

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Wednesday, August 29, 2007*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended and will resume at 10.30 a.m.

10.10 a.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

10.22 a.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

SUSPENSION OF HOUSE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, those of you who are in the Fifth Parliament, I want you to throw your minds back to the period, when during budget presentations, this House would have to meet until 2 o'clock and 3 o'clock and we had to come back at 10.00 a.m. and most Members did. So I am very disappointed that Members today, those who are absent, were not present at 10.00 a.m. It is something that I have commented on before. When the House is adjourned to a particular time, some Members do not see it fit to be present on time. I am again appealing to Members to be on time; 10 o'clock is 10 o'clock, not 22 minutes after 10.

INDEPENDENCE GREETINGS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received a letter from the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons from the Commons of Canada which I should like to read. It is addressed to:

“Senator The Honourable
Dr. Linda Baboolal

The Honourable Barendra Sinanan, MP

President of the Senate
Parliament - Red House

Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament – Red House

Dear Colleagues,

We are honoured to convey to you and to your compatriots on behalf of our fellow parliamentarians and all Canadians, our congratulations and best wishes for happiness and prosperity on the occasion of your National Day.

On this historic day, may you recall with pride your past accomplishments and look with promise to the future.

Independence Greetings
[MR. SPEAKER]

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Cooperation between our two Parliaments stands to make an important contribution to the future development of our bilateral relations and will reinforce our shared goals of peace and prosperity. We therefore commit to lessen any geographical distance between us through a regular exchange of ideas and experiences that will promote relations between our two countries.

Please accept the assurances of our highest consideration on this memorable occasion as well as our best wishes for the well-being of the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Yours sincerely,

Noël A. Kinsella

Speaker of the Senate

Peter Milliken

Speaker of the House of Commons”

PAPER LAID

Annual audited financial statements of the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (Petrotrin) for the year September 30, 2006. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY (NO. 2) BILL

**Joint Select Committee Report
(Presentation)**

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on a Bill entitled the Bankruptcy and Insolvency (No. 2) Bill, 2006.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY BILL

**Joint Select Committee Report
(Presentation)**

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker on behalf of the Member for Diego Martin East, I wish to present the Second Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on a Bill entitled the Equal Opportunity Bill, 2007.

BAIL (AMDT.) (NO. 3) BILL

Bill to amend the Bail Act, 1994, [*The Minister of National Security*]; read the first time.

10:25 a.m.

APPROPRIATION BILL**(BUDGET)**

[Fifth Day]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment (Hon. Penelope Beckles): Mr. Speaker, let me join my colleagues before me in congratulating the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for delivery of what is clearly a people's budget that reflects the theme "Vision 2020, Determined to Reach Our Goal".

I will first of all start off by saying that I actually got home a little after 2 o'clock this morning and we are here again to start. Unfortunately the proceedings have been delayed. When the hon. Prime Minister referred to the fact that he was called the "Energizer Bunny", some of my colleagues on the other side were laughing, but clearly we see where the energizer bunnies are and where there are those who did not seem to be able to get up early this morning at all. As a matter of fact, this morning, from the other side only the hon. Member for Oropouche was here; everybody else abandoned this honourable House. I would go so far as to remind them that those who aspire to lead must respect this honourable House and must have stamina and energy. That is what we have on this side. [*Desk thumping*] I propose in the time I wish to speak to talk about the achievements of the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, not just for this fiscal year, but for the past five years.

I will demonstrate that the Ministry is well on its way to achieving Vision 2020. One of the things we have done is to examine scientifically the response of the population to the Ministry's performance. The results of the MORI poll showed that over the period 2006 to 2007 satisfaction with the postal sector was 79 per cent and 84 per cent respectively; T&TEC, 81 per cent and 79 per cent respectively, and the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA), 64 per cent and 62 per cent respectively. That, therefore, gives us an idea of what the country is thinking about the Ministry's performance.

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I heard the MP for Fyzabad say that the National Street Lighting Programme is not making any impact at all on the lives of the citizens. I should like him to know that the MORI poll said that 91 per cent of the population believes that the programme has contributed immeasurably to an improved quality of life. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the budgetary allocations for the Ministry is in total \$2.437 million, representing 6 per cent of the total budget. We in the Ministry are extremely pleased with that allocation.

First of all I will start with the water and waste water sector and in so doing indicate that there are several interventions this Government has embarked on to ensure an improved supply of water. We are talking about the Water Sector Modernization Programme, the Infrastructure Development Programme, the Public Sector Investment Programme and the National Social Development Programme.

I will deal, first of all, with the Water and Waste Water Master Plan that Cabinet approved earlier this year, which will be completed in some 18 months at the cost of US \$6.9 million. There will be two separate yet interrelated components of the plan, one for Trinidad and the other for Tobago.

As it relates to the Water Sector Modernization Programme, that is a \$1.2 billion programme basically spanning a period of three years. We are really looking at moving the 26 per cent supply of water 24/7 to 36 per cent. As it stands, funding for the first year was some \$433 million and of that figure \$233 million was allocated to Trinidad and \$66 million to Tobago. In the financial year of 2006/2007, WASA was allocated some \$75 million towards the implementation of these projects.

Some persons have alleged that these projects are starting because of the election, but I want to make it clear and remind them that I said they were agreed to by Cabinet in 2005.

So far to date, we have a major well development programme; about 31 wells were approved and to date 17 have been substantially completed. We are talking about that impacting on 45,000 persons in the communities of Freeport, Carlsen Field, Caparo, El Socorro and Chatham.

We have completed the contract for the drilling of the Cumuto wells, one to five, and we are going to get an estimated 5.5, 5.35 million gallons. That project commences in May. The Cumuto Water Treatment Plant should be completed within the second quarter of 2008. I will also say very quickly WASA has

approved the design of the Pilote and Ortoire Water Treatment Plants, and that will affect some communities that have absolutely no water supply: Kernaham, parts of Guayaguayare, Mayaro, St. Joseph, Radix, St. Ann's and Grand Lagoon. Also the contracts for the construction of the water treatment plants at Matura and Salybia have already been awarded. That will cost us some \$35 million and we will get an additional 12 million gallons. The cost of the Salybia and the Matura is \$25 million and another \$28 million.

We have completed three booster stations at Brieves Road, Knaggs Hill and in Maraval. We had some complaints in Lady Young. We also completed the putting up of a booster station in Sangre Grande to impact on the areas of Biche, North Manzanilla, Cunapo Southern Main Road, Plum Mitan, just to name a few.

In terms of 2008, the Government has allocated another \$41 million. We will continue the Cumuto Treatment Plant; commence construction of Salybia, Matura, Pilote and Ortoire. Reconfigure booster stations at St. Mary's, construct a new reservoir at Tortuga.

The laying of the 29 kilometres (17 miles) of transmission pipeline is very strategic. That is the project I launched at Dades Trace. We will need to put in the actual pipelines, so we are looking at upper Ecclesville, Clear Water Village, Bristol, and Mafeking. Those areas either do not have a supply of water or they have a very poor supply.

I will go now to the Infrastructure Development Fund. Partially funded to date, we have gotten some funding from that fund specifically for the Navet Trunk. Cabinet agreed to that project, costing some \$574 million, to impact almost 250,000 persons. Mr. Speaker, that network was first established in 1962, so it is an old network, leaking quite a bit. The areas to be impacted will be as far as Rio Claro to Marabella, New Grant, Tableland, Moruga, Princes Town, Williamsville, Piparo, Barrackpore, Cocoyea and St. Charles. At present, just about 17 per cent of the 250,000 persons receive a 24/7 and 26 per cent receive 28 hours.

Mr. Speaker, when that project is completed, we will be looking at 60 miles of pipeline distribution networked, five reservoirs, 115.8 miles of new pipelines. We are looking at 36 months for that project. Tenders have already been invited for the design.

I just want to go quickly now to the Public Sector Investment Programme. From that programme we are looking again at installation of four kilometres of 400 pipelines at Carlsen Field. The areas to be affected positively are Arena, Chickland and Fletcher. There is also installation of three kilometres of pipeline at

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the Lady Young Road. I mentioned some of the areas: Caledonia, Coconut Drive, Chinapoo and Romain Lands.

We are looking at improving the conditions for the workers of Princes Town. I know that my colleagues from both Tobago East and West spoke about Tobago, but I should like just briefly to talk about Tobago.

One of the main initiatives was the upgrade of the Diamond and Daniel Wells which produce now some 500,000 gallons; that project cost \$2 million.

Of course, we also have the Courland Well development with an additional two million gallons per day. This project proved for areas such as Arnos Vale, Mason Hall, Plymouth, Courland and mainly Southwest Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I remember the 2002 dry season in Tobago when trucks actually had to go across to Tobago from Trinidad. It was one of the worst dry seasons. I was glad to hear both my colleagues report that there were actually no complaints from the hotel industry in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Tobago can boast of, at least, more than half the population having water more than 24/7.

The water reuse programme—we are talking about some 20 million gallons of water as a result of the water treatment plants at the Beetham. Cabinet has agreed to look at that particular programme with a view to having that 20 million gallons of water available, particularly for the industrial sector. That will allow the freeing up of quite a bit of water to go into the system.

That is a good idea as to exactly some of the projects, but again I want to specifically indicate that the energy sector committee has agreed to look at these interventions: Increase in water supply from the desalination plants; reduced reliance on surface water; adoption of regional approaches to transmission and to seek alternative sources of water.

I will go on to the last intervention, which is the national Social Development Programme. Over the last five years we have spent some \$569 million. That programme has been designed specifically to look at rural communities that are either underserved or where you have absolutely no supply of water. To date we have completed the total laying of 732 pipeline projects; 35 booster stations and 24 wells.

The lives of persons that have been impacted positively: some 273,000. We recognize, and it is one of the points that have been made from time to time, that the training of persons is one of the areas the Government should address and, therefore, under the National Social Development we have designed a programme

that actually has already started in Tobago, where we are training young persons between the ages of 17 and 25 years in pipe laying and all matters related to the water sector. That programme cost us some \$1.3 million and we will continue it. It is due to start in Trinidad. I congratulate the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) who has now made land available for the establishment of a facility, so that we will now have continuous training both for persons entering the water and the electricity sectors.

Before I go on to the electricity sector, I refer very briefly to what I consider to be continuous irresponsible statements by Members of the Opposition.

10.40 a.m.

Now, you would recall in the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition—the Member of Parliament for Siparia—she indicated that the UNC delivered water to 80 per cent of the population. Today, only 30 per cent have a water supply. It is amazing that the hon. Member for Siparia could get up and say something like that, because to make that kind of statement is really getting to the point of desperation.

Now, I am sure that one of the statements that would remain in the minds of most Trinidadians and Tobagonians is the UNC's comment that the country will have water for all by 2000. One of the things that I have always been very, very clear about is not misleading the population of Trinidad and Tobago and I have been very clear on informing them as to exactly what the situation is as it relates to water. So there it is, they were saying water for all by 2000, knowing very well that that statement was a desperate statement calculated to influence the voters. Fortunately, the voters were not foolish and they knew very well that that could do nothing.

I just want to share with the population—because, you know, one of the things that I think are very important for us, as politicians, is when we have the opportunity to criticize, we do precisely that; when we have the opportunity to let each other know that we have faltered, we do precisely that, but what we must always do if we are graceful enough, is to be truthful and to at least inform the population when we have succeeded in getting projects in our area.

I do not like to always do this, but I have great difficulty when Members of Parliament stand here and give the impression that the PNM is not doing anything in their area. I am so sorry that the Member of Parliament for Siparia is not here because I think, more than any other person on that side she had succeeded in getting the most projects. I am going to spend a minute to read the number of

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projects she got in her area. Just very quickly: Small Trace, Guerra Trace, Quinam, Clara, Cayenne, Waddle, Taylor Avenue, Alter, Richardson, Quinam, Lazzari. That is some \$4 million under the NSDP.

Mr. Singh: All of that for pipe laying?

Hon. P. Beckles: All of that pipe laying, yes. I continue: Bunsee, Along, Gonsales, Victor, GP, Bunsee Trace, Crawford, Dandee Lane, Victor, Dynamics, Gambel, Oropouche, Alter, Murray Trace Road off Timal. Let me just go on quickly: Mora Dam, Mora Dam Extension, David Drive, Murray Trace, Well Road, Coora Branch Road, 1 and 2, Seeback Trace, Quinam, Scott Road, Scott Road, Cotton Trace, Johnson outskirts, Sou Sou Land, Seebalack, Siparia Old Road, Ramcharan. Now I have about four pages—and that is another \$8 million. Another \$12 million: Scotts Road 1 and 2. I do not have time to read out five pages of projects at a cost of \$53,287,219.48. [*Desk thumping*] That is for the constituency of the Member of Parliament for Siparia.

Mr. Singh: I am getting jealous.

Hon. P. Beckles: I do not want you to get jealous, because, you see, there are some of us who only use opportunities to show when things are bad. This was an unusual dry season so it gave her the opportunity to talk about the water problem, but at least there are some of us in this House who understand that a little letter of gratitude and thanks can go a long way. I want to read this letter.

“As Member of Parliament for Caroni East it is my distinct pleasure to recognize individuals and organizations that are providing exceptional service to the development of my constituency, as well as to our nation as a whole. First of all, I would like to thank the Water and Sewerage Authority for its continued support and commitment to the upgrade and ongoing development of the Caroni East constituency. Worthy of particular mention...”

And I would not want to say the names because, you know, that could cause a little problem. That is not to say that there are not problems still in this constituency. There are problems still in his constituency, but at least he was able to write and say: “Listen, thank you.” [*Desk thumping*] I want to commend him for that. I do not have the total cost for his area because, you know, some persons have it to say that I have been putting projects in that area because he is my friend. The point is that the Member of Parliament for Caroni East, the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad and myself, were all in class together. As a matter of fact—

Dr. Moonilal: Fyzabad is a lawyer?

Hon. P. Beckles: Siparia, sorry. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: Read my text.

Hon. P. Beckles: Okay. Shall I read it now? Be careful of what you told me.

And the point about it is that, I am not certain but I think the Member of Parliament for Siparia also taught the Member of Parliament for Caroni East and we were actually in the same student council. Fortunately for both of us, we have learnt the importance of honesty and truthfulness and at least indicating, from time to time, that a little letter of thanks can go a long way. I will give her a copy so maybe on the next occasion she would recall that \$53 million spent in her constituency deserves, a measure of thanks, not to me the Minister, but probably to WASA, the same organization that she continues to denigrate.

What really upsets me is the fact that they continue to come here and give the impression that the PNM Government is discriminating. Some of my colleagues here, from time to time, criticize me for actually neglecting some of the PNM constituencies and doing work in some of the other constituencies. Why do they do that? Because the water problem exists in every constituency, but we must admit that the rural constituencies, in particular, have had a problem. That is why the hon. Prime Minister saw it fit to develop the National Social Development Programme—of almost \$600 million.

So when they say that we spent a lot of money in Mayaro to win the Mayaro seat, the point is that this is an area that needed water, and we continue to go all through the country, from Matelot to Cedros, from Guayaguayare to Tobago, and the fact that we could achieve more than 50 per cent 24/7 in Tobago, I tell you, Mr. Speaker, that is going to be achieved in Trinidad as well. [*Desk thumping*]

I do not want to go into others, but I would challenge any Member of Parliament, anyone on that Opposition bench, to get up this morning and say that they have not gotten a water project in their area—any single one. And do you know what? Not one could get up, because I have written every single Member of Parliament and I have said to every single one: “You tell me what are some of the projects you need in your area.” And they have all complied. The Member of Parliament—the one that now cannot come into the House, included. He is outside, but the point is, he also sent his list and I have tried to accommodate every single person. [*Desk thumping*] And I will tell you why I do that. Because that is the philosophy of the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

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I would go on now to the electricity sector, but I want to say as I close off from the water sector that it is not easy. The Member of Parliament for Caroni East is a former Minister of Public Utilities. The water sector is not easy. It is a challenge all over the world and, yes, we need to improve WASA and its performance and management, so Cabinet has also taken the decision to restructure WASA so that it could deliver better to the people. It is not going to be easy as we try to ensure that we have a good quality supply and we get to 24/7. What I am absolutely certain of is this Government, this Prime Minister, this Cabinet, have taken all decisions necessary to ensure that we get to the stage of having 24/7 for the entire public of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to go to the electricity sector and in so doing I want to start off on the same foot, because I have sat here and heard accusations. Sometimes I do not think they really mean it; I think it is just the cut-and-thrust of the politics that causes them to say, again, that we are focused on delivery of electricity exclusively to PNM areas. I grew up in a rural community; I knew what it was to grow up without lights and water until I was a teenager, so I understand the challenges of persons in rural communities. What I do not like is when the impression is given that, again, you need to have a PNM party card to get water and lights. That is not true.

Let me just go to projects agreed to by this Government and this Cabinet. Let me first of all start with the National Streetlighting Programme. Cabinet agreed to that programme two years ago and, in essence, that programme spoke about lighting every pole in Trinidad and Tobago—every pole. That was what the agreement was—looking at areas where there were no lights at all. I just want to say that to date T&TEC has excelled. In that two-year period it has surpassed what Cabinet asked it to do.

By yesterday 114,000 street lamps have either been lit or upgraded. That is performance! [*Desk thumping*] I just want to spend two minutes going through some of the areas and giving some figures: Arima, La Horquetta, Guanapo, Malabar—4,800; Chaguanas—2,515; Couva, Tortuga, Preysal—2,578; Cunupia—3,663; Debe, Barrackpore—2,541; Diego Martin—3,000; Freeport, Chase Village—3,514; Marabella, Gasparillo, Williamsville, Piparo—4,115; Mayaro beach—1,412; Penal, Siparia, Chatham, Cedros—5,997; San Fernando, La Romaine, Corinth, Diamond Village—5,683. And I could go through.

So there are times when we must celebrate the fact that projects have been designed to ensure that they have national coverage. This is one such project and I want to congratulate T&TEC for the work that it has done. [*Desk thumping*] But

just to read again, very quickly. [*Short pause*] I am not seeing exactly where it is, but the point is that the Member of Parliament and Leader of the Opposition stated that there are going to be so many blackouts—yes, here it is.

10.55 a.m.

In her contribution the Member said the issue with electricity is the same, and the demands are outstripping the supply. That the Government's major projects are coming on stream in 2009, and we would have load shedding, electrical blackouts and an unreliable supply.

Now, some of us can throw our minds back to 10 or 15 years ago and what it was then. What has happened in Trinidad and Tobago is that electricity cannot go for a minute because everybody panics. Some people just cannot do without it. The truth is that we have had tremendous improvements. I quickly want to go through some of the improvements.

As it stands, about 97 per cent of the population have a supply of electricity and T&TEC has a customer base of 831,000. To date, the maximum demand recorded is 1,132 megawatts which was recorded at April 18, 2007. This is expected to peak at 1,161 megawatts by the end of 2007. Robust forecasts have also been made for the next five years and plans are in place to ensure the necessary generation capacity is added in a timely fashion to meet the projected load demand and reduce the time lag for the restoration of electricity supply after an outage.

So far for 2007, customers have had an electricity supply 99.8 per cent of the time and it took on average 1.82 hours to restore a supply after a power outage, a marked improvement on past performance. Trouble reports have been reduced from 7.1 per 1,000 customers for the year ending December 2005 to 5.4 per 1,000 customers for the year ending December 2006. In addition, same day connections are now the norm rather than the exception.

Mr. Speaker, the existing total generating capacity is 1,625 megawatts and this is expected to increase to 2,300 megawatts by 2012. To date, the addition of 208 megawatts of additional generation capacity to the national electricity grid in April 2007 has been timely to deal with load demand.

