

*Leave Of Absence**Friday, February 22, 2008***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, February 22, 2008*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo requesting leave of absence for the period February 17 to February 27, 2008. I have also received communication on behalf of the hon. Member for Oropouche West requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

Mr. Maharaj SC: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central had a death in his family.

Mr. Speaker: I got no communication from him but I will record it.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION**Rural Electrification Programme 2006/2007****(Details of)**

5. **Mr. Harry Partap** (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Could the Minister list the projects undertaken under the Rural Electrification Programme in 2006 and 2007 and the projects proposed under this programme for 2008?

Vide end of sitting for written answer.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, the Government will be answering questions Nos. 35, 36, 37 and 57 today. I ask that all other questions be deferred for a period of two weeks, please.

Mr. Speaker: In doing that, let me remind you that question No. 23 was already deferred for two weeks. Questions Nos. 24 and 43 were likewise deferred for two weeks and then we have some written questions for answer. Please get the relevant Ministers to answer these questions.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Municipal Corporations
(Wooden Bridges owned by)**

- 23.** Is the hon. Minister of Local Government aware that a person was injured when he fell through a dilapidated, rotten wooden bridge in the jurisdiction of the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation?

Could the Minister state:

- a) the number of wooden bridges under the jurisdiction of each municipal corporation;
- b) whether funds have been allocated to municipal corporations for the conversion of these wooden bridges into concrete bridges;
- c) the allocations for conversion of wooden bridges into concrete bridges in each municipal corporation, if the answer to (b) is in the affirmative; and
- d) the number of wooden bridges she expects to be converted into concrete bridges utilizing the said allocation? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Special Purpose Companies
(Criteria and Purposes for)**

- 24.** Could the hon. Prime Minister state:

- a) the allocations given to the special purpose companies for carrying out infrastructure works for the years 2006 and 2007;
- b) what criteria and/or mechanisms are used in determining the type of work and the areas in which such works are to be carried out by the special purpose companies;
- c) the various ministries under which each special purpose company falls; and
- d) the criteria and procedures adopted by these companies in awarding contracts; and
- e) the persons and/or organizations which supervise and/or monitor the performance and the quality of work carried out by them? [*Mr. S. Panday*]

**Self-Employed Persons
(National Insurance Coverage for)**

- 43.** Could the hon. Minister of Finance indicate:
- a) why coverage of self-employed persons has not been introduced under the National Insurance Board; and
 - b) whether this will be done in the future, and if so when? [*Mr. N. Baksh*]

**Naparima Mayaro Road
(Details of)**

- 53.** Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport give a status report on road paving works along the Naparima Mayaro Road to Rio Claro inclusive of the present condition of the road, scope of works still needed to be done and projected completion date? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**Constituency of Mayaro
(Details of Road Works)**

- 54.** Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport state:
- a) what roads within the constituency of Mayaro are earmarked for road paving, restoration/rehabilitation; and
 - b) when these works are expected to commence? [*Mr. W. Peters*]

**Financial Support for Needy Students
(Details of Selection)**

- 60.** Could the hon. Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education state:
- a) how much money was spent in 2007 to support needy students seeking tertiary training abroad;
 - b) how these students were selected for financial support;
 - c) whether there was any advertisement with respect to the availability of this fund for assistance to local students studying abroad; and
 - d) if the answer to (c) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state the dates and the specific media in which these advertisements were placed? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Allocation of Police Vehicles
(Details of)**

- 61.** Could the hon. Minister of National Security inform this House as to:
- a) how many vehicles are allocated to each of the following:
 - i. Freeport Police Station,
 - ii. Gran Couva Police Station;
 - iii. Longdenville Police Station; and
 - iv. the Flanagin Town and Las Lomas Police Post; and
 - b) how many policemen are allocated to work in each of the stations and police posts in (a)? [*Dr. H. Rafeeq*]

**Sangre Grande Public Market
(Details of Construction)**

- 62.** Could the hon. Minister of Local Government state:
- a) what was the estimated cost of construction of the Sangre Grande Public Market;
 - b) when was construction started and when was it scheduled for completion;
 - c) which contractor/contracting firm was awarded the contract for the construction of the market; and
 - d) is the contractor still on the project and has there been a cost overrun on the construction project? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

**Sangre Grande Regional Corporation
(Details of Construction)**

- 63.** Could the hon. Minister of Local Government state:
- a) whether government intends to construct a new complex for the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation at Plum Mitán Main Road, Manzanilla; and
 - b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, would the Minister give the scheduled date for the commencement of this project and the estimated cost thereof? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

**Construction of Fire Station
(Plum Mitan Main Road, Manzanilla)**

- 64.** Could the hon. Minister of National Security state:
- a) whether government intends to construct a new fire station at Plum Mitan Main Road, Manzanilla; and
 - b) if the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, would the Minister give a date for the commencement of this project and the estimated cost thereof? [*Mr. H. Partap*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**Point Fortin Hospital
(Commencement of)**

- 35. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh** (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the hon. Minister indicate when the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital will commence, the projected date of completion and estimated cost of the above mentioned?

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): The Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (UDeCott) has now assumed responsibility for the Point Fortin Hospital Project. UDeCott has indicated the following timetable.

- January—March: pre-qualification of eligible construction firm;
- March 15, 2008: request for proposals for design/build to prequalified contractors;
- July 15, 2008: RFP closes.

Accordingly, the projected dated for completion and the estimated cost of the Point Fortin Hospital are yet to be determined. However, the expected date for commencement of construction is October 01, 2008.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to indicate whether UDeCott has set any of these issues for open tendering to ensure transparency, or the contract would be done by UDeCott?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: The information I have on the Point Fortin Hospital is in accordance with what I have read. I assume that all of UDeCott's arrangements are done with transparency.

Mr. Sharma: Could the hon. Minister advise this House if moneys already spent—are we going to recover any of it on the same project?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: I am not aware that any money has been spent as yet.

Scarborough Hospital

(Details of)

36. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the hon. Minister indicate the expenditure to date on the Scarborough Hospital, the work completed, the projected date of completion and the estimated total cost of the project?

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Nipdec, which is managing the project, has provided the following information to the Ministry through correspondence and recent discussions:

- (a) Expenditure to date on the Scarborough Hospital is \$117,485,548.
- (b) The hospital is approximately 55 per cent completed.
- (c) It should be noted that the completion of the Scarborough Hospital is essentially a renovation project since the project originally envisaged, has been suspended for over two years. Several of the construction elements have deteriorated and most importantly, questions have been raised about the quality of work done by NHIC. The full extent of the remedial work can only be assessed when the new contractor is on site and further investigative works are done.
- (d) At this time, a total estimated cost of the project cannot be provided because Nipdec is engaged in securing the services of an international contractor to complete the Scarborough Hospital Project. Two out of three of the prequalified contractors have requested an extension of the deadline submission of their modified/design building proposals.

As a result, Nipdec's Tenders Committee has extended the deadline date for submission of proposals from January 31, 2008 to March 20, 2008.

Further, based on discussions with Nipdec, the timetable set for the completion of the project is as follows:

Particulars	Deadline Date
Evaluation of contractors' proposals	March 20—April 03, 2008
Nipdec's Tenders Committee approval of the evaluation team recommendation	April 03, 2008

Particulars	Deadline Date
Award of contract to successful contractor	April 18, 2008
Contractor's mobilization of works on the Scarborough Hospital site	June 20, 2008
Project completion date	August 31, 2009

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would the hon. Minister indicate whether what he is speaking about with Nipdec is a renovation project on the original contracted work at the Scarborough Hospital or is it in fulfilment of the continuation of the work that was started? Is this \$117 million—give us a figure of the original estimated cost that was supposed to be on the project.

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: Mr. Speaker, I think I said that the completion of the hospital is essentially a renovation project. Of course, it is the continuation of the old project. This matter is now before arbitration and, therefore, it is being treated as a renovation project. I do not have the original cost at this time.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I want to be sure that the hon. Minister is telling us that Scarborough Hospital which is supposed to be constructed—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Ask a question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is it the renovation of the original Scarborough Hospital? I want to make sure.

Mr. Manning: He just answered.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is it a renovation?

Mr. S. Panday: Is the hon. Minister stating that the Government is renovating a hospital which has not yet been built?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: I have provided an answer to this question. There have been some issues. This matter is in court. The matter is now before arbitration. The Government has done all in its power to ensure that taxpayers' money is protected in a manner that is consistent with what one would expect with good governance. Thank you.

Health Sector

(Improvement and Development of)

37. Mr. Jack Warner (*Chaguanas West*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

- A. Could the hon. Minister indicate whether any projects and plans outlined for the improvement and development in the health sector,

in the Prime Minister's Budget Statement of 2006/2007 inclusive, have been unfulfilled?

B. If so, could the Minister list them and indicate their status?

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Mr. Speaker, in the Prime Minister's Budget Statement of 2006/2007 the following projects and plans were outlined for improvement and development in the health sector:

- The completion of health centres in 2008, namely: Barataria, Petit Valley, San Juan, Debe, La Romain, Ste. Madeleine, Diego Martin, Carenage, Morvant and Upper Laventille.
- The construction of the Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Centre and Toco Maternity Unit, which was commenced in 2007.
- The projected completion in 2007 of Point Fortin and Scarborough Hospitals, as well as a new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital.
- Commencement of construction of the National Public Health Laboratory in 2007.
- Initiation of the Port of Spain General Hospital replacement facility and the Central Trinidad Hospital Facility with inpatient and outpatient capacity; and
- The computerization of all participating pharmacies in the CDAP in 2007.

The status of the health centre construction projects to date is as follows: the Barataria and Petit Valley Health Centres have been completed; the San Juan, Debe, La Romain and Ste. Madeleine Health Centres are scheduled for completion by March 31, 2008; and construction of the Morvant Health Centre is expected to commence by March 01, 2008.

With respect to the Diego Martin Health Centre, pre-qualification of contractors has been completed for the award of contract and the NWRHA is now to issue tender documents to the pre-qualified contractors.

Regarding the Carenage Health Centre, the Ministry of Health is in the process of completing acquisition of the land that has been identified for construction, and in the case of the Upper Laventille Health Centre, a site has also been identified and the NWRHA is currently in negotiations with its owner.

Construction of the Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Centre is expected to commence within the first quarter of 2008, whilst the conversion of the Toco

Maternity Unit into an Accident and Emergency Unit is now scheduled to commence within the second quarter of 2008.

Pre-qualification of contractors for the completion of the Scarborough Hospital Project has been completed and construction work on this project is now scheduled to resume in the second quarter of 2008 and be completed in the latter half of 2009.

With respect to the new wing of the San Fernando General Hospital, designs are currently being developed and implementation of pre-qualification for the tender process is expected by mid-2008.

In the case of the Point Fortin Hospital, UDeCott has now assumed responsibility for the project and they are in the process of preparing an RFP for the construction of the hospital on a design/build basis.

The National Public Health Laboratory (NPHL) is intended to consolidate the current operations of the Trinidad and Tobago Public Health Laboratory, the Chemistry Food and Drugs Division, the Sexual Disease Infection Laboratory of the Queen's Park Counselling Centre and Clinic and the Insect Vector Control Laboratory.

The functional programme for the NPHL has been completed and the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex at Mount Hope has been confirmed as the site for the new NPHL. The next stage of this project would be to obtain Cabinet's approval for the construction cost of the NPHL.

The Port of Spain General Hospital Replacement Facility and Central Trinidad Hospital Facility are still very much in their early stages of development. To date, DR Architecture Incorporated, a health planner and design firm from the United States, has been retained to prepare a master plan for these projects, inclusive of a feasibility study for a new hospital in Central Trinidad. This plan is to be submitted in the second quarter of 2008.

Mr. Speaker, the computerization of the participating pharmacies in the CDAP encompasses the following:

- Development of an IT solution for delivering CDAP services for 250 selected pharmacies in Trinidad and Tobago;
- Deployment of an application in the Nipdec technical environment and associated services to prepare stakeholders and enroll patients;
- Deployment of point of sale terminals in participating pharmacies;

- Support of the hardware deployed by Infotech in Nipdec's environment for operating the CDAP application;
- Licensing, maintenance and support of the host application and access to the terminal network for purposes of running the host application;
- Use of the terminal network; and
- Licensing, maintenance and support of the third-party software (SQL and Crystal Reports).

To date, all aspects of the above have been substantially completed and are operational, except for the actual implementation of the CDAP electronic card.

1.45 p.m.

The contract originally envisaged the use of 50,000 electronic cards. However, actual CDAP usage suggests the need for 300,000 such cards. A decision was made to utilize the original 50,000 cards for special projects, such as AIDS and glucose monitoring programmes, until the Government appointed task force completes its assessment of the smart card usage in the country.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, could the hon. Minister indicate whether the promise in the Prime Minister's budget statement in 2006 where he indicated that the Point Fortin Hospital, the Scarborough Hospital, the National Oncology Centre and the San Fernando General Hospital's new wing will be completed in 2006 has been a failure?

Sen. The Hon. J. Narace: Mr. Speaker, I have provided the information as requested by the Member, and I think it will suffice.

Details of Money Spent on Carnival 2008

57. Mr. Winston Peters (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:

With respect to Carnival 2008, could the Minister state:

- (a) how much money has been spent by the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Development Company Limited to promote Carnival 2008, inclusive of expenditure on advertising, foreign consultancies, foreign media coverage, sponsorships et cetera; and
- (b) whether Black Entertainment Television (BET), a US based Cable Channel, was used again to promote Carnival 2008, and if yes at what cost?

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Joseph Ross): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Cabinet had agreed that with regard to tourism marketing and promotion, all elements of tourism marketing and promotion would be the exclusive responsibility of the Tourism Development Company (TDC), and it would include but not be limited to:

- the appointment of appropriate international representatives;
- the appointment of appropriate advertising and public relations agencies;
- the development and maintenance of marketing partnerships with approved airlines, tour operators, and wholesalers;
- the development, production and distribution of all promotional material;
- the planning and implementation of all overseas promotional tours and trade shows;
- the planning and implementation of all travel agents' familiarization tours;
- the design and utilization of the TDC component of the national website to ensure maximum electronic exposure of Trinidad and Tobago tourism product;
- the expansion and development of Trinidad and Tobago's public relations image and tourism media relations through the development and implementation of all forms of marketing and promotion through electronic and print media.

Accordingly, the advertising, marketing and promotion of Carnival which is our biggest tourism activity is an integral part of this mandate. Carnival 2008 expenditure included the following:

TT \$1.1 million for foreign media coverage, and this includes airfare, accommodation, tours and transportation for over 30 journalists who visited Trinidad and Tobago from publications in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and the Caribbean.

Over the years, these media familiarization trips called "press trips" have proven to be quite successful in promoting Trinidad and Tobago as a destination. International journalists who come to witness and experience Carnival in all its facets, as well as to gain exposure to all the other dimensions of the tourism product, return to their respective homes to write and publish articles about their experiences and the product in widely read magazines and newspapers, including the *Washington Post* and the *Time*.

Mr. Speaker, the journalists are carefully selected by our overseas marketing representatives and public relations agencies in the various markets, who also follow up the publication of articles on Trinidad and Tobago by these journalists.

International media coverage of this nature gives a greater return on investment than traditional advertisement. For instance, in 2007, following on such media trips, the country achieved £275,508 worth of coverage in the United Kingdom; £116,604 in Europe. In the North American market, coverage included features in the *Caribbean Travel* and the *Live Magazines* totalling US \$674,912.

Secondly, we spent TT \$350,000 on sponsorship support to major Carnival events such as Soca Monarch.

Mr. Speaker, \$250,000 was spent to promote Carnival on the CMC network which is available in North America via Direct TV and most Caribbean cable channels.

We spent \$77,000 on the development of brochures and Carnival route maps for visitors and on the set-up of information dissemination booths on the Brian Lara Promenade, the Queen's Park Savannah and at both airports.

We also spent \$498,000 at the Piarco Roundabout facade. The beautification of this strategic welcoming entrance represented one of our initiatives to enhance the visitor experience through an exhibit of the Carnival art form using artistic copperwork. It reflects characters including the Fancy Indian, the Panman, the Fancy Sailor, the Bookman, the Dragon and the Roman soldier. The exhibit was produced by the highly accomplished Brian Mac Farlane Designs Limited, and will remain in place for the hosting of the Caribbean Hotel Investment Conference which we expect to come off in May.

The TDC also utilized online marketing as one of its tools for promoting Carnival. In September 2007, a brand new world class website www.gotrinidadandtobago.com was launched. The site included a full Carnival calendar of events, an image gallery, historical facts on Carnival and links to other local Carnival websites.

Over the last five years, our efforts at marketing have seen a general upward trend in Carnival visitor arrivals. In 2008, full occupancy rates were recorded by all our major hotels. Other accommodation establishments, including guest houses, villas, host homes and bed and breakfast establishments enjoyed high visitation. Arrivals in 2008 are projected to be in excess of 40,000 visitors.

When consideration is taken of the multitude of activities engaged in by visitors at this time, including playing mas, visiting pan yards and mas camps,

attending all the different Carnival events and shows, sightseeing, dining, shopping, et cetera, the projected expenditure by visitors is in excess of US \$50 million.

