to 2001 never existed in this country. But we will leave that for another time.

Mr. Panday: You are there now! You are “tiefing” by the billions.

Hon. J. Rahael: I am very pleased to enter this debate on the fiscal measures outlined by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for the year 2007/2008, for two reasons.

Firstly, as Minister of Health, I am pleased with the provisions made for my Ministry. Our level of funding has been increasing every year for the past five years and next year's allocation, that is 2007/2008, of \$3.2 billion, will allow the Ministry of Health to continue our reformation of the health sector in keeping with the Health Sector Reform and our own corporate plan for the period 2006—2009.

This plan is fashioned to achieve the goals and objectives in the report of the Vision 2020 subcommittee on health, with the underpinning philosophy of nurturing a caring and responsive client-centred public health sector. Secondly, because it presents me with the opportunity also to review the performance of the public health sector over the term 2002 to 2007 in the context of our national vision of attaining developed nation status by the year 2020, as well as to address some of the misinformation covered widely in the media.

The Member for Siparia, the Leader of the Opposition, in her presentation, quoted from the PAHO report, and quoted selectively. The report, although presented in 2005 and dated 2005, was mainly for the term 1999 to 2001. It also talked about the term 2000 to 2004. It talked about mortality rates for cancer for the period 2001. The Leader of the Opposition reminded me—and if you would permit me to also quote a bit of the Bible. In Matthew Gospel, chapter 4, it is indicated that the devil was trying to tempt Jesus. The devil failed because Jesus would not be tempted. Now, a little over 2,000 years later, the devil will fail again, because the people of Trinidad and Tobago will not yield to any temptations by the devil to vote anyone but the PNM. “All yuh” could sleep with the devil how many times “all yuh” want, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are not going to fall for that. [*Desk thumping*] So when you are quoting, ensure that you quote properly.

Therefore, as I continue my contribution, let me indicate that the Vision 2020 subcommittee in its report envisages a society that is empowered to live long, healthy, happy and productive lives.

3.15 p.m.

In pursuit of this vision the sub-committee identified seven major goals and objectives. They are as follows:

- (1) To improve the general health status of the population. Some of the objectives are to decrease the infant mortality and increase life expectancy; control substance use and abuse especially as they relate to tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs.
- (2) To enhance the management of communicable and non-communicable diseases. Some of the objectives under that goal are to enhance the control of non-communicable diseases and other lifestyle related conditions. CDAP comes into play here. We will talk about that a little later.
- (3) To improve the performance of the health care delivery system. Part of the objective is to utilize technology for information, science, health care and medicine.
- (4) To improve the quality of a national health care service. Part of that goal is to increase the appropriate use of effective health care services by medical providers and to improve consumer and patient protection among others.
- (5) To unify the delivery of health care services. Some of the objectives are to promote integration among health care services and to promote private and public sector collaboration to obtain greater efficiencies.
- (6) To develop and strengthen the health research system to facilitate evidence-based decisions-making, policy formation, new learning and development. Part of the objective is to advance the conduct of biomedical as well as behavioural and social research that provides findings to promote health and guide the prevention and management of disease and disability.
- (7) To create a client-centred health care environment. Part of that objective is to modify behaviours and attitudes, perhaps, the biggest challenge facing the health sector today.

Other information is available on the Ministry of Health's website www.health.gov.tt.

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I will make my contribution in the context of realizing these goals and objectives. I want to do so against the backdrop of what we found when we assumed office, so that this honourable House and the people of Trinidad and Tobago can better appreciate the phenomenal strides that we have made through a number of landmark achievements.

In 2001/2002, what did we find in the public health sector? We found a health sector that was beset with industrial actions by health care workers that were impeding the delivery of many health care services. There was a serious shortage of nurses, doctors and pharmacists that was affecting the delivery of services.

In 2001/2002, sometimes our senior citizens were spending days waiting for medication at our public health pharmacies because they could not afford the high price of medication in the private pharmacies.

When we came into office over 15,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago were awaiting surgery; some as long as 10 years. HIV/AIDS was threatening to dicinateour population. There were unreliable ambulance services and infant mortality was at the highest. The list goes on and on.

There was no computerized system in any of the public health institutions. We immediately set about the task of revamping the Health Sector Reform Programme to re-position the public health sector on a path of sustainable improvement, towards attaining developed nation status.

One of the first things we did was to remove VAT and duties from over 600 items to bring down the prices on pharmaceuticals and other medical products. We introduced the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme. We carried out over 12,000 surgical procedures in partnership with private institutions and a weekend initiative at our hospitals, significantly reducing the waiting list and eliminating the list for some elective surgeries.

We launched the cardiac programme. To date, we have done over 500 cardiac bypass surgeries and 800 cardiac angioplasty procedures. We introduced the Embolization Fibroid Programme. Over 375 female patients qualified and benefitted from this programme. That is a programme with new technology that was introduced into the public health sector for the first time in its history.

We provided over 270,000 free CT scans; MRI scans; ultrasounds and X-ray procedures at public health institutions. We partnered with various non-governmental organizations like the Rainbow Mission and Mission International to provide specialist treatment for our citizens, both locally and abroad.

Just recently, 16 children had interventional catheterisation to correct their cardiac defects which is a non-surgical procedure at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex by one of these missions. This allowed them to live a normal life. The normal cost of one of those procedures can be \$100,000.

The entire public health sector is now averaging 30,000 surgical procedures annually. When we came into office the average was 20,000 surgical procedures in our public health institutions. Today it is a 50 per cent increase in output for surgical procedures in our public health institutions.

We doubled the urology procedures at San Fernando General Hospital. We have one of the best equipped, state of the art clinic, to provide services in urology at the San Fernando General Hospital.

We also partnered with Global Medical of Trinidad and Tobago to launch a new EMS service that has dramatically improved the response time to medical emergency calls. When last did you hear that persons were waiting for a long period of time before an ambulance reached the scene of an accident? These are improvements that we have made in the public health sector that are going unnoticed. It is only when something adverse happens you hear about it. Thousand of trips are made by our ambulance service. For the past two years you have not heard any outcry that no ambulance service was available or it took an hour or two before it arrived. Very soon we will be introducing a three digit number to call for emergency services. It has been confirmed by TSTT but we would wait and launch that in the very near future.

We embarked on a vigorous training programme to train more doctors, nurses, ENAs, scrub technicians, PCAs, pharmacist assistants and other health technicians to satisfy our local needs and in the interim, mounted an international recruitment drive. As a short-term measure, we brought in doctors and nurses from Cuba and nurses and pharmacists from the Philippines.

I will inform you as to the impact that had on the public service in Trinidad and Tobago. By the introduction of these additional nurses, those that we are training and those that we brought from Cuba and the Philipines, we were able to open more wards at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex and the San Fernando General Hospital; establish a satellite pharmacy in the eye clinic at the Port of Spain General Hospital, releasing the pressure of the number of patients that needed to go to the general pharmacy to access their medication. That is one reason that patients are no longer waiting for long periods of time in our public health pharmacies. Almost on a daily basis, over 100 patients visit our eye clinic

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at the Port of Spain General Hospital. Because we put that pharmacy within the eye clinic with only eye medication with a local and Phillipino pharmacist, we are able to dispense the medication for the patients in the eye clinic, relieving them from going to the general pharmacy to access the same medication. Patients from other clinics can go to the general pharmacy to access their medication.

We have improved facilities at Port of Spain, San Fernando and Mount Hope by outfitting modern equipment in almost every department resulting in a fall in the infant mortality rate in the neonatal units in Port of Spain, San Fernando and Mount Hope. Although it is not yet at the level we want it to be, the decline is there.

We have improved the compensation packages for our health care professionals over the period and we are continuing to address this critical area, as we seek to make all our health care workers full time.

Because of these landmark achievements more and more of our citizens are turning to the public health sector to satisfy their health needs. I will show statistics that would confirm that more and more citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are accessing health care at our public health institutions. It is instructive to note that the MORI poll indicated in 2005 that 50 per cent of the population felt optimistic about improvement in the public health care system. The latest poll has reported that there has been an increase in the expectation of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago; 66 per cent of the population feel optimistic about improvement in the public health care system. In other words, there is a growing confidence in the public health sector. We must be doing something right.

Prevention and primary health care are the most important aspects of health. The Ministry of Health has been and will continue to focus on the question of primary health care. It is critical to improving the health status of our people. There is no doubt that enhancing citizens' access to primary health care and treatment and getting people to adopt healthy behaviour will yield tremendous benefits to the individuals and save millions of dollars in tertiary health care.

Let me update you on some of the primary health care initiatives that this Government has undertaken. Tens of thousands of people in every region of the country are now being served by a network of health centres and facilities under the ambit of the Regional Health Authorities. Between 2002 and this year, we have been able to complete and open 57 of these establishments; 11 are nearing completion as we speak. We are still to start work on seven others; five in Trinidad and two in Tobago.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, these are only a few district health facilities that have not yet started. There is still infrastructure works in some of our hospitals and some of our programmes that have not yet started. Part of the reason for this is because Nipdec is being challenged in order to provide the construction of these facilities. However, as I said we were able to refurbish 57 of these health centres.

The Chaguanas District Health Facility is a district health facility that we have been trying to get off the ground. I have been working closely with the Member for Chaguanas and he is very much aware of the challenges that we have with respect to that district health facility. We had to go out for tender on more than two occasions. The price that we are receiving, with respect to the cost, is over \$2,005 per square foot. What we have done is we have gone out internationally for quotes, in order to get a costing that is realistic.

As we all know, the whole question of labour in the construction industry is a challenge and we are continuing to make every effort to build the Chaguanas District Health Facility and the Diego Martin Health Facility. We have already started the construction and refurbishment of the district health facility in St. James. Efforts are being made to ensure that all of this is being done.

The Ministry, over the past five years, has strengthened its public education campaigns. People talk about PR, but information is knowledge and with the information that knowledge—all those ads that we have on television, in the press and on radio—is to inform the population about healthy lifestyles and the services that are available in the public health institutions, whether it is at our health centres, hospitals and clinics throughout. The Ministry is utilizing, not only the media, but interpersonal communication as well, to raise awareness and build health skills in targeted population. These include non smoking, healthy lifestyles, sexuality management, exercise and nutrition and initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent the development of chronic diseases in the youth population.

We also piloted, in three schools in the South West and North West Regional Health Authorities a school-based initiative for the adoption of healthy lifestyle. This was also piloted in the two regions.

We are working with the Ministry of Education and are now going into our schools from primary level upward. We are doing this to educate our children from a very young age to inform them about healthy lifestyles, the dangers of smoking tobacco and educate and inform them about good nutrition. That is what we are doing. We are actually going to our schools and trying to ensure that, at a

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very early age, they are informed. The Ministry also established partnership with the Regional Health Authorities to promote the health of the population.

We are also partnering with various NGOs, the Diabetes Support Group in the Eastern Regional Health Authority, the Renal Support Group of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Health Promotion Council and the Caribbean Network of Health. We are working with all these groups. It is a partnership. Health is everyone's business. Your health is your wealth and it is you. You have a responsibility for your own health. Therefore, we have to inform and educate.

With respect to our school health initiative, approximately 52,000 children, first and second year entrants into public and private secondary schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago, received hearing screening. We are screening our young children for hearing and vision.

Too often, when a child does not do well in primary school, we believe that—we are quick to say that the child is “duncey” or “harden”. In fact the child may have a hearing impairment or vision impairment. We send the child at the back of the class and that only makes it worse. We have embarked, together with the Ministry of Education, on a screening exercise. We have been able to screen 52,000 in the past year only, with respect to hearing. With respect to vision, over 25,200 students have also been screened for vision. After we screen we do not leave it there. If you are screened for hearing impairment then a further screening is done. If it is determined that you really have a problem, whether it is a surgical problem or a hearing aid problem, we refer you to the right quarters in order to have it done.

We have entered into a contract with DRETCHI to provide, in the first instance, 5,000, hearing aids for children who need hearing aids so that they can develop in the way that we would like all our citizens to develop.

We have already started to give out glasses to children who have been identified with a vision problem. All of that we are doing in collaboration with the Ministry of Education; this School Health Programme. It has been one of the most successful programmes because we are dealing with the situation at a very early stage, at the primary level. That is what we need to do. The programme mounted, as I indicated, is in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, and it is to identify and arrest potential contributors, including chronic and non-communicable diseases. We are not stopping at vision and hearing. We are also talking about the whole question of chronic and non-communicable conditions, learning disabilities and the development among our population from a very early age. Again we are focusing on primary health care, even at the age of five and above.

Mr. Speaker, while we are hoping to prevent our young children from getting ill, there are many of our citizens who are already ill with these non-communicable diseases. Many of them could not have afforded the medication and therefore, many times they would have gone without medication.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, being a government for the people and by the people and a caring government, introduced a programme called the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme. This is now a very known programme. I do not need to belabour the point except to say that the number of citizens that are accessing CDAP is in excess of 300,000. Now anyone suffering from all of these 11 chronic illnesses can access medication at no cost, so that they would be able to get their medication.

Of course—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rafeeq: I am sorry to interrupt you while you are in full flight, but I thank you for giving way. I looked for the information and I could not find it anywhere else. I do not know if you have the information. I think you said 300,000 persons are accessing CDAP. Can you give us roughly how much money was spent over the last fiscal year on CDAP or in any fiscal year for that matter? How much money would be spent on CDAP for one year?

Hon. J. Rahael: Certainly. We actually have a breakdown of over 300,000 citizens. We also have it by category as to how many patients with hypertension, diabetes, asthma, arthritis, depression, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, et cetera, access CDAP. We have it broken down. I can make that available to all Members of Parliament.

In addition to that, the average cost per annum is approximately \$40 million, in order to provide the 300,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago with the medication.

Dr. Rafeeq: Thank you very much.

Hon. J. Rahael: Certainly. We know that diabetes is rampant in this country. We know that those who are on insulin need to be tested at least three times per day. Those strips are not cheap. Those strips are pretty expensive.

Again, in order to ensure that our citizens who are suffering from diabetes would have access to these testing strips to test their glucose at least three times per day, to be able to control the insulin that they require, we are now putting those strips on CDAP.

Mr. Partap: For all persons suffering with diabetes?

Hon. J. Rahael: No. All persons who are on insulin. Those persons will

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continue to purchase. For the benefit of Members on the other side, I believe there are approximately 7,000 citizens who suffer from type II diabetes who require insulin. For those patients, because of the degree and nature of the diabetes, it is important that they are tested. That will cost approximately \$30 million to provide for those 7,000 patients. It is important that we do that because if they do not take the correct level of insulin that they require, what will happen is that they would end up with end stage renal failure. When they get end stage renal failure they would then need to be dialysed. We all know that you need to be dialysed at least three times per week. The cost of dialysis and the medication that is required can easily cost anything like \$14,000 or \$15,000 per month, in order to dialyse three times per week and take the proper medication that is required. At times you are required to change the fistula and other services that are required with being dialysed. It is being forward thinking. We have a vision. We want to ensure that those who are already ill with diabetes do not end up with kidney failure being unproductive.

If you have to be dialysed three times per week then, of course, your productivity level drops, et cetera. Again, this is a clear indication that this Government is a government for the people. This is a Government that is looking towards providing medical care to those who can least afford it. Again, CDAP has been a roaring success.

For the detractors who tried to discredit the programme by talking about the efficacy of the drug, saying that they have been discredited. Again, they are very selective in their quotations. All of those medications have been on the formulary for years. All those medications were being sold in all the private pharmacies and are available in the public pharmacies.

In addition to that, it is a medical doctor who has to prescribe the CDAP prescription; certainly a Minister. He is not a doctor to start with. A doctor has to prescribe medication on the CDAP form. In some cases, there are two or three different types of medication for any one illness.

In addition, to that we are complementing our action by providing medical teams from the Ministry of Health. We have introduced new treatment regimes with successes in Princes Town and La Romaine for diabetic foot care programmes.

We have introduced in our health centres in St. George Central, St. George West and La Brea, these diabetic foot care programmes and we hope to roll it out in all of our health centres. These will not only improve the quality of life of our patients, but also with respect to foot care, now decrease the incidence of amputation. We have a very high incidence of amputation and, therefore, we are focusing on that.

There is additional initiative to treat with chronic non-communicable diseases. I already indicated the new testing for glucose level through diascan, the measure of the blood pressure and blood chemistry.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in September, we launched two manuals for the treatment of hypertension and diabetes. We are continuing to focus on primary health care.

With respect to immunization, the expanded programme on immunization has been assessed by a team from the Pan-American Health Organization. It has been well planned and executed, and it is being given high priority by the Ministry. The programme has ensured the absence of the incidence of polio, measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome through an effective vaccination and surveillance system.

Coverage has remained at about 90 per cent. It was generally noted that there was no incidence of vaccine preventable diseases in children 15 years and under during the period 2001 and 2006, except for one case of Hepatitis B.

Mr. Speaker, we are not only providing medication and providing the information and services at our health centres, but we are now going to patients in rural areas. In addition to all that I have said, we have launched the mobile clinics. In every Regional Health Authority in Trinidad, there are two or three mobile health clinics. These mobile health clinics are well-equipped with testing instruments and an assistant nurse. These mobile clinics go out into the most rural areas. If any Member on the other side wishes the mobile clinics to come to his area, he can contact the Regional Health Authority and they would make arrangements.

We are going to the population. We are not just waiting for them to come to us. We are reaching out to ensure that our citizens' well-being is being taken care. How do we do that? In addition to all the services that we are providing, we are going into their homes as well. This gives our health care providers the opportunity to be able to sit in a family setting, and they will have more time to be able to provide information and the education that is required, so that we can develop a country with healthy citizens. Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on.

The Ministry of Health is working towards modernizing the National Mental Health Programme by realigning psychiatric care with the primary health care framework of the local health model. Mr. Speaker, some of initiatives are partnering with Dalhousie University and developing a model and establishing an implementation plan; introducing psychiatric service at the Port of Spain Hospital;—Mr. Speaker,

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tenders have gone out for the refurbishing of the wards—treatment and care with primary care system focusing on home-based management support from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Development; and the training of staff with respect to mental health. To date, approximately 150 nurses have been trained in psychiatric nursing. Scholarships and bursaries are also being made available for psychiatry and psychology.

Mr. Speaker, I have spent much time on primary health care, because we are convinced that we need to inform and educate the population, and we are starting at the primary school level in order to do that. At the end of the day, no country in the world can support its population with tertiary health care, because it is extremely important and, more than that, it causes the population to be unproductive.

People have to be dialysed three times a week and when you have to go for tertiary-type procedures like open-heart surgery or organ transplant, all of these things are very expensive and, in addition, your productivity level drops. We need to have productive healthy citizens in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we have provided all of our general hospitals with new equipment and instruments such as X-ray units. In the Port of Spain General Hospital, there is one extra unit at the Accident and Emergency Department. We added another in order to make sure that if one of the extra units is not functioning, and an emergency comes in, there is an extra unit.

Mr. Speaker, we have a mobile C-Arm machine, CT-scanners, laparoscopy equipment, new general X-ray systems and mammography machines at all of our hospitals—Sangre Grande, Port of Spain, San Fernando and all over. Women can now have their mammograms done at our hospitals. The list is very long. There is an MRI machine at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, an extra system and a state-of-the-art CT-scan and I can go on and on.

We have refurbished a number of wards at the Port of Spain General Hospital, the San Fernando General Hospital, and we have opened a number of wards at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. The purpose for refurbishing these wards is to ensure that the environment where our patients and staff are is one that is conducive for the care that is required.

It is not only dollars and cents that are important in the workplace, but it is also the environment and, therefore, in the Port of Spain General Hospital, we have refurbished approximately four or more of those wards. We have put in new flooring, ceiling and beds. This is really a complete refurbishment. In that

refurbishment, we made sure that there is a room that is beautifully outfitted with chairs and sofas so that our health care providers—whether they are doctors or nurses—can interact with the patient’s family in a semi-private surrounding—they could interact with privacy in an environment that is pleasing and welcoming. Mr. Speaker, not only in the Port of Spain General Hospital, but in all of our hospitals, we are upgrading our wards and the infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, again, as you are aware, for the very first time at the Port of Spain General Hospital we have, in fact, introduced a number of new procedures. With respect to open-heart surgery, in June, we did the very first open-heart surgery at the Port of Spain General Hospital, and that hospital is over 100 years old. We have been able to do open-heart surgeries there. Last week, we did two more surgeries and, hopefully, next month we will do three surgeries and the following month we will do four surgeries.

The waiting list for heart surgery is very long. Before open-heart surgery was introduced in the public service, citizens would not have been able to afford this surgery privately. Mr. Speaker, they would have died.

The same PAHO report showed that heart illness is one of the leading causes of death in Trinidad and Tobago. Actually, it is the leading cause of death followed by cancer. From 1997 to 2000—this is the PAHO report—you will see that over 2,400 persons died annually, because of heart diseases and 1,282 died of diabetes and the list goes on and on. Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is saving lives. That is what we are doing. We are introducing these new services that were never available in the public health sector.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, at the St. Ann’s Hospital, we were able to refurbish a number of wards and provide new beds. We have installed over 1,000 new and modern beds at that institution. We have upgraded the National Radiotherapy Centre (NRC); at the St. James Medical Sciences Centre, we have upgraded the chemotherapy suite, thus increasing the number of patients that could be accommodated to 31, and reducing the waiting time, as citizens who are afflicted with cancer have continued to increase.

Mr. Speaker, we opened a new ward under the name of “Perrygrine” Chemotherapy Suite at the National Radiotherapy Centre. Mr. Speaker, the kitchen at the St. Ann’s Hospital has been refurbished—a brand new kitchen and the list goes on and on. I know that time is against me to indicate all that we have done, but Mr. Speaker, not only are we providing these services, but we are providing an environment so that our health workers can perform.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Rahael: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and hon. Members for extending my time. One of the most significant interventions that this Government has made was the opening up of the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. We have now made the services there available to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, before January 2005, citizens of this country who could have least afforded it, could not have accessed those services. Mr. Speaker, because of that, more and more citizens in Trinidad and Tobago are accessing the services.

Mr. Speaker, I want to give you some statistics. Let me start with the number of persons who have, in fact, accessed the Patient Care Facility at Mount Hope and at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. Like I said, prior to January 01, 2005, all those citizens who could not have afforded to pay could not have accessed the services. Look at what took place!

In the year 2004, the number of visits to the PCF, which is really accident and emergency, at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex for adults visit—this is not pediatric—in the year 2004 was 7,260 patients.

In the year 2006, you would have thought that this figure would have increased by 100 per cent or 200 per cent or even 300 per cent, but the increase in visits to the Priority Care Facility in 2004 was 7,206 and 43,879 in 2006. Mr. Speaker, that is almost 600 per cent increase. That is phenomenal.

4.00 p.m.

When you have that kind of increase of citizens now who previously would have never been able to get a MRI at no cost; to be able to get certain types of surgical procedure at no cost; the 500 open heart surgeries that we did since we opened up Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, that is 500 lives that we have saved; that is what we have done and how many more.

In addition to that, let us look at some of the other services. Examination by general X-ray modality: in 2004, 25,788; in 2006, 56,716—another increase. MRI modality: in 2004, 322; in 2006, 4,062. Examination by total modality for

radiology services, in 2004, 35,769 procedures done; in 2006, 75,517 procedures; double the amount in the radiology services. Because when you have increase in patients, there is increase throughout the system. More X-rays need to be done, more MRIs, more of everything.

In the bio-chemistry laboratory for instance, in 2004, they did 282,058 procedures by testing; in 2006, that figure moved from 282,058 to 589,000, almost double the amount in every single area.

The one that was really phenomenal was the pharmacies. By bringing in the 50 Philipino pharmacists, we were able to open the out-patient pharmacy at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, when that pharmacy was closed for years. In San Fernando, the out-patient pharmacy was closed there for almost 12 months, because there were no pharmacists available. I do not want to hear that the public service was paying less than the private sector. Because if the private sector had taken up all of the pharmacists and there were extra pharmacists, then they would have had to come and work in the public sector. There simply were not enough pharmacists in the country, so we brought in these 50 Philipino pharmacists and we were able to place them in the eye clinic in Port of Spain General Hospital; open more windows in the Port of Spain hospital for the pharmacy; open an out-patient pharmacy that has been closed for years in Mount Hope.

In 2004, the number of prescriptions that were filled was 27,493. In 2006, from 27,493 it went to 107,300; little less than 400 per cent increase in prescriptions that were filled. All of this goes to show that what is happening is that more and more citizens of Trinidad and Tobago today are accessing the public health institutions. It is not only those with no income. You will be surprised, it is also middle-class and upper-class people.

As a matter of fact, we are starting to screen to make sure that those patients do not have insurance, because a number of them are trying to get on to some of our programmes even if they have insurance. And the reason for that is because the insurance company will only pay 80 per cent of the cost of the procedure. So we have to screen those patients now and let them know that, listen, claim that 80 per cent from your insurance company and the medical social worker will determine whether or not the Ministry should assist in the other 20 per cent that may be required.

Mr. Speaker, when we went into office there were less than 40 beds that were available at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; today, there are 100 beds. We have been able to add about 60 or more, over 100 beds at the Eric Williams

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Medical Sciences Complex. All of that to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And the list goes on and on and on.

There are about 1,000 of these letters to the Editor thanking the public health sector for its service. I would like to quote just one, to kind of confirm what I just said about persons accessing the public health sector. The *Daily Express*, Wednesday, August 15, 2007, page 15:

"Hats off to the staff of Ward 31

I would sincerely like to thank the members of staff at the Port of Spain General Hospital for the excellent service I received on August 12.

I was admitted to the hospital via the EHS, due to a serious but temporary medical condition. While on my way, I was making arrangements to be accommodated at a private medical facility for fear of rumours surrounding the service offered at the public health facilities..."

If the EHS has to respond to a call, they would take that patient to the nearest public hospital. That patient was being taken to the Port of Spain General Hospital. He continues:

"However, that was quickly diminished. My first time at a public hospital and it surpasses the highest standards. Drs Avinash Panday and Christopher Cassim attended to me efficiently. While warded at Ward 31, the nurses and staff left me speechless with the service I was given.

This shows that we as Trinis have not forgotten our inbred warm and friendly personalities that we are famed for...

To the staff of the POS General, doctors, nurses, ward attendants of Ward 31 thanks. Mr. Rahael keep up the great work."

[*Desk thumping*]

By the way, written by Ravi Maharaj. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. J. Rahael: Again, let me give you some more statistics, because it is important. I already indicated how many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have benefited from Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. On behalf of those thousands and thousands of patients I want to thank, this evening, this Government and the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Patrick Manning, for making Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex available to the citizens who could not have afforded it to have access to those services. [*Desk thumping*]

It was the hon. Prime Minister's budget speech in 2004/2005 that made that happen. The 500 citizens who had open-heart surgery would not have had it. [*Interruption*] Yes, I remember clearly, Mr. Prime Minister, in the debate the Member for Caroni Central indicated that it would have failed and that was madness. Let me tell you it was not easy; it was very challenging. And I am saying it is not perfect; the health sector would never be perfect; Ministers before did their share. I have no doubt that the Minister—and I understand that the shadow Minister of the UNC; I suppose that is only for shadowing the UNC. The fact is that he would have done his bit, although I would love one day for us to bring out the scorecards and compare what was done in this past six years and the six years that you were there. [*Crosstalk*] He is training.

Mr. Speaker, let me indicate how many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago access the public health sector. In 2001, it was 446,000; in 2007, it is 803,000; 80/90 per cent increase and these are the statistics from 2001 to 2006; 446,425 to 803,328. So, the demands are greater in our public health institutions and yet we are coping; we are providing.

We have a number of initiatives. We introduced the Organ Transplant and Community Care Programmes. We were confident and brave and we were determined that this dual employment must stop and we have been able to do that. A number of our quality initiatives, we have been able to implement. Let me just tell you some of them.

With respect to quality initiatives, the sector had few challenges and the Ministry is forging ahead with a structural approach to systems and processes: Re-engineering to improve the quality of care delivered to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The following highlights some of the initiatives in this regard:

- We have conducted quality audits at all institutions in the public health sector and are utilizing the findings to improve services.
- We have developed and launched a comprehensive policy and guidelines for infection prevention and control to reduce the incidence of nosocomial infections at both private and public health institutions.

The Ministry was commended by the Pan American Health Organization for this particular initiative.

This comprehensive policy and guidelines on infection prevention and control is the first of its kind in the English speaking Caribbean. This manual has been posted by the World Health Organization on its website. We have developed a

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national policy for blood transfusion services. The National Blood Transfusion Policy of Trinidad and Tobago has been approved by the Cabinet together with the Advance Practice Nursing in Trinidad and Tobago—two new policy documents that are going to be laid in the Parliament for public input. In addition to that, we have already laid in the Parliament our policy paper on health services accreditation.

So, what we are doing is in a very structured manner. All of this is part of our corporate plan for 2006—2009. We are not working by "vaps". We have our corporate plan; we have our Vision 2020; we are putting policies in place to ensure that we have a sustainable health sector as we move on to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country.

They talk about money. It does not take much to train. We have trained over 2,000 nurses and 400 nursing assistants. We have also trained 1,500 patient care assistants. When we came into office a registered nurse (RN) is a registered nurse; there was no mobility for a registered nurse. We have for the very first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago working with the University of the West Indies, introduced a Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing.

Now a nurse does not necessarily have to remain an RN, there is mobility now where that nurse can advance herself or himself. So a Bachelor of Science Degree is being offered at the University of the West Indies. We have gone one step further; we have offered a Master's Degree in nursing. COSTAATT is offering an Associate Science Degree in nursing. We are training midwives and we are continuing our training programme because we realize that our human resource is the most important thing that is required now. Whether we bring in all of the state-of-the-art equipment, regardless of how much money you put or you do not put into the health sector, unless you have the human resource then you will not be able to deliver that health care.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have been recruiting Trinidadians and Tobagoians now from United Kingdom.

Mr. Singh: Nobody came.

Hon. J. Rahael: That is not true. There is a cardiologist that is here; there is the—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. Rahael: No, I can tell you, the specialists, those are the ones we want. The person who came back here is an oncology surgeon; the person that does the laparoscopy services at Port of Spain General Hospital, for the very first time as well, that was provided, it was done by a returning resident to Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Shastri Sookai and we could tell you of many others. So do not say that nobody came back. Even if we only had one, that is good enough; the fact is that the initiative was done.

Mr. Speaker, we are moving forward; we are providing the training; we are providing the opportunities. One of reasons why these professionals are willing to come back is because in the public health institutions now you have the services so that they can practise their specialty areas. In the way forward—how much time I have, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: You have about 12 more minutes.

Hon. J. Rahael: Oh wow! All right, Mr. Speaker, let me now direct the way forward.

The Trinidad and Tobago Health Sciences Initiative by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago partnering with Johns Hopkins is in effect a response to the recommendation of the Vision 2020 Health Sub-committee that Trinidad and Tobago requires a health sector that is responsive, accessible, affordable, caring, proactive, knowledge driven and technologically advanced, while at the same time, recognizing and selectively embracing the use of alternative medicinal practices in the treatment and prevention of disease.

The TTHSI, partners with Johns Hopkins University of the United States and the University of Trinidad and Tobago, also envisages collaboration with such institutions as the University of the West Indies, COSTAAT, the University of the Southern Caribbean to attain the following:

- introduce a Masters in Health Administration at UTT, focusing on leadership, management and health systems;
- technical management;
- leadership training;
- training programmes for allied health professionals;

The list goes on and on, Mr. Speaker.

- creation of a clinical research institute to conduct clinical studies;

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- specialty and clinical programmes;
- cardiovascular services to complement and augment programmes under the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, including upgrading of catheterization services;
- development of a national centre to provide central support for diabetes interventions;

Very important, Mr. Speaker.

- development of a programme that will deliver advanced medical care for digestive related disorder.

Mr. Speaker, we are looking also at the whole question of management—management systems and infrastructure. We recognize that there are shortcomings in certain areas that we have to focus on and develop, and the management of some of our RHAs is another area.

- we will review existing and proposed management systems at the nation's hospitals;
- constructing of the hospital to complement Port of Spain General Hospital;
- construction of a hospital in Central Trinidad;
- construction of new a hospital in Sangre Grande.

And I know that the Member for Caroni East is going to get up and ask us what about this health centre and this hospital and will focus on the fact that we have not yet brought on stream the two renal dialysis centres. But in the meantime, what we are doing is ensuring that the capacity of the dialysis services is being expanded. Only last week we increased the number of dialysis chairs at the San Fernando General Hospital by 50 per cent. We increased the number of chairs at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex; we are also dealing with the private sector; and the NGOs, to provide the services for patients that need dialysis.

So, Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, as we look ahead to the next term; we are looking ahead to the next term and to plan strategies to overcome current challenges, as well as new ones, our approach will be guided by several initiatives. Among these will be:

- the Health Services Accreditation Policy—

As I have already shown.

to transform how our health institutions, public and private deliver health care; And that is what this is going to help do.

- advanced nursing practices policy—

Very, very important piece of document. This advanced nursing practices policy—

- to widen the scope of nursing practice and boost the human resources available for the delivery of health care.
- the National Blood Transfusion Policy—to provide a reliable and safe service in a timely and efficient manner.

Mr. Speaker, all of these initiatives are underpinned by our corporate plan to take us to the year 2009 and beyond. We will ensure that:

- patient's safety is paramount and utmost;
- accident and emergency services;
- obstetric and gynaecology services;
- maternal and child health services;
- laboratory and oncology services; and of course
- the management of chronic non-communicable disease.

Mr. Speaker, we are making quality improvement as an integral part of every procedure we carry out, so that our gains can be sustained over the long term and our people continue to benefit from a modern public health care system for many years to come. I did not get time to talk about the NHIS or the NHS, that is way advanced. I am confident that in the year 2008, there will be the roll-out of the National Insurance System.

Mr. Speaker, this cannot happen overnight. What we are proposing to do is to pilot projects where we will be able to introduce the national health system for a certain category of our population. We feel proud today, that the health status of Trinidad and Tobago has been improved over the term. The burden of disease from infectious and communicable diseases is declining significantly and there is greater life expectancy. What this means, is that the country's health profile is already beginning to point to developed world status.

There is no doubt that we delivered. All of these initiatives could only have been done under the PNM administration [*Desk thumping*] and will show a

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people's centred government at work. We will continue into the next term to work for the love and advancement of our people and country because we care. I am confident that from every corner of Trinidad and Tobago, the people will again, place their trust and confidence and hopes for the future in the hands of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we have the vision; we have the plan; we have the standards; we have the strategies and the resources to continue our journey into 2020 and only a PNM Government will get us there, no one else. Long live the PNM, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. Gerald Yetming (*St. Joseph*): Mr. Speaker, in the few minutes that I have before the tea break, the Minister of Health read from a newspaper article from the *Trinidad Express*, written he claims by a guy by the name of Ravi Maharaj. I will read from an article from the *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday*, dated August 26, 2007, yesterday, an article written by a lady by the name of Nalinee Seelal. Headline: "How my brother died."

Mr. Speaker, in this article, Nalinee Seelal said that:

"My brother ... was just 43 years old. The holder of a labour-law degree and an employee of the North West Regional Health Authority for 11 years, he was looking forward to a bright future. He was a fairly healthy person, but he was a diabetic."

He fell ill and he was diagnosed with kidney failure. He needed immediate dialysis to survive. He went to the Port of Spain General Hospital and there was no dialysis machine. Port of Spain Hospital did not help him to get access to urgent dialysis. She, Nalinee Seelal begged and begged. She begged the NWRHA, no help. She begged the Minister of Health, no help. She was eventually told to go and get it at a private institution to pay \$1,200. She was sent there by the Port of Spain Hospital, but without the essential catheter, to be sent back to have it installed and with this back and forth Nalinee Seelal's brother died.

So he could get up and boast all he wants. What does he tell Nalinee Seelal? The Minister got up and he boasted about all that had been done and has been done for the past few years. If you had a budget allocation of \$3.2 billion for a year, in fact, compared to the last Minister of Health of the previous administration of \$1 billion in health, with \$2.2 billion more to spend in one year; \$2,200 million, a first form student could have done the same thing. So this boast

about state-of-the-art equipment and whatever—we expect it! We expect no less! And yes, CDAP and all those things, but what do you tell Nalinee Seelal?

What do you tell the families and friends of all those who have died in the hospitals through negligence? What do you tell them? This nonsense you came here in the last debate and talked about “adverse events”; the terminology that is used in these situations. Using “adverse events” will give any comfort to these people's families and friends? You have to take responsibility! And with \$2.2 billion more than the last Minister of Health; you have no beds in the San Fernando Hospital. Recently, for the past couple of weeks, no beds. Poor people had to walk with their beds to the hospital.

Mr. Rahael: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. G. Yetming: Poor people had to walk with their beds, so what nonsense you are talking?

Mr. Rahael: Not true.

Mr. G. Yetming: And in the maternity hospital, pregnant women had to be standing in the corridor or sitting on hard benches. What do you tell these people? You are boasting about the \$2.2 billion more; the \$3.2 billion; \$3,200 million that you have to spend in one year.

Mr. Speaker, what could he tell the families and friends of all those who have died? What could he tell the people of Tobago? For all the institutions, what would he tell—You know, with all the money; with the ability to build big buildings almost in days; with the ability to build the Prime Minister's residence almost overnight; and we cannot build this National Oncology Centre that has been on the drawing boards for years. And what do you tell the communities of Siparia, St. James, Chaguanas, Diego Martin and Point Fortin which have been crying out for facilities? What do you tell them, that at 4 o'clock in the afternoon when they cannot get treatment and they have to take taxis and transport to get to a hospital? Do not get up and beat your chest. You should be ashamed of yourself. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I look forward to returning after tea to continue this debate. [*Desk thumping*] I look forward because I want to speak to the Prime Minister this afternoon. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: For all Members who intend to speak, let us go and have some thirst quenching tea.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. G. Yetming: Mr. Speaker, I just want to make one more point to the Minister of Health before I get into the substance of my contribution to this debate. With respect to the National Oncology Centre, that project is at risk at the moment. My understanding is that the matter has gone to the Attorney General for legal advice and it is very likely that the contract with the consultants will be cancelled. The CCI group involved in that project is the same group involved with the Scarborough Hospital. Mr. Speaker, US \$13 million has already been paid to that group and in addition to which a lot of staff are currently on the payroll engaged now for the past couple years doing absolutely nothing.