As a 51 per cent shareholder, the Government contributed some \$321 million to that. What we have done now is the installation of a 65 megawatt of dual fuel generating plant, and that would be completed by 2009. Another 104 megawatts is also to be added to the system. We have the Mount Pleasant/Diamond Vale, 66

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KV which will improve those areas like Diego Martin and Carenage, and there are several new substations that will cost us some \$844 million. They are under construction at Invaders Bay, St. James and Macoya.

To the business community, you have expressed some concerns, but Cabinet has already approved funding and the projects have already started. We have the establishment of the Bamboo/ East Dry River, 132 KV due to be completed by February 2008 and the Sea Lots project, 132 KV and that will reinforce the supply into Port of Spain and the substation will be supplied from Bamboo with 132 KV.

Again, in Port of Spain, another 6.6 KV load to the 12 KV system to cater for additional growth. The residents of Bamboo will have an improved supply, because that project has already been awarded and it is continuing. Also at San Raphael/Wallerfield another 132 KV tower line, and that is for the Tamana In-teck Park.

In terms of San Fernando, there is the construction of the Debe/Union 222 KV tower line; Debe/Penal, 132 KV; Union, 132 KV and Reform and Debe 132 KV substation.

In Tobago where there have been some concerns as well, in order to improve the reliability to Tobago a 66KV network is also being developed for Tobago, while a 33KV network is also being upgraded. These circuits will improve the reliability of supply to Tobago, and they will cater for future load growth and facilitate the establishment of the Cove and Studley Park area.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to rural electrification. Cabinet has agreed to \$49 million for 65 projects. There are a number of areas where it might have been uneconomical for T&TEC to run lines, but the Government has agreed that it is our responsibility—I see my colleagues are very interested, but I cannot read the entire 65. I know there are several in Tabaquite and Nariva. I cannot go through all, but I have all the areas—Train Line Village, Brasso—*[Interruption]*—whatever you have submitted.

The point is, the agreement is to fund those projects. In the event, even if it is out now—we have Babooram Trace, Moruga; Riverside, Poole; Indian Walk, Princes Town; Dhanrajie Trace in Tableland, Buen Intento and Boo Settlement, Deep River, Rio Claro. So, most of what you have asked for is there, and they have been approved. If there is any that is not there, I would give you the list and you could always let me know, and we could make the adjustments.

Similarly, under NSDP, they have continued to light areas. We have developed a special project for the wiring of houses. What we have found is that after you have wired houses, there are a number of persons who cannot pay for the wiring of those houses, and we have developed a criterion. Of course, there would be challenges. In many of the rural communities, you may go now and see electricity, but the point is that they cannot afford it. So, the ministry, under NSDP, will fund the cost of wiring those houses once they have so qualified. We are looking at using contractors in those areas so that it would make it much easier.

I want to go quickly to the environment and to say some of the things that we have done. I know that is an area that is of special interest to the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite. We have revised the national policy and it was laid in both Houses; we have completed the enactment of the amended Water Pollution Rules; we have completed the drafting of the Air Pollution Rules. Cabinet has approved them and they are before the Attorney General for finalization. As soon as he gives sign off, they will be laid.

We have the consultant for the drafting of the waste rules and that is completed; and we have awarded a contract to facilitate the redrafting of the forest policy and protected areas. Now, I know that is a contentious area, but the point is that the last forest policy is more than 50 years old. What we have sought to do, therefore, is that in drafting that policy with the assistance of the FAO, was to incorporate all of that. There will be public consultations so that we will probably have a document that people will be comfortable with.

In terms of minimizing pollution; implemented: noise pollution regulations. We have awarded a contract for the improved system of waste collection; phased out the use of leaded gasoline; phased out the ozone depleting gas CFC; and completed the inventory on hazardous waste.

Whilst some members of the public have been very critical of the Government's performance as it relates to the environment, I must say that some of these interventions are historical in nature and have never been done before. We have declared Caroni Swamp and Buccoo Reef as wetlands; declaration of the Matura Forests, Nariva Swamp, Aripo Savannah as environmentally sensitive areas. Again, last night, when concerns were raised about Tobago, Buccoo Reef and Main Ridge, these areas have already been declared by the Cabinet as sensitive areas and what is taking place now is the official notice from the EMA.

We have declared the pawl, the manatee, the white tailed saberwing hummingbird as environmentally sensitive species and initiated steps to have marine turtles, the

golden tree frog and the ocelot declared environmentally sensitive species. Those are unique to Trinidad and Tobago

The World Bank has signed an agreement with Trinidad and Tobago to initiate steps to have the ecology of the Nariva Swamp restored. For the first time, the Forestry Division has received 15 new vehicles at the cost of \$9 million. We have now acquired nine automatic weather stations.

With respect to the Doplar radar that you are concerned about which is in your constituency—I am sure that you know more than I do—we are well advanced in terms of that and when it is completed we would join some of the other countries in the world in terms of having one of the most modern facilities to be able to do forecasting in terms of flooding and so forth.

In some of the other areas, we have continued improvements like the National Reforestation Programme that we are looking to expand. That is a success story. It is really a 10-year programme where we are going to reforest 33,000 acres of land. We have now officially completed the national action programme for land degradation. That is going to be laid before this honourable House.

Someone spoke about the advisory for Fort George, and we have improved security at all our areas like Lopinot, Fort George, and San Fernando Hill.

Some concerns were also raised about wildlife study, but I would like to say that for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the Forestry Division has signed an MOU with the University of the West Indies to do studies on wildlife in Trinidad and Tobago. That is going to help us with the inventory, and knowing much more about our wildlife.

With respect to the Green Fund, we have completed the operationalizing. We have promulgated the regulations this year, and there has been the amendment to the Miscellaneous Taxes Act. The only thing that is left to do now is to have the appropriate personnel in place. I have taken the precaution of raising with Cabinet that much responsibility has been placed on the Minister in that Fund. As you know, the Minister has an operational function and finance as a supervisory function. What I have suggested is an advisory committee that will protect the Minister.

I heard what the Member for St. Joseph has said and others, but the fact is that whatever you do people are going to assume politicking, but we are putting in place a kind of system that I think will reduce those complaints. The UNPD has offered to assist us in operationalizing the fund.

Cabinet has agreed to give some \$237 million for disaster preparedness for both T&TEC and WASA. So, we are now going to have generators, mobile units and water tankers. This is the first time that any funding has ever gone for disaster preparedness for the ministry.

The last matter that I want to deal with is the issue of CEPEP. I read in the newspapers where the former Leader of the Opposition said “CEPEP back pay a scam”. Suddenly, he is saying that he is not interested in politics anymore, and he is going back to be a trade union leader—but I do not know, he might have a choice—so that he could fight for CEPEP workers. One of the things that you have to decide when you are fighting is if people want you to fight for them. You cannot just offer yourself to fight. He is assuming that they want him to fight for them. [*Interruption*]

There was a time he said that if you saw him and a lion fighting feel sorry for the lion. I wonder if he is still of that view. I think the lion may feel sorry for him. [*Interruption*] He said that the increase will not go directly to the workers, but to the contractors who may very well sink the money to finance the PNM upcoming election campaign. Mr. Speaker, we know very well that CEPEP is designed in such a way where salaries go directly to the workers so they cannot go to the contractors.

My colleagues have been so excellent in defending the CEPEP programme, I really do not need to go any further. What I would say to the CEPEP workers in particular—the programme is not perfect. I have said that from time to time, that nobody ever pelts a tree that does not have fruits. CEPEP has been attacked continuously because of the success of the programme. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Siparia spent forever attacking my father because he has a contract, and her position was that she wanted to close down the programme but, suddenly, they want to fight for the workers; they want to give them maternity benefits; and they want to give them everything when they get in power. I do not know which power. Once they continue to do as they are doing, they will remain there and we are going to remain here. [*Desk thumping*] I want to tell the CEPEP workers to have faith and hold strong. They are doing an excellent job. They have transformed Trinidad and Tobago and they have made us proud of the country.

11.10 a.m.

As I close, I congratulate the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance on an excellent budget. I am glad for the opportunity to speak in this budget debate. I thank my Permanent Secretary, Deputy Permanent Secretaries, all members of

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staff and agencies for the support I have had since I have been in the ministry and the efforts they have made to provide a better quality of service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche*): Mr. Speaker, I rise to contribute to the debate on the budget statement 2007/2008. I am also mindful that it is the last time I will contribute to a budget debate as the Member of Parliament for Oropouche. As you know, the constituency of Oropouche no longer exists. I will express personal sentiments later.

Let me begin by saying that we are coming to the final hours of the budget debate and we are down to the last 10 overs, so that the run rate must now increase. After hearing the Member for Arima, it is necessary that we up the tempo in the budget debate. While the Member of Parliament for Arima may mean well; be sincere and genuine in facing her task and discharging her duties, one cannot proceed on the basis that all is well or even good, as far as the provision of utilities and services are concerned and as far as the Government is concerned.

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance came to the House on Monday, August 20, 2007 and presented a budget statement for three hours and 20 minutes. These budget statements in terms of minutes and words are climbing. We are happy that he may not have another opportunity to do that, because we may find ourselves here for four hours. After his uttering almost 25,000 words, the country is no better off now than it was before. Between Monday, August 20, 2007 and today, August 29, 2007, we have had 13 murders. In the nine days it took us to debate the budget, 13 persons have been killed. The budget did not stop the killings.

This morning Members of this House came late and while we are sorry and regret starting late, there was massive traffic and congestion on the road to which we have become accustomed. It is no longer a case of leaving San Fernando one hour before a meeting in Port of Spain, but a case of leaving two or three hours before a meeting is carded to take place in Port of Spain. The budget did not stop that. That is crime; that is traffic. In Trinidad and Tobago we do not need statistics to tell us that you cannot go outside. At six o'clock in the evening you have to lock up; put on three or four burglar proof locks on your gate and stay at home.

Today in Trinidad and Tobago, notwithstanding the sincerity of the Member for Arima, citizens need to stock up on candles and matches because when you go to sleep at night, the chances are you may have a power outage. It is very regular in San Fernando in particular. The Minister confirmed that it is everywhere. We have an outage that occurs with monotonous frequency, every other day. You are preparing to come out on mornings and you have to take a cold shower when it may not be necessary. That is the reality that faces citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. You need to stock up on candles and matches.

You have the problem of water. We would get into that as we go along. In 2007, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, in the constituency of Oropouche are taking water from a well to use for cooking, drinking and hygiene. The last six years in our nation's history have been six of the most embarrassing years that this country has ever faced. Paradoxically, there are six years that we have enjoyed the most wealth that this country has ever accumulated. They have been embarrassing years. Over the last six years—it is appropriate now as the Prime Minister will end his term as prime minister of this country—it is appropriate that we reflect on the last six years of this administration. They have taken this country from being poised for growth, development, prosperity and equal opportunity to what it is today, truly, a banana public.

Over the last six years you will recall that there were police stations where policeman packed up and left; closed down and camped outside. Today, there are police stations where when you call, the telephone numbers are not working; you need to get a mobile number for them if you want to contact them. There was a case where a private citizen had to donate a car to the police in San Fernando in the aftermath of a kidnapping. There are places in this country, by their admission, where “police afraid to go”. Police officers are telling you that they are not working there. That is Trinidad and Tobago, a small island-nation state.

Over the last six years, there was a case where the State wrongly read a death warrant to a prisoner. A gang leader got a 12 gun salute at death. Policemen ask regularly for water at police stations. The Arima Magistrates' Court closes because of a lack of water. In San Fernando, a patient will have to walk with a bed. When you go to the hospital you see something spinning but no blades; that is the fan. You need to take \$100; buy a fan and carry it for your loved one in the hospital. These are truths. This is not a fabrication. No one can tell me that we fabricated this. You have the case of Radha Kissoon, a pregnant young lady from Debe who went to San Fernando Hospital and had to stand in the corridor for two days. After much pleading with the authorities in San Fernando, she was provided with a bed. That is the situation.

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I will remind the Member for Arima that I am not one to be ungrateful or dishonest. If the Member for Arima cares, she would indicate to the House that when the Member for Caroni East would send her a letter thanking her, I would not have time to do a letter, but I send her a text. I told her, "Thank you." We had a case where two families lost their houses in Debe and were begging for water. The Member of Parliament had to intervene to get a tank of water. You have to call the Minister. The issue is not that the Minister is not kind; the Minister responds. In 2007, should it be the case that if you want a tank of water you need to contact the Minister of Public Utilities to get it?

Clearly, that is not the road to developed country status. You need to beg if you need to help any constituent or write letters to the Ministers begging. The Member for Diego Martin West and Minister of Housing probably has a cabinet filled with letters from the Member for Oropouche recommending persons for houses. We send our letters. That nonsense they talk sometimes that people in opposition constituencies do not apply for this or that is rubbish. I want to indicate that we monitor the letters. I would be interested in knowing how many letters came in the Oropouche file and how many people have been provided with houses. No one in Oropouche has come back to tell me that he or she got through with a housing unit.

I live in San Fernando East and I also write letters for community members in San Fernando East because I am from there. I want to tell you very instructively that members in San Fernando East will come back and say that they got through and thank you, but not Oropouche. They are giving out keys and units every week. There are two housing estates in Oropouche; one in Golconda and one in Wellington that they are constructing, as far as I am aware. Not one site is ready for them to provide the units for members of the community and the people of Oropouche who have applied. There are other units for which they are offering keys in San Fernando East, San Fernando West and I believe Pointe-a-Pierre, but not in Oropouche.

It took a record time to construct a mansion for the Prime Minister. I think they have a tour some time today. They are handing over the mansion today, but the houses in our constituencies are not prepared and in a position to be distributed. In San Fernando and Pointe-a-Pierre they are giving out keys like call cards.

Dr. Rowley: Is the Member aware of anywhere in San Fernando or Pointe-a-Pierre where keys were given out in projects that were not complete? Is the Member saying that even though the projects in Oropouche are not complete we should hand out the keys?

Dr. R. Moonilal: You seem to be quick and speedy like “Speedy Gonzales” when it comes to San Fernando, Pointe-a-Pierre, Tunapuna and San Juan, but for some unknown reason in Oropouche the houses are not ready. The deadlines have not been met and there are problems on the construction site. I do not know if they had problems at the Prime Minister’s mansion. In record time, with \$150 million they completed the house for the Prime Minister but there are other projects that they cannot complete. World Cup “come and gone” and we are still waiting for the Tarouba Brian Lara tsunami stadium; it is still a hole in the ground. His Excellency was sworn in five years ago; his fifth anniversary is coming and the President of the Republic is like an executive squatter. The house has not been repaired.

You have the Scarborough Hospital; \$300 million and we do not have the hospital. They have not been able to complete all these projects, but the mansion has been completed and they would be handing it over later. I made the point only with the houses. These have been embarrassing years for this country.

This is a banana republic. This is a country where because of the political intervention, vindictiveness and malice, a Chief Justice is accused of seeking to pervert the course of justice and a Chief Magistrate is accused of bringing the Judiciary into dispute. That is the hallmark of a banana republic.

Mr. Speaker: Both matters are before tribunals. You have much more to say on other things. Do not go there.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am using the two references for establishing how bad and embarrassing it has been for this country. It has been an embarrassing period. I say no more on that matter.

In looking at this budget, the fundamental question that citizens must ask is: Can we trust the Government to deliver? Two parties in this country have had the opportunity to serve in government. The back bench have not had the opportunity in their latest manifestation to serve in government. In the next few weeks, as citizens look at the parties they must ask which political party will deliver and has the credibility to deliver on its promises. It is a universal fact that the only thing they deliver on time is a budget. They come in August and may come in July if they get a chance again. Absolutely nothing else! We can rattle on about what others have done. All the promises that they have come with and nothing. I do not want to get into the promises.

Every year it is a road to Mayaro and a road to Point Fortin. Early one morning I went to San Fernando looking for the water taxi to avoid the traffic. I

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have been following the Member for Diego Martin East and the Minister of—not jokes—Works and Transport, so I went down to the wharf. There were a “fella” named Randy selling bake and saltfish; five stray dogs and three stray cats.

11.25 a.m.

I was looking for the water taxi. Every year they would come with the same thing, the water taxi is coming. The Scarborough and Point Fortin Hospitals are still to be completed. There is also the extension to the San Fernando General Hospital. We are just fed up. What is the name of the song? “We fed up ah de same thing over and over.”

One year they promised family farms. The Minister of Finance said state farms. Do you know the only thing we ever got was SuperPharm. That is their track record of delivery. We are just fed up.

One year it was the technology park. He came with the 2006 budget and from the technology park, he promised a financial park. What is the new park he promised in this budget? He promised an energy park. In six years he built a car park on Edward Street. “It eh finish. Dey put ah roof over some cars.” This country is now fed up with these promises.

We talk about water, electricity and, of course, crime. What is really painful is the spending. It is not surprising, even in Parliament that on occasions, and it may become more regular, we have had outages. This House had to be suspended because of an outage on two occasions. They are spending. This Government believes that when you announce your achievements, spending money is an achievement. They believe that. They mix up an input with an outcome. Money and budgeting is your input. That is not an outcome.

When they do their colourful ads in every newspaper where they tick this is done and this is done, do you know what their achievement is? It is their spending. We have spent X and given money here and there. That is an input. Basic economic students—the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro was looking for economic scholars—will tell you that difference between input, output and outcome. There is a fundamental difference between input, output and outcome. While they should be focusing on the outcomes, they are focusing on expenditure as an input. We have spent X amount. You have spent so much and the Magistrates' Court in Arima is closed because there is no water. In the Magistrates' Court in Arima, they stand on one level and shout your name downstairs to go upstairs. They have spent so much that children are protesting that they want schools in Trinidad and Tobago. Your expenditure is not your outcome. That is not your achievement.

That is part of another problem. They believe if you fling money at social problems you solve them. They have proven in six years that money cannot solve social problems. They cannot solve them.

I listened to the Prime Minister. At some time during the debate you would recall that it was the Opposition benches that had to correct him on his minor errors. Nobody on that side listened.

They talk about promoting family values and again how much they have spent. Do you know what family values they have promoted? Somebody is the human resource director, his wife gets a job. Somebody is the Chairman of the NWRHA, the contracting firm goes to the wife. At the San Fernando Hospital, the HR Director's husband is the consultant. That is how they promote it.

In the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, there is a Human Resource Director; look around and find the husband. He is the CEO of an agricultural company in South. That is what they call family values. In another place they would call that theft, corruption and nepotism, but nepotism is family values for them. We are not talking about the man who went to fix a leak in WASA. He is now gone.

They promised a praedial larceny unit to deal with agriculture. There is absolutely nothing. In terms of promises and pledges, the Prime Minister of this country is a repeat offender. That is the big word they use to describe that.

Expenditure policy and how much you spend is not the solution to the problems facing this country. There are deeper problems. It has to do with institution building, delivery and political will.

I want to take a few minutes to respond to a few issues raised in the debate by several Members, because we are involved in a debate. You would not think we are involved in a debate if you follow how it is going here. On the last evening there were five speakers from the other side.

The Minister of National Security came to this House. He was an early bird. They are in a mood where they congratulate themselves. I would not be surprised if the Minister of Health calls himself on the telephone to congratulate himself. They compliment themselves on a good job that they are doing. The Minister of National Security acknowledged that they really did not build any police stations in six years. I have a report which was done by the Commissioner of Police on a Crime Management Unit—*Crime Management Review 2004*, in which they recommend a list of 38 new police stations, both constructed and to be built. They are begging for motor vehicles.

In this report of 2004, the office of the Commissioner of Police is telling you what is required so that they can do an effective job to police Trinidad and Tobago to deal with the crime situation.