Mr. Speaker, Black Entertainment Television (BET) was not engaged to promote Carnival in 2008.

For 2008, a different segment of the diaspora market was targeted, through the use of Carib Vision, a media network dedicated to promoting Caribbean culture, lifestyle, news, sports, current affairs and entertainment.

Thank you.

**RISING FOOD PRICES
(GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO CONTAIN)**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [January 25, 2008]:

Be it resolved that this honourable House condemn the Government for its failure in containing food prices at affordable levels for the entire population.

[*Mr. H. Partap*]

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: On the last occasion, that is on Friday, January 25, 2008, the hon. Member for Fyzabad was on his legs, and he has 41 minutes of original time remaining. I now call on the hon. Member for Fyzabad. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Some 100 days ago, the hon. Prime Minister took the oath of office at Woodford Square in Port of Spain with the *Bible* in his hand, and he told the national community of Trinidad and Tobago that one of his areas of focus would be to reduce food prices. I am certain that today the hon. Prime Minister regrets making that statement, because almost every single food item has increased in the last 100 days—chicken, bread, flour, oil, cheese, eggs and so forth.

Last year, during the national consultation on food prices, the hon. Prime Minister went to different parts of the country and collected information and, again, made that same promise. Within the last few months, on two occasions, the hon. Prime Minister has misled this country.

Mr. Speaker, recently on the television you would have seen many people dead, and you would have read in the print media what took place, not very far from here, in the Orange Grove Estate area, where acres of farmers' produce were

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

destroyed. This is not the first time that this PNM Government has done this kind of victimization—taking advantage of poor families.

In fact, when one looks at the history of the PNM as it relates to agriculture, it seems very clear to all observers that this PNM Government has absolutely no interest in agriculture. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this goes further, and I am going to demonstrate very clearly that it appears as if the PNM has a hate relationship with agriculture and those who are engaged in agriculture. When one looks at what this PNM Government did to Caroni (1975) Limited, this could not be one of anything except spite and hate. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at millions of dollars being pumped into other state enterprises that bring very little returns and Caroni (1975) Limited was bringing foreign exchange into this country, providing one of the best research centres in the Caribbean and encouraging people to go into farming, the Government totally demolished that, and it did this only for one reason, and that is the PNM is of the opinion, whether right or wrong, that a large majority of persons in this country do not support the PNM, and among them, there are many persons who appear in the eyes of the PNM to be involved in agriculture.

Today, this country finds itself in a crisis. The greatest pain today is the pain of hunger. I am certain, in your previous manifestation, you would recall people coming to your office at another place and demonstrating to you their inability to purchase food.

Under the UNC government, families were able to obtain foodstuff at a much lower price. Today, that is no longer so. I want to take you to two homes very quickly. One home is in Fyzabad, where a short while ago, lunch was served to a family of four. They had rice, peas, one other vegetable item and a salad. That lunch cost that family \$8 per plate.

Mr. Speaker, not far away, in my friend's constituency, the Member for La Brea, another family of four had a similar lunch with one meat item, and it costs \$9.50. In the case of the La Brea family, the breadwinner is a CEPEP worker, earning about \$100 a day, and in the case of the Fyzabad family, the breadwinner is a taxi driver earning about \$120 per day.

2.00 p.m.

It is very clear that the majority of families, some 300,000 persons are unable to feed themselves, thanks to the PNM. This PNM has done absolutely nothing in

the last 100 days and in the last 30 years to add any value to agriculture. [*Desk thumping*] When you look at the appointments of the Ministers of Government on the PNM side in agriculture, it makes the story stronger, of spite and hate, because the Ministers have demonstrated no interest, have added absolutely no value; in fact, many of the Ministers have done things against agriculture. You would recall in this very House when questions were asked, you had the Minister going to Debe and handing out a cheque to a farmer who had lost four acres of watermelons; \$47. That is how the PNM intends to treat with farmers.

In the last 100 days, this PNM Government, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has not done a single agricultural access road. They have not assisted any farmers with any subsidies. They have not gone out to any farming community and indicated to those farmers what might be available. So it is very clear that the Government intends to maintain high food prices, and again, it is for another reason, and that reason is, it is their friends and party hacks who are in the business of importing food and making millions of dollars.

Today, the average school child cannot obtain a glass of milk. You would recall, Mr. Speaker, in the early days it was available in all the schools, where the kids would have a glass of milk. Today, when you look at the lunches provided, it is not in keeping with the best practices of what children should be eating. In fact, the Government continues to favour people and there are many kindergarten schools in this country that do not obtain breakfast from the School Feeding Programme.

Dr. Moonilal: Breakfast or "breakfases"?

Mr. C. Sharma: Or both. And the question is, why are some schools given and some schools do not receive it? It should be for all the kids who attend kindergarten in this country. We have raised this on a previous occasion and the Government's response is that they would look into it.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER in the *Chair*]

When we look at what is happening, perhaps it would be instructive to us to look at a newspaper article that appeared on the *Trinidad Guardian* on August 16, 2007. It reads:

"Prime Minister Patrick Manning yesterday promised an unprecedented level of food production in this country that will make food affordable to everyone."

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know that is not true; that has not happened. It went on to say:

"Delivering the opening address at the two-day National Consultation on Food Prices at the Bishop Anstey High School/Trinity College East in Trincity,

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

Manning outlined the Government's plans for the establishment of 17 100-acre farms..."—throughout Trinidad.

That has not happened. He said:

"With these large farms we shall move agricultural production to...heights in this country."

That has not happened. So, it is very, very clear that the Government comes and make all these promises, spends millions of taxpayers' money on research, consultations, largely gifts to their friends and supporters and nothing is happening. The Prime Minister said:

"We expect that there will be a sustained supply of primary and processed food for both domestic consumption and for export;..."

This must be a big joke. You cannot feed the local population, what would you export. He said:

"and with this level of production, prices would be kept at affordable levels."

You would recall when the Member for Princes Town North (South/Tableland) presented on the last occasion; he seemed to have copied this line, "affordable prices or affordable levels". There is not a single item on the shelves in the groceries that has not gone up in the last 100 days. [*Interruption*] And my good friend says, even chicken. [*Laughter*]. It goes on to say:

"He said the Government would do everything possible to make agriculture as important as energy, adding that 'we will succeed'.

'We did it in energy and we shall do it in agriculture'."

Well let us look at the Government's performance in agriculture in the last few years. We had many Ministers; we had the Member for Diego Martin West, who did absolutely nothing in agriculture; added no value. Then you had the former Member for Arouca—same thing. And the current Minister again, has not demonstrated to the national community what is the Government's policy on agriculture. The farmers are all left alone.

So, it is a calculated effort of the Government to maintain high food prices and with it affecting the national community. The Prime Minister continued:

"...the establishment of the 17 large farms was part of...Government's..."

attack on food prices. When you look at the farming community today, largely small farmers in the rural community, they are not assisted at all by the Government in

any area. Farmers have been complaining about access roads, cost of fertilizers, when their crops are lost through flooding largely as a result of Government's failure to do proper drainage work.

[MR. SPEAKER in the *Chair*]

When you look at the compensation, up to this day, the Government continues to use an old schedule. So, today the Government is paying, I think 46 cents for maybe an ochro plant; it costs the farmer up to \$3 to put that on the ground—labour, material and plant. In many of the prices—and we have asked the Government on numerous occasions to show some concern, to demonstrate to the national community that they are very serious about reducing the cost of food to everyone.

Mr. Speaker, from an article that appeared in the newspaper, the *TnT Mirror*, the headline:

“Food prices too damn high!

...imagine HiLo, Tru Valu scrambling to drop food prices and even begging customers to come for free bread and cheese.”

The article reads:

“While the prices of cellphones continue to drop with the coming of Digicel into the market, the cost of basic food items are (*sic*) daily going higher and higher.

Whoever thought Trinidadians would have seen the day when you could get a mobile phone for a mere \$39?

Look at what a little competition could do.

It makes me wonder what would happen if a major foreign-based grocery chain comes to TnT offering unbeatably low prices on all items.

Maybe locals would finally start paying more reasonable prices for goods.

I remember not too long ago...”

referring to the period of the UNC administration, a period that you are familiar with, Mr. Speaker—

“when the minimum wage was \$7 hour and you could have purchased a pack of 1800g full cream powdered milk for under \$40.

Those days have since gone as costly grocery prices continue to rape the pockets of citizens.

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

Nine dollars an hour later and the price of that same package of milk is...\$60.”

And at the last count it has gone to \$80 plus.

So, here you have the PNM Government fooling the electorate, moving the minimum wage from \$7 to \$9 and when it was \$7 under the UNC the citizens could have purchased the same milk for \$40. Today with \$2 increase in their income, they are paying \$80 for that milk; of course, the taxi fares have gone up too. It says:

“Something has to be wrong with the society we live in today if a cellphone now has become cheaper than a basic food item.”

Thanks to the PNM. This is what the PNM has brought this country to.

“Maybe Digicel should try opening a grocery now.

Government and those in authority sit in their high chairs and wonder why the crime rate is so out-of-control and what they could do to stop it.

Well, I have a suggestion: Lower prices on basic food items and other basic necessities.”

And the country is calling for this. The national community is calling for lower food prices.

Mr. Speaker, a resident from Laventille wrote an article to the editor in the newspaper, and said, over the years under PNM rule, for some reason they keep the prices out of their reach. And they asked the question, why does the PNM do this. And one of the reasons they advanced is that the PNM hopes to keep the people under their control. Because one of the things the PNM is famous for is going out and giving food hampers—all the taxpayers' money of course.

So rather than do things to lower food prices, add value to the infrastructure of the country, the Government does none of it. The person continued writing:

“As a youngster not wanting your family to go through more hungry days, you could end up choosing the wrong way, which is never the right decision.”

So, the Government is pointing people in the wrong direction. People need to feed their families.

“...if by going that route, he could maintain his family and give back to his parents, why not, some of them argue.”

That is why you are seeing the increase in crime. Persons do not wish to commit crime but they have their families to feed and they are saying they cannot

get jobs, or when they do get jobs, the meagre pay does not allow them to care for their families. [Interruption] You want to say some thing? [Interruption] You have 75 minutes. It says:

“People in authority, instead of sitting on the outside looking in, should take a walk into the ghetto and seriously listen to the residents’ various problems.”

Here is an appeal to come out and listen and see what is happening. Why are you pretending that everything is okay in this country? Why are you suggesting that people are living okay here? Not here at all.

“Grocery prices are way too high to survive on minimum wage pay; something definitely has to be done about that situation.”

This is the national community saying that the wage that they are obtaining; whether it is in CEPEP, URP or elsewhere, cannot pay for the grocery items. In fact, of the 200,000 persons who are earning less than \$2,000 a month, more than 50 per cent of it goes into grocery bills, because they have to pay for other things. So many, many families are malnourished in this country.

“A law should be passed to stop the groceries from raising the prices on essential goods, at least for a while.”

You are hearing the cry of the national community.

“A further look at how severe these escalating prices have become: a pack of 50 cents snack for our children has now been increased to 75 cents.”

That is at the time of writing. That is a high increase. So again, the Government is not doing anything, is not saying to the national community what they are going to do. The writer says:

"It seems, to me, that the system is organized in such a way that the rich must stay on top and the poor will always be poor."

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the Ministry's performance in recent times, as it relates to the agricultural sector, which is largely responsible, we are of the opinion on this side that the country can sustain itself in many areas in food production, as it did in previous times. When you look at the Government's performance it has destroyed all the sectors of agriculture.

The rice farming community has gone out of business under the PNM. They have destroyed Caroni in all its manifestations. You would recall the UNC had a proposal for Caroni to make sure that it was self-sufficient in many areas: dairy

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

farming, livestock, agricultural short products, oranges in the citrus industry and more of the community were able to access food and essential vegetables.

2.15 p.m.

The World Health Organization is saying that people in Trinidad and Tobago are not eating enough vegetables and it is affecting the kids at the school; when you look at the kids' development, when you look at the kids' performance. In some of our secondary schools we are getting less than a 10 per cent pass rate for an O level certificate. Again, the research is showing that because the kids coming up from the elementary schools are malnourished, they are not able to perform, they are not able to cope with the level of work required, and the Government is aware of this and still the Government is doing absolutely nothing.

The Opposition on this side has made numerous requests time after time. In fact, only two Fridays ago the Member for St. Augustine raised a Motion on the Adjournment of this House asking about the agricultural input, and what we saw—how does the Government treat with the Opposition? The Member for St. Augustine raised a Motion and within 72 hours or 96 hours the Government causes its agents to move into the constituency of St. Augustine and destroy the farmers' production.

Mr. Ramnath: Shame.

Mr. C. Sharma: So it has to be a Government of spite and hate, because no other Government will do this. I cannot see how a Government can sit there and know that the country is in crisis, know that people are suffering, know that there are so many challenges in the country and here are people trying to feed the nation, and what do they do? They go and destroy it. They do not give a cent for access roads, they do not help with the infrastructure in any way and they keep doing this all the time.

Mr. Speaker, another article:

Trinidad Inflation Rises on Food Costs—

Report: Central Bank Head Says Trinidad Must Cut Spending, Boost Food Supply to Tame Inflation

—Trinidad and Tobago must reduce public spending and invest more in agriculture to lower food prices and stem rising inflation, the chief of the central bank...”—said yesterday.

The Governor of Central Bank in which its own appointee to the chair is the Governor has made this point on numerous occasions. Food cost has increased 25 per cent since 2005, and it is going up again. High wholesale food prices are felt most strongly in the countryside where tens of thousands of people have missed out on gains from the nation's striving energy sector which accounts for 40 per cent of Trinidad's gross domestic product. So, the point has been made here that the larger population are not benefiting from the windfall in the oil sector, they depend on the agricultural sector and the Government is not assisting at all.

From the day this Motion was raised by the Member, the Government has not indicated in any document or in any public statement—and they have had numerous opportunities so to do, every Thursday after the Cabinet meeting—has not told the press and the national community what they are doing. They are not saying to the national community, you can expect lower food prices because we are doing: A, B, C or D. None of it. What the national community is saying is that they are doing absolutely nothing and this cannot continue.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the experiences elsewhere. We have seen that there is only so much that any community can withstand. We have seen in Haiti where families who are unable to feed themselves are making cookies out of mud. Is this what the PNM wants to reduce this country to? But before they go or when they start making those mud cookies they are going to take to the streets. Is this what the PNM wants? Because the PNM is prepared to do anything to stay in office. Anything! You cannot come and tell the national community, “vote us and we will solve your problems”, and since you came into office 100-plus days ago more problems have increased in this country. The health sector has collapsed. So, one, you cannot feed the nation, the increase in diabetes has gone sky high.

Yesterday I visited a constituent who is diabetic, had an amputation, has to go for eye surgery and was given a date of March 2010. Imagine that! So you cannot feed the population, you are not giving them access to low food prices, you are not providing the infrastructure, and of course it affects their health. They end up in the hospitals and you cannot take care of them at the hospitals. What kind of Government is this? What does this Government hope to achieve?

We are calling on the Government today to clearly demonstrate—I think this food crisis in this country has reached a point where we must engage the national community at all levels to rescue this country, to make sure that food is available to all families regardless of where they live. In fact, the more healthful foods are not within the reach of the majority of this country; the poor families just cannot afford them.

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

In looking at the high cost of food prices in Trinidad one had to look at how it is affecting the school kids. What I have found, in many schools the teachers are saying that many children, because they are not fed properly cannot cope with the level of work in the schools and they have made requests, they have made suggestions to treat with it and the Government is totally ignoring it. When you look at the performance of average test in many schools it is not what the schools expect; poor diet, poor performance. According to one report the level of nutrition in school children's body affects their performance in schools.

The research shows a lack of vegetables in the diet of children today, which means children are undernourished. The effects of undernourishment are evident in the children who come to schools in their performance. They looked at a child who is 10 years old, entering Standard 4, preparing for the SEA examinations, and the child just cannot cope with the school work, and it is happening in many areas. Some of the teachers said they remember when the schools were provided with milk and biscuits, all the kids had something to start with and perhaps the time has come when we must return the milk programme into the schools. The research is showing further that the milk should be now chocolate flavoured because it adds value to the child's ability to perform.

Mr. Speaker, I indicated earlier that in many kindergarten schools—mostly private—the kids are being treated differently. They are not receiving the breakfast as provided by the School Nutrition Company, and upon enquiry why this was happening, the common answer is, we are looking into it. It is always we are looking into it. In the constituency of Fyzabad I know of many kindergartens, and elsewhere, that the applications have been made and to date nothing has taken place. Many studies have shown that a child's diet can influence how well he or she does in school. The studies found that good nutrition improves the child's ability to be attentive, increase energy levels and develops the brain process to take on the learning. So the Government's failure or lack of care to make sure that our kids are fed properly at the school level is affecting the school's performance and it is going at all the levels. Certainly the research is also showing that it leads to the crime situation as well. The report says:

“If a child's diet is not balanced and has too much junk food and sugar in it, he or she will miss out on the micronutrients that affect brain development and learning.”