Mr. Singh: This Government sick with corruption!

Mr. Ramsaran: The Prime Minister "run"; he did not come back?

Mr. G. Yetming: Waste! The Minister of Health made reference to the MORI Poll. My information is that that the MORI pollsters, as a result of the poor response the Government has been getting on their budget, have been requested to do an urgent poll for results, before the end of this week, to give the Government feedback on where the weaknesses are. We should not be surprised if before the end of this debate the Government announces certain additional measures it wants to put into the budget for next year.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in his opening statement to this budget, said that the budget was to be:

"...a comprehensive account of our stewardship over the past five years, outlining our many successes...

We intend to be in Government for the next five years, I also propose to couch the Budget...in the context of a longer term plan..." for Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member for St. Augustine, the Leader of the Congress of the People, in his outstanding contribution last Friday, addressed the next five years. He spoke about getting the economics right; managing our wealth right for the benefit of all with equitable sharing. He outlined new policy perspectives in many areas, such as the disabled community; confronting poverty; the insecurity of tenure for homeowners, farmers and squatters to be addressed through an independent land tribunal. He addressed youth; the gaming leisure and entertainment industries, education and an expanded Concordat. He dealt with jobs with a future to release our people; jobs for the poor to emancipate them from poverty and handouts. He dealt sufficiently, for the time being, with the next five years. I do not intend to go there.

In any event, if we are talking about the next five years, who do we talk to? Member for La Brea, not coming back; Laventille West, not coming back; Tunapuna, not coming back; Tobago West, not sure; San Fernando West, not sure; Tobago East, not coming back; Laventille East/Morvant, not coming back; Mayaro, not coming back; Point Fortin, not coming back; Port of Spain South, not coming back; Arouca North, not coming back; Arouca South, not coming back; Toco/Manzanilla, not coming back. Nobody coming back, so who am I talking to? [*Desk thumping*] And I "eh" too sure about the three Diego Martins and they "ain't" too sure themselves. [*Laughter*]

The Prime Minister, his wife in the other place, deputies in the other place, acting Prime Ministers in the other place; who am I talking to?

Mr. Valley: "You coming back?" [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. G. Yetming: So talking about this budget in the context of next year and the next five years, I do not know whom I am talking to; so I intend to deal with the past five years.

Mr. Narine: New blood.

Mr. G. Yetming: The Prime Minister is not here. I told him before he left that I wanted to talk to him.

Hon. Member: "He run!"

Mr. G. Yetming: "He duck and run." [*Desk thumping*] "Who is de real duck and run in this place now?" [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Singh: Manning!

Mr. Valley: He said he "doh" want to hear you!

Mr. G. Yetming: I want to speak to him, the self-proclaimed father of the nation; now commonly known as the emperor; the Member for San Fernando East, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. I want to have a conversation with him.

Mr. Ramsaran: You have to pay \$100,000. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Narine: Make an appointment.

Mr. G. Yetming: For free. I wanted to tell him, "Father of the nation, we have been blessed for the past five years; we have benefited from bountiful gains from oil and gas." To use his words in the budget, "Let Almighty God be praised"; not him, but Almighty God. Yes, as father of the nation he has provided

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for his family. He has provided appropriate and deserving benefits, but at the same time, father of the nation has been negligent, abusive, cruel, heartless and, in some cases, brutal to his family. I intend to speak on their behalf today. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to tell him that the gifts of this budget: 15 per cent here and whatever they are, will not save him. He wants the people to decide; that was how he ended his budget statement. The gifts will not save him. He should know and, Mr. Speaker, maybe you would know, money cannot buy love. [*Desk thumping*] What he ought to know is that he will shower the gifts, but they will love him until somebody else comes along. Do you know that song? [*Laughter*]

I want to remind him about the time when he went up the islands courting them with hundreds of millions of our dollars, until the Venezuelan in the military uniform and red beret, went flashing dollars at them, and all of them left him. He got "horned", as we say locally. [*Desk thumping*] This time Dookeran is "de" man. [*Desk thumping*] So he will get two "horns" in one year. [*Desk thumping*]

What he should know, father of the nation, is that Ramesh "get horn and he getting horn" so they are meant for each other, they can go together now. He should also know that people will pretend that they love him when they get all those gifts, but they will realize, sooner rather than later, that they have more to get from Winston Dookeran. [*Desk thumping*]

I wanted to tell him, as father of the nation, that the majority of his family are mad at him and they are about to put him out of this House and the \$150 million house. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. G. Yetming: I wanted to tell him that he was fortunate to have been given office by the President in 2001, but this country has benefited over the past few years from windfall revenues. As presented in the various budgets, using the language as he put it in the budget statement, using "customary analytical presentations", the expenditures during this five-year term compared to the previous five-year term, he had more than \$100 billion more in this administration to spend than the last administration; \$100 billion more. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

In the comprehensive account of his stewardship over the past five years he outlined that each one of his Ministers would get up and talk about their many successes. But their many successes have got to be viewed in the context of the \$100 billion more that they had to spend.

Of that \$100 billion more, over and above what was available to the previous administration, he ought to have done many more things than he did, and he should have been doing many more things than they are doing. The problem is that he could have done better with that additional amount of money. He could have done much more. He could have made the members of his family, father of the nation, much happier, better fed, safer, healthier, less stressed and better prepared for the future. Many people who died, did not have to die. [*Desk thumping*]

He is now discovering, a few months before the general election, the error of his ways. He is now discovering that he made many omissions. I am saying to him that it is a little too late; his family will be putting him out of the House. I suggest to him that before he leaves he ought to apologize to the many thousands of people he has affected negatively over the past five years.

5.15 p.m.

I want to remind him of some of them. First he has got to apologize for the high cost of food in this country. Mr. Speaker, there was a National Consultation on Food Prices that took place a couple of weeks ago and the Prime Minister made a most amazing statement.

He said we come together to discuss the important issue of food prices in Trinidad and Tobago, and he could think of no matter of greater importance since when food prices rise, every citizen is affected with the most telling effect on the disadvantaged and the vulnerable.

Imagine in August 2007, he is now admitting that when food prices rise every citizen is affected with the most telling effect on the disadvantaged and the vulnerable. Where was he all these years? For the past several years people have been crying out because of the high food prices, families have been finding it increasingly difficult to buy groceries to feed their families and from day one, there has been excuse after excuse from him, on why this was happening.

It was a global problem, middle-men and all kinds of things, but apart from making the excuses, he was ignoring them. Because when he can say something to the effect that he does not eat chicken, it was to tell the people who were crying out that it is not a problem. I do not eat chicken, so you do not have to eat it, and there was some other idiot who talked about eating cassava.

Mr. Speaker, he did not care. I want to reminisce a bit to make my point. In September 2001 when I delivered my budget in this House I removed VAT on salt

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fish, deodorant, toothpaste, feminine napkins, tampons, bath soap, laundry soap, and baby and adult disposable diapers. This list was deliberately chosen because I wanted poor people in this country to get some relief—[*Desk thumping*] and I am sure they all remembered me for that. But when I delivered that part of my budget statement, the Prime Minister laughed, he ridiculed it, and he thought it was a joke. I am trying to help poor people and he is laughing. That is why today, years after, poor people have been suffering to feed their families—[*Interruption*] Coming with disrespect in the House?

The Prime Minister was warned because in an editorial in the *Trinidad Guardian* it spoke about the frenzied, simultaneous execution of large building projects undertaken with easily predictable effects on the economy. It also spoke about the collateral damage of inflation. The point is, he created the problem. When he got into office, inflation average for the five-year period before was about 4 per cent, and inflation for that entire period was a very low single digit. I just want to remind you that the Governor of the Central Bank at the time was Winston Dookeran. [*Desk thumping*] So he met low inflation, and by his actions, he created inflation to rise, he created the problem where food prices rose astronomically, and he can say all the hell he wants about—

Hon. Members: Oooh!

Mr. Speaker: I know you are on a roll, but watch your language.

Mr. G. Yetming: I am very passionate about the plight of these poor people, and doing so with a man who gives a few dollars to the CEPEP workers, giving them a 15 per cent increase on a \$75 daily wage and thinks he has done a great job.

Mr. Imbert: How much you want, 100 per cent?

Mr. G. Yetming: So he inherited low inflation, food prices were normal, acceptable, and when that was happening, he was using the right language. In his 2004 Budget Statement, he spoke about very high priority for the modernization of the agricultural sector; he spoke about the reform for the fiscal regime for the agricultural sector, about strengthening the provision of roads, drains, electricity and water for the new developments and the settlement of new farms. All kinds of things he spoke of at the time because you will hear them repeated in the 2008 budget. He spoke about strengthening and enforcing measures aimed at combating praedial larceny, and interestingly he spoke about appropriate protection for domestic agricultural producers from unfair foreign competition, but now he is bringing in the Cubans and these other foreigners.

Mr. Speaker, but not only that, I have said in this House before when we were warning him that the Central Bank in its 2005 Monetary Report made a very interesting point. It said there was need for an urgent review of policies geared to increasing agriculture output. The Central Bank was saying it, people were crying and he did not find it fit from those years to have the National Consultation on Food Prices which he had the other day. Then he comes in 2008—

Hon. Member: Who is “he”?

Mr. G. Yetming: The “Father of the nation.” Comes in 2008 and talks the same thing. But the most interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, at that consultation he made another very interesting statement.

Mr. Speaker, he said: “There you are ladies and gentlemen, the new landscape of the modern Trinidad and Tobago; tall buildings in the city, rolling farms in the undulating countryside.” This is the new Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Singh: Delusional.

Mr. Ramsaran: That was when he was sleeping.

Mr. G. Yetming: Could we not have had the rolling farms in the undulating countryside in his first five years? Could we not have left the tall buildings in the city for his next five years? Would it be when the people started to cry because of the price of food and their inability to properly feed their families? Could he not have done two things at the same time? He gives the impression that he cannot walk and chew at the same time. Surely some adjustments could have been made in their spending, in their frenzied approach to tall buildings to accommodate good tall buildings in the city, and the rolling undulating farms in the countryside at the same time.

But the Member spent the first five years and now discovered weeks before election that the people are crying and unless I can say something to fool them, they may not re-elect me. They are not going to elect him. [*Desk thumping*] This is abuse. Talking nonsense about tall buildings in the undulating countryside.

The public servants for whom many of these tall buildings were built would have waited. They would have said they would prefer to stay in their old buildings until next three years because they are suffering from food prices too. They would have waited. But to come and justify tall buildings in the first five years with absolutely no emphasis on agriculture and feeding the people, you now discover if you have these farms and you plant some food, food prices will come down. All the time you were saying it was all kinds of nonsense—international whatever.

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Mr. Speaker, he has to apologize to every citizen of this country, more particularly the disadvantaged and the vulnerable whom he recognized at the food consultation. He has to apologize for the pressure he has put them through and the problems created for families. I want to suggest to him that giving the people a few dollars more will not compensate.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has to apologize for the widespread state of insecurity and fear in this country. He has to apologize as “Father of the nation” for not protecting all members of his family and not making them safe even in their own homes. He has to apologize to them. He made it unsafe.

When he assumed office, there was no state of insecurity. People did not feel that sense of insecurity they feel now. It was not so at all. In fact, when the Minister of National Security spoke in this debate last Friday he admitted that there was an increase in crime and violence during the past five years. He acknowledged it.

He suggested that it was a regional problem, it had to do with drug transshipment and narcotic trafficking and he spoke about the inflow and outflow of drugs and guns and the guns remaining here. They have been speaking about a 360-degree radar system around Trinidad and Tobago and 71 prostitutes can get into Trinidad and Tobago undetected, he does not believe that the drugs and guns will get in too?

For the record, the previously successful Minister of National Security was Brig. Joseph Theodore, who is now a member of the Congress of the People (COP), just for the record. Money was not a problem. In 2001, the budget for the Ministry of National Security was \$1.3 billion, the budget now is \$3.2 billion—per annum I am talking about. So the Minister of National Security, similar to the Minister of Health has \$2,000 million more per annum and they invest it in “blimps” and “eye in the sky” and all nonsense. You still have today after six years and \$2.2 billion more per annum, dilapidated police stations, no vehicles, shortage of manpower because of lack of training and training facilities, you are not turning out enough men and so forth.

5.30 p.m.

Where is their priority? Where did the money go? I made the point earlier, you could build skyscrapers in days and you could build a house almost overnight, but you cannot fix some police stations? [*Desk thumping*] People are hungry, they are unsafe. You could stand up there and boast all you want about all you have done with this great amount of money you have got, but people are

starving and people are not safe, [*Desk thumping*] and he, Father of the nation, the Prime Minister, must apologize to every single citizen of Trinidad and Tobago for that.

An interesting thing—when the Minister was here last Friday he was speaking about his experience with the Belmont station. It was due since January; they now promise it in September. He said: “I am not holding my breath.” But he said: “I have found a way to get around it.” It took you six years? But the Prime Minister found his way around it when he could have built all those big buildings and the house in days and months. The priority is your own house; your priority is the big buildings; your priority is not the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Let him talk to the people of Brasso who had to mount a vigil; protest action; station closed down years ago; they keep getting promises. But apart from every single citizen, the Prime Minister must apologize to the families and friends of the 1,600 people who have been murdered over the past few years; to the 1,200 people who were kidnapped for the past couple years and to the 10,800-plus people who were victims of serious crime in this country. [*Desk thumping*] He must apologize to them one by one.

I want him to apologize to every single citizen. In fact, the apology should be extended to future generations in this country because he has permitted an unprecedented level of waste, theft, corruption and loss of wealth in this country. [*Desk thumping*] The buck must stop somewhere. He permitted it. When you have CEPEP that cost the taxpayer \$1.6 billion over the past couple years, out of which only \$650 million got to the poor and \$950 million of it going to overheads and to a few supporters and friends of the PNM. Under normal circumstances if you have a programme geared to the poor, more than 70/80 per cent of the money should reach to the poor. Assuming a 25 per cent figure for overheads, that \$650 million would be \$800 million. Therefore, the programme that has cost us \$1.6 billion should have cost us \$800 million. Eight hundred million dollars given away!

The Scarborough Hospital—

Mr. Singh: Oh, what a shame!

Mr. G. Yetming: It was budgeted to cost \$134 million; it went to \$350 million. We are now being told, suddenly, after the Tobago people have been suffering, that they have now found the resolution to the problem. But what is it going to cost us? Already it is \$216 million over the budget. Let us conservatively add another \$200 million to that to finish it; \$416 million down the drain with that project! [*Desk thumping*]

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The Brian Lara Stadium: When the thing was announced, they said Cabinet approved it. I would expect that when a project went to Cabinet for approval it would have gone after all the various approvals had been received: engineering, architectural, the works. Now we are being told that the Brian Lara part of it at \$275 million has gone to \$558 million, and we are being told something about the thing because it had to be moved from one location to the other location. Why did you put it in that location? Then you discover, after you make the decision and after you begin to do the work, that you have all kinds of conditions to deal with. Then we have the nonsense coming from Calder Hart who said: “That is the new modern way of building.” My guesstimate is that we have lost \$300 million so far on that project.

I am only identifying a few projects. That loss figure, giveaway and waste—and I have not dealt with corruption—has gone past \$1.5 billion. Do you know how much poor people that could feed? You have people starving in this country and they are giving away the money? In the Gafoor Report on the health sector, Dr. Petronella Manning spoke about people are waiting to hand over incontrovertible documented facts. This is not some orderly speaking. Dr. Manning—incontrovertible documented facts to the police to support charges of criminal activity in the public health sector. She went on to say:

“I know for a fact that inside health there is a lot of theft.”

She knows and she said:

“I make no apologies for making the statement.”

She said, and I quote her:

“AA Laquis was given unfair advantage in the competitive bidding process.”

Then the interesting thing, Nipdec, which acquires drugs on behalf of the Ministry of Health; the chairman of Nipdec is Calder Hart.

Theft! Waste! We have spoken in this House about how much we are losing in CNMG—\$71.5 million invested. The last we heard, they lost \$20 million in the first year. We reported in this House about the loss when Petrotrin was upgrading their No. 4 vacuum and distillation plant, the contract was awarded under questionable circumstances to a Cudjoe Construction. The bid from Damus, experienced in the business, was about \$27 million. Cudjoe gets it; never handled a contract of more than—I think the figure was about \$5 million. The contract eventually ended up with an excess of \$104 million—\$104 million down the drain!

Mr. Singh: Shame!

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. G. Yetming: Thank you for my extension, Mr. Speaker.

The Piarco repaving project, the contract originally awarded was about \$27 million; job messed up; the same contractor gets a redo job costing \$140 million. Is the figure \$140 million correct? Then the \$27 million down the drain. Is the \$27 million correct? Then \$140 million down the drain. Either way you look at it, millions of our money going down the drain.

What about the Rapid Rail Project? They could get up and say what they want about what their process was and what international attorney was involved, and so on, the fact is that there are questionable circumstances in the award of that contract to questionable people—seriously questionable people!

Mr. Imbert: Rubbish!

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. G. Yetming: We are being told that that project, when it was originally announced it was \$15 billion; we are now being told it is \$7 billion because if you have 100 kilometres of track at \$15 million per kilometre—but what about the other infrastructure; what about the rolling stock, the vehicles?

Mr. Imbert: All of that in the price. I tired tell you.

Mr. G. Yetming: We will find out.

Mr. Imbert: Stick break in your ears.

Mr. G. Yetming: I am inclined to go with the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro. That project is a \$15 billion project and that is now being awarded under questionable circumstances.

Mr. Imbert: Not true. You have to prove it.

Mr. G. Yetming: In a *Newsday* article, August 08, 2007 a couple weeks ago, stated:

“Central Tenders Board to go.

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Prime Minister Patrick Manning is expected to announce the implementation of a new public sector procurement regime and the disbanding of the Central Tenders Board (CTB) when he presents the 2007/2008 Budget in Parliament in September.

This was disclosed yesterday by... Minister...Christine Sahadeo.”

She ought to have known. She is a Minister in the Ministry of Finance. She made that statement, in fact, to the representatives of the Inter American Bank, an international institution. They come in; she tells them the Prime Minister will make that announcement in the budget statement. He made that statement in the three previous budget statements. Every time he says: “It is coming; it is coming; it is coming”, and this year it disappears; no statement about it. He will get up and say it is going to come.

Mr. Singh: And you believe that? Never!

Mr. G. Yetming: The point is that this new public sector procurement regime is being deliberately withheld from Parliament. The Green Paper was produced since 2004 and then the White Paper came soon thereafter. It is deliberately being withheld from Parliament because the Government does not wish to have the new regulator examine any one of the contracts that they are awarding—\$50 billion of contracts! He is going to come and say, after the contracts have been awarded, “we are going to bring the thing to Parliament next year.”

Mr. Manning: He would not say that at all.

Mr. G. Yetming: The public will not buy that.

As we continue to talk about losses and waste, how much money have we pumped into Liat; how many billions have we pumped into BWIA and Caribbean Airlines, and how much more will we have to pump into Caribbean Airlines—hundreds of millions.

Hundreds of billions.

5.45 p.m.

I am just dealing with waste. Three offshore patrol vessels will cost this country \$2.2 billion over the next five years for training, maintenance and the hardware. I am informed by people who ought to know, that to patrol the borders of Trinidad and Tobago, you do not need those three warships. You could control your borders by your coastguard in a far more cost effective fashion. If you connect the dots, the Prime Minister has spoken about setting up this coastal radar

system up the islands; one in Grenada; two in St. Vincent and two in St. Lucia, costing I believe \$50 million. He spoke at some other time about Caricom coming to an agreement to have other Caricom partners being able to patrol their waters. No small island is coming to patrol Trinidad and Tobago waters. It is Trinidad and Tobago. The Emperor is planning to have that reach in the Southern Caribbean and he is spending billions of our dollars to do it.

I do not have a fundamental problem with facilitating development in the smaller islands and helping them. There must be reciprocity. They are part of the Caribbean and we are part of the Caribbean. We must help. Giving \$20 million to Jamaica is not a problem. This thing with these offshore patrol vessels and this radar system is part of a grander design and it will come to light. I will focus now on how much of our money is being wasted.

The Member for Princes Town spoke at length about the Home Mortgage Bank issue. We have not heard the last of it. I will expect that the Integrity Commission would conduct an investigation into that matter, if they have not already started. They should have. It is public knowledge. They should not have to wait.

We have spoken before in this House about the Government's contribution to the loss of wealth in this country and I am laying it at the feet of the Prime Minister. I spoke in a previous debate about what happened when the Central Bank—and the Government did not act—restricted pension plans from holding local equities beyond 50 per cent which they had gone over because of the market. The Bill came before Parliament; was passed in the Lower House and was passed in the Upper House last week, as part of the resolution to that problem, but it is not enough. Too late for the individual investors and depositors in Unit Trust who lost money because many of them cashed in. You have to apologize to them.

The latest problem is National Flour Mills. My information is that Mr. Neil Rollingson is no longer the CEO of National Flour Mills. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance will say that it is a private company. But it is his Government that said that National Flour Mills will be one of the entities used to bring down food prices. How will you get—what you will call for convenient purposes—a private company to engage in activities to keep prices down at the expense of the private shareholders? No announcement has been made about the fact that Mr. Rollingson is no longer CEO and a gentlemen by the name of Anthony Joseph is now the CEO. The removal of a CEO in a public company is a material event and should have been reported immediately to the stock exchange which would have reported it immediately to the brokers. Nothing! Last week, more than one

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million shares of the National Flour Mills, a most unusual transaction, changed hands. Investors are losing money and the buck must stop with the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister for at least the transactions to which I made reference.

The Prime Minister must apologize to the children and parents of this nation for his continuing neglect of most of the schools in Trinidad and Tobago. It is brutal to children—after six years and more than \$100 billion—to protest on the streets of their communities for better schools. It is brutal to children of Biche, Brasso Seco, Moruga and many other communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago whom he has neglected at the expense of his house and other things. He just does not care. He can boast all he wants. Instead of leaving out the public sector procurement regime from the budget, after the junior Minister made an announcement to the IDB you could have left out the statement about the Early Childhood Care Centres. You should have been ashamed to put in that after putting it in budget statements for the past five years; 50 in one year; 150 another year and to announce that only seven have been completed, is nothing to boast about.

In spite of the billions of dollars and all the boasting, the quality of students coming out of the schools has not improved. Between 2000 and 2004, the pass rate for students with two subjects at GCE Advanced Level declined from 62 per cent in 2000 to 53 per cent in 2004. If you look at the rate of primary school children migrating into secondary school, the percentage is lower today than it was in 2000. It is not to say that you could boast about all these schools and different interventions, as a result of which the quality of child we are producing is improving. They are not. Every child in this country should demand an apology from you. You must account as you try to do in your budget statement for your performance over the last five years.

The GATE student—the Minister is here. He will get up and boast about all the things that he is doing with the billions of dollars that he has at his disposal. I will address only one aspect. The fact that thousands of GATE students have had to be stressed and suffer from anxiety and pain because of their uncertainty with respect to getting the GATE payment for certain institutions is wicked. You do not wait until weeks before the contract with the educational institution is due to expire and come up for renewal to make a decision about whether or not you will continue. Yes, there may be legitimate reasons for raising questions about some of these institutions. Perfectly legitimate! But you are incompetent to wait until the last minute to deal with them! Thousands of children went through a period of anxiety and stress. They do not deserve that! “Yuh wicked!”

Mr. Imbert: Watch yourself. You will fall down.

Mr. Singh: He has no pacemaker.

Mr. G. Yetming: “I am like the energizer bunny too, yuh know. It ain’t only you.” All systems are functioning.

Mr. Manning: Says who?

Mr. G. Yetming: I spoke about the health sector. I will only say to the Prime Minister that every person who has gone to the hospital and health centre; failed to get proper treatment and a bed or whatever, you deserve; you should, you must apologize to them.

To the people of this country throughout Trinidad and Tobago who have had and continue to suffer for the lack of a regular supply of water, you need to apologize to them. To all those communities who have had to go to the streets to protest for water, whether Barrackpore or Penal—and when the Prime Minister went to Oropouche, he begged them to be patient. He told them that it was the driest dry season. Big surprise. He should have begged them for forgiveness which is what he should be doing now. Imagine the regional corporations which can provide truck borne water to provide some relief to these poor people had to beg the Minister for additional money to carry water for these poor people. Now we are hearing that there is a desalination solution. All along we have been hearing that the problem is that the distribution system needs to be replaced.

6.00 p.m.

That was what we were hearing. We now hear that there is a desalination solution. I do not know whether desalinated water would flow through these busted pipes better than the regular water they get from the natural system. You must apologize to everybody.

Two years ago, the people in Belmont had to protest. They did not have water for seven days. You can put on your own independent supply to the residence, so that you do not get cut off but these people need it. They cannot pay for it.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister must apologize to the people of Caroni (1975) Limited for brutalizing them. It was, according to him, one of the best decisions he has ever made. “Yuh brutalize” 10,000 people and their families and it was the best decision. It was courageous, according to him. It was momentous, according to him. It was strategic, according to him. It was wicked. It was brutal. Those people have not recovered. Those people have not gotten all that they wanted and should have gotten. [*Interruption*] This nonsense about you started it.

Mr. Valley: You started it.

Mr. Singh: That is not true.

Mr. G. Yetming: I have addressed that issue too many times before. If you really wanted to close it down and you really felt that it needed to be closed down, it could have been done in a more humane fashion. I have said that before and I would say it again.

What about the workers of the private members' clubs? You have to apologize to them. Up to now they do not know whether they are coming or they are going. They have been fooled, carried along by discussions with the junior Minister. You are making announcements outside Parliament about gambling and so on that you are shutting it down. You did not say a word of it in your budget statement. You must apologize to the workers of the private members' club.

What about the commuters and the residents in areas who have had to endure—okay, building new roads takes time. But I am not convinced that sufficient has been done. Why should it take six years for you to now start on the interchange; six years? There are traffic jams, the stress and the negative impact on families with the waste of time on these roads. Year after year you make your announcements and that is fine, but in the meantime people are stressed.

Mention was made of it by the Member for St. Augustine in his contribution, that traffic that took place around the Savannah a week or two ago. It was called a traffic nightmare and a traffic jam of monstrous proportions. Somebody took a decision to block off the street to have the rehearsals for Independence Day. All I would say for those who were caught in it for two hours and more, do not forget how you were stressed on that day. Do not forget it. Do not forget the seething rage. Do not forget it. I know of people who were seething with rage. Hopefully, it would not leave their system soon.

To the people of Hardbargain in south Trinidad and many other communities—Saturday night I think it was, it appeared on television, not in the newspaper, there was protest action in Malick for roads. There was the burning of tyres. They do not make the print media anymore, but it made television. Today, after \$100 billion more, people still have to protest in the streets for roads and schools. You have to apologize to the communities of Bagatelle, East Port of Spain, Chatham and Otaheite. You want to move them around and herd them like animals from here to there—brutal. These people are stressed. You have stressed them. You have messed up their lives. You need to apologize to them.

Not to talk about the victims of flooding throughout the six years—we are hearing now that makeshift action cannot work. After six years you have now discovered that. We are hearing about consultants, yet in the newspaper, at the beginning of the rainy season, there were articles quoting people from the Diego Martin Regional Corporation and South saying that they are now about to clean the drains and clear the watercourses. What kind of nonsense is that? And you care?

In all of this, the Prime Minister has been taking care of himself. He took his salary increases. He made the appointment of the Minister of Education. All that came with that. New office. That one and this one to come. New house.

Mr. Valley: Jealousy.

Mr. G. Yetming: We understand a plane is to come. Some people say: “It buy already.” And much more. In all of this he has taken good care of himself. I want to tell him that notwithstanding all he has done with the good fortune of abundant revenues, he has been negligent, uncaring, heartless and abusive.

Mr. Singh: He is not talking about the Chief Justice issue.

Mr. G. Yetming: You should never expect that the good you have done would compensate for the neglect and abuse of your family. You should not expect them to forgive and forget. I have come here to use your budget language, not with contortions, fabrications and exaggerations. I came to speak on behalf of the citizens of this country; your family, dear father of the nation. I came to express their hurt, their disappointment and pain. You get up to attack me for doing that, you attack them too. They would not allow you to buy their love. They would not allow you to buy their vote.

Mr. Manning: Oh, “yuh” know what coming.

Mr. G. Yetming: They would not allow you to buy their love. They would not allow you to buy their vote. Someone better has come along. Dookeran is the man. With him, the people are assured they would lose nothing that you have given them. They would lose nothing that they have received. In fact, they are likely to get much more than you have given.

Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister, let the people decide.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. “Dey say that when good ants ready to die they get wings and they get strong and red and

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they fly. Next morning when yuh looking for dem, they fly around whole evening, they dead by the lamp.” Mr. Speaker, I hope in my contribution to restore some calm, some sobriety and some composure to this budget debate.

I have learnt a lesson being here this evening. I have learnt the reason for that exorcism that took place in the UNC. I have recognized that the present leader of the UNC had great difficulty controlling some of their demons and they have exported them. I have also gained a degree of sympathy for the Member for St. Augustine. I know he would have got difficulty—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Singh: You are calling us demons?

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: —controlling some of those entities.

Mr. Speaker, let me begin my contribution by congratulating the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for what was indeed a very successful budget presentation.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, over the last five years, we have had a series of successful budgets. Any individual budget must never be seen in isolation, because it is that sequencing...it is the cumulative effect of all the budgets put together that would have the effect of transforming a country and the economy and improving the life of the people. It is the effect, as I have said, the cumulative effect, of all the budgets put together and that is what this Government and this Minister of Finance has been able to do; put together not a single budget, but a series of budgets which have had the cumulative effect of taking this country forward, improving the quality of life of the people and making a giant leap forward, as we move towards developed country status. This budget must be taken in the context of the last five budgets.

Over the last few years, we have been able to see where different aspects of social and economic development would have been addressed. You would recall in the early stages, there was an emphasis on the establishment of training programmes and relief for the vulnerable. Very early in our term, there was also emphasis on housing and infrastructure. Additional relief was provided with the introduction of CDAP. You would recall the street lighting programme came on very early. There was relief to taxpayers.

The period 2005/2006 was a bumper year for education because in that year we saw the introduction of free tertiary education. This year, again, we see additional relief for the vulnerable, with the increases in the amounts of money paid to persons in receipt of the Public Assistance Grant and the Senior Citizens

Grant. All these, over the last few years, provide evidence that this Government indeed has a plan to address comprehensively the social and economic development of all our people. In fact, in education, we have been particularly successful. In fact, education has been, particularly tertiary education, a tremendous success for this Government.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, our goal to become a developed country is, certainly, before the year 2020. In order for us to achieve that particular goal, we must address the issue of the quality of our human resources, because it is the quality of the human resources that will determine whether our systems will function efficiently.

In any system—the health care system, the judicial system, the education system—in order for any human endeavour to succeed; for any endeavour of a government of a State, of a people to succeed, we must have top quality human resources, and we must have the expertise available.

Now, having expertise available to any developed country is not an easy challenge to overcome. There are many developed countries that are struggling to ensure that they have available to themselves the quality and quantity of human resources, in order to ensure that their systems work well.

In the United Kingdom, we are familiar with the fact that they are forced—in spite of the fact that they have a mature education system; in spite of the fact that they have a large population; they still find themselves having to import nurses from various parts of the world; they have to import doctors and other professionals to ensure that their various systems are working in accordance with what one might call international best practices.

In the United States of America, they are faced with a similar situation. They also have to import IT professionals from India and other experts with different expertise from different parts of the world to ensure that their systems are working consistent with what one might call First World standards. So, Trinidad and Tobago is not any different.

As we aspire to become a developed country, we have to ensure that we have all the human resources of the quality that will allow our systems to operate at standards that are consistent with international best practices. In part, that provides the rationale for our heavy investment in education, and some of the explanations for the diversification of our efforts in education and our heavy investment, particularly in tertiary education.

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We also have a deadline of 2015 in education. By 2015, we must achieve our targets. Our main target is that we expect that by 2015, 60 per cent of the graduates of the secondary school system must move on to some form of higher education. We say by 2015 simply because if all the other systems are to work well and if all the other systems depend on expertise and human resources, then the human resource factor must be taken care of well before 2020.

As we achieve our target by 2015, our output of the education sector will be moving in to the other aspects of education like the Judiciary, the police service, the health care system, the banking system and all the other sectors to make those sectors work more efficiently. That is why our target has been set at 2015 and not 2020. That is part of the Vision 2020 plan which is a comprehensive plan and which has no match in that there is no other political organization that has even come close to identifying and developing any kind of plan that would take this country forward.

Mr. Speaker, it is very easy to identify shortcomings. In any society, it is very easy. It is also very easy for us on this side to do so as well, and recognizing and articulating them—never once articulating a single solution; never once being in a position to identify any solution whatsoever is what one must recognize as the fact that would define somebody's claim to be able to perform in office; to be able to perform in Government. The fact is that the easy part is to identify a problem. The hard part is to develop a solution.

What we have been able to do over the last few years is to recognize fundamental challenges that any society experiences, and develop solutions. We have been working towards that.

In the history of tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago, we have experienced over the last five years, unprecedented, unparalleled and unmatched success. The achievements of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly in tertiary education, have been without comparison in the context of the history of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, I know that this would have traumatized and depressed some Members on the opposite side, because they are very easily traumatized and very easily depressed.

Mr. Speaker, listening to the last speaker, it is obvious—and not only from his contribution but, generally—that when in Opposition, your business really is to sell gloom and despair, and any positive—any attempt must be made to have the citizens perceive the society in a manner that will suggest that things are gloomy and in despair.

When you are in Opposition, misery is the tool of your trade. You deal in misery. Misery is what you have to offer; despair is what you have to offer; and gloom and despondency is what you trade. All the success that Trinidad and Tobago is, they have to try very hard to look away from that and to seek to look at where they can find despair and gloom and bring that to the attention of the people. That is what they sell; that is what they do; and that is what they have become good at. [*Desk thumping*] They talk that, but the people know different. Mr. Speaker, do you know how I know that the people know different?

Mr. Speaker, I have been active in politics over the last few years and, more so, in recent times—active in terms of interacting with the people. Mr. Speaker, when we hit the ground and I meet people going from house-to-house, they say thanks for GATE. They say: “Mr. Minister, tell your Prime Minister that we appreciate the free tertiary education.” They say: “I was home doing nothing, and I now have an opportunity to get a degree.” They say: “I have been on the MuST programme for the last six months and before I was on the block doing nothing. Now, I am employed on a construction site.” Mr. Speaker, they are grateful; they are happy.

In the midst of all of that, there was a statement made by the hon. Minister of Housing, the Member of Diego Martin West that there was a concept of “bum fly and sore foot”—whenever there is a sore foot, you would see a fly coming to sit on it. Mr. Speaker, there are some who are attracted only to the “sore foot”. There are some amongst us who sit behind a computer screen and forget colloquial expressions. There are some who grew up in concrete houses with flush toilets and feel that they were born in a suit, but they were not born in a suit.

Mr. Speaker, what they do, is that they try to sell anxiety, uneasiness, uncertainty and misery. That is their business. [*Desk thumping*] They hope to ride a ship of misery into Government; they hope to jump on this ship of misery and ride it into Government, but no such thing will happen, because the people of Trinidad and Tobago know much better.

Mr. Speaker, there are two matters that have been in the news recently, to which I would like to turn my attention. One of these matters was mentioned by the hon. Member for St. Joseph, and it had to do with the GATE programme, and a claim by the hon. Member for St. Joseph that some stress, anxiety and pain were being experienced by some students in this country, and I would like to respond to that.

Mr. Speaker, the history of tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago is that since independence; the establishment of a government in Trinidad and Tobago—

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[*Interruption*] I have heard you say “the onlyiest time” and I have heard you say students. Once upon a time, the hon. Member for Princes Town got an instant diarrhoea. He came to this Parliament and spoke about the “onlyiest” time he got an instant diarrhoea. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, since Dr. the Rt. Hon. Eric Williams established his government and following on, the hon. George Chambers, and right up until 1986 under successive PNM governments, the concept of a fee to access tertiary education did not exist. A fee, even when the oil price fell to \$9 barrel in 1985, past PNM governments ensured that tertiary education remained accessible to poor people in Trinidad and Tobago.

If it is we argue that education is the ladder that we use to ensure upward economic and social mobility, then it must be available to all and it must be available to the poor. Mr. Speaker, the irony of the situation is this.

For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, I saw on the television a number of persons in very hysterical and anxious frantic fashion, generating anxiety and generating stress in themselves and attempting to generate that stress among other young persons, making a claim that the Government was about to shutdown GATE in the private institutions, and that young persons were being put into undue hardships as a consequence of some action by this Government. The irony is that there was a group of young persons wearing the clothing of the COP. They were on the television trying to worry and generate anxiety among young persons. The irony is that today, the hon. Member for St. Joseph says that the Government was the one that created this anxiety. Let me tell you how this anxiety was created.

Mr. Speaker, the irony of that is that the first time that tuition fees were ever introduced into this country, they were introduced by a political party of which the hon. Member for St. Augustine was a major player and a major part. Those fees were introduced in 1988. I remember it well. Do you know why I remember it well? That was the year I was to go on to university, and I almost did not go because the hon. Member for St. Augustine decided to charge me \$2,400. They decided to charge me \$2,400, and I was almost denied a tertiary education because of Mr. Winston Dookeran, the hon. Member for St. Augustine.

6.30 p.m.

It is the political leader of those COP persons who introduced fees in the first place. How is it—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Listen, hon. Member for Chaguanas, you spoke already. You cannot speak again. [*Interruption*] No, no, no, please. Continue Minister.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: We only have fees here because of the Leader of the COP and his cohorts, including the Member for Caroni East. That is where I got fees from. They introduced fees; we were the ones who brought free tertiary education back into place, consistent with traditional PNM approach to education. We were the ones who in January 2006 reintroduced a system of free tertiary education into this country. We were the ones who continued and have supported our students and will continue to support our students. They were the ones who introduced the fees, but they are sending people to say that we intend to generate anxiety among the people. That is unbelievable!