The Minister of National Security came to this Chamber and he said:

“I know we did not build the police stations. I feel bad about that.”

He feels bad about the police stations not being built on time. When pressed, further, he said: “I doh build police stations.” I want to tell him that he is correct. I have never seen the Defence Secretary of the United Kingdom with a hammer and nails building police stations. Had he gone to Westminster, the mother of all Commonwealth Parliaments, they would have chased him with an umbrella. He said:

“We intend to build police stations but I am not holding my breath.’
Imagine the Minister of National Security said: “I am not holding my breath.”

He tried to indicate to this House that, of course, he has good intentions like anybody else and he would try his best. He made some promises. The long and short is that the Minister of National Security came to this House and really offered his resignation, but that was not accepted. That is the sum total.

There were other presentations. To some of them, it is not necessary to respond. I want to respond on the matter of agriculture somewhat. The Member for La Brea made a statement in this House which I think should not go unchallenged. They have been promoting their propaganda. I need to deal with the matter of agriculture and farming, because they are related intrinsically to the crisis of food prices and inflation, which is a serious problem facing Trinidad and Tobago. The eloquent Member for Nariva spoke and indicated the crisis we face with respect to food prices. The Member for Siparia, in her comprehensive response to the budget, dealt with this matter of food prices and inflation. I want to take the opportunity to congratulate the Member for Siparia and Leader of the Opposition and indicate to her that with contributions like this, it is inevitable—the book is *Inevitable Surprise*—that the UNC Alliance will form the next government of Trinidad and Tobago.

On the matter of agriculture, the Member for La Brea said one evening during the week, that the UNC did nothing for agriculture and that we did nothing for Caroni (1975) Limited. I thought it is fitting now to remind the national

population of the words of the Opposition Leader, the Member for San Fernando East, in 1999, responding to the budget. He said on Friday, October 15, 1999:

“The Prime Minister himself...”

meaning the Member for Couva North—

“has now directed the national community to the impending demise of the sugar industry, a development that would wreak havoc in central and south Trinidad where some 60,000 of our citizens depend on this industry for survival and sustenance. The People's National Movement will not allow this to happen.”

I repeat:

“The People's National Movement will not allow this to happen and wishes to advocate a new approach to the industry based on:

- (a) mechanical harvesting;
- (b) automated sugar production;
- (c) intercropping of short crops in the cane growing season;
- (d) agro processing...”

Oh my God!

“This approach to technology and efficiency will make this industry competitive in any market of the world and, while protecting the sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago, will ensure a stable and secure future for sugar workers and cane farmers alike.”

The cane farmers are protesting in front the office. They are still waiting for money. The sugar workers cannot be found. That was in 1999; the words of the Member for San Fernando East. I will speak later about his words concerning a desalination plant. These are words in 1999.

By 2002, Caroni (1975) Limited was gone. By 2007 there was a headline in the newspaper: “Closing Caroni, the best decision I have made.” You did not tell the population about that in 1999. The closure of Caroni (1975) Limited, has led in part to the crisis we face today with food prices and crime. People may not connect the dots, but the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited has been responsible in part for the crisis in crime, food prices and health. I will point it out to you.

Caroni (1975) Limited produced, over the years, a magazine called *Our Destiny*. In this magazine, they would periodically outline their contribution to the

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national community. Very few people would understand. When you look at Caroni (1975) Limited—I could quote from the front page:

“We contribute 44.78 per cent of GDP to the agricultural sector. We inject \$680 million into the national economy every year. Our employees, farmers and contractors earn \$447 million every year and pay more than \$32 million in taxes.”

Hear this:

“We provide full medical services, including drugs to our employees and their dependents at no cost to them. We subsidize the National Health Service to a value of \$7 million per year. We subsidize national housing. We help to diversify the industry with profit centers because we are developing agricultural and industrial parks.”

They value their assets at over \$1 billion. I thought I would remind the national community that by 2002, Caroni (1975) Limited was reporting a bumper crop.

11.40 a.m.

They had the most successful productive harvest in 2000 since 1977. Mr. Speaker, it was 95.3 per cent, an increase of 24 per cent in the processing of raw sugar—record setting performances at the factories—and the highest volume of sugar processed by the company. The company was on the move. They also have reports of their efforts in citrus production, dairy and aquaculture. Mr. Speaker, they had the buffalypso herd and, today, you cannot find the herd. You have to look in their bellies to find the buffalypso.

Mr. Speaker, Caroni (1975) Limited was on the move by 2000 to rationalizing its production processes; on the move to expanding and creating profit centres; and on the move on a new strategy of private/public sector cooperation. That is very interesting.

In the 1999 budget statement under the government of the United National Congress, the then Minister of Finance outlined the policy for Caroni (1975) Limited and said that Caroni (1975) will pursue what is called an implementation plan geared towards the phased private sector participation in the operations of Caroni (1975) Limited. This will be facilitated through restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited into a holding company and the creation of strategic business units. The long and short, that is the policy of private/public sector participation. You know, they have closed down Caroni (1975) Limited and come back with the same thing. state farms, but done in conjunction with the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, they closed down Caroni (1975) Limited because the Minister of Public Administration and Information, a key strategist for the PNM, told the sugar union that Caroni (1975) Limited was the manufacturing process plant for Opposition politicians and a support base for the Opposition and that is why they closed Caroni (1975) Limited. Five years later, they come with state farms. What is a state farm? A state farm is Caroni (1975) Limited. They come back with that! Mr. Speaker, this is the deceit; this is the deception.

I want to go on record with another matter. This is what is going to hurt the national community. You have closed Caroni (1975) Limited, because subventions to Caroni (1975) Limited were found to be a drain on the Treasury. I want to indicate that when they were talking about drain on the Treasury, the price of oil was \$9 a barrel and, today, it is \$70 and more.

I have in my hand here—the Member for Caroni Central handed me this a few moments ago—a Cabinet Note dated September 06, 2007; note for Cabinet report by the Food and Agriculture Organization FAO consultancy on measures to ensure success of large farms as a means of motivating the agricultural sector.

So, the Food and Agriculture Organization—I believe it is an agency of the United Nations—has suggested that they may move into large farms and create large farms. By 2006, they sought in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, according to this Cabinet note, to establish five large farms including organic farms and so forth. They have outlined where these farms were identified to be: Orange Grove, Caroni, Jerningham, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, for these large farms, do you know what the estimated budgetary requirement from the Government for infrastructure development is? The budgetary requirement from the Government for infrastructure development according to the Cabinet Note is estimated at \$253 million to create the five large farms, but they closed down Caroni (1975) Limited. I am going to come to farming problems like access roads, praedial larceny and drainage and so forth. That is \$253 million of taxpayers' money to create large farms, and when we had large farms, out of malice and vindictiveness, they closed them down. Is that the economic scholar that you were looking at? That must have been the economic scholar that you were talking about. How do you spell that “scholar”? We do not know.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to quote from the executive summary of the FAO consultancy report. This is another striking piece of news here. To create these farms that they are talking about, it is estimated that they will have to plough in the \$253 million immediately. Apart from that, in the case of some of the sites

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that they have identified, they have found that these sites are not suitable for agricultural development. There are problems with soil after years of utilization of some of these areas, that they require extensive work to rehabilitate them. So, this plan about farms and so forth, you are going to take another half a billion dollars because you closed down Caroni (1975) Limited and the taxpayers must now suffer.

With this Government, wasting money is the “love thing”. How do you protest when people waste a small amount of money? You cannot protest about a hundred thousand dollars and so forth. That is pocket change for them. That is next to the election date.

Mr. Speaker, there is another Cabinet Note dated September 04, 2006. Now, they have acknowledged that agriculture is in a crisis. If you read Ernst & Young’s review on the budget you get it; and if you read PricewaterhouseCoopers review, you will get it. Everybody has acknowledged that agricultural inflation and food prices and so forth are a major catastrophe caused by the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, do you know there is the National Agricultural Awards Programme which is coming up in a few days? They are giving out awards for agriculture when the sector has collapsed—it is less than one per cent of GDP. The price of having this award function for agriculture is \$4,119,900. That is to give out awards for a collapsed sector.

Mr. Sharma: What a shame!

Dr. R. Moonilal: This one is nice. This is pocket change for them.

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

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will in a moment. Mr. Speaker, it is \$72,000 for a media launch and \$4 million to give out awards. That is how they are spending the money. So, you are having a media launch and you are spending \$72,000 to launch the ceremony which takes places later and that will cost \$4 million. That is the cost of the awards function according to a Cabinet Note from the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Mr. Speaker, I do not know where these notes are coming from. As I said before, they have collapsed.

With respect to NAMDEVCO in south Trinidad—they are trying to use NAMDEVCO to market imported agricultural goods and so forth—but they fired the last CEO for no reason and appointed an acting CEO on a month-to-month basis. You know, the acting CEO is the husband of the Director of Human Resources at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. Apart from

that, he is also the recipient of about 50 hectares of land somewhere. So, he is a land recipient and another husband-wife tag team that is coming in to deal with NAMDEVCO. It is really family farms. That is how they are running the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, whilst that is happening, farmers are complaining of the simplest matters. They complained that when they plant their crops people come in the night and steal them. They do not have crops, because the people steal them. The Prime Minister has promised every year to have a praedial larceny unit to deal with policing in agricultural areas; but there is absolutely nothing. Farmers are frustrated that they plant and work very hard and then their produce is stolen.

Another major problem is drainage. We have a phenomenon in this country called “drizzle flooding”. If it drizzles it floods. Drizzle flooding is a new phenomenon. In the agricultural areas—because of the Government’s sheer incompetence and lack of planning—almost idiotic planning—when there is flood in rural areas crops are destroyed. When you look for compensation, they would say it is not compensation it is relief, but it is comic relief to give people \$21 to compensate for thousands of dollars of lost crops. This is the story with agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, a related problem with agriculture has to do with wages. I want any farmer to tell me where are you going to get someone to go and dig up dasheen and yam; to go and cut dasheen bush; and to go and pick baigan and bodi and so forth. Where are you getting them to do that in today’s labour market when the State has absorbed all the labour? So, today, labour is not available for agriculture. A future UNC Alliance government will then have to look at subsidising agricultural labour, because farmers cannot get labour. They cannot get persons to go and work on the land, because they have been absorbed, and this is a problem with the manufacturing sector.

Last evening, I listened attentively to the Member for San Fernando West. The Member for San Fernando West—I do not know whether to call it black jacket or white jacket—but she stood here and embarrassed the Government on one occasion, and then sought to praise the Government after in case somebody reported her to the absent Prime Minister. This Member for San Fernando West is on record as saying on February 14, 2007, during the debate on the Evidence (Amdt.) Bill and I quote:

“Criminals walk the street with absolute impunity. Criminals know...that they could get away. There is contempt by criminals for the Government, for the Legislature...”

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Last evening, the Member for San Fernando West said that competitiveness is a matter for the private sector; not for the Government. The private sector must ensure that the manufacturing business is competitive; it is not a government issue—I had an interesting debate with the Member for Barataria/San Juan over labour and productivity—I could not follow her argument, because during her contribution on television they took a break for the Play Whe draw. They played No. 20. I do not know what No. 20 means. They had to interrupt the debate, so I did not follow her argument properly.

Hon. Member: Dog.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Do not say that. Mr. Speaker, the crisis we face with agricultural labour today is that the Government has this policy of absorbing labour. I want to issue some advice to members of the business community and the captains of industry and so forth. Many of them have been conned into this hallucination that the country is enjoying full employment—add that to your economic indicator matrix. What full employment are we enjoying?

They have absorbed labour in the state sector programmes and squeezed labour from the productive private sector, and then you start to bring in labour. So, you have nurses from the Philippines, doctors from Cuba, labourers from China and India and so forth. This is the Government's approach. I thought it appropriate to give some type of analysis of the crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I am predicting a crisis in the labour market where this Government has successfully wrecked the labour market in Trinidad and Tobago, and it will take an enormous amount of planning and work to return the labour market to productivity; to return this labour market to a balance between genuine supply and genuine demand. That is the crisis that this Government has led us into.

I just want to make a couple statements on this for the benefit of the national community, because like others I have been hearing about full employment and I think it is useful. We are in an election season—whether you like it or not—and people will have to look at credibility.

I just want to do a quick comparison with 1995 to 2001 and 2001 to 2007 of the labour market—

Mr. Speaker: Before you get on to that aspect of your contribution. Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Oropouche has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

11.55 a.m.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, let us look at the labour market in 1995. By 1995, let us look at the labour market in 1995, the labour market that the UNC inherited. In 1995, 431,000 persons were working—now it is 431,500, let us leave all the little hundreds and tens and fives out, so we will follow the argument—unemployment was at 17.2 per cent. By the year 2001, 514,000 persons were working at jobs; unemployment had dropped to 10.8 per cent—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: By whom?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Under the leadership of the United National Congress and the very distinguished Minister of Labour, the high performance Member for Nariva—in that period. What is instructive here now is that the UNC created 82,600 jobs. [*Desk thumping*] This is CSO data from the labour force reports of the Central Statistical Office and I want to indicate to you, the last labour force report data we have is 2005.

Dr. Rowley: Where are you going?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, 10.8 per cent, we created 82,600 jobs, now what do we have? In 2001, of course, their Big Brother handed them the Government and by 2005, the last we have of the annual labour force data—we cannot be using quarterly figures because when you add up at the end of the year and you do the calculations, they may vary, because you have also seasons and so on—persons with jobs, 574,000, so it was 514,000 in 2001, 574,000 by 2005. According to CSO, they created 60,000 jobs.

What is instructive about job creation is not just the absolute numbers—and the UNC win hands down with absolute number—we are talking in today's world of quality jobs, of decent work. The ILO has linked decent work to poverty alleviation; we are talking about decent work, quality jobs, jobs where people are not at the lower end of the labour market as the Member for San Fernando West outlined.

Mr. Speaker, do you know if you do a comparison—according to the CSO figures in manufacturing—if you have two sectors and you can look at two sectors and try to estimate, in terms of manufacturing, the UNC created—in manufacturing, we are just using that as an example—11,100 jobs.

Mr. Valley: How many more jobs—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Hold on, you are rushing, be careful. Let us look at manufacturing. The PNM created 2,900 jobs which is 5.5 per cent more in their time, 2001 to 2005. They created only 5.5 per cent more jobs in manufacturing, 2,900 jobs. The UNC in their term of office created 8,500 jobs in manufacturing, 19 per cent more. [*Desk thumping*] That is instructive, 19 per cent more at a lower price for oil. So our job growth in manufacturing was 19 per cent. Their job growth in manufacturing is 5 per cent, so where are the jobs we are talking about? However, there is a category in the CSO data called Elementary Occupations and I think that defines itself. It is really the lower skills, low wage; unskilled type work.

Here are the data for unemployment in this country. Mr. Speaker, let us look at performance here. The UNC created in Elementary Occupations, 11,000 jobs; the PNM created in 2001—2005, 37,000 jobs in Elementary Occupations. So in Elementary Occupations, the UNC growth rate was 11 per cent, while the PNM growth rate in elementary jobs was 33 per cent. That is really an indication to of the quality of jobs that they are creating, when they want to boast about job creation, and that is where the Government faces an enormous challenge today, that you absorbed people and created elementary jobs, but you are not putting the policy framework in place to create the long term productive dscent work, preferably in the private sector, the manufacturing sector which now, in terms of employment, is not creating jobs at the rate it was creating before. That, Mr. Speaker, speaks to serious problems, and having said that, I just want to give some overall figures.

The Prime Minister is extremely proud of his baby in labour market, the dragon; proud of the CEPEP and the URP and we have said time and time again, the CEPEP may have potential to help this country in terms of clean up and environmental upgrading and so on. In fact, what about the evening classes they promised last year? Did we have any evening class or night class or morning class or any class? They promised evening classes last year for CEPEP.

Mr. Speaker, a quick summary of their spending in URP and CEPEP, two programmes alone between 2004 and 2008, estimate. They would have spent in CEPEP between 2004 and 2008, estimate, \$1.5 billion; in URP, \$1.5 billion. They would have spent \$3 billion between 2004 and 2008, in two programmes alone in creating these elementary jobs—\$3 billion. Even at a price of \$9 a barrel, UNC created 82,000 jobs, with job creation in manufacturing and in the productive sector. How would you explain—[*Interruption*] you took \$3 billion and created

elementary jobs, and today you have workers outside of decent work; outside of health and safety. You have workers who are now due to collect back pay.

I want to commend the Member for Arima—I will be coming to you, I will give you more to ask in a moment. Just allow me a minute and you would have more to ask. I will give you more questions, hold on. The matter of the CEPEP wage, I want to say categorically that CEPEP is a programme of contractors. Now, I am not talking as the campaign manager of the Member for Toco/Manzanilla is a CEPEP contractor, that is not my issue. I am not on the issue that the general council of the PNM are all CEPEP contractors, that is not my issue, what I am saying is built on contract labour.

The Government pays contractors; contractors pay workers. Now, unless I am mistaken, central government will not keep a database of these employees, the contractors will have their database. So any wage increase—and in this case, that wage increase is not bargainable, they never bargained for it; it was given by central government—contractors are responsible for paying workers, not central government. Contractors must pay and the very distinguished former trade unionist, former Prime Minister, Member of Parliament for Couva North, raised the issue of, would contractors, who themselves admit are all members of the PNM general council and so on, would they be paying the 15 per cent and what mechanism will be in place to ensure that they pay? Because there are CEPEP workers who will not get that 15 per cent.

Do you know what the CEPEP contractors have to do? They have to fill 10 buses, five buses, eight buses because on Saturday they are going to Bon Air.

Mr. Manning: Yes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. That is what the CEPEP—I thought it was Lakshmi Girls' you are having this thing in?

Mr. Manning: No, Bon Air.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Is Bon Air? I thought you told me in the corridor that you are going to have it in Lakshmi Girls' High School. The CEPEP contractors need 10 buses this week; they ordered 200 from PTSC—I do not know if they have 200 buses—The CEPEP contractors' job on Saturday morning is to fill up five to ten buses from every constituency and send them to Bon Air.

Mr. Manning: You know you do not like to talk the truth.

Dr. R. Moonilal: All I want to ask them, at this Bon Air Secondary School, would you be giving out the 15 per cent on that day? Would they line up and collect their 15 per cent on that day? Because if I was involved with that CEPEP, I would tell all the workers, go up to the convention of the PNM at Bon Air and collect your money on Saturday, because you are not getting it again. And as soon as these contractors get their money, all of them need to give a hefty donation to their party and we are not taking that “mamaguy”. They cancelled the \$100,000 plate. They had a dinner for a \$100,000 plate. This man really feels he is George W. Bush, \$100,000 a plate to have a conversation with the Prime Minister. I now know why you cannot hear the cries of the poor. Because they are poor they do not have the \$100,000 to have a conversation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when they get some lash in the newspapers about the \$100,000 plate, they cancelled it. But they have a promoter on that side; he is a peddler of trinkets at Balisier House, I am sure they will be cooking up some other plan to get that \$100,000 from citizens. I want to report to this House that the distinguished former Prime Minister has indicated already to some of us, particularly, those in the labour sector that he has received over 100 calls from CEPEP workers asking him to intervene to ensure that they get their back pay. [*Desk thumping*] He has communicated this to me, the Member for Nariva from the labour sector and Sen. Mark, so do not think that the poor people will be fooled by waiting for after election to collect their 15 per cent increase. It will not happen that way. So, they have wrecked the labour market.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Oropouche for giving way. Just to correct the record, it is not that they created 82,000 jobs during their term of office, but 82,000 jobs were created under their watch and when I speak this afternoon I will let him know how that happened.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you. Mr. Prime Minister, you are not helping yourself by—I thought you had the answer, but in any event it is good for you to flag. So we have dealt with the agricultural sector. We have dealt with this conmanship about full employment. I want to move speedily to a few other matters here.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell what the Prime Minister did not read about in three hours and twenty minutes. Three hours and twenty minutes, Budget presentation. Unless I am mistaken, a researcher working for me did a check on Microsoft Word. The Prime Minister never used the word “equality” in three hours and twenty minutes. It was a word that did not come out of his mouth and we can accept that because if the word “equality” comes out his mouth, he may well choke.