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) it says, that to enable the body to produce enzymes, hormones and other substances essential for proper growth and development, a child's meals must be balanced, and must be every

day; it cannot be one day a week. So many families are finding it difficult to feed their children and the fact that the Government is aware of it; the fact that we have brought the Motion to the House to indicate that the price of food is definitely too high, something needs to be done and the Government is not saying a single thing nor doing anything.

Two very important needs of children are vitamins A and iron, and should children lack this, even the slightest of either of them their health is seriously threatened, and in many schools we are finding this. The report continues:

“Children tend to eat what they like and parents prefer to prepare what is easy to cook. Many kids simply dislike eating vegetables usually because their tastes have been trained to like sugary or salty food. It seems normal but beware; feeding children only what they want often results in their having diets that lack healthful food, particularly vegetables, which are among the rich sources of food values”.

So again the Government has to make sure that all kids at all schools obtain a breakfast that reflects what the research is showing.

Mr. Speaker, when I indicated the two examples of the families in Fyzabad and La Brea, I demonstrated very clearly, based on the income of the two families that they are unable to maintain their families because the income does not allow them to purchase the food that they require. I go further. In low income communities across Trinidad the story is more complicated, because what is happening is that many families, even where there are extended families are finding themselves with less buying power. It is unfair for a family to go into a grocery one week and see an item for \$40 and one week later that very item goes up by \$10, \$12 and \$15, and his salary remains the same, and many families are showing that. In fact you have seen many articles in the newspapers, on many of the talk shows, people are complaining about the high food prices.

One family indicated that they work for \$250 per week and out of it—

Miss Le Gendre: Mr. Speaker, on a point of clarification. The Member for Fyzabad has made several statements about—

Dr. Browne: Thank you for giving way.

Miss Le Gendre: Thank you for giving way, Sir—the Government's position on the support for poor families, especially within the school network. For clarification, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Education, currently provides in excess of 110,000 lunches as well as 50,000

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

breakfasts daily in Trinidad and Tobago to schools from the Early Childhood Centres right through to secondary schools and these meals are provided on a needs basis. One has simply to ask for these meals and they are provided to the schools. The meals are properly balanced and are prepared in state-of-the-art kitchens, some 75 kitchens spread throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and so today we are proud to say that there is not a single child in our school system who is not provided with a meal should that child so desire.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, hon. Minister, and I think you have just confirmed the points I was making. You said by your own account that 15,000 breakfasts are served—

Miss Le Gendre: No, 50,000.

Mr. C. Sharma:—and you have also agreed that there are more than 50,000 kids at the kindergarten schools. You are aware of that?

Miss Le Gendre: Yes. Hon. Member, I indicated that it is on a needs basis. The meals we currently serve are those that are requested. What it means, is that less than 30 per cent of our school population is at a stage where people feel they need to request these meals. If that number were to rise we would continue to provide more meals at the schools, but at this time we are providing all that is required, because no child is turned away from the Government's meal programme.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you, hon. Minister, but I want you to note that since you have responded, there are many kindergarten schools that have applied and have not yet gotten. I will be happy to give you a list of a few in Fyzabad and I am certain other Members will have. The point is that you might not have the correct information to suggest that all the kids who need the breakfasts and/or the lunches are provided because that is not the story. But I am sure—[*Interruption*]

Miss Le Gendre: That is the information I received.

Mr. C. Sharma: So, I was making the point that a domestic breadwinner who is earning \$250 per week and has three kids is unable to feed, unable to purchase and two of her kids who are at kindergarten, for which she has to pay, are not receiving the breakfast—there are private schools in Fyzabad and those two different kindergarten schools are not getting, and they have applied by the way. But again, that is the story in many other places; it is not an isolated case in Fyzabad. What may be required, there must be a Government policy that all kindergarten schools should be treated with. It seems as if it is not done presently, for whatever reason.

Mr. Speaker, further, since the hon. Minister responded, I want to continue on the question of nutrition, how it affects the child's development because I think it is very important and it is the concern of parents, grandparents and guardians across the country. It is said that damage from malnutrition in early childhood can be permanent. Whether or not children are well-nourished during the early period of pregnancy or the first few years, what is very important is that the kids must get a balanced meal and must have the environment to grow. And if in families they are unable to provide that, then we are lacking something and we must make a concerted effort to treat with it.

It is said that human milk still remains the single most important food value for kids, but many mothers are unable to breastfeed their kids for one reason or the other, and one of the major reasons is that they themselves cannot afford basic food items that encourage and promote that milk. So it is not just natural, there must be supplemental food items and they are not getting that. It is said that those who are breastfed have a higher IQ, higher level of attention and concentration and attain higher in schools, so I am calling on the Government to make sure to encourage it and to make the necessary adjustments.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall one of the proposals from the UNC was to make sure that milk would be made available to every mother. No child should go without having the ability to have a glass of milk or whatever milk is required. We want to call on the Government to revisit, for infants, for mothers who are nursing their babies and who have to feed their babies to make sure that milk is available, whether at a lower price or through the CDAP programme, but to make sure it is accessible to all mothers.

Mr. Speaker, they said the longer the development delays remain uncorrected, the greater the chance of permanent effects. Intervention must occur early so there must be food security for poor households. I am talking about the 300,000 families in this country who are within that group. There must be some education to the families as well to understand the importance of nutrition in the early childhood period. It helps if the children eat well and are taken care of and it helps to protect them from infections, et cetera.

Mr. Manning: You are talking from experience.

Mr. C. Sharma: The report went on further:

"We must pay special attention to the health needs of girls and women."

Again, our food items, the cost of it, the availability of it and the quantum that must be available, must be looked into because we cannot continue saying all is

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

well in the country, that families can go to the grocery and buy what they need, that is not so unfortunately. This has come to the Government's attention on numerous occasions.

Mr. Speaker, we have to ask ourselves: "Why have we found ourselves in this situation?" We have to go back to our history. We are well known in this country for many farming ideas and ability. We produced some of the best watermelons at one time; our cocoa is well known throughout the world, our sugar plantations; our vegetables, both for local and export, and something happened. With happened, the PNM started to withdraw the support. When you look at the spending on agriculture in this country, it warrants concern. When you look at the infrastructure, the money spent for infrastructure—in fact the question I asked in this House, when you look at what moneys were spent in agriculture, access roads, and the very few that were done, it is clear that the Government has had no interest.

When you look at the subsidies that were paid, when farmers came and said that the fertilizers were too expensive, the wheel tractors were too expensive—When you look at what they did to the Caroni farmers and the Caroni workers, in many instances they gave them or promised to give them two acres of land and that has not come. Even with the two acres of land, it is not sufficient for them to make sure it is profitable to the farmers.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Sharma: [*Crosstalk*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Early in the contribution, I did indicate that the situation in which we find ourselves with these high food prices is largely because the PNM has a hate relationship with a large sector of the national community. I want to qualify that by asking you to visit with me what the Government has done and I want to start with Caroni.

It is clear that the decision of the Government to close down Caroni (1975) Limited was a political one, [*Desk thumping*] very clear. It is also clear that in the Government's estimate that they thought that persons associated there were not in favour of the PNM and they went at all lengths to destroy it. At one time, Caroni was the premium research centre for the entire Caribbean, and today, they have

destroyed it. In fact what they are doing now, they are moving out the research centres and putting it under University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), so even that they are dismantling.

When you look at the moneys spent elsewhere, BWee is a good example. Millions and millions of dollars were spent on BWIA. They subsidized BWIA much higher that brought very little returns to this country and Caroni did much more. When they looked at what the Caroni workers were doing, they promised retraining for them and to give them agriculture holdings, none of it has come. So it is clear that the Government's only intension was to destroy Caroni at all costs and they achieved that, but when you go further and you look at any other agricultural sector, the dairy farming, same story; when you look at the citrus, the same thing. When you look at the small farmers in rural communities, let us look at what assistance the Government has given and there is very little you can talk about. When you look at money spent elsewhere—you just heard the hon. Minister of Tourism saying the amount of moneys that was spent on Carnival promotion—the Government has spent close to \$150 million on Carnival. One would argue that they brought back a few dollars, but would it not be better or to make sure on comparison that equal moneys go into agriculture?

In fact, it is said that the research has shown for every dollar invested in agriculture, you get a return of \$6. If you have an import food bill of one point something billion dollars, it means to say that if you invest \$500 million, \$600 million in agriculture, you will be getting a return of \$2 billion or \$3 billion. Again, the Government has no interest in doing that and it begs the question, why does the Government do what it is doing as it relates to agriculture? The national community can think of nothing else because they hate those who are involved in agriculture. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the small processing plants in this country owned by the small farmers, no encouragement is given. You have an outfit in this country call NEDCO and if you look at the loans given by NEDCO, they give loans to persons who wish to go into little businesses for Carnival, but that same money, that eagerness to treat with the small farmers does not obtain, hon. Prime Minister.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Fyzabad for giving way. Has the Government not made special arrangements for farmers through the Agricultural Development Bank? Farmers have a whole bank for themselves, why are you making that comparison with NEDCO? NEDCO was never set up for that purpose.

Mr. S. Panday: NEDCO was set up to give PNM “fellas” free money.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, you would recall at a committee meeting of this Parliament, we were asked to write-off loans given out by the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) and there is a history of loans issued by the Agricultural Development Bank. Oftentimes it is the same group that goes around getting these loans and after a few years they are written off. Is the Government aware of the difficulty farmers are having in accessing these loans? For instance, all the Caroni workers who were promised these two acres of land, not a single one of those workers has been able to access a loan from the ADB.

So, if the Government is really interested, it would say: "Listen, there are 5,000 farmers, Caroni workers who wish to go, we can set up a sub-office in that Caroni Central area to make sure they can access it." The Government should also demonstrate how many farmers have applied and how many have gotten loans. In fact, when you look at the properties put up for sale by the ADB, you would see where farmers have not been treated fairly. One must understand that in the farming communities, sometimes situations would occur that you have no control over. When there is a flood, the farmers do not control; the farmer makes the request of the Ministries to do the drainage work, and 90 per cent they do not ever do it.

As a result when they lose their crops, they are unable to pay their loans and they are not treated with in many instances. But on the point of NEDCO, NEDCO cannot deny a small farmer who wishes to obtain moneys to go into expansion of his business or to add value to a processing plant, if he wishes to make honey or whatever it might be. So to argue that the ADB is for that purpose and NEDCO is not for that purpose is not fair. Since it came into focus, why are NEDCO loans not available to the national community in similar ways? For instance, if it is that those who are engaged in the Carnival productions can go to NEDCO and get a loan within 24 hours, let the farmer in Penal or elsewhere know that he can go to the ADB and be treated in the same manner. [*Desk thumping*] The equality of opportunities does not exist at all.

When we look at other agencies that are there, for instance, the Minister of Trade and Industry and other offices under the UNC administration, all our foreign offices were able to assist the country by identifying markets. I recalled when the then Prime Minister, hon. Basdeo Panday, came to this House and indicated there was an interest in purchasing bananas from this country, in particular, what is

called the chiquito fig, the very small fig, very sweet for tourists in North America, the PNM laughed; they made a big joke out of it, and today, the health research is showing it as one of the best fruits in the world in terms of food value. I am sure the Member for Diego Martin Central is aware of the research of bananas.

2.45 p.m.

This country can produce; it can do a lot more. Why is this Government not doing more? How does the simple-minded person in any part of this country see the PNM, as it relates to agriculture? He sees that the PNM does everything to maintain a distance; he sees that the PNM does everything not to lend assistance. There are many small farmers who can benefit from assistance.

We had suggested the use of the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) and CEPEP workers to assist in that development, so you could get some returns, and they could be trained at the same time. Up to this day the Government has not responded. There are many farms laying idle all over the country, for example, in Sangre Grande.

When you look at the housing development areas in this country, there is absolutely no greenery around them; there is no practice of agriculture; no little plot for families to develop some kind of agriculture that could contribute to their own development, that could reduce the problems and challenges we face from time to time. Recommendations were made for that. In fact, I remember showing this House that a simple 10 x 10 plot could produce for a household of four sufficient vegetables, and it would also allow the family to fellowship together. There really are a lot of opportunities. I think the call has to be made for the Government to revisit its agricultural policies.

Mr. Speaker, farmers in this country must be encouraged. Persons across the board must be encouraged to grow food; they must be encouraged to go into the agriculture business, whether it is fishing or marine life, to make sure that we can feed our population. The Government must demonstrate clearly that it intends to treat with all families and communities that are interested in lowering food prices in this country. The Government must demonstrate clearly that it has an interest in developing agriculture.

There was a time when there were gardening competitions in the schools, so the kids themselves were exposed to some kind of gardening, they would have a love for it and take it to another level. When you look at what the Government has done to the institutions that promote agriculture, there is no support; Centeno is a good example. You can look at those involved in research.

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

We have made the case, and it is public knowledge, that the cocoa beans in this country are used to flavour the chocolates of the world. Again, the cocoa farmers are left alone. It is also said that the honey from this country is among the best in the world; again, the honey farmers are not encouraged in the least. [Crosstalk] [Laughter]

We hope that when the Government responds, and I trust it will, it understands that this is not a Motion of the Opposition; this is a Motion of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to have a higher quality of life. You cannot pretend, as you do all the time; you cannot shout down at us and feel that you could fool the national community. Those days are long gone. The national community is demanding attention and they are using the loyal Opposition to highlight their case. We have seen riots in many countries resulting from hungry bellies. I think you are pushing the national community in that direction. You have to be very, very concerned. [Interruption]

Mr. Dumas: You are encouraging it?

Mr. C. Sharma: This foolish question of yours about whether we are encouraging it is irrelevant. The important thing is: What are you doing about it?

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Mr. C. Sharma: The Government Members cannot come here and hide under the cloud of I do not know what, and pretend that all is well in this country. Food is a basic right. It is the right of families to have access to good food and they must obtain and enjoy it. The Government must not stand in the way by denying people. [Crosstalk]

Sometimes we pray to protect the Hansard reporters, sometimes I wish they would listen. That foolish statement which just came from across the floor, that we should take guns and take it away from the people—from a Government Minister. It is a real sad state of affairs, and this is how the Government sees it. It is all about violence. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: You are a very experienced Member of Parliament; you need not take on any statement that you find irrelevant; address me.

Mr. S. Panday: Even if it is foolish!

Mr. C. Sharma: Had it not come from an equally experienced Member, I would have totally ignored him, as I usually do.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition is calling on the Government, to which we are prepared to lend assistance. The Opposition has a wealth of experience. The

Opposition has a wealth of networking to do everything on a collective basis to reduce high food prices. It is not rocket science that is required. It just requires a determination, a concerted effort by the Government to use the taxpayers' money to do what is in their best interest. The Government gives the impression that the moneys belong to them.

The number one problem in the country is crime. A large percentage of the crime is coming from those hungry bellies, from those persons who are unable to feed themselves. You need to establish some kind of effort that the national community could buy into. Let us return Trinidad and Tobago to what we know it to be; to peace, harmony and goodwill.

We know we can feed our population; we know that we can go back and plant all the Caroni lands that you have taken away, all the Caroni lands that you want to give to your friends and others. Let us return some of it to produce food for all. Let us return to the rice farming community and those who wish to engage in rice farming. We have a wealth of rice farmers in this country; let us lend the support. When you look at the basic food basket, the number of items in it is 44. More than 300,000 families cannot buy the basic food basket today. This should not be; this is an oil rich country; there is money for everything else. When you hear the amount of money wasted on projects—we just heard about the Scarborough Hospital, hundreds of millions of dollars. This Government has not delivered a single project within budget. If the money is better managed, then we could pump more money into the agricultural sector; certainly the country needs it. We also know that there is a big export market out there as well, but we must first treat with local consumption.

Mr. Speaker, we want the Government to say how it intends to proceed with this, the time frame and the budget that goes with it. It is useless that the Government comes here and say, "We are going to do A, B or C," gives no time frame and no budget for it. There must be consultation on it as well. While the Government wishes to go on with those large farms, we want to make a call on behalf of all the small farm holders in the country. They are asking the Government to make sure assistance comes to them as well. We want to make sure that all the offices have adequate staff. In many of the agricultural offices there is a shortage of staff, equipment and vehicles.

Again, it is calculated to be that way, because the government is fully aware of it. Why can the extension officers not get their vehicles to go out, or get the chemicals, the literature or whatever, to make sure the farming community benefits from it? We are asking that that be taken with immediate effect.

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

In Carlsen Field there used to be a station that bought rice, and for many years under the PNM it has been left alone, with the skeletal staff doing very little. There was also a research part of it; we want to make sure that happens.

Mr. Speaker, concerning health, I indicated that diabetes had become the number one concern in this country, so also heart ailments and a number of other illnesses of a similar kind. One of the major contributing factors is our poor diet. The World Health Organization and other similar bodies have suggested that we must eat well, we must eat vegetables. Tomato has become one of the more important ones. A few days ago we saw where tomatoes with a market value of close to \$2,300 million plus were destroyed. Is this Government policy? Is this what the Government is saying to the small farmer? "You go out there and plant, use your money and when it is time to reap we will come and destroy." More than that, the matter was raised in this House, so it is not that the Government was not aware. It seems as if it is Government's intention to sabotage the Opposition to prevent the Opposition from doing its work.