No one could deny this Government's contribution to education. And I want to give an assurance to all our citizens, all our young persons out there. [*Desk thumping*] Every single one of them who has had access to the GATE programme that they will continue to have access to the GATE programme. All 66,000 of them who are at present benefiting from the GATE programme, [*Desk thumping*] from free tertiary education will continue to benefit from free tertiary education.

Let me give a little explanation on this particular point, Mr. Speaker, because you see for 18 years, between 1988 and 2006, poor people of this country were locked out of the university. Enterprise people, the same Bagatelle people they spoke about were locked out of the university. I come from Patna Village, next door to Bagatelle and they tried to lock me out by telling me I have to pay \$2,400, just like that.

I, along with thousands of other citizens of this country; I had done reasonably well at O'levels; I had done reasonably well at A levels; I had the grades to get into university, but they told me I could not come—\$2,400 and I had to scramble. The Member for St. Augustine did that; that is what they did in office. They could come now and talk all kind of nice things, nice fancy language. Judge them by what they have done when they were in office.

You are telling me that they could not find the \$25 million or \$30 million that they were expected to earn as a consequence of this test somewhere else. But it is because education was not a priority of theirs. They are very busy these days sending out text messages to young people urging them to become members of the COP. I want to warn our young citizens, “Do not be deceived by those who come bearing these kinds of fruits; they are poisonous”. The first time fees were introduced into this country they were introduced by the hon. Member of St.

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Augustine. And we have every reason to believe that the next opportunity, if they ever, God forbid get such an opportunity, they may very well do that again. That is their record. [*Desk thumping*] They come and cry today; they were the ones who cut public servants salary. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: They attack poor people first and they tell them no social ladder for you; you to stay!

We introduced a system of free tertiary education effective January 01, 2006, just like had been the case under the PNM for 30 years. Once again, the PNM comes, and in the interest of the poor people of this country, was able to offer a policy and be able to direct resources to the benefit of the masses of people. [*Desk thumping*] To benefit people as I said, from Enterprise, Caroni, Endeavor, Patna, Bagatelle, La Brea; to benefit ordinary citizens of this country.

Not only did we introduce free tertiary education at public institutions, which means if you want to go to UWI, St. Augustine; if you want to go to UTT, COSTAATT, UWI, Mona, UWI, Cave Hill, you have free tertiary education. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago; the People's National Movement would pay for you.

We also did something unprecedented anywhere in the world. I am not aware that this has taken place anywhere else in the world. You know what that is, Mr. Speaker? We pay for citizens of our country to access tertiary education at private institutions. Could you imagine that? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Now, the Members of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant and Mayaro, you all are disturbing me; you are disturbing the speaker and I think most of all, you are disturbing Hansard. Please, if you want to carry on go outside.

Hon. Members: Go outside and "doh" come back.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: It is unprecedented and I am not aware that this takes place anywhere else in the world, where a government pays for students at private institutions. In fact, when the dollar for dollar was established, I will tell you, they talked about dollar for dollar; they marketed it in such a way; they had a big stage from the left side to the right side, dollar for dollar. Compared to the GATE, dollar for dollar was pipsqueak of a programme, and I will tell you why.

In the years that dollar for dollar existed, they assisted just around 2,300 to pay half their fees. When it was introduced, it was only available to students at the University of the West Indies and students in first year. So if you were in second year, nothing for you, pay your full fees; if you were in third year, nothing for you, you pay your full fees. And they marketed the programme as though it were a big fantastic intervention levitation; it was not. It was a sleight of hand; it was all marketing and very little in terms of substance. That is what dollar for dollar was, a pipsqueak; 2,300 persons benefited from dollar for dollar. So far, over 75,000 citizens have benefited from the GATE programme. [*Desk thumping*] And we pay the full tuition fee for everybody in year one, year two and year three of the University of the West Indies. If you are in Mona or Cave Hill, we pay for you as well. If you are at private institutions, we pay for you. If you are at UTT, we pay for you. If you are at COSTAATT, we pay for you. If you are at TTHTI, we pay for you. All of the undergraduate programmes; tens of thousands of citizens benefited from this programme and even beyond if you are interested in going to do postgraduate. If you are interested in postgraduate work, the Government will pay for you if you are at a public institution, 50 per cent of that fee.

Mr. Valley: How much will it cost a student over the three-year period?

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: It depends on the faculty; it varies from faculty to faculty; it depends on the discipline that you are pursuing; the cost will vary. But it matters not; you choose the discipline and we would provide the funding. [*Desk thumping*]

When the NAR came into office, to be a doctor it cost a student \$55,000 tuition fees for the first year. That is what the hon. Member for St. Augustine did—\$55,000 for one year. You tell me now, who in Bagatelle could afford to pay that? Who in Barrackpore could pay that? You come and you cry for Bagatelle today. Who in Hardbargain could pay that? Who in Endeavor could pay that? Who in Laventille could pay for that, to become a doctor? That is what they did. Do not come and cry today and pretend you like people. Since when you like people? [*Desk thumping*] I never know you to like people. They learn to like people when? They must be read a PNM manifesto and decide they like people. Let them behave. We know them. You cannot change your clothes and come; we know "yuh". Do not turn your hat back to front so people cannot see you. We know them very well.

We decided to pay the tuition fees for students at private institutions; today there are 15,000 citizens of this country accessing education opportunities at private institutions paid for by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Hear the story, Mr. Speaker.

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Because we recognize that private institutions offer a valuable opportunity for education and it assists the Government in expanding capacity. So, we signed a memorandum of agreement with these private institutions, because we have to make sure that next semester they do not increase the tuition fees, because there is no market factor in effect anymore. Once the Government is paying the fees there is no market factor. It matters not what the fees are, the students will register and attend. So, the Government has to protect itself against arbitrary increases in fees and exploitation, so what we decided to do was to sign a memorandum of agreement with the institutions to protect the Government's interest.

There was a shortcoming in the memorandum, in that, there were other fees charged and the memorandum was silent on those fees. We locked in the institution into a tuition fee for two years; so the tuition fee could not be raised for two years. But there were other fees. There was, for example a registration fee, exam fees, other service charges which are for the account of the student; relatively minor fees we expect students to make; \$100, \$150 registration fee as the case might be, depending on the programme. But we had not anticipated the callousness of some of the institutions and the owners of the institutions. I think, really on our part, we expected that our citizens were going to be cooperative partners in education, as many of them are. But there are some owners of private institutions who have been flagrantly and blatantly trying to exploit students. In as much as we have secured and settled the matter of the tuition fee, we remain silent on non-tuition fees. And what we saw happening to students, is that these students are now being faced with having to pay a registration fee that went up from as little as \$100 to \$1,500. Students were now being called upon to pay exorbitant fees, when we were covering their tuition fees and thought that they were getting an affordable education, we find some individual interested in profiteering and exploiting students, coming to charge a pound and a crown registration fee; ridiculous as it might seem.

So, what they have done is converted the tuition fee into a registration fee. That cannot be allowed to continue to happen. Inasmuch as the memorandum of agreement is coming to an end at the end of August, we took a decision that we were going to review that memorandum and put in it a provision to protect the interest of the students. [*Desk thumping*] What we proposed to do is to lock the institutions into fee structure. Although the registration fees and the examination fees will be met by the students and the tuition fee, which is the largest fees will be met by the Government; we would lock them into a fee structure so that the

institutions cannot arbitrarily increase the fees to the students either. In much the same way they cannot increase the fees to the Government; that is the agreement we are negotiating with them; they would not now be able to increase the fees to the students.

Mr. Speaker, who came to the defence of these institutions? Who came to generate anxiety to put pressure on the Government, to relieve the pressure on the institutions? Nobody else, but the same Member for St. Augustine and his political party, who introduced fees in the first place. And they come to cry for Bagatelle, the people of Bagatelle do not want you crying for them. They know you do not like them. If somebody comes and stands in the elevator with you, you want to walk out the elevator. [*Laughter*] We know that.

We are attempting to tighten the system to protect students and there are other challenges with which we have been faced. It is a new system; there is room for improvement and as we attempt to improve the system, there are going to be challenges along the way; we are going to have to work those out.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, there are other challenges you know, but this has been going quite well and our attempts to renegotiate with the institutions are going well and if there are any institutions that decide that they do not want to participate in the GATE programme, they are free; it is a free country and they are free not to participate in the programme. They are free. There are 35 institutions with whom we have agreements, if there is anyone that is not interested, well that is just fine. If there is one, then we have 34 and the Government is willing to pay, but we must have a cooperative partner in the institution. There are other challenges that we found working with private institutions and we continue to try to work them out.

Mr. Speaker, on July 18, we did in fact issue a letter to the institutions saying that we will be renegotiating the Memorandum of Agreement. On August 20, there was a meeting with all the institutions. The officers of the Ministry met with all the institutions and a discussion took place in terms of what we are attempting to do. On August 22, we circulated a draft revised memorandum. The comments were received from the Association of Private Tertiary Learning Institutions. On August 24, that was a Friday, there was an agreement and there are meetings taking place today to finalize the agreement. And so we expect to have the agreement in place in the not too distant future.

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Mr. Speaker, you have to understand that our response had to do with the timing of the institutions. As problems surface then we respond. It is not that we knew these problems existed in the first half of last year. These problems are problems that have surfaced as a consequence of the auditing exercises that we have been doing, and as fast as we have completed the audited exercises, we have been able to identify these problems and so that is why we are now in the position to renegotiate and that is all that is involved in the matter. But our involvement, our effort, our intention in this matter is to protect the interest of students; not to protect greedy, exploitative, callous owners of institutions and there are a few among them. The hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre will tell you that as well, that there are a few. There are a few among them. Hers is not one. She has been a very intelligent and cooperating owner of a private institution and so we respect her for that.

Miss Lucky: Thank you.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Unless the audit shows otherwise, as far as I know, Mr. Speaker; as far as the information that has come to me. That is the first matter. Any anxiety experienced, was anxiety deliberately and calculatedly intended by the Members of the COP; they deliberately and strategically, for political gain attempted to generate anxiety in students and they come today to pretend that they care about people. That is the first matter. We expect, let me say categorically, that every student who has so far been supported by the GATE programme, will continue to be supported by the GATE programme in pursuit of their education, and the GATE programme remains available to citizens of this country who intended to pursue education at private tertiary institutions provided that the Memorandum of Agreement is in place. It is the mechanism by which we are in a position to negotiate with institutions and it must take place.

Mr. Speaker, the second issue that came to the attention of the public is this matter of scholarships to Mona. You may have heard in recent times, a Member from the other Opposition—I do not know which is A and which is B, I am not familiar with the terms in this particular House, but one is A and one is B.

Dr. Rowley: One is corpse and one is funeral home.

Mr. Imbert: One is from the funeral home.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: I am not familiar with who is A and who is B, so it matters not to me. But there was an issue as to whether students of this country who had been approved for scholarships in Trinidad had been turned down by the Faculty of Medical Sciences at Mona. What the press conference

said, was that 43 students selected by this Government and approved for tuition scholarships, when their names were sent forward to Mona; when the 50 names were sent forward to Mona, 43 of them were rejected by Mona because they did not meet the minimum standards that Mona required to gain admission.

Dr. Rowley: In Gopeesingh's dreams.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, I have never heard—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: A bigger lie.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon M. Abdul-Hamid:— such blatant and flagrant fabrication on the part of an honourable human being.

Hon. Member: He is not honourable.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Of a so—well let me not say that. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what the facts are. Well in 1988, the Faculty of Medical Sciences was established at Mount Hope, previously, Mona would have accepted 35 students from Trinidad and Tobago. That was our quota. But we lost our quota because the then NAR established the Faculty of Medical Sciences at Port of Spain and we discontinued our contribution to the Faculty of Medical Sciences at Mona and that money was redirected to the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Mount Hope, and so, they established this faculty in Trinidad and students were charged \$35,000, et cetera, as I said. But no longer did we make contributions to Mona and so our relationship with Mona, in terms of government's contribution was discontinued and students from Trinidad and Tobago were no longer allowed access to Mona unless they were prepared to pay the full economic cost of the education which at the time might have amounted to just over \$100,000; between \$90,000 and \$110,000 per year. So the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Mount Hope was established.

Having established that faculty, over the years the numbers of students would have increased. In fact, when we came into office, we negotiated with them to expand the capacity because capacity is a factor. We needed to train more doctors, and so in the last two years, we asked the Faculty of Medical Sciences, Mona—I was involved in it—to see what they could do to have a larger intake of nationals of Trinidad and Tobago into their faculty. They were able to move it from just about 110 to 160 and one of the ways we suggested to them, one thing they could have done, which they did, was to reduce the number of international students

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intake, because they were taking international students for economic reasons, because they were attempting to earn more money by admitting international students. And we said to them, take the number of international students you need to continue to take to preserve the international reputation of the institution, but once you have satisfied that, let all the remaining places be available to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago for which the government of Trinidad and Tobago will pay; And they were able to move the numbers from just about 110 to 160, an additional 50 places.

So every year now, we have 50 nationals of Trinidad and Tobago who previously would not have been able to access tertiary education at Mount Hope, now being able to access that. So it has opened up somewhat. In addition to that, we have the scholarships arrangement with St. George's and a number of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, again, have been able to access a degree in medicine at that particular institution. And over and above that, what we decided to do was to reopen negotiations with the Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies to allow access to Mona. What they did, was that they made available to us 50 places at Mona, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will pay the full economic cost for students, nationals of Trinidad and Tobago applying to attend Mona, in the Faculty of Medical Sciences.

We negotiated that. It was a discussion that took place between the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and the Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, and as a consequence of that, we were able to open these 50 places. However, we will do it on the basis of a scholarship arrangement, meaning that we will advertise. First of all, the students must meet the minimum entry requirement at Mona. If you do not meet Mona's entry requirement, then forget it. The students must meet the minimum entry requirement for Mona. But we will advertise; they will be interviewed by the scholarships section and the scholarships section will determine who will get the scholarship.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what has happened so far. I know what the reason is for this questioning of the quality of the students, because they have a habit—and in the other House they do it all the time. Anytime they hear scholarships, they take the list and they start to count names. They start to count names, trying to come to some conclusion as to why this name and not that name. I know what names they are counting. I know what names they are counting because one of them in particular, said there were only 25 of "we". Only 25 of "we" get scholarships out of 60 and it supposed to be "half." He counted to see who is Jones, from who is Seewattan and who is Williams from who is Narine, that is

what he has come here to do. That is how you intend to run a country by counting names; counting who gets what. What the Member for Oropouche had said, "They do that to ensure quality. What is to suggest what?"

Dr. Moonilal: I said equality; you deaf?

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Oh, so merit.

Mr. Speaker: No, no. Please, you need to apologize.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw that statement.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, so then what he is saying, the issue of meritocracy does not apply? He is saying the issue of meritocracy does not apply, so you give me that and I give you yours.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I know what the implication of their statement is. I know that this quota system that they are contemplating—and it is the same quota system we saw under the 18/18. You take this Ministry, I take this Ministry. You take that Ministry, I take that Ministry. Do you know, in my view, that was a forerunner to a system, I think they were contemplating—you govern that part of Trinidad, let me govern that part of Trinidad? That is where they are heading because if we cannot govern the whole thing, give me my half. Mr. Speaker, no such thing will happen in Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: The integrity of the State of Trinidad and Tobago will be preserved and it will be preserved because this Government governs in the best interest of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Because I know when on my walkabouts—and I notice that they have not nominated their person to come up against me.

Mr. Speaker, I know because all the people say thank you for GATE, is matters not where they come from; it matters not what they look like; they appreciate the GATE programme. That particular programme, what we have been able to do with

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this scholarships programme and the questions that they have raised, let me explain to the national population what exactly has happened, so I would be able to demonstrate that the allegations and accusations being made by the Members, not immediately here, but from the Members, generally, opposite, I would like to demonstrate very clearly the extent to which those allegations and accusations are false.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Scholarships Division will have to adjudicate on who get these scholarships. These scholarships were advertised. Remember, we were the ones who negotiated these 50 places. We want nationals of Trinidad and Tobago to go to Mona and to access this education opportunity. The scholarships were advertised. They said no advertisements took place; where were the advertisements? They were advertised in the *Express Newspaper* on February 07, 2007 on page 62. They have a computer, so they could go online and check the archives and see if that is true. They were advertised in the *Newsday* on February 06, 2007, page 22.

In response to those advertisements, 12 persons applied. I do not know where they get this 40 something and 50; 12 persons applied. Of the 12, when the applications were reviewed, and very clearly outlined was the criteria for all applicants which included that they meet the minimum entry requirement of Mona, so there is no possibility of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago or the scholarships committee approving someone who did not meet the minimum entry requirement for Mona. Once you did not meet the requirement, you could not be awarded a scholarship.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, of the 12 persons who applied, six were awarded scholarships. Of the remaining six, it is listed very clearly why they were not in a position to access the scholarships, why they were not qualified. Some of them did not have biology, which is a requirement of Mona; some of them did not even have A levels; some of them had different problems, like their transcripts not being available, having no O levels or incomplete application forms. Nowhere in this entire exercise was there any case of 50 nationals of Trinidad and Tobago being nominated by this Government and being refused by the University of the West Indies at Mona; that never happened. They are trained in hysteria.

They also asked who adjudicated those scholarships. They were advertised in the newspapers. I have identified the six persons who got scholarships, not by name. These six persons will be moving on to begin their MBBS programme at Mona this academic year.

The scholarships selection committee is made up of public officers based at the Ministry of Public Administration and Information. It is chaired by Mrs. Arlene McCormie, the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration. It includes Mrs. Rita Portillo, PS, Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. It also includes Mrs. Marlene Juman-Redhead, Deputy PS, Ministry of Education; Mrs. Gloria Edwards-Joseph, Director of Personnel Administration (DPA), Service Commissions Department; Mr. Dyer Narinesingh, Faculty of Science and Agriculture, University of the West Indies; Prof. Denise Thompson, University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT); Mrs. Roslyn Kanhai-Trotman and Mr. Zaffar Ali, representatives of the public interest. Those are the persons who adjudicate and determine who get scholarships. No politician gets involved in that. It is a committee made up of public officers, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is not fair that the integrity of these citizens be compromised by ruthless, wicked allegations coming from those on the opposite Benches. How can you say that about persons who work hard? For that, Member for St. Joseph, the Opposition should apologize.

We have been working hard over the last few years to increase capacity at UWI and other institutions, because in order for us to achieve our target we must have the capacity. Over the last five years, we have been working with all our institutions to increase capacity, because if 60 per cent of our high school graduates must move on somehow via education, we must have the capacity at the tertiary level to absorb them from the secondary school system.

This is useful information to help us understand where Trinidad and Tobago stands in the context of the English-speaking Caribbean. Mr. Speaker, if you rank the top 4,200 best performances at A levels in the Caribbean, and that includes Jamaica, Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Trinidad and Tobago, all the members of Caricom; 3,500 of them come from Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We perform head and shoulders above the rest of the region. We have the best secondary education system in the region. With all the challenges that we are working to overcome, we do the best in the region. That largely is as a consequence of the investment in education that took place between 1956 and 1986.

We need to have expansion of the tertiary education sector, and capacity is a major factor. When we came into office in 2001, UWI had an enrolment of 8,629 students. We have worked with the institution over the years increasingly providing our contribution, in terms of funding, working to ensure that we will be

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able to expand, maximize and optimize the capacity that they may have had. In 2002, that number went to 9,000; in 2003, 10,600; 2004, 13,400; 2005, 14,196; 2006, 15,100. Today, the enrolment figure at the University of the West Indies stands at 16,000; citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are able to access a quality tertiary education opportunity, as a consequence of the direct intervention of this Government which now sits in office. [*Desk thumping*]

That was not an easy task and it has not come cheap. Sometimes they scream and bawl about contributions to UWI, but I know why. When we came into office, the budget that they had allocated, the then government's contribution was \$199 million in 2001. By the following year we increased that to \$289 million; by 2003, \$299 million. In 2004, \$461 million came from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago into the University of the West Indies. It was \$514 million in 2006; by the end of this fiscal year, that amount will cross over to \$600 million. In the last five years we have put into UWI over \$2.5 billion invested in the education of the people. [*Desk thumping*] That is one and a half airports or one and two-thirds.

That is a government that cares about the people. The 8,000 citizens who are now able to go to UWI, as a consequence of Government's investment, understand the love and care that this Government has to offer.

Mr. Speaker, we have also established the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT). It is a multicampus institution. We are looking at a number of campuses across the country. We recently approved the construction of the main campus at Wallerfield at a cost of \$1.2 billion infrastructure. It will provide this country, when it is completed by early 2009, an additional 7,000 tertiary education places. Citizens of this country will be able to access an opportunity which previously they could not. There will be 7,000 places at Tamana Park. Across the Point Lisas, O'Meara, San Fernando, Port of Spain, Valsayn and Chaguaramas campuses, all told, when the UTT is fully established, we will be looking at an additional 15,200 quality tertiary education places.

In as much as I am on the UTT, I will reveal to this Parliament a factor dealing with the issue of accreditation and excellence at UTT. It is something they have had to say a lot about. Mr. Speaker, as you know, the UTT has partnered with a number of institutions, including UWI, in developing a number of programmes. With our manufacturing and engineering programmes, we have partnered with the University of Cambridge, the best in the world. The single institution that is most famous in the world for petroleum engineering is the Danish Technical University; with our petroleum engineering programme, that is our partner.

For petroleum and geosystems engineering, the University of Texas at Austin; for mechanical and electrical engineering, the University of Houston; for maritime studies, Southampton Institute is our partner; for information technology, the TATA Infotech of India. A number of quality institutions, the world's best in different disciplines, are our partners. We are developing the programmes that are intended to be among the best available in the world.

When the Opposition questioned the accreditation of UTT, I said to them that in order for accreditation to take place you must have a cohort of graduates, because part of the accreditation exercise is that the graduates must be assessed, and the performance of the graduates in the industry also to be measured and assessed. So until such time as you have graduates, you cannot assess and, therefore, you cannot accredit.

The good news is, now that we have had a cohort of graduates out of the UTT, the accreditation exercise in two particular programmes have been completed. I have before me a letter from the Institution of Engineering and Technology, based in the United Kingdom (UK). This is the institution that accredits engineering institutions throughout the world. They post the accreditation status on the Internet, so it is free for everyone to check. From the Institute of Engineering and Technology, the letter reads:

"I am pleased to inform you that the Academic Accreditation Committee of the IET has considered the report on the recent visit to the Point Lisas Campus, University of Trinidad and Tobago and your action plan. Both documents have been accepted and therefore programmes I and II, the Bachelor of Applied Technology, BTech in Electrical Engineering, and the Bachelor of Applied Technology, BTech in Mechanical Engineering, are awarded three years retrospective accreditation from the 2002 intake to the 2004 intake." [*Desk thumping*]

That is what they were waiting on. So because we have been able to produce the graduates of cohort, we are now in a position to be accredited and we have been positively accredited by the Institute of Engineering and Technology, an international institute that accredits programmes like these throughout the world.

That was what they were waiting for; that was what they doubted. That is the misery. They were trying to sell the misery that students attending the UTT will not be accredited. There is no sale for misery in Trinidad and Tobago. The people are not buying and they will soon find that out. They will soon find out that the people have no interest in the misery they have to sell.

Mr. Hinds: Bunch of blue flies.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: They will be immersed in their own doom and gloom and they will wallow in that until another five years when, perhaps, they may try to grow some new wings and flap around a bit once more.

The effort to establish the UTT as an institution of excellence is an effort well justified; it is beginning to show success. The UTT, well established and well justified as it is, has now secured its status as an accredited institution in those two programmes of which we are very proud. We expect every single programme of the UTT to be so accredited, provided that we get the cohort of students, and that will come. Notice, Mr. Speaker, it was retrospective to 2002, because accrediting institutions do, in fact, have the authority to accredit dating back.

Sometimes they on the other side pretend they do not know. The Institute of Business was established and operated for nine years before it got its first accreditation. It is now called the Arthur Lok Jack Institute, but for nine years it had no accreditation. The University of Trinidad and Tobago was since 2002; it now has accreditation and we were only established just a couple years ago. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: The capacity factor is something on which we are working on. We are expanding capacity with the introduction as well of the community college, which we spoke about. Government has already agreed to three campuses, one in North Trinidad, one in South and one in Tobago. Both campuses in Trinidad will have a total enrolment capacity of just around 8,000, and the Tobago campus will have just around 2,000, again adding to tertiary education places.

We also have the Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute (THTI). Government has already approved a \$58 million development plan over the next three years that will see the capacity and quality of education at that institution improving.

We have also agreed on a system of technology centres which will provide the skills training necessary for our citizens, so that as we develop our industry and as opportunities for employment become available in the energy and non-energy sectors, these institutions will, in fact, be providing opportunities for training.

7.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are talking about skills training in the energy sector; drilling, rigging, pipe fitting, pipe construction, underwater welding. We are talking about

construction skills, welding and other skills that are necessary in the development of the non-energy sector; like skills for the manufacturing sector.

Mr. Speaker, all of these constitute a comprehensive system in the tertiary education and training sector designed to provide this country with the expertise that we need and we are keeping a close eye on the relevance of our training programme and the specific relevance is the national development objectives.

One of the shortcomings of the University of the West Indies (UWI) is that it is a regional institution that is less responsive than we would like it to be, to our national development training needs. So we have put our own institutions in place and we have put captains of industry to govern these institutions.

If you look at UWI and you look at the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) you will recognize that the shortcoming perhaps of UWI is that it is governed by academics. If one looks at the governing structure of UTT, one is going to see people like Mr. Robert Riley of BPTT is on the board. There is Mr. Frank Look Hin, of the National Gas Company and a number of captives of industry are involved directly in the administration and governance of the institution, and that we know is what is leading to the kinds of programmes that are required by industry. So that we expect a smooth flow of graduates of UTT into the energy sector and into industry, because they would have been specifically prepared for industry...not prepared to take on an academic role necessarily, but to operate in industry, and it is the same thing we are doing in the agriculture sector.

At the UTT we are designing programmes to produce farm-ready farmers, people to whom you can grant 25, 50 and 100 acres of land and ask them to convert that into a farm. They are not going to be exclusively academics looking for a job in the university or in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, but they can go out in the real world and take land, resources and packets of production and create farms and produce food.

So at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, we are intending to create hands-on farmers and that is the philosophy behind it in all the various faculties. And as needs exist in the country, we have designed programmes. The Minister of Trade and Industry has spoken about the yachting and maritime industry and we have established a maritime faculty at the UTT in Chaguaramas. We have spoken about a film industry and we have an academy for the performing arts.

As we have spoken about industries and their development, we have immediately designed education and training programmes to provide the human

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resources and expertise necessary for the operation of those industries as we move forward. That is the comprehensive plan we are talking about, that is what Vision 2020 is. It is the harmonizing of the education sector with the industry so that one feeds into the other and industry playing a role at the same time in determining the design of training programmes of which the industries themselves would have need. So relevance is a major and important factor and, more than that, necessity must be a factor. There must be flexible admissions criteria.

Traditionally, we have used A levels as the admission criterion to the University of the West Indies, but we are learning from other countries that A level is not necessarily the best qualification. It is useful, but it does not determine—traditionally, the view was if you did not have A level, you could not do a degree. But even in looking at some of these applications for scholarships at Mona, we were seeing where students who got “D’s” and “E’s” at A level went on to get First Class Honours. The point I am making is that we have learned from the United States of America and other countries in the world that the elite system of education is no longer applicable, so one has to be more flexible with admissions policies.

We have created a number of diploma programmes; National Engineering Diploma programmes which provide a transition from O-levels to degree education, and also the establishment of associate degree programmes as well, allowing students to transit from O levels via the route of associate degree, and the undergraduate diploma unto Bachelor of Sciences, Bachelor of Arts as the case may be. So we are making these kinds of adjustments to ensure accessibility to the faculty because accessibility does not only speak to geographical location but we are dealing with the geographic location factor as well because we are establishing campuses throughout Trinidad and Tobago with UTT as I mentioned earlier.

We are putting residence halls so that students who live in remote areas can stay on campus at Point Lisas, stay on campus in North Trinidad as the case may be. All of that is intended to create an educated society, one that has access and opportunity to pursue 60 per cent tertiary education by the year 2015.

The last factor is the affordability one, because what sense is it to have all these spaces available and the students cannot afford. So GATE was introduced to make the education affordable by paying the tuition fees. The capacity factor, the inclusion of private institutions as well are expected to make a contribution and so far as I mentioned earlier, they are contributing approximately 15,000 places.

So when we add what we have in the private sector, at COSTAATT, TTHTI, the technology centres, UTT and the University of the West Indies, we are looking at a network of institutions providing all the capacities we need to ensure that 60 per cent of the graduates of the secondary school system will have places at the tertiary level which they can access. And they can do so at the expense of the Government—free tertiary education.

Mr. Speaker, more than tuition fees because we recognize that even if tuition fees are paid there are still some citizens from the same Bagatelle, who are unable to access the education opportunity precisely because there are other costs associated in accessing education.

There are the costs of registration, tuition, and personal maintenance. For instance, an 18-year-old who comes from a family without financial means, who is going to sustain you while you pursue your degree? As a consequence of that, recognizing that there is cost of accommodation, books, meals and so forth, we have introduced the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP), which is companion to the GATE Programme.

They are soft loan programmes providing you with funding to meet your non-tuition needs. If you are studying in Trinidad and Tobago, you have access to \$25,000 per year. You will pay no interest while you study, the Government will pay the interest on your behalf; the second year, you have access to a second \$25,000; the third year you have access to a third \$25,000; you apply, your application will be evaluated and we will grant you a loan to help you to meet those expenses.

While they were locking people out of the university doors in 1988, we were figuring out ways to open those doors, Mr. Speaker—[*Desk thumping*] and to make access easier for our citizens. They were busy trying to decide how to reconstruct the society so that only those who had would get more. We know that. That is what they stood for, and what they stand for even today. They stand for bourgeois policies, and we were aware of that.

The Higher Education Loan Programme is here to contradict those bourgeois policies. So that programme is there to assist our citizens to access tertiary education opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I can talk about a multiplicity of training programmes if I had the opportunity, I would do so in the upper House. I would talk about the Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme (MuST) and how we have been able to assist 12,100 citizens of this country at training opportunities. And recently we

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have improved and increased the stipend for the MuST trainees from \$60 to \$80.00 because we love them, and at Level 2, it moved from \$90 to \$100.

I could also speak about the 35,000 citizens who have benefitted from YTEPP over the last five years learning skills, making their lives productive and their stipend has also been increased in the last week from \$24 to \$60. Those are the citizens from Bagatelle, from Endeavour, Enterprise and Laventille.

We have also had the HYPE where 7,000 benefitted in the last five years, we increased the stipend to \$50. There is also the On-the-Job Training Programme (OJT) which has offered opportunities to our citizens and over 35,000 have benefitted over the last five years. All told, within the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education alone over 200,000 citizens of this country have been able to access some benefit as a consequence of the policies of this Government. [*Desk thumping*] They are not seeing doom and gloom, they are seeing a way forward and access to opportunity. The role of Government is to make available to our citizens opportunities.

I want to urge my population, my citizens, my compatriots to ignore the hateful and spiteful malice that spews out of the mouth of some of them who pretend to like people. They like you not. Beware of those, judge them not by what they say but by what they have done. There is no market in Trinidad and Tobago for misery, no market for gloom, no market for despondency. Let them keep their gloom and despondency, keep their misery and wallow in it until they satisfy themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Adesh Nanan (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a contribution on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, first I would like to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on an excellent reply to the budget. [*Desk thumping*] From all reviews, the Internet chat rooms and the email sent on that day, we have seen the PNM getting blows.

As the Leader of the Opposition spoke and one looked at the email, one saw that the PNM was getting blows and blows. That is how it was, and this hon. Minister comes to the House this evening to pull wool over the eyes of the population. And I will show in my contribution what is happening with the education system that he was bleating about here this evening.

I want to remind him when he gave the budgetary expenditure, the allocation gave a profile which I want to go to. The Minister said the allocation in 2001, \$199 million, \$289 million, \$461 million, and \$514 million. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. A. Nanan: Excuse me Member; you are a guest in the House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, take your seat!

We have been enjoying all the contributions so far, do not get carried away. I keep saying keep the standard up. Please continue.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Speaker, I want to remind him that when the United National Congress government looked at the budgetary allocation with respect to the University of the West Indies, there was \$300 million arrears by the PNM. That is the mantra of the PNM, squandermania!

When they had the oil bounty, history will recall the squandermania. They taxed the citizens and they had subsidies and subventions. They wasted the money. That is the record of the PNM. So to come to this House and talk about expanding the tertiary sector, let me explain something to him in case he did not know. There is a 50 per cent failure rate in this country under the PNM administration in the CXC. [*Desk thumping*] How can he quote that the secondary graduates must be absorbed by the tertiary level institutions when they cannot even make the grade. How can he expand the tertiary sector when he cannot move from the secondary sector to the tertiary sector? Are you so foolish? Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

7.30 p.m.

Are you talking about the best secondary education in the Caribbean? You should talk about that when the United National Congress was in government; not the PNM! [*Desk thumping*] It is the PNM that has railroaded the education system; the great platform that we gave to the PNM. The United National Congress platform has been derailed by the PNM and that is what will continue!

Dr. Rowley: And that is a pa-ra-dig-im.

Dr. A. Nanan: I would not deal with the Scarborough Hospital, Member for Diego Martin West. I know the “tiefing” of the sand and gravel that you—[*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: That is another pa-ra-dig-im.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. A. Nanan: But, Mr. Speaker, I have to deal with that, because this Minister came in the House and talked about the expansion of the sector. Let me explain something to you. Every programme that you talked about began under the United National Congress. That is the genesis, the United National Congress! You expand because you have an oil price of US \$72 a barrel. We were working with US \$9 a barrel. Do you know that the Public Sector Investment Programme—if you read at all; I do not know if you read. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Public Sector Investment Programme was \$1 billion. Do you know what it is today? How much is the Public Sector Investment Programme? Do you know? It is \$7.9 billion. That is the comparison we are looking at. So when you talk about money and more money, that is what is happening. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please. Hon. Members, for those of you who have spoken, there is a Standing Order that I can use and for those of you who are yet to speak, please look at Standing Order 33(1). There are two sentences there which are very important to look at. Please, the hon. Member is on his feet. This is his last contribution in this Eighth Parliament in the budget—[*Interruption*] Let him make his contribution, please.

Dr. A. Nanan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was making reference to the variations. You are looking at US \$70 a barrel and we are looking at US \$9 a barrel, and we are looking at performance. The Minister talked about performance. Let us talk about performance.

That same University of Trinidad and Tobago that he is boasting about started under the United National Congress. All those programmes that are now being accredited were the vision of the United National Congress, to have the best linkage between that particular institute and the rest of the world. So to come here and talk about you have done this and that; you have now got accreditation, I find it takes quite a long time to get accreditation. We are in 2007; you have been in office since 2002. Or have you forgotten? It is a five-year lapse in memory, I must say, Minister.

The Minister also talked about the relationship between Mona and the Faculty of Medicine at Mount Hope. But there is a credibility gap when we look at what the Minister is saying and what the budget documents are saying—a major credibility gap. The Prime Minister's budget statement talks about—on page 5:

“We have paid careful attention to the provision of special education. In this fiscal year alone, the Government upgraded the physical facilities of nine public special schools.”

How can we believe the Prime Minister? Is the Prime Minister being set up by the Minister of Education? The Draft Estimates of the Development Programme points to an allocation at Head 26, the Ministry of Education on special education, of \$10 million. That was the allocation for 2007. The Revised Estimate is just under \$1 million; 10 per cent of the budgetary allocation spent on special education. So how could the Prime Minister in a budget statement say, “We have paid careful attention to the provision of special education”?—10 per cent.

“In this fiscal year alone the Government upgraded the physical facilities of nine public special schools.”

Credibility gap! We heard of a cut and paste budget by the Leader of the Opposition when questioned on her views on the budget and I want to agree with her.

The *Public Sector Investment Programme*, on page 65, Item 246—and I want to read for you. I hope you will permit me, Mr. Speaker.

“This Establishment of a National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Authority will develop the human resource and infrastructure necessary for Trinidad and Tobago to initially establish ‘three model national parks’ and a modern conservation programme. This project was allocated \$0.1 million to enable the signing of a contract between CANARI and the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment in April 2007.”

Item 247:

“In the area of Solid Waste Management, for the fiscal year 2007, the Company has been allocated \$3 million of which \$0.1 million was expended to implement the following programmes:”

Item 248—I will skip a little bit.

“This Establishment of a National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Authority will develop the human resource and infrastructure necessary for Trinidad and Tobago to initially establish ‘three model national parks’ and a modern conservation programme. This project was allocated \$0.1 million to enable the signing of a contract between CANARI and the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment in April 2007.”

I am sure by now you would have realized I read the same thing twice, and it is there. Item 249 makes reference to the same thing:

“In the area of Solid Waste Management, for the fiscal year 2007, the Company has been allocated \$3 million of which \$0.1 million was expended to implement the following programmes:”

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So, Mr. Speaker, this has been rushed. If you go through this document you will see there are many, many errors. Imagine another section—I just want to go quickly to that section to show you what is happening. Listen to this piece of information here on page 615.

“The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, in recognition of the critical role which education plays in development was allocated...”

Who gave it? Jamaica? [*Laughter*] Who gave the allocation to the Government; the taxpayers?

“The Government of Trinidad and Tobago in recognition of the critical role education plays in development was allocated \$618.6 million in fiscal year 2007 for funding projects and programmes aimed at developing...”

Probably it is the IDB or the World Bank. That is the kind of literature that you have to go through. It is very tiring and very difficult, and in preparing for this exercise it was a very difficult one; tedious. If you look at the documents, they are not adding up.