The Member for Toco/Manzanilla who stood one evening and as he began, he wanted to congratulate the Minister of Finance and he nearly choked. The word “equality” was not used in three hours and twenty minutes. Three hours and twenty minutes, “equality”, but I want to remind the Prime Minister—sorry, I almost called you the President; it is the same thing I am told—that the UNC Alliance believes that development is not only about people, development is for people.

12.10 p.m.

This Prime Minister and Minister of Finance comes and tells you how much he is spending, and he is finished. What are the quantifiable targets? What are the measuring indicators they are developing so this country will reach developed country status?

There is no country on planet earth today that can call itself a developed country unless it has implemented equality of opportunity legislation. Equality and security go together. Under this Government, for six years we had them kicking and screaming that they will not pass the Equal Opportunity Bill to provide equality of opportunity for all citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. The hallmark of a developed country is equality of opportunity. [*Desk thumping*] It is a fundamental pillar. I challenge you; look at Norway, Sweden, Germany, England, anywhere; they have the legislation in place and they implement it.

The Government want to get to developed country status without equality, because at every moment, at every junction, they are accused of discrimination; they are accused of inequality. You do not have to quote from the court documents on the Maha Sabha, Devant Maharaj or Marlene Coudray—I am not seeing the Member for Point Fortin again.

Mr. Panday: "He give up."

Dr. R. Moonilal: You do not have to quote court documents to tell you that the Government have promoted inequality, and that is why they are mortally afraid of passage and implementation of the equal opportunity legislation. They feel that if they implement equality they will lose the election, because they will not be able to get away by putting their party hacks all over the public service. They will not get away with nepotism, because there will be equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity is there for everyone, not persons of one particular group, party, race or religion.

The greatest statesman of the last century, in my lifetime, is Nelson Mandela. When he was released from prison and formed the government in South Africa, he said that he believed in equality. He said that if the whites in South Africa

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discriminated against the blacks, that was wrong. But he also said that if the blacks in South Africa discriminated against the whites, it was equally wrong. That is testimony to his status as the statesman of the last century.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I just wanted again to tell the Prime Minister that when Mr. Mandela came here, he pushed me out of the line at Piarco to meet Mr. Mandela. He rushed to the door. In fact, they had a big fight as to who would meet him first, the Prime Minister or Jack Warner. *[Laughter]* "Dey fight." Mandela came and left. In this country today, unless I am mistaken, this Government of the PNM that is so proud of Mandela, has not erected one monument, statue, library, part of a library or one shelf in his honour. They refused when asked to allow him to address this Parliament. I picked up a British newspaper this morning and I read where Gordon Brown, the new Prime Minister of the UK, had just erected a statue in honour of Nelson Mandela at Westminster Palace, in front the Parliament in London.

The UNC Alliance pledges that we will bring that honour and status to Nelson Mandela. *[Laughter]* *[Desk thumping]* All their talk about equality and roots is just "ole talk". If Mr. Mandela came back here the only thing they might give him is a CEPEP contract. *[Laughter]* That is the only thing they may have to offer him; and that is Mandela.

A note came to me which I refused point-blank to sign. It was a request for an extension of time to address matters of the Equal Opportunity Bill. You will recall that the Bill came here; it was "Kill Bill". The Bill went to a Special Select Committee and at every point in that committee, "Cannot work; cannot meet". Mr. Speaker, if they were serious about equality of opportunity, in two weeks, 14 days or 10 working days they could have brought the equality legislation back to the Parliament and passed it. *[Interruption]*

They built a whole house; and they are asking Roodal Moonilal to sign for an extension; no way, Santa Fe. I will not sign for an extension, because they are not serious. We should have met and dealt with the equal opportunity legislation already. You should have gone to the electorate and said, "We support equality; we have passed and implemented equality opportunity legislation". They have a crisis with implementation.

Health and safety. Again we had them dragging and screaming here. We passed the Bill; it took ages before they would appoint the Health Authority Council, before they would put inspectors in place. To this day they do not have adequate inspectors in place to deal with health and safety.

At Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL) a few days ago, again a worker was killed on a construction site. How many workers must die before this Government monitor and police the health and safety laws which we have passed? But that is the crisis they face with implementation. Their feeling about implementation is just tell us how much money you fling at every problem.

I will say a few words on public administration, another missing area in the budget statement.

I do not buy this hogwash—give me another word—

Mr. Panday: Pig wash!

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, I cannot use words like that. I do not buy this rubbish that you do not have enough time. What did Minister Enill say, "Well a budget is just an executive summary." Three hours and 20 minutes is an executive summary? That is the longest executive summary I have ever heard.

Last year the Prime Minister spoke about flexitime for public servants. Every year public administration gets less and less time in the budget. What have they done in public administration? Sir Robert Worchester is driving their public administration policy. Every day they are doing a poll; they did the MORI poll in the public sector; I have seen the results. Do you know 4 per cent of the people polled believe that Vision 2020 will be realized? Almost zero public service officers in that poll of 2004 said that they were treated equally or on the basis of meritocracy. Half the public service does not believe that they would be promoted on the basis of meritocracy. In fact, there are public servants who tell you that they have a better chance at winning the Lotto than being promoted on the basis of meritocracy. It was reflected in the MORI poll what they did with public service workers.

Where are we with performance appraisal? You do not have any performance appraisal because the persons to appraise you do not want to appraise you. Where are we with job evaluation? Where are we with all these policy instruments to reform the public service? Do you know what they are doing? They are increasing at two points: contract workers, so you avoid the public workers, and the creation of what is called "special ad hoc state companies". When you create special ad hoc state companies you effectively undermine or get around the work of your public servants and avoid tendering procedures. They have undermined the public service.

Police officers in this country are almost akin to vagrants under the PNM. In San Fernando they sit by the Magistrates' Court in the car park with a desk and

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chair. If anybody comes and their muffler has a hole, they have to inhale carbon monoxide whole morning. They sit next to the toilet to eat in San Fernando.

Policemen and police women do not have uniforms; 300 Special Reserve Police (SRP) have been appointed over the last two months. Do you know that those SRPs cannot get uniforms? The Police Commissioner issued a statement—I think he made it at a PNM meeting—“We are looking for good men and women to be police officers”, but when they had an exam in October last year, out of 1,500 persons about 25 failed. Do you know what they did? They formed a football team and put 11 of them on it. All 11 came into the police service through the football team; invariably they were related to senior officers in the police service. So you quarrel on the one hand about not getting quality persons, but on the other hand you undermine your own policy by bringing into the Police Service those who are not qualified—nepotism—but would become police officers and eventually rise in the ranks.

In the area of foreign policy we heard nothing from the Prime Minister. They have established missions in South Africa; they are going to establish a mission in Uganda; they have to establish these missions. We do not hear of the work of these missions; what they are doing to benefit Trinidad and Tobago. A UNC Alliance government will strengthen our missions to deal with our commercial and economic problems. We will strengthen our missions to help us deal with the pressing problems of food prices and inflation.

Today in the United States college students are learning Chinese. While they are doing that, Trinidad and Tobago is putting up posts to tell people how to pronounce "street" in Spanish. In America they are teaching their children to speak Chinese, because they predict that China will be a dominant industrial power of this century and the American business community must interface with China.

The UNC Alliance will implement strengthening of our missions in India, not only in Delhi but in Bangalore which is the industrial capital of India. They make from lead pencils to airplanes there. We need to get a mission presence in China so that our business community can benefit working together with the industrial power to emerge.

Mr. Speaker, there are other matters, but because of time constraints I did not even speak about some of the corruption issues. I did not speak about the favourite topic for some colleagues, the Landate issue. I am seeing this report, "Testimony and Larceny Act, Illegal Acts"; that is something I will not have time for.

I want to end by telling the population of Trinidad and Tobago that this country will not see developed country status under a government of the PNM, because it has never been committed to equality of opportunity, regardless of spending \$15 billion on national security, a lot of money. In fact, the UNC's entire budget in 2000 was \$13 billion. They have spent \$15 billion on security and to this day they cannot provide security.

I thank colleagues on both sides of the House for the last six years. I thank the UNC and the leader, Mr. Basdeo. Panday, for the opportunity to serve in this Parliament and serve the people. The hon. Leader of the Opposition on our behalf has said goodbye to the Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, may I tell you goodbye and I wish you all the best in your future endeavours. [*Laughter*]

The Minister of Housing (Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that for the first time I do not know where to begin; I have so many options. But it being a historic occasion, I think that I should probably begin with the King James version of the Bible. [*Laughter*] I begin with the gospel according to Luke, chapter 9, verses 57 to 62. In this text, I crave the indulgence of the three leaders of the House. They may find it interesting that in the King James they are all actually taken care of in this way. I quote:

"And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head..."

I understand the UNC's predicament.

"Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead..."

I understand the COP's predicament. [*Laughter*]

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." [*Laughter*]

You are advised. [*Dr. Rowley turns to Mr. Manning*]

12.25 p.m.

I have been in Parliament for a number of years now. I think this is my 20th opportunity to take part in a budget debate and it also is an opportunity to say farewell to a number of my colleagues on both sides who will be leaving the House, for one reason or the other. I simply want to wish them all well in whatever they end up doing, because there is a good chance that our paths will not cross in the political arena, or in this House for that matter. And as I do that, I wish them Godspeed.

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In the same vein, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance and his staff at the Ministry of Finance, for presenting to this country, what I consider in my 20 years in Parliament, the best budget the people of Trinidad and Tobago have ever been presented with by a Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] I understand the predicament of the Opposition in trying to respond to the state of our country, which has some significant problems, but by the same token, we are a fortunate people and we should start by recognizing where we are.

I want to run down very quickly, the summaries of where we are as published by PriceWaterhouseCoopers, having taken it out of our budget. Listen to our position today—and this is significant for me because I was in the Cabinet before, in 1991 to 1995, when it was nothing like this. Trinidad and Tobago had a different picture to deal with: We are growing at an average of 9.7 per cent GDP. Look at the rest of the world. Our GDP has doubled in the period, from \$55 billion to \$114 billion; our per capita income has grown from \$7,100 to US \$14,790; we are increasing the creation of jobs by 14,400 annually; unemployment has fallen from 11.7 per cent to 5 per cent; our poverty reduction is expressed from 35 per cent to 16.7 per cent; we have received \$6 billion in net foreign investment; our debt ratio, lowered public debt from 60 per cent of GDP to 28 per cent of GDP; our external debt, from 17 per cent to 5 per cent; our foreign exchange reserves stand at \$6.5 billion and our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund account stands at over \$10 billion. That is a snapshot of what Trinidad and Tobago is facing on the positive side.

So in the face of that kind of picture, the only real political attack that the Opposition can find is, one, to accuse the Government of squandermania and to try to “buss” corruption marks and, thirdly, to misrepresent, as far as is possible, all the facts of our circumstances. We are accused of spending too much money. That is one of our crimes; spending too much.

Let me just quickly review what our budget situation has been over the years since the period of Independence. In 1958, the national budget was \$139 million, with a development programme of \$1.3 million. By independence in 1962, our national budget was \$240 million and the development programme was \$88 million. Ten years later, in 1972, the national budget was \$500 million with a development programme of \$110 million; for the first time a development programme of over \$100 million. The year 1975 saw us for the first time with a billion-dollar budget. Five years later, the national budget was \$5 billion. So the size of the national cake was growing under the PNM, from \$240 million in 1962, by 1980 you were at \$5 billion. That was the rate of growth.

Then we got into a period where the budget grew from \$6 billion to \$8 billion up to 1983. That ended the period of the so-called oil boom. Then we went into a period of stagnation. Ten years, the budget between 1984 and 1992, \$9 billion, \$9 billion, \$9 billion, \$9 billion, \$7 billion, \$6 billion, \$7 billion. By 1991 our budget was \$7.6 billion. The PNM came back into office and we reversed that. That national budget then became \$10 billion; then by 1995 it was \$10.5 billion; by 1999, \$13 billion; by 2001, when the UNC came into office, the national budget for that year was \$16 billion.

I just heard my friend from Oropouche say that “we spent \$13 billion in national security”, and for their entire period that is what they had to spend. What a simplistic lie! In the year 2001, it was \$16 billion; 2002, \$17 billion; 2003, \$19 billion; 2004, \$21 billion. Where did this story come from? In 1997, it was \$12 billion; 1998, \$11 billion. Where did this \$13 billion come from?

So we are fortunate today, as a result of a number of circumstances, our national budget is in the order of \$37 billion last year and we are looking at a slightly higher budget this year. Do you not expect, under those circumstances, that the Government of the day would be spending money? Because, according to them, spending money in relation to the budget, is a crime. In 1962, when the budget was \$240 million, the development programme was \$88 million. Today, the total budget is \$37 billion and our development programme would reflect that; it must reflect it.

But interestingly enough, at the same time they are accusing us of spending too much on what we have spent, they are saying we have not spent on a number of things that we should have spent on. I presume if we had spent on those things, we would have been spending less, and they are promising if they had the opportunity, they would have spent more in a number of the areas. But the one interesting thing that they have not done throughout the entire debate is that insofar as we are able to point out where our major expenditure is—Education, we are expecting to spend \$3.7 billion, where last year we spent \$3.4 billion; we are planning to do a little more next year; Health, \$3.2 billion, as against \$2.6 billion in the last year; Works, \$2.04 billion as against \$2.28 billion; National Security, \$3.9 billion this year as against \$3.4 billion for the year ending; the Ministry of Finance with all the supporting programmes in there, \$8.1 billion as against \$9 billion last year; the public debt, we are going to spend \$3.2 billion in the coming year as against \$4.2 billion last year; for a total, overall, in everything that is spent, \$41.8 billion in the coming year, as against \$41.0 billion in the year that is going.

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Not one of them got up and said: “We will not spend in this area and we will spend in that area.” They were very careful never to say which of this expenditure they object to under any of the heads, but just general “ole talk” about spending and spending too much. Where in education you will cut the expense that we propose? What in health you will not do to change that expenditure? What in the Ministry of Works and Transport will you forego? What in national security will you will not spend on? What in finance will you not support? Will you close down the University of Trinidad and Tobago? Maybe you will, if you get a chance. Will you shut down the support programmes? All the welfare programmes, will you shut them down? Instead of shutting them down, the red beret man is saying he will pay more. All of a sudden the hogs at the trough at CEPEP will get more! You understand? Contradictions from top to bottom! They have a problem. They can support nothing good in this country. They could find not one thing to support; not one! And of course we are accused of having not eliminated poverty from our country, because we have money.

A few years ago I was in America and I went to a supermarket in New Mexico. America is the richest country in the world; 240 years old, with more money than anybody else in the world. I came outside the door and there was a family sitting by the door of the supermarket with a sign saying: “Will work for food.” I was shocked. In America a family so starved and hungry that this guy, his wife and children, are sitting on the steps of the supermarket with a sign saying: “Will work for food.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention and the attention of those on the other side to the fact that in the Christian religion there is a place called heaven, where everything is supposed to be perfect; there is no other place. In other religions there are other names of places, but you cannot get it better than heaven, and there was discontent in heaven and a “fella” called Satan and some of his friends had to be thrown out because there was discontent in heaven. I am not surprised that there is discontent in Trinidad and Tobago largely coming from politicians who see no hope in the face of a condition as described in this budget.

I want to quote for you from a New York best seller, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, written in 2004 by John Perkins. I want to quote one line. He says: “Twelve million families in our own United States worry about their next meal.” But in Trinidad and Tobago the UNC and others will have you believe that because we are going through some economic prosperity at this time, there would be absolutely no instance of poverty or anything like that. Twelve million families in America do not know where their next meal is coming from, but in Trinidad

and Tobago we are supposed to eliminate, eradicate obliterate, poverty. But when the record shows that our efforts have reduced poverty as per a set yardstick, from 30-odd per cent to 17 per cent, there is no recognition of that; none!

They can quote instances. There has been a power failure in one part of San Fernando, as far as they are concerned, Trinidad shut down! One person dies in the hospital, Trinidad shut down! As if I cannot go back to the archives and find many stories in the papers of persons who died in hospital under their six-year term.

Mr. Imbert: About 50,000.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: You understand? So this is what they have been reduced to. They have engaged no aspect of policy and insofar as they seek to engage policy, they resort to naked untruths, misinformation and, of course, hypocrisy and hyperbole.

The Leader of the Opposition talks about, we have had \$200 billion. As the Leader of the Opposition she ought to know how much money this country has had in the period she refers to. She must know! The documents are there, but she gives us \$50 billion more to be able to make a case against us. “Lie” is not a parliamentary word, so I would not use it—untruth, misrepresentation or pure incompetence, you make your choice, Mr. Speaker.

I want to spend some time talking about the housing programme, because in there, it demonstrates the dilemma as well. This Government has taken the decision that our actions are focusing on changing the lives of our people in a way as to let Trinidad and Tobago be described and qualify for being a developed country by the year 2020. One of our focal points is the area of housing, because in our society there is a great shortage of housing and PNM policy has been, and continues to be, that there is a direct role for the Government in the creation of housing units in the market.

You would have heard the Member for Fyzabad enunciate an opposite failed policy as the policy of those on the other side, and that is, that we should give people land and let husbands, wives, friends and family build houses on the weekend, and that is a housing policy that will satisfy Trinidad and Tobago.

12.40 p.m.

It is precisely that policy which was pursued under five years of NAR rule and six years of UNC rule, a total of 11 years pursuing that policy of giving people land and expecting that alone would create housing units. That has contributed

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substantially to this housing shortage in this country today. In the face of that shortage and the high prices they came back here yesterday and espoused that policy again. I put the country on notice today that the thousands of persons who are accessing public sector housing now and the 94,000 who have applied, you will have no chance whatsoever under their governance because they are promising to recreate the failed policy, that put you in the position that you are in today.

Let me walk through some documents from the Ministry of Housing where we talk about showing Trinidad and Tobago a new way home. We do not simply talk that; we do the things to move from policy to delivery. A house is an expensive item and has to be paid for. The Government focuses on how it will be paid for. We have a mortgage policy which allows even persons with a minimum wage—if you take the minimum wage to be about \$1,500, one person can access the cheapest unit. A family of two where both are making the minimum wage could comfortably access our low income units. The Government has done that by reducing the interest rate to 2 per cent; it is a subsidized interest rate. Once your income is under \$8,000 a month, you would qualify for a 2 per cent interest rate. We also make available to you an additional \$15,000 for appliances to put in the house, all tied up in your mortgage to take off that strain of two payments.

We go to the situation of raising the amount of the ceiling of the house with the kinds of houses that fall into the programme. It is public sector housing. To accept Government's support and subsidies can be up to the limit of \$450,000. It used to be a ceiling of \$350,000; it is now up to \$450,000. Any house built for \$450,000 and under would qualify for the Government Support Programme.

Many persons are stuck with a 25 year mortgage and if you are too old you cannot get it. We have said that any time during your working life you can access a mortgage; then, you can assign it to your estate. Persons who inherit your estate would be required to discharge the rest of the mortgage if they want to inherit that property. A father or mother can enter the programme at any stage of their working life and their children can assist to complete the purchase later on. That is a new policy. If after assessment you are found not to qualify for the mortgage, you go to a rent-to-own. You rent and after a period of five years you would be assessed and if you qualify, two thirds of what you have paid as rent will go towards the mortgage. If at that time you still do not qualify, you can go for another three years.