When an Opposition Member came to this House and raised that matter, as he did a few days ago, what was the Government's response? The Government did not say, "We are going to protect the farmers." The Government took the information that was laid in this House. I do not know if I am in a position to suggest to your good self, as Speaker of this House, that if a matter is raised by an Opposition Member and the Government takes the information and destroys the crop, as in this particular case, should the Government Member not be held in contempt of this Parliament, because he used information that came to his attention via this House? What is it saying to the Opposition Members: Do not raise such situations again? Is that what they hoped would happen?

The destruction of this crop did not take place last year; it took place on Sunday. It took place after the Opposition Member, in fulfilling his duties, having taken the oath of office to do certain things, came to this House, as he was required to do and obtained your permission to raise the matter. I want to assure the national community, all the citizens that we represent on both sides of the House—we do not only represent citizens in the constituencies we hold, but all the other constituencies. From time to time they would ask us—that we will continue to rise to your cause. We will stand in your defence as we are required to do. You cannot threaten us by taking this kind of action. I hope that after I sit, a Government Member will immediately stand and say why this crop was destroyed, apologize to this House and indicate what will be the compensation, and tell all the farmers in this country, whether in Laventille, Fyzabad or Siparia

or where have you, that they are going to be protected. The country needs the food. The Government is not producing food.

Mr. Ramnath: What about increasing water rates and the impact on food prices?

Mr. C. Sharma: We also saw on a previous occasion some six weeks ago, that five acres of peppers were destroyed in a similar fashion. It is a pattern of the Government's behaviour. Is it targeting a particular constituency? Six weeks ago in the very constituency of St. Augustine five acres of peppers were destroyed, and they were ready for reaping. Six weeks later, you destroyed a large plantation of another crop.

We are seeing that the Government is giving no support, but, on the other hand, every day they are threatening to raise costs. In the case of water, they want to raise the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) rates. As you know, Mr. Speaker, farmers cannot use WASA water in their cultivation, so they have to dig ponds at their own expense. They cannot take water from any other source; they have to pay for that too, and now WASA is threatening to raise its rates.

The reason they are raising their rates is largely to cover their costs. We have made the point on numerous occasions; we have demonstrated that WASA is a PNM party group where employment is for all the friends and families of the PNM, including close relatives of Ministers of Government, present and former. Instead of raising the WASA rates to cover their ill spending, they should be pumping money into agriculture; they should be encouraging scholarships in agriculture. Sometime ago the Government through its agents spoke about the removal of the gas subsidy. If the gas subsidy has to be removed, we want to know where that saving is to go. We want to suggest that it goes to agriculture; it is close to \$2 billion. We think the injection of that kind of money will certainly add value to what we are talking about today, lowering prices.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, sometime ago there was a paper "A vision for Agriculture 2020". I have looked at that paper and there has been very little implementation of any kind and I want to suggest that since we are concerned about food security, we want an assurance from the Government that food security will be available for all citizens at all times, that they will have access to sufficient, safe and good food to meet their needs.

We want to see some improvement in the production of local foods, a replacement in the food importations and a reduction in it as well. We want to see

Rising Food Prices
[MR. SHARMA]

Friday, February 22, 2008

an improved access to food, we want more and more people to obtain food, we want to see an improvement in the production in all the areas; rice, dairy farming, vegetables, root crops, fruits. We want to make sure all this becomes available to all our people. We want to see an improvement in research, technology, and development. We want to see the ADB and all the lending and development agencies more accessible and meaningful and responding to people's needs more and more.

Mr. Speaker, we want to see a promotion of innovation to all our farmers; regardless of the size of the crops or where they are farming. We do not want to see farmers being treated better in a PNM constituency; we want farmers across the country to know they can access information.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things the farmers have been quarrelling about for the longest while is the water resource management. The Government has promised the dam at Mamoral because that flooding has affected the crops of this country in so many areas and we want to make sure that water resource management comes in and irrigation flooding is treated with.

Mr. Speaker, we want to see more lands being made available to the farmers and this will reduce the high incidence of food prices. As it is, farmers cannot get lands to plant so while you may be encouraging people to go into business, for some reason, nobody knows what is the policy to obtain a parcel of land to do agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, we want to see planning and development more accessible to all the farmers. For instance, farmers who cultivate their crops whether on a three-acre or five-acre parcel and wish to build a small house so they can be there to take care of their crops must be allowed, presently it is not permitted, only those farmers who have lands in excess of five acres, but many do not have five acres because of the technology and the development that was available. Now, a farmer can do four acres and be very productive and earn money at the same time and such farmers must be given permission on the planning approval.

Mr. Speaker, very important is the question about financial assistance. Farmers are not asking for handouts and credit facilities, and that must be public information. Just as the Government pays millions to place advertisements in newspapers saying all kinds of foolish things, let them indicate to the national community where loans, assistance and credit facilities are available. Marketing is critical. As I indicated, under the UNC administration, we were to open many markets. We want marketing to come on the front burner again so farmers will be able to know.

Mr. Speaker, in many countries in Africa and India, the farmers are told way in advance when you put crop A, B, or C on the ground at the time of reaping they are guaranteed “X” amount, so they know about it. In the same way we want our farmers to have that information so they will be encouraged. A farmer cannot be told to plant five acres of peppers and when they are ready to be reaped, you destroy them; the PNM has to change its attitude.

Mr. Speaker, for the last many years, I cannot recall a session of Parliament where some reference was not made to access roads, and when the Member for Diego Martin East answered a question, he demonstrated where in the regional corporation for the same length of road a councillor was given \$20,000 and the ministry doing a road of the same length was given \$8 million. We want access roads to be treated in a fair fashion; farmers need to access the lands and there must be roads. It must not be left for the farmers to build the roads; the Government has a responsibility to make sure the access roads are there.

The fishing community has been calling—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will give you one minute to wind up, because you have already reached your 30 minutes.

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have indicated very clearly that the country is in crisis as it relates to the availability and accessibility of food for all our citizens, and the Government has a responsibility to make sure it does all in its power for the promotion of agriculture so that food prices will be within the reach of all our citizens.

Thank you very much.

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Kennedy Swaratsingh): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate on the Motion tabled by the hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Before I go on, since this is my first contribution to a debate in this honourable House—[*Desk thumping*] I wish to pre-eminently thank the constituents of St. Joseph for the trust they have placed in me to represent them in the highest forum of the land, and I assure them and the entire nation that I will do my utmost to successfully discharge the sacred responsibility they have placed on my shoulders.

Before I share my own contribution, there are a couple of points I want to respond to which the hon. Member for Fyzabad shared. First of all, I was not in this honourable House at the time—but if my memory serves me right—the last budget read by the hon. Prime Minister in the former Government had by far the largest allocation to agriculture that we ever had in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Rising Food Prices
[HON. K. SWARATSINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

Mr. Speaker, I am a little flabbergasted when I hear a Member of this House justifying crime on the basis of the need to feed one's family. If that is the thinking of those on the other side, we on this side feel that crime, under no form or fashion can ever be justified. [*Desk thumping*] While much was said on the Government's failure to indicate its plans for the agricultural sector, I hope in my own contribution to share some of those. In fact, it was also indicated by the hon. Member for Fyzabad that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources over the last 100 days failed to visit a single farmer.

Mr. Speaker, this morning, the Minister, together with the Member for Barataria/San Juan, visited the El Socorro area to examine possible sites for the establishment of a tilapia farm; [*Desk thumping*] to examine vegetable farms in the Barataria area, and the Minister also indicated to the farmers that over the next few months, he will be visiting all agricultural sites throughout the country. In fact, he is due to visit in my constituency, the area of Aranguez within the next two weeks, so it is not true to say that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources over the last 100 days failed to visit a single farming area.

Mr. S. Panday: He visited one today.

Hon. K. Swaratsingh: Mr. Speaker, the Motion before this honourable House points to an important issue facing our country today—the rising of the food prices—and indeed, the Motion, as I have read it from the hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, is to my mind, a false premise. Contrary to the imputations of the Motion, the fact of the matter is that continuing from the previous administration, this Government has taken steps to deal with the rising food prices. The Government therefore does not stand condemned for failing to act; in fact, the Government must be applauded for its swift, comprehensive and effective actions, including both short and long-term measures to deal with this situation. I will point these out shortly, Mr. Speaker, but it will also be remiss of me if I do not place this debate in its proper context.

The hon. Member for Fyzabad was very simplistic in his analysis. To fully understand and appreciate how the Government has sought to protect the citizens in the face of rising food prices, we must recognize that this is indeed a global development affecting all nations—large, small, developed and developing—causing concern among governments worldwide.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the rise in food prices which we have managed to keep under significant control must be seen in the context of a much wider phenomenon of higher prices in goods and services at the international level. It is an inescapable reality that in today's increasingly interdependent world, external

forces will always contribute significantly to the inflation that we import into Trinidad and Tobago. One of these main factors is the very high price of oil which has now gone for the first time to over \$100 a barrel. The high price of oil, though it contributes greatly to the buoyant national revenue, is at the same time, mainly responsible for the high cost of imports since it fuels rising cost in manufacture, packaging, transportation, processing, energy production and services generally, all of which have a direct impact on the rise in the price of food, driving prices up throughout the world.

As we should also know, Mr. Speaker, the situation regarding the cost of energy is expected to continue and possibly become even higher. As we move forward, the demand for energy continues to grow in the other large and growing economies of the world. There is a situation where, while there is an even greater global demand, there is no corresponding increase in supply, a scenario aggravated by continuing instability and uncertainty among major suppliers.

In addition to high energy prices, there are other forces driving up the cost of food. The demand has grown as many countries in the developing world, particularly in India and China, have experienced high economic growth within recent times. In fact, real GDP growth in developing Asia, for instance has increased by 9 per cent per annum between 2004 and 2006. Africa also experienced rapid growth of some 6 per cent during the same period. We are talking here of some of the world's most populous countries, including China with a population of some 1.25 billion and India with approximately 1.4 billion persons. High-income growth in these countries is translated into increased consumption of food including wheat and wheat-based products driving up prices the world over.

Mr. Speaker, while there has been increase in demand, there is, unfortunately, not a corresponding increase in supply. In fact, adverse weather conditions have produced significant shortfall in the production of grain, particularly wheat, coarse grains, maize on the world market. For instance, between 2004 and 2006, wheat and maize production in the European Union decreased by some 12 per cent to 16 per cent. Today, global cereal stocks are at their lowest levels since the 1980s and are continuing to decline. Stocks in China which constitute some 40 per cent of total stocks declined significantly between 2000 and 2004 and are yet to recover.

3.15 p.m.

The effects of climate change will continue to impact negatively on food production for the foreseeable future. Another fact impacting the price of food is the further aggravation to the supply side of the equation in the increased

Rising Food Prices
[HON. K. SWARATSINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

production of biofuels as global warming has become one of the main issues on the international agenda. There is now the increasing urgency to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. More and more farmland and farm produce are being deployed in the more profitable production of biofuels, including the price of products on grocery shelves and the cost of meat and meat products since grain is one of the main components of most animal feeds. For example, the use of corn as the principal feedstock in the production of ethanol has seen the price of corn rise astronomically within the last few years. There is now the frequent spread of animal diseases causing the slaughter of a huge number of poultry and livestock intended for human consumption, resulting in limited supply and higher prices.

We have also been subjected to acute price increases in dairy and dairy products brought about by the removal of subsidies in the European Union and we continue to be buffeted by currency fluctuations in the economies of some of our major trading partners. This is the background against which we must see the rise in the price of food in Trinidad and Tobago and the national community must not be fooled. We must also take into account the unprecedented social and economic developments that have been taking place in Trinidad and Tobago as we transform this country into a developed nation.

The economy has doubled in size since 2001 and is now the strongest it has ever been, growing at an average rate of 8 per cent over the last five years. This Government did that. Over the last five years we have had foreign investments in excess of US \$5 billion and we continue with our new programme of industrialization and the diversification of the economy into other sustainable industries. There has been business expansion in all sectors and the Government's developmental programme has been moving full steam ahead in all areas of economic, physical and social infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago.

Most significantly, we achieved the historic milestone of full employment for the first time since independence of this country. With so much developmental activity and business expansion in both public and private sectors and with the increase in consumer spending that invariably accompanies economic success, it is not unexpected that food prices will rise, but we do not let the situation become a runaway horse. We did not let it then; we would not let it now. We took action to protect the population in November, 2006.

Among other measures, the Cabinet established a ministerial task force to deal with the general increase in prices, with particular reference to the food sector. The task force did very well, employing measures such as the establishment of

farmers' markets to eliminate the unscrupulous middleman; the creation of the Trinidad and Tobago Food Importation and Distribution Programme in collaboration with our regional neighbours to increase the supply of basic food items to Trinidad and Tobago; the importation of basic food items from non-traditional sources, including Latin America; the removal of VAT and common external tariff on a number of food items; the removal of the surcharge on imported chicken; setting up a website to provide realtime market information; the development of a consumer awareness and information programme to help the population in making purchasing decisions.

In one of the former establishments that I worked for, it had the effect of letting consumers be aware of what choices are available to them. In fact, many consumers choose to go to the supermarket, whereas products are available in the markets, because they choose to pay additional high prices for shopping in comfort, for wide aisles and increased variety. Therefore, the Ministry of Legal Affairs must be commended for the increased awareness that consumers now have. [*Desk thumping*]

To elaborate further, regarding the removal of VAT and the reduction of the CET, the Government pursued a three-pronged approach ensuring the maximization of the benefits afforded to all our citizens. Firstly, we ensured that a list of the items from which the VAT and the CET were removed or reduced, was published in the media. This allowed for business persons and the general public to acquaint themselves with the items to which these measures applied and to ensure that these changes were reflected in their individual transactions.

Secondly, the Government also proceeded to monitor the price movement of the particular item to determine the impact of the measures taken so as to guide future policy decisions and actions. Thirdly, we incorporated into our public education programme the publication of comparative prices on a range of basic food items. The Government therefore issued three weekly publications in the daily newspapers and one monthly publication regarding weekly poultry prices. This publication detailed the price per pound and the pluck-and-gut fee as a sample of about 40 pluck shops across Trinidad and Tobago. The publication also indicated the average per pound paid for fresh or live chicken.

Another item on the list was weekly fruit and vegetable prices. Fruit and vegetable prices spanning regions across Trinidad and Tobago are collected and published weekly. A total of eight markets and 31 supermarkets comprise the sample survey, but an average of one market and a supermarket in its environment are surveyed weekly for publication. We are now in our third publication. Since

Rising Food Prices
[HON. K. SWARATSINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

the start of these publications, although the prices in the supermarkets continue to be higher than what obtain at the market, there has been a narrowing of the gap, and supermarkets move their prices closer to the market due, in no small measure, to the efforts of the Consumer Affairs Division and the constant change in buying habits that have come about as a result of a better educated and better informed consumer.

The weekly publication of selected food items is a third matter. On July 05, 2007, the Consumer Affairs Division commenced the publishing of prices of 16 selected food items by regions across Trinidad and Tobago. To date, 27 supermarkets have been surveyed. This strategy has had the effect of exposing the business community to rigorous scrutiny, in addition to encouraging comparison shopping by consumers. In fact, the Central Bank, in its monthly media releases, has alluded to this phenomenon of comparison shopping and its attendant benefits to all concerned.

I must also add that a unit has been established in the Ministry of Legal Affairs to handle consumer complaints. Consumers have been made aware of the consumer hotline which is 800-4CPS. The Consumer Protection Services Unit received approximately 734 complaints in 2007 and 1,403 enquiries, with 1,029 consumers visiting the Port of Spain office. Three hundred and thirty cases were closed, with the remainder being at different stages of investigation and negotiation. The result of this significantly detailed effort was that we did reduce general inflation and reduced food prices from a high of 26.5 per cent in October 2006 to around 14.7 per cent in the latter half of 2007. As you can see, we did take action and in a very detailed and focused way.

More significantly, to deal with the long-term solutions to the problem and to ensure greater food production in Trinidad and Tobago, the Government convened a National Consultation on Food Prices on August 15 and 16, 2007, which was opened by the hon. Prime Minister, where he outlined three specific strategies to deal with the problem.

Firstly, as the Prime Minister said then, we took the courageous and strategic decision—not a malicious one, but a strategic one—to close down Caroni (1975) Limited which was not only perennially draining the Treasury, but had become even more unviable with the loss of preferential international markets for sugar. We terminated the outdated operations in a most humane manner and with adequate compensation to the workers, including the retraining of thousands of former employees for the emerging modern workplace in Trinidad and Tobago. But most importantly, we saw it as our chance to modernize the agricultural sector

in this country. Through this pivotal decision, we liberated thousands of acres of prime agricultural land for the more diversified production of crops for both the primary and the agro-processing industry. We made more land available for food production. We created over 7,000 new farmers from the former workers of Caroni (1975) Limited, each with a two-acre plot to produce food for this country.