The Member for Diego Martin East spoke about the Leader of the Opposition not getting her figures correct. He was quite wrong. He did not even peruse the document. If you read this document you would see, and I will show you. This Draft Estimates of Development Programme talks about the Ministry of Education on page 269, having an allocation of \$775.59 million for the development programme. Contributions coming are: \$61.2 million from the IDB; \$269.39 million from the Consolidated Fund and \$445 million from the Infrastructure Development Fund. If you look through the Public Sector Investment Programme you are seeing a great lapse. You are seeing a gap in terms of where the money is being allocated and what the money is being allocated for. So the relationship is not there, in terms of allocation and what is happening.

Is somebody trying to hide the money? Is it a conspiracy year for an election fund from this particular budget? I want to go on because it is important to understand that when the United National Congress came into government, the education system was in shambles, just like it is today! There is a regression in terms of what is happening in the society today. An area of great importance was the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector. And we heard from the Leader of the Opposition on the Public Sector Investment Programme document and I want to read it because it is important also. Nobody can deny what is here; it is in black

and white so nobody could say that the Leader of the Opposition was wrong. On page 6 of this document it states:

“An expenditure of \$63.2 million was incurred for the completion of 6 centres in La Romain, Santa Rosa, St. Augustine South, Sangre Grande, El Socorro South and San Pedro.”

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Ten million dollars for one.

Dr. A. Nanan: About \$10 million for one centre. Let me give you an analysis. A PSIP of \$1 billion in 1996 was the total allocation for all the ministries. The Ministry of Education had a very minuscule amount; if I recall around \$50 million. But we used the money wisely. We constructed Early Childhood Care and Education Centres for up to \$250,000. You could go to Rose Hill in Laventille and see it is still standing there; you could go to Gran Couva. I want to remind the House that I saw in a *Hansard* contribution in the Senate where the Minister of Education said that these Early Childhood Care and Education Centres were crumbling. What falsehood! That should not be reported in *Hansard*. Misleading the Parliament!

This was not a programme conceived in a vacuum; this is World Bank standards. These pre-schools were built by World Bank standards. They had the best architects on board. Are you saying that Colin Laird is a bad architect? Are you saying that these architects that we hired that were given approval by World Bank are bad architects? The Gran Couva Early Childhood Care and Education Centre is a model; it is like a mini castle; it has roman pillars. That is the kind of designs that came from these, not like what the Member for Diego Martin West is building throughout the country; stereotype houses; not giving people a chance to have their creative ability in these houses, but another shadow minister will deal with that matter.

Dr. Rowley: What chance you gave them?

Dr. A. Nanan: We were giving them land, in case you did not know, and their creative design was emanating and you can see it as you drive along in Duncan Village.

Dr. Rowley: I agree—

Dr. A. Nanan: That is the situation. The landscape was improved in terms of a standard and the standard was maintained throughout, because the World Bank was giving their approval, and you know how difficult it is to get World Bank approval, Member for Diego Martin East, in terms of conditionalities.

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But it was taken care of, and we built 43 of those centres. The Minister of Education built one centre, if I am correct, and a few unfinished, over a period of five years and boasts about that one centre. That is the comparison. We have to compare the oil price then to the oil price now, in terms of performance. The Leader of the Opposition talked about absorptive capacity and the ability of the Ministry of Education to function effectively. You can give the Minister of Education as much money as you want, but what we see turning out is absolute failure on the part of the Minister of Education.

In terms of the Tranquility Government Primary School there is an allocation here of \$10 million in this development estimates and spent \$8 million. That is the revised estimate of \$8 million. Not a post hole on the site. In fact, they have not even cleared the site yet and the school is going to open in September.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: And how much did they spend?

Dr. A. Nanan: From what the budget documents say, it is \$8 million. Somebody has to be held accountable. Is it Monteil? Where is the money going? It is in the estimates! They are showing that the money is \$8 million. It cannot be designs. Design is a few hundred thousand dollars. You have \$8 million vanishing and when we look at the Tranquility Government site nothing is in place.

There are other areas in the document that would point to those things, allocations made, revised estimates, and nothing is happening; designs of schools! They are still designing schools in 2007 that were supposed to be done in 2003. That is the excuse! And you come here, Minister, to talk about your progress in the tertiary education sector and the whole education sector is collapsing from the ground underneath? Do you now know when you are building a tower you have to start with a strong foundation? The Member for Diego Martin East must be aware of that, and we are seeing it crumbling from the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector. The UNC government would have made pre-school education compulsory because we recognized that was one of most important years, the formative years in the life of a child student.

7.45 p.m.

They come here and talk about success and we have failure in one of the most important areas in the education sector. Very little is being done and money is being spent. The Minister of Education is on record as saying so much money is spent per child. Are we reaping the benefits?

A failure rate at CXC. I want to deal with another matter as I am on CXC. It has been reported to me and I am sure that Members of the House are aware that the

reason we took a watching brief—Prime Minister, I warned you about that Caribbean Proficiency Examination (CAPE) that you have released or unleashed as the case may be, on the population. [*Interruption*] It is not since and “sence”. I want to let you know, Prime Minister, that we took a watching brief for a reason. The United National Congress took a watching brief on the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination because you know the record of CXC and leakage of papers. I have been told that it was reported to the Ministry of Education and they said bring the evidence. It has been reported this year that there has been a leak of the CXC and CAPE papers. It is taking place throughout the county. People who are genuinely studying to get their four ones and people who are buying papers and getting four ones and those people are being squeezed out of the system.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Tabaquite for giving way. I want to let the Member know that whenever there is a leak in an exam it shows up quite easily by people in a particular area or particular school suddenly getting unusual marks. It shows up very easily and the authorities are able to take corrective action. You are quite right that there have been leaks in the system, but that does not mean that the system ought to be condemned. The approach that we have taken, since we believe the exam to be a far superior one, is to try to refine the system to the point where the leaks have been minimised. Incidentally, there were also leaks in the exams that preceded it and it is not just CXC. It was also in the Cambridge exams.

Dr. A. Nanan: I thought the Prime Minister would have made a statement with respect to the exam. To defend the Caribbean Proficiency Examination, I will not go into the merits and demerits of the examination. There has been a leak and the Ministry of Education has not launched any investigation. There is that situation where people throughout the country—it is not isolated to one particular school. Papers are being sold throughout the country. How can you detect that? People are suffering. It is not only at CXC and CAPE. I understand the SBAs too. It has been a complete mix.

In terms of the education system and this particular area, is it a lack of security by the Ministry of Education?

Dr. Rowley: When a leak occurs at UWI, you will close it down?

Dr. A. Nanan: You will speak when you have your time, sir.

I brought it to the attention of the House. People are out there and you know that they are enrolling at the faculties. People have 14 points which they have worked hard to earn and there are people with 15 points who have had the opportunity to get the examination and they cannot get into medical school.

Sen. Abdul-Hamid: Go to Jamaica.

Dr. A. Nanan: Go Mona. That is the suggestion. Do you know the difference between the fees for Mona and UWI?

Sen. Abdul-Hamid: We are paying the fees.

Dr. Rowley: Where you study? Where you learn to pull teeth?

Dr. A. Nanan: I raised that as an aside. We are dealing with that particular issue of CAPE and CXC and the reason we took the watching brief.

Let us go into the primary school because we have finished the pre-school and you have failed to deliver in pre-school. When we came in, there were four schools: Reform Presbyterian on the drawing board; Guayaguayare R. C.; the St. Mary's Children's Home Primary School in Tacarigua and there was one other school. We were dealing with four schools with respect to the Fincor Programme. It was stalled for three years under the PNM. For three years those schools were being constructed. When we came we had to start from scratch and in one and a half years the Reform Presbyterian School, St. Mary's School and Guayaguayare R. C. School were completed. Under the United National Congress the Minister of Education was opening schools north, east, west and central, whether pre-school, secondary school or even the skills centres.

I want to get to that. The hon. Minister talked about the various skill centres. The United National Congress started all those skills centres. All those technology centres were opened under the United National Congress.

Dr. Rowley: Not true. The one in Laventille, you opened that too?

Dr. A. Nanan: I am saying that we started the programme of technology centres that you copied. We have no problem. Once it is a good thing they can use it, but use it wisely. You wasted the opportunity that we have given you. We gave you an opportunity in 2002. In fact, we did not give you, the President gave you, but you failed for five years.

You had everything at your disposal. You had a high oil price; a great education plan and everything in place. You failed! Square pegs in round holes. You failed. I am not saying you failed because I want to say you failed. I will produce documentary evidence. It is in the Prime Minister's document that he never read. The Prime Minister made a statement and never read one of the documents that he submitted. I will show that it is a cut and paste budget.

In the primary school sector I saw the Minister of Education's web site. I am sure that none of you went on the Minister of Education's web site. If you go on

that web site they are claiming schools that the United National Congress built. I do not know if the Minister of Education is aware. I do not blame them. We built all the primary schools and pre-schools. They have nothing to report. They must find something to put on the site or they would be fired. If you are doing nothing and you have to get some information there, you must put the UNC's performance. It is the worst web sites I have seen. Go to Singapore's and New Zealand's web site in terms of the Ministry of Education—do something properly. They do not have the information so it does not matter whether or not they have a proper site.

In terms of the primary school environment, if you go through this country you would see all the primary schools that were built under the United National Congress. They were probably not opened under the United National Congress. The plaque of the Prime Minister was there in the school but it was designed and constructed by the UNC; it was opened by the PNM. I remember my friend, the Member for Diego Martin East with a glass of champagne in his hand and smiling when we opened the school in River Estate, Patna. He was invited and he came. *[Interruption]* You should not talk. I will talk about the school in Diego Martin we opened.

I am sure that you remember in a *Hansard* contribution when I pointed to every Member and told them which school we will build and in which constituency. I do not want to go through that because I have more to say.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Which school you built in Tobago?

Dr. A. Nanan: Buccoo and Castara were designed and constructed by the United National Congress government. Member for Diego Martin West you will agree with me. The Mason Hall Secondary School was designed by the United National Congress government. You know that; you cannot deny that.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Do not go there. You did not build it.

Dr. A. Nanan: For your information, Member for Tobago East, you should read the document. Go to Parliament's web site if you have not gone there and you would see it there. You will see the design, construction and the plans of the United National Congress and what they did for Tobago. When you stand you should congratulate the United National Congress for building the school in Tobago. I want to take one minute to deal with the Member for Tobago East. It is the intervention of the United National Congress that is making Main Ridge in Tobago famous, in case you did not know. I will deal with that in the tourism part of my contribution.

Dr. Rowley: You build that too? You plan for Main Ridge?

Dr. A. Nanan: I did not say that. I am dealing systematically and chronologically with the education system. I was in the primary school environment. We did not only build schools but we also restructured the curriculum. We trained teachers for the pre-schools; put in library books and text books. We did not have much money. The allocation was \$1.6 million for text books. Their allocation is \$20 million and \$50 million. We have a difference in the amount of money passing through the country in terms of allocation. With our limited resources we did what we had to do to expand. We built a platform with less resources than they have. That is what we gave to them and they have failed. That is the primary school. The primary school also saw the introduction of computers. Let anyone of you stand here, Prime Minister included, and tell me which secondary school under your watch, 1991 to 1995 received a computer from the government. None! You know that. Not one of you could say you gave one. The school probably got a gift from a rotary Club, but nothing from the Government. [*Laughter*] You want to talk about 21st Century technology. When they have the opportunity they cannot deliver the computers to the school. We have gone past that. Children should be in school with their lap tops. We are still fixing rooms in schools. I do not want to get sidetracked because I want to go back to the delivery of computers.

It is the United National Congress that negotiated with the oil companies that were drilling here. It was Amoco at the time. They made the adjustment so that these secondary schools, 80 at one time were given computer labs. There were 40 computers in a school. That was the vision of the Basdeo Panday government.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

We gave it to you free. We did not charge you for that vision. Watch what you have done. Vision 2020. Hopeless. You should have continued with the vision we gave you. That vision did not come up like that. We planned for that vision.

Mr. Manning: What was it called?

Dr. A. Nanan: Total quality nation and human development is the main part of the plan. This Minister talks about human development and how they are attracting the best people.

In the tourism sector there was training. I want to show the linkage because human development is very important. In the tourism sector, we allowed people to have well-paid jobs and move to the highest level of management. That was the vision of the Basdeo Panday administration. We gave you that vision. The tourism sector is collapsing. A tourism park is okay but you must have the product. You

cannot have five things on your island when you have a multitude of sites to display. I like the Tourism Park. If a visitor comes you go there first and you would see the various attractions. You have very limited resources in that Tourism Park. You need to have much more. To do that you must identify the sites.

In my constituency in Piparo, we have one of the best waterfalls. We could compete with Maracas.

8.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have tourism action committees that would have identified and they could have worked with the MPs and the regional corporations to identify those sites. That was the relationship, quickly, for human and sustainable development for a total quality nation. We had all those skills programmes. It was our vision that you utilized. We had all of that. I was talking about the vision planning exercise. That vision did not come about by accident. It was a vision planning exercise. All that work was done, with respect to what were the future requirements and labour analysis. Everything was done in Tobago at a retreat. A lot of work was done on that division. You need to take a look at that. I would give you the documents. I have them at home. It was a win-win situation for Trinidad and Tobago in the short, medium and long term. Those are the plans.

When you came in 2002 everything was there. Again you had to start all over with your various planning exercises which failed in planning and development, in terms of where we are going from there. The Minister of Planning and Development sent a leaflet on Vision 2020. It is a failed vision. You need to reconstruct and get a new vision or utilize our vision, because that is the only way for success. It is too late now because we are coming back to take our vision forward.

In terms of human development and sustainable jobs, that was the main thrust of the Basdeo Panday administration.

Mr. Manning: What was the main thrust?

Dr. A. Nanan: Human capital. We did it. Education and training went hand in hand, just like culture and tourism should go hand in hand, but the Member for Tunapuna apparently does not talk to the Minister of Tourism. They are supposed to be working together. It should be inextricably linked between the two. That is unfortunate because our country could be moving leaps and bounds. We have the possibilities here. We have a different environment in Tobago. No mass tourism—that

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was the UNC's plan—but niche tourism. I do not want to get into my other half hour before I come back. I want to stay on education and then move on, but they are all linked. That is the situation, in terms of the primary school environment and human development.

At every single budget, with every allocation as the money increased, it was for human development. There was YTEPP and the National Skills Development Programme. I do not know if you are aware of that. That was a UNC initiative that was continuing forward. Under the UNC, we had retraining for displaced workers. Do you know how many programmes we ran throughout this country to retrain people when there was the fallout from various sectors? It is all about diversification. It is about economic diversification. That was the thrust. The social service was a major part of that. Putting all your eggs in the energy basket, as the Leader of the Opposition said, is not advisable. We continue to say that.

I want to quote a term because it is important since we are dealing with finance. It is the inter-temporal sustainability of expenditure. I would not go into the intricacies of finance. I want you to understand when I talk about that, it is about keeping expenditure over a sustainable expenditure pattern. It is what the Leader of the Opposition talked about. You could reduce your price of oil, when you talk about US \$35 per barrel. Put more money into the fund and not shut it down like the Member for Diego East said: "You shut down this sector and that sector." That is not what the Leader of the Opposition was talking about. You would have the interest and \$20 billion by 2020 and also have your pattern of sustainable expenditure at that particular time. That is why I talked about the inter-temporal sustainable unit of expenditure. That is a matter I would not want to go into, in terms of finance. That is what we are looking at when we are dealing with expenditure patterns.

In that particular environment, we now go a bit further into the secondary school environment where we had computers entering the secondary schools. We had training and the foresight. You negotiated the World Bank loan and we give you credit for that, but you could not implement. We came and met a stagnant situation. There was dormancy in the Ministry of Education, with that particular loan. We negotiated the IDB loan for the expansion of the secondary sector. That is what is happening now. Again, you have failed. In 2007 that programme was supposed to have been completed. This year should have been the end of the IDB programme. I am reading the document and seeing that you are renegotiating for

another three years. Of course, in terms of your performance, it is so poor, you have to renegotiate with the bank.

We gave you the platform. Everything was in place. The architects were on board for the design of these schools. We built 20 secondary schools. That was part of the deshifting exercise. That was the plan, but you could not do it. The Minister of Education could not do it. The Prime Minister, in his budget statement, spoke about deshifting and that all junior secondary schools would become five-year schools. When? Would it happen in September? Are you aware if it would happen in September? You do not know. You make these airy-fairy statements. You must have information. You must ask questions. When you come to the House you make a statement not only for Members of Parliament but the national community. I do not want people to meet me in the street and say that our Prime Minister speaks untruth, when you are misled by information.

What are we seeing? We are seeing a secondary school environment. We are seeing a situation in our schools of the breakdown of discipline, moral and values and we are moving towards more and more youths being desperate and desolate and going into a life of crime, because of the situation in our schools. That is what is happening.

Mr. Prime Minister, I do not know if you are aware, but there is a programme which was started under the UNC. Apparently that is the catch line with all our programmes. That is the National Certificate of Secondary Education (NCSE). It is a pilot of level II and still a pilot of level II. Under the UNC, we had a pilot of level I. In 2007, level II should have been throughout all the schools. We do not know if it is a good thing. The National Certificate of Secondary Education, Part I was very difficult to implement because there must be teachers to correct these examinations. It was a difficult exercise.

There were a number of students writing the exam with no results because of the situation. I am not sure if it has been rectified. When I look at the Ministry of Education, in terms of its performance—the Auditor General reports that the Ministry of Education pays the most amount of money, in terms of errors. If they cannot get that right, how can they get this right, with respect to the NCSE? That is the situation. Not only are you failing, in terms of your infrastructure projects which the Prime Minister talked about: the special purpose companies and how great they are, we heard about the special purpose company in the Ministry of Education and the PNM Treasurer, Mr. Monteil. How great are these companies? Why have you gone into these companies?

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There is a major part of the IDB loan for secondary schools which was the strengthening of institutions and the Ministry of Education capability in all areas. Of course, the IDB consultant, Mr. Kenrick Burgess, would have said that is the way to go, marginalize all the public servants in that Ministry, form a company and move on like that. That is not how the loan was negotiated. The loan was negotiated based on the conditionalities of institutional strengthening in the Ministry of Education, not in the Education Facilities Management Company, a special unit. I have the information here. They are paying more than \$1 million to that unit under the Secondary Education Modernization Programme, for the implementation. You are seeing a company that has been given the allocation to do certain projects. I am sure. I see the Minister of Education already projecting in advance that schools would be closed for the month of September, because their repair programme is behind schedule.

My good friend from Nariva, at Elswick Presbyterian School I see they are doing pre-engineering classrooms. I do not know if they are going to fall from the sky. That is a new thing in the budget, pre-engineering classrooms with an allocation of \$5 million for that. What would be the design? Have they discussed that with the Members for Nariva and Naparima, in terms of pre-engineering classrooms?

The Minister of Education is busy doing analysis and coming up with statistics as to how many children are being disciplined and that in terms of the discipline problem it is decreasing. Why does the Minister of Education not do an analysis in terms of the number of children who are home?

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. A. Nanan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. How time flies when you are speaking the truth. That is the situation we are faced with. I have so much more to say on the education sector, in terms of the various sectors. I feel sorry for the youths of this nation, but it is only for a short while. I am sure the Prime Minister would call the date and relieve the country of its misery because we need a change. The education system has to be overhauled once again, to make it more adaptable to our society.

We have so many problems in all the sectors. I talked about the infrastructure projects. We have problems in the other areas, in terms of salary negotiations.

It is important to know how many students in this country are not in school. It is no fault of theirs. They are all willing to go to school, but we have situations of schools closing and shift systems in various primary schools. Something like that should never take place in this age.

I want to leave the education sector and move to the environment sector. I want to deal with one area in the environment sector. Hon. Prime Minister, you should be aware because you mentioned it in many of your budget presentations, that is the Beverage Container Bill. It has come up again in the 2008 budget. Where is it? Have you agreed to have the Beverage Container Bill, or is somebody stymieing this particular Bill somewhere? Why can we not have a recycling facility? It is a very simple exercise. It is done in Germany. I am sure Members of Parliament are aware of that in other countries. I know that side travels a lot. It can be done. The Government must consider a recycling facility for Trinidad and Tobago. If they did not, I am sure in the UNC manifesto, there would be a recycling facility. What we see in the document, in terms of SWMCOL, is that they are trying to identify a site in Caroni for the establishment of a biomedical waste collection facility.

8.15 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you must be aware that before they can establish any biomedical waste collection facility, there must be an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Now, I hope that they have not hoodwinked that toothless bulldog, the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) into having their way with them, but we are going to keep a very close eye on that particular exercise.

The other area is the pre-qualification exercise for the engagement of a consultant to undertake closure and rehabilitation of landfills. We heard the Member for Arima, Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment, projecting long before this particular statement was put forward in this document, about the closure of these landfills. There is no time frame. This is just a policy decision taken to close the landfills, but there must be some mechanisms in place. You cannot just close the landfills and have nothing in place.

Mr. Speaker, we are rich in terms of our oil and gas reserves, but there is something that we need to look to, according to the Ryder Scott Report, when oil and gas run out in 2012. These landfills that we have in Forres Park, but more in the Beetham, are very good sources of methane gas. In fact, in Montreal, they

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utilized an old landfill site to meet the electricity requirement of an entire town. So, in that particular landfill, we have the potential for the generation of electricity that must be considered.

Why are we not into solar power in this country? Why must we let little Barbados go ahead in terms of solar power? Why can we not have solar power to cutback on our electric grid? That is not pie in the sky. A solar generator is not something that is difficult to obtain. That is probably in almost every house in Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago cannot. It is not that we do not have the technology and the expertise, because I know of persons who have graduated from the University of the West Indies with that solar engineering capability. So, there is that pool or resources available in terms of solar energy panels and solar energy generators.

We need to look critically at the energy sector and we need to plan for 2012. We cannot just say that we are going to find the oil and gas.

Mr. Panday: Hope for the best, but prepare for the worst.

Dr. A. Nanan: Yes, hope for the best, but prepare for the worst, as the Member for Princes Town said. That is what we should be going towards, in terms of our planning process. We have solar energy potential. I am sure that is not the only potential available. There is wind power and we have many mountains that we can utilize in terms of trapping energy. We also have the oceans where you could trap on and obtain energy from the waves. We have all those possibilities. Maybe, the Ryder Scott Report is an eye-opener for this country, in terms of getting ourselves ready for alternative fuels.

If the United States of America and Brazil move like how they are moving, they will need no oil and gas. So, even if we have it in 2012, there will be no market for it. We need to move in that direction now! We need to move to solar; and we need alternative energy forms.

We heard about a combined cycle for the new power generation plants. Why did it take so long to have that? Why did it take so long to have a combined cycle power generation plant? Why do we have to wait in 2007? Why was this not done before? So, we are hearing all these things. Why did it take so long? That is the situation. This is a government by “vaps”. Do you know what I say about this budget? I called it nice from far but far from nice. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I called this budget. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to deal with another issue—and every year I deal with this matter in this Parliament—and that is the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation

Authority. It is either they want it or they do not want it. Get it right! You brought it in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 and it is here again for 2008. If you do not want it then say so. Do not just bring it because you have to put it in. It sounds good, but there are many intricacies involved.

You have a Wildlife Division in the Forestry Division that is responsible for some of these areas. You have a situation—I do not want to say that it is turf or territorial in terms of the wildlife. If an authority is set up, there could be persons on contract, and you could have secondment. It has to be worked out. If you want it, get the Director of Personnel Administration or the Chief Personnel Officer to work it out properly, but do not just bring it here and say that you are going to have three national parks.

In fact, if I recall, in 2002 there was one national park; in 2003, two national parks; and now in 2007, three national parks, but you do not have any national park wildlife and conservation authority, so you are putting the cart before the horse. That is the situation. That is what this Government always does. They are back to front.

I want to raise a matter here, because I do not want to run out of time and this has to do with the Emperor Valley Zoo. Now, the Minister of Tourism said that there is going to be an expansion project at the Emperor Valley Zoo.

Now, in terms of the arrangement, the Emperor Valley Zoo was started by the Zoological Society of Trinidad and Tobago of which I am a member. [*Desk thumping*] It was a group of persons who got together and said that they wanted to have this and they put it together. The land was leased for 99 years, if I recall. There is an arrangement there where there are workers who are daily-paid and workers under the Statutory Authorities Service Commission that has the responsibility for hiring, firing and disciplining.

The Zoological Society was doing a good job. There is a subvention that comes from the Government. Initially, they started with the zoo and, later on, the Government came in and gave a subvention. Now, according to the document, a consultant was hired for the expansion of the zoo. There is no problem with that. I see the need for that in an urban centre and, of course, they are looking for alternative sites for further expansion of the zoo. The issue here is: Why is the President of the Zoological Society being threatened? Why do you want to marginalize the Zoological Society and take over the whole running of the zoo? I am informed that the President of the Zoological Society is a UNC. You cannot operate like that. The man is a professional, and he does his job professionally.

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You should not try to undermine him and get him out, because you think he is a UNC supporter. That is the situation.

I have been told that the Government wants to bring a Bill to amend the Zoological Society Act to remove the Zoological Society from having any role and function in the Emperor Valley Zoo.

Mr. Panday: That is like the medical board.

Dr. A. Nanan: Exactly. They are undermining everything. They are power hungry. Get rid of them! That is the attitude. You want to marginalize the society and amend the Act and say that the Government will take over control throughout the society. They have been there for years. In fact, they have brought in consultants on their own for the expansion of the Zoo. So, I am pleading with you to reconsider this particular approach, where you want to move the Zoological Society from having anything to do with the Emperor Valley Zoo.

The other area in environment is the failed EMA. Every time I read the document it says that the EMA's Legal Department has redrafted the air pollution rules and is currently drafting the hazardous waste rules. Every year they are drafting the same thing; the air pollution rules and the hazardous waste rules. Of course, the Green Leaf Award is the highlight. Every time the "Green Leaf Award" appears in the document it is highlighted. Get it right! It is either you want it or you do not want it. I know that there is a strong lobby by the oil and gas companies against the air pollution rules. There is negotiation. Is it that you want sustainable development, preservation of the environment or these people to take over? Every year they are drafting these air pollution rules.

The other issue with respect to EMA has to do with the aluminium smelter. It is my information that they were clearing land in Chatham before they received the EMA permission. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know how many macaws and monkeys they have killed in La Brea. You know that and you have done nothing! I do not want to bring you into the debate. *[Interruption]* They have destroyed that. In fact, there are indigenous species that they have wiped out in that area. In that area in La Brea—with that particular kind of indigenous species and that diversification of species—it is unique. It was wiped out. You had the possibility there for great tourism potential, and it has been wiped out.

I am not even sure if you will get the rewards from the aluminium smelter, because what I am seeing is people are complaining for jobs and the jobs that you said that you are going to get, I am not sure of them. That is the situation. They have killed all the macaws. There were lovely macaws in the Vessigny Forrest.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I am talking about macaws, hear what is the highlight of the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment in a document in the *Public Sector Investment Programme*:

“Award of contracts to four community personnel for the monitoring of blue and gold macaws.”

Why are you putting in these little intricacies in a document as important as this? Did you give them binoculars for them to go and check them? If you did that, then put it here. Put something important here. There are so many other things that the ministry could put here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I feel sorry for the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment. That ministry should be the highlight of the Caribbean. We gave them everything. We gave them the Environmental Commission, a superior court of record to deal with the environment; a Caribbean court for the environment, but what have they been doing? The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment is not doing her job in terms of getting those persons to do their jobs.

So, that is the situation. Everything was in place. The vision was there; the platform was there. Look at this particular issue! The Minister of Tourism beats his chest. Under “Tourism” you have “Maracas Beach redesigned”. Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know that the UNC government came in 1996, it allocated \$8 million to repair the Maracas Beach Facility; and now you are going to redesign Maracas again. [*Desk thumping*] What is the issue?

I recall under TIDCO that there was a situation in Maracas and the sand was blowing in. They were constructing a wall along the seashore to prevent that from happening. What I am saying is that in the documents—I do not know if they read their documents—you would see what is happening in tourism. I am going to read it for you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know, in terms of human development, and tourism, there are backward and forward linkages that can be utilized that are not being utilized here? We heard about the yachting industry; the marine industry, from the Member for Diego Martin Central, in terms of diversification of the economy, but it can happen in tourism.

8.30 p.m.

You have agro-processing. The Leader of the Opposition and the political leader of the United National Congress talked about agro-processing and the possibilities. In fact, let me remind you, Mr. Deputy Speaker that under the

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United National Congress government there was a negotiation between the cruise ships and Angostura. And at that time in 1999, 15,000 cases of Angostura were being bought by the cruise ships. And you are talking about linkages, Minister, there is nothing with respect to the cruise ships. They are boasting in this document about two conferences coming up at the convention centre that they are going to open, one is the cruise conference, but there is that linkage that can be established; it is a great market.

The United National Congress has started the discussion with the cruise ships to supply fruits and vegetables; you could even supply condiments, because you know in terms of our condiments, and chardon benit, and the other areas that we can utilize and market via the cruise ships; that is another area. I talked about the backward and forward linkages with tourism. You see I have left environment and I am into tourism.

The PNM's vision for tourism is a hotel and a pool. Everywhere you go abroad, what are you all doing for tourism in Trinidad and Tobago? So their vision is a hotel and a pool. The United National Congress's vision was to have other tourism facilities, not only a hotel and a pool. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we had started tourism action committees in various constituencies, to reach out to the communities. When I was doing my research for this particular area, I was very shocked and astonished that the laws of Trinidad and Tobago that they gave us did not have the 1991 National Trust Act. I was surprised because there was an amendment to the National Trust Act that was made under the United National Congress government. The Member for Tunapuna, I continually say this, that that Ministry that has the responsibility to implement the National Trust Act must work with the tourism Minister. The two Acts go together; the Tourism Development Act and the National Trust Act can work together. You have the capability to identify and you have the money allocated there; you can allocate your money there.

Nelson Island: I saw some journalists going to Nelson Island and talking about when they were incarcerated. Great area, Nelson Island, a whole eco-system that is isolated out there; that is great potential. You know how many nations would have utilized those islands as a treasure, Gasperee Island; lovely little island. Those are the treasures of Trinidad and Tobago, but they are not being utilized. What am I seeing? Kayaking here and kayaking there.

In Toco—I am sorry the Member for Toco/Manzanilla is not here—great, great area. Some of the stones in Toco/Manzanilla are unbelievable. I recall when I was in Brazil there were these stones, once you cracked them you could see a

nice little design and you just polished them and use them as bookends. I am sure in our country we can do that too. I am sure we have the mineral deposits. Probably we are not looking for those things because we have oil and gas. But if we did not have oil and gas we would have to look at every nook and cranny to make money. Revenue, that is the main issue; diversification, but what are you going to diversify into? You have to identify the areas.

There was an incident in Barbados a day ago, where a house collapsed into a cave, so we have to be careful. The Member for San Fernando East is a geologist and I read on the Internet, Prime Minister, that you did not finish your course. I do not know how true it is. Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I read on the Internet that the Prime Minister did not finish his BSc in Geology, because he did not finish the last part of the project. *[Interruption]* I do not know, I just read that. If you want, you could go on TnT.com; that is the site that was praising the Leader of the Opposition every hour that she spoke.

Mr. Imbert: It is a UNC site.

Dr. A. Nanan: It is not a UNC site. There were a lot of PNM on that site trying to defend, but they were not doing a good job. I am saying those things are on the Internet. *[Interruption]* I am not sure so I am just making that point.

But back to the cave, because we need to know. We need to have archeologists; I am sure we have archeologists in this country who can identify those things and make sure those things are not a possibility in this country. If you are doing your work, Member for Tunapuna, in terms of the junior Minister of Culture, when you go about identifying your sites you will also identify caves. Like the Member for Nariva, Tamana caves. I do not know how many of you have been into Tamana caves.

Mr. Subhas: Beautiful!

Dr. A. Nanan: You have been to Tamana caves?

Mr. Panday: Yes.

Dr. A. Nanan: Well, I really admire you, because to go to Tamana caves you are going in with your feet first and you are going around a little corner on the wall and you are dropping off the ledge into bats, cockroaches, spiders; it is a lovely experience. But I want to assure you that when you are going there do not look up.

Mr. Manning: Why?

Dr. A. Nanan: Because you have bat droppings and bat urine coming down. Do not ever look up in a cave. But that is a beautiful environment. It is untouched, but it is a treasure. I find what you should do is have treasures of Trinidad and Tobago. You do not have to have a register, you just do that on your own. Ask for the information and we will give it to you from the various constituencies. Treasures of Trinidad and Tobago, and list them. Help out the National Trust; let them have a register. We will give them that information. Build your register, allocate your money. In this document, every year what is that Tourism Development Company doing? Signage, signage, signage. Every time they put up signs in this country people pull them down. They are forever putting signs in the Northern Range, but get it done right.

Mr. Hinds: You should put a sign on you marked "Finished".

Dr. A. Nanan: Laventille East/Morvant, you have a beautiful area there; you have the best view in the country, in terms of when you stand on the Laventille hills. You could market that. Market your views.

Members for Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin East and Diego Martin West, from Chaguaramus you could see straight across to the Diego Martin Valley. That is another view that you can utilize. Before I forget, I think at some time later on in the morning there is going to be an eclipse of the moon.

Hon. Member: Midnight.

Dr. A. Nanan: Midnight? Yes, midnight. In fact, that was another thing you could actually market, Mr. Speaker. You laugh at that. Let me tell you something, when I was in Mexico they were giving out—this was the eclipse of the sun—these pieces of glass so you could actually look at the eclipse.

Mr. Imbert: You could look at the world with glasses.

Dr. A. Nanan: Do not be ridiculous. That is the situation; those are marketing opportunities and your mother is involved in that and you are pooh-poohing the whole idea. [*Crosstalk*] That situation is marketable and branding. It is about branding and marketing opportunities. Those are available.

Why should Dominica market eco-tourism and we cannot do the same here? It is unfortunate; I said it many times with respect to our beautiful country. It is true that if you go on the websites you would see a crime-ridden country; you would see less people coming in here; more people leaving.

Hon. Member: That is not true.

Dr. A. Nanan: Of course, go on the websites.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please allow the Member.

Dr. A. Nanan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 200,000 arrivals under PNM; 1999/2000 under UNC, 400,000 arrivals. I do not know if the Member for Tunapuna—who is making mischief this evening— [*Laughter*] is aware that was it was supposed to be—if I recall, 8,000 rooms was the cut-off point with respect to tourism. In 1995 there were 2,450 rooms; in 2000, there were 5,000 rooms. The Minister of Tourism came and talked about various projects—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two minutes.

Dr. A. Nanan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—to increase the room capacity and we gave the facility. What is very striking, I saw an advertisement in the newspaper about a taxi driver saying that he is so happy under the PNM and the Tourism Development Company; he has been able to upgrade his car twice. But it was supposed to be in 2007; that Act was passed in 2000. Why is it that in Barbados their taxis are Mercedes Benzes? Look at the difference in fleet. Why we cannot have that kind of level—and we gave the incentives. The incentives were given—

Mr. Imbert: You are telling untruths.

Dr. A. Nanan: I am not telling untruths. The incentives were given and there are Mercedes Benz taxis in Barbados; go and check. You are the Minister of Works and Transport, you should know.

Look at little Barbados and compare us with Barbados, you will see how they have been able—and I feel that is because Barbados did not have the oil and gas that we have and they were forced to make those policy decisions. And I want the Government to go back. Prime Minister, you still have the opportunity when you reply to make a difference in this country. It might be your last stand but do it, Mr. Prime Minister.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jarrette Narine): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: Your swansong.

Hon. J. Narine: I certainly can say that I am going to be debating in the last budget debate in my political career. [*Desk thumping*] But you have Members on that side who do not know when to say no.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What side?

Hon. J. Narine: On your side.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: And on your side.

Hon. J. Narine: Who do not know when to say anything, you understand. [*Laughter*] They keep babbling all over the place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure this afternoon to enter this debate on a Bill entitled An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on September 30, 2008.

The first thing I would like to address in this debate is the reply from the Member for Siparia. I recall last Monday, when the budget was read by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance—and may I take this opportunity to congratulate him and his staff at the Ministry of Finance for giving us a budget that is a continuation of Vision 2020, certainly we will get there. I may not be here but. I am certain that with the PNM in office, we are certain to get to full world class status by the year 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

You would recall that the Member for Siparia could not find the \$1.2 billion in the budget that the Prime Minister spoke about. After all these years in Parliament, I cannot understand why it is that you still cannot read the documents. I am saying the recurrent in the expenditure was \$525,833,417; development programme consolidated funds—certainly you will sit and listen to where the money is, Member for Siparia—\$148,250,000; development programme (IDF), \$57 million; development funds, Caroni—and that is to develop Caroni lands—\$350 million. Of course it is under EMDC because they are the ones that are disbursing the funding under there, but it belongs to the agricultural sector.

If we spend \$350 million to continue the development of the two-acre plots in Caroni, to build bridges, drains, roadways, to plot the lands, which has been already done, that is the surveys and all that, then put in irrigation systems, certainly that money will be spent in agriculture, because that is going to bring food to Trinidad and Tobago.

8.45 p.m.

Land acquisition, \$40 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we went into office and met a backlog of land acquisition. This Government has cleared up the persons and according to the Act, they were supposed to pay 80 per cent. When you acquire lands you need to pay 80 per cent, the next 20 per cent will be paid when

you come to Parliament with section 5. Once you do sections 3 and 4, you have to pay that. The 20 per cent will have a 9 per cent interest, so that \$40 million and let me say this, normally is this the budgetary allocation for a six-month, we have mid-term review. We also have Cabinet, where you can go and approach Cabinet to get additional funding. So to say that we have not been spending money in agriculture, I will come to that further down.

Agricultural Development Bank, Mr. Speaker, \$75 million. Statutory boards, that is, the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago, the Cocoa and Coffee and Industry Board and NAMDEVCO, \$34.426 million.