They are trying to come up with dollar-for-dollar in housing. It is the same programme that failed in education. It is a programme that had its genesis in my

constituency in Victoria Gardens with ex-minister Gillette whispering in Prime minister Panday's ears: "A lot of people here have children studying abroad, so give them something; what they pay the Government could match it." Prime minister Panday announced dollar-for-dollar right there and then in Victoria Gardens; trying to pan for my constituents. Of course you had to have the dollar to get the Government's dollar. Two thousand persons accessed that programme, but our GATE Programme is 15,000 and rising. They still have not learnt from the error of their ways, so they bring dollar-for-dollar to housing now. This means that if the house costs \$200,000 you have to get \$100,000 before you can access the government assistance unit.

In our case we go the other way. We say no down payment; you start with your first mortgage payment. Do you know what they said to that? They said that we are giving away the houses. It is not giving away; it is taking off the burden of having to come up with a lump sum upfront. You start with your first payment as your first month's mortgage. It does not change the price of the house to you. It is relieving the burden of making it available to you. They do not understand that.

The Government has taken the cost of infrastructure and persons are paying for the cost of the raw land and the construction of the house. That is a big relief to many persons. There are two other programmes; the beneficiary owned land—if you have your land and you qualify with your income being below a certain level, you can get a subsidy upfront. On the other hand, if you are buying a house below a certain price you can get a subsidy upfront to allow you to afford a more expensive house because the Government has reduced the amount that you have to put in on the subsidy. All these programmes are meant to increase the availability of houses especially for persons at the lower and middle income levels. These things are published in the newspapers.

The Opposition Leader read out how many millions the Government spent on what she called propaganda. Not public information, you know. You get no propaganda from the Ministry of Housing; you get public information. We pay the newspapers to put these policies and programmes on a regular basis so that every citizen can see what is available and how it is accessed. She looks at the cost of those information packages and calls them propaganda and then accuses the Government of all kinds of things.

If there is one person in this country in the political arena who believes that his political fortune or his party's political fortune can be helped by a healthy dose of racial strife, it is my friend, the Member for Fyzabad. [*Desk thumping*] It is the only thing that he knows. If the truth is unearthed he lives on Pluto. Yesterday, I

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saw that gentleman from Fyzabad get up in this House; and accuse the Government—in the face of these programmes that I have just described—of carrying out a programme of hate in the housing programme and of discriminating against him and Indians. All that he talks about every time has to do with dividing our population along racial lines; who is Indian and who is not Indian. He comes in the budget debate in the face of a housing programme with policies like this which we publish in the newspapers, and talks about discrimination. I do not know what he knows about the daily programme of the Minister of Housing because “ah doh see him; ah doh smell him; ah doh hear his cooking” and I stay far from him.

He comes here and says that I have not been to Fyzabad. That is not true. It is not whether I have been to Fyzabad. It is whether the people of Fyzabad access the housing programme. He said no and accused us of hatred and racism in the programme. Let me tell you the facts. That Grant Programme where we give \$15,000 as a grant to repair or fix your house, once your household income is under \$3,000 a month, we have made that grant available to 5,000 persons. Of the 5,000 persons, 282 are from the constituency of Fyzabad. [*Desk thumping*] In many instances they would have been assisted by the Member for Fyzabad who would get the form and shepherd them. That is 17 per cent of the programme went to Fyzabad. On average, if you look at it on a constituency basis it should be 14 per cent. Fyzabad got 17 per cent. He comes in the House on national television and seeks to inflate racial feelings by saying that there is racial discrimination in the programme and accuses the Government and me of discrimination, when he got more than the fair share.

With respect to the subsidy programme, there were 97 applications from Fyzabad and 95 were approved. That is a 98 per cent success ratio, yet that gentleman from Fyzabad comes here and talks about discrimination. Mr. Speaker, what do you say about a man like that? He cannot say that he does not know because he is one of the few MPs who are personally involved in the programme. There are many MPs whom I have not seen being personally involved. That MP is personally and directly involved, so he knows. As far as he is concerned, if he can say and do things to incite the Indian population, somehow, it would redound to the benefit of the UNC and put him in government. That and a green faced jackass he will never see. [*Desk thumping*] He is not the only one.

The last speaker was the Member for Oropouche. We have 100 projects all over Trinidad and Tobago of different sizes, scope, scale and they are coming in on completion. We can only hand out keys when houses are completed. The

instruction from me that the HDC works under is that no person is to be allocated a house and given a key unless the house is ready for immediate occupancy, where the light is on; there is water; the toilet can be flushed and the surroundings are safe. When a project is completed we take it from the contractor and only then is it ready for handing out. Yet, my friend, the Member for Oropouche who started with that project as a person who took part in the official ceremony and can see it every day in Wellington Road, Debe, knows fully that that project is going on very well. It is a large project but it is not yet completed. He comes to Parliament and tells the country that he sees keys being handed out all over the country, but not in Oropouche.

He saw keys in San Fernando. Yes, in San Fernando. This programme started in San Fernando. There is much construction in San Fernando and some are completed. We completed one and had the distribution of keys; for the incomplete ones we have not given keys. In order to send the wrong signal he comes here and says that Oropouche—and again, beating the drum of discrimination. From the day we started that project he has been consistently sending names. His intention is that he will control the allocation.

He sends names for the houses. Now he is telling us that he will look to see whether the names that he has sent are the ones who got the houses. I am not aware that the sending of a name by an MP is part of the allocation policy. Look in the newspapers; it is published in many newspapers. The policy is there. Nowhere does it say “name sent by Moonilal”. It does not say that because on that basis all MPs can send names and the houses would go in that way. We have a policy that does not involve his sending names. He is trying to send names so that he would determine who goes in there and if he does not determine who goes in there, he would accuse the Government and me of discrimination, then he can go and put that where the monkey put the nuts. Because we have a policy to follow; send names or do not send names. He will not dictate the policy. One MP said to us once that we should build the houses and let the Opposition distribute them.

Mr. Ramsaran: Will the Minister give way? Before you go too far from it, I know that you gave keys. I have a problem in the constituency of Chaguanas where after the keys were handed out and people occupied the houses there was no follow-up as to having the drains cleaned. The regional corporation is saying that they were not handed over.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: Those are administration issues which can be dealt with differently. If there are issues requiring the HDC, we handle them post distribution. I do not want to spend too much time on roads and drains. I have too

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many other things to deal with. Those are administration issues and when they arise we can deal with them and we do deal with them. Some bureaucracy is involved in the handing over from the HDC to the local bodies. That is not insurmountable and we can deal with it.

I am dealing with the misrepresentation from the Member for Fyzabad. He said that the Housing Development Corporation spent \$10 billion on housing and did some voodoo mathematics which said that the houses cost \$450,000 and nobody could afford them. I told you, Mr. Speaker, do not take anything that comes from the Opposition because in desperation they will say anything to make the good look bad, so that their fortunes may improve.

12.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in fiscal 2003/2004, we had 385 housing starts. We did other things, but being the year of initiation you could not expect to get a whole lot built in that year. That was the kick-off year. Only 385 housing starts were done in that year, but we spent \$473.6 million.

The following year, we increased that by 2,051, producing 2,436 housing starts in that year, spending \$815 million.

In 2004/2005, we went to 7,988 housing starts and we spent \$1.17 billion.

The following fiscal year, 2005/2006, we had 7,965 housing starts for another \$1.5 billion and we are projecting, for the coming year, to do even better than that.

In total, we are looking at 26,000 housing starts for that period, for a total of \$3 billion—Listen carefully. The Member for Fyzabad was here saying that we spent \$10 billion creating over-priced houses and he knew that houses were not built in the budget. We spent \$3,985,479,000 on 26,000 housing starts. I do not know where the Member for Fyzabad would have gotten that figure from. It is irresponsibility of the worst kind, on the part of a Member of Parliament, to come in a budget debate, pull figures out of the air, make analyses, present positions and then make accusations. It is totally wrong, totally false and deliberately so, because the programme has to be discredited. The first thing they said is that we would not do it and that it is a promise that we cannot keep. Then they were saying we are building it in their constituency to voter-pad. Now we are hearing that we have built them and that they cost so much money. We are hearing that people cannot afford them. They have to say something, in the face of the best housing programme this country has ever seen to solve a particular problem. The Opposition is reduced to clutching at straws and telling lies.

Mr. Speaker, we have built on sites like Pleasantville, Rio Claro, Palo Seco, Malabar, Boys Lane, Barataria, Tarouba North, Carlsen Field, Ojoe Road, Mayaro, Buen Intento, Mount Hope, East Grove in Curepe, Valsayn, Arouca, Enterprise, Fyzabad, Valencia, Princes Town, St. Augustine and Tobago. These are only some of the sites on which we have built all over the country dealing with a particular need.

With respect to the programme of giving out land and letting people do their own thing, we have had to go back and reverse that policy. It resulted in having what is called an Infill Programme. These are our lots in existing developments, with no houses on them, where persons got those lots and failed to build as per their contracts. We have taken back many of those lots, or we have built for those persons in recent times. In that programme, we have reacquired 41,000 lots and built 3,125 houses on those lots.

In the joint venture programme, where we use mainly the big contractors, we built a total of 8,200 units and distributed them and we are expecting by the end of next month to distribute another 3,000 units built in that programme.

For 2007/2008, we are projecting that we could have another 8,215 housing starts. That is our target for the next fiscal year starting October 01. The breakdown of that would be in the Infill Programme where we are building on those lots within the development; that is what we are taking back from people who had lots and did not build on them. We are expecting to take and build on 1,108 lots, using a variety of small contractors. We use only small contractors for that programme and it has been very successful.

Under the Joint Venture Programme, we are expecting to build 2,825 units on 15 sites. Our main thrust in the coming fiscal year, is doing our Urban Renewal Development Programme. Successful as the programme has been to date, it has not been successful in the area of greatest need and that is in and around the City of Port of Spain, but we are making some progress. You would have seen that we have acquired a lot of property along South Quay and we are going to rebuild the entrance to the city. That would involve some housing and some commercial activity there. We are expecting to do approximately 500 units in that area. In total, under the Urban Renewal Development Programme, we are planning to do 1,100 units there.

As we speak, we are preparing to start work at Clifton Hill on 110 apartments. Of course, we are hoping that programme overall, could, in short order, add 5,000 units to Port of Spain.

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I can guarantee you when that is completed, when we add 5,000 new units in the City of Port of Spain, you would see a dramatic improvement in the quality of housing in Port of Spain. It would have a significant impact on the traffic in and out of Port of Spain because many persons who, today, are commuting back and forth, if they have the opportunity to rent or purchase accommodation in the City of Port of Spain, would take advantage of it and it would reflect itself in a variety of ways, economically and socially.

More important is our new town initiative. We, up to this point, have used up a lot of the infrastructure that existed and was easily available. We have created a few greenfield sites but from here on in, we are placing a lot of emphasis on the work that we have done in preparing to build what we call new towns. We have four of those areas for consideration in the coming weeks and months.

In Princes Town, in 1971, the Government acquired Fairfield Estate for housing, but because of the economic decline during that period and 11 years of a policy that said that the Government has no role in housing, nothing was done with respect to using Fairfield Estate for housing. We are changing that now. We have just finished our structure plan and we are about to use 880 acres, 500 acres of Fairfield and another 300 acres of Broomage and we intend to build 2,500 units in the vicinity of Princes Town by creating very much a new town. That will deal with the growth in and around the Princes Town area to deal with our present demand, as well as our expanded demand, with respect to the growth we anticipate as we develop that area between San Fernando and Princes Town. That work would start very soon and we intend to put out for bids inviting local and international contractors to operate on a major scale in that area and deliver in the way we can do it, using the best delivery system that is available.

In Wallerfield, we are about to start to build the first 1,200 units out of a projected 30,000 units that would end up in new town Wallerfield when that town is completed. That is tied in with the growth of the University of Trinidad and Tobago and eTecK Park between Arima and Sangre Grande. In the vicinity of Valencia, we have already started significant housing there. We would be doing approximately 1,200 there in the coming year.

In Chaguanas, we have just commissioned a study to do a structure plan to complete what we are doing there and we expect to have another 4,000 units in that general Central area.

In La Brea, in keeping with—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rafeeq: Can you tell me what area in Chaguanas? Is it the Carlsen Field area or outside of Carlsen Field?

Dr. The Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It would not be just one area. It is generally the eastern side. We intend to create a new sub-town centre in that area, where we are going east, where the land is available. We can only build where land is available. When we say Chaguanas, we mean the eastern part of the existing Chaguanas, greater Chaguanas. We expect to add another 4,000 units in that area over a short term.

In La Brea, we expect significant developments, with respect to our industrialization; La Brea would move from being the sleepy village of Trinidad and Tobago to an area of significant activity, as it used to be in the old days of Brighton. I am told by my friend and others that long ago when you wanted a good nightclub in town you had to go to Brighton because Brighton was the place to be. I have seen the picture of Brighton when Brighton was the bright spot. La Brea, better days are coming. Better days are here. [*Desk thumping*]

We are just about to award contracts in Herbert Town, Boodoosingh Trace and Point Dor for 770 units. We have plans and they are pretty much completed for Newtown, in the vicinity of La Brea. We are expecting significant construction in and around La Brea during fiscal 2007/2008.

In Tobago, work is progressing very nicely in Plymouth at Venture Estate and we are about to complete, albeit with a bit of delay. There are three sites in Tobago. We expect to hand out 200 units before the end of the year: in Castara, Blenheim and Roxborough. We hope to tie up those three projects.

At Courland Bay, the planning is completed and very soon we would be completing our discussions with the THA to assist them with the housing programme. Between Courland and Plymouth, we expect to add at Plymouth 382 units and Courland 250 and hopefully at Friendship, which has been acquired by the THA, another 500 units. Tobago is involved.

A major part of the programme, which would start this coming fiscal year—it was not part of the programme before—has to do with the land distribution arising out of the development of creating service plots on Caroni (1975) Limited lands which are now state lands. We announced at an earlier time that the EMBDC was mandated to create a number of building plots throughout Central and South Trinidad. The first batch of those would come in the coming weeks. We have had 8,000 applications from persons who would like to have a plot to build on. We are screening those persons and we should be in a position to allocate the first thousand in the very near future. What that will do is bring the private sector

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initiative and their family initiative into the housing construction programme, in a way that it has not been before. With the State still aiming to build its 8,000 units and commercial developments doing 1,000 or 1,500, and private landowners getting plots and building on those plots, we expect to significantly exceed our target of 10,000 houses per year from here on.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for the extension. I mentioned the Home Improvement Grant before. To show you how that programme is going, we aim to do 1,000 of those. It is meant to maintain the housing stock. Those persons who are at the lower income bracket, who have property and are unable to spend some of their income on it, we want to maintain the housing stock so the Government makes available to such persons a \$15,000 grant to fix windows, roofs, bathrooms, as the case might be. Between October 2006 and August 2007, we disbursed 936 of those grants.

In the period October 2003 to now, we did approximately 5,000 of those and we intend to continue in that vein and probably do 1,000 or 1,500.

Under the home improvement subsidy, that is where persons access that money to match what they have, we have done approximately 2,500 of those and we intend to continue with that.

Whatever one wants to say about the housing programme, it is a programme that visibly demonstrates how Government is spending our oil and gas dividend on the people who need it most. You can see it. If you want to see how people react to it, come to the handing out ceremonies where many people are given keys to homes.

Our friends on the other side, in seeking to pooh-pooh and destroy whatever political advantage they think it will give to us, described them as hog pens, ghettos and match boxes, but at the same time they are saying that they want more and more of them.

1.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I can say without fear of contradiction that nowhere in the private sector, the lower and middle income areas, any housing available is better than the housing that is available in the public sector. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me demonstrate to you what benefits people are getting from having a programme like that. In the private sector, in Maracas Valley and Aranguez, a two-bedroom unit will cost in Aranguez approximately \$875,000; a three-bedroom unit in Maracas Valley will cost \$1.1 million; in Maloney a two-bedroom unit will cost \$275,000 to \$800,000; a three-bedroom unit will cost up to \$1 million. In Barataria, a three-bedroom unit, you are talking about a minimum of \$750,000; and in San Juan a two-bedroom unit will cost \$525,000. Those are the kinds of prices that prevail in the private sector.

If you are looking at rentals, in Longdenville a two-bedroom unit is \$1,800; a three-bedroom unit is \$2,600 in Gonzales. Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on, but we do know that in the private sector rentals and purchase prices are way beyond many persons. What we have done in this housing programme is to so structure the availability policy that a person in range 7 in the public service can access the housing programme. Two persons earning minimum wage can enter the mortgage.

Mr. Speaker, let me demonstrate to you, contrary to what was said by the “misinformer” from Fyzabad, who spoke about houses costing \$460,000, we have one project of the 26,000 housing at the start that I mentioned—I think it is 180 units—where the price is above \$400,000 and that was deliberately so.

We catered specifically for the middle income grouping, because the property there was expensive and the Cabinet decided that it was not going to be subsidized. As a matter of fact, the note for Cabinet approval will be coming up this week in Cabinet. So, other than that housing project, there is no housing project in this programme anywhere near \$400,000. So, I do not know where my friend, the Member for Fyzabad, got that figure from.

Let me just give you an idea of what the prices are and what the mortgage requirements are. In the Tunapuna/Piarco area, which is the area in greatest demand, a single family unit will go for \$196,000; a three-bedroom apartment as high as \$300,000. That is the highest price. We have two-bedroom apartments, \$230,000; a townhouse, \$274,000; and a duplex, \$209,000. The prices will vary according to the style of the unit, the size of the unit or the location of the unit. As part of the Government’s policy, the Government picks up all the infrastructure cost, but the Government passes on a part of the raw land cost to the beneficiary and the construction cost makes up the bulk of the price. That is the kind of prices that we are looking at; \$196,000, \$209,000, \$274,000, \$230,000 and 300,000. Where in the private sector can you get a townhouse in the Tunapuna/Piarco area for \$300,000? It is only in the Government’s subsidized programme.

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Mr. Speaker, the unit that cost \$196,000, the mortgage on that unit is \$837 and the qualifying income is \$2,500. Two Kentucky Fried Chicken workers earning minimum wage, husband and wife, can afford that. Yet, you have some Members of Parliament coming here and saying that we have built houses and nobody can afford them, because they want to destroy whatever good they figure this project is for the Government and the PNM. If we do good then vote for us, and if we lie to you then vote against us.

A three-bedroom apartment for \$300,000, the mortgage is \$1,281 per month and the qualifying income is \$3,843. One of the lowest ranges in the public service—there is hardly anyone in the public service today in any post who is earning less than \$4,000 a month. The qualifying income here is under \$4,000. That alone should tell you how affordable these houses are.

In Chaguanas the prices are coming in between \$280,000 and \$320,000, and the mortgages there will be from \$1,195 a month with a qualifying income of \$3,500 a month or \$1,366 with a qualifying income of \$4,098.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to run down very quickly for you the prices that we are looking at in the Couva/Tabaquite area; \$250,000, \$210,000 and \$205,000; in Princes Town, \$250,00, \$235,000 and \$220,00; in San Fernando, \$220,000, \$245,000, and \$265,000; in Sangre Grande, \$115,000; and in Mayaro, \$230,000. Those are HDC prices. Compare those prices with what I told you a while ago that prevail in the private sector and you are going to see the extent of the benefit that persons are getting when they get a public sector house.