We continue also with several other initiatives to help our farmers. We have improved credit facilities from the Agricultural Development Bank to new and existing holdings and we have further facilitated food production through the programme of appropriate incentives, including assistance for the purchase of machinery, equipment, fertilizers and for the introduction of technology into farm operations. We are improving infrastructure through an enhanced system of access roads and bridges and are moving towards better water management and supply, including retention dams and additional desalination plants. Most importantly, we shall deal with the disincentive of praedial larceny by creating a special unit within the police service to deal with this issue. All the support systems will be provided once and for all for the thousands of our small farmers who will continue to play their very important role in providing food for our nation.

The second strategy as was outlined by the hon. Prime Minister involves our Caricom partners. Trinidad and Tobago is an integral part of the region's effort to achieve food security. In addition to our programmes on the home front, we shall, inter alia, partner with our neighbours for the regional production of food, focusing efforts in those countries of the Caribbean Community that have the resources, especially land space, for large-scale production. We are positively exploring the very real possibility of expanding the domestic sea bridge, involving, initially, the countries of the southern Caribbean. This will help to reduce the possibilities of food shortages in Trinidad and Tobago and also generate economic expansion among our Caricom partners.

The first strategy that our hon. Prime Minister outlined at the National Consultation has been regarded as truly transformational, even though some refer to it in a manner that is less encouraging. We are now preparing the ground for a level of food production never before seen in this country. Under our National Agri-business Development Programme and in collaboration with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, we are creating 17 large-scale farms of approximately 100 acres each in this country, all utilizing modern techniques and management for the large-scale production of food. These estates will be operated along commercial lines and will involve participation by the private sector, including established international companies in the field.

Rising Food Prices
[HON. K. SWARATSINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

The farms will be strategically placed throughout the country in the following way: In Jerningham, there will be one farm of 108 acres for vegetable crops; in Edinburgh, there will be three farms comprising totally 354 acres, also to produce vegetable crops; in Orange Grove, there will be one farm of 100 acres producing vegetable crops; in Caroni, there will be one farm of 100 acres to produce root crops and rice; at La Gloria, there will be two farms comprising 364 acres for mixed farming and livestock; at Mon Jaloux, there will be two farms totalling 417 acres for integrated farming with crops, livestock and aquaculture; at Picton Estate, there will be five farms made up of 1,201 acres for livestock, tree crops and root crops, and in Chaguaramas, there will be two farms utilizing 200 acres operated in collaboration with the government of Cuba, which will focus on root crop, rice production, mixed farming, livestock and integrated farming.

With these large farms, we shall move agricultural production to unprecedented heights in this country. There will be a sustained supply of primary and processed foods for both domestic consumption and for export, and with this level of production prices will be kept at affordable levels. Nobody in this country will ever suffer from inability to buy food.

3.30 p.m.

In this new century Trinidad and Tobago will enjoy its highest level ever of food security. These large farms will employ all the modern methods and technology for increased productivity. They will inspire through example and the demonstration effect, the modernization of the entire agricultural sector in this country.

Our smaller farmers will be exposed to practical and on-hand experience and knowledge of operations for efficient modern agricultural production. Most importantly, the large farms will be focussed mainly on those commodities that have export value and the potential to develop into major food industries. Their major output would be directed into processing, thereby fueling the growth of the agri-industry and also generate employment in foreign earning. Consequently, they would not be in competition with the smaller farmers or the domestic primary market and will only supply this area in case of unforeseen inadequacy.

It is well thought out taking into account the multidimensional strategies that we must employ for survival in a globalized arena that is both fraught with dangers and opportunities for success. When we think it through, we will; we can and we must succeed. This is what we are doing in agriculture and food production in this country.

We have to look at the complete picture. We also know that with this strategy and level of production, we would be seeking for the first time since our independence, to penetrate the international market with our large scale agricultural products without preferential access. We shall do all else that is necessary for the attainment of this objective.

Recognizing the strict standards at international level, we shall prepare ourselves to meet the standards of global quality. There is work to be done. For the improved competitiveness of this sector, we shall improve the regulatory and institutional framework in agriculture through legislation when it is necessary; incorporate systems that satisfy international safety standards; continuously improve support mechanisms for the local sector and engage in more effective market intelligence. We shall bring agriculture in this country into the 21st Century and ensure the availability and accessibility of food for present and future generations.

Therefore, I find it impossible to support the Motion tabled by the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. The Government is very aware of the rise in the price of food. As I have clearly indicated, we are doing all that is necessary to ensure that our nation is able to meet the challenges posed by this global development. It is a global development. We are succeeding and our efforts will be further demonstrated with the passage of time and the full fruition of all our initiatives.

Before I conclude and take my seat, let me add this very important perspective. Dealing with any national problem is not the sole responsibility of the Government. Our citizens must also do their part. Regarding food prices, the consumers must be alert to exercise the right choices. They must be aware of the information being disseminated by the Government through the Ministry of Legal Affairs, so that the right decisions could be made regarding the purchase of food items. The private sector, our wholesalers, distributors and retailers have a critical responsibility. They must not raise prices indiscriminately. This could affect social stability as well as the long-term viability of their business operations. The point is that at this time we are in this situation together and we have a contribution to make in ensuring that as a nation, we overcome successfully, the challenge posed by the rise in food prices. The Government will continue to do its part and we will succeed in greater measure than we have done before.

One could argue that the focus on agriculture is rightly placed and it is long in coming, but nonetheless, it is the intention of this Government to ensure that the prices of food remain affordable. We shall do all that is within our power to ensure that, that remains so for all the citizens of our country.

Thank you.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I congratulate the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla for bringing this Motion to the House at the appropriate time, when the people of this country are suffering tremendously, as a result of the inability to buy food and eke out a living for themselves. When 17 per cent of this population is under the poverty line and more than 35 per cent earn less than \$2,500 per month, that means that one in every three citizens is unable to buy the food that is required for sustenance and a comfortable standard of living. They are unable to do so because of the massive increase in food prices and the inability of this Government to do anything whatsoever in controlling food prices.

This Government has to take full and absolute responsibility for this chaos in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They are causing the people of Trinidad and Tobago to starve. The Prime Minister and his bunch of PNM hacks have to admit that they have failed this country. In 39 out of the 50 years that they have run this country, they have failed the agricultural sector and in almost every sector of development in Trinidad and Tobago. They have destroyed systematically, the agricultural sector over 39 years.

You will remember that the University of the West Indies started from the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA). This college was at the site of the University of the West Indies when it started and then it became the university. It was the centre for research and biology and one of the best in the world, that the people around the world had to come to Trinidad to seek advice and help. Scientific research was done for the agricultural sector, particularly for tropical countries of the world. What has the PNM done? For 39 years they have decimated the agricultural sector. Agriculture used to contribute to about 10 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Every time they come into power, the contribution of agriculture to GDP has been lower and lower and now, they have brought it to less than half percent of the GDP. Is this something that they will be proud of? How have they decimated agriculture? They have decimated the lives of thousands of people by closing down Caroni (1975) Limited. I will elaborate on this.

What have they done? The whole question of the Caribbean Agriculture Research Development Institute (CARDI) used to be another centre where much research was done in agriculture. They have allowed CARDI to be taken over by Jamaica which never had any agricultural sector. CARDI has been lost to Jamaica. What have they done with the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF) at Centeno? They have destroyed it. In essence, this Government has

systematically and deliberately plundered the agricultural sector and has failed to develop any part of it.

You destroyed the agricultural sector in Caroni because you thought that it was sustenance for the United National Congress. You were wrong. You destroyed it, but yet, the United National Congress—*[Interruption]* You are a minority government. Out of the 950,000 persons who were supposed to vote at the election, 600,000 persons did not vote for PNM and 350,000 persons voted against them. They have no mandate to speak about governance in Trinidad and Tobago. Absolutely none!

Dr. Moonilal: Legitimacy.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: You have no legitimacy. You have failed this country for six years and you will continue to fail for another five years. But, we will remove you! The people who are starving will remove you.

The last Member who spoke made a promise to serve his constituents. It is not a nice thing to deal with for a person who is making a first speech. I wonder if he knew that he made a promise to serve God, but he did not fulfill his promise. I hope that he will make his promise to fulfill the people and he will be able to fulfill the people. *[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: I will deal with you!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: He is defending an indefensible situation. He is trying to defend a situation where he has quoted extensively. We will do this and we will do that. We have been hearing that since 2002. Did they not promise that they will build a hospital in Point Fortin and Scarborough and the National Oncology Centre? Today, they have admitted that they have failed. Six years later they have not done anything.

I quote the hon. Prime Minister from the budget debate in 2007 on the agricultural sector. He said that with the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited additional land became available for agriculture. They closed down Caroni (1975) Limited which was producing sugar cane and we were still able to get almost \$500 million per year from selling sugar cane, externally. They said that Caroni (1975) Limited was a drain on the Treasury. Which is a drain on the Treasury? Is it WASA which is losing over \$900 million with mismanagement, corruption and inefficiency? Do you know what was on the Trinidad Guardian (Business) of Thursday February 21? I want to quote from an article written by Asha Javeed. I am making this point because they closed down Caroni (1975) Limited because it was a drain on the Treasury. Hear what is the drain on the Treasury. This is just one of the drains on the Treasury.

Rising Food Prices
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

“Corruption and inefficiency at WASA

The possibility of T&T facing a drought in 2008 has abated. But it could face this natural disaster in 2009 or 2010.

This gloomy prediction was given by Prime Minister Patrick Manning at a ‘thank you’ meeting hosted by the ruling People’s National Movement in Tunapuna on January 12.

Ironically, he announced at the very same meeting that the nation should brace for higher water rates.

If the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) has its way, it will be...100 per cent...”

The Government is burdened by a huge annual subsidy of \$919 million per year and rehabilitation and extending the authority’s network will cost \$27 billion for 15 years.

Here is WASA losing \$919 million in one year. What have you done? You will close it down? You closed down Caroni (1975) Limited.

You closed down BWIA and said that you were restructuring it and you wanted to bring on Caribbean Airways. It is costing the taxpayers \$1.5 billion in the restructuring of BWIA. For what did you restructure it? To put a balisier on the tail of the aircraft? That is restructuring for you! To put a balisier on the tail of an aircraft, cost this country \$1.5 billion. They said that Caroni (1975) Limited was a drain on the Treasury. In this statement the Prime Minister promised that land would become available for agriculture.

3.45 p.m.

These lands were producing sugar cane. There was a citrus industry, a buffalypso industry, milk production, a rum distillery, fish farming, but they have closed all of that; shut Caroni (1975) Limited down and destroyed all the industries. They have destroyed the citrus industry, the buffalypso industry, the milk industry, the cattle farm, the rum distillery; everything. In addition to that, they have destroyed the lives of almost 10,000 workers and, by extension, families equivalent to 40,000 to 50,000 people. Because of the destruction of the industries that arose from the sugar industry in central Trinidad, they have destroyed the lives of 100,000 people.

They have given them a little pittance for voluntary separation. All the money is finished. The people have been promised two-acre plots of land for agriculture

and no one has title to that two-acre plot. These plots have been given to people miles away from their home. How can they produce products when the land is so far away and praedial larceny is so rampant? By the time the produce is ready, everything will be stolen.

The whole concept of this Government trying to revitalize agriculture is an abysmal failure. Today, they talk about 17 mega farms. The Member for St. Joseph spoke about 100 acres and 200 acres of land. Where are these mega farms? What are they producing? In the Budget Speech 2007, the Prime Minister said that the thrust would now be put on the creation of medium and large-scale farms and providing the conditions to encourage amalgamation of small farms into larger economic farm units.

The Government said it is giving people two-acres and now it wants to change its mind? They said we must amalgamate small plots into larger ones. Make up your mind what you want! While you say you want large farms, 100 acres, 150 acres, you give the poor people of Caroni two-acres. How can a farmer, to be economically viable, produce things to be cost effective on a two-acre plot? You have to give the farmers larger plots for mechanization of the produce in larger plots, but you have treated the people with contempt and discourtesy by giving them two-acre plots to which they do not even have title after three or four years of closing Caroni (1975) Limited.

You also told them you will give plots for housing; that was a plot. Where are they? You are now telling them, after they have utilized the money, that they have to pay for the plots and these plots were promised free of charge. Now you are telling them that they have to pay \$20,000 and \$25,000 for 5,000 square feet of land, which you had promised would be free. This Government has no credibility in talking about agriculture and in dealing with anything as far as Caroni (1975) Limited is concerned. That is one area I wanted to touch on.

Let me go on to some more scientific figures and show this Parliament what has happened with inflation and food prices in Trinidad and Tobago. I am quoting from a Central Bank document because they had a consultation on increasing food prices. The Government could not have one. Because they knew the prices were going up, it took the Central Bank over two days to decide that they were going to have a consultation on the escalation of food prices.

Here are the figures that the Central Bank has produced. Mr. Speaker, headline inflation in 2001, when we were in government, was 3.22 per cent. Under this administration, in 2005, it was 7.16 per cent; in 2006, 9.08 per cent and up to June 2007, 7.3 per cent; more than two and a half times the inflation we

Rising Food Prices
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

controlled up to 2001 at 3.22 per cent. We controlled food prices to the extent that the highest food price was 7.51 per cent. Do you know what has happened to food prices under the PNM? In 2002, it was 11 per cent; in 2003, 12.28 per cent; in 2004, 20.57 per cent; in 2005, 22.57; in 2006, 22 per cent and up to mid-June 14.69 per cent. There was a 105 per cent increase in food prices over a five-and-a-half-year period. This means that a basket of food which cost \$100 in 2001 now costs, up to June 2007, \$205. That is the PNM boast; that is the PNM accomplishment—driving the cost of food prices up over 105 per cent over a five-and-a-half-year period. This analysis was not completed. The increased inflation in food prices was 25 per cent.

The Prime Minister has been saying that the Government wants to control inflation, but it can be controlled by just dealing with the issue of food prices because food accounts for about 20 per cent of the typical consumer basket, which has a direct impact on headline and core inflation.

I want to look at regional inflation rates. Bahamas has a regional inflation rate of 1.9 per cent; Belize, 2.7 per cent, Jamaica, 5.6 per cent, and Trinidad and Tobago, 7.8 per cent. This is the administration of the PNM, which cannot even compare with places like Belize, the Bahamas and Jamaica where core and headline inflation is far less than ours. Where is your ability to implement things so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit? [*Interruption*] You must be aware of what the last administration did.

You know what the Central Bank said, Mr. Speaker. The Central Bank said that the statistics I gave a while ago showed that the increase in food prices has been much lower in other Caricom countries than in Trinidad and Tobago. The reasons for this are not totally clear, but may have to do with better performance of the agricultural sector. Imagine Belize, Jamaica and the Bahamas perform better than Trinidad and Tobago in the agricultural sector. That is a shame and disgrace on the PNM for what they accomplished for 39 out of their 50 years. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The next point that came out of the Central Bank studies showed that in Trinidad and Tobago fruits and vegetables, meat, fish and dairy products show a sizeable increase, perhaps suggesting that greater domestic agricultural production would facilitate lower increases in the price of the food basket. Where is the local food production in terms of these products?

I want to show what has been the production in agriculture during this PNM administration. Under the UNC, simple food crops, for example, tomato, in two years, we produced 5.1 million kilogrammes of tomatoes as compared with the PNM in 2005 and 2006, which produced 2.9 million kilogrammes. We produced almost twice as much. Cabbage, we produced 3.6 million kilogrammes as opposed 1.9 kilogrammes that they produced in 2005 and 2006; cucumber, we produced 8.2 million kilogrammes and they produced 2.2 million kilogrammes; pumpkin 17.1 million kilogrammes; they produced 4 million kilogrammes. That is the history of the UNC performance in agriculture as compared to the PNM's non-performance in agriculture.

I go to another point. What has this Government been able to do in terms of the widening gap between wholesale and retail prices? These farmers work very hard to produce their products and get very little or no value for their products. Do you know who is making the money? The big supermarkets are making the money. I want to prove the point statistically. What, as a responsible Government, are you going to do about it? I will give you some figures as far as that is concerned.

Price comparison in various markets:

- Tomato at wholesale per kilogramme: the farmer gets \$13.23, but do you know for how much the supermarket sells it? \$29.84.
- Melongene: the farmers get \$2.2 for one kilogramme of melongene and the supermarkets sell for \$14.66, almost seven times the value.
- Sweet pepper: \$7.72 per kilogramme at the wholesale market by the poor farmers, and in the supermarkets \$22 per kilogramme.

If they were a responsible government, would they not have an active interest in what is going on at that level? Why should the poor farmer get a small amount of money for his produce? What have they done about encouraging markets throughout Trinidad and Tobago so that the farmers do not have to go through middlemen, but can go to the large markets and sell their goods and get larger prices rather than the supermarkets getting these profits?

The Central Bank also said in its study on the increase in food prices that one obvious reason for the increase is the decline in sluggish agricultural production. According to CSO data, most agricultural commodities are showing production declines from levels obtaining at the beginning of the decade. I am showing conclusively how that is moved. So the fluctuations in the distribution margins are very wide and this Government must take responsibility for correcting that.

Rising Food Prices
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

4.00 p.m.