Mr. Speaker, a total of \$1.240 billion, I just leave the rest out. But I am saying to the Member for Siparia, after so long in Parliament and you cannot get those figures out of the documents, which is very simple to do and make sure that what the Prime Minister said was right. The Prime Minister once said \$1.2 billion was rounding off the figures, it is over that. And including there, we are still to find the area where the Livestock and Livestock Product Board has money into the budget so that will add to that.

So when this Government assumed office in the year 2001, one of our key goals was to achieve a satisfactory level of national food security. This is a major policy goal of our Vision 2020 plan. Our mission is to make available an adequate supply of good quality and safe food affordable prices for all our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, it is now public knowledge that this Government inherited a pumpkin and bhagi agriculture sector. The agriculture sector abandoned by the previous regime—and I notice that they have abandoned the Parliament also—and was therefore in an undeveloped, unproductive state. As a consequence, this Government was faced with a number of serious challenges in an effort to revitalize and modernize the domestic agricultural sector. Some of the more serious challenges that we encountered in our effort to transform the agricultural sector, included:

1. inadequate and deteriorating agricultural infrastructure, including access roads, bridges, drains and irrigation channels;
2. high incidents of praedial larceny which is still relevant today, which discourages investment in agriculture;
3. inadequate access to agricultural lands and poor land tenure arrangements;
4. limited financing and inadequate levels of new investment in agriculture;
5. an ageing farmer population and the lack of youth involvement in agriculture production;

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6. an outdated and inefficient agricultural health and food safety system,
7. inadequate levels of research and development in agriculture;
8. limited training programmes to upgrade agriculture skills and produce quality human resource within the sector;
9. low levels of technology utilized in the agricultural sector; and
10. the promotion of non-viable institutions, such as Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC government spent their term in office quarrelling and fighting among themselves to the detriment of the agricultural sector. Our first task in 2002 was therefore aimed at revitalizing and rejuvenating the agriculture sector, so that local food production can contribute more significantly to the domestic food supply. This Government recognized that the platform for agriculture development and increased food production was seriously compromised by the previous six years of neglect. Over the last five years, this Government has set about the task of revitalizing and modernizing and redeveloping the agricultural sector. Our objectives in this regard were to:

- improve agricultural production, thus increasing the domestic food supply;
- to ensure that locally produced foods were affordable to consumers;
- to improve the food security of the citizens; and
- improve the food sovereignty of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, unlike other industries, investments in agriculture have a considerable time lag or gestation period as we refer to. That is to say, that we have to wait quite long before we could obtain returns from our agricultural investments. An example, if you put a cocoa plant into the earth this year, you have to wait six years to even get a cocoa pod and that plant. So that the gestation period is quite long and it varies from crop to crop. Of course, we have short term crops. With over \$1 billion allocated to the sector, it is very obvious that this Government has placed agriculture at the centre of our national development agenda.

We have been consistent in pursuing this agenda by investing significantly in agriculture research and development, the land distribution programme and development and maintenance of agriculture infrastructure. This Government has also given priority to the introduction of new and advanced technology in agriculture, as well as to improving the skills of new and existing farmers.

We have also taken steps to significantly increase the acreage of land under productive agriculture; improve agriculture marketing infrastructure and increase the involvement of youth in agriculture. This Government has implemented a number of initiatives aimed at making food more available to the population at affordable prices.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to outline a few specific achievements of this Government in its effort to revitalize and modernize the agricultural sector. Some of their achievements are as follows:

1. Government has taken steps to increase the acreage of agricultural lands available for cultivation, including:
 - processing more than 1,000 leases comprising over 6,000 acres of farm lands;
 - allocating 4,000 acres of Caroni rice lands to rice cultivation;
 - developing over 18,000 acres of Caroni lands for former Caroni workers, 522 are currently under cultivation.
 - the Agricultural Access Roads Programme has made available over 41,000 acres for cultivation;
 - at Todd's Road, 25—50 acres citrus farms were developed and allocated;

At this present time, we are putting the infrastructure in.

- at La Gloria, 27—50 acres citrus farms were prepared for allocation; and

What I am saying is that it will be soon advertised that these areas at La Gloria were talking about citrus groves that Caroni left. These are the citrus groves that the Government decided that we will put in the infrastructure, divide the land, not into small parcels, but 50-acre parcels, so that it can become viable for someone to do citrus farming to mix farming in those areas. So very soon La Gloria will be there; it is already surveyed that the infrastructure has started.

- we initiated the development of 15 large farms, totalling 2,227 acres.

I will come back to those items.

2. Government has significantly improved the agriculture infrastructure during the last six years:
 - more than 262 kilometres of agricultural access roads;

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And when you look at the 262 kilometres that we have done, it is 140 roads in agriculture we are talking about.

This was constructed and many more kilometres were refurbished and maintained. These access roads benefitted over 4,200 farmers and impacted on more than 41,000 acres of agricultural lands.

During the last six years, Government invested heavily in water management and flood control systems, as well as drainage and irrigation systems,

- over 306 farm ponds were constructed, upgraded or expanded;
- more than 141 sluice gates were constructed or repaired;
- in addition, we did 60 kilometres scores of drain, age and irrigation channels,
- 460 cylinder crossing, constructed and repaired;
- 22 bridges;
- farmers crossing—230;
- box culverts 75 were constructed and refurbished;
- Depot Road, we installed three pumps which is in Longdenville;
- we also installed the Trinidad Sluice Gate in the Oropouche Lagoon;

Where two kilometres of embankment also was built;

- in the Plum Mitan area, we refurbished three pumps that was there and we have now installed a further three irrigation pumps.

So that in the dry season, you can take water from the channels pump in for the farmers and in the rainy season, pumps go off automatic when it is flooded and it clears the lands for them. That will create the situation where they would not be flooded out when they are not. There in the night—automatic pumps;

This infrastructure benefitted thousand of farmers and opened up hundreds of acres of farm land for active farming.

Mr. Speaker, training. The extension of the training and services division of the Ministry, over these few years that we are in office, we had 1,800 training sessions and out of those 1,800 training sessions, you would see like every month there is an advertisement as to where these programmes are and they are all over

the country and we bring people into our stations to be trained by the technical officers; 15,577 persons were trained during this period. And let me say, we have found that the new farmers will come to centres, like Centeno, Rio Claro, Craignish, Point Fortin, wheresoever, Penal.

9.00 p.m.

What has been happening is that our real farmers stay in the fields with their crops, so we have started field schools. Our officers go, develop a plot of land and actually do the physical work so that the farmers there would learn about the new technologies, seedlings and how to do them. I visited Rodney Road recently and they were doing a plot there. The farmers came in from Preysal and all over to be trained on the spot, in the physical training that is.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has also succeeded in encouraging increased involvement of the youth population in agriculture. You would realize that the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA) has been very successful. I will indicate to you just how successful in a while. We developed and implemented YAPA, which aimed to attract young people into agriculture. YAPA ensures the provision of technical knowledge, specialized training as well as skilled development in farming. Trainees are offered financial support and graduates have access to agricultural land; that is the third phase. We are now getting off the ground with the third phase. To date, more than 7,148 trainees have participated in this programme.

In YAPA 7,140 persons were trained in phase one; in phase two, 335 persons were trained; and that was the nine-month programme where we train them in different things. The training by theory is introduction of good agricultural practices; marketing; post-harvest handling; grow box; integrated pest management incentives, how to use fertilizers; pest and disease and the requirements for growth of a plant.

On the practical side of it, we have taught our students over that nine-month period: grow box; vegetable production; hydroponics; plant propagation, that is budding, grafting, layering and cuttings; land preparation; weed control; pest and disease control, for example, spraying; harvesting and marketing. They themselves carry the goods to market and whatever they sell them for they are allowed to keep the funding in a pool. Some of them went to the Unit Trust in Sangre Grande recently. The graduation exercise at Sangre Grande proved very successful, in that a group of students was able to deposit \$46,000 within a six-month period, and that was part-time farming, because they were going to class and growing their crops outside. They went to the Sangre Grande market and sold their own crops. So the \$46,000 was a start when they were leaving.

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We also offer them on graduation some tools and some other incentives that they could take home with them and start production. They plant crops like vegetables from seeds; pumpkins; cuttings, example cassava and sweet potato harvesting; grading of crops, which is very important for sale; planting materials and sowing seeds; livestock production; poultry feeding and cleaning of pens.

In some areas, like Craignish, we have introduced rabbit rearing. So they are now into rabbit rearing and they are quite happy with that. Down at Penal, a crop of young people there have sold some sheep, goats and also rabbits. They are making much more money than the Sangre Grande instance I told you about, because that was mainly short crops.

The current information that I have in tracing the programme is that the number of graduates involved in the farm business from the 7,140, is 816. The YAPA graduates who obtained jobs in private enterprise, 958. Concerning Entry into the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF), the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), 18 persons left YAPA and entered these institutions. They returned to school and evening classes. We have traced 112 students from YAPA, and 370 of those have started their own business. [*Desk thumping*] So definitely you can see that YAPA has been successful.

Recently I had the opportunity to visit Cunaripo where I met one Miss Dass. I am certain that the MP for Nariva knows the Dass family. While she was on YAPA, her father got into an accident and had his both legs broken. It was devastating for her, because she was just completing the programme. She started off with one grow box and within a short period of time, when I got there last month, that young lady had 21 grow boxes. She is marketing her own produce at the Sangre Grande Market. She minds her family up to this point in time, because her father was not able to do so after the accident.

During the past six years, this Government has significantly increased financial investments in the agricultural sector. During the time of the previous administration, government's investments in agriculture were mainly in the form of subventions to Caroni. I think at one time I dealt with that, but it bears repeating. They gave money to agriculture, but all of it went to bail out Caroni and its debts and the rest went to the farming population; 30,000 farmers at that time in Trinidad, got nothing. The money just went to Caroni. Government support for Caroni from 1995 to 2001, was at the expense of the rest of the agricultural sector. In 1993, government wrote off \$2 billion in debt for Caroni. By 2003, Caroni created a further debt of over \$5 billion.

We have people yapping all over the place and saying that they are going to restructure Caroni. It is only the PNM that can restructure Caroni. The PNM has spent about \$7 billion to restructure Caroni. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I will give further information. Caroni's subvention, the deficit recorded between 1996 and 2003, was as follows: 1996/1997, \$175 million; 1998, \$246 million; 1999, \$305 million; 2000, \$349 million; 2001, \$367 million; 2002, \$480 million; by 2003 it was \$597 million. One would understand that Caroni just could not work.

Then the European Union decided that within a three-year period sugar will not be subsidized any longer and we lost 39 per cent. At the time when the PNM took that decision, it was an excellent decision. The Prime Minister, Cabinet and the Members of Parliament of the PNM made sure that there was a soft landing for the workers. They got up to 50 per cent enhanced payment, because it was a VSEP programme. They were allowed a house spot, which is now costing about \$20,000 for a lot of land with all the infrastructure in: underground electrical cables; everything is underground in modern areas like Joyce Road and Edinburgh. They are better off than where I live. We paid fantastic amounts of money for lands in my area in Samaroo Village in the back of Arima actually.

Let me say what has happened to the Caroni agriculture land project, since a lot of persons have been going around saying that they want to restructure. By the time the PNM gets back into office, they would have stopped talking, but they want to recall the persons who have been treated so good. That was their base support, which is no longer.

You have 18,561 acres of agricultural lands identified for distribution to the ex-employees of Caroni. We identified 17 areas of good agricultural land. In Trinidad, we grade land from one to seven. Caroni has no grade one lands, so two, three and four are what we use. Five, six and seven are good lands, but you need to upgrade them and put in the various chemicals to get it back on stream, because you would recall mainly sugarcane was grown in those areas. They fed those sugar cane areas with urea, so as the old people say, "We sour de soil". It is resting now and it can come back into agricultural production very soon.

At present agricultural leases are being done and these lands are being surveyed and subdivided into 7,773 parcels. I heard someone on television last night saying that nobody got any land. He was just fooling the rest of Trinidad and Tobago. The people who worked in Caroni are quite aware that they have already taken the decision; some have already paid money and they are already shown the agricultural plots, but that would not happen overnight.

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The same Opposition would have come here, if we had said, "This is your plot", without any infrastructure, and tell us that we just gave them lands that they could not develop, because there would be no roads, no drainage, no irrigation systems or anything. Things will not happen overnight. We have been working. The lands have been divided into 30 sites for the conduct of the infrastructure, that is, the provision of roads and drains; upgrading of 185 kilometres of existing roadways—and those were the tasker roadways as we know them—we have to do 354 kilometres of new roads. We have to do 569 kilometres of drains; 891 culverts; 97 farm gates. The infrastructure work on one site has been completed, that is Jerningham, which is 686 acres. Persons have already started occupying.

By October this year, infrastructure works on five additional sites will be completed, namely, Orange Grove, which is about 90 per cent completed, 250 acres; Waterloo, 1250 acres; Felicity, one, 800 acres; La Gloria, 741 acres; Exchange, 1A, 1,295 acres. At present, the infrastructure works in the programme on 12 additional sites, tenders invited for four sites, contract negotiations in progress for two sites and tender documents being prepared for six. All infrastructure works will be completed by May of 2008.

At this point in time, I am happy to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we are well on our way to give the former workers of Caroni their two-acre plots. The total cost of developing the 18,561 acres is \$590 million. Yet you hear them say that we are not spending any money in agriculture. It is expensive now to put down roadways, drains and irrigation systems, plus the surveying that was done. To date, we have spent \$127 million.

I will like to deal with a matter. Yesterday I heard a dying politician yapping, talking about Caroni and their livestock herd, the cattle, buffalypso, goat and sheep. When we came into office, the former government under their watch got brucellosis in Trinidad. It is a disease in buffalypso and cattle. We had to remove all the buffalypso that he spoke about when he asked, "Where it gone"? "It gone to Mora Valley." That was why he fired the Minister of Agriculture, because he did nothing about it.

What should have happen at the time was that testing should have been done and those animals should have been culled. Another thing with brucellosis is that at Mount Jallo where they were, they had to take five years of sunlight to get rid of the brucellosis. We are in a position to say safely that we have saved the animals and we have taken some of the best animals up to the livestock station for breeding and getting semen.

Brucellosis was for the cattle and the buffalypso. For the goat and sheep, Johnne's came into this country under your watch, under Mr. Reeza Mohammed. The technical people at the Ministry advised him that they should cull all the infected animals, because Johnne's is a disease of such that the animals take in feed and just pass it out. They get smaller and smaller and then they suddenly die.

9.15 p.m.

But while there are large animals, it is safe to eat the meat once it is well cooked, but they did not do it. What has happened is that the breeding stock that Centeno supplied to farmers—at that time they sold rams and so on and it did not happen for four years and it is only about two years ago we were able to put the disease-free animals back on the market so that farmers can purchase them. I can say that farmers are very satisfied that they can purchase goat and sheep. They can also purchase cattle and buffalypso.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that the Prime Minister indicated that Mon Jaloux—it is about five or six years now since we removed the animals so it is now tested and free from the brusilosis and at the last Prices Committee consultation we promised the small ruminant farmers of Trinidad and Tobago that 427 acres of land would be given to them when they come up with a proper business plan, because we need to subdivide the area before giving it out to the farmers.

Between 2002 and 2007 this Government—and remember 2002 was a UNC budget—has invested the respective sums in the agricultural sector: 2002, \$250 million; 2003, \$392 million; 2004, \$421 million; 2005, \$469 million; 2006, \$583 million and this year, \$750 million for development.

The proposed allocation for agriculture in fiscal 2008, over \$1.2 billion, this represents a 480 per cent increase over 2002. So we have increased our funding for development in agriculture by 480 per cent yet people are trying to fool people. The con artistes are out there because this is an election year. So they will try to convince people that we have done nothing, but we have spent more than 480 per cent in the agricultural sector. Is that not a committed Government to the agricultural sector? As I have said, agriculture is a gestation period, and it will take a while to get off the ground.

Mr. Dookeran: I was just wondering if you wish to comment on the fact that expenditure may be rising, but production may be falling overall.

Hon. J. Narine: I am happy that you have raised that question because I am going to point out some of those things. Yes, production in certain areas is falling

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and it is rising in other areas. The input for agriculture is our problem in that fertilizers, pesticides and all these things have risen and we need to go into organic production, which we will come to. When we go into organic production, I may not be here but I am certainly going to reap the benefits of it in Trinidad and Tobago.

Additional money allocated to the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB), over \$75 million for financing agricultural development by private farmers. You will recall last year we had given the ADB an additional \$30 million which was distributed to some 300-odd farmers who got small loans and were able to do their business.

It is interesting to note that the former administration had planned to close the ADB, which is now history because we have saved and restructured it and it is now doing an excellent job. The reason for saving the ADB is that 97 per cent of the loans given to agriculture come from there and I can tell you we started off with something like 12 per cent and right now we are down to 6 per cent and the Prime Minister has appealed that if they are to get additional money, then it must come down further. So I am hoping that next year loans to the agricultural sector would be about 4 per cent from the ADB.

The other 3 per cent are from the commercial banks and the land value has to be twice the amount for which you have applied. Many times agricultural projects are not given loans through the commercial banks. At one time Royal Bank did it with a former worker from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, Mr. Sam Bharat who was working with the bank and who had made a plan of action for the bank as to how to lend, who to lend and for what, because agriculture is a risk. You all know that, and it is difficult for a poor man to put down his crops and lose them through praedial larceny or diseases. The ministry has been helping them you know, but they go about saying they get \$12 and so forth. They get \$12 because they only had two plants.

We improved agriculture and training in agriculture. This Government embarked on the initiative to encourage improved education and training in the agricultural sector. This was intended to produce farmers who are capable of working smarter by using improved technologies in agricultural production and activities.

Mr. Speaker, in this regard, more than 1,800 farmers were trained in the modern aspects of crop and livestock production as well as new agricultural production systems and under YAPA over 7,000 students were trained.

We also trained about 700 persons in fisheries technology at Carenage. Government also embarked on an aggressive agricultural research and development programme, which was meant to introduce and develop new and improved technologies within the agricultural sector.

In 2007, more than \$10 million was invested in agriculture research and development in an effort to modernize agriculture by developing and introducing new technologies. Believe it or not, when we came, Centeno was really dilapidated. I was sorry for the Director, Ms. Persad. She has dedicated her life to that area. There was no equipment, the roofs were leaking, the buildings were dilapidated and over the last five years we have refurbished that place.

We have also refurbished the library which serves the students from ECIAF and students from all the schools of Trinidad and Tobago visit that library to get knowledge and I am really proud of that section.

Significant improvements have been made to the National Agricultural Health and Food Safety System (NAHFSA). Government promoted increased production of cheaper food as well as good quality and safe food. It also developed the HACCP-ready fishing facilities.

We promoted a system of good agricultural practices and we are educating the population about health and food safety issues. We have successfully introduced the grow box development programme. This initiative was introduced by Government to increase the supply of cheaper, healthier foods to the population.

Over the last five years, more than 1,000 householders have been trained in grow box technology and grow boxes were established. Before grow boxes were introduced, we trained the people, for example, some people from Belmont and Laventille were taught to put grow box on concrete and produce enough food like chive, lettuce, tomatoes and so forth.

On this occasion we provided a starter box for them. We give them the grow box free. We are also giving them plants and showing them the technology and they can expand from there if they need to do so. They can grow their own supplies and not have to go to the market.

Government expanded the Agricultural Incentive Programme (AIP). This was introduced to encourage increased agricultural production, increase profitability, and reduce the production cost to the farmer as well as the price of food to consumers.

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Over the last five years, more than 14,500 applications were processed and approved for payment, and more than \$85 million were paid out under the Agricultural Incentive Programme.

A wide range of commodities as well as activities are covered by this programme including agricultural equipment, machinery, land preparation, milk, citrus, cocoa, coffee, to name a few. The programme was recently reviewed with the aim of increasing benefits to farmers. That incentive programme has not been updated for a number of years now, so we have brought it to a state where we can increase and where there were shade houses—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Narine: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues in the House. We implemented an improved agricultural marketing system, because it is a critical link in making adequate and affordable food available to the population.

Government's objective was to create a more direct link between the farmers and consumers, in so doing Namdevco was restructured and retooled to achieve this objective. Several fish markets including the Port of Spain fish market were restructured and upgraded to HACCP food safety standards.

A packing house was constructed at Piarco to facilitate the grading, preparation and packaging of agricultural commodities; several farmers markets as well as municipal markets were strategically established to aid direct sales to the consumers. They are doing well and the farmers are getting more money for their products.

Steps were taken to improve the market information by establishing the *Greenvine Newsletter*, from Namdevco, publishing marketing price watch information, establishing a national agriculture market information system.

Namdevco is only now delivering on its mandate and I can tell you people who are talking all over the place—a certain person was talking about agriculture and he was the Chairman of Namdevco for six years, he was also the Chairman of the Agricultural Society and nothing was done.

I can tell you that when the resignation letter went into the agricultural society and that person expected to get the approval to continue in office, she was told: Thank you very much, take your leave, we do not need you.

9.30 p.m.

They know much about agriculture now, but we kept them—six years in that area. We started work on the development of large farms and there is a lot of “ol’ talk” going on about large farms. I can tell you that today the Request for Proposals is in the newspaper. They are talking about people coming from outside to do agriculture here. If our people are interested in agriculture, there is a Request for Proposal in today’s newspaper from the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited, better known as RuDeCoTT. They have advertised: Caroni—100 acres for one farm; Edinburgh, three farms, 354 acres; Jerningham, one farm, 108 acres; La Gloria, 364 acres, two farms; Orange Grove, 100 acres; Picton, 1,200 acres for five farms.

They have identified root crops and vegetables, and so on. There is also a date of closure for the proposals, and so on. And I can tell you that is local. We are also advertising regionally and in some cases like India and China. When Minister Valley visited recently they had an interest to come and do the modern type of agriculture, where you can use less land and produce more. My colleague from Naparima, Mr. Saheed Baksh, has been a farmer all his life—cane farmer—and he decided to divest and he took the advice of the Ministry’s technical people. He now has a shade house. Of course, the shade house is very expensive. It is about \$120,000, but you only need one worker and you could get tenfold products in that small area.

So what we have been doing is, in our new incentive programme we are going to introduce where other persons can get grow boxes and the new technology would be made available to our people. Mr. Baksh, the brother of MP for Naparima, told me that he is willing to put down about five or six more cover houses like that. That is what we talk about when we talk about technology in agriculture and that to increase production the farmer must be a smarter farmer. The farmer must not be a family farm farmer who is working otherwise; work on weekends. The family farms, the small parcels, will not make money, so we need to mix the large farms with the small farms. Nobody is going to fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Farms are available to the people of Trinidad and Tobago once you have the wherewithal.

I am certain that we are going to give priority to our farmers with these large farms. They talk and give so much bad information about the Cubans coming here. Yes, we said the best lands were at Tucker Valley. The CADP, which is the Chaguaramas Agricultural Development Programme that we have, was there because there was a buffer zone and we were producing materials for the farming

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population in Trinidad and Tobago. As a matter of fact, last year they did over 15,000 kilograms of various types of seeds. They are now planting material for farmers. The Member for Chaguanas said when he went there he only saw three seeds. That is not true. I can take you, if you would like to go next week. We had produced over 15,000 kilograms of seeds. You were talking about the seed centre at Chaguaramas. You recall that? So that the false information that you gave here, it is like what they are saying about the Cubans. The Cubans are bringing technical advice. Our people are going to be working there and they are going to get the knowledge and impart that knowledge to other farmers in Trinidad and Tobago. So why can we not bring them here to teach us what they know about organic agriculture? It is to our benefit you are talking about.

So when we look at these things, we know it is propaganda; we know it is an election year. I have never heard the Member for St. Joseph—I thought I had a microphone in my voice; probably he installed one last week. He was very heavy today. His voice was kicking and you know this is the time for that, where you could give false information last night and night before all over Trinidad about large farms; you are going to put the small people out of business. Why do you think we started the agro-processing industry in Trinidad and Tobago? And they have been doing quite well. It is because the large farms are going to do agro-processing for export and when we have a shortage in the local market we will release it.

When we talk about importing from other countries, what do you think we are doing? Yes, we are sourcing cheap food, but we are not going to put our small farmers out of business. When we anticipate that there is going to be a shortfall in any crop, say tomatoes, then you will source that. The Government will bring some, but let me say this. The private enterprises are very interested in that. I have visited Costa Rica. They have rainfall all year round. They do not have to do any irrigation system and they produce. They have different soil types. At one point they are about 5,000 feet above sea level, so you understand what is happening there. As you go up the hillside you see the conifers coming in—sorry about that—the pine trees. I am accustomed to these things. I worked in agriculture for 41 years before I became the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

So when people go on television and say they do not know; Jarette just have a couple common fowl in his yard. I inherited lands from my grandparents. The Member for Nariva will tell you that—acres of lands in Cumuto which I cannot work.

Mr. Manning: How much fowl you have?

Hon. J. Narine: I enjoy the common fowl because I do not have to spray my yard, Sir. They eat out all the insects. We do not eat the fowls. So I do not have to use chemicals in my property. Of course, if that time should come and we have a threat of Avian Influenza, I will have to get rid of them, because the Minister at that time will have to send an order out to either get rid of those chicks that you have let loose in your yard, or house them. I love my common fowls and they run to me in the morning, because as soon as the door is opened, they know that feed is coming. So I have some fun in the morning very early.

We started work on those large development farms and we have La Gloria, Mon Jaloux, as the Prime Minister declared. When the small ruminants people came and said that they were going to compete against large farms, the Prime Minister, because he is a caring man and because he is going to be the next Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, told them that the 427 acres will not be advertised, and it is not advertised. If you look at today's newspapers, Mon Jaloux is out. We took it away because the Prime Minister was very serious about giving the small ruminants people the farms. They got it; and they will get it. Once they bring a proper proposal they will get Mon Jaloux and it is going to be further divided.

We are bringing in new varieties. At this point in time we were supposed to bring some new breeds from the United Kingdom, but you would recall that there was a foot-and-mouth outbreak, so we have to put it on hold, because it is not safe right now to bring those animals.

Picton Estate—five farms for livestock, tree crops and root crops; Jerningham, Edinburgh and Orange Grove. The project for the 15 large farms was introduced at the mid-year PSIP with funding of \$98 million from the IDF. That \$98 million is to put infrastructure to Farmgate. Certainly, if we had to put our small ruminant farmers at Mon Jaloux, we will have to make infrastructure available to them: water, electricity, roads, drains. Everything has to be in place so that they can produce. Then when they do not produce, like the way Wallerfield was, the Government will have to deal with them. You understand?

In giving the small farmers those plots, we must have some conditionalities. You must produce. Because we have given out lands before; they never produced; all of a sudden you see something coming for change of use. They want to build houses and all that. I have never entertained that, and I will tell you something. This Government has taken the worst lands in Trinidad and the worst lands in

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Caroni to put houses. We need houses. There is competing interest for land. I cannot stand there as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and say there is no land for people who want to build a house. Of course, you have to house your people. If you are a caring government you will build the 26,000 houses that we have built over the last five years. [*Desk thumping*]

The large farms are to address the production of the commodities identified by the National Agri-business Programme, including root crops, vegetables, tilapia. The tilapia farmers and rabbits have gotten to the ministerial business committee. Tilapia, in this year, to start off, they got about \$1.3 million and the committee, including the President and his tilapia association, Mr. Bharath, have been involved—and they are working on a programme—they have a consultant down here—and very soon you will see the improvements in tilapia production.

Government implemented the National Agri-business Development Programme. During fiscal year 2007, Government launched the National Agri-business Programme with an investment of over \$56 million. The TTABA is now off the ground. TTABA has an office. TTABA has started producing already. They are doing agro-processing. There was a glut on the market recently. I do not know if those who speak about agriculture would realize, there was a glut of hot peppers. They had to buy out the excess. They have bagged it. They are out for export. They are holding it for the local market so that when the rain damages the other crops you would still have hot peppers here that you can produce and you do not have to import. As a matter of fact, our hot peppers sell at the New York terminal, at the Miami terminal and up in Canada at higher prices than in the Latin American countries or even Jamaica. The Greenvine document will show you that.

So we have done a lot. This programme has targeted to bring 20,000 acres of land into production, including 14,000 acres to be farmed by former Caroni workers. The programme is expected to increase the supply of locally grown foods and reduce the price to the consumer; increase the shelf life and availability of local foods. It is also to restructure the small farming community in highly organized industries; provide efficient marketing arrangements for small, medium and large farmers; initiate the development of a viable agro-processing industry.

The Government has pursued several other initiatives in order to develop the agricultural sector; ensured increased food production and reduced food process to the consumers. I can say at this point in time, the ministerial committee under the chairmanship of my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, we have worked hard since last year and we have seen the progress that we have made in getting all the farmers and the associations to come in and talk to us. Mr. Valley

has done an excellent job. We have been able to stabilize those prices. It is only that farmers are a bit scared. When NAMDEVCO tells them: “Well, look, you should plant this because in the next four months you can harvest and there will be a shortfall in that commodity production and you will make the money for it,” they want to plant what they want.

Very soon farmers would realize that if they follow the advice coming from NAMDEVCO and from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, they will survive because agriculture is a business; agriculture is not something you do part-time. It is a full-time job and you can make money with agriculture.

The Government has pursued several other initiatives in order to develop the agricultural sector, including:

- Conducted the agricultural census in 2004;
- Established and upgraded 14 fishing centres.

ECA has done a survey recently and they said what I was saying. They take the statistics from the north and south wholesale markets and that is how we get our GDP. Anything from agriculture going to processing, it goes to the manufacturing sector. ECA, an Inter American association for agriculture, has done a good job of looking at that in Trinidad and Tobago and they have said that our GDP should have been about five times what it is. So that we know for a fact that the system that is being used and which was being used all the time—I make no complaint—should be changed.

9.45 p.m.

We have trained about 700 persons in fisheries. We have established collaboration in agriculture and fisheries with the governments of Argentina, Mexico, the Republic of China and Costa Rica. We have promoted and implemented the National Tilapia Development Plan.

The development work that we have accomplished in agriculture over the last six years has enabled us to re-establish an excellent platform for the revitalization and modernization of the agricultural sector. We are now in a position to increase agricultural production and boost the supply of food to the population which in turn will result in more affordable food prices to our citizens. We are comfortable where we are at this time and we could only get better.

Permit me to summarize the development initiatives undertaken during 2001 to 2007. We expanded and upgraded the agricultural infrastructure; improved the quality of the farming population; increased the involvement of youth in agriculture;

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introduced new and improved technology in agriculture; we have significantly increased the level of government investment in agriculture; we have increased the acreage of agricultural lands available for cultivation; we have pursued a more aggressive research and development agenda; we improved the quality and reliability of the agriculture, food and health safety system. We have revised and expanded the Agriculture Programme increasing support for the nation's small farmers. We expanded and upgraded the agricultural marketing system, what we know as NAMIS. This is NAMDEVCO's brochure on it. This is the National Agriculture Market Information System for Buyers and Consumers. You could go on line on any given day and find where the products are; call directly to the farmer and indicate how much you need and at what price. You can negotiate. It is a better system than going to the wholesale market.

Although much has been achieved for the last five years in terms of agricultural development, there is still much work to be done to achieve food security and sovereignty in Trinidad and Tobago. The sector is now poised to achieve new and exciting growth development.

The measures outlined in the 2008 budget demonstrated that this Government is determined to achieve food security to all our citizens. It is also important to note that the 2008 fiscal measures indicate this Government's commitment to the continued development of the nation's small farmers. Our strategy is to promote the development of large farms side by side with existing and new small farms.

In the recent public consultation on food prices, it was agreed that a number of actionable interim measures be implemented. The Prime Minister had outlined these measures and they will be introduced to these areas.

In addition to these interim measures, the Government will continue to implement its development agenda in the agricultural sector. In this regard these agricultural projects and programmes will be given priority during the next fiscal year, 2008. There is the establishment of more than 7,000 two-acre farms for the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited. Government has allocated \$350 million towards this project. Over 1,800 acres of Caroni lands were identified for use in this project. The land has been surveyed and sub-divided into 7,773 two-acre parcels. To date 7,339 plots have been distributed to former employees. Infrastructure works included the provision of roads and drains. Work will continue and are projected to be completed by May 2008. At present agricultural leases are being prepared for the beneficiaries.

There will be the establishment of 15 large farms at 100 acres. The sum of \$20 million was allocated for the large farm programme which will supply

agricultural commodities for export and agro-processing. The large farms will be operating by joint venture arrangement, mainly private. The Government is going to provide the land. As is aid, the RFPs have been advertised today.

RuDeCoTT has been contracted to do the advertising of the large farms locally. Two large farms to be developed are Tucker Valley in Chaguaramas; and Government will establish the Model Farms Resource Centre and the greenhouse in Central Trinidad in collaboration with Nitrogen Limited. These facilities will provide local farmers with advanced agricultural training; technical assistance and advanced technology which are currently available in Trinidad.

I recall the Prime Minister saying that we should get our partners in the industry and the industrial capital in South Trinidad to help with the production of agriculture; do training programmes and facilitate our farmers. I am in total agreement with the Prime Minister. I know that when he speaks to them they would adhere because he is a man who can be trusted and a person they believe in. He will be there for the next five years. He keeps his word.

Government has allocated \$51 million for the continuation of the Agricultural Access Roads Programme. In 2008, the Government proposes to construct, rehabilitate and maintain over 88 kilometres of agricultural access roads. This is in addition to what we have done. The programme will be focused all over Trinidad.

Do you know something? Nobody has challenged me during the last three years when I put out my agricultural programme to tell me that I or the ministry has discriminated. If discrimination has to go, it is only in the Opposition areas most of the agricultural lands are, so that is where most of the agricultural infrastructure development was. Recently, I went with the Member for Caroni East to open 10 kilometres of road in McNair. We did about 20 farm ponds and four bridges. One of the bridges was called One Plank Bridge because there was one plank and they had to walk across that plank. It is nearer to Ragoonanan Road. He made the point that we have been able to take a bhagee and pumpkin ministry and turn it around to something good, that we could only go forward from here. I was thankful that the MP for Caroni East could have come and see the work that we have done. He has been around his constituency.

Even the Member for Chaguana has indicated to me that we have been doing some good work in his area. I am happy to do so because it can only bring more food under production.

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In the Nariva constituency, he may say what he wants—they have received about 40 agricultural access roads. In Fishing Pond, there are three ponds that we have refurbished. All the irrigation systems we put in this year belong to Nariva.

You will hear them talk because there is much more to be done. [*Interruption*] I will deal with that before I go. We have been doing all this work and we will continue to work.

The Government will continue to invest in water management flood control programmes. Thank God, that this year we have not had any major flooding to say that we have been receiving any flood relief claims. The Ministry of Works and Transport; the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources and the Ministry of Local Government have been able to do a fairly good job in clearing some of those watercourses.

Agriculture research and development will receive \$12.8 million for fiscal 2008. The research facilities at various locations will be upgraded. Emphasis will be placed on researching rabbits as a source of food. Research will be conducted to improve the food safety capabilities of Trinidad and Tobago.

Government will continue the development of the fishing industry. The sum of \$20 million has been allocated for the construction of the Moruga Fishing Complex. We need to work on that complex because of the CET. For the jetty in San Fernando, the sum of \$5 million has been allocated; \$9.8 million for the development and upgrade of fishing centres in Las Cuevas, Brickfield and Salibia. The National Agriculture Marketing System will be upgraded and expanded. NAMDEVCO has received over \$26 million for that. You have heard about the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB).

In closing, I understand that the *Sunday Guardian* had a picture where I was getting my colleague to sign a passport for my mother who was 90 years in June. She is still healthy and collective and needs to travel, so she needed to get her passport renewed. Jarrette Narine was not going to take any passport to be renewed: it is only for holidays. I am not leaving this country.

It has been a pleasure to be in this Parliament for the last 15 and more years; it has been since 1991. In closing, I wish you well. This is definitely the last time I would be speaking in a budget debate. The people who are involved in the politics, I am saying this to the national community, I have no problem with my political leader; I have no problem with the PNM. I am going to work in this election to the dying end to see the PNM back in office. [*Desk thumping*] I am certain that is going to happen. All those who have approached me to give me a

safe seat because I have a problem with Mr. Manning, that is not so. I have won seven elections over a 25-year period. I was around in 1986 and what we considered safe was not so safe.

With these few words, thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Gillian Lucky (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Mr. Speaker, I know that it would be remiss of me if I did not take the opportunity, bearing in mind that the Member for Arouca North has made it quite clear that this is his last contribution with respect to a budget debate, to say that having given the country 15 years of service, there must be commendation. In Trinidad and Tobago, there are some politicians who are very deserving of the derogatory remarks that are made about us collectively as politicians. At the end of the day, there are those who want to serve and give service. The fact that you have made it to double digits, 15 years and brought 41 years of experience in agriculture, I ought to commend you.

I will go further and give you an assurance—this would make you even happier. Let us end on a happier note by saying that I listened very carefully to all that you said from the important point you made the common fowl. That is no trivial thing. I know that that is the advice my father gave me. When you have to deal with insects as scorpions and tarantulas instead of using the insecticide which is often dangerous to the environment and soil, put two common fowls and they would deal with them.

I listened carefully to the simple suggestions and some of the intricate suggestions you have made. When you made the statement that the new minister of agriculture would have certain challenges, I thank you for the advice given. Clearly, that new minister of agriculture will be coming from the Opposition Benches. We will be able to carry through with what you have said. Your knowledge would not be wasted and that is the important thing. We need to recognize that we as politicians are running a race. Too many of us see a finish line. In fact some of us do not see the finish line.

10.00 p.m.

We just feel we have to run and run and run and what we forget—in my view—I see politics as a relay race, where those who are experienced are running with the baton and they have to understand that when the time comes for you to let go, you have to let go, otherwise what could happen is that the baton falls or the other runners do not get the head start that they need and let politicians start understanding that from day one.

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Having said that, Member for Arouca North, I am not going to try to enter an arena that is not my area of great competence. You have dealt with agriculture and I am sure that there are Members in the Front Bench Opposition and others who would be speaking after me in the Opposition Bench, who would be dealing with the issues that you have raised.