Mr. Speaker, they could say what they want. They might not be able to see what the Ministry of Health is doing and the beds in the hospitals because, as you know—drive past that. They might not be able to see what the Minister of Finance is doing in the Ministry of Finance in creating the financial centre to make us an international financial centre, so one can assume that it is not happening. I am going to tell you one thing and that is you have one hell of a task convincing anybody in this country that the 26,000 houses built in this country were not done and not benefiting people in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to touch on a couple of the issues raised, and one thing that struck me in the debate is the extent to which Members on the other side are not prepared to learn. I remember a few years ago, there was a strongman in Tobago called Hochoy Charles. He was called the “heavy roller” and he had tremendous support in Tobago. I was building a wall at my house in Tobago near election time, and the mason was a strong Hochoy Charles supporter.

He said to me one day during the work: “I am going to vote PNM this year.” And I said: “You are going to vote PNM?” And he said yes. I knew he was a staunch Hochoy Charles supporter. I said: Why are you voting PNM? He said Hochoy Charles made an error with ADDA and I was prepared to support him still, but when he got on television and said that he was going to do it again, I say no, no, PNM this year. And that was the end of Hochoy Charles. The Opposition has not learnt.

They made a mistake with their housing policy. They have seen a successful housing policy, and they are coming back here and saying if they are given the opportunity they will resort to a land policy again. [*Desk thumping*] The sou sou land policy and the squatter policy—half of the squatting problems that we have in this country today was encouraged by the failed policies of the last governments of the UNC and the NAR, and we are trying to fix that now. They are saying to you, in the face of a successful—they so want to cry down everything in Trinidad and Tobago that nothing should be supported—housing policy where the State is bringing benefit to people using the oil and gas dividend, they are saying put them in office, and they will do the same thing again. So, if the people in this country who want public sector housing want to put them in office to not build any house, election day is coming, when?

Mr. Manning: Shortly. [*Laughter*]

Dr. The Hon K. Rowley: They are saying the same thing; the identical representation in this budget debate on the energy policy; a failed energy policy and, more importantly, I heard my friend, the Member for St. Augustine—well, of course, if you are working in a funeral home you do not expect anything—I mean, he got vexed with his political leader and his reaction was to form a political party. That is the basis for forming the party, and then you go now and give the party a name and call it “COPS.”

You know, the Member for St. Augustine was the architect of the policy that says if the economy is in trouble you contract it. That was the Dookeran philosophy of the NAR. He was the one who advised Mr. Robinson when the NAR came into office and was there in a period of difficulty in a contracting economy, it was his advice that resulted in the NAR reacting to those circumstances by cutting public servants’ pay and taking away their COLA. That was their idea of how you deal with a recession. Today, he comes here and says the same thing and that is, if they are put in Government today, the problems of the economy as they see it—notwithstanding all that has been described here about our good performance and sound economy, the envy of the world—they are going to contract it. The

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PNM's philosophy is the opposite. We intend to grow the cake so that we can get larger slices. [*Desk thumping*] That is why the economy has grown the way it has grown and why our ambition is to have the GDP expand as fast as possible so that there is more for all of us to get.

Mr. Speaker, under the PNM, my first job was Assistant Fisheries Officer in Tobago, and my salary then was \$169 a month; a big salary, and that same job today carries a salary of about \$7,000 a month. That could only happen because in the intervening period the economy has grown in size. They have a problem with the economy growing.

When I listened to the Member for Siparia describing Trinidad and Tobago in her budget contribution, I said in her dreams; that is the country she wished it was and which could help her in an election. If we all were in that situation, polling day was relief. So, every single thing in the country is bad. When she was finished, I could not believe she was talking about Trinidad and Tobago, where today we talk to the diplomats from all over the world. It is viewed as the best posting anybody could get from any country. [*Desk thumping*] When you are posted to Port of Spain, it is luxury. [*Desk thumping*] Notwithstanding our crime problem which we are trying to solve and whatever other problems we have, a posting to Port of Spain is a prime posting. Understand that!

In the energy sector when workers are asked to work in companies working in Trinidad and Tobago they consider it a plum posting otherwise they could be sent to Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia or wherever. In fact, in some companies, they have to bid for it and wait. The Leader of the Opposition described us in a way that would give you the impression that if what she said is true, we will all pack-up our bundles and run as far as possible from this place; they wish it was so.

In fact, if you listened to the speech from the Member for Oropouche this morning, it was written three years ago, because they were sure again that the election issue was kidnapping and crime and he never updated it. It was not updated. He came here this morning and talked about all kinds of stories. They would have been as happy as pig in mud if, today, we were having 20 kidnappings per day. They are sorry that kidnapping is off the news. Do you think that they are happy to hear that our children when they write their international examinations that they rank up there with the world? Do you think they want to hear that? In fact, you saw their glee when they misunderstood the Ryder Scott report—gas is going to done so PNM is going to done. With gas or without gas, PNM is the PNM. “Great is the PNM and we shall prevail.” [*Desk thumping*]

When our economy was oil, banana and sugar and so forth and gas was flared here in the 1960s, the PNM ran this country and ran it successfully. You all must be a little more patriotic. There was a time in the Edwardian period you would have lost your head for that. Bad mouthing your country is a very bad thing, and they border close to treason.

There is one website with a UNC activist out of Texas who lists on the website every single crime in Trinidad and Tobago. That is all she can do for this country. When John Kennedy told his country: Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country; she stays in Texas and runs a website telling the whole world every shooting as if other countries do not have those kinds of problems, but when you gave away the government's money in France and I raised it here the first reaction from her was there is crime all over the world. They have just discovered that. So, the people in this country must understand whom we are dealing with.

1.25 p.m.

I want to make one point; they have lost their government because there was nobody in the UNC Cabinet, none, who was able to stand up to the corruption in that government. I say publicly, if there was anybody in the UNC Cabinet at the time, who was able to take a stand on corruption and force the Prime Minister to act against the corrupt ones, the UNC would have been in government today, but there was nobody in that government. I am wondering, I came here and I gave chapter and verse on the airport projects with documents and a certain Minister came to me by the door and he said to me, "I cannot understand what is going on. We have a retreat this weekend and I am going to give them hell; this cannot continue" and when we came back from the tearoom, he was the Minister whom they put to respond to me and he sought to respond to me using a whole treatise on O'Halloran.

You heard them and I am glad they have been converted. Every Member of the Opposition now knows that corruption is a bad thing, but when they were in government, they sat here, saw the Attorney General, Agriculture Minister and the Foreign Affairs Minister get up and walk out of the government on the issue of corruption and they had not one thing to say. But for the last six years because they lost their government based on corruption, they thought that all they have to do is to buss mark; every day in the Parliament they are bussing mark, hoping that that will can be the end of the PNM. But it is one thing to buss mark, it is another thing to support mark, it is another thing to get allegations, so you come now—they are talking about Andre Monteil. My friend from Caroni East, I was

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surprised, I was very surprised indeed that he did not link me personally to whatever he accused Mr. Monteil of, since there were some allegations about HDC. I do not know he did not do it. He is falling back. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: “He must be forget. He forget.”

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: Fall back. That was the same gentleman who ran the Inccogen scam, ran the Desal scam, and in fact, I was told when it was announced at the PNM convention some time that there are more to get locked up in two weeks’ time, they sold toilet paper in Cunupia as they never did before because diarrhoea was running down the chute.

All of a sudden something happened and he is as perky as a sparrow in a tree. Every day who corrupted, who corrupted and who corrupted and he comes here and of course, Andre Monteil has something to do with HCL and links him with the Foreshore project. I am wondering if the connection that he is making to HCL is proof of Monteil’s wrongdoing. Who is the bigger fish in HCL, Monteil or Duprey? How come Duprey’s name is not called, but Monteil’s? And of course, Monteil has nothing to do with the Foreshore project, but in this Parliament, all they have to do is just throw the names out, come here and make all kinds of allegations about Ken Julien, but they dare not go outside and say it. Not one of them could go outside and say anything that they are saying here about Ken Julien. And if there is one man in this country, whom this country owes a debt of gratitude, it is Ken Julien. [*Desk thumping*] Every day they are coming here, making no connection and they have the gall—how much time have I, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Eight minutes.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: Okay—to come in here and raise the waterfront project and imply having read the Internet about Bouygues, makes some tenuous connection between Bouygues and the PNM Government for corruption. What does their record show, Mr. Speaker? Do you know what is going on at the waterfront project? They know that Monteil and HCL gave contracts, which is a lie, absolute lie. Read today’s newspapers, UDeCott has put out a clear statement as to how that project was handled—a prior contractor. But you know, when I became Minister of Planning and Development—this is a copy of the document here. It says:

“On January 30, 2002, the Honourable Dr. Keith Rowley of Planning and Development, established a Committee to examine the structure and financing of the proposed Port of Spain International Conference Complex and make recommendations ...”

And that was done. Let me tell you very quickly, Mr. Speaker, let me give you a few of the issues:

- “1. RGM Limited was not selected as developer for the project on a competitive basis;”

Mr. Imbert: Imagine that.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: Sole selective tender. They hand the waterfront project to RGM, yet she has the gall to come here and slander Mr. Monteil, who has nothing to do with the project. But when she was a Minister of the Government, this is what they did with the same project. I continue:

- “2.. The project was reconfigured by RGM Limited ... based on its own assessment;
3. ORTT financial contribution greatly exceeds the projects agreed by Cabinet in April 1998.”

So the Cabinet approves something they were doing that greatly exceeded that. RGM was building at \$917 per square foot, when the going rate was \$500 to \$600. The land was given away not at market value and the *crème de la crème* is that they gave the Government the loss-making part of the project and they gave to the private sector the profit-making part. That was the UNC policy. [*Desk thumping*] After 15 years, all that you see on the waterfront would have gone to RGM. Now, if I never earn my pay and the PNM never earns its pay, by stopping that we have saved the people of Trinidad and Tobago billions of dollars from the UNC [*Desk thumping*] because what you see at the waterfront there, is owned 100 per cent by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I do not have time to go into Jack Warner and the stadia; I do not have time to go into the school building programme where they left the IDB money there because that tendering process they had to get scrutiny for, and went and funded it differently to give it to their friends. All of a sudden these UNC people know about corruption and have the gall while their leader is in where he is, they come in the Parliament and pointing finger at us. Just saying anything until the Leader of the Opposition goes on the Internet reads about Bouygues and comes here and makes all kinds of 10-year connections. Which big company in the world you cannot go and find something negative about it?

Mr. Imbert: Even the Home Office in the Government, read that.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: But according to them—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Read that, read that.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: How much time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Four minutes.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: The Prime Minister will read it, but I have something else I want to read. I want to read into the record of this Parliament, a letter to conclude my contribution, so that if and when—whenever they get up here and talk, the people of this country must know how bold faced they are. Right?

This letter is dated January 16, 2007 and it is addressed to the Attorney General. The gentleman is a “fella” called Leonardo Arture Mora Rodriguez and I am reading this into the record because it symbolizes and captures exactly what the UNC was about. Mr. Rodriguez writes to the Attorney General and he says:

“I do not write well in English, so I relied upon the assistance of a friend ...”

Mr. Valley: Oh, my goodness.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: I continue:

“I want to begin by telling you that I come from Colombia, a country like yours, which is in the process of developing and fighting to eradicate poverty and in search of justice and opportunity for all. I recognized then the grave damage inflicted by corruption on our societies and how it generates more poverty. I have also been a witness to the abuses that certain businesses that come into our countries inflict by employing corrupt practices, corrupting public officials, and ultimately, disrespecting the very nations that are welcoming them. It is because of this, that is most difficult to have found myself as part of a criminal enterprise ...”

I want to repeat that: “I have found myself as part of a criminal enterprise” and it continues:

“created to defraud the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Without obtaining meaningful personal gains, I allowed collaborated in, and facilitated the execution of several of the frauds during the construction of the Piarco Airport, through the use of my bank accounts as well as through the subcontracts into which I entered. What was originally a work opportunity for me and dozens of Colombians, who travelled to your country to flee the violence in our country and find work due to a recession in Colombia, was ruined by my actions.

For the above, I want to express my most profound apologies to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to recognize my obligation to make amends...”

This is Leonardo Rodriguez.

Mr. Imbert: Plenty jail for that.

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: Another one called Rene Diaz de Villegas. He had a similar letter and he says:

“... I wish to express my deepest apologies to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for my participation in these wrongful acts and illegal transactions. I will make appropriate restitution to the people of Trinidad and Tobago ... “

There is another one called Eduardo Hillman-Walker:

“... I wish to express my deepest apologies to the people of Trinidad and Tobago ...”

When I came in here with the document I asked, what did the airport pay OCIC \$10 million for? I filed a question in this Parliament to the UNC, what service did OCIC provide to the Piarco Airport for warranting a payment of \$10 million? We had three elections under the UNC; that question was never answered and today, I have to stand up and watch them come and tell me about corruption. Nobody in the UNC, until you apologize like de Villegas, Rodriguez and Hillman-Walker, should speak to anybody in this country about corruption [*Desk thumping*] because according to Mr. Rodriguez that he put here in writing, you ran a criminal enterprise in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Imbert: UNC

Dr. The Hon. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, in the one minute I have left, I simply want to say, that God has blessed us, but there are many who will try to curse us. I saw the ultimate ignorance in the newspaper recently by one of our experts who said that what we should do as the PNM to show that we are good managers, we should prepare a balanced budget which excludes the revenue from the oil sector. [*Laughter*] Now if the word was not unparliamentary, I would have described that. However there are many persons in the country who are not along those lines. Thank God for the PNM which will continue under our motto to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago to take us from where we are now to a developed country by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I support the measure and I congratulate the Ministry of Finance and the Minister of Finance for doing what they have done and continue to do.

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The people of Trinidad and Tobago have a lot to be thankful for and I feel so good to be a member of this population because it could not be better anywhere else in the world. [*Desk thumping*]

1.40 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, pray silence for the distinguished Member for San Fernando East, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Whee!

The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance (Hon. Patrick Manning): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your very kind and most unusual introduction. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

I thank all the hon. Members of this House, on both sides, who contributed to this debate on the Appropriation Bill for fiscal 2008, which is before this honourable House for consideration. I particularly thank my colleagues on this side who contributed to the Government's effort in advancing this budget and in articulating the Government's programmes over the last few years on what is ongoing and what is to come, as we seek to bring to a close this session of Parliament and go to a general election.

The budget that was presented this year is a continuation of a process started in fiscal year 2003, as we began to map out and implement a plan designed to achieve developed country status by the year 2020. It was part of a plan. Every year we advanced the cause of that plan, moving closer to the goal we established for ourselves, taking the country forward in the right direction. That is what we have been doing with successive budgets. Therefore, what some persons had anticipated for us in this budget did not materialize.

Some said that it would be an election budget in the sense that they expected wild and profligate spending, merely because the Government was faced with an election, and they cast us in a mould where they felt that we were prepared to do anything to win the support of the national community; but the PNM is much more responsible than that. Indeed, what we sought to do this year was not to compromise in any way the gains that we have made and to put in place the steps required to continue the journey on which we have embarked and which has already taken us a very significant distance on the road to developed country status by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, as early as 2002, before the budget for fiscal year 2003, we began a programme of social transformation in Trinidad and Tobago. You remember that in the election campaign which led to our advent into government on Christmas Eve day 2001, we had made it clear that if the PNM was elected to office, there would have been a significant shift in the pattern of public expenditure towards the social sector. The minute we got into office and we began to operate on January 01, 2002, we moved to put that in place.

In fact, I had condemned for a number of years the notion of a Prime Minister accepting any portfolio other than that of Prime Minister; yet in 2002, I accepted the portfolio of Minister of Finance. It was necessary and it was done so that one could ensure a significant shift in that pattern of public expenditure towards the social sector. My colleagues in the Ministry of Finance will tell you that the way we conduct our business in the Ministry is that we have open discussions with the senior management of that Ministry. It was a constant dialogue and constant battle, as it were, to be able to do that, and in our view we have achieved the objective we have set for ourselves.

All of that was designed to make the society a more caring one. I remind you again that a caring society was one of the planks on which we had conducted our election campaign in 2001. A caring society is one of the planks on which we have predicated our move towards developed country status by the year 2020. A caring society was at the root of PNM policy for Trinidad and Tobago.

Over the last five and a half years, we have introduced a whole slew of social programmes. We have reintroduced the on-the-job training programme. That was a programme we had left in place in 1995, but which the government that succeeded us had immediately terminated, sending some 7,000 of our young people on the streets at the time. They did not subscribe to the programme and, therefore, terminated it very suddenly with the consequence that many people, 5,000 to 7,000 of our young people, were on the streets.

A retraining programme was introduced. We also introduced the Multi-sector Skills Training Programme (MUST), which is doing a lot of training for the construction sector, the hotel industry and so on. There is also the HYPE programme. We have now been able to introduce the MILAT and MYPART programmes; both of them are based on the armed forces, together with the Civilian Conservation Corps. The YTEPP programme has been expanded, as you know. We have introduced the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA), which is for training young farmers in agriculture. There is also GAPP, the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme. I could go on and on, because there is a whole heap of them.

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In fact, we have introduced so many social programmes that we thought it prudent to include all of them in a document the Government has published called *A Guide to Social Programmes and Services*, which was published two years ago. It details the bulk of the programmes. So many were they, that we had to put them in a document like this to make it available, not just to hon. Members, but also to members of the national community so they can properly access the programmes. The programmes were not put in place for window dressing, but rather to benefit the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who would have benefited from the benevolence of the State by way of these programmes.

We also put some new institutional arrangements in place. We established a standing committee on the social sector; a sub-committee of the Cabinet, which, indeed, was a replication of the very successful approach taken in the energy sector, where the Standing Committee on Energy, contrary to the views of hon. Members opposite, has been a most successful intervention. We sought to replicate in the non-energy sectors the very successful approach we had put in place in the energy sector.

So we established a standing committee on the non-energy sector with all the key stakeholders in the public sector sitting around the same table with a couple of international agencies. Most importantly, it was chaired by the Prime Minister and included some of the key social sector Ministers in the Government, so that there was enough political weight in that committee to give credence and credibility to whatever decisions the committee would take on behalf of the Cabinet and recommend to the Cabinet successfully. I hasten to point out that these committees are not clothed with executive authority; they operate on behalf of the Cabinet, they are advisory to the Cabinet, therefore, the Cabinet takes the decisions. We are not setting up mini Cabinets in an overall system of governance.

As we have put so many programmes in place, we have also put in place a review mechanism. We set up a team of experts headed by Dr. Carla Noel of Bhp Billiton; again someone from the energy sector, trying to utilize the expertise of the energy sector in other areas of national development; the key area being the social sector.

That team of experts is reviewing every social programme in the public sector; making recommendations to streamline them to ensure that we minimize and eliminate overlap of the various programmes—some of that exists—and most importantly ensure that the programmes are now carried out in such a way that they have a reach to all sections of the national community. I make that point for the benefit of the very distinguished Member for Fyzabad.

We have a mechanism in place designed to ensure that our programmes reach all sections of the national community and they, in fact, benefit those for whom they were designed in the very first place. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Nanan: Is this Dr. Carla Noel the same person who was working in TIDCO?

Hon. P. Manning: I hasten to point out that at the time we embarked on this new thrust in the social sector, at the time that we moved to demonstrate the caring of which we had spoken in the election campaign and for which the PNM is now well known, oil and gas prices were not yet high on the international markets. Therefore, the programme was not predicated on any enhanced revenue position. It was predicated on the understanding by the PNM of what the society requires and on the PNM's commitment to caring. It was predicated on that and on our determination to create in Trinidad and Tobago a kinder, gentler society. It was based on love. It was a love thing. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Panday: Larry is here to share that love.