The Member for St. Joseph spoke about the Government being prepared to remove VAT and duties on agricultural produce. I want to show you how this is only “ol’ talk” and promise. The Government has no intention of removing VAT and import duty on food items. Look at what Central Bank showed. Central Bank showed import duties on selected food items such as milk and cream. Duty before reduction was 25 per cent and duty after reduction is 15 per cent today in Trinidad and Tobago when people cannot afford to buy milk to feed their babies. This Government is punitive. This Government has decided that it must punish the mothers of Trinidad and Tobago by putting a duty of 15 per cent on milk and cream products. In today’s age, is that fair to the society? Is that fair to the average person who cannot buy anything? They have not encouraged anything in agriculture. We will talk about the price of milk that the poor farmers are getting now and what the subsidies are. They have 15 per cent duty on condensed milk. There is a 15 per cent duty on grape juice.

I want to quote from the Central Bank statistics. It is not the UNC that is making these statements. The value of food imports in Trinidad and Tobago in 2003 was \$1.9 billion; 2004, \$2.2 billion; 2005, \$2.7 billion; 2006, \$2.6 billion; and 2007, over \$3 billion. Do you know why? It is because the PNM administration failed to do anything about agriculture. Almost anything people consume in Trinidad and Tobago has to be imported; \$3 billion worth have to be imported on an annual basis. Do you know what is even more punitive? This PNM administration is punishing the poor people. Do you know what they have done about food prices? They have VAT and import duty on these food prices.

In 2003, they imposed \$269 million of VAT and import duty on food products. In 2004, they imposed \$295 million of VAT and import duty on food items. What a shame and disgrace! You have continued to punish the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2005, they imposed \$315 million of VAT and import duty. They are punishing the poor people more. You say you want money. You are imposing \$315 million of VAT and wasting \$14 billion per year on high-rise buildings and almost \$10 billion on corruption during your term of existence.

They have spent \$10 billion in corruption in UDeCott, CEPEP, URP, the health projects, Scarborough Hospital, Brian Lara Promenade and so on. They are too numerous to mention. They spent almost \$10 billion in corruption during their last term, but they want to punish the people with VAT and import duty of \$315 million in 2005. In 2006, it was \$319 million in import duty and VAT on food items. What a disgrace! This is a Government that gets up everyday and tells the

people that they want to do something about food items and they want to reduce the price of food.

What is the hon. Minister saying? He said the people must take some responsibility for themselves. What a shame and disgrace to have made that statement. He is in keeping with what one of his colleagues, Dr. Rowley, said. Hon. Dr. Rowley made a statement—where is it? I will find it. Anyway, I cannot find it at the moment. Here it is. It is in the *Express* of Thursday, February 21, 2008. In the business column it stated:

“Rowley on high food prices
T&T attitude, the cause”

The Minister of Trade and Industry, Dr. Keith Rowley, said that the citizens have to blame their own attitudes and their lack of productivity for the high food prices the country is now facing. He was speaking to the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association. He said that in this country we are consumers with a consumer culture. What a national disgrace! Where is Dr. Rowley’s compassion on the people of Trinidad and Tobago? I expected him to be different. Does he realize that he is blaming an innocent, hardworking population for the deliberate failure of this Government to provide food to the people; the basic necessity of life? Does he realize that his blanket condemnation of the people of this country involves the aged, the sick and the pensioners who have struggled all their lives, the disabled and their children? He is making a blanket condemnation of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and saying that the reason for the rising food prices is because of people’s attitude.

It is the same thing that this Government said about crime. They said that the people must be blamed for the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago. They blamed Ramesh and everybody. They blamed the UNC for the rise in crime. Blame yourselves. Look at yourselves. You are responsible for the crime situation. You are responsible for the abysmal failure in the agricultural sector and you must take the responsibility for it. Again, if you look in the mirror you would see “Sugar Aloes” singing about what you all have done.

This is a Government with no conscience. They want to punish the people. They want to move the people down to the ground and they boast about it in the end. The people still went back and voted for them. Anyway, 600,000 people did not vote for them.

I want to make a statement on behalf of all the suffering people of this country. We, the UNC, have to ask: How does Dr. Rowley dare make this

Rising Food Prices
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

insulting comment like that and how could the Minister—I expected better of you, Member for St. Joseph—make a condemnation that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have to blame themselves?

I reminded you that this Government shut down Caroni (1975) Limited lands. You have destroyed the agricultural sector. It was because they felt that it was a UNC base. The UNC has blossomed back from that.

When words like that come from a Government Minister—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Swaratsingh: Would the hon. Member give way, please?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Is it on a point of clarification? All right, I would give way, you are younger.

Mr. Swaratsingh: Thank you very much for giving way, hon. Member. I want to clarify what I said. Our citizens must also do their part—no one—regarding their choices and consumer confidence—no one. I want to clarify that for the hon. Member.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I do not want to deal with you anymore, my younger colleague. I will deal with him at a macro level. I would not engage in a bilateral discussion. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will appreciate that. I am going at a macro level and I would not be deterred by that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, hon. Members on the Government Benches, the Member is making a very passionate contribution. I am interested in hearing what he has to say and so should you, because somebody on your side would have to reply to him. Let us hear him in silence. Please continue.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Based on what I have said, I think they ought to reply. They might have no reply to this whatsoever. I thank you for indicating to them that they should reply. I am sure they will not have anything to reply. All they have to talk about is: “We will do this and we will do that”—empty rhetoric coming from year to year.

At this stage, I think it is important for us to indicate, based on the Motion that my colleague brought before this House, we believe that there should be a commission of enquiry into this Government. We need an independent probe into why it is, for the past six years, this Government has allowed and fostered the decay of the agricultural sector and allowed the increase in food prices to be exorbitant to this extent. We are calling on the Prime Minister to establish a commission of enquiry into this. The country needs to know if it was a plot by this

Government to starve the people of Trinidad and Tobago, sheer incompetence, or mismanagement of the finances of this country. We will not be satisfied until the Prime Minister and his Government gives a proper account of why they have deliberately caused the agricultural sector to go into decay and caused more than one-third of the population of this country to suffer as a result of high food prices.

Mr. Speaker, let us go on to the 77,000 acres of lands that are available in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to that, there had been a number of very fertile grounds and agricultural grounds south of the—not the mountains, we do not have mountains in Trinidad—the hills. Mountains are 15,000—20,000 feet high and our highest hill is approximately 3,000 feet, or whatever. On the southern side of these hills, over a period of time, there were some of the best agricultural, fertile lands.

We had them in Aranguez, Oropune and Orange Grove. Do you know what? Everywhere you see the Housing Development Corporation's buildings going up, those were agricultural lands that they took over. It was a footprint for the destruction of the agricultural lands in the East-West Corridor. They were deliberate in their intent to "house-pad" and "voter-pad" so they chose lands that were available for agriculture and usurped the agricultural lands to put houses to put people so that they could vote and defeat the UNC. But, with all of that, they have failed because only 13,000 votes separated us and them for this election in six constituencies and 9,000 votes separated us and them in five constituencies. In 2001, only 1,186 votes separated us. No matter what housing development you put up, the people are fed up with you all and your time is coming. You saw that you had over 300,000 votes in 2002. You now have 290,000 votes. You have almost lost 60,000 of your people. Your people are fed up with you. The people are crying out against crime, food prices, the health sector, the education sector and the massive corruption on a day-to-day basis. The PNM has invented, masterminded and perfected corruption.

I would give just one example in the agricultural sector. There is one man who is a close friend of the Prime Minister. He has many close friends. Do you know what he said?—"No better friend do I have than thee." That was when he spoke about Mr. Malcolm Jones. No better friends do I have than Uthara Rao and Calder Hart. These three men—I will not go further. The population will know what they are doing with the money in this country. UDeCott is controlling almost \$15 billion without any accountability, transparency and probity. Uthara Rao, with the EMBDC, has spent almost \$1.2 billion. When he came to the Joint Select Committee of Parliament he had to answer to that. The sum of \$1.2 billion was spent by the EMBDC for developing the agricultural lands of Caroni (1975)

Rising Food Prices
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

Limited. Where has that money gone? We need to find out what he has done. Today, there are lands that do not belong to the EMBDC, my colleague from St. Augustine will tell, and he is asking the people to demolish their five-acre plots of peppers and tomatoes that they have planted. The lands do not belong to the EMBDC. They are state lands, but he is asking the people to demolish their peppers and tomatoes. That is a man that has spent \$1.2 billion for the development of the Caroni (1975) Limited lands. When he came to the Joint Select Committee of Parliament and we asked him, he bluffed and huffed and could not give any answers to anything when he was asked about the massive corruption that is going on in the EMBDC.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, since the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited, what has happened to all the equipment, houses, tractors and machinery that were working? What a disgrace! That is massive corruption! Mr. Hospedales said that there was no big corruption, because they were worth only about \$2 million. The agricultural tractors and machinery that Caroni (1975) Limited had were worth almost \$50 million. Whose hands did they go into? Where is the accounting for all of this?

Hon. Member: Mc Nicholls!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The magistrate has some. Imagine it went into the magistrate's hands!

Mr. S. Panday: Mc Nicholls' hands! [*Interruption*]

Ms. Kangaloo: You are not supposed to be saying that.

Mr. Ramnath: Do you make rules here?

Dr. Moonilal: The Speaker will decide on that, not you.

Mr. S. Panday: Mc Nicholls is squatting on Caroni (1975) Limited lands.

Mr. Ramnath: Mc. Nicholls got the equipment.

Ms. Kangaloo: Go and say it outside.

Mr. Ramnath: I could say it outside, and I have said it outside. He got lands; he got cultivable lands.

Mr. S. Panday: Fifty acres! [*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: Why do you think he put Panday in jail?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Today, the Member of Parliament for St. Joseph comes here to make excuses. He said that world prices are affecting the price of food in Trinidad.

Mr. Ramnath: He is a fraud.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: He tried to show how world prices are affecting the price of food in Trinidad. Are world prices affecting us so we have to import \$3 billion? He talked about the prices of grain, corn and climate change. I wonder if they did not think about climate change when they were purchasing the blimp. [*Laughter*] They are now making excuses and saying that climate change is affecting the increase in food prices, but let us get an explanation about the climate change in Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the purchase of the blimp which is worth \$16 million.

Dr. Moonilal: They bought that from Alaska.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: With respect to the removal of subsidies, I gave sufficient illustrations and statistical empirical evidence to substantiate that this Government has been punitive in dealing with the population as far as subsidies are concerned. What subsidies has the Government given to the people?

A while ago, the Prime Minister spoke about the Agricultural Development Bank. He made a statement in 2007 that they were going to give \$30 million to the Agricultural Development Bank, but who gets the money? PNM party hacks got the money! Who is most corrupt and who can grease who got the money!

In one of PNM's administrations, who got the lands in Wallerfield? Who is getting the lands in Caroni (1975) Limited now for development? It is PNM friends and PNM party hacks who are getting the lands at next to nothing. Who got the bungalows in Caroni (1975) Limited? [*Interruption*] They know the answers, and the population knows the answers.

Now, what has happened to the Pernod Ricard lands that is 400-plus acres? This is very fertile land. They were given a lease to grow aniseed and something has happened? Who got a bribe to transfer these 400-plus acres of land to Blue Waters? The Government has to come clean on this matter. What has happened to the 400-plus acres of land that Pernod Ricard had? Was a lease given to Blue Waters? Who gave the lease? What is Blue Waters going to do with the lands? Are they going to get water on the land to produce water? We need an answer, and the country needs an answer. There is massive corruption in this matter. This is another element of corruption that is continuing day in and day out by this PNM administration.

Mr. Ramnath: They are not allowed to give any reason.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: They are like lambs for slaughter. They have just come in and I empathize with them. I feel the pain that they are feeling, because of the corruption that your predecessors have gone through. [*Desk thumping*] I hope that you all do not fall into the trap. There are very honourable and distinguished persons here. [*Interruption*] I am pleading with you that whenever you see massive corruption coming around you, stand at once and say that I am not going to be part of that, and I am going to resign my job, because for collective responsibility you will have to resign your job.

Hon. Member: That is why Ramesh left. [*Laughter*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: That is why Ramesh is here with us today. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, now, this is all well and good, but the Hansard reporter has to take down certain information. Please, have some regard for the Hansard Reporter.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC has come here to haunt the PNM over the next few years. [*Laughter*] He is going to ensure that some PNM people will not be able to return to Trinidad and Tobago just as Prevtat and John O' Halloran were not able to return to Trinidad and Tobago. He is going to ensure that some of your predecessors who sat there will not be able to return to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] I am being careful.

The hon. Minister talked about the doubling of the economy—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much colleagues on both sides. I know Minister Joseph has handed in his resignation. We have the letter of resignation that you handed in, but we are not going to raise that matter as yet. The hon. Prime Minister said to take it easy, he is not accepting your resignation as yet. He sent him down to Mayaro.

The hon. Minister talked about the doubling of the economy. He said that the foreign direct investment has exceeded \$5 billion and so forth. He also spoke

about industrialization and diversification. Do you know that this Government has not exercised any aspect of diversification of the economy? Mr. Speaker, 60 per cent of this economy is related to oil and the energy sector; half per cent is related to agriculture; and about 7 per cent to the services sector. Where are we going? So, when they come and make empty promises and empty boasts about diversification of Trinidad and Tobago, they are not talking to foolish people. That is only empty rhetoric. It is meaningless and it does not have any depth whatsoever.

The Minister also talked about the increase in consumer spending. People are earning their wages and they want to have a decent livelihood, so they try to purchase the things that would allow them to have a decent living. The Government is preventing them from doing that because it is not doing anything about the prices.

The Minister also talked about publications. What publication is the Minister talking about that would assist in reducing the price of food? Unfortunately, do you know that almost one-third of the population is unable to make sentences and so forth? We have a high degree of functional illiteracy, and that is 39 per cent of the PNM's administration in the education sector. [*Desk thumping*]

There are about 8,000—10,000 children who have been left out of schools—for 30 years that is almost 300,000 children. So, when you are talking about publication, who is going to read it? [*The Minister of Education stands*]. I think you are eroding my time. If it is a matter of clarification, I am going to give way. [*Interruption*]

Miss Le Gendre: Mr. Speaker, on a matter of clarification. There has never been a point where 10,000 children have been left out of the education system. [*Desk thumping*] I think the Member for Caroni East must be aware that under the previous system, any child who was not accommodated through the Common Entrance Examination went on to a second chance or to post-primary education and, subsequently, into vocational training. [*Interruption*] No child was left out of school. We need to set the record straight, because there is too much of this false information by Members on the other side. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister is new. I think they took her from the energy sector and brought her into education. First of all, the Minister has to know about the education system, and get information and knowledge first before she makes those statements. She must be aware that almost every year 8,000—10,000 children of the 30,000 children who sat the Common Entrance Examination did not get a place in a secondary school. They were left with only a primary school education. [*Interruption*]

Rising Food Prices
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

It was the UNC who brought on universal secondary education so that no child was left without a place in school. [*Desk thumping*] Those children who did not have numeracy and literacy skills were put into post-primary classes. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: This PNM administration has caused more than 300,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to remain as functional illiterates.

When we came into government, we established distance learning centres; we established education centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago so that mature persons could have gone and improved their education. They do not know anything about education. We can teach them about education. We established a revolution in the education system under Prime Minister Basdeo Panday. [*Desk thumping*] I would not go into that now. To date, they have not done anything about the Early Childhood Education Centres and the deshifting of junior secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker, in the four minutes that I have left before the tea break, I want to alert the population on a number of other issues that have contributed significantly to the increase in food prices over the years.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to construction prices, this Government has done nothing to reduce the cost of construction materials like steel and concrete. Construction materials have gone up by more than 60 per cent within the last two years, and they are blaming the increased demand in China. We have steel mills in Trinidad. Why is the cost of materials increasing to such an extent? This Government sits idly and does nothing about the increases in construction materials. Construction has a domino effect on almost every aspect of the society, including food.

With respect to the traffic woes, when people have to take two hours to move in one lane, all of that frustration is adding to the increase in the prices of food items.

I have spoken about the water rates. They want to increase water rates by 100 per cent. Some people do not have water where they are doing agricultural work and so forth, and they have to buy water at hundreds of dollars per tank, and that price is going up even further. Are you not going further into making the agricultural sector worse and worse? Persons who are engaged in agriculture have to buy water, because they do not have water. Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent of the population is not getting any water in their homes.

There are inefficiencies at the ports; massive inefficiencies. In Singapore, you can remove a container from the docks in one hour, but it takes five days here to

remove a container. Is this not adding to the price of food? This is because of the inefficiencies of this Government. They are unable to do anything on the port. They have their party hacks and party boys on the port.

The Customs and Excise Department takes days to complete a transaction for something that is coming off the port. That is inefficiency. So, if you are a responsible Government and a Government worth your salt, which you are not, you should have taken all these factors into consideration and dealt with the issues surrounding the increase in food prices.

We have enumerated all these things for your consideration, education and edification, so that when you are having Cabinet meetings, you can look at all these factors that are impacting on the prices of food and have some deliberations on them. We have given you enough information.