What I want to do, in my contribution—let me say from the outset, Mr. Speaker, that my policy has always been that 75 minutes is too much speaking time. I feel when we are reviewing the Standing Orders—I made the suggestion that 30 minutes in the first instance and an extension of 10 minutes. I have only arrived in the country a little over 24 hours ago and have not had much sleep. Whereas normally I do not use my full 75 minutes, this evening at the hour of 10 o'clock, I intend to go for my full 75. Had I been allowed the opportunity to speak when I was calling told—everyday abroad I was calling Trinidad and saying: “When would I be able to speak?” Let me say Trinidad and Tobago, Member for Tobago East, because I am going to be dealing with that.

Could I deal with it immediately because I deal with C for crime and C for culture? I want to make this point about culture. I want to tell the nation, but the Member for Tobago East, how seriously I take the connection that Trinidad must have Tobago.

Before I left this jurisdiction, approximately two weeks ago, I went to a movie at Movie Towne. In no way am I trying to embarrass the establishment. For those of you who go to the movies and do not indulge in looking at pirated movies on DVD, they showed the footage in the advertisements. There is a flag of Trinidad and Tobago and the words were: “Trinidad is my land.” I may be a little off but Tobago was not mentioned. Before I left the jurisdiction and as recently as this afternoon, I called a representative from Movie Towne, I identified myself and I said to them: “Please, when you are putting that up—which I think is a step in the right direction because you are showing the flag and we are trying to develop patriotism—we are losing a few points when we put: “Trinidad is my land.” If I were a Tobagonian sitting there, I would feel left out. I have been given the assurance that they would be dealing with it. Trinidad and Tobago is my land. I know we have had calypsos that say “Trini to de bone.” We have had a very good calypso, which I love very much. “Trinidad is my land and of it I am proud and glad,” but we have moved on from there.

Let me state from the outset that is how strongly I feel about including Tobago because I am too fed up of politicians especially, who, especially when election time is around, jump on bandwagons because it is the politically correct thing to

do. My point of view is whether we sit here or we see it elsewhere, let us adhere to the philosophy that it is Trinidad and Tobago and of our land we are proud and glad.

I have been watching with great interest. I was making the point that when I was abroad I was informed that I would be able to speak on Tuesday. I was quite surprised when I recognized that it was because of the system that is being used. My friend from Barataria/San Juan always makes the point that the Opposition would have its say but the Government would have its way. I am concerned that this debate is soon going to reach to a stage where it is not really a debate because speakers from the Opposition Benches would run out. Ministers are coming from elsewhere and making their contributions, which I know they are allowed to do, by virtue of the Standing Orders. The reality is we lose the cut and thrust and we lose the level of responding. I mean no disrespect to anyone in the House. What sense is it, when what is really happening, in my view, with the greatest respect, is that we are having a parade of the rising stars, the fading stars or stars who are “ars” who would be coming here to tell us all the great things that they believe they have achieved, when in truth and in fact, by Tuesday morning or afternoon, if my calculation is correct, the Opposition forces or force, at the end of the day, would be heard no more. By Wednesday, we would be hearing loud noises from, perhaps some empty vessels. That is why there is an importance in being independent.

The Member for Barataria/San Juan has always made it clear that he is independent. In fact, he is considered the fourth force. He is a very forceful person. I am taking some level of comfort in knowing that at least at the end of the day, when all these Ministers are brought from the other place and come here to make their contributions, even though they may have their chance elsewhere, we still have a very strong player we can bring from the sideline and put forward to deal with the issues. That, of course, is my good friend, the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

There is also something else. I am making this prediction. Normally when I make predictions they do not happen, because I am by no means a prophetess and I do not walk around with Prime Ministers of any sort, predicting to them when they should call or not call elections, but I certainly feel the way Black Stalin felt when he was singing that calypso. I admire Black Stalin tremendously. He sang a calypso: “Ah Smelling It.” Somehow I am smelling that this PNM meeting that I am reading about in the newspaper, which would be taking place on Saturday in the East-West Corridor in a constituency to be announced, would be the day when certainly we would be hearing when there will be this upcoming election.

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This is no longer a debate about the budget, it is really an opportunity for those who want to go back, to show their boss how good they have performed, even if the track record does not show it; for those who are leaving to say goodbye and for those who are yet to be screened, to still say good luck to you all and may you all have the opportunity between Tuesday and Wednesday, to make contributions so sterling in quality that you would be able to override all the other contenders for the seat that you wish to come back for.

What I would say, however, is that I would continue along my line of always being objectively independent and recognizing—[*Interruption*] Member for Princes Town. There is no need to apologize because I know you had to deal with a much bigger issue and I know we have always collaborated on the issue of fighting crime. I want to show you when I am dealing with national security, I would be incorporating many of the suggestions and solutions and issues and matters that you too have raised in your contribution. I thank you for dealing with the bigger picture and dealing with a C word that is perhaps bigger than crime, which is corruption. You certainly handled that corruption issue very well. Far too often in this country we talk about the corrupt acts that people do and when they are exposed we do not hear about the sanctions. It is time we start hearing about the sanctions. What is going to happen if?

What comes to mind is that Auditor General's Report, which my friend, the Member for Barataria/San Juan had brought to my attention when I was making a contribution several months ago. We read about the Auditor General constantly saying—there was a phrase, which was almost like a mantra—procedure was not followed and process was not followed. There were so many glaring instances in which the Auditor General said, with respect to the award of contracts, that it was not done in a transparent manner.

Today I ask—what sanction? If in this country, we are going to say this is wrong and we do not roll the ball forward to say this is wrong and if you do it, this will be your punishment; people will continue doing what they are doing when they are in government. They would continue taking and being corrupt because they know that they could do it and get away. That is what our society has become. It has become a society where you do what you want if it is wrong, just make sure you do not get caught. Because if you get caught, then something may not happen to you, or the most that may happen is you would just be given a rack on the knuckles and nothing more.

What I want to point out—I want this to go on the *Hansard*—because I cannot boast of a 15-year presence in the politics. My stint in the politics has certainly

been eventful. It has been like a rollercoaster ride but I love rollercoasters. There have been ups and downs. But what I would say is that in this country, I think we are the biggest hypocrites. We talk about wanting people to be objective and independent but when people come forward and they are objective and independent and they do not say what we want them to say, those are the people who face the greatest sanction. The example I use is a personal example. I really hope nobody takes offence.

I had the opportunity, for several years, to be writing a weekly article on a Friday in the *Guardian*. At first I was paid a stipend; a very small amount and I would give it to a particular charity. Then I was told: “We could no longer pay you, but if you want to write you can write.” I said: “Yes, I want to continue writing because I want to remain objective and independent and I want to put forward views and let the country decide.

Then, quite recently, I was very disappointed—I would say quite openly—when a representative from the *Guardian*—I would not call his name, but he would know when he hears what I say is true—told me that my article on a Friday could be no more, that a policy had been taken that there would now be articles written on behalf of the major political parties on a Sunday and that I would have to write as a COP, the party to which I belong and if the COP did not want me to write on its behalf, then my column would be removed. I rang the Chairman of the COP and I said to him: “Chairman, when you are given this option, please do not even facilitate considering me, because I have always written my article objectively; running the risk that I might not have pleased everyone and, perhaps even tread on the toes of persons who, within my party, may disagree with my views.” What was even worse—you do not have to believe it, Member for Diego Martin Central, maybe you would not understand what it means, with the greatest respect, to be passionate about being independent—is when the MFO survey was released quite recently, I recognized, for the first time in this MFO survey that looks at all the media houses, my particular article was rated 7th out of 10. That number 7 just seems to follow me wherever I go.

It is not a boast, Member for Diego Martin East. That is what you do. When I do it, I put it in a context. Please, you have spoken. I have read what you have said. Please, words like “bogus and arrant” are becoming, in my view, clichéd. You were totally, with the greatest respect—I have your contribution. It is a good thing I read it while I was on an aircraft because I really could not have done anything but sit and have to face it instead of jumping through a window, which would have been a good option having to read it. I do not think the Member for Siparia deserved many of the remarks that were said. Arrant is a word he uses all the time.

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The simple point I am making, to get back on track, we are here for many minutes, as far as I am concerned, in my contribution. Having realized in the MFO survey that I came 7th overall, but number one—[*Interruption*] You would not understand narcissism. He is not distracting me. Do you not understand this may be the last kind of interaction I may have with the Member for Diego Martin East. I may not be here. He may not be here. We both may not be here, so let me enjoy the banter while it lasts. My shoulders are broad. My back is wide.

The simple point I make is that what concerned me to this day and concerns me is here is a newspaper, the *Guardian*, with a columnist who has been rated 7th overall, but first for the *Guardian*. There were six *Express* columnists who ranked one to six, who no money is paid to—I do not receive any money for writing the article—and the message you sent to me. I am 40 years old. I am no longer young, but perhaps very naive and politically naive. To think that here you have a number one columnist for your newspaper whom you are paying no money whatsoever, who, according to the MFO survey, is responsible for selling your newspapers on a Friday and you tell that person: “Sorry, we have changed the policy a bit and we cannot allow it.” But you allow a member of the PNM Youth League, whom I think is the chairman, to continue writing. When you use politics as the reason to exclude me, how is it you are using—I think his name is Mr. Wesley George—How is he still allowed to write?

The saddest part of this whole thing—you could hold me back but you cannot hold me down—is that next year I would not be able to go and defend the calypso monarch competition at the *Guardian*. That is the saddest part of it all because I really believe—Member for Tobago East I saw you nodding—I want to end this particular point—that people do not want independent thinkers in Trinidad and Tobago. They do not. What they want are persons who would be yes men who would stand and say: “Yuh sound good boss. Yuh look good boss. Yuh make the best presentation ever boss.” They want someone who would tell other bosses: “Listen, we win the election already. We getting 47 seats.” Even though there are 41 seats. They want to be like little elves and the emperor—if the story that was written that we all know, the Emperor and the New Clothes. If a man could walk through the streets naked because two little people pretending to be tailors told him: “Yuh looking hot and yuh looking good.” The picture in the story book has the emperor looking everything but hot and good. If a big emperor could believe two little fools, who are people who are not emperors? We do have some emperors amongst us.

10.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you hear a lot of time Ministers on the other side boasting about what they have achieved, but I have used a phrase which I might be guilty now of using as a cliché; “to whom much is given much is expected”. This Government has been given much, in terms of being in office at a time when the prices for oil and gas are very high.

If we use the philosophy of “to whom much is given much is expected”, this Government has failed miserably in terms of achieving any benchmark of acceptable expectation. They have failed the country, because they have been given much in money, and when you look at how much have been given and how much have been achieved, it is sorely lacking. I am going to tell you why.

Mr. Valley: That is a biased statement.

Miss G. Lucky: You see, Member for Diego Martin Central, anything I say that will paint the Government in a dim light, you would deem it to be a biased comment. I have given my track record and, certainly, when you make your contribution—I take it that you have not made your contribution yet, but you can stand and talk about all that you have done, that would show how independent you are, and let the country decide. [*Laughter*] What is wrong if he resigned and then went on his knees and God pointed him in a direction? That is his right. Let the country decide!

Mr. Speaker, I really do not mean to go into any biblical quotes, but this Government’s operation for which much has been given, really reminds me of that story about the talents. Those of us who came from a Christian background must remember the story of the talents. [*Interruption*] He did use it, but I want to give it a little different twist.

That is a story, whenever I heard it in church it always bothered me, because I felt that the person who got one talent was really treated unfairly—the other person who got 10 he could have done so much with the 10 he got; the persons who got five did so much; and the one who got one—as a young person, and I am talking about seven or eight years old—that bothered me, until my parents explained what it really meant to show and, that is, whatever you are given, you are meant to use it to the best of your ability, and that is how you are going to be assessed. So, it is not in the end, who has more but it is really who has been able to use wisely and best how much has been given to them, to the maximum benefit of all. Again, this Government has shown that it has been given so much, and it has not been able to maximize it to the benefit of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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Mr. Speaker, I have heard much from Members on the other side. The hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education did speak about what happened in the NAR time with respect to the introduction of cess and so forth. I just want to put this on the record so that we will understand it in its correct perspective, because I suffered as a result of the imposition of cess.

I started at the University of the West Indies in 1986, and for those of us who have studied law, we do one year in Trinidad and Tobago—Member for Tobago East, I said Trinidad and Tobago, even though the campus is in Trinidad—and we must go to Barbados for two years, and then there is a further two years where we have to study for the bar at Hugh Wooding Law School. When cess was imposed, it affected the Trinbagonian students so adversely that when we went to Barbados, the issue was—some of my colleagues were wondering—how do we continue? Of course, our currency, when compared to the Bajan currency was lower, and we had to deal with the cess issue.

I want to tell the hon. Minister and those who made the point and tried to change it, say that the NAR was oppressive—PNM gave free education and the NAR came in and was oppressive—that is not being objective, independent and fair. I can say, as a student on campus, when I went to the Ambassador at the time who had been appointed to Barbados from the NAR regime—a group of us went. I was the President of the Trinidad and Tobago/Grenada Students' Association and we organized a march. We were marching in Barbados against the imposition of cess.

Mr. Speaker, although we were marching against the imposition of cess, our quarrel was not with the NAR government that imposed it, but the previous PNM regime that had squandered it. [*Desk thumping*] That is a fact! Names like O'Halloran were four letter words, and I do not mean "love". Mr. Speaker, I am not going further, because I know I will be unparliamentary. [*Interruption*] I am telling you, Member for Diego Martin Central, it will be difficult for you to understand it. I know what it is to work in Barbados. I worked for three months in different jobs to be able—I was a deejay; I worked in Paradise Hotel; and I worked in a bar. We were all looking for odd jobs because that is what cess did.

In fact, when we returned to Trinidad and Tobago we, as law students, told the NAR government at the time that we have gone through three years but, unlike other faculties, we still have two years, and do not impose the cess at the Hugh Wooding Law School and, at least, give us that two-year reprieve, and we were told that there was no money.

Member for Diego Martin Central, I am going to throw out this challenge. In 1991, when the PNM Government returned to power: Why did the PNM government not remove everything and give us back free education? The economy could not sustain it. [*Desk thumping*] Let us really be honest!

When the UNC government came in—and, you know, when it comes to the UNC, I have a great difficulty with some of its philosophies. I believe that professional integrity should reign supreme—the money was available at that time, they came with dollar for dollar. I have always commended the PNM Government for saying that with the oil boom and the higher gas prices and so forth—yes, you have moved from dollar to dollar which the UNC could only have afforded at that time, and now the PNM is giving GATE. I have always maintained that is good. They have extended GATE to private tertiary institutions—but do not try to skew why the NAR had to do what it did. I am speaking as a student who, at the time, suffered as a result. Do not tell me that is not unfairness!

You had the opportunity in 1991. It was the squandering that took place, and that is why we had a landslide in 1986 with the NAR getting 33 seats and the PNM getting only three seats because, by then, arrogance had stepped in. [*Interruption*] Member for Diego Martin Central, I know the time is late and maybe around this time you get a little excited, but you will get a chance to speak, have no fear.

What is partiality? To me, partiality is when you can see dilapidated buildings such as police stations and places without any fire stations, and yet still go and build a \$148 million mansion that could compete with celebrity homes in Los Angeles. That to me is partiality; that to me is unfairness; and that to me is squandering. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for St. Joseph made the point. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing is wrong if you want to build a big mansion, but when all the money runs out, let us hope that we could have bus tours as they have in Los Angeles going to the Getty mansion, going to that mansion there to show them what it looked like in the days when we had money. Let us understand it!

You know, the problem in this country is when politicians get power, it does not just corrupt them, but they get arrogant. They do not walk on six inches of air, but they walk on clouds. They cannot handle when young people come and say to them that what they are doing is wrong. They see it at a terrorist action, and then they want to get rid of the people. [*Desk thumping*] Well, you will not have a hard job. I chose to leave the *Guardian*, and if I am leaving politics I, too, will choose. I do not ever let anybody kick me out. I make my independent decisions.

Now, let us get down to national security. Again, we are hearing so many idle boasts about how well we are doing. You know, they say when people blow their

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own trumpets—well, with this Government, there are so many persons who blow their own trumpets, they really have an orchestra section. That is a fact. Again, because the Member for Diego Martin Central likes people to be so independent, I want to see how he is challenging this now, but, you know, I like to hear you.

I have three independent travel advisories before me, but I am not going to read the three of them. One is the “Travel Advice by Country Foreign & Commonwealth Office”, and the other is the “Travel Advice for Trinidad and Tobago Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Tourism” and the other is a travel report for Trinidad and Tobago from the Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. So, I have chosen Canada and Australia. So, I have gone to two different hemispheres and I have also looked at the travel advice by the Country Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Mr. Speaker, I now want to quote from this Country Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It is still current at August 27, 2007. It was last updated on July 31, 2007. This is the summary, and I quote:

- “There is an underlying threat from terrorism. Attacks could be indiscriminate, including in places frequented by expatriates and foreign travellers. See the Terrorism section of this travel advice for more details.
- You should be aware that there are high levels of violent crime, especially shootings and kidnappings. British nationals have been victims of violent attacks, particularly in Tobago where law enforcement is weak. See the Crime section of this travel advice for more details.
- The main type of incident for which British nationals required consular assistance in Trinidad and Tobago in 2006 was directed towards victims of crime and those arrested on drugs charges.”

Mr. Speaker, in the “safety and security”—I am trying to give an abridged version so that I am not guilty of tedious repetition. I do not intend to read the other two but suffice it to say that the other two advisories are consistent with what this advice is saying. So, it is not just that you have one. I have really tried to go across the board and choose as randomly as I could. This is what they say about crime in Trinidad and I quote:

“There is a high level of gang related violence and crime in Trinidad. Incidents are concentrated in the inner city neighbourhoods east of Port of Spain’s city centre, particularly Laventille, Morvant and Barataria, but can occur in other areas.

Theft from vehicles and property can be a problem in parts of downtown Port of Spain and in other urban areas. Cruise ship passengers should take

particular care when walking around the docks and downtown, and should avoid straying into areas affected by gang violence. There has also been a worrying increase in robberies and break-ins in all areas. A British national was robbed and repeatedly stabbed in Chagaramas on 10 July 2007 and another British national was attacked and robbed in Independence Square, Port of Spain in July 2007. There has also been an increase in attacks, some involving the use of firearms, at tourist sites, including Fort George, the Pitch Lake and also at car parks of supermarkets, shopping malls, nightclubs, restaurants and business premises. Since January 2005, four foreign nationals have been shot. The most recent was on 4 March 2007, when a British national was shot outside his home in Westmoorings.”

The British are known for not being very—unlike the American. This is not disrespect to the Americans, but the British say it as it is and they try not to be unduly inflammatory. They went out to advise:

“You should not carry large amounts of cash or wear eye-catching jewellery...”

So, here, people coming to our country are being told: “Listen, you are coming to relax, but watch out”. This reminds me of when the former Minister of National Security was dealing with the increase in crime. He said: “Listen, yes, there is an increase but, be calm”. But that is another story and he is in another ministry. Incidentally, he is in the Ministry of Tourism where there are problems, not with tourism but, certainly with the crime in Tobago.

Member for Tobago East, the only reason that I am bringing you in—Member for Tobago West, I should not leave you out. I remember, Member for Tobago West, when you made a contribution, you made the point that you were concerned about the increase in crime in Tobago—this is the first time that I am seeing a travel advisory where Tobago has been given as much, in terms of paragraph content as Trinidad. I know that it is important to recognize that crime is everywhere. We often hear the Government saying that it is a global problem, but countries have implemented measures to deal with what is a global problem. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, clearly, we are not implementing sufficient measures in sufficient time, and I will be dealing with that shortly.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Tobago, this is just a synopsis of what was said. It says:

“Although most visits to Tobago are trouble free, crime against tourists in Tobago and the inability of the Tobago authorities to apprehend and prosecute the perpetrators remains a concern.”

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So, here you hear the travel advisory recognizing that although you are safer in Tobago than in Trinidad, there is a problem with detection and also successful prosecution.

It continues:

“The authorities on the island are taking steps to improve the situation. There have been a number of serious robberies against tourists in recent years. Some of these incidents were accompanied by violence, including rape. An elderly British resident was violently assaulted in her home in July 2007.”

I am sure the two Members for Tobago are aware of that incident. It continues:

“There were several serious attacks targeted against privately rented villas in the south west of the island in 2006, near the towns of Bethal, Buccoo, Mount Pleasant and Plymouth, and incidents continue to be reported. Caution is advised if renting villas in the south west.”

Mr. Speaker, it goes on to say—I do not want to read it to bore anyone, but just to say and recognize that in Tobago there are problems.

The point I am making is that when we are using benchmarks or when we are assessing whether we are doing well or not, in any particular area—I am dealing with national security—it is not good enough to say that we are spending so much money, or as the Member for Laventille East/Morvant loves to remind us, how much of the percentage of the budgetary pie the Ministry of National Security gets. The problem is, if you keep giving money to any particular ministry, and you are not seeing an output or positive returns, then something is wrong.

My concern is, we have been monitoring travel advisories from the days when—I do not know how many Members of the House will remember.

10.30 p.m.

I know that Members of the Opposition will remember that when a delegation was sent, remember there was a travel advisory about cruise ships and the Prime Minister got very upset and a delegation was sent to try and beg and plead, "oh gawd, change it nah, change it nah—we spent money there too." Minister Gift, he wanted a gift for a change in a travel advisory. Clearly the international authorities must not only have laughed at us; must not only have thought: Is this the way you change a travel advisory that is bad? You come and you beg; no, that is not the way. What is worrying, is that happened so many years ago and when you look at the travel advisories today we do not seem to be in any better position. If anything, things have certainly worsened and that is the concern that we have.

Just recently, I was reading that the blimp is once again giving a lot of trouble; it is in blimping trouble. I remember asking the Minister of National Security—again, I do not make any personal attack against the gentleman, because that is where the politics degenerates and goes into levels that I do not care to go. All I am saying is that the Minister is a square peg in a round hole. I remembered when the Minister came to the House; I had asked a question and he was giving a response. I had asked about the maintenance; do we have the maintenance and service contracts. I was alarmed that we bought this expensive item—I called it an expensive trinket—I suppose it was not by way of credit card. We did buy this expensive trinket, a blimp, we have not even determined how we are going to service or maintain, and that must be a problem. Because when you go to buy a commodity and many of us have bought vehicles. I am sure one of the main things we ask is, okay, I am buying it, it is a nice vehicle but what about service.

Mr. Panday: After sale service.

Miss G. Lucky: Exactly, Member for Princes Town, after sale service is critical. What is happening is we have bought these expensive pieces of equipment, such as the blimp and they really become white elephants. Because they have now become liabilities rather than assets in terms of fighting crime.

I remember the Minister of National Security, he was in this House about two months ago; he put up his shoulders and he put up his hands and said, he does not understand why some of the police stations are not being completed in time. He sounded frustrated, he said he did not know—I think the Member for Chaguanas is remembering; he is nodding—and he had not gotten an explanation. In my point of view you are the Minister of National Security and people must respect your office to the extent that if there are delays in the contracts, they must account to you as to why there are these contractual delays.

It is not good enough to just tell the population, well you know, there are problems with finishing the buildings. Why are there problems? How much is overrun? You need to get this level of feedback. Because when the population is seeing the whole skyline of Port of Spain, which many people are saying is in fact looking very beautiful. At nighttime when I drive and all the lights are on in the building, you really think sometimes you are in a foreign land. But the reality is, you are seeing a Prime Minister's house literally being built in a couple of months; you are seeing all these buildings going up; you are hearing about all these contractors foreign places who are so no good, no doubt.

Why have we not taken care of the police stations? Why have we not built a fire station in Mayaro as yet? Why am I still hearing mention being made of

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plans to build police stations and fire stations in districts and counties in 2007, the very places that were mentioned in the 2002 and 2003 budget? [*Desk thumping*] I mean it is a shame! A big shame! And shame on the Government for not producing! So, when we say 2020 vision, I am very worried that we have given ourselves too far a time line and in 2020 when we rock back—if we allow this Government to continue being the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—and we will say, well done, we would find that we are way behind still. Because in 2020, our list of achievements to me states where we should be right here, right now, not in 2020.

When I read in the budget about those offshore patrol vessels, some that would be coming in 2010, I think one in 2012 and we have two that we would be using in the interim, but they are still being worked on. The criminals of today are going to be more advanced in terms of technology tomorrow. So, when we hear the Prime Minister say as he said some months ago, "doh worry, in two years we ready for them". When we are ready for them in two years they have moved ten steps forward. They may now be stealing things online. When we are dealing with crime on the ground, they have crime in the air.

In America, they are now dealing with credit card theft and identity theft. People are stealing your identity; they are stealing all your health benefits; that is where they have reached in America and that is the problem here in Trinidad and Tobago. We think backward and we have to start thinking forward. [*Desk thumping*]

For 2020, I cannot quarrel with the policies, you know, I quarrel about the time line. It is like a child telling you, yes, "Doh worry nah, I go learn the alphabet when ah reach 45; right now I have three letters, A, B, C; doh worry ah getting to D here." By the time the child reaches Z, I mean; alphabet; the child should be at that point an adult; should be bilingual, trilingual.

Let us stop giving ourselves time lines that really make us look ridiculous. Because when you give yourself a ridiculously and, to me, an unacceptably long time line, it means that you are not serious about fighting crime. It means that you are giving yourself too much of a laid-back position. It is like knowing you could run 100 metres in about 12 seconds, but you are saying, do not worry, I could run that 100 metres but I am going to take a full 10 minutes—nonsense. We are dealing with criminals who are moving faster than us.

All those deportees who are being brought back from America, who have interacted with high-tech criminals in jail, when they come back here—the same

way the Member for Arouca North shared his knowledge of agriculture, 41 years you were involved in it—when these deportees have interacted with criminals, who for their whole life time have been dealing with crime come back to Trinidad, and we could never find where these deportees are. People living in Trinidad and Tobago for three years and we cannot find them. What do you think they are doing with all the knowledge they have? Writing books—“How to steal” by I Thief? No; they are going there and they are implementing what they have learnt.

So understand what the concern is. These time lines are worrying. Yes, I looked at this document, *Vision 2020 Operation Plan 2007 to 2010, Transformation in Progress, 2007 Report*. When I looked through this and it talks about for example, the need—you see the objectives are noble but it is the time line to achieve them that I have the quarrel with, let me make that clear.

When you talk about the fact that there is a backlog in the courts and you are giving yourself something like three years to deal with it or four years; that is nonsense. When you talk about a homicide rate being increased from 25.5 per cent. Just let me read this one, it is page 216, Criminal Investigation and Homicide Detection:

"Over the period 2006 to 2007, the homicide detection rate increased from 25.5 per cent to 26.3 per cent."

Not even 1 per cent more. This is so shameful. There are some people when I laugh like this they say I am trivializing, I am not; I am ashamed. And it went onto say:

"This was a direct result of the following initiatives:..."

And seven initiatives are listed. In other words, seven initiatives gives us less than 1 per cent increase. Question to everybody in the House at 10.40 p.m.; if seven initiatives gives a 1 per cent increase, how many incentives will it take to reach the objective to increase, which is to get the homicide rate to about 80 per cent to 90 per cent? Please, nobody has taken out pen and paper, not even calculators; we are behind. [*Crosstalk*]

I mean, really, this has to be shameful, but the serious point is this; you have an increase by a full 1 per cent, yet you have implemented all these measures and it is not working. The obvious conclusion is either given option, one, the criminals are so far ahead that we would never be able to catch up with them or two, we are using incentives that clearly are not the correct incentives that ought to be used,

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and I really think it is the second one. Because with criminals you cannot tell them things like "doh worry, we coming for you in two years". That bothered me when that statement was made by the Prime Minister, "doh worry, beware criminals, two years from now we coming". The criminals must sit back and say, right, two years, let us see what we could do and let us see how we could improve; try and get us in two years; they have moved on.

Mr. Speaker, this is the concern that I have with respect to how you are dealing with fighting crime. If this Government does not want to come to terms with the fact that it is failing miserably in the fight against crime, what serious hope do we have if the Government is in denial, that we really are able to get it right, and that is my concern. Because the first step in dealing with a problem—I am sure the Member for Barataria/San Juan would agree, when people have drug problems or problems with alcohol and they want to deal with the problem, the first thing they have to do is recognize it. That is why, for example in Alcoholics Anonymous you have to say your name, and it is the awareness, my name is so and so, and I am an alcoholic and then you get the help.

What this Government is saying is that we are winning the war against crime; we are doing very well; we have improved by less than 1 per cent; and we have implemented all these measures. Thanks for the measures. Page 216, Member for Oropouche, and if I said it wrong I am going to allow you to interrupt me because I do not want to be guilty of misquoting anything. I looked at page 31 of the Budget Statement. When we talked about legislative reform and the hon. Prime Minister spoke about the DNA Bill; the Proceeds of Crime (Amdt.) Bill; all this is legislation considered most critical that would be coming to the House.

"The DNA Bill;..."

We know that is still in progress; it was brought to the House; certain things had to be dealt with.

"The Proceeds of Crime (Amdt.) Bill;

A Bill to establish the Special Anti Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago;

Amendment to the Defence Act;

Protective Services Compensation Act;

The Immigration (Advance Passenger Information) Act; and

Prison Service Rules under the Prisons Act."

Mr. Speaker, you know what bothers me? Is that for years in this House I have asked the Government repeatedly to bring the legislation that would reintroduce mediation in criminal matters and I remember the hon. Attorney General—Member for Princes Town, I do not know if you are agreeing—promised years ago that the legislation would be brought in its redrafted form because I agreed there was a problem and I am not going to go into the problem again because I have said it ad nauseam. But nowhere is this mentioned. Give Jack his jacket, when the UNC was in government; when it came to an aggressive legislative agenda, the UNC had it, because there was an aggressive legislative agenda to deal with the whole issue of fighting crime. No mention of criminal mediation. So the Criminal Mediation Act, which needs to be fixed; so you already have a template, not mentioned. The Jury Act, we made the point that we have jurors who are scared. There was a high profile matter in which jurors said they were intimidated, not just for themselves, their family. The suggestion being made that do not limit jurors to a particular jurisdiction; see if we could amend the Act to include jurors from—you know if a matter is being heard in Trinidad, maybe jurors from Tobago or jurors from foreign lands, even the Caribbean, nothing mentioned about it. Should we still have a jury system?

These are the kinds of intellectual issues and the kind of legislation you want coming to this Parliament, so we would be really able to send that message: "Criminals beware." But even the legislation outlined in the budget is not impressive. Those criminals outside reading this are laughing at us.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Miss G. Lucky: Thank you very much to all the Members who have supported my extension of time.

Mr. Speaker, I have already dealt with the issue of the offshore patrol vessels and in the budget statement, the hon. Prime Minister made the point that it was important for this country to protect the maritime borders. Again, I have made the point ad nauseam; it has obviously fallen on deaf ears; that one of the borders that concerns me is that Manzanilla/Mayaro/Guayaguayare border is really an unmanned area. I think it is in today's newspapers I read about residents of Manzanilla who are so upset because of the relocation of the Manzanilla—I would not say the police station—mobile police post.

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The Manzanilla/Mayaro/Guayaguayare border, that entire area where cocaine washed ashore; many people would remember that and again, you think, okay, cocaine washing ashore, it means we have to do something; nothing was done by this Government. I was thinking what practical solution now, not 2020, could be done without any purchase of offshore patrol vessels, to at least send a message to the criminals that listen, there is a police presence. I cannot rely on the purchase of cars because government after government, especially this Government, if you ring police stations; if you ring the Mayaro Police Station and I will put this on record.

I have called them because in Mayaro right now there has been an increase in crime, the Member for St. Joseph may be aware of it. There is an increase in crime, in fact the Mayaro community has had meetings because houses have been broken into and there is a little gang operating; you can get any kind of gun that you want and so on. The police are aware of it too, but limited resources. You call and ask for them to come and check out something; they cannot; they have no vehicle.

I was wracking my brain and thinking what could be done; what could be done, because you buy cars; no proper maintenance of the vehicles; these cars whether you like it or not, police have to go in all the back roads; you cannot blame them; they have to drive at high speeds and cars get into accidents. What could be done?

10.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I thought of this solution and I bounced it off a friend of mine whose advice I really take very seriously. I said to my friend, why in Mayaro where there is shore and sand and so many of the roads on the Guayaguayare Main Road—for example, the off shoot roads that lead to the beach—why not use horse patrols in those areas and let the police operate not from the Guayaguayare Road going into the roads that lead to the beach, but they can go along the sand; in other words, the beach side and they can come up into the streets leading to the Guayaguayare Main Road? So that in certain streets—the police are aware of the streets where the gangs are operating—there would be the police presence and if the criminals decide to run onto the beach front, then the horses can gallop through. My friend said to me, but, why would you say horses? And I was saying, because you need quick access to the beach and it would be very difficult for vehicles, and of course, because of the salt water and so, the vehicles will have to drive through, you are talking about maintenance and so.

I am just saying, why can we not have this level of creative thinking? I have heard nobody make that suggestion before. I do not want to call it a Lucky suggestion, but I am just trying to say, why can we not use what we have? And there are many horses. There is a horse farm there and I see many of those little horses there which look at though they still have a lot of life in them and they do not know what else to do, but eat grass and bake in the sun. Let us see how we can use the resources that we have.

Once the criminals start recognizing that those narrow streets leading to the beach are being patrolled, you will begin to have that as an automatic deterrent. Again, not a difficult solution, but the only way you are going to really maximize the creative genius that we have within us to fight crime, is if we recognize, listen, "This is what we have now, how are we going to implement using what we have now?"

Talking about 2020. The DNA legislation, which I am very familiar with, when that legislation is implemented—and I commend the Government for holding on to its commitment to bring the DNA legislation, but does the Government recognize that with the DNA legislation, there is going to be need for more forensic science centres? Because you cannot have just one forensic science centre in St. James.

I have made the point to the Members for Tobago East and Tobago West; fight to get a forensic science centre in Tobago because when a crime is committed and we need to sanitize or cordon off or quarantine the area; when that exhibit or potential exhibit has to be taken and kept and transported to Trinidad for forensic analysis, it could be lost along the way; it could be contaminated along the way; the chain of custody is in jeopardy. Why can we not have a forensic science centre in Tobago? Are we going to wait for the implementation of the DNA legislation to then recognize that we have a problem in that we do not have the infrastructure to deal with it? Let us start putting in the infrastructure right now.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan made the point, in fact, he was going through my papers and he asked me if I had brought my favourite documents and those documents being the statistics with respect to crime. I am glad I did not disappoint him in this regard because I do have the most recent statistics that are available and the statistics that I am comparing is the Comparative Data on Serious Crimes Reported/Detected for the Months January to July 2006 and August 16—19, 2006.

In 2006, for that time period, the number of serious offences reported, 1,077; the number detected, 1,688; an overall percentage of 15.24 per cent so, in 2006, for the same period that we are in, 15.24 per cent.

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For this year 2007, and bearing in mind in the budget statement it was so important to put to the last decimal point, we are at the grand percentage of—this is the overall—the total reported crimes 10,637; total detected, 1,617.

Now this Government would jump up and down, use these statistics and say, "Hi, we are improving in the fight against crime. Last year this time was 11,077, this year, same time, 10,637." That is less. No, it does not work like that. Look at your detection rate, the overall percentage for last year, 15.24 per cent, as I said before and for the same period this year, 15.2 per cent. So we are down by .04. So when you think of the fact that crimes may be less in number, the detection rates are not increasing.

I want to make a point and I am sorry the Member for Laventille East/Morvant is not here, because the last time I quoted statistics, he wanted me to highlight—and suggested that I was not being totally fair in pointing out that with respect to narcotic offences, detection rate was 100 per cent. In fact, for the month of July, 47 narcotic offences reported, 47 detected.

I just want to put on record, Mr. Speaker, and explain to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant that in narcotic offences the reason you always have 100 per cent detection rate—detection not successful prosecution—is that people do not go and make a report about a drug bust or a drug deal. You do not go in as a criminal and say, "Police, I want to make a report. I am going to be involved in a drug bust, a drug exchange, come and fine me." What is done, is the police after that tip-off and they go and get the person, then they make the report. The police make the report and in the station diary, they will put: How many officers left; whether they were armed or not which vehicle; which area they went; and what they got. So, they make the report and yes, they detected it because that is why they were able to make the report. That is why you have 100 per cent detection rate. But the Member for Laventille East/Morvant jumped up and down and said that I should be proud about that 100 per cent and I was only dealing with the negative ones, the ones that are as low as 15.2 per cent and so.

Mr. Speaker, we have larceny of motor vehicles that the detection rate is 7.86 per cent. For larceny of dwelling house, 14.81 per cent; burglaries and break-ins, 9.56 per cent. So you see, when these travel advisories—and I was really astonished that the information was so accurate where they actually highlighted the serious crimes in which the detection rates were low and the serious crimes that are committed most frequently, they are also getting access to statistics, not just going on what they feel or what their vibes tell them or what some prophets from somewhere say how things feeling; how the vibes going, they are going on

hard core facts. And if we want to change this, not only do we have to change this Government, but we have to get serious about fighting crime. That is the point, we have to get serious.

So I hope the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, no doubt he will be responding, I just hope he understands that is the point with respect to that 100 per cent. There is another one that is 100 per cent actually, and that is serious indecency where the percentage is also 100 per cent. And again, I just want to point out, that when there are instances of serious indecency, it is usually a case where the person can identify who has done it, and again, that is why you would have a high percentage.

So you know what I did to be very fair—and when I was involved in the production of a competition called "Caribbean surround", I did the same thing with the judging to ensure that contestants were treated fairly—I did what they do in the Olympics, that is to knock off the highest and the lowest.

Mr. Speaker, when I knocked off the highest percentage detection and the lowest percentage detections—so that if you are on the extreme end, let us really see where we are at—the percentage just move to 18.52 per cent. So, I am just saying we are still not where we are supposed to be. And I have checked with the foreign experts who are in Trinidad and Tobago and I have asked them the question quite forthrightly: Where should we be in terms of the percentage for detection rates for homicide? And they have said we should be 80 to 90 per cent and that is certainly not where we are. We are way, way below. For murder, 12.5 per cent, sometimes 20 per cent, but certainly not near 50 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I was very disappointed to learn that when the Member from the other place, the Minister of National Security made his contribution, he did not furnish us, something that I have been asking for, for the longest while and that is, we get the reported crimes and we get the detection rate, but I have been asking, what is the percentage of successful prosecutions because when a detection rate is so low, that is already demoralizing to the public.