Hon. P. Manning: If today we are able to take this programme forward on the basis of high oil and gas prices, then all praise to Almighty God. [*Desk thumping*] It is His will that has caused things to be as they are, and our responsibility in that matter is to use the instruments that he has given us.

Therefore, we do not share the view of the Member for Siparia; nor do we share the view that was articulated by the Member for St. Augustine—which was so ably handled by my colleague—that oil and gas were a curse and we must operate in every possible manner that ignores the existence of the reality of oil and gas or that we were, indeed, an oil and gas based economy. We make the point again: If that is what Almighty God has given to us in His wisdom, it is with oil and gas that we will start; that is where we begin. The PNM will never treat oil and gas as though they are a curse, but, indeed, they are natural resources given to us by Almighty God to use for the benefit of the national community and in the interest of national development. That is how we see it.

Mr. Speaker, two or three years ago we were able to make some major shifts in our social intervention and to introduce some significant new programmes designed to have a fundamental effect on our society. Firstly we reintroduced free tertiary education. A previous PNM government had a form of it. We were able to introduce free tertiary education two years ago, and, more than that, it was not just at institutions that were established, like the University of the West Indies or the new University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), or for that matter the University of

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the Southern Caribbean, but we have for the first time also extended this facility to private institutions, recognizing that the demand for tertiary spaces was not completely satisfied by UWI or the established traditional tertiary institutions.

We took it further than that; we even went as far as the University of St. Georges in Grenada. Now we have taken it to Mona, Jamaica, in respect of a medical programme where we are guaranteeing the university authorities that we will take up whatever spaces are available in almost every discipline, including the discipline of medicine. We have expanded it. So today we are able to boast, largely as a result of these initiatives and others in the tertiary and post-secondary sectors, a participation rate that moved from 11 per cent when we came in, to some 35 per cent today. Our target is 60 per cent by the year 2015 of the cohort of persons eligible for post-secondary and tertiary level education. It is a very credible performance in the very short time we have done that.

We were able to reduce the tax rates for both income tax and corporation tax. We did that two years ago. We lowered these rates from 35 and 28 per cent to a unified rate of corporation tax for that category of 25 per cent and a top marginal rate of income tax of 25 per cent. It was a significant reduction in taxes, and at the same time, we introduced an increase in the personal allowance from \$25,000 to \$60,000 a year. We have done all of that.

2.45 p.m.

We have done all of that, which has had the effect of increasing the extent of disposable income in the hands of the taxpayer and, therefore, put him in a position to experience a significant jump in his standard of living and quality of life as the PNM continues to govern and move the country in the right direction of developed country status by the year 2020.

Mr. Speaker, our social intervention was felt very significantly in the education sector, and quite apart from all the curriculum changes and all that the Minister of Education so ably articulated before this honourable House yesterday, we also increased school meals which have gone to 145,000 a day including breakfast. We introduced the book grant, we enhanced the school bus transportation system which was put in place, and in the health sector we also made other interventions—the Minister of Health was able to articulate this very competently in his contribution—including the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP), the landmark programme where free medication is available to persons with chronic diseases. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Rafeeq: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Panday:—not the CDAP programme, CDAP.

Hon. P. Manning: Correct. Mr. Speaker, imagine me taking English lessons from the Member for Princes Town. I clearly have hit rock bottom, but there we go.

Mr. Speaker, the amount of money the country has now been able to spend on free operations, very complex operations and I remember my own case. In 1997 when I came back from Mauritius, having had two heart—I had two heart events there—I went to the doctor and he told me that I was coming up to valve replacement surgery which cost \$130,000 and I could not afford it. What do I do? A lady came to see me shortly afterwards to tell me she was coming because she believed her case was exactly like mine. She had a heart event, needed valve replacement surgery—two valves, she was given six months to do it or she would die; she needed \$120,000 and did not have 120 cents.

Mr. Speaker, the Government, through the Ministry of Health has now put a programme in place where persons in those circumstances can rely on the assistance of the State that you do not die but you are cared for and nursed back to a state of—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in our various budget presentations before this honourable House, we have assisted the old, retirees, the young, the unemployed and socially displaced, and the handicapped. We have assisted people over a wide range of social circumstances.

In addition to that, we have sought to make the society more efficient by removing inefficient state enterprises, the most notable being BWIA and Caroni (1975) Limited, and hon. Members opposite know very well when they talk all the nonsense they have had to say in this debate that the sugar industry in this country has no future, especially in circumstances where the industry has lost its preferential market access into the European Union which was not the case in 1999 when we put forward an alternative for the sugar industry, but which became obsolete the minute the EU took a position to get rid of preferential market access for Caribbean sugar from the ACP countries bringing about a completely new set of circumstances and, therefore, requiring a completely different response from what we articulated in the year 1999. So we had to respond to that.

Mr. Speaker, we responded not with emotion, we said if it has to be done then the time to do it is now, but we would do it in as caring a manner as we can. And

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those of us on this side remember very clearly when we were doing that, hon. Members opposite were of the view that it would lead to 9,000 persons on the breadline.

Mr. Speaker, shortly after we had closed Caroni (1975) Limited—and we are now discussing with the cane farmers their own exit from the industry—we were privy to a report from the Ministry of Labour, “Small and Micro Enterprises Development” and from the Central Statistical Office on what the labour situation is. Even when they were claiming that 9,000 persons were on the breadline and unemployment was rising, it actually fell to the lowest ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago—5 per cent in the fourth quarter of last year—and, therefore, there is no basis whatsoever on which hon. Members opposite could have made the allegation in this budget debate that the closing of Caroni (1975) Limited resulted in undue unemployment in certain parts of the country, and to be used in the context of equity or lack of it, and discrimination as so many of them on that side are wont to say and to put forward to members of the national community.

Mr. Speaker, no such thing happened. We were able to close those two companies and today Caribbean Airlines Limited, the successor airline, is doing extremely well. In fact, the performance is beyond what our anticipation was, but we will await the first full year of its operation before we say what we would like to say on this.

Mr. Speaker, all these steps we had taken—especially as many of them were on the expenditure side—had to be buttressed by actions on the part of the Government to make sure revenues were maintained and, therefore, to do that we looked at our economic base by reviewing the tax regime under which the energy sector operated. Precisely the course of action which the hon. Member for Siparia has indicated as gambling with \$3.5 billion of tax revenue. What she did not understand, is that we had to give tax concessions to ensure that the requisite level of exploration activity now take place in the country. Without exploration, there can be no oil and gas discoveries and without that, we are unable to sustain the level of output of the energy sector, nor are we able to expand that level of output in the way we contemplate doing it over the next few years in the caring hands of a PNM Government. I will have to return to that issue during my contribution.

Mr. Speaker, we have sought to create jobs and reduce unemployment. In the first instance we did it by increasing public sector expenditure in the construction sector. We had said it before election, we have targeted certain areas and construction was one area which we had targeted for job creation and we have

done that. Again, with the consequences that you now see, not only have the jobs fallen, the unemployment level has fallen and the level of employment of the people in our society has risen to unprecedented levels, we are seeing the face of our country change as new facilities are put out essentially in the public sector where public servants, the employees of the State, are given environmental circumstances and facilities much better than those to which they are accustomed, making them much more comfortable, and we expect as a consequence, the level of service that they give to the population to be suitably enhanced. All designed to improve the level of service that the people get from the agencies of the State with which they do business.

Mr. Speaker, we have not merely looked at the energy sector, we have taken steps to diversify the economy. The Minister of Trade and Industry, and the Minister of State in the Ministry of Trade and Industry spent some time in this debate talking about the seven new areas we have identified as a result of the work of the business development committee, another subcommittee of the Cabinet: Printing and packaging; fish and fish processing; music; entertainment; merchant marine; yachting and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, we have looked at all and we have taken those actions, plus we found a new enterprise called eTecK to replace the old IDC and TIDCO and eTecK now has a mandate in respect of IDC and the now energy sector to attract investments in that area, one similar to the mandate that the National Energy Corporation has in the energy sector ensuring that as we do it in energy so we do it also in the non-oil sector and maintain balance as we go down. The efforts of the Government to stimulate non-oil activity, non-energy activity are efforts that are there for all to see with the consequences that the Minister of Trade and Industry was able to point out in terms of the rate of economic growth in the non-energy sector vis-à-vis the energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, we sought to make the society a safer one—all this was done over the last five years. We have put new police legislation in place—a little late but we have put it—to better manage the police service because we identified the problem as largely a management one. When you go to a police station and it is not able to respond because it does not have a car or there is only one man in the station, all of which are merely symptoms of a management problem and, therefore, it is to the underlying cause and not the symptom to which we turn our attention. So we put legislation in place that will facilitate new management arrangements in the police service and we confidently expect to see an improvement.

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We have put a street-lighting programme in place, initially targeting 82,000 new street lights to the 6,000 upgrades at a cost of TT \$627 million—very ambitious—that is 1,018 lights in three years. At the end of July, we have done 112,000 lights in just over a year and six months, a creditable performance by the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) and one which is worthy of commendation by Members of this honourable House. [*Desk thumping*]

We have made a very significant other intervention; we have established the Special Anti-crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago which has considerably enhanced our abilities in law enforcement and would go down as one of the innovations of this Government, and more than that, one of the innovations of this country as the authority sought to make Trinidad and Tobago a much safer place. Above all, we have sought to improve the standards of integrity applicable to the conduct of our public affairs.

Mr. Speaker, this in very broad outline is the way we have gone over the last five years. I am trying to demonstrate to you, Mr. Speaker, to hon. Members, and to the national community, that the PNM has been operating in accordance with a plan that as we go forward, we are taking it step by step and as we complete one step, there is no need merely because an election is at hand to do wild and crazy things to gain the support of the electorate.

The electorate of Trinidad and Tobago is not foolish and would look back and see what has happened over the last five years and when comparisons are made between what has happened in our time and in the time of hon. Members opposite they will come to the inescapable conclusion that, really, in the election to come, they have one choice, and one choice only, the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Partap: “Yuh campaigning, call de date, man.”

Hon. P. Manning: Yes, I am campaigning. Is it a crime?

Mr. Speaker, my friend from Nariva asks me if I am campaigning, I wonder what the Member for Princes Town was doing.

Mr. Panday: Just talking the truth.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, all of them were campaigning except the Member for St. Augustine, because his contribution could not have been considered a campaign in support of his party. In fact—and I do not want to be uncharitable—if, as one of my colleagues pointed out to me, when we were in Opposition I had responded to budget debates in the way the Member for St. Augustine has

responded to this one, today we would have seven seats and still be in Balisier House in Opposition. [*Desk thumping*]

3.00 p.m.

But that is not a matter for me, that is a matter for him and his colleagues. If that is the way they choose to go, then I wish them well and I assure them that they will be comfortably ensconced in the Opposition for years to come, if at all.

All that we have done over the last five and a half years is now threatened because hon. Members opposite either are unable to grasp the complexities of governance as this country moves forward—a simple concept like the reserves-to-production ratio, not only what I have said as Prime Minister and Chairman of the Standing Committee of Energy; I have had something to say on the matter. We are greatly indebted to my colleague from Ortoire/Mayaro—and I must put it on the record. Never before have I heard a contribution like the contribution that he has made in this Parliament yesterday. [*Desk thumping*] He was excellent and I would just like to state that for the benefit of the parliamentary record. If, following that contribution, hon. Members opposite are still not convinced, then there is only one conclusion to which I could come and that is that “stick break in their ears”.

I cannot understand! The complexities of governance are just too great for them to comprehend! Everybody in the industry knows that the reserves-to-production ratio is an indicator that was not designed to tell you how long your oil and gas resources would last; it was not designed for that purpose and, therefore, must not be used for a purpose for which it was not designed. It was not designed to tell you that and will not be able to tell you that in the future.

Therefore, the minute they say that the reserves-to-production ratio is 12 years and therefore—the conclusion they drew—in 12 years’ time the oil will run out, it just tells you that they are unable to grasp the nuances of that indicator; they are unable to grasp key issues in the governance of the country and they are not fit to govern the people of Trinidad and Tobago! [*Desk thumping*]

It is not a point to be taken lightly. They have had those misconceptions before. In the run-up to the election of 1986, we looked at the energy sector—get the NAR manifesto any time you want; it is interesting reading; we should put that in the archives—and hear what they had to say. They condemned the approach of the government of the day, an approach that led us into mega projects in what they called sunset industries. They called ammonia and methanol sunset industries. Do you know why they called them that? Because one of them read somewhere that

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nitrogen fixation was about to come in and they were sunset industries and, therefore, we were on the wrong track. So what they, therefore, put in the manifesto was this: They will discontinue the practice, as they put it, of depending on the mega projects in the sunset industries, but instead, will develop new subsectors, the viability of which is guaranteed on the basis of the domestic market. That is what they said!

Dr. Rowley: Madness! Absolute madness!

Hon. P. Manning: That is what they said! To say that is to misunderstand the industry completely. It is a world scale industry. China, 1.3 billion people; the United States of America, 300 million; Britain, 60 million people; Germany, 80 million; Trinidad and Tobago, 1.3 million; how could you tell me you would go domestic market?

Dr. Rowley: Big market!

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, if you make enough pepper sauce in your house, you have to export it; you cannot sell it in Trinidad and Tobago. The market is just too small. And for big men—

Dr. Rowley: And women.

Hon. P. Manning: Women, you are right—to come to the national community to put that in a manifesto and to say that, “we will discontinue the mega projects”, as they put it; “they are sunset industries”, because somebody read one book more than he should have read—he read too much and did not understand what he read; he was unable to grasp the complexities of governance—they are going to now develop new subsectors, the viability of which is guaranteed on the basis of the domestic market.

So they did that! When they came into Government, they did that! And, of course, the investments in the big projects—in the methanol and ammonia—started to decline. To their eternal credit, they realized what they had done by 1989, but it was too late to change it. When we came in, in 1991, it took us one full year, with Prof. Julien—a man to whom this country owes a tremendous debt of gratitude—[*Desk thumping*]*—to be able to reestablish Trinidad and Tobago on the radar screens of some of the important boards of directors of energy sector companies around the world before we could once again seek to attract foreign investment in the energy sector and to regain our place as the second largest recipient of direct foreign investment in the Western Hemisphere, behind Canada.* [*Desk thumping*]

When, therefore, they come and refuse to understand what the reserves-to-production ratio means, I see exactly where that is heading. They will now conclude that since the oil and gas are running out, as they say, they are going to curtail any further development based on oil and gas. That is what they will do! What is worse, the Member for Siparia, who is Leader of the Opposition and who is seeking to become Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Valley: When?

Hon. P. Manning:—has said to us that we gambled with \$3.5 billion in revenue. The tax concessions that we gave to the oil companies as an incentive for exploration activities, she is saying, should not have been given. Therefore, I am to conclude that if they get into government they are likely to reverse that. What is looming around the corner is a disaster of tremendous proportions! That is what is looming around the corner. And do not believe it is “ole talk”, because they have demonstrated before that they have done it and they will do it again.

They condemned the housing arrangements. Dr. Rowley, the Minister of Housing, in his contribution a few minutes ago, saw it. What was their policy in housing? Land for the landless. It was rooted in culture; it had a cultural antecedent and that is what I am afraid about it. It is not a question of good sense; it is not a question of looking before you and seeing what the realities are; it is the cultural antecedents on which such a policy is predicated and that they are likely to return to it—

Mr. Singh: What you mean by that?

Mr. Dookeran: Explain.

Hon. P. Manning: Explain? Mr. Speaker, they cannot understand the complexities of governance! Let them think it out themselves!

Mr. Singh: Nonsense! No, no, you cannot make a blank statement like that in a cosmopolitan culture!

Hon. P. Manning: If they do not understand what is meant by it; if they do not understand what they themselves have been saying, I want them to know we understand it and we have seen the consequences of that disastrous policy.

It was the same Minister of Housing, between 1986 and 1991 and the same Minister of Housing between 1995 and 2000—and he got an award in some remote African country for the Sou Sou Land concept. Not so? And he “come” back here with a big—if you see the—they had a model of some house. It had a

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tapia roof? [*Laughter*] He got an award for that in some African country where that would have been cutting edge technology for that country, not for Trinidad and Tobago! As they put those things in place, we have seen the consequences.

Three weeks ago, in collaboration with my colleague, the Minister of Housing, we initiated a new housing project. In fact, we handed over the first set of houses in Tardieu Gardens in Tarouba South in the constituency of San Fernando East. Those houses were built for squatter relocation and I am pleased to report that the squatter relocation programme in Mootoo Lands and elsewhere in that constituency is on track and going very well, indeed.

When I saw those houses I could not believe it! All the utilities are underground for those houses. I am talking about electricity, telephone, cable television, water—that is drainage, and so on. Everything is underground. They did not disturb—[*Interruption*] Why do you not listen and learn?

Hon. Member: The street lights are underground?

Hon. P. Manning: The street lights are above ground but the wiring for the street lights is underground. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: Not even that they understand. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. P. Manning: And I imagine you are testing too.

Mr. Sharma: Yes.

Hon. P. Manning: Okay, that is fine. Mr. Speaker, I would not be surprised if that comes in their manifesto as a new innovation, you know: “We will put street lights underground.” It sounds good.

Mr. Sharma: And put the wire on top. [*Laughter*]

Hon. P. Manning: Yes, and put the wire above ground. That is the logic.

They did not disturb the topography of the area and therefore the houses are sitting on the natural—if you see that area. But right next to it is Thompson Gardens which was established by hon. Members opposite when they were in government, when they relocated people from King’s Wharf in San Fernando and put them in Thompson Gardens as relocation. It is there for anybody to see. I invite members of the national community to go to Tarouba South; look at Tardieu Gardens on the left; look at Thompson Gardens on the right, and you will see what the PNM stands for and that of which the UNC is proud! [*Desk thumping*] It is a stark contrast!

That is why we condemn the Sou Sou Land concept. We condemned it then and we condemn it now. And you see this question of regularization of squatters? That is to be done only in special circumstances, lest, as you regularize squatters you regularize slums in your country. They cannot see the difference. Land for the landless! A policy that is culturally rooted. Land for the landless! And “doh” care what you say; “doh” care how it looks, they are slavishly adhering to it; coming back in the year 2007, in a budget for fiscal year 2008, after all that has been done, after the Government’s housing programmes are plain for all to see all over the country, they come back with that kind of thing: Well, they “doh” like this here and they “doh” like that there and it is costing too much money. One of them spent a lot of time—which one was it? I do not know; it does not matter. All are the same thing. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: Same dotish.

Hon. P. Manning: Yes. Come here talking about it is better if you give them land so they could ask their “nanni” and “they bougi” and their cousin, and so on, to come and they do a “gayap” and they build a house, and it builds in them a sense of achievement and it brings the family ties together. I have no doubt all that is true, but when they are doing that—to assist “bougi” and “nanni”, and so on—the squatting population in the country continues to rise.

What they do not understand is the size of the problem we have and what is required to fix it. Therefore if the people of this country put God out of their thoughts and put them back into government, what you are likely to see is more of the same, and they have made no secret about it!

The \$3.5 billion that we have given in tax concessions to the oil companies—and the figure is not \$3.5 billion but I am going to use your figure—as the Member for Siparia put it, is something that should not have been given, so therefore she will take it back, and as she takes it back, the exploration that is taking place in the country now in the oil and gas sector, will just go down; we would have no more discoveries to get and it spells the end of the oil and gas sector in Trinidad and Tobago. Do not believe it is not possible; they have done it before. Mr. Speaker, they just do not understand. So we are under significant risk.