Mr. Speaker, when this Government tries to lay blame on the population—the Prime Minister makes repeated promises in budget after budget. He talked about participation in the agricultural sector by expanding ECIAF, which he has destroyed. He said that the Government would provide funding, manpower, equipment and adequate logistical support for the establishment of a praedial larceny police unit. We do not even have police officers to take care of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. The police force is depleted by almost 2,000.

4.30 p.m.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 90, I wish to move that we suspend Standing Order 10(2) to allow the Motion for the Adjournment to commence immediately.

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, February 29, 2008 at 1.30 p.m. and on that day, we will be doing the Immigration (Advance Passenger Information) Bill and if time permits the Copyright (Amdt.) Bill.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, before I put the Motion for the adjournment there is a matter to be raised and I now call upon the hon. Member for Princes Town North.

Failure of the PNM Government to pay Overtime

Mr. Subhas Panday (Princes Town North): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On February 11, 2008 I gave notice to this honourable House under

Failure of Government to Pay Overtime
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, February 22, 2008

Standing Order 11, that I intended to raise the following matter on the adjournment of the House. That Motion was the Failure of this PNM Government to pay long overdue and substantial amount of overtime moneys to a large number of members of the Trinidad and Tobago Protective Services.

Today, the definition of protective services, I want to restrict it to the police service, that is the moneys that this Government owes police officers and they have not paid. This situation has resulted as a result of the incompetence of this Government; sheer incompetence of this Government, and in particular, the Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East. I feel sorry for this hon. Minister; I feel he is a—[*By Order of the Chair, remarks withdrawn*] that Member for San Fernando East. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Ramnath: What is wrong with that?

Mr. S. Panday: He is a victim.

Mr. Speaker: No. That is very unparliamentary language. I will ask you please to withdraw it! [*Interruption*]

Mr. S. Panday: Withdrawn, Mr. Speaker, but he is a victim of that Member for San Fernando East. He is suffering under the heels—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Member for San Fernando East is responsible. He is the chairman of the National Security Council, and the buck stops with him. I did not say that; PNM people themselves are so disgusted with the behaviour and the activities of the Member for San Fernando East that they themselves are saying so and I make reference to Louis Lee Sing. Louis Lee Sing has been a beneficiary of the PNM, and he says, “Do not blame Martin for the crime situation, the buck stops at the Prime Minister.” [*Desk thumping*]

Today the problem that the police are having is because of the incompetence of this PNM Government, and in particular, the Member for San Fernando East. We must ask ourselves here today, why have we found ourselves in this situation? Why have we found ourselves in this situation where we need to have overtime? The answer is because there is a shortage of manpower in the police service. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, do you know that this incompetent Government headed by this incompetent Member for San Fernando East, for the years 2004 and 2005 did not recruit any other police officer. [*Interruption*] No regular police officer, so you have a shortage in the police service and this Government refuses to recruit police officers, as a result the criminals are running wild and that is an issue we must

deal with. Why did we allow this situation to reach such drastic proportions? Imagine a government owes police officers \$20.8 million in overtime. It is not \$20 or \$200; \$20.8 million. Why did you allow this to accumulate like that? And when they try to answer—and I say that honourable, beautiful Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, I would not like to say anything about her.

This PNM Government could not have paid the money because—the shameless excuse—given the number of police officers to whom arrears of overtime was due, based on revised salaries, the accounting unit was unable to process those payments before the end of fiscal 2007. You ever hear a thing like this? You have people working. Police officers have gone beyond the call of duty. They have put their lives on the line. They have put their lives on the line to protect you and me, to protect the citizens of this country and this shameless PNM Government refuses to pay them. Why? Tell us why? These are what—Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, I would not attack you today, but I want to tell you we know why you were fired from the Ministry of Education and I want to say—

Mr. Parsanlal: Can I ask the Member to give way, please? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. S. Panday: Adesh Nanan was an honourable man—[*Interruption*] who never condoned corruption or fraud. Dr. Adesh Nanan was a man who never encouraged indiscipline, and Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: He was never in the UNC. [*Laughter*]

Mr. S. Panday: Adesh Nanan fired him. That is all I want to say for the time being. So when you are attacking on this side watch how you are attacking.

Mr. Speaker, let me get back on to my substantive. Why it is you have OJT, all over the place? You have people with five and six subjects, you have them painting stones in CEPEP, young people who could do some work. Why did you not take the CEPEP people and put them in the department? If you did not want to help poor people, you want to keep the young people in a state of dependency and you want people who have four and five subjects to continue painting stones for their living, Mr. Speaker, why it is they did not contract out the work? Why did you not get an accounting company and give out the work so, you could have paid police officers in time?

This is where this Government has carried the police service. That is why crime is at the level at which it is. There is no excuse on the part of this Government for not paying our dedicated police officers in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service \$20.8 million; you owe them. Those policemen are saying, they are not getting the money. I want to tell you how the process works; it works

Failure of Government to Pay Overtime
[MR. S. PANDAY]

Friday, February 22, 2008

like this, because of the shortage of policemen the senior officer will request officers to work overtime. When the officers work overtime, the number of hours and the amount of money that they will gain from overtime is calculated. This is sent to your senior superintendent and then sent to the financial unit.

So, the money is already calculated, all they have to do at the accounting unit is to verify. But to tell policemen that the accounting unit could not have dealt with their matters because of increased salaries—why did you not pay them on their old salaries, so at least the poor police officers would have gotten something to mind their children. Police officers are just like everybody else. They have to face the groceries. You do not want them to be corrupted, we do not want them to be corrupted also, but when this Government failed to pay police officers what do you expect them to do? They have children to educate; they have children to send to school and they are not beneficiaries of \$8 million in an account abroad. They have to work, they have to work hard, and we think that we need to show our appreciation of policemen that whenever they work you must pay them their overtime as soon as possible.

This Government in fiscal 2007 did not pay the policemen \$20.8 million. Will this Government—you are owing the police officer this money for over a year—pay interest on the debt that you are owing them?

Mr. Ramnath: No.

Mr. S. Panday: Or will you just treat them like dogs? One would expect that this is a contract [*Interruption*] where the people have worked and where they are owed moneys and I am asking the Minister, if you will be kind enough to pay the officers interest on the money owed to them, and I hope they do, Mr. Speaker.

I want the police officers in Trinidad and Tobago who have put their lives on the line to save this country to reduce crime. That money which was not paid to the police officers—\$20.8 million for hard work done by the police officers—was vired to another head for overseas joy riding, overseas travel.

Mr. Ramnath: What?

Mr. S. Panday: Policemen worked and they cannot get their money; money went in overseas travel, or if not, security management for the World Cup, and you know we got the Brown Bag. [*Laughter*] We took a Brown Bag and moneys which we should be paying our police, they sent the money for security. [*Interruption*]

Further to that, that money went in another direction for the acquisition of offshore patrol vessels. You could have blimp, as we have the limp blimp, you

could have offshore patrol vessels if you want, but once police officers are not satisfied and motivated, all this money, we are spending, all this high-tech equipment will come to naught if the police officers are not motivated. The police officers cannot be motivated if you are owing them \$20.8 million and refuse to pay them. This Government has done that.

Mr. Speaker, the story goes on, what has been history as we have gone along so far, my instructions are, when I filed this Motion on February 11, last week Thursday I got a call from somebody who said he had a distress call from the Minister, he cannot touch the figures, he does not know about the figures and he cannot calculate the figures and they wanted the Motion to be adjourned to today's date. A distress call!

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Speaker, what they have done since that has happened, my information is, they will play for time. [*Interruption*] They wanted to look good; they wanted to say that they were working, so what they did since that time to now, they have started to pay some of the officers. So he will come here, and this shameless PNM Government will come here today and he will try to answer me this afternoon and say, what is the Member speaking about, we have started to pay. I want to tell this country this is an effective Opposition working and pushing the Government to work to pay the police officers. [*Interruption*] We have done it before. PNM abused their office; they made T&TEC put up posters on July 14, in Cocoyea with PNM banners, with the Prime Minister's photograph, and they failed to pay. They used state resources for political purposes. Only when I raised a question in the last Parliament—

[*Mr. Speaker, indicated that Mr. S. Panday had one more minute.*]

—and we forced the PNM to pay T&TEC \$3,600 for “all yuh thievery and corruption”, that is it.

4.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have one minute again, and I want to ask this Minister, [*Laughter*] do not come here and mamaguy, give us a date when you will complete the payments of the overtime to police officers; if not, we are coming back next week.

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

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the hon. Member for Princes Town North has indicated that he has narrowed his Motion not to deal with the

Failure of Government to Pay Overtime
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

protective services, just with the police. I will respond accordingly because the only other service that is normally paid overtime other than the police is the prisons. I will not deal with prison.

Let me just make the point. The Member for Princes Town North in listening to him, an impression is given that the Government has not been paying officers. He talked about people who have to send their children to school; have to buy food, et cetera, forgetting that we are talking about the non-payment or the late payment of overtime and not salaries, so I just want to make sure that we underscore that. He is giving an impression that this is a callous Government that is not concerned with the well-being of its police officers, and as a result, has not been paying them. Nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members.

Mr. Speaker, just for the information, he is right. Police officers work overtime for a number of reasons because of the exigencies of the services or because of the fact that they may be called out to work for extended hours, and as he has rightfully said, that there is a manpower shortage and, as a result, we expect police to do overtime, from time to time.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, just for the information of this honourable House: in fiscal year 2005, salaries paid to police officers amounted to \$505.7 million; allowances \$103.2 million; overtime \$93.1 million, which means the total remuneration in 2005 for police officers amounted to \$702 million. In fiscal year 2006, salaries \$504.5 million; allowances \$102.1 million; overtime, \$132 million; total remuneration of \$738.6 million. In 2007, salaries \$620.5 million; allowances \$152.5 million; overtime \$143.4 million; a total package of \$916.4 million.

Over the three-year period salaries paid amounted to \$1,603.7 million or \$1.6 billion; allowances \$357.8 million; overtime \$368.5 million; total of \$2,357 million or \$2 billion. I am saying that within the context of not paying \$20 million for 2007, the hon. Member for Princes Town North is giving the impression that this “callous” Government has not been paying, so I want to put this thing in context. As a result, the processing period can become protracted, especially if all parties—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: Spare us the lecture, just tell us whether you are paying or not.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: No, no, no! He “ramajay”! He “ramajay”, understand what I am saying. Mr. Speaker, [*Crosstalk*] let me just—because the hon. Member for Princes Town North just kind of glossed over the process. Overtime is determined and paid based on the stipulation set out in the Police Service Regulations, section 66; the Commissioner of Police Departmental Orders, 93

of 1972 and 2073 of 2001; and the Police Finance Branch Circular, 1 of 1994. According to these documents for the second division officers, a week shall consist of seven days; the normal working hours of which shall be 40 hours. Officers who work in excess of the 40 hours may:

- (a) be given commuted overtime pay or allowance at rates approved by the Minister of Finance;
- (b) be granted compensatory time off ; or
- (c) where such time off is not practicable, be paid overtime pay rates approved by the Minister of Finance.

The Police Service Regulations also state that except in special circumstances, no overtime claim shall be allowed if submitted after six months from the date the overtime was earned.

Mr. Speaker, there are steps established for the payment of overtime. But to cut to the chase, a number of things happened. Sometimes it is convenient for police officers not to claim the overtime just when it happened, they prefer to accumulate it, and as a result, the payment is larger. In those circumstances, they go beyond the six-month period and as long as you go beyond the six-month period, certain things must happen. The overtime must be audited; a whole series of things must happen that, as a result, delay the process. If we go and pay these claims without meeting the financial regulations, they will be the first to accuse us of breaking the law with respect to how it is that these payments are made.

I wish to categorically state that it is not the practice of the Ministry of National Security or this Government to deliberately withhold any moneys due to employees. In fact, we appreciate the increasing demands being placed on law enforcement officers in particular, and are redoubling our efforts to ensure that they receive moneys due to them in a timely manner. [*Desk thumping*] However, as I indicated, there are circumstances that at times prevent the prompt settlement of these claims. Generally, if there are no queries and the period for which the claim is made is within the current year, it takes approximately two weeks to process. A query claim however, may take between three weeks to months, depending on the nature and the extent of the query.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, when you look at the amount of overtime paid for 2007, the \$20 million pales in comparison to the amount paid. Okay? The main factors that account for the delay are due either to the officers withholding or the late submission of claims or an inaccurate or incomplete submission. At times, clarification and resubmission are required. Consequently, a large amount of

Failure of Government to Pay Overtime
[SEN. THE HON. M. JOSEPH]

Friday, February 22, 2008

overtime claims become previous year's payments making the audited process compulsory. This lengthens the processing period, and on occasions when there are other competing and critical demands being made on the Ministry's auditing unit, or when auditing queries arise, a further delay is incurred. So this is really the genesis of the challenge that we face with respect to overtime.

The Ministry is looking—and I am not coming to say that we delay answering the question so that we could pay. What we are doing is looking at ways in which we can improve the process, but it requires cooperation on the part of the very people who are claiming overtime and the submission of those overtime claims on a timely basis.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I put the motion for the adjournment, let me on your behalf and on my own behalf, congratulate the hon. Member for St. Joseph on his main contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.55 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

The following question was asked by Mr. Harry Partap (Cumuto/Manzanilla):

Rural Electrification Programme 2006/2007 (Details of)

5. Could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities list the projects undertaken under the Rural Electrification Programme in 2006 and 2007 and the projects proposed under this programme for 2008?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid): Rural electrification continues to be a high priority of the Government, consistent with our vision to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by the year 2020. In 2006 and 2007, rural electrification projects were undertaken through three (3) Government-funded programmes:

- The National Social Development Programme
- The National Streetlighting Programme

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

- The Government-funded Rural Electrification Programme.

The specific projects undertaken in 2006 and 2007 are at Appendix I and Appendix II respectively. In 2008, it is proposed to undertake approximately fifty (50) projects, the details of which are being finalised.

Appendix I

Rural Electrification Projects Undertaken In 2006

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
North			
1	Cascade	1	Upper Cascade Valley Road
2	Diego Martin	1	North Post Road
3	Las Cuevas	1	Sunset Drive
4	Laventille	1	Trou Macaque
5	Maracas	3	Grand Fond Road
			Tyrico Bay
			Food Gardens, La Fillette Village
6	Maraval	2	Campbell Road
			Pierre Street Extension
7	San Juan	1	Lot #369-370 Thunder Hill
Total North		10	
South			
1	Barrackpore	5	Douglas Road West
			144 Western Trace, St. Mary's Village
			#19 Juman Trace
			Lashmania Trace
			Charran Maharaj Trace
2	Cedar Hill	1	Mooliesingh Trace
3	Debe	1	Debe Trace
4	Fyzabad	2	Bungalow 7

	No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
	Fyzabad (cont'd)	2	Standard Road
5	Gasparillo	3	36 Dalloo Road Gasparillo Ministry Centre Darneaud Street
6	Guapo	1	Parrylands Village
7	Guayaguayare	1	Guayaguayare Road
8	La Brea	6	Secondary Avenue Extension Sobo Village Queen Street Three Hands LP 1585 Southern Main Road Lot #47, #42 Road
9	La Romain	1	Beckles Trace, South Esperance
10	Mayaro	3	Eccles Road Extension Fields Trace 23 Balata East
11	Mon Desir	1	Off Berridge Trace
12	Moruga	1	Loney Road
13	New Grant	1	Monkey Town Branch Road
14	Oropouche	1	Ralph Narine Trace
15	Palo Seco	1	Webber Trace
16	Penal	16	11L Bernal Trace Molai Trace West Off Quinam Road 2 1/2mm Doorlassa Trace

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
	16	Penal (cont'd) Suchit Trace Ramjohn Link Road La Fortune San Francique Pluck Road Deosaran Trace Murray Trace Laltoo Trace Tennant Trace, Pluck Road Chaitar Trace, Mohess Road Gonzales Trace, 3 MM Clarke Road Sirju Trace
17	1	Piparo Ramlochan Trace
18	4	Princes Town Jordan Hill Mission Lane The Church of Christ Moonan Third Avenue, Malgretoute Road
19	2	Rio Claro Cushe Food Crop
		Matura Street, Fonrose Village
20	1	Rousillac Rum Still Avenue
21	1	San Fernando Pappourie Main Road
22	8	Siparia Coora Branch Road Recreation Ground Alta Garcia Trace Quinam Road Road Off Lily Trace Ramdass Trace Extension

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
	Siparia (cont'd)	8 188 Siparia Old Road Lot #2 Ramcharan Trace Ritto Ville
23	South Oropouche	2 Trace Opposite Eric Joseph Trace Red Brick Trace
24	Tabaquite	1 #76 Guaracara Tabaquite Road
25	Tableland	1 Rooks Trace
26	Williamsville	1 Scale Road
Total South		67
Central		
1	California	2 Ramkumar Trace Estate Road New Settlement
2	Caparo	6 D'abadie Road #1 4 1/2 Mile Post Todds Station Road Pierre Trace, Chickland Road Sejore Trace, Thompson Road Carr Mamoral Road, Caparo and Chickland Seebachan Trace
3	Carapichaima	6 Perseverance Rd. Ramsaran St. Ragoonanan Trace West Chickland Village Korea Village Main Rd. Orangefield Road #38 Brickfield Road
4	Carlsen Field	1 # Connector Road