There is no way you could instill trust and confidence in the police service when those who are supposed to, as the public sees it, deal with detecting crime—for in many instances, no fault of their own, they just do not have the resources to deal with it. The public feels, okay, it makes no sense, perhaps I should not even report the crime. But what is worse, is when you already have a low detection rate and then when the case goes to court, it falls through and that is a figure I think we need to know. How many cases that are going to the courts, how many of

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them go on to become successful prosecutions, not just in the lower courts, but all the way up to the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Speaker, what also disappoints me and I suppose this might also disappoint the Member for Princes Town who also is an active practitioner, is that last year the acting Chief Justice at the time the Hon. Justice Roger Hamel-Smith had spoken about a method that can be used to remove the backlog of cases in the Magistrates' Courts. And the suggestion again I have dealt with it, when he spoke about removing the payment of the traffic offences, when people do not pay for their tickets in a timely fashion, the normal 14 days, those matters, they are summoned to the courts—it is on the ticket itself, the court date is shown if you want to challenge it—and there is a court session and at the end of the day the list that the Magistrate has to deal with, all 186 cases in some instances per day, you have many of the traffic matters.

A very viable suggestion made so many times. We are going to have the opening of the new law term very soon, on September 17, one year has passed and this Government has done nothing in that regard. Nothing! No proposed legislation, nothing! And this is a suggestion falling from the lips of the Acting Chief Justice as he then was at the time.

Mr. Speaker, if we want to remove the backlog, I know that the Government—I have read the Budget Statement; I have read the Operational Plan 2007—2010; it talks about removing the backlog and the fact that in some courts there has been the introduction of the audio taping and that certainly has helped because I practise extensively in the courts and it certainly helps not using the longhand writing system again. But the fact is, if the magistrate still has a very huge and burdensome list, how many matters will be able to be heard because by the time you go through 186 matters, each case having to be called taking a minimum of one and a half minutes to two minutes, do the mathematics. Although I cannot ask Members of the House to do it because some of them did not even do the mathematics with the last problem question that was put forward.

So what has to be done is, we need the legislation, if you get a ticket in Toco, you can pay it somewhere else. What is difficult about that suggestion? We have said it before, let the Justices of the Peace or the Clerks of the Peace attached to the court, they can do a lot of the administrative work. Because even though a magistrate might have heard the evidence quite rapidly because of the audio taping, the magistrate still has to review that evidence and take time to match facts with the law to make a determination of whether there is innocence or guilt.

Mr. Breaux: Could you, just for my own edification, please let me know when it is the honourable Acting Chief Justice made that suggestion and where?

Miss G. Lucky: It was at the opening of the law term last year, 2006 and the Chief Justice addresses all the practitioners. He made the suggestion and I quoted from it the next time I made a contribution in the House, and he specifically dealt with it. He also went on to say not only could the system be that you pay your ticket in a jurisdiction different from where you might have received it, but he went on to say what could be done with the Transport Division, so that they could make a determination of some of the offences that would be going before the courts. And it is in that document.

11.00 p.m.

Mr. Breaux: I hear you, but it would seem that every time we come to this House we talk about interfering with the Judiciary. Controlling the courts and making suggestions for the better working of the courts is a matter for the Judiciary. I would think that a suggestion like that would come to the Executive so that the necessary law could be passed.

Miss G. Lucky: With the greatest respect, that is why we have a Parliament and the separation of powers. The judicial arm has made the suggestion. I have come to this House and said what was stated. There needs to be legislation; we are the Legislature, or have we forgotten that? When a suggestion is made, Member for La Brea, you talk about wrongful interference, that is a different thing; that has nothing to do with it.

In the same regard, for example, we have to move away from this practice. You must be aware that if an offence is committed in one jurisdiction, it must be heard in the Magistrates' Court nearest to that jurisdiction; but that also causes a lot of problems. We need to address the relevant legislation which has been on the books for umpteen years, and change it. Even though a kidnapping might have occurred, let us say, in San Fernando, it could be heard in a court in Port of Spain. Right now we also have jurisdictional issues. It is for the separate arms to raise the point and the necessary legislation to be passed.

When we had to pass the legislation to deal with the taking of evidence, the reality was that we could not just say, "Longhand is ridiculous, it takes so much time; let us go to what was the equivalent to the CAT reporting"; we had to pass the laws. That is why it is for all of us to listen actively, come here and see how we could implement it. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre for giving way. Are these matters not those that will properly inform the work of the Crime Commission and, therefore, we can expect a comprehensive set of recommendations coming out from the Commission? Is that correct?

Miss G. Lucky: It will be a continuation of what I have already been doing in the Parliament for the last five or six years. Even if you get it from whatever source, the fact is these are things that you do not need a commission for. When I use the word you, I do not mean you as in your capacity as Prime Minister. These suggestions have been made all the time. I am hoping that the Commission and, of course, with those who will be involved in its work, will act as some kind of catalyst to get the suggestions off the ground and implemented. That is what I am hoping for.

Mr. Manning: These ideas are going to be available to the Government in a structured way and, in fact, the Crime Commission of which you are part is going to assist in the implementation of some of these. So the ideas are going to be available to us and would be put into effect. That really is the point.

Miss G. Lucky: Mr. Prime Minister, and I say it with great respect to you, there was no need for a commission to do it. I am happy if the Commission catalyses it, but these things have taken so many years. We need action right now, right here.

For example, I have spoken about the need for a drug court since I have been contributing in 2002. I know sometimes, hon. Prime Minister, you have heard me talk about the need to separate the drug users from the drug traffickers. In fact, Magistrate Lee Ann Lee Kim who was interviewed today, is moving on. Everybody would speak about her as magistrate in terms of her impartiality, the manner in which she dealt with the drug court for so many years. She is moving on to the family court now. There was an interview in today's newspaper.

Again I make the point; the Family Court has worked. In Trinidad and Tobago when something works, why do we try to reinvent the wheel? The Family Court is a resounding success; kudos to all the staff: the judicial and the administrative, because it has worked. That is because in the Family Court there was a laying back of the cut and thrust and adversarial approach. Instead, the first approach is, "Let us try to see how we can solve this; let us try to see how we can mediate." That is why it was important to have the mediation legislation brought back. There was a promise to bring it and it has not come; that promise was made three

years ago. There is already legislation dealing with the drug court; I was in the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) when that had come for comment and I remember making the comment. Let us hope that if the Government has not listened to persons making the contribution in other places that, at least, the Commission will be able to achieve that. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, might I just ask how much more time I have, please?

Mr. Valley: Ten minutes.

Miss G. Lucky: Mr. Speaker, if I will be allowed, I really want to deal with the issue of culture in my final 10 minutes. I know I dealt with it very early in the day, culture in terms of including Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

In the budget statement I read with interest that the hon. Prime Minister did make specific mention of the important development of the steel pan; that is the G Pan. [*Interruption*]

Member for Oropouche, I think you would like this point. [*Crosstalk*]

It stated:

"Recently the country celebrated a most important development when a new steel pan, the G Pan, was unveiled after several years."

I am really sorry that I could not go to that ceremony, because we were all invited. I feel that anything that deals with the steel pan is something we should be all involved in. I have gone so far to say that in every school we should teach the steel pan. [*Desk thumping*] It is our national instrument. In fact, I am wearing it on my Trinidad and Tobago tie.

I will tell you what bothered me, and if I might say it directly to you, Member for San Fernando East and hon. Prime Minister. We all love the steel pan. We all recognize how much it has been "taken away from us" to a certain extent. We are trying now to re-embrace it and take it back.

Why then did we remove it as the logo when BWIA was closed and we now have Caribbean Airlines? Why was the hummingbird put on? An explanation was given in the newspapers about the hummingbird, the fact that it was Caribbean Airlines, so it is all about the Caribbean and you want to include everybody. Do you think that you could ever go to Jamaica and say reggae is Caribbean music? You will come back to Trinidad and Tobago in a coffin. You try and say that we are Trinbagonians singing reggae before Bob Marley and see what happens to you, if we ever find you again. You jealously guard what is yours.

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So BWIA for whatever reason had to be closed down; we put a hummingbird. Why could the hummingbird not be put with the pan? My suggestion is, and you can laugh if you want, say it is ridiculous, or you can come up with something better, put the hummingbird insignia within the pan and put "Nothing sweeter than pan", so wherever that aircraft went, young people, old people, people who do not know would ask, "What is that?" Somebody would say, "That is the steel pan; that is land Trinidad and Tobago".

I remember in the days when we only had channel 2&13, it used to say, "Isle of the hummingbird and land of the steel pan". Why about that level of patriotism? Why have we removed the steel pan?

We are talking about the G pan and how great it is. Hon. Prime Minister, the G Pan is excellent and great, but there are some little challenges with it.

Mr. Manning: I want to hear them; tell me.

Miss G. Lucky: The one challenge I was told is that because of the size of the pan, young people, school children—because I believe in having the steel pan taught at school—it may be a little difficult for them to come over. That does not mean that we do not like the steel pan. It is good that we have the G Pan. I am not in any way hitting G and saying that we should go to C. Why did we remove the pan? I was proud when I saw the BWIA aircraft with the steel pan. I felt proud; I felt okay that we were endorsing and branding that this is Trinidad and Tobago.

In fact, I remember once sitting in a BWIA aircraft many years ago and when I looked at the menu I saw jerk chicken. I told the flight attendant, "I am not having anything to eat"; and she asked why. I said, "I do not understand; I am looking at the menu and I am seeing jerk chicken which we all know Jamaica takes; how come I am not seeing anything that is Trinbagonian?"

The explanation was given, "Well, you know, we fly to so many destinations in the Caribbean that we want to be inclusive." I said, "Nothing is wrong with being inclusive, but jealously guard your own." When they say charity begins at home, they do not mean building a mansion, Member for Baratavia/San Juan. They mean you should love your country first. I make no apologies for saying, "Love Trinidad and Tobago".

Embrace other countries, but you have to endorse what is ours. We definitely have a problem. We are speaking about legislation. No doubt, we recognize piracy. I do not mean piracy on the high seas. What has happened now is that we do not just have street vending of persons selling the music of others. David

Rudder said that he does not even want to come back to Trinidad and Tobago, because persons just steal his music. So many of our calypsonians and chutney artistes say that their music is on CDs that have been burnt; people do not buy the originals.

We now have street vending of all those pirated DVDs. I am sure no Member of this House looks at pirated DVDs. Persons are selling them 20 for \$100, \$5 for one. It is a total breakdown. How long have we said that we are dealing with the Copyright Act of Trinidad and Tobago and the fact that we need to amend it? Every Carnival season it is a big issue. The Copyright Organization of Trinidad and Tobago (COTT) has been doing yeoman service; but it can do so much and no more.

We did have a Joint Select Committee; the Bill, in fact, lapsed and we have not brought it back.

Mr. Speaker, in my last three minutes I will say that budgets will come and budgets will go; governments will come and governments will go, but one thing will remain, that we are Trinbagonians. You can change so many things about yourself, but you cannot change who you are and you cannot change the country in which you were born. We have our challenges. It is good to have vision, but if we can have the Vision 2020 policies brought in a much earlier time period, then and only then can we hope for a better Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Community Development and Culture (Hon. Eulalie James): Mr. Speaker, I thank God for this moment that I can stand here to give my contribution in this debate. I stand to make my contribution with a strong sense of commitment and a duty to my constituency and the Government which I proudly represent, and the national community.

I wish to compliment the hon. Prime Minister for his presentation of the budget for the new fiscal year. The presentation was very comprehensive and all inclusive. It was not as superficial as many may have wished it to be, but it was rooted in a vision for developed country status by 2020. It included a consolidation and advancement of programmes and projects in the social sector, which were well thought out, some of which are already on stream.

My focus will be on the social sector against the background of the services provided by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and as a representation of my constituency of Laventille West. The role of the

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Ministry is generally undervalued. This may be because the service provided by the field officers in the Ministry are not very easy to be measured, but those are the people who are responsible for keeping communities institutions alive and prepare them for their role in national development. I, however, have no doubt that as we move towards the decentralization of the local government system, the importance of community institutions such as village councils, women's group and community centres will not only regain their past glory, but will also rise to a new level of significance to assist communities to prepare for greater responsibilities and involvement in the process of development.

The Ministry implemented 156 leadership training programmes in this fiscal year and it intends to expand and deepen the training process. Mr. Speaker, 280 primary level leadership training courses and 38 advanced leadership training courses will be organized. We are not only training members of the community, but also making sure that staff members are trained in various areas to enable them to cope with future demands as we go forward.

We will continue to work and provide support for community organizations, because they are key vehicles for promoting and, in some cases, managing Government's social programmes. These persons and institutions also have a long history of caring for others, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens. We can, therefore, rely on community institutions to assist in a caring society as envisioned by Vision 2020.

In a caring society, all communities must be respected and treated with dignity. Laventille must be just as important as Woodbrook and Chaguanas, but this is not the case at present.

11.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, Laventille is painted with the brush of negativity, helplessness and hopelessness. Very few people take the time to understand the inner beauty of Laventille. This is a community which gave birth to the steel pan—and we just heard Miss Lucky speaking about the steel pan—and witnessed the transformation of the steel pan beater from being stereotyped as an outcast to become respectable locally and internationally as pannists in a steel orchestra.

This is a community which overcame an upsurge in crime in the 1960s, as a result of employment opportunities in the Special Works Projects, which was the equivalent to the URP.

Mr. Speaker, there is a message in all this, that message is that Laventille is not hopeless or helpless. The problems experienced in the past with the steel pan

and the crime were resolved through the efforts of the people, Government and the private sector in the case of the sponsorship of the steel pan.

Crime has now emerged as a major problem in our country today and Laventille is being highlighted as one of the high crime areas to the extent that everyone from the community is perceived negatively. But as has happened in the past, this can change with the dedicated effort of people and agencies from within and outside of Laventille.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has presented a peace and love budget because he recognizes that these are the critical ingredients in building a strong and stable nation. He also knows that peace and love begin in the home and the house. For this reason, the National Parenting Programme is introduced as a new initiative for bringing about change in the behaviour of our youths. Change will not come overnight but over time. We should see the improvement in the attitudes and behaviour in communities throughout the country.

Mr. Speaker, peace and love to live in the same house was a situation in the past. People in our communities used to appreciate one another as they looked after the interest of one another. We can therefore learn from our ancestors the recipe for peaceful and loving co-existence in our multicultural society.

Mr. Speaker, we can start with the knowledge that a relationship precedes true love. Even if you think you can love a person at first sight, to develop or strengthen this perception, one must get to know the other person. No one can therefore doubt that a relationship is the key to love which is a normal human sentiment.

The budget is rightly called a “love budget” because it promotes the building of relationship between the young and aged; women and men; community and community; and among members of all ethnic groups and citizens at large.

Mr. Speaker, I will use the example of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs to illustrate my point. Our Geriatric and Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP) trains our youth to care for the elderly while at the same time learning from the experience of the elderly. This programme has done a lot to narrow the generation gap.

Through this programme, young persons visit the homes of the elderly as part of their training in preparation for service after graduating. This exposure encourages graduates to serve as caregivers to the elderly and also to pursue careers in geriatric nursing and gerontology.

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This year, over 700 young persons have benefited from the training and many of them are employed in the patient care assistants programmes and other areas in the hospitals.

Mr. Speaker, our Retirees Adolescent Partnership Programme (RAPP) also builds relationship between our vulnerable youth and retirees who are willing to provide services to their community. This programme managed by NGOs and CBOs, provides mentoring, educational support and training in sport, culture, and life skills at centres. The lives of our 300 youths have been transformed at centres located at Belmont, Couva, Valencia and La Horquetta.

Programmes under the Gender Affairs Division are designed to strengthen the relationship between men and women, boys and girls, as well as to reduce imbalances in gender relations which may exist.

The domestic violence hotline provides a 24-hour service, seven days a week to persons who are exposed to domestic violence or who are experiencing a breakdown in their relationships.

Assistance is provided in the form of information, active listening and referrals to rapid interventions by the police, to shelter, or to counselling services. Over the past five years, more than 14,000 calls have been received by the hotline.

There is also the Defining Masculine Excellence Programme which provides training to men in order to prevent them from becoming involved in domestic violence, or violence in the wider society. The programme comprises a series of trainers workshops to equip men from various state agencies, private sector organizations, CBOs and NGOs with knowledge and skills to improve their social relationships and to provide training, community support and outreach to other men and boys in vulnerable situations.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that this programme in particular is one of our flagship programmes. It has really assisted quite a number of persons and even some of our people in Laventille have participated in this programme.

At the level of the community, our Community Safety and Enhancement Programme has been bringing people together to take action to protect their community. Community Safety Enhancement groups have been organized throughout the country and they have organized a number of projects including crime prevention rallies, training workshops, and job-creation initiatives in order to cater for the needs of unemployed youths.

We have also established safety and enhancement information desks at Laventille, Chaguanas, Diego Martin, Beetham Estate and La Romaine. In addition, we launched a series of seven regional crime prevention expositions in San Fernando on July 20, 2007. Expositions have already been held at Point Fortin, Couva, Sangre Grande, Rio Claro and Siparia. The last exposition is scheduled for San Juan on September 05, 2007.

Besides the display of crime prevention information, young artistes from our community safety and enhancement groups perform items on crime prevention at these expositions.

A very active programme of construction and refurbishment of community centres has been embarked upon during the current fiscal year. Fourteen community centres are currently under construction, most of which would be completed by December, 2007. These centres are located at Diego Martin Central, Gonzales, Mulchan Trace, Penal Rock Road, Hardbargain, Guapo, St. Joseph, Upper El Dorado Road, Tunapuna, Beetham Gardens, Maracas Bay, Pelican Extension, Morvant, Thick Village and Tortuga which is expected to be opened shortly.

Mr. Speaker, under the Community Centre Refurbishment Programme, nine centres have been refurbished and modernized and work is in progress on 13 others. In the new fiscal year, 2007/2008, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs also proposes the construction of 50 new community centres and refurbishment and modernization of 35 existing community centres.

Through memorandum of understanding, it was agreed that two special purpose companies, Evolving Technologies and Enterprise Limited (eTecK) and the National Commission for Self-help Limited, undertake the construction of 25 community centres respectively.

The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs is committed to ensure that members of all communities have access to the use of all facilities in modern community centres. Many of the existing community centres were constructed more than 30 years ago, at a time when the population which they served was small. Since then, the population size has increased rapidly in most cases and there are demands for more programmes and a wider range of activities.

The strategy of the ministry is to assess each one of the over 200 community centres before pursuing the options to build, upgrade, and expand the centre. At the same time, many communities will be having a centre for the first time. The presence of a community centre will allow citizens to receive services and participate in activities in their own communities.

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The completed community centres will be the venues for training and development activities. The ministry has been organizing training programmes at community centres throughout the country. These include skills training programmes of which 59 basic courses and 21 advanced courses were implemented this year. Citizens in almost all communities will benefit.

Mr. Speaker, the ministry also organizes leadership courses and collaborates with other ministries and agencies to educate and sensitize the public on issues relating to lifestyle diseases such as hypertension and diabetes, drug use and abuse, financial management, poverty alleviation, crime prevention and social responsibility.

The ministry is committed to revive and strengthen the craft industry. Besides skills in a number of crafts, participants are exposed to business development training. One hundred and twenty-five trainees participated in the business development training, 71 of whom started their own business and 16 found employment.

The Women in Harmony Programme is aimed at improving the skills of the vulnerable single female heads of households. It was executed nationwide in agriculture and elderly care training women 25 to 50 years of age, 540 women benefited.

Mr. Speaker, when we had our last graduation, it was very heartening to see that two days later, one of the trainees came in with an elderly person on her arm and it was because the family of that elderly lady gave her that person to take care of immediately on her conclusion of the course and the money she was getting was very encouraging. She was supposed to receive \$4,500 per month.

11.30 p.m.

So we have seen a lot of our women gaining employment through the courses we do. We could give you success story after success story. There is another group that came and today they have their own business set up and they offer all types of services: cleaning, building—anything at all—call cards, letterheads. They have a whole range of services coming out of the training they had from our Ministry.

We also join in the HIV/AIDS Outreach Programme of the Government and 40 women have been trained to provide outreach HIV/AIDS prevention services in Moruga. They established an information and support service office at Basse Terre from where they engage in house-to-house campaigns in the district. Forty other women were trained in San Fernando to provide similar services. Our Non-traditional Skills for Women Programme was implemented at 12 centres

throughout the country; 600 women were trained in a pilot project. A course in kitchen construction and design has been developed for implementation. We believe this is a very good course as some women now, instead of hiring people to redo their kitchen, will be able to do it for themselves.

It comprises of a cluster of four skills, namely: Masonry, carpentry, electrical installation and plumbing. There is another programme. We have the Export Centres Programme. That one is training women to do different craft, making soaps, candles and all sorts of different crafts and many of them are exporting craft at this time, especially in the candle and soap-making areas. Therefore we can boast that we are improving the lives of people out there by the work we do at the Ministry.

There are quite a number of other areas that we train people in, and I am sure my two other colleagues will talk about those that I might have left out. But we are very proud that we are indeed doing our work and assisting the people of this country in many ways. We offer assistance to community groups, to other people and it is heartening to see the number of people who come to that Ministry for help daily.

My constituency of Laventille has benefited from many of these programmes so I know that some of the people of my area are finding self-employment because they were trained in some of the areas that we offer. Just recently I had the pleasure of giving to a pre-school a set of upholstered furniture, they were built by the trainees at the Laventille Centre and they were very glad to receive them. We are also benefiting by many agencies with respect to physical development work, on the internal work system: drainage; community centres. In my constituency I am happy to note that the Beetham Centre is under construction; the Pelican Centre is under construction; Gonzales Centre is under construction; Success Village has been refurbished; the Trou Macaque Centre is almost complete.

Indeed, we are benefiting from the water upgrade from WASA. They are doing a lot of work in the area upgrading the pipelines and I am sure the people of Laventille can see that the water system is being upgraded. We have also benefited from the lighting system. A number of bright lights are all over Laventille and we continue to be assisted by that. Very soon some of our playing fields will be lighted. We have also received a new pavilion at Sugren Trace. I want to also thank the Ministry of Housing for the new block of flats off Lady Young Road in the Stephenville area. Some people recently got their keys for that facility. Indeed, Laventille is benefiting in several ways. There is still a lot of room for improvement, we know, and I have no doubt in my mind that the process will continue.

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I am happy to rise at this point, as I said before—and before I sit, somebody asked a question about—I think it was the Member for Naparima—the board for the community centre in Barrackpore. It is my understanding that the letters are being prepared so that board will be in soon. Also the Preysal Centre that they talked about sometime ago, that was stopped because they needed some more space in the hall; it was too small, and some more seating arrangements, and so on. It is back on stream at the cost of \$9,514,000,45.

Hon. Member: Caroni Central, \$9 million?

Hon. E. James: That is the total cost. [*Crosstalk*] We are hoping that it would be completed by November 30, 2007, Member for Caroni Central, so you should have your centre very soon.

As I outlined, there are quite a number of centres coming on stream and I am sure that very shortly everybody in their area would benefit from the programme that the Ministry has with regard to community centres. Right now, our Best Village Programme is going on and I believe one of my colleagues will elaborate on that. It is one of the programmes that we take delight in and we are very happy that we were able to bring it back on stream. It is going very well; there are quite a number of groups, more than before participating and you see true integration in that programme—everybody from Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Hart: Grenada and all.

Hon. E. James: So, Mr. Speaker, this is just a very short contribution and, like Minister Narine, it is my last budget contribution in this House. It has really been a pleasure serving with Members in this House. [*Desk thumping*] Only one thing bothers me. The Member for Tabaquite—I am sorry he is not here, but—

Hon. Member: He is there.

Hon. E. James: He is there? Oh, I was looking for him down there. He also boasts about what they did against what we did; and is “we” who do this and “you did not do that”. I want to tell the Member for Tabaquite that government is continuous and if something is good, we do not expect the other government to just throw it away. They will build on it and continue. So it is nothing to boast about, because when you are there you do your share; when somebody else is there, they do theirs. I am sure he is seeing that the PNM Government is doing a very wonderful job. You cannot gainsay the fact that we are doing well; we are really going towards the year 2020. You will not be able to make out the face of

Trinidad and Tobago when we reach the year 2020. You can see the changes taking place on the waterfront. Everywhere you turn in Trinidad and Tobago you can see the changes taking place.

As I say that, I must say thanks to the Prime Minister for his foresight to bring a programme like CEPEP on stream because that programme, too, is assisting to keep this country so clean [*Desk thumping*] that when tourists visit our land they would have good things to say about Trinidad and Tobago. I am also thankful because we were at the point, when the last government was in power, where the people of Laventille were not getting any kind of work at all anywhere. They were left out of the loop and when the PNM came back in power, things started to move again for the people of Laventille. I hope that they will not forget that. It seems as if only when a PNM Government is in power that the people of Laventille survive a lot better. Let me thank him again for that foresight. The CEPEP is here to stay and I am glad to hear the Opposition praising it and they have seen the worth in it. I am glad that they see it as a programme that is well worth keeping.

It was truly a pleasure. I enjoyed the company of each and everyone. I will miss you but now and then I might peep in to see what is taking place. So good luck to all of you and remember Trinidad and Tobago is looking at you; the children are looking and listening, so be careful what you say; how you say it; what you do; how you do it and keep this Parliament at a very high standard. God bless you all. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Harry Partap (Nariva): Mr. Speaker, allow me to join with my colleagues in commending the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the distinguished Member for Siparia, for what I consider to be a landmark response to a lacklustre presentation of the budget by the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister on Monday. The hon. Leader of the Opposition gave a clinical and decisive analysis of the budget.

Mr. Manning: Incisive.

Mr. H. Partap: Incisive and decisive, which supported her initial description of it as a cut and paste rehash of broken promises. Our distinguished Leader of the Opposition dismantled the veneer and exposed the budget for what it is, a wish list with no substance or commitment for implementation.

We commend the hon. Leader of the Opposition for her fearless stand in exposing PNM waste, mismanagement, inefficiency and corruption. Madam Leader of the Opposition, if I can offer any advice, I would advise that you ignore the

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editorial comments in Saturday's *Newsday*, August 25, 2007. Only he who has eyes and cannot see will defend the PNM against what you so vividly described as, and I quote:

“A substantial number of our citizens live in poverty and destitution whilst government ministers and their friends are smiling all the way to the bank’...”

Only he who has eyes and cannot see will rush to the defence of the PNM when you commented that the PNM is:

“irrevocably brutal, reckless and irresponsible, and guilty of perpetrating the most heinous, abusive and offensive assaults on the lives and livelihoods of our citizens’...”

That was a statement by the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

11.45 p.m.

Madam, the evidence is on your side. Is it hyperbole when we point out that the PNM continues to persecute former prime minister, Basdeo Panday and now the Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, Satnarine Sharma? Dr. Vijay Naraynsingh escaped the PNM's net only because Basdeo Panday had taken the unprecedented step at a public meeting in Gasparillo in exposing the prosecution's reluctance in placing vital evidence that would have quashed the matter.

We are not exaggerating when we condemn the PNM for callously bringing down the houses of landless citizens and throwing women and children on the streets. The *Newsday* thinks that we are exaggerating.

When the Minister of National Security made his budget contribution, he spoke of a dark cloud hanging over the country. He identified that dark cloud to be the drug trade. He may be right. I believe differently. I believe that that one dark cloud is the PNM. Remove the PNM and you remove the obstacle to peace, stability and happiness in our land. Hear what the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah said in Chap. 39 1:2:

“Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear.”

The PNM has a history of non-performance. Neither the PNM nor the Prime Minister has any credibility when it comes to performance. We are witnessing once again a level of cost overruns and delays on every project undertaken by the PNM. The most glaring examples are the construction of the Scarborough General Hospital and the extension of the highway to Sangre Grande; four years in the making.

Mr. Imbert: No cost overruns. Not one cent. You make up stories.

Mr. H. Partap: When the truth comes out we would know.

In case the Minister of Finance does not know, cost overruns and delays can lead to corruption. Under the PNM cost overruns and delays are synonymous with corruption.

The Minister of Finance and Prime Minister has the brass face during the closing stage of his budget presentation to point fingers at Members on this side accusing us of corruption. I will let him in on a little secret. There is a standard joke now making the rounds in Trinidad and Tobago. That is, if you want to see your PNM parliamentarian to discuss a constituency matter, just stand outside the courthouse. They are moving in and out answering charges ranging from being caught with their hands in the cookie jar to “cussing” left, right and centre. Perhaps, the Prime Minister is not aware of what is happening around him and among his Cabinet Ministers and Members of Parliament.

I will tell him: Two of them are before the court on corruption charges; one is on appeal for “cussing”; one was playing bad John but was discharged under a section of the law; and one is currently playing hopscotch, jumping in and out of a wheelbarrow in front of the jail door, after allegedly taking materials from a government project in Tobago. That is the history. It must have been this sorry situation in the PNM’s front and bank Benches that the Minister of Finance was referring to when he ad libbed in his budget presentation that “this nation was plagued with a level of dishonesty.”

PNM’s honchos are lining up to get what they could from the gravy train. The PNM raiders are no longer at the door of the Treasury; they are inside. The scandal involving the PNM treasurer, Andre Monteil, a \$110 million share in the Home Mortgage Bank using insider information, is a case in point. PNM raiders are already inside the Treasury. No wonder poor folks in Marquis Road, Manzanilla and Pancho Road Extension, Fishing Pond cannot get a decent road to have electricity and water extended to their village. No wonder the landslip in Plum Mitan cannot be repaired for over five years. No wonder Fishing Pond and Caigual Road cannot get a pipeborne water supply; because the PNM raiders are inside the Treasury.

These citizens of Trinidad and Tobago living in the rural part of East Trinidad must exist under primitive conditions in a land flowing with petro dollars. This budget does not offer them any hope. It offers us no hope for the future. It is sterile and empty. It offers no hope for the poor and vulnerable except for the

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promises of postponed benefits. It excels in public relations; plenty public relations but no substance and hope for implementation.

You would have heard the hon. Leader of the Opposition say that the PNM had set aside over \$1 billion for public relations; publicity; publications; overseas travel and entertainment. The PNM will spend over \$1 billion in this election budget to provide a spin to mask their inefficiency, waste, mismanagement and corruption. The Leader of the Opposition had given a breakdown of the big spenders, so it would be more of the same after six years with this PNM Government. Let me sound a note of warning to the Government. Public relations and spin can never be a substitute for performance. [*Desk thumping*] It may work for a time, but the stark reality is that people will find you out and they are doing so now.

Several other red flags are popping up in that budget presentation and allocations to the various ministries which we must monitor. I wish to identify some of these. There are some allocations that could hide the corruption that we expect in this election. The Government, through the ministries will have access to a breathtaking sum of \$1,918,178,000 under contract employment; short-term employment; other contracted services and fees. This we fear can be channelled into pork barrel incentives for election purposes.

How can we on this side question money that should be spent on a ministry's sports and family day finding itself into the PNM's election war chest? This is the breakdown of that money. Contract employment will be over \$1 billion for all the ministries when you go through the estimates; other contract services, \$508 million; short-term employment, \$91 million and fees, \$99 million. This is a strange one that I saw in the estimates. I saw extraordinary expenses. I do not know what it means. The allocation is \$177 million. How can we verify extraordinary expenses?

Mr. Valley: Under what Head you saw that?

Mr. H. Partap: Check it. I do not have to go through it again. I went through it. How can you justify money paid for three loads of gravel being converted to pay maxi-taxis and buses transporting PNM supporters to a PNM election rally? They put it in as three loads of cement or three loads of gravel, but they are paying for maxis. At present maxi and private bus operators are paid from URP funds for transporting PNM supporters to PNM pre-election mobilization events in Sangre Grande. As I speak it is happening. The "fellas" go there and collect their cheques from the URP office.

I am reliably informed that URP funds are being used to pay persons doing house-to-house campaign for the PNM in the Cumuto/Manzanilla, Toco/Sangre Grande and La Horquetta/Talparo constituencies.

Hon. Member: Princes Town also.

Mr. H. Partap: Now we hear in Princes Town; in Claxton Bay. You may say that it is rubbish. Taxpayers' money is being used by the PNM for the election campaign.

It is our view that these allocations will be channelled eventually in the PNM's war chest. [*Interruption*] We are not taking in front; we are telling you what the situation is.

12.00 a.m.

We are asking you to be careful, because when the UNC Alliance government comes into office you would have to answer.

Mr. Speaker, it is regrettable that in a 59-page budget which took three and one-half hours to read, the Minister of Finance completely ignored industrial relations and labour, offering no blueprint that would impact on workers' rights and workplace security—none.

The Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development has received a record budget allocation of \$129,530,141 for this fiscal year. This is \$2,223,446 more than the Ministry received last year. This record allocation represents three times more than what the Ministry received six years ago. One would have thought that with such a hefty allocation, the core functions of the Ministry would have advanced significantly to meet the new challenges in labour. One would have thought that. But, if we examine the Draft Estimates of Expenditure, there has been no significant change in the establishment that is necessary to effectively monitor the vital functions of the Ministry. For example, the Labour Inspectorate, which has the responsibility to monitor and enforce the provisions of the minimum wage, the Maternity Benefits and Protection Act and labour standards, had an increase of seven officers since 2001. Of that seven, four were temporary officers. The Labour Administration Department of the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development had a complement of 57 officers in 2001.

In 2002, when the PNM was handed office, an additional three persons were recruited. They were labour attachés to High Commissions overseas. These were political appointments to reward PNM party hacks. They were PNM failures. One such lucky PNM operative was a failed politician, Rudrinath Rampersadsingh. He was assigned to the Caribbean Seasonal Workers Programme in Toronto. He was the labour attaché.

Mr. Manning: Just for the record, as the person who recommends these appointments to the President, I made no such recommendation and no such appointment was made.

Mr. H. Partap: I really hope that the Prime Minister is correct. But I know that he had been there as the labour attaché. [*Interruption*] What did he go there as? Mr. Speaker, he was the PNM candidate, beaten by the distinguished Member for Couva South, Mr. Kelvin Ramnath, in the last general election. [*Continuous interruption and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is just after midnight. We are on a new day, so let us give the Member his opportunity.

Mr. H. Partap: He was rewarded for his daring political suicide, with the position of labour attaché. [*Interruption*] This is why I have to say it. I represent people.

Mr. Speaker, but Mr. Rampersadsingh was hurriedly recalled from the post, following a scandal in Toronto. Last week the Hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development answered a question which I posed and told this Parliament the labour attaché was recalled because of a domestic dispute involving his wife, which attracted the attention of the Canadian Police. That was what he said. I sincerely hope that the hon. Minister did not mislead this Parliament. In fact, I urge the Minister to investigate this matter again, because information reaching me suggests that the scandal involved money paid to the labour attaché by a Toronto businessman, to facilitate the award of lucrative state contracts here in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] All right, let your Minister investigate it.

Apparently the deal went sour after the labour attaché could not meet his end of the bargain, because he could not get the Ministers over here to deal with him. He is a lower operative. He did not have the political weight like, perhaps, Monteil or Calder Hart. My information is that the Canadian businessman was very annoyed and he demanded a refund and he was not given the refund. Therefore, he decided to take court action.

Mr. Valley: Against whom?

Mr. H. Partap: Wait, you would hear. The incident, whether it was a family dispute or it bordered on embezzlement, was developing into a diplomatic embarrassment for Trinidad and Tobago. It forced the intervention of the then High Commissioner to Canada, who is now the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Trinidad, Sen. The Hon. A. Piggott. It forced him to go to Toronto.

High Commissioner Piggott made a hurried trip to Toronto to deal personally with the matter. That trip by High Commissioner Piggott was dubbed the first ever inspection of the farms on which Trinidadians and Tobagonians were employed in Canada, in order to camouflage the truth. The newspaper clippings are there if you want to see them. It was dubbed the first ever visit. They camouflaged it because he went to see if he could get Rampersadsingh out of his troubles.

I did not want to call the name. The Minister told this House that the labour attaché was paid the unexpired portion of his contract salary to the tune of \$302,930.21, plus a gratuity of \$53,384.54. It would seem to us that the Government decided to reward this labour attaché for embarrassing Trinidad and Tobago.

Instead of him being punished, he was rewarded. What Jerry Narace said is true: The PNM takes care of its own—Dhansam Dhansook fame. They are taking care of their own with taxpayers' money. That is the difference.

I call on the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development to state whether the Canadian Seasonal Farm Programme account in Canada, which had over Can. \$5 million, is now depleted in six years. When I left the Ministry, there was over \$5 million. "Where de money gone?"

This account was used to pay workers that 19 per cent gratuity on completion of their stint in Canada. I am told that the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development may have to seek funding from the Consolidated Fund to meet its commitment to farm workers, because the money just blew away. That is the level of corruption in the PNM that they are trying to hide.

Hon. Prime Minister, you should have this matter investigated. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: I want to speak for the benefit of the record that the incident involving the labour attaché in Toronto had to do with a family dispute, rather than anything else. In fact, I should also say that Mr. Rudy Rampersadsingh was in no way involved in that.

Mr. H. Partap: I hear the Prime Minister. I want to remind the Prime Minister that when he is pointing fingers on this side, remember four fingers are turning in his direction. It is four; these three, plus your thumb.

Even with the massive increase in funding to the Ministry, no attempt is being made to increase staffing to carry out the core functions of the Ministry.

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The same could be said about the Factory Inspectorate, which will, under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, have a major part to play in ensuring the enforcement of the Act.

The Minister is on record as saying that additional factory inspectors were employed, but the estimates do not reflect that. In fact, I think he said that 38 inspectors were appointed. I have not seen it here. The complement has remained the same.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Who was the man involved?

Mr. H. Partap: Rampersadsingh. He was the “fella” who contested against Kelvin.