Since we are on it, there is a third one I am going to raise. You see that On-The-Job Training Programme? We put that in place, you know, between 1991 and 1995. When we left government, there were somewhere between 5,000 and 7,000 young people on that programme. When they came in, without even asking anybody a question, they just cut it and murdered the aspirations of 7,000 young people!

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Do you know why we put it in place? Young people apply for jobs; they are not qualified; they tell them: “You cannot get a job; we want experience.” But young people argue: “If you do not give me a job, how am I getting the experience?” They are in a chicken and egg situation. They have no job and no experience. The PNM says: “Okay, the State will put a programme in place where we will subsidize the cost of—we will pay some of it—attach you to somebody in business who is doing a job that you could sit next to him and learn.” Therefore, when advertisements come out in the future and people ask for experience, you can say: “I have experience; I gained my experience from the On the Job Training Programme of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.” They stopped it!

There is a law in geology that we call the law of uniformity. If you want to know what processes operated in the years gone by, look at the processes operating today, and vice versa. Therefore, young people have nothing to guess about, you know. If they want to know what that government will do, just look at what they have done before; look at their antecedents and then it will be plain for all to see that that is a disaster just looming around the corner and they will do well to carefully consider how they exercise that franchise as and when the time comes, and it is going to come not too long from now.

3.15 p.m.

Dr. Nanan: The On The Job Training (OJT) Programme was not stopped. It was being revised because when we looked at it about 75 per cent of the expenditure was going towards administration costs.

Hon. P. Manning: When we came we met no OJT Programme.

There is also one other matter that was raised in this debate in respect of which I wish to make a comment. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. P. Manning: It has to do with the transfer of shares from the Home Mortgage Bank to Stone Street Capital a company owned by Mr. Andre Monteil and his wife in circumstances that are very questionable. The matter was raised in Parliament by the Member for Caroni East, but it had come to our attention before.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. P. Manning: In the debate that preceded, the Member for Caroni East raised the question of the shares in the Home Mortgage Bank—the two reports, the Report of the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Report of the Central Bank on this matter—I intervened and said that these reports had been referred to the Commissioner of Police; the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Integrity Commission. Mr. Speaker, on checking, that information is not correct. [*Desk thumping*] I wish without reserve to apologize to this honourable House and the national community. It was not an attempt to mislead anybody. We are doing so many things at the same time [*Laughter*] that we mixed up that particular investigation with the report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Health Services. That is the report that had been referred to these three agencies.

Once again, I wish to apologize to hon. Members of this House and the national community for that error. It was always our intention to refer it to these three bodies. I now wish to advise hon. Members that yesterday the two reports were referred to the Commissioner of Police; the Integrity Commission and the Director of Public Prosecutions for action as they consider appropriate.

Incidentally, I thank the Member for Caroni East for his generosity in this matter because he realized what happened and had been generous enough in his contribution to recognize it publicly. I thank him very sincerely for that.

When I made my statement in this honourable House what, perhaps, I did not do was to convey the extent of the Government's displeasure over this transaction, whether or not it was legal. That is what I did not do. I did not convey the extent of the Government's displeasure over this action whether or not it was legal. I wish to make it pellucidly clear to this honourable House and to members of the national community that whether or not it is legal, it is contrary to Government's policy and the Government frowns on the way the whole transaction was conducted. The Government frowns on that. I do not wish to appear to be going overboard on this matter or any other matter.

What I will say is this: It was at the instance of this Government that hon. Members opposite supported us in changing the legislation that facilitated that transaction by the gentleman concerned. We were able to convince our colleagues opposite to support us and they did. We thank them for their support. They might now conclude that we misled them on this matter. I want to assure them that we did no such thing. We did not know what was coming down. We did not know what was afoot. What has now emerged with one individual or one company

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substantially owning the shares of the Home Mortgage Bank is contrary to the Government's policy. Just as legislative action on the part of the Government facilitated that transaction, so we intend to resort to legislative action to correct it, and in correcting it, we are going to ensure also that the shares are now retransferred at the same price the shares were transferred in the first place.

Mr. Panday: You are now taking the advice of the Central Bank.

Hon. P. Manning: We are going to do that. Such a legislation will require more than likely a special majority of Parliament. I hope that on this matter we can depend on the support of hon. Members opposite.

Hon. Members: Before the election.

Hon. P. Manning: We will bring it before the election.

Everybody knows. *[Interruption]* We are not defending that at all. You do not understand. I was not defending that. There are none so blind as those who will not see and the Member for Siparia just refuses to see.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: They defended it.

Hon. P. Manning: They did not defend it. I was here. We frown at the whole thing. I could say more about it but leave it to the agencies concerned. Suffice it to say that the Government will take appropriate steps.

Mr. Panday: We believe you.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph spent much time on the construction sector trying to point out to the Members of this Parliament and the national community, that the Government was involved in squandermania in the conduct of our business in the construction sector. I will be the first to admit that all has not gone well in the construction sector as we accelerated our rate of development of this country. I will be the first to admit it because it is so. Not only that. We have some examples. What has happened in respect of the airport and the hospital in Tobago is indefensible. There is a series of circumstances that has brought about that. Not only that. The last straw as far as the Government is concerned, the straw that broke the camel's back was the Brian Lara Stadium. We have a situation in this country where some practices have developed which lend themselves to escalation in the cost of every project that we put forward.

I do not want to appear to be attacking architects or the construction sector because we have met. Together with my colleague, the Minister of Works and Transport, I have met with the JCC and we have now agreed on a way forward.

We have also agreed that all of this public bashing is neither in our interest, their interest nor the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We have a problem and we have agreed to collaborate to solve the problem.

A solution was the Chinese. We have reached full capacity in the domestic construction sector. One of the reasons we had to go outside is to increase our rate of construction without adding to the country's inflation. In other words, you are able to increase capacity and control inflation at the same time. When everybody was saying slow down the rate of development, the Government said, "No. We are not slowing it down. We will find other ways to accelerate it and maintain it." One way is by Chinese workers. It is not just Chinese; it is the foreign contractors on the whole. One of the buildings that have gone up very fast is the Legal Affairs Tower and the company that is doing that is a Malaysian company and there are so many others.

Mr. Partap: You reintroduced slavery.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, let the Member for Nariva put whatever spin he wishes to put. He has had his chance. We are trying to give you a perspective of it. As we go for foreign contractors and labour we are able to expand our domestic capacity without adding to the country's inflation. That is the reason.

The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro made the point. It is applicable not only to the energy sector. When people talk about running out of oil and gas, what is really happening is that they are running out of ideas and that is what happened to hon. Members opposite. As they run out of ideas, they have fallen for what was the popular view, "cut back; cut back; cut back; don't do this; don't do that; cut back; cut back; cut back" without sitting and considering carefully what lies before them as to whether there was some alternative. Cut back!

So many other countries have done it before us. It did not cross their minds for one minute that they could examine what Dubai or Saudia Arabia is doing or examine what has happened in the Emirates. It did not cross their minds for one minute. All they were prepared to say is that you are going too fast, slow down and stop; "yuh causing problems in the domestic economy". That is how they saw it. The Government, the PNM had a different view. We have introduced that view and now, we have agreed to meet with the construction sector, without going into the details, and put our heads together, to see how we can solve this problem and bring the domestic construction sector up to the international standards that are required in a country like ours, at the stage of development that we are at and progressing, at the rate at which we have identified to progress and how to do it.

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May I also say that Sonway the Malaysian company told us that 10 years ago Malaysia was in the same situation and at that time they brought Japanese construction companies. To day, 10 years later, the Japanese construction companies are unable to compete. Understand and appreciate that something else had to be done. They put their heads together and came up with new approaches that now redound to the benefit of the Malaysian society to an extent that the foreign companies are unable to compete with the local companies. That is where we are headed in Trinidad and Tobago. Far from trying to kill the domestic construction sector, we are trying to work with them to ensure that they too come to a place where they can perform in the way that the foreign companies are performing, to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I could have gone into more detail on that issue but I have chosen not to do that.

Just one minute on another issue that has been raised. I do not know who raised the Rapid Rail Project. [*Crosstalk*] It could have been raised by any one of them. “Yuh know what they harping on?” There was no feasibility study. That is why you have to be careful with whom you put in government. All they understand is that before you do any project you must have a financial feasibility study. What they are unaware of is the norms of the transportation industry.

Listen to what a consultant from India had to say about that. Wrights Limited is the name of the consultant and this is in November 2003.

Experience has shown that road buses can optimally carry 10,000 persons per hour per direction. When traffic density on a corridor exceeds 10,000 PHPDT the average speed of the buses come down; journey time increases; air pollution goes up and commuters are put to an increased level of inconvenience. Thus, when on a corridor, traffic density during peak hours crosses this figure, provision of rail-based transport should be considered. In any case a metro system may become inescapable if the traffic density on a corridor reaches 20,000 PHPDT.

When it reaches 10,000 passengers in one direction per hour, you have to begin to consider a mass transit system.

When it crosses 20,000, a mass transit system is mandatory. That is what it says. In 1996, 11 years ago, when the study was done—it was done by a Canadian firm called Cansult, the figure was 21,000, projected to increase to 28,000 by 2015.

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In 2006 when the company Cansult came back and did the study again, the figure was 30,000. In other words, by 1996 the traffic volumes in the East-West

Corridor had already crossed the levels at which the consultants believe and the industry believes that a mass transit option is mandatory. It had already crossed it. Now it is going to 30,000. It is in those circumstances they are saying on what basis you decide to do mass transit, you should try to do a financial feasibility study. The national community could clearly see that is how they would conduct their business and while they fiddle and do feasibility studies, the traffic volumes increase, increase and increase and the level of frustration of the population goes up and up and up. They go on their merry way doing financial feasibility studies because they learnt that in a textbook in some school somewhere.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if they knew that we mentioned it in the budget. A contract has now been awarded. I think it was the Member for Siparia who had much to say about Bouygues—

Hon. Member: About “Bhoujee”.

Hon. P. Manning: What did you call it? The Member for Siparia conveniently is unable to hear what I am saying at this time. Bouygues is a company of international repute. I am reading a press release from the Internet from the British Home Office.

“The new Home Office Headquarters has been officially completed on time and on budget saving taxpayers around £95 million. Home Secretary Clarke announced today. From next week staff will begin moving into the new offices...”

at an address.

“Eventually 3,400 staff who are currently in separate offices in Queen Anne’s Gate and elsewhere would be working on one site.”

It was built by Bouygues. In the event that hon. Members opposite are not aware, for the construction of the Home Office in Britain, Bouygues obtained an international award for this Home Office from the Government of the United Kingdom. One of the reasons why we were anxious to have Bouygues on the waterfront here is that they had just completed the Home Office in England, and exactly the same team that built the Home Office in England, and which was the recipient of an award from the United Kingdom Government, is the team that was brought to Trinidad and Tobago to do the Waterfront Project. Look at it. Look at how it is going and tell me if hon. Members opposite are justified in the uninformed and unfair comments that they have made about this company, Bouygues.

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All around the world companies get into all kinds of problems for business practices. Boeing has had to pay fines in the United States; Halliburton. It has happened all over the place, but when it happens to Bouygues in one particular instance, the Member for Siparia believes—in several instances—that is justification to ban Bouygues from coming to Trinidad and Tobago. If you want to bring to Trinidad and Tobago only companies that have no issues, as it were—

Dr. Rowley: Go to the Vatican.

Hon. P. Manning: Go and spawn a company in the Vatican and bring it. *[Interruption]* I have read it. Incidentally, Archbishop Marsincos came to Trinidad. Do you know that? It is from the same book. He came to Trinidad some years ago.

Mr. Speaker, therefore the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has decided to proceed. The contract has now been awarded to a consortium. I think Bouygues is involved in the consortium, in three stages at approximately \$400 million in the first phase. At the first phase we have an option to decide whether to continue into phases two and three or whether we do not continue.

In the same way, we are convinced of the integrity of the process, because the process was tried and tested in a lot of projects that we did.

The project for the purchase of OPVs that the Member for St. Joseph condemned—Do you know what he had to say? The Member for St. Joseph had to say that we do not require OPVs in Trinidad and Tobago. We are carrying warships. The hon. Member for St. Joseph was a Minister of Finance in this country. To get up and make an uninformed statement like we do not require offshore patrol vessels—For a start, an OPV is not a warship. For a start an OPV is not a warship. A warship has a compartmentalized hull and a hull that is armoured. The OPVs are neither armoured, nor do they have a compartmentalized hull. It is effectively a merchant ship. It is a patrol vessel, but at 89.5 metres, which is the length of the boat that we are buying, it is able to deal with the rough waters on the east coast. At certain times of the year, the east coast is as unfriendly and as hostile as the North Sea and, therefore, to be able to patrol our vital petrol installations on the east coast, we need a special vessel to be able to do that.

More than that, we are an archipelagic state, 200-mile limit outside. We have fishing stocks. Anybody who goes on the south coast or Beach Camp, stands up and looks to the south would see but would not believe there are foreign trawlers in Trinidad and Tobago waters. We are powerless to do anything about that. To be

able to do that, and to protect your vital resources, you need a vessel of the class of the OPV that is able to patrol. It is not aggregate spending. It is not expenditure designed to salve somebody's over-inflated ego, as they like to say; it is the requirement of Trinidad and Tobago. The problem with them is that they do not understand the problems of the country. If they do not understand them, what do you expect, in terms of the prescriptions that they will bring? The prescriptions will reflect their lack of understanding that has characterized contribution after contribution by hon. Members opposite.

Water—I want to make a final comment on water before I take my seat. We are very concerned about climate change worldwide. We are very concerned that what is likely to come is unpredictable. Look at what has happened this year. This year, we had a dry season that was much more intense than before, but the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment will tell you that as the rain has started to fall, there seems to be a shift in the pattern of rainfall in Trinidad and Tobago, shifting to the west coast, as opposed to the east coast. Therefore, whereas we are having flooding in west Trinidad and Tobago, the catchment areas in the east coast that are used to fill reservoirs are not having enough rain and that the reservoirs are only partially filled, even at a time when there is flooding in the western part of the island. The climates are changing and we do not know what is to come.

Some have predicted that drought is at hand. At one stage, I was very concerned and so too Members in the Government, that the rains would not come on time. If the rains did not come on time, we know what could happen because it has happened already in 1973. I was in Government at the time. Rain fell all year in 1971. There was no dry season in 1971 and the rains came in August in 1973. They said it. But in the current situation, you would have a move outside of Trinidad and Tobago, to go to the route of barrel fuels. What normally would have been used for food is now going to make fuel and where you have increased prices in certain parts of the world and certain essential commodities, to now experience drought in Trinidad and Tobago, is to see your food prices go sky high. That is the first thing that would happen.

But also, when people cannot get water, the one thing that people ever rioted for in this country is water as has happened in 1903. The one thing they ever rioted for in this country is water. Therefore, any threat of drought in this country is a threat to the peace and stability of Trinidad and Tobago. That is how the Government sees it. [*Interruption*] His solution is to bring out the Riot Squad. Okay. What he is really doing is giving us a privy of their manifesto. The way

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they would handle this matter, is by bringing out the Riot Squad. With respect, we will do it differently.

We have decided that in those circumstances we have to go to the desalination option. In other words, we have to reduce—yes we did condemn it. They are right, we did condemn it. We have to reduce our dependence on surface water. I hasten to point out to Members of this honourable House that 65 per cent of the water that we consume in this country at this time, comes from surface sources and there is a deficit in the amount of water, by approximately 70,000 gallons per day. We produce 230,000 gallons and the demand is 300,000 and 65 per cent of the 230,000 comes from surface water. If, therefore, we have a drought, then we have a big problem. The only sure way out of that is desalination.

At the Standing Committee of Energy, we have discussed a programme designed to put approximately five desalination plants in place in the shortest possible time. Since part of the problem is leakage of water in the transmission and distribution system, we are putting in a new transmission system and a distribution system for limited parts of the country. Each desalination plant, having spare capacity and responsible for a certain part of the country but all of the systems interlinked in the event that you have a deficit in one area, it can be made up with supplies from another. That is what we are saying. Not only that, we do not know what will happen next year and the year after. Therefore, this solution is required with the greatest dispatch. This has to be done quickly.

It is not—if you all get into government, God forbid; if that should ever happen, you would have that problem to face. Mr. Speaker, I thought I was an optimist, but I would have to dub the Member for Oropouche the supreme optimist of Trinidad and Tobago. If they get into government they will have to face it. Just take careful—this has nothing to do with the PNM or the UNC. *[Interruption]* Of course, if you wish that we would work together.

Since he has raised that—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Singh: Based on the analysis you have done, there is a further problem. If rain is not falling in the northern and eastern areas, you have a recharge of the subsurface area. You have a further problem that will emerge.

Hon. P. Manning: With the water from the wells. Yes, if the aquifers are not being charged we will have that problem. Yes we see the problem.

Some years ago, the Members opposite—there were no backbenchers—in the British Parliament there are 636 MPs—a whole heap of them. In other words, there are many backbenchers in the British Parliament to make a committee system work.

In the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, because of a lack of size, this is not so. The solution of the Member for Princes Town to reduce the size of the Cabinet is not a solution that we find attractive. The size of the Cabinet has not been selected on the basis of happenstance, but on the basis of our projection and what is required to properly run the country and bring about the transformation on which we embark. That is the idea.

With 41 Members coming into the Cabinet, there is a slight change—in the Parliament. I am sorry. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Valley: “Yuh cyah even listen!” Coming into the Parliament.

Hon. P. Manning: All right, the Parliament! With 41 Members coming into the Parliament—Mr. Speaker, “Dey betta. Let me doh say dat.” Enjoy your last days, folks. With 41 Members coming into the Parliament now, we can now begin to identify the limited committee system that we should operate. I am advocating, on behalf of my colleagues on this side, that whatever committees we put in place, the time has come to put a parliamentary committee on energy in place, so that we could ensure that whoever is in government would depoliticize this matter. I am afraid of what I am hearing coming from the other side. Something could happen in this country, as has happened before, where they could get into government and the country would pay in blood for that.

3.45 p.m.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister for giving way. As you know, in our Standing Orders now, there is a Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs that has never sat. So, whilst you are putting your energy committee into place, I think we should also do the one for foreign affairs.

Hon. P. Manning: I will put it differently. Let us agree at the appropriate time on what committees we should put in place in the context of what resources are available from the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, that is our approach. Our approach as we go forward is a collaborative approach with hon. Members opposite. The country is moving too rapidly; the country is developing too rapidly for us to find ourselves in a situation where hon. Members opposite do not understand what we are doing and, therefore, become an impediment to national development. We assure hon. Members that we will continue to work in the best interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we govern this country without fear or favour, without malice or ill will; with malice to none, but in the interest of all. Mr. Speaker, it was a

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pleasure to present to this honourable House and to the national community, the Appropriate Bill for fiscal year 2008. Once again, I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House for their contribution to this budget and, in those circumstances, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House now resolve itself into Committee to consider the Bill clause by clause and to consider the Estimates.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House will now go into Committee. At this stage, all members of the public gallery, all members of the press, with the exception of the members of the budget section must demit the parliamentary Chamber.

Bill and Estimates committed to Finance Committee.

3.50 p.m.: *House resolved itself into Finance Committee.*

3.59 p.m.: *House resumed after Finance Committee.*

Hon. P. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Finance Committee has not been able to complete its deliberations and that we have adjourned the sitting of Finance Committee until 1.30 p.m. tomorrow.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, August 30, 2007 at 1.30 p.m. when we will continue the Finance Committee meeting and, given time, the Government will be desirous of dealing with Committee Business, which is on page 5 of the agenda, Bill No 2.

Be it resolved that the Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on a Bill entitled, The Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Bill, 2006 be adopted.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.00 p.m.