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

	No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
5	Caroni	3	Surim Trace, Chin Chin Road Rostant Road Rikki Trace, Ravine Sable Road
6	Chaguanas	2	#172 Caroni Savannah Road Ragoonanan Road West Chandernagore
7	Chandernagore	1	Baggan St. Off Cementary St.
8	Charlieville	3	#19 Mohammed Lane Upper Ashraff Road Temple Lane Extension
9	Chase Village	3	#4 Derrick Rd Agostini Settlement Mandela Drive, Derrick Road
10	Claxton Bay	11	Bando Trace Ali Trace Extension LP #105 Soledad Road South # 34 First Street #97 Soledad Rd. New Testament Church of God Hilltop Spring Village 66A Forress Park Rd Mt. Pleasant Road Old Train Line Indian Trail to Macaulay Flyover
11	Couva	6	#108 Farm Rd Grant Trace Extension, Beaucarro Road LP#15 Mowlah Road Indian Trail Village

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
	Couva (cont'd)	6 Carolina Village Sooknanan Avenue
12	Cunupia	11 Mc Nair Trace East, David Toby Trace Alladi Rd. Off Ragoonanan Rd. Tirath Rd. Off Welcome Rd. North Rampaul Avenue 123 Bejucal Road David Toby Riverside Road, Off Mon Plaser Road Southern Main Road, Warrenville Cemetery Street #12 Warren Road Ext. Sookram Drive
13	Edinburgh	2 LP#55 Brasso Venado Rd. Christian Benny Dr.
14	Enterprise	1 Yusuff Lane
15	Freeport	9 Calcutta Road Kurban Ali Drive Bartholomew Road Arena Road, Freeport Ramlal Trace, Chickland Road Preysal Crown Tr. East 158 Arena Road Sooknanan Avenue Razac Trace

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

	No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
16	Gran Couva	3	Frasal Road End San Pedro Road Gran Couva Road
17	Longdenville	16	Harry Choon Rajpaul Street Rattannee Street 1 ³ / ₄ PO Box 32B Main Road John William Tr. Depot Road Farmers Group Bartlett Trace Yussuff Lane Longdenville Old Road Sello Mitchell Road Lynch Trace Carr Road LP 94 Joseph lane Thompson Road, Palmiste 41/4 Mile Post, Todds Station Road Railway Trace Sawmill Trace
18	Palmiste	1	Clovis Avenue
19	Piparo	1	Bissessar Road
20	Preysal	1	Lower Couva Road
21	Warrenville	1	LP 3225 Southern Main Road
	Total Central	90	
	East		
1	Aranguez	1	Kanhai Street Extension
2	Arima	11	Jean Street Extension

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

	No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
	Arima (cont'd)		28 Dundee Village Evergreen Road LP# 20 Freedom Street Wallace Road Race Course Road Springer Drive, Unity Lane Tricia Avenue Getwell Ext #400 Sesame Street Mottley Trace
3	Bamboo #2	1	Nabbie Street
4	Carapo	3	Race Course Road, Evergreen First Street Jokhan Trace
5	Caura	1	Tumbasson Village
6	Cumuto	1	Nicaragua Road
7	Cunupia	2	Madrass Road, Chin Chin Palm Street
8	La Horquetta	1	Hardaway Lands
9	Las Lomas	2	Surjan Trace Ramnarine Street West
10	Macoya	1	Macoya Road Extension, South
11	Manzanilla	1	Jattan Trace
12	Maracas	3	Sumbradora Extension LP# 211 Lluengo Village Naranjo Road
13	Matura	1	Lot #4, Toco Main Road

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
14	San Juan	1	Sundarsingh Drive Extension
15	San Rafael	1	Brazilome Trace
16	Sangre Grande	4	27, Brazil Trace
			Upper Cunapo Road
			Turure Road
			Mc Shine Street
17	St. Helena	1	Bisnathsingh Trace
18	Talparo	1	Sween Trace
19	Toco	4	Beggs Trace Extension
			Salybia Trace
			Monsegue Trace
			LP #60 Paria Main Road
20	Valencia	4	Nicholas Trace
			Plantation Road
			LP#6, Plate Circular
			Jamoon Drive
21	Wallerfield	2	Eastern Main Road
			#58, Moonan Road
Total East		47	
Tobago			
1	Belle Garden	2	Iron Ridge
			Boucher Trace
2	Bethel	1	Beverly Hill
3	Calder Hall	1	Calder Hall Trace
4	Canaan	1	Friendship Road Extension
5	Concordia	1	St. Cecelia Trace
6	Glamorgan	2	George Street

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

	No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
	Glamorgan (cont'd)	2	Bushy Park Trace
7	Hopetown	1	Big Stick Road
8	L'anse Fourmi	1	Main Road
9	Les Coteau	2	Franklyn Road
			Amos Vale Road
10	Louis D'or	1	Louis D'or Bay Road
11	Lowlands	1	Allfields Trace North
12	Mason Hall	4	Adelphi Road
			Street Off Belmont
			Spence Trace
			Les Coteau Road
13	Moriah	1	Highlands Road
14	Mt. St. George	4	Windward Road
			Castara Road
			Cor. Windward Road and Chapel Hill
			Toe Hill
15	Patience Hill	1	Hopeton Trace
16	Plymouth	1	Spring Garden Trace
17	Richmond	1	Richmond
18	Riseland	1	Riseland Trace
19	Whim	1	Felicity Heights
Total Tobago		28	
TOTAL - 94 COMMUNITIES		242 PROJECTS	

Rural Electrification Projects Undertaken In 2007

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
1	Arima	6	La Horquetta Trace Off Tumpuna Road
			Maturita Trace Extension
			Printeryville, O'meara Road
			Heights of Aripo Via Arima
			River Valley La Arrichette Rd
			Jokhan Trace Carapo
2	Arouca	1	Windy Hill and Edna Hill Arouca
3	Blanchisseuse	1	2 2/3 MM Morne Bleu
4	Brasso	3	Sookdeo Trace, Todd's Station Rd Caparo Valley
			Train line Village
			13mm Tabaquite Road Brasso
5	Brasso Seco	1	Paria Main Road off Blanchisseuse Road
6	Aripo	1	Heights of Aripo
7	Avocat	1	Thompson Trace
8	Balmain	1	Cemetery Street
9	Barrackpore	9	Cunjal Rd North, Rochard Douglas Road
			Off LP#10 Manohar Trace, Sumarie Trace Rochard Road
			Oli Mohammed Trace, Rochard Road
			Paynter Trace, Cungal Road, Rochard Road
			Rochard Douglas Road
			Subratie Trace, Cungal Road, Rochard Douglas Road
			#547 D Rochard Douglas Road
			Wilson Rd
Cumuto South Trace			

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
10	Bejucal	1	Bejucal Road
11	Brazil	1	Brazil Lome Trace Off Tumpuna Road
12	Buenos Ayres	1	Spring Trace
13	Calcutta	2	Sancho Road & Super Avenue, Calcutta #1 & #2
			Swami Chinmayananda Drive
14	California	2	Dow Village
			135 New Settlement Dow Village
15	Carapichaima	2	Lot 70 Korea Village
			Orangefield Road
16	Carlsen Field	2	Xeres Extension Road
			South of Connector Road
17	Caura	1	Caura Road Caura
18	Cedros	3	Coromandel Main Road
			Savannah Road, Iacos Village
			Mc Donald Road, Bois Bough & Coromadel Road
19	Chandernagore	1	Joyce Road Extension South
20	Charlieville	1	Assaraff Road Extension, Charlieville
21	Chase Village	1	Bhagna Trace Chinese Village
22	Claxton Bay	2	5th Street Extension, Pranz Gardens
			Tamboo Trace, Forres Park
23	Coalmine	5	Anganoo Trace
			Phipps Trace Extension
			Rampartap Trace, Off Cunapo Southern Main Road
			Ali lane Off Pole # 34 Coalmine Road
			Ramcharan Trace, Jurisingh Village
24	Coryal	2	Cumuto Old Road, Hosein Village

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
			Sou Sou Lands, Off St. Maries Emmanuel Road
25	Couva	4	Basta Hall
			Carolina Trace #1, Carolina village
			Carolina Village
			Carli Bay
26	Cumuto	3	Martin Salazar Trace, Off LP# 395 Tamana Road
			Saligramme Road, Off Pole # 85 Marie Emmanuel Road
			Sookoo Branch Trace, Guatapajaro Road
27	Cunupia	5	Charles Street Extension, Off Jonathan Trace, Cunupia
			Phase II Petersville, Chin Chin Road
			Wilson Lane, Off Chin Chin Road
			Las Lomas #2
			Bridle Rd. Via Munroe
28	D'Abadie	3	Esau Hosien Drive, Off Mausica Road
			Phase 2 Lynton Gardens
			Runway Drive Extension
29	Debe	1	Maniram Drive, Off LP 53 Lalbeharry Trace
30	Ecklesville	1	Ecklesville Road Extension, Guacarra Tabaquite Road
31	El Dorado	1	Upper Caura Royal Road
32	Endeavour	1	Kazar Drive, Off Endeavour Road Extension
33	Enterprise	7	Bhagaloo Street, Boss Lane
			Chrissie Terrace Extension
			Crown Trace Extension
			Crystal Terrace, Bhagaloo Street
			Egypt Extension, Crown Trace

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
			Flora Terrace, Dass Trace
			Spring Drive & John Street, Crown Trace
34	Erin	2	Lomerall Trace Off LP A699, Siparia Erin Road
			Richardson Trace, Buenos Ayres
35	Fishing Pond	1	Cro Cro Bar Extension Road
36	Freeport	2	Calcutta Road #3
			52 Savannah Dr. Nelson Rd
37	Fyzabad	8	Dabie Avenue, Siparia Old Road, Avocat
			Mon Desir Road
			Mon Desir Road Off LP 71
			P.C.O.L. Forest Reserve
			P.C.O.L. Road Thick Village, Siparia Old Road
			Warden Road, South Oropouche
			Berridge Trace
			Mondesir Delhi Road
38	Golconda	1	Temple Street Extension
39	Gran Couva	2	Corosal Road
			San Salvador Estate, Tortuga Road
40	Gran Reviere	1	Paria Main Road
41	Granville	5	Hilltop Drive
			Pasea Trace Extension
			Sahadeo Drive
			Syfoo Trace
			Unity Hindu Temple, Off Boodram Trace Pt.Coco
42	Guico Tamana	3	Jawahir Road, Off Little Cora Road & Bon Air Road

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

	No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
	Guico Tamana (Cont'd)		Santa Ana Trace, Upper Guico Tamana Road
			Tamana & Carmichael Road
43	Guayaguayare	1	Vesprey Extension Trace
44	Hindustan	1	Matiste Road, Off Naggie Road
45	La Brea	2	Celestial Park
			Sobo Village
46	La Romain	2	Colthrust Drive Off Renn Avenue
			LP 16/2 Lowlands Ponds Street
47	Las Lomas	1	CR Lane
48	Longdenville	1	Thompson Rd, Palmiste
49	Manzanilla	5	South Manzanilla Road Off Pole #1061, Comparo Village
			Pleasant Drive, James Smart Village
			Sadhoo Trace, South Manzanilla
			Stone Hill Trace, Off Nariva Road
			Sadhoo Trace Off Pole 61 Manzanilla Road
50	Marabella	1	Eckel Village Branch Road, Williamsville
51	Marchin	1	Marchin Road To Bridle Road, Jerningham
52	Mayaro	3	Eccles Road
			Food Crop Extension
			St. Ann's Road
53	Moruga	6	Fairfield Road Off Perry Young Road
			Hamilton Trace, Sixth Company
			Basket Trace Off Toppin Trace, St Mary's Village
			Burton Trace Extension
			Hamilton Trace, Sixth Company
			Babooram Trace

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
54	New Grant	2	Gangaram Trace, Torrib Tabaquite Road, Busy Corner
			Post Office Trace
55	Palmiste	2	Gopaul Trace, Caparo Valley Road
			Paradise Cescent, Caparo Valley Road
56	Palo Seco	3	Jackson Trace
			Wilson Road Beach Road
			Hewitt Bradshaw Circular
57	Paria	1	Madamas Road off Brasso Seco Road
58	Penal	23	Azim Avenue
			Batchyia Branch #1
			Belamy Trace, Bunsee Trace, Penal Rock Road
			Bunsee Branch Trace, Penal Rock Road
			Bunsee Trace, Penal Rock Road
			Dabiedial Rd
			Digity Branch #1
			Jaya Lutchmi Drive Off 176 Rochard Douglas Road
			Julien Branch Trace, Rochard Road
			Katwaroo Trace
			Mohess Road
			Moolai Trace, Penal Quinam Road
			Old Quinam Rock Road
			Penal Roack Road Off Lp 272 & Bhimull Trace
			Rampersad Trace
Road Off LP 61 Ramai Trace			
Road Off LP17 Sunress Road			
Ramjattan Trace			

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
	Penal (cont'd)		Arjoon Trace, Clarke Road
			Scotts Road, Morne Diablo
			Rochard Road
			Batchya Trace
			Goodmand Trace
59	Petit Café	1	Nagee First Branch, Gomez Trace Extension & Charles Street
60	Piparo	1	Pascal Road
61	Pleasantville	1	Blitz Village, Pleasantville Circular
62	Point Fortin	18	Bridge Mohan Ave, Warden Road
			Canteen Centre Road, Warden Road
			Cap De Ville School Road
			Dasheen Head Circular, Hollywood Extension
			Francis Lane Off E Street
			Hollywood Beach Road
			Joe P Avenue, Hollywood Extension
			Reservoir Hill & St. Clair Street Extension, Village
			Road Off LP64 Hollywood Road
			Roberts Lane, Abel Street
			Ruth Brown Ave, Souhern Gardens
			S Street, New Village
			Salazar Trace Off LP 26 & 28
			Savannah Road Off Waden Road
			Stafford Avenue, Hollywood Extension
	Sugar Hill Off Boodoo Street		
	TPD Extension		
	Unis Street, Salazar Trace		

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
63	Poole	6	Brittan Trace, San Pedro
			Railway Road, San Pedro
			San Pedro Road
			Glod Road NM Road & Saint Road Off Logwood Road Trace
			Riverside Road
			23mm Naparima Mayaro Road
64	Princes Town	9	Bronte Road Off Sugar Hill Road, Borde Narve
			Leaking Trace Off St. John's Road, Brother's Road
			Navet Trace Off LP 115 Sisters Road
			Glenroy Estate, Buen Intento
			Lucy Lucas trace off Sixth Co. Rd
			Realize Road
			Cumuto Rd, Indian Walk
			Inverness Road, off Lothains Roads
			Dheeragie Trace, Tableland
65	Rio Claro	8	Ajodha Road, Poole
			Naparima Mayaro Road, Bristol Village Off LP A1083
			Old Railway Road
			Roble Grove Road,
			Old Mayaro Branch Road, Libertville
			Robbel Grove, Hibiscus Arch, Boos Settlement
			Roble Grove Road, Deep Ravine Village
			Imm Campbell Trace Libertville
66	Rousillac	1	L.P 31428 Southern Main Rd
67	Sangre Chiquito	1	Gadjadar Road Off Eastern Main Road

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

	No. and list of Communities	No of Projects	Projects
68	Sangre Grande	8	Fishing Pond Road Coco Bar Gunness Trace Off Little Cora Road & Ophillie Trace Pine Settlement, Upper Ojoe Road Rampartap Trace, Off Coalmine Road Wallenvale Extension, Jacobee Avenue, Coalmine West Lane Fishing Pond Riley Settlement Redhead Trace off Turure Rd
69	Santa Cruz	1	Upper Gasparillo Road, Shrine Gardens
70	Siparia	4	Gonzales Trace, Siparia Erin Road Thick Village Well Road Extension Coora Road
71	South Oropouche	1	St. John's Road, Bamboo Village
72	St Augustine	1	Freeman Road
73	St. Helena	1	Boysie Trace, Warrenville
74	St. Margret's	1	Train line Village
75	Tabaquite	2	Bolt Trace, Alleyne Road, Navet Stone Road
76	Tableland	4	First Branch Road, Local Road Glod Road & McSween Road North Road & Warwell Road #1 Branch Road off Local Road
77	Tamana	1	De Gannes Trace, Off Guiaco Tamana Road
78	Todds Road	1	Ravine Sable Road to Flecter Road, Todds Road

Written Answer To Question

Friday, February 22, 2008

No. and list of Communities		No of Projects	Projects
79	Valencia	4	Alexander Circular Off Plantation Road
			Off Plantation Road, Valencia
			Clarence Trace Off Pole 37/LV9 Valencia Bypass Road
			Farm School Access Road, Off Orchid Drive Phase I
80	Wallerfield	2	Aqua Santa Branch Road
			Off Pole #26 La Retreate Road
81	Waterloo	1	Temple Street, Brickfield Road
82	Williamsville	2	Garth Road
			Eccles Village Road, Hardbargin
TOTAL: 82 COMMUNITIES			237 PROJECTS