Mr. Speaker, can we trust the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development with the health and safety of workers if he has not taken steps to ensure that we have the people to monitor the Act?

We continue to say on this side that the proclamation of the occupational safety and health legislation alone would not be enough to promote workers' safety and health. There is urgent need to replace the Workmen's Compensation Act with a comprehensive compensation and sanctions package of legislation. It is very important.

The UNC Alliance has proposed the Industrial Injury and Disability Compensation Bill to replace the Workmen's Compensation Act. We have left that Bill in the Ministry, hoping that it would have followed the OSHA legislation in Parliament. The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development said that the Bill had to be revised and in fact he renamed the Bill. He gave it another name. If that is so, Mr. Minister, please do it so that workers can be better compensated in the event of an injury.

The Minister's tardy approach in this matter points to the contempt with which the PNM has always treated workers in this country. They seem to be anti-labour. The UNC Alliance has also prepared draft legislation to revise the Co-operative Societies Act, but the Ministry has failed to advance that movement forward.

We left a draft of the Termination of Employment Bill and a Basic Conditions of Employment and Minimum Wage Bill, but the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development is dragging his feet on progressive labour legislation, which the UNC Alliance left at the Ministry.

We are hoping, that by now, the legislation to revise the Industrial Relations Act, as well as the Recognition Registration and Certification Board and the

Trade Unions Act, would have been brought to Parliament, but no such luck from them, so we are going to do it. The UNC Alliance will do that.

12.15 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC Alliance reaffirms its faith in the workers of this country and will continue to do its part in protecting the safety and health of workers. We are committed to the concept of decent work, articulated by the Director General of the International Labour Organization. That includes CEPEP and URP. This is why we support the 15 per cent increase in the wages for CEPEP and URP workers. This was in pursuit of the decent work concept that the UNC government, headed by the distinguished Member for Couva North, Mr. Basdeo Panday, when he amended the Minimum Wage Act to make it easier for aggrieved low-skilled workers to seek redress when employers fail to pay them.

Under Mr. Panday, we gave female workers the right to maternity benefits under the Maternity Benefits and Protection Act. We also revised the then Occupational Safety and Health Bill, and we forced the PNM to support the passage of this Bill and its subsequent proclamation. [*Desk thumping*] We did it and we forced them to implement it. Even today, the Minister has failed to bring the regulations for the Bill. I am told that if you do not have the regulations, you cannot succeed in court with any court matter relating to any health and safety issues. You must have the regulations. So, all this big hullabaloo about taking matters to the court will amount to nothing. Workers will not be protected. They are not being protected by the PNM Government. What is keeping back the regulations? We left the regulations there. I will give you a copy if you want.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC Alliance housing policy is aimed at meeting the basic housing needs of all sections of the national community. It involves a squatter regularization programme and the development of a “land bank” to ensure more efficient and effective utilization of land for residential purposes; the adoption of cost-efficient land use planning and infrastructure standards. That was our policy on housing.

The UNC Alliance will honour and implement the provisions of the State Lands (Regularization of Tenure) Act, 1998 by honouring the certificates of comfort; providing a 30-year statutory lease; and the issuing of deeds of lease where these are applicable.

The UNC Alliance will make available lands for residential purposes and provide loans to low and middle income families for home construction. Our policy will not only provide a roof over the heads of these low and middle income families, but they would provide community, infrastructural and social services as well.

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Mr. Speaker, the PNM fool them enough. They closed down a school that should have been opened, and they are going surreptitiously—sending people with whacker and cutlasses to cut down a place and telling them that a school will be built there. Fooling the people! They are going back to fool people for election, but they are waiting on them. Just ask Lennox what he experienced down there!

The UNC Alliance will pursue the home ownership savings plan as articulated by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. This will be for first-time home owners who earn less than \$4,000 a month. The hon. Leader of the Opposition has indicated that for every dollar the prospective homeowner puts into the savings plan, a UNC Alliance government will match it dollar for dollar. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I cannot understand the song and dance by the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance with respect to housing. He said that over the past six years, a total of 26,000 housing units were constructed. He said that a further 8,000 units were currently under construction. I think I am right. You said that 26,000 units were constructed and 8,000 units were under construction. I do not know if all of the 26,000 units have been completed and handed to recipients.

What I do know is that the Minister spends thousands of dollars in hosting handing-over ceremonies, but manages to hand over only portions of the number of houses due for occupancy.

We really cannot believe you. Do you know why we cannot believe you? It is like smokes and mirrors. Their housing policy is a tale of broken promises.

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. H. Partap: In fact, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance owes us an explanation. I see he is taking some notes. As far as I am concerned, his housing policy has failed. [*Desk thumping*] I am going to tell you why.

In his 2003 budget, that is five budgets ago, the Minister of Finance said that his Government would be building 10,000 housing units per year.

Mr. Manning: I never said that.

Mr. H. Partap: It is in the budget. I am really sorry I do not have the page here.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Nariva for giving way, but he has to be accurate. We have said it time and time again that the target is 100,000 houses in 10 years, an average of 10,000 houses per year—8,000 in the public sector and 2,000 in the private sector. That is what we said.

Mr. H. Partap: That is not what you said in the budget of 2003. If we take him at his word, and I caution that we should not, the Ministry of Housing should have delivered 50,000 housing units at the end of this year. If you multiply 10,000 by 5 you will get 50,000.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, let me make the point again. It is for an average of 10,000 houses a year. Elsewhere, we have explained that, initially, in the start-up of that programme, we will not achieve those targets, but as the programme progresses, we can exceed those targets, and it will average out over a period of time. I do not understand the Member for Nariva.

Mr. H. Partap: I will refer you to page 30 of your 2003 budget statement and I will read it:

“Our accelerated housing programme will provide 2,925 new housing units this year in 30 sites across the country and a targeted 10,000 units per year for the next five years.”

That is what you said.

Mr. Manning: Check the *Hansard*.

Mr. H. Partap: So, you have been fooling us in your budget presentation? Mr. Speaker, we have, time and again, stated our concerns about Government's housing policy. We are concerned about the selection for distribution of houses; the unavailability of the prescribed application forms at the Ministry of Housing; the structural integrity of the houses; and the availability of social services after the projects are completed.

I have received reports from my constituents that your people at the Ministry—the workers at the Ministry of Housing—are very selective as to who gets an application form. They do not give it to everybody. Please have them stop this kind of victimization and discrimination at the front desk of the Ministry of Housing.

Everyone is entitled to an application form irrespective of what they look like and who they may wish to support in an election.

Mr. Valley: May I just inform the hon. Member that anybody who cannot get an application form at the HDC can get it online.

Mr. H. Partap: That is a fallacy. That is not true. You can get it online, but they do not accept it there. They say that they have consecutive numbers. In other words, you cannot even photocopy a form and carry it in. We have checked it out. Try again!

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Mr. Speaker, our concern of selection for a house and the structural integrity of the buildings are also the concerns of the Ombudsman. We are not alone in that. According to the 29th Annual Report of the Ombudsman, 2006 at page 31 she says there were “multiplicity of complaints against the Ministry of Housing.”

The Report stated:

“Complainants were not satisfied with the Housing Development Corporation's policy of selecting, at random via a computerized lottery draw, applicants for housing accommodation.”

That is the Ombudsman; not me.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: May I just indicate to the hon. Member that if he has more pages than time, he needs to read a little faster. [*Laughter*]

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, thank you and I want to thank all those who supported the extension. I was talking about the Ombudsman's report. I was saying that she also has a concern that we had. She was talking about the random selection; the computerized lottery draw and she says:

“This system allows for more recent applicants to be selected before those who had submitted applications many years earlier. They deemed the process unfair because in the event that the luck of draw was not in their favour, home ownership would not become a reality.”

Mr. Speaker, again, the report continued:

“There is an overall tardiness in effecting repairs to rented accommodation. The persons charged with effecting repairs to these units often either completely ignored the request or claimed that there was insufficient time, money or material to do the work.”

According to the Report, there were allegations of nepotism and cronyism, because in some instances repairs were done as soon as they were requested while other households waited several years for work to be done.

12.30 a.m.

The Ombudsman also investigated claims that even though some homeowners had satisfied all the requirements there was an inordinate delay in obtaining their deeds of release. This resulted in home owners losing out on accessing financial assistance for the repair or the reconstruction of their houses.

The Ombudsman also investigated complaints that the terms and conditions proposed to mortgagees by the HDC were unreasonable. So many things are happening in the housing programme.

Mr. Speaker, we are also concerned about the structural integrity of the houses built by the HDC. The Ombudsman's Report outlined a case where a couple bought a house from the HDC and within three years of occupancy "unsightly cracks appeared on the walls".

The Report stated at page 52, "the cracks became progressively worse resulting in the separation of the walls from the building." This is why we are concerned about the structural integrity of these houses; these matchboxes that you are building. The Ombudsman ended her assessment of the complaints against the Ministry of Housing this way. I will read what she said:

"Having regard to its mandate from the Government to provide suitable and adequate housing, the HDC, as a state corporation is expected to exhibit a greater sense of responsibility than a private developer.

In fact, I am of the opinion that the Corporation is under a moral obligation to rectify the situation expeditiously, especially in cases where the persons who have suffered loss may not have the wherewithal to have the matter litigated before the courts."

The Ombudsman continued:

"As Ombudsman, I also believe that I am obliged to bring to the attention of all State entities the concept of fairness.

The Ombudsman is telling you all that; that concept of fairness. She says:

"I am not simply limited to a strictly legal interpretation but must consider all facts when commenting on the administrative actions of Government agencies."

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Housing cannot really feel "a sense of accomplishment" as he said down in South. He said he feels "a sense of accomplishment". He cannot feel a sense of accomplishment with respect to Government's housing construction programme. If citizens believe that they are not being treated fairly;

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and the citizens really believe outside there that they are not treated fairly. So it is not too late for the Government to take a look again at the policy.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Consumer Affairs gave us a shocker earlier this year when she claimed that vegetable prices had dropped because of the market price survey, which her Ministry had been publishing in the newspapers almost every day in the week. She said it is because of that the prices dropped.

The Minister cannot be serious.

Hon. Member: Which Minister?

Mr. H. Partap: The Minister of Consumer Affairs. She cannot be serious. As far as I am concerned those publications by the Ministry serve no one but the newspapers which stand to benefit in advertising revenue. Providing a comparative price listing by regions does not help the consumer, because the differences in prices are too narrow to derive any savings by consumers.

I just want to refer to two or three of these and I am quoting from the newspaper, Mr. Speaker. For example, I live in Tableland and in Tableland, the price per weight for a live bird is \$5.50 but I can get that cheaper according to this big thing they have here, if I travel to the Southern Main Road in California where it is \$4.39 a pound.

Hon. Member: How much to reach there and come back?

Mr. H. Partap: That is what I am saying. If I have to leave Tableland and travel to California to say I would be saving, because I would buy a six pound chicken, I would save \$6.66, but I have to pay \$30 to reach there. [*Laughter*] So this does not mean anything to anybody. It is a waste of money. I want to read you another one. Here now are supermarket prices. The first one I have is a 225 gram powdered milk. It is \$12.49 in Debe, but if you go to Rio Claro you will get it for \$11.99. So you will save a grand sum of 50 cents, but you have to pay over \$30 to save 50 cents. [*Laughter*] You see what joke this is? I will give you another one. Cheddar cheese, 449 grams—and I like cheddar cheese—it is \$18.50 in Princes Town, but you can get it cheaper in Rio Claro for \$15.75. I live in Tableland and if I decide that I am going to Rio Claro to see if I get it, to save \$2.75 I must pay \$10 because I have to pay \$10 to reach. What stupidity is this?

I am taking Country Pride Flour; if the Member for Siparia, who lives in Siparia, she has to pay \$7.50 a pound for the flour, but if she wants she can run into Rio Claro and she would get it cheaper. So what she would get it at is, she would spend \$30 to save \$1.74. You know who is benefiting from this? Only the newspaper, because this ad is costing about \$3,000.

Mr. Sharma: \$6,000.

Mr. H. Partap: It is \$6,000 and it goes to the three newspapers and it is repeated. Wasting time and wasting money. If I were living in Iceland today and I was listening to the Internet and I was hearing the Member for Arouca North, man I would have left Iceland immediately to run down here. Because I would have thought that food was in abundance and cheap. The kind of picture the Minister painted for us; doing this and doing that and so on, not realizing that the growth of agriculture in Trinidad dropped last year. I think it is now 1 per cent and you are boasting about all these YAPA, "DAPA" and "SAPA" and making people feel that things so hunky-dory in Trinidad with food. I tell you I am surprised at what I heard. Thank God, I was here to listen.

The Minister spoke about the wholesale market. He did not tell us today that the Macoya wholesale market; when these poor farmers come down to sell their goods at 2.00 a.m. and so on, they are being robbed at knife point and gunpoint. The wholesale market authorities have done nothing to assist the farmers and he stands there and makes it appear as though it is so hunky-dory and nice. You just drive in and you deposit your business and you come back again and you get robbed and so. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. H. Partap: I really could not understand what the Minister was saying. He was boasting and I could not understand why he was boasting like that, when he knew full well the kind of problems that the farmers face.

I heard him say that the YAPA people in Sangre Grande, some lady plants her grow box and brings produce to the Sangre Grande market. The Sangre Grande market now is under a tent. The council gave a contract to build the market. All the money was exhausted; the market has not even started yet, but they are using now the regional corporation workers to build the market. But the contractor who they paid; received the money and ran away, he is free. Taxpayers' money, again, dancing up and you are telling me about market under a tent in Sangre Grande. And you are encouraging agriculture? I am sorry for the people in Trinidad and Tobago if PNM should ever get back into office.

Again, the PNM is equating mega projects with mega returns. That is not so. Any child will tell you that cannot be so. The proposal for the creation of large farms is a failed policy; you know that. We should know this and we should judge it from our experience in Trinidad and Tobago under the PNM. The evidence is

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there: Esmeralda, Wallerfield, Carlsen Field, Moruga food crop project, Bristol and Navet. All failed projects. Big mega projects, mega losses.

These large farms failed as a catalyst to boost food production in Trinidad and Tobago. I had mentioned—I did not mention it but I think somebody mentioned it—they did not succeed in Cuba either. If we are to judge from the performance of Cuba in the 1960s they were not successful. I do not know what they showed you; they showed you something else. As was pointed out, the PNM ran away from agriculture when they closed down Caroni (1975) Limited. [*Desk thumping*] Now they are attempting resuscitate a flawed model. Fidel Castro had introduced the large-scale collectives in tobacco effectively restricting the small farmers and that was a disaster. It was a disaster to the point where Castro reversed his policy and reverted to farming on small plots. Why are you letting the man fool you? He changed and he threw it on you and you come here now. Somebody must tell you that small family farms are easier to maintain and are better managed; you get optimum output. Go back to the small farms.

There is a cultural thing about farming and agriculture, and the Aranguez farmers will tell you that.

Mr. Manning: I thank the hon. Member for Nariva for giving way. Just to point out that we have by no means abandoned the policy of small farms. What we have decided to do is to supplement that approach, which has not been as successful as we would have liked it to be, with an approach of larger farms. So it is now going to be a combination of smaller and larger farms.

Mr. H. Partap: That should never be so. There has always been competition. As I said, it is a cultural thing about agriculture and the Aranguez farmers could tell you about that cultural thing. It is hard work; it is commitment and it is the will to succeed. You do not have that. You all do not even engender that in people. Remember what I tell you? There is a cultural thing about agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, remember you had appointed a high powered team last year or year before, I think it was, of experts to see if he could boost the food production? What happened? It flopped, because you put a square peg in a round hole. The PNM is not benefiting from history. Apart from these failed policies, these large-scale farms proposed in this budget statement may effectively destroy the small farming community.

Already the cadre of small farmers is dwindling under this Government and they may dwindle further and they may even be dismantled by this hare-brained scheme of the PNM, which, of course, you will not have a chance because we will be there so we will ensure that that does not happen.

12.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has no idea of how to keep prices down and how to boost food production. You do not know a thing. But what you do is—even the Minister of Agriculture now has his picture on a big ad in the papers. Even the Minister. It boils down to him; it trickles down. I am sure it trickles down, higher than normal.

Mr. Speaker, remember that it is the PNM that destroyed the large agro-industrial Caroni Limited and they also destroyed the Petrotrin, Palo Seco agricultural farm. It is the PNM's policy that caused that. If the Ministry wants to assist in boosting food production, you must revise the compensation rates for losses of crops through flooding. [*Desk thumping*] The current rates are outrageous and out of touch with the reality of today's prices. In fact, the compensation package is 10 years old; we had revised it when we were there.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Prime Minister, let me give you an example, under the present compensation package that you all will offer—

- a cabbage plant is only worth 66 cents—they would get 66 cents compensation;
- a corn plant, they would get 19 cents compensation;
- a dasheen, 34 cents compensation;
- a cucumber plant, \$3.28 compensation;
- a tomato plant, 97 cents competition;
- a watermelon plant, \$4.13 compensation;
- a pigeon peas plant, \$1.68 compensation; and
- a bhagi plant, 66 cents.

Farmers get no compensation for losses to banana plantations.

Mr. Narine: Member, would you give way? I just wanted to inform the House and the public of Trinidad and Tobago, it is not compensation, it is relief. It is to put back the farmers on the farms to continue planting. It is not compensation. Look at the programme, it is marked flood relief.

Mr. Panday: You all do not really care about farmers. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: 49 cents?

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, farmers get no compensation for losses to banana plantations, while compensation for a coffee tree is \$5.78 and a cocoa tree is \$79.30, and then, recently, the Minister ordered that “bandania” be removed from the list of compensation, so they are no longer.

Mr. Panday: [*Inaudible*] do not die, that is what he is saying.

Mr. H. Partap: Mr. Speaker, I represent farmers in a farming community and I will tell you that the farmers prefer to sell their crops. They preferred to sell their crops in the market rather than depend upon compensation. They do not want compensation; they do not work for compensation. They lose thousands of dollars through flood damage, but they get a pittance in return in compensation. Farmers are not interested, as I said; they are interested in planting, not for flood damage. They want to plant so they can reap and earn a living.

Therefore, we urge to take immediately steps to prevent flooding first, and if the Government cannot alleviate the flooding problem, then they must increase the level of compensation. We will say compensation for farmers because it amounts to nothing more than compensation because you are compensating the farmer. The farmers do not want any relief, they plant their watermelon and so on and they lose it by flooding because of your problems, the problems that you imposed on them.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hedwige Bereaux (*La Brea*): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to join the debate on the Bill entitled, an Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2007. I would like first to congratulate the Minister of Finance on what was a comprehensive and masterful budget statement and presentation. The 2007/2008 Budget Statement “Determine to Reach our Goal”, is yet another cluster in the successive set of measures designed to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago becomes a developed country as quickly as possible, but in any event, at least by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, the rate at which this Government is progressing, I am certain that we will be well by the year 2020. As I stated before, I wanted to deal specifically with certain items in my constituency, but the hon. Member for Nariva and before him, the hon. Member for Naparima made certain comments in respect of agriculture which I feel I would be negligent if I did not deal with them and deal with them immediately.

In the first instance, I will deal first with the hon. Member for Naparima and his comment, a vicious comment as far as I am concerned. I never expected that

from him, but he was prompted by the hon. Member for Princes Town, when he said that the PNM did not do anything about agriculture because their support was not in the agricultural areas. I want to remind the hon. Members opposite that it was the People's National Movement government that purchased Caroni in 1976 and agreed when Basdeo Panday was the leader to raise salaries of the workers in Caroni. And it was their same attitude about destroying and doing, the members of the ULF—especially led by Panday—went ahead and encouraged the workers of Caroni to disrupt the operations of the factory and I have the evidence from persons—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. H. Breaux: Yes—who worked there. I may represent La Brea, but I was born in Chaguanas, I know the sugar industry and I know manufacturing and people in the sugar manufacturing industry, and the members who worked in Brechin Castle wilfully damaged equipment in Caroni Limited. I am making that charge and I could stand by it because I know persons who will verify it. So the crocodile tears you crying over Caroni Limited are just what they are, only crocodile tears because when you had an opportunity to do something for Caroni, you did nothing. When you had an opportunity to do something for agriculture, you did nothing, that was the time when you chose to be with the parasitic oligarchy. When considering the people of Caroni, you rode the backs of the sugar workers and the people in agriculture and now you come here to cry about agriculture.

More important, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Nariva and I have to call him honourable, claimed that the PNM destroyed Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited. Nothing is further from the truth. The truth is that when they—“UNC”—were in government, the persons on that side, what they did, they sought to bring down to reduce the agricultural activity in Palo Seco. Remember Palo Seco is, PSAEL is Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited and it is in my constituency. They brought down the activity in Palo Seco, cut up the land into 50 acre parcels and sought to sell it off to their friends. They left 4 feet high bush in Beach Camp, so that their other friend, the [*Kilwal*] could buy it; the one that Manohar calls the [*Kilwal*] could buy it.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Mr. H. Breaux: You do not worry; he knows whom I am referring to. The one that—the hon. Member for Chaguanas calls “kilwal” could buy it. They were trying to do the same thing—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Who?

Mr. H. Bereaux: You just stay where you are—to the Palo Seco Sporting Club, running it down. I recall casually going to the club one day and I saw certain people inspecting it, they did not recognize me and they told me they were looking at it the Palo Seco Spirting Club to purchase it. So when you speak about agriculture—and then that same document which you read from, is a document, meant in some instances, formally in the oil companies we use to compensate people, but you were in government—the so-called people who come from the agricultural areas—for six years and when you reformed that same schedule, that is what you did and now you are coming blaming the hon. Member for Arouca North for it. No, it is because you all did nothing for agriculture; you did nothing for Caroni; you left them in the doldrums because they were a bank of votes and that is all you saw them as. You rode their backs and now you are talking.

I am ashamed at you all! I did not come here today to speak on this. I came with a very quiet and calm goodbye, but you insulted me when you started that. Let me tell you, all of you, I do not think any one of you, other than the Member for Naparima deals with more agriculture than I do, and I do not mean send people to work; I work in it and I could always say that. Any Sunday or Saturday you come, check me out and you will find me in my agricultural holdings. That is where I am, that is where I will be after I cease to be the Member of Parliament for La Brea.

So, Mr. Speaker, I must apologize for that outburst. I would say, but I was so upset with the hon. Member for Nariva that I had to deal with him quickly otherwise. *[Interruption]* I would not get bad.

The Budget Statement focused appropriately on the five development pillars upon which our Vision 2020 is anchored, developing innovative people, nurturing a caring society, enabling competitiveness in business, investing in sound infrastructure and the environment and promoting effective government.

1.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, as an outgoing Member, speaking in what certainly will be my final budget debate as the Member for La Brea, I have examined critically the La Brea constituency in the context of the development goals since its adoption by the PNM Government. I have come to the inescapable conclusion that this constituency has benefited tremendously from the measures introduced by the PNM administration. I start with development pillar No. 1, Developing Innovative People.

The residents of my constituency have benefitted from the various training programmes put on by the Government catering for all ages in both traditional and non-traditional areas: YTEPP, MuST, Women in Harmony and Women in Action, to name but a few. Those who are qualified or desirous of becoming qualified grasp the opportunity to avail themselves of free tertiary education through GATE and HELP. Moreover, early in the life of this Government two technology centres were set up in the La Brea constituency: one in Palo Seco and one in La Brea Village, to provide computer training to the residents. There is now skills training going on at a pace in the La Brea constituency, and in La Brea Village in particular, by the National Energy Skills Centre (NESC) in conjunction with Alutrint. I shall come to Alutrint shortly.

This is to prepare young persons to access opportunities which are available and those that will become available through the Union and LABIDCO Industrial Estates. TUFCO, another company doing business in LABIDCO, is ready to start a training school to teach their employees and other persons desiring to work with them on the LABIDCO Estate and to train welders and fabricators. Additionally, we also have Servol training in this constituency.

During the early life of this Government, the Vessigny Government Secondary School was built by the PNM. The Palo Seco Secondary School is a singular achievement; 16 classrooms were built in eight weeks; a three-storey building in eight weeks. A building was found for the Palo Seco Primary School inside Beach Camp and is now on the drawing board to be rebuilt.

The other area is: Nurturing a Caring Society: community centres. The Los Bajos Community Centre is in the process of being constructed; Lot 10 Community Centre, constructed; the Daly Village Community Centre, possibly one of the best is fully air-conditioned. Palo Seco/Los Charos, being constructed; La Brea/Point D'or, being constructed; Vance River, to be renovated; Rancho Quemado and, above all, Quarry Village, which is now going to the constituency of Fyzabad. "Ah give yuh one." [*Laughter*]

Mr. Sharma: May the Lord bless you.

Mr. H. Breaux: Palo Seco Settlement Community Centre; Guapo, which is now coming from Point Fortin into La Brea, will be constructed.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of nurturing a caring society, my constituents have benefitted also from all the Government initiatives with respect to the increases in social services and benefits; increases in pension, the disability grant and, in particular, the national insurance payment.

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I recall that one of my constituents who we called Bull Campbell, over the years when the NIS payments were very low, he would write me regular letters. It is unfortunate that he is not around today, but I know I will benefit from the \$2,000. Persons like my good self will benefit from the increase in NIS payments and the other benefits.

A number of persons in my constituency are benefitting from the housing assistance in respect of the improvement grants. There are two small housing estates; one in Palo Seco and one in La Brea. I understand from the documents that there is also a new housing development to come into La Brea. The other side decries about the housing initiative of the Government. Let us take, for instance, the 2 per cent interest.

When I was a senior manager in Petrotrin and Trintopeç, I was proud to benefit from the 2 per cent housing. Those of you who pass by my house today can see it. It is a very good benefit. For those who do not know, the difference between 2 per cent and 8 per cent interest is \$6,000 a year per \$100,000. So if you have a \$300,000 house, every year is a gift from the Government of \$18,000. There are other benefits.

Mr. Sharma: Only if you take the loan.

Mr. H. Beraux: Of course, if you have any sense you will take the loan. [Crosstalk] No, there is no down payment. You were not listening. I will tell you why you were not listening. [Crosstalk] There is no down payment. If you are even working for \$1,400 a month, you can pay the instalments.

Mr. Ramsaran: How much is it so?

Mr. H. Beraux: If you cannot count, that is not my fault. [Laughter] You get a calculator and work it out. [Crosstalk] I am not trying to fool anybody. I can only fool you.

Mr. Speaker, you can qualify for the loan if you are working for \$1,400 a month. You had your opportunity and you did not use it; do not blame me.

The other pillar is investing in strong infrastructure and the environment. It is under this heading that the greatest advances were made in my constituency. I referred in the beginning to the LABIDCO estate, which their government stopped for six years, but the PNM came back into power and now that industrial estate is filled.

Several platforms were built to service the upstream in the oil industry, in the LABIDCO Industrial Estate. More than that, US \$1 billion was spent to develop the

Union Industrial Estate. As a result, in the Union Industrial Estate, there is going to be an aluminium industry, a complex. What happened with that? Many of those who support the other side tried to stop the complex. They even took the Environmental Management Authority to court; but linger long and die you must. We now have Alutrint with the first smelter and we expect also Alutech Limited, which will supply 720 megawatts of electricity, not only to service the smelter and the other plants which will be on the Union Estate, but also to provide electricity security for the rest of the area.

With the estate we also have port facilities to be developed in La Brea. It is well known that Brighton, La Brea is a top class natural harbour that is protected on the western side of Trinidad. The Minister of Finance in his budget statement has indicated that at Brighton, port facilities will be developed.

Even more than that, the whole picture of La Brea, the whole shape, will be changed with the coming of the new town of La Brea. Those on the other side would never say that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is also developing one in Princes Town and Chaguanas. They would make their constituents believe that it is a one-sided operation, but I am proud that La Brea will have its new town. I know you will be glad that Chaguanas will also have a new town, although you will not be representing Chaguanas. It will be Jack Warner representing Chaguanas West from now on. [*Crosstalk*] I am telling you. We have somebody else to represent Princes Town, but I will not tell you yet.

Mr. Ramsaran: De Couteau!

Mr. H. Bereaux: Could be; I do not know. He was an old PNM; you could expect anything from him. He might come back.

The increase in the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) fleet from 80 to 200 buses and then the expected increase to 300 will do a tremendous good to the La Brea/Palo Seco areas. For years the PTSC was wilfully run down by the UNC government; that is why persons who ran other forms of transport were able to hold the poor and downtrodden and the Government to ransom system; but it is not going to work anymore. A number of my constituents now wait for their bus. They buy their tickets or they pay on the bus. They tell me how comfortable it is. It is air-conditioned and new and on time. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: I thought that was only happening in Morvant! [*Laughter*]

Mr. H. Bereaux: No. There is a PTSC bus going from Erin to San Fernando and one leaving Siparia very early in the morning and going into Port of Spain carrying workers. There are persons living in Siparia who are working on a

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construction site in Port of Spain and they take the bus. There is a PTSC bus going from Erin back through Buenos Ayres into Point Fortin; until some miscreants once or twice stoned the bus. [*Laughter*] Yes, they did it.

Mr. Hinds: Fyzabad sent them!

Mr. H. Bereaux: Whoever; I am not ascribing any misdeeds to anybody. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: That is the kind of man he is. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. H. Bereaux: The bus goes through to Point Fortin, then one goes from there to San Fernando and that happens all day. You see them making those rounds.

Mr. Ramsaran: Until they steal them.

Mr. H. Bereaux: Well, I do not know about that; you may know something. Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of operation we have.

I come now to the Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency. It is unfortunate that the hon. Minister of Works and Transport is not here, but I know he will hear about it. I would be most ungrateful if I did not commend him and his staff.

It is said that the Ministry of Works and Transport deals with certain roads and then local government deal with other roads. But the Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency (PURE) is really working. [*Desk thumping*] Wadell Village, three roads; Cayenne Trace, three roads; Jacob Settlement, four roads; Los Bajos, four roads; Paria Gardens, about six; Silver Screen, two; Merimac, Vance River, about three or four; central road to Salazar Trace is not entirely finished. I passed through Point Fortin and I see that my good friend's road, the Member for Point Fortin, is also being handled, the same part of the central road.

1.15 a.m.

Rancho Quemado, roads and drains done by PSAEL, one of those maligned companies, the special purpose companies. Lorensott, Lagandore in La Brea, Point D'or, Rumstill Avenue. I would say there were about 27 to 30 roads they had done. [*Desk thumping*] I leave so happy, and what made me happier is that I saw the hon. Member for Diego Martin East when I came on Friday and I told him I was having some problems in Point D'or.

Mr. Speaker, you know La Brea there is a geological situation because of the pitch and its influence, and the heavy weight of traffic passing, the roads get

damaged from time to time. I said to him I am having some problems that the Point D'or Road is being damaged and he said he anticipated that, and he is taking care of it. You know he is a man full of confidence.

On Sunday when I was driving, I was so confident that the road would be fixed, or at least something would be done, I passed through with my Mercedes Benz, I have a truck too, but I passed with the Benz and work on the road had begun. It is not completed yet, but I was convinced that it would have been ready.

Mr. Speaker, I do not understand the duplicity that we get from the other side. In 2003, when we came to this honourable House, the Members on the other side put CEPEP under serious attack. Although it was the fault of their leader that some of their supporters may not have gotten into CEPEP because he told them not to apply and they should take nothing from this Government.

Mr. Hart: Yes. That is how they operate.

Mr. H. Breaux: He told them that. Typical resistance, civil disobedience.

Mr. Hinds: In the meanwhile he had his millions in London though.

Mr. H. Breaux: Well, that is something else. I do not want to bring the two arms of the State—the Judiciary is dealing with that, and we are dealing with the Legislative so let us keep that where it is. I am saying, he told them not to take part and all they did for five years was to attack CEPEP; called them slaves, every unfair name they could find.

Mr. Hinds: He called them cockroaches.

Mr. H. Breaux: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if there is any significance in this but in the constituency of Fyzabad every CEPEP shed that is built is burnt. Yes, they burn the CEPEP sheds.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Who Sharma?

Mr. H. Breaux: I do not know. I did not say that. I am making a statement of fact that in the constituency of Fyzabad, every shed that CEPEP built was burnt and CEPEP built them again. I did not know that, it is not evidence I have personally; it is evidence I got as a result of some discussions I held with some people on Saturday, but I am saying it here loudly that we have put some things in place to locate and catch the burners of the CEPEP sheds. Whoever is burning them. [*Interruption*] I do not know. I am not saying it is them. I am just saying we have put something in place to catch them.

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Now when the Government has decided to raise the pay of the CEPEP workers, they say we are satisfied with that but—

You see the Government of Trinidad and Tobago did not raise the pay of CEPEP and URP just like that. You will recall the public servants pay was raised by a certain quantum and it is about four or five years the CEPEP workers had received an increase, so their pay was raised by 15 per cent retroactively from January 01, 2007.

Sometime ago I saw a clown on the television minus the red beret saying that he is going to step down from politics and all those persons in CEPEP and URP who have not collected their back pay should write to him because he is also a lawyer and he will be able to take up their cause.

I want to say to the hon. gentleman although he is no longer a Member of this House but he may or may not be back. I want to say to him that he has enough legal problems of his own that he would need superior skills and do not interfere with CEPEP people because he has treated them so badly. I remember him saying that they painted every pebble and things like that.

Mrs. Job-Davis: And corbeaux.

Mr. H. Béréaux: Yes, and the corbeaux thing, but I will say that CEPEP takes care of the environment. They work and they deserve every penny and as a result of that, I think there are some lessons to learn. If there was anything that was wrong with CEPEP, we have to correct it but CEPEP and the reforestation programme are good programmes that need to be emulated.

I suggest if we look at how a group of people can work in a CEPEP context, I commend the reforestation group called SENAM located at Quinam Road, it is a combination of Sennon Village and Quinam Road. Senam is the contractor and they operate their group on a system of a co-operative so that the group is the contractor and the members are workers of the group. They had their initial problems, they dealt with them and are now operating properly.

Mr. Speaker, there is the other problem about promoting effective government. I know the other persons from our team would speak on that but I just want to comment on local government reform, the computer generated birth certificates, the machine readable passports and on various crime fighting advances. As we talk about the crime fighting advances I did not want to disturb the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre when she was speaking, but the hon. Member for Chaguanas is here so he would take the message to her.

I heard her talk about all the crime advisories on Trinidad and Tobago I do not like that, but I am going to England hopefully if God spares my life after election. [*Interruption*] No, no, the one thing you do not know about me, my progeny is spread throughout many countries and I visit them from time to time. [*Desk thumping*]

England had a bomb attack about a year ago that killed about 50 or 60 persons. You do not hear any Englishman complaining about advisory from England. [*Interruption*] I look at the BBC World every morning and I saw quite recently an 11-year-old child killed by stray bullets. I do not like the rate of crime and I think we have to do something about it, but while certain Members on the other side are speaking about the state of crime here, they are running to the United States of America.

The hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre just returned from the United States I think where 3,000 persons were killed on 9/11. Nobody had an inkling about what was happening, but you are talking about bombs in Trinidad. I am saying it is all well and good to talk about the state of affairs here, but do not try to make it look as though our country is the last word on criminality. We must correct it and approach it in a scientific way; and while I am on that, I thank the Back Bench Opposition, COP, for the work which they did with the Government in order to bring some of the crime legislation in place.

I thank them for that. I recognize what you have done but do not try to tell us that Trinidad and Tobago is so bad in terms of crime. Further, any time the hon. Members opposite speak, it is about how much money is being spent on high-rise buildings as though we are just building them for spite.

That is not so, the Government—and I am going to use maybe two examples—is paying large sums of money in respect of rent, and I will take a few. I will take the Ministry of Public Administration and Information, the rent for the general administration for 2006 was \$21,883,263; by the time we get to the estimates of 2008, the rent is estimated at \$35,794,171; an increase between 2006 and 2008 of over \$14 million.

1.30 a.m.

That is only in respect of one area. The Ministry of Finance, in 2006 the rent was—just one area—\$14,522,000 per year. By 2008, it was just \$15 million so I am going to excuse that comment. I will go back to Public Administration because that has a number of others. In total, the rent for Public Administration for 2008 is \$49,656,277, as opposed to 2006, \$28 million, over \$21million more.

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If you go at that rate, what I am saying is, a number of persons who keep complaining about Government's building cost and producing these high rises, they are wise to their own interests, because if you check some of them, you will realize that some of them are landlords to the State, so they are protecting their own exorbitant rent, and if we did not attempt to put up those buildings, they would have been carrying the rents through the roof.

So it is not only more comfortable accommodation for the public servants who will be in the building, it is also a savings and the savings could more than amortize the price of the buildings. So, do not try to follow—as my mother used to say, do not follow multitude to do evil. We know what we are doing and in any event, the rate at which things are increasing, if we do not build it now it will cost a lot more when we come to build it later. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Panday: Who is causing that inflation?

Mr. H. Béréaux: Inflation will be caused by a number of things but all inflation is not homegrown. I believe you know better than that so I am not going to explain. But earlier, the Member for St. Joseph—I think he has gone home but if he has not gone home, he will hear me. I think he just had some problem today or he did not like the comprehensive report given by the Ministry of Health, so he got off in a kind of crazy way. I do not mean it in a derogatory manner. I was very surprised to hear him.

Mrs. Job-Davis: He eat “mother-in-law”.

Mr. H. Béréaux: Yes, he may have eaten “mother-in-law”. We all know what “mother-in-law” is; it is a very hot dish. He started off by reading the top half of the letter—

Dr. Moonilal: You started off the same way.

Mr. H. Béréaux: That is true. I apologize—[*Interruption*] He started off by reading the top half, making it appear as though the Government was at fault. But it turned out at the end—the lady said, and I am going to read the bottom half:

“Richard may have survived a little longer if the people at the Port of Spain General Hospital did what they were supposed to do. The time lapse in getting my brother dialyzed cost him his life. His seven-year-old daughter...”

And those comments I do not want to bring in. So, in fact, she focused on what one would call, maybe delay in the Port of Spain General Hospital.

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

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Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. Hon. J. Narine]

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg for move that this House be now adjourned to later today at 10.00 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 1.37 a.